THE REPRESENTATION OF ETHNIC MINORITY MEN IN PRINT ADVERTISEMENTS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally gender studies on advertising have focused on women. The present study investigates how ethnic minority men are represented in advertisements in male audience magazines. A content analysis approach was used to rate human male figures, both real life and illustrated, in a sample of advertisements from selected magazines in 1983 and 2003. Overall, Caucasian males were portrayed more positively in advertisements. However, over time, representations improved of ethnic minority men improved in both number and style.

INTRODUCTION

Although past research on the images of women in advertising exists, Kolbe and Albanese (1996) report that except for their study, few have investigated exclusively male portrayals in magazine advertisements. Further, none have examined race as a factor. There is, then, a need to investigate the portrayal of ethnic minority men (EMM) in advertisements. The present study is a first attempt at conducting a content analysis to determine how often and how EMM are represented in magazine advertising. EMM are defined in this study as males who are essentially “non-White.” Specifically, I compare Caucasian/White males and non-White males in magazine advertisements published in 1983 and again in 2003. The focus of the research is on the extent of representation and manner in which minority men are portrayed in advertising images.

The United States (U.S.) Department of Commerce has reported that in the year 2000, minorities made up 20 percent of the buying power in the U.S. Further, it is clear that this segment of the population is growing at a faster rate than that of the non-minority population (see Mastro and Stern, 2003). No wonder, then, advertisers are aggressively tapping into the “minority market.” It is of interest, then, to examine how EMM are portrayed in advertising in comparison to White men both today and two decades ago.

Many people engage in social comparisons when observing images in the media (Frisby, 2004). If racial and ethnic minority youth see the under representation or negative portrayals of EEM in the media, they might begin to feel disconnected from society (Stern, 1999). In addition, because consumers learn from what they see in media (Mastro and Stern, 2003), an analysis of how EMM are portrayed in advertisements is imperative.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

As already noted, several studies have examined depictions of women in advertisements (see, for example, Goffman, 1979; Lee and Hwang, 2002; Pope et al., 2001). However, other than the study by Kolbe and Albanese (1996), only a few studies have analyzed the portrayals of sole males in print advertisements. One study focused on the Sexism Scale applied to men in advertisements (Skelly and Lundstrom, 1981). Another compared the images of men in advertisements in the U.S. and Finland (Hakala, n.d.). However, neither of these studies measured race as a factor. In fact, race has never been mentioned in studies of advertising.

The research by Kolbe and Albanese (1996) was a content analysis of sole-male images in male audience magazines. They measured body characteristics, hairstyles, facial hair, body and head positions, and dimensions of eye contact, clothing styles, and types of adornment. Here many of these factors are examined with the addition of race as a major variable. Another major component of the present study is incorporation of the Sexism Scale developed by Skelly and Lundstrom (1981). They analyzed male sex-roles in magazine advertisements using a sexism scale for women but applied to males (see Pingree et al., 1976).

Goffman’s (1979) book *Gender Advertisements* examined how women are depicted in print advertisements. This study is essential in training researchers to observe “hidden truths” in advertisements. For example, Goffman found that men were more likely to be positioned higher up than women in the advertisements, thus reaffirming the stereotype of the dominance of males or conversely the subordination of women. Here we are interested in exploring whether EMM are similarly portrayed in magazine advertisements relative to White males.

Research Questions

Given the above, five research questions guide this exploratory analysis. These questions are listed and discussed below:

**RQ1:** *Between 1983 and 2003, are there differences in how are EMM portrayed in terms of socioeconomic status (SES) as determined by the type of clothing worn in advertisements?*

Clothing is often associated with one’s social status, profession, and activity involvement (Kolbe and Albanese, 1996). The present study adopted 19 different clothing styles from those examined by Albanese and Kolbe. These included: Business, Fashion Trendy, Casual Upscale, Outdoor, Sports, or no clothing at all. In some of the cases the clothing style reflected the SES of the male. In addition, I estimated the occupation status of every male model by how expensive his clothes appeared to be.

**RQ2:** *Between 1983 and 2003, are there any observable differences in the representation of ethnic minority men and the level of products they are advertising?*

Following Larson (2002), which examined the types of products minority children were associated with in television commercials, the present study focuses on the general level of worth of each advertised product or service. Specifically, the present study measured whether a product/service appeared to be high end (expensive) or low end (inexpensive). The purpose was to determine whether there was a difference between White males and non-White males in the level of products/services they represented and whether these changed over time.
RQ3: Between 1983 to 2003, are ethnic minority males portrayed in advertisements as being more or less “sexual” than White males?

To address this question I used a male Sexism Scale adapted from a scale developed by Skelly and Lundstrom (1981). The scale consists of five levels regarding whether a male was portrayed as: 1) being purely sexual/attractive; 2) engaged in traditional male roles; 3) engaged in non-traditional male roles; 4) portrayed equally compared to women; and, 5) showing no distinction between sexes. Although women were not included in this study, levels 4 and 5 were left in the scale. In addition, in the Albanese and Kolbe study, perceived sexual connotations were operationalized in terms of whether the male was showing bare arms, legs or chest. For example, if an advertisement featured a male’s body without the head, the emphasis on the body would be identified as being sexual.

RQ4: In 1983 compared to 2003, are ethnic minority men represented in advertisements as being more or less aggressive than White males?

Aggression in advertisements can portray a group of people negatively. Goffman (1979) argued that the slightest representation could subconsciously set a schema in people’s minds. If a group is represented in more aggressive ads, this could lead to a negative stereotype, which could harm the image of that group.

RQ5: Between 1983 and 2003, was there an increase in the representation of ethnic minority males in advertisements comparable to the number of ethnic minority men in the general population?

Here I hope to determine whether there was a significant increase in the representation of EMM over time. By comparing my findings with the census numbers over this time period (http://www.census.gov/) I will be able to determine whether the ad samples matched the real population for each group.

METHODS

The magazines selected are popular magazines with a primarily male audience (Kolbe and Albanese, 1996). Many newer magazines popular among male readers such as Stuff and Maxim were not published in 1983. The four magazines selected for this study were: Rolling Stone, Business Week, Newsweek, and Gentlemen’s Quarterly (GQ). Samples were taken from these magazines from 1983 and 2003 for an over time comparison. All of the 1983 advertisements were obtained from microfilms. Most of the 2003 advertisements were copied from archives, while the rest came from microfilms. Sports Illustrated, Playboy, and Esquire were excluded for this study. Sports Illustrated might portray more aggressive males and produce confounding effects. Esquire was not used because its content is similar to that of Gentlemen’s Quarterly (GQ). Kolbe and Albanese (1996) stated that Playboy magazine was not a good source for their sample and therefore was not included in the present study either.

The present research is a content analysis of the portrayal of EMM and White men. Samples were taken from the months of March, July, and September in both 1983 and 2003. These are neutral months, meaning no major events occur that could produce any confounding variables (for example, Christmas, Easter, or Black History Month). From each month I randomly selected the first 10 full-page advertisements featuring at least one human male. For two-page spread advertisements, both pages were coded separately. For the magazines that have more than one issue per month, I took the first magazine of that month. For advertisements that appeared more
than once, only one was chosen and coded. Selecting the 10 ads from each of the three months was done once for magazines published in 1983 and once for those published in 2003.

Items in the coding sheet were adopted from previous studies already cited. The 20 coding items included race, ad layout, aggression, SES, product/service, quality of product/service, and sexism (see Appendix). A total of 214 advertisements were included, and 317 male figures were identified. A trained second coder was employed to measure inter-coder reliability (see Riffe et al., 1998). The coder reliability coefficient was 85 percent. This second coder coded 10 percent (32 male figures) of the sample. The data were analyzed using SPSS.

**FINDINGS**

The first research question focused on differences in how are EMM portrayed in terms of SES as determined by the type of clothing worn in advertisements. Specifically, men’s SES is represented by how expensive their clothing is and their apparent occupations. In general, in the advertising samples examined EMM appeared to have a lower SES based on a three-point scale of expensive to non-expensive clothes, where a higher mean score indicates more expensive clothing. In the 1983 ads, EMM (Mean = 3.0, N = 1) appeared to wear more expensive clothes than White men (Mean = 2.90, s.d. = .31, N = 29). In 2003, the opposite was true (Mean for White men = 2.54, s.d. = .66, N = 35; Mean for EMM = 2.00, s.d. = .89, N = 6). An ANOVA reveals a significant difference between the two races and the two time periods (F = 5.04, df = 3, p < .01). Ignoring the years and looking strictly at the relationship of race and clothing, overall EMM were portrayed in less expensive clothing. A t-test (t = 2.38, p < .05) shows that White males (Mean = 2.70, s.d. = .55) were more likely to be shown in expensive clothing than EMM (Mean = 2.14, s.d. = .90).

In terms of occupational levels, a lower mean score on the two-point scale (High = 1 and Low = 2) indicates more upscale jobs. In 1983, White males (Mean = 1.24, s.d. = .43, N = 83) were more likely to be portrayed to have higher-level jobs than EMM (Mean = 1.33, s.d. = .58, N = 3). In 2003, White males (Mean = 1.26, s.d. = .44, N = 35) were also more likely to be portrayed in higher-level jobs than EMM (Mean = 1.64, s.d. = .50, N = 11). However, an ANOVA test shows no statistical difference between these four mean scores (F = 2.64, df = 3, p > .05).

Within the higher-level job group in 1983, White males accounted for 96.9 percent (N = 63) and EMM males accounted for only 3.1 percent (N = 2). Within the same category in 2003, White males accounted for 86.7 percent (N = 26) and EMM accounted for 13.3 percent (N = 4). Unfortunately, a Chi-square test (covering the high-low status and four years/races) was not an appropriate test because many of cells were smaller than 5.

When the year of publication was not a factor, White males were still represented in higher-level jobs more often than were EMM. Among figures portrayed as having high-level jobs, 93.7 percent (N = 89) were White males and only 6.3 percent (N = 6) were EMM. By contrast, White males accounted for 78.4 percent (N = 29) while EMM accounted for 21.6 percent (N = 8). If we focus on race, 75.4 percent of White males were portrayed to have high-level jobs, and 24.6 percent of them were shown to have low-level jobs. In comparison, 42.9 percent of EMM were portrayed to have high-level jobs, and 57.1 percent of them were portrayed to have low-level jobs. The differences between these four cells are statistically significant (Chi-square = 6.58, df = 1, p < .05). Therefore, it can be concluded that EMM are generally portrayed as having a lower SES in comparison to their White male counterparts.

The second research question focused on observable differences in the representation of ethnic minority men and the level of products being advertised. In 1983, among all male models in ads promoting expensive products, EMM accounted for only 5.3 percent (N = 5 of 95). In 2003, White males accounted for 87.8 percent (N = 72) and EMM accounted for 12.2 percent (N = 10). While the percentage doubled during the intervening period, EMM are clearly still underrepresented in these publications.
In 1983, for models in ads for inexpensive products, 97.9 percent (N = 47) were White males, and 2.1 percent (N = 1) were EMM. In 2003, the representation was equal for both groups (50 percent, N = 16). This, then, shows a significant difference between years, races and levels of products represented (Chi-square = 19.33, df = 3, p < .01). The portrayal of EMM in advertising, in terms of the types of products with which they are associated appeared to show improvement over time.

When year and race were combined, and product value was treated as a two-point scale (Inexpensive = 1; Expensive = 2). The findings are as follows: In 1983, White males (Mean = 1.66, s.d. = .48) were wearing less expensive clothing compared to EMM (Mean = 1.83, s.d. = .41). However, in 2003 this relationship is reversed. White males were pictured in more expensive clothing (Mean = 1.82, s.d. = .39) than were EMM (Mean = 1.38, s.d. = .5). The difference is statistically significant (F = 6.86, df = 3, p < .01).

When year was excluded as a variable, White males were more likely than EMM to be using more expensive products. Among all White male figures in ads, 72 percent (N = 162) were promoting expensive products, compared to 28 percent (N = 63) associated with less expensive products. On the other hand, only 46.9 percent (N = 15) of EMM appeared in ads for expensive products, compared to 53.1 percent (N = 17) who appeared in ads for inexpensive items. In ads promoting expensive products, 91.5 percent (N = 162) showed White males, and 8.5 percent (N = 15) showed EMM. In advertisements for inexpensive products, 78.8 percent (N = 63) used White male models, and 21.3 percent (N = 17) used EMM. The difference is statistically significant (Chi-square = 8.25, df = 1, p < .01).

The third research question shifted focus to whether EMM are portrayed in advertisements as more or less “sexual” than White males. On the five-point Sexism Scale a lower mean scores indicates that a model is portrayed as more “sexual.” In 1983, the scores for White males (Mean = 2.07, s.d. = .67) were lower than those for EMM (2.33, s.d. = .82). In 2003, the mean for White males was 1.88 (s.d. = .47) compared to 2.01 (s.d. = .55) for EMM. This finding suggests that for both years, the portrayals of White males were more negative than EMM on the Sexism Scale. An ANOVA test shows that the difference is statistically significant (F = 3.15, df = 3, p < .05). However, when year was not a factor, there was no difference between White males (Mean = 1.99, s.d. = .6) and EMM (Mean = 2.14, s.d. = .59) based on a t-test (t = -1.38, p > .05). Overall both groups of men were equally represented as being sexual or attractive.

The fourth research question again focused on differences between portrayals of EMM and White male models. Here the concern is with whether the former are portrayed as more aggressive. Interestingly, in 1983, all aggressors in ads were White (N = 4). However, in 2003, 54.6 percent of aggressors were White (N = 6), and 45.4 percent were EMM (N = 5). There were no victims of aggression in the 1983 advertisements. However, in 2003, there were some victims and all were White (N = 5). When year was not taken into consideration 66.7 percent (N = 10) of the aggressors were White while the remainder were EMM and, as noted, all victims were White. Because some cell sizes were too small (< 5) the statistical significance of this relationship could not be determined.

Finally, the fifth research question asked whether the sample is representative of the U.S. population Census for those specific groups (see Table 1). The 1983 and 2003 figures were projected from the 1980 and 2000 census reports. Some of the Hispanic/Latino(a) and mixed race population overlapped with the White population. That overlap was omitted to provide a clearer picture. Comparing the figures of White and EMM in the ad samples along with the census data, one can easily conclude that EMM were greatly under-represented in advertisements in 1983, but slightly over-represented by 2003. Therefore, their representation in advertising has improved over time.
Table 1. Comparative Representation of EMM and White Males in Print Advertisements

| Year | Ethnic Minority Males | | | White Males | | |
|------|-----------------------|------------------|----------------|----------------|------------------|
|      | Population N* | % | Advertisements N | % | Population N* | % | Advertisements N | % |
| 1983 | 15.3 | 16.9 | 6 | 3.6 | 92.3 | 83.1 | 161 | 96.4 |
| 2003 | 27.3 | 19.3 | 34 | 22.8 | 114.0 | 80.7 | 115 | 77.2 |

*In millions.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overall, White males were portrayed in the ad samples more positively than were EMM. For instance, white males were presented in more expensive clothing and higher level jobs than EMM. These examples reaffirm the reliance on White privilege stereotypes, which portray Caucasians as having an advantage in the job market.

Findings regarding the Sexism Scale revealed no significant difference between EMM and White males. In other words, both groups were portrayed equally in terms of being attractive or sexual. When breaking down the years it shows that, over time, White males were more likely to be portrayed as more attractive/sexual than EMM. Further research is needed to determine whether this is indeed a significant trend.

Although not supported by the analysis, on the surface, White males were more likely to be portrayed as aggressive compared to EMM. At the same time, White males were the only group represented as being a victim. Curiously, and contrary to how the media often portray EMM (Entman and Rojecki, 2000), they were never represented as victims in this study.

The ad samples showed that, in 1983, EMM were drastically underrepresented in comparison to the census data. However, by 2003, EMM were slightly overrepresented suggesting that over time EMM have been more accurately represented.

The present study examined only magazine advertisements, which is a common approach among studies of images in advertising (see for example, Frisby, 2004; Hakala, n.d.). Because this study examined only images in magazines, generalizations about how EMM are portrayed in advertising in general cannot be made. Future research should focus on other advertising media such as television. In addition, future research should investigate interactions, such as being aggressive or dominant, between EMM and other characters in both print and television commercials. Finally, audience perceptions of these representations should be investigated.

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Appendix A: Coding Sheet
I- General Information
1. Case ID #:________
3. Date (dd/yy) ___________
5. Is this Male __________  1. Real life   2. Illustrated
7. Advertiser(s) (specify):_______________

II- Advertisement Layout
8. What is the color scheme of the overall ad? 
   1. Brighter   2. Darker   99. N/A
9. Where (in proportion to everyone else) is this Male? 
   1. Front   2. To the side  3. Behind   4. Middle   99. N/A
10. Is this male holding or using the product? 
   1. Yes   2. No   3. Unknown
11. Is this male: 
12. Indicate whether the product is: 1. Inexpensive or Low end  2. Expensive or High end  
   3. Unknown or service   99. N/A

13. Nature of Advertisement Sponsor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Fashion</td>
<td>14. Technology Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Fashion accessories</td>
<td>15. Movies/ TV Programming</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Hygiene products</td>
<td>16. Concerts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Motor Vehicles</td>
<td>17. Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Computers</td>
<td>18. Politics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Technological products</td>
<td>19. Armed Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Cigarettes</td>
<td>20. Sports</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Alcohol</td>
<td>21. Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Food</td>
<td>22. Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Photography equipment</td>
<td>24. Charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. DVD video</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. CD/ Mp3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
25. Retail Store
26. Financial Service (bank etc.)
27. Insurance

14. What level of occupation is this male?
   1. High Level-(Top Level Manager, Professional, Entertainer, etc.)
   2. Low Level-(Service, Clerical, Construction, Student, etc.)
   3. Unknown
   99. N/A

15. Indicate whether the clothing is an:
   1. Expensive brand
   2. Inexpensive brand
   3. Medium Expensive
   4. Unknown
   99. N/A

16. Clothing Style
   1. Classic menswear
   2. Casual upscale/preppy
   3. Casual downscale
   4. Fashion Upscale
   5. Casual Hip
   6. Trendy Fashion
   7. Recreational athletic
   8. Outdoor recreational
   9. Sports uniforms
   10. Western wear
   11. Biker Wear
   12. Work Clothing
   13. Professional Uniform
   14. Historical period attire
   15. Costume
   16. Underwear
   17. Not enough shown
   18. All other
   19. Nude or partially clothed
   99. N/A

IV- Sexism-
17. Choose the best level that suits the model.
   1. This male is in this advertisement to be attractive
   2. This male is taking on traditional male roles (Authority, Business, or Fatherly)
   3. Show men in non-traditional roles, but portray their traditional role as important (i.e. A man cooking dinner for his wife, as long as he can watch football later)
   4. Ad shows sexes are fully equal and there is no distinction between the two.
   5. Ads are non-stereotypic and are based on capabilities, not sex
   6. Unknown
   99. N/A

18. Proportion of body shown?
   1. Head only
   2. Head and Shoulders
   3. Waist up
   4. Knees up
   5. Full Body
   6. Legs only
   7. Waist down only
   8. Torso less head
   9. Full body less head
   10. Buttocks only
   11. Hands only
   12. Arms only
   13. Feet
   19. Bare Chest or Back?
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. Unknown
   99. N/A

20. Bare Legs or Arms?
   1. Yes
   2. No
   3. Unknown
   99. N/A