EFFECTS OF TELEVISION ADVERTISING ON AFRICAN AMERICAN TEENAGERS

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The 1990 census reported that the 31 million African Americans, the largest minority group, accounted for 12.1% of the U.S. population, up from 11.7% a decade earlier ("1990 Census Shows," 1991). African Americans as a group represent a large and growing consumer market. According to a recent consumer survey, African Americans spent more than $170 billion a year. Although many African Americans are poor, two thirds are not (Waldrop, 1990, p. 32).

As African Americans become a major economic force, the representation of African Americans in advertisements has been increasing significantly in recent years. Previous research suggested that African Americans in general react favorably to advertisements and products that use African American endorsers. The most widely used celebrity endorsers have been sports figures, actors, or other types of entertainers. However, critics say that using African American models in advertisements for products such as tobacco and alcohol is unethical, particularly when these products are aimed at the African American market. They argue that such a practice only serves to exacerbate health and family problems in the community.

Nike advertisements that feature basketball player Michael Jordan and film director Spike Lee have recently been the target of negative press. Critics have noted that shoes have become so important that young urban African Americans are willing to kill for them (Waldrop, 1990). African Americans were estimated to generate one third of

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the total sales for Nike products, which stood at about $2.5 billion in 1990 (Hume, 1990, p. 59).

Despite the frequent use of African American celebrities in the advertisements, there is little research done on the effects of these ads on the African American consumers. Less is known, for instance, about the effects of television advertisements on young African Americans.

The primary purpose of the present study was to examine the attitude among African American teenagers toward television advertisements on athletic shoes featuring African American athletes. The secondary purpose of the study was to determine the perceived influence of such ads on the perception of the product and on the purchase intent. Finally, the study further investigated the existence of parent-child conflict as a result of awareness and desire for the advertised shoes.

PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Previous studies on the African American representation in ads, on such representation in celebrity ads, and on adolescent consumer behavior were reviewed.

REPRESENTATION OF AFRICAN AMERICANS IN ADS

There have been many studies on the presence of African Americans in advertisements. Most of them are content analyses of advertisements in television and in the print media. A number of earlier ones by Shuey, King, and Griffith (1953), Cox (1970), and Colfax and Sternberg (1972) found that few ads contained African American models. Later studies done by Bush, Resnik, and Stern (1980), Humphrey and Schuman (1984), and Zinkhan, Cox, and Hong (1986) also examined the portrayal of African Americans in print ads. Most recently, Zinkhan, Qualls, and Biswas (1990) reported that African American representation in print ads remained low.

Other studies done by Dominick and Greenberg (1970), O'Kelley and Bloomquest (1976), Bush, Solomon, and Hair (1977), and Bush, Hair, and Solomon (1979) measured African American representation in television advertising. According to Zinkhan et al. (1990), African American representation in television advertising was relatively high and was in approximate proportion to the percentage of African Americans in the total population.

Qualls and Moore (1990) pointed out that most of these studies have concentrated on the mere presence of African Americans in advertisements and have usually counted the times an African American face appeared in an ad featuring African American models and actors. Thus whereas it appears that the representation of African American models has undoubtedly increased over time, according to Qualls and Moore, the roles they play and their subsequent impact are not fully understood.

CELEBRITY ADS

Previous research suggested that African American consumers tend to be more receptive to advertising in general and more responsive to advertising featuring African American models.[1]

Hume (1983) cited evidence that African American consumers were at least twice as likely as Whites to rate celebrities as being more believable than noncelebrity endorsers. *Marketing News* reported on a study that indicated that celebrity athletes and entertainers were the most likely advertising spokespersons who could cause African Americans to buy a product ("Survey Measures," 1981).

In one of the early studies on the celebrity ad, Friedman and Friedman (1979) found that the celebrity would be more effective for products with psychological or social risk, involving such elements as good taste, self-image, and opinions of others. Atkin and Block (1983) speculated that because young people tend to respect famous entertainers and athletes, the impact of the celebrity extends to the message and product. The general finding in almost all of the experimental research that used predominantly White samples concluded that celebrity ads are more effective than noncelebrity ads.

A very limited number of studies only recently have begun to focus on the role of celebrity ads on the African American consumers. Pitts, Whalen, O'Keefe, and Murray (1989) examined the effects of four television commercials that were written and produced by African Americans. African American subjects in their study consistently responded with vigor and enthusiasm to the ads rich in African American icons, experience, and actors. Williams and Qualls (1989) analyzed the difference between African American and White middle-class consumers' reaction to advertising featuring two African American celebrity endorsers, Bill Cosby and Sugar Ray Leonard. Here the African American subjects rated celebrity advertising more positively than did Whites regardless of their level of racial identity index.

ADOLESCENT CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

The available research, according to Moore (1990), has clearly demonstrated that television advertising has considerable influence, particularly with children and adolescents. Moschis (1987) found that television advertising increases young viewers' materialism and conspicuous consumption.

Donohue, Meyer, and Henke (1978) reported that African American children and teenagers watch more television in general than do their White counterparts, and they are more likely to evaluate television shows and ads as being more realistic and believable. In his book, Moschis (1987) stated that African American youth are more likely to respond favorably to ad stimuli.

Although there is growing concern in the African American community, not much information is available to answer the increasing number of questions regarding African American teenagers.

Based on this previous research, the following research questions were formulated for the present study:

1. How do African American teenagers rate and respond to television ads on athletic shoes featuring African American athletes?

2. What are the effects of these ads on the product perception and purchase intent among African American teenagers?
3. How does the creation of awareness and desire for the advertised product affect the parent-child interaction in the African American family?

METHODS

SUBJECTS

A total of 161 African American teenagers in the public schools of Houston participated in the study in April 1991. The mean age of the sample was 14.56 years with a range of 12 to 18. The sample consisted of 30.4% boys and 69.6% girls.

About 50% of the sample had annual family income of $30,000 or less; 26%, $30,000-$49,999; and 24%, $50,000 or more. Occupational status of parents consisted of more blue-collar workers than white-collar workers. Nearly 67% of the students lived in single-family residences, whereas 33% lived in apartments.

On household ownership of communication equipment, 65% had cable television, 84% had VCRs, 96% had stereos, and 25% had personal computers.

MEASURES

The first section of the questionnaire for the study included items on demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the subjects as well as several indexes on television and other media uses.

Amount of television use was determined by asking subjects the number of hours they usually watch each weekday. The alternative media preferences were examined by six items: (a) watching television, (b) reading newspapers, (c) listening to radio, (d) going to movies, (e) reading books, and (f) reading magazines. For these six items, the students selected any one of the 5 response categories, with 1 being *like to do least* and 5 being *like to do most*.

The second part of the questionnaire focused on athletic shoes and athletic shoe commercials. The subjects were first asked whether they were wearing athletic shoes. If they were, they indicated the brand name and price paid for the pair.

Attitude toward television commercials was measured on six adjectives (items) using a 10-point scale with 1 = *most negative* and 10 = *most positive*. Likelihood to buy was also measured using a 10-point scale with 1 = *not at all likely* and 10 = *very much likely*. These rating scales were adapted from previous studies (Atkin & Block 1983; Friedman & Friedman, 1979; Williams & Qualls, 1989).

Intent to purchase was determined by a single item that asked the respondents the likelihood of purchase of these items on a scale ranging from 1 to 10, with 1 being *not at all likely* and 10 being *very much likely*.

To measure the perceived influence of African American celebrities in the ads, respondents were asked, "How much influence do you think African American sports celebrities have on your decision to buy a particular brand of athletic shoes?" Answer categories ranged from *quite a lot* to *none*. Finally, the influence of television commercials on the subsequent intrafamily interaction was examined by asking, "Have your parents ever disagreed with your choice of athletic shoes you want them to buy?"

FINDINGS

Results of statistical analyses made to answer the three central research questions are presented following the discussion on the media use patterns of the sample.

The amount of time reported for television use per day was rather heavy. About 22% of the sample watched between 3 and 5 hours, 26% between 5 and 7 hours, and 27% more than 7 hours. In summary, 75% of the subjects watched television for 3 hours or more on weekdays. Our data also revealed little parental control over television use with 40% of the sample saying that they can stay up as late as they want watching television.

TABLE 1
Television and Other Media Use ($N = 161$)

Item	*1 (percentage)*	*2 (percentage)*	*3 (percentage)*	*4 (percentage)*	*5 (percentage)*	*Overall Mean*[a]
Watching television	5.6	8.1	20.6	23.8	41.9	3.88
Reading newspapers	35.2	24.5	21.4	11.3	7.5	2.31
Listening to radio	3.1	44.4	8.8	23.3	60.4	4.33
Going to movies	4.4	5.7	15.7	23.9	50.3	4.10
Reading books	27.4	22.9	21.7	12.1	15.9	2.66
Reading magazines	19.7	19.7	26.1	18.5	15.9	2.91

a. Means were computed using the following scale: 1 = *like to do least*, 5 = *like to do most*.

Responses on other media use, as shown in Table 1, suggested that most subjects prefer listening to radio, going to movies, and watching television to reading newspapers or books.

ATTITUDE TOWARD TELEVISION ADS ON ATHLETIC SHOES

At the time of the survey, 73.1% of the African American teens in the sample were wearing athletic shoes. Among these, 46.2% had Nike brands, 14.5% LA Gear, 12.8% Adidas, 9.4% Ellesse, and less than 1% Reebok, as shown in Table 2.

More than 14% spent $100 or more for the pair, 13.2% $76-$99, 53% $50-$75, 16% $30-$49, and 4.4% less than $30. The majority of the students reported the fashion look or style or "in thing to do" as the primary reason for buying a particular brand, whereas prestige and comfort were the second and third most important reasons.

Table 3 presents results of ratings on the two major television ads, Nike's Air Jordan and Reebok's the Pump. Nike ads featuring Michael Jordan and Spike Lee were rated more positively than were Reebok's the Pump featuring Dominique Wilkins for all of six adjectives. For instance, on a rating scale of 1 to 10 with 1 being the lowest and 10 the highest rating, the mean likability scores were

TABLE 2
Information on Athletic Shoes

Item	n	*Percentage*
Are you wearing athletic shoes right now?		
Yes	117	73.1
No	44	26.9
If yes, how much did you pay for the pair?		
Less than $30	5	4.4
$30-$49	18	15.8
$50-$75	60	52.6
$76-$99	15	13.2
$100-$125	8	7.0
More than $125	8	7.0
Motivation to buy a particular brand		
Prestige	10	7.2
Fashion look/style/trend	95	68.8
Comfort	9	6.5
Price	3	2.2
Quality	7	5.1
Other	14	10.1

TABLE 3
Attitude Toward Selected Commercials

Item	*Nike's Air Jordan*	*Reebok's the Pump*
Likable[a]	9.07	6.37
Enjoyable[a]	8.68	6.37
Believable[a]	7.00	5.29
Attractive[a]	8.91	6.35
Interesting[a]	8.37	6.44
Convincing[a]	8.01	5.75
Likelihood to buy[b]	8.29	4.99
Estimated selling price	$108.78	$99.53

a. Means were computed by the following scale: 1 = *most negative*, 10 = *most positive*.
b. Means were computed by the following scale: 1 = *not at all likely*, 10 = *very much likely*.

9.07 for the Nike ad and 6.37 for the Reebok ad. These two African American celebrities in the Nike ads were perceived as more likable, enjoyable, and attractive than believable and convincing. The most favorite celebrity in sports shoe commercials recalled by

TABLE 4
Perceived Influence of African American Celebrity Ads, by Access to Cable Television (in percentages)

Access to Cable	*Quite a Lot*	*Some*	*Little*	*Very Little*	*None*	*Don't Know*
Yes	41.7	22.3	1.9	8.7	7.8	17.5
No	38.2	12.7	14.5	3.6	9.1	21.8

$\chi^2 = 12.63$, $df = 5$, $p = .02$.

the students included Michael Jordan (76.1%), Bo Jackson (12.0%), Magic Johnson (3.2%), Dominique Wilkins (1.6%), Spike Lee (1.6%), and others (5.6%).

PERCEIVED INFLUENCE OF TELEVISION COMMERCIALS

The likelihood of actually getting the Nike product was significantly higher than that of getting the Reebok product among African American teenagers, as shown in Table 3. In fact, nearly 63% of the sample rated the possibility of 10 for Nike's Air Jordan product. The controversial call for boycott of Nike products by Operation PUSH received a low awareness rating from the teens. Only 27.8% of the sample were aware of the boycott movement.

The perceived influence of African American sports figures in the ads was measured by asking, "How much influence do you think African American sports celebrities have on your decision to buy a particular brand of athletic shoes?" A rather substantial proportion of students, 40%, suggested *quite a lot*, and 19.5% answered *some*. On the other hand, 6.9% said *very little* and 8.2% *none*.

The association between the amount of television viewing and the perceived influence of celebrities in television ads was positive but not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 24.86$, $df = 20$, n.s.). However, there was significant difference between the subjects who had access to cable television and who did not in the perceived influence of television ads featuring African American sports figures. Table 4 presents the results of the χ^2 test. Those students who had cable

TABLE 5
Perceived Influence of African American Celebrity Ads, by Sex (in percentages)

Sex	*Quite a Lot*	*Some*	*Little*	*Very Little*	*None*	*Don't Know*
Boys	45.8	27.1	2.1	8.3	8.3	8.3
Girls	37.8	16.2	8.1	6.3	8.1	23.4

$\chi^2 = 8.74$, $df = 5$, n.s.

television believed that African American athletes influenced them more than it did those who did not have cable service.

To determine whether sex differences were present in the data, the data were analyzed by χ^2 analysis, which did not approach statistical significance. The data, however, suggested that boys demonstrated a higher level of perceived influence than did girls, as shown in Table 5. This may be attributed to the fact that most of the celebrities in television ads were male athletes.

PARENT-CHILD CONFLICT REGARDING SHOES

The effect of television and other sources of information on the purchasing behavior of athletic shoes within the African American family was also examined in the survey.

As summarized in Table 6, about 24% of the sample cited television advertising alone as the most important source of information for shoes, whereas another 19% cited television and friends. In fact, friends (32%) was found to be the most important referent among all the sources for this particular category of product. Both friends and television emerged as significant sources of information and influence.

In the meantime, the extent of parental involvement in shoe purchasing appeared to be based on economic considerations rather than on others. Our data revealed that 56% of the sample admitted that they had disagreements with parents regarding the shoe purchases. Nearly 80% of them reported that the conflict was over price but not about the appearance or style attributes of athletic shoes.

TABLE 6
Sources of Information on Athletic Shoes ($N = 161$)

Source	n	*Percentage*
Friends	51	31.68
Television ads	39	24.22
Television ads and friends	31	19.25
Store/mall/salesperson	25	15.53
Store/friends	8	4.97
Family/relatives	5	3.11
Catalog/other sources	2	1.24

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The results of this study again reiterate the attractiveness of television and radio among African American youngsters. It is strongly evident that exposure to television ads on sports shoes played a major role in the selection of shoe brand. This was indicated by the overwhelming response (68%) showing fashion look/style/trend to be the primary motivation to buy a particular brand and the fact that friends and/or television advertisements provided the sources of information for 75% of the respondents. It may be concluded that these sources were used to determine what was the "in thing to do," suggesting the combination of peer influence and television to be a powerful determinant in their selection.

There was a strong indication that celebrity commercials were highly influential in the selection of shoe brand. However, the fact that those with access to cable perceived significantly greater influence (41.7% *quite a lot*, 22.3% *some influence*, giving a total of 64%) by celebrities made it apparent that the variety of choices and greater opportunity to view more sports programming may have played a role in reinforcing the influence of celebrities. This suggested that advertisers might see greater marketing benefits in the future by using cable for exposure.

DISCUSSION

The findings from the present study suggested that many African American teenagers do indeed display positive liking toward television ads featuring African American athletes. Michael Jordan, who has proven himself on the basketball court, has been extremely effective as a spokesperson for Nike products. Perhaps young African Americans identify with him easily or want to emulate him.

The second research question of the study was to examine the perceived influence of celebrity ads. Amount of television viewing and exposure to cable seemed to be related to the perceived influence among African American teenagers. Buying intention, which was taken as a measure of influence, was quite high for Nike products. This adds support to previous research that related the impact of celebrity to the brand preferences and purchase intent among television viewers.

The goal of the third research question was to determine the effect of television ads on the intrafamily interaction regarding the advertised product. Responses from the sample revealed that parents and teenagers in fact often disagree and argue over purchase decisions on athletic shoes. Again this seems generally in line with the results of previous research on predominantly White samples, which showed that the extent of parent-adolescent involvement in purchasing appeared to be related to the price of the product and social visibility. One of the most important questions to be examined in the future research would be the process and mechanism of resolving intrafamily conflict regarding purchase decisions. What causes parents to yield to children's pressure to buy expensive athletic shoes even though economic considerations are a serious issue and there is an initial resistance to such purchases?

NOTE

1. For an overview of empirical findings relating to Black consumer behavior, see Moschis (1987, pp. 259-262).

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