

June 2020

A Case Study on Black Twitter's Reactions to the Framing of Blacks in Dove's 2017 Facebook Advertisement

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A Case Study on Black Twitter's Reactions to the Framing of Blacks in Dove's 2017 Facebook
Advertisement

by

Shereena Farrington

A thesis in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
The Zimmerman School of Advertising and Mass Communications
College of Arts & Sciences
University of South Florida

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Date of Approval:
June 25, 2020

Keywords: Black buying power, representation, skin lightening

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Abstract

Insensitivity to racial issues has long been one of the main causes of controversy in the marketing field. Among many brands to have caused outrage across social media, is the notable brand, Dove. The criticism that the veteran brand received has shown that even experienced marketers can still find themselves being accused of insensitivity or even racism (Ma, 2018). The gaffe of an advertisement released by Dove in 2017, serves as the impetus for the need for diversity in brands. Given today's complex society, the purpose of this study is to identify themes that emerged in Black Twitter's responses to Dove's 2017 Facebook advertisement. Further, the study provides marketers with practical recommendations on how to avoid representational issues in future ads. This research is a thematic analysis of popular tweets, which identified emerging themes in Black Twitter's reactions to Dove's ad. The author has chosen to add to the existing literature by examining the problematic issues with Dove's 2017 ad. To address the racial issues found in the ad, the following three themes have been identified as themes on Black Twitter: 1. Black buying power, 2. skin lightening and 3. representation.

Chapter One: Introduction

Through the changing times of marketing and advertising, digital marketing has reached more audience and generally is cheaper than, for instance, billboard advertising (Minnium, 2014). A common and popular channel for digital marketing is social media. Social media serves as an engaging communication tool and repository for commentary on current topics, providing real-time feedback. Consequently, the inception of social media has in many instances forced marketers to take a serious look at the content that they publish, so as to avoid unintentionally offending their consumer base. However, although the Black dollar is highly sought after by large brands, advertisements that intend to promote or sell products to Blacks, contain negative imagery about Blacks. The ads subtly perpetuate and reinforce negative societal beliefs and expectations about the Black group. Negative images and texts become part of the culture of a society and become the basis on which new images and words are created (Baker, 2005). As such, people draw conclusions about others based on the negative words and imagery they learn. MacDougall et. al. (2016) states that the way in which we perceive others has a direct effect on how we interact and behave towards them. Studies show that audiences substitute stereotypes they see on screen for reality, when they have not had any direct interactions with particular racial groups (Wallace, 2019). To avoid the perpetuation of negative stereotypes about Blacks, the media has a responsibility to portray full-bodied and realistic depictions of all people of color. The depictions of people of color by the media should avoid the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes (Baynes, 2003).

To expound upon said point, research draws knowledge from the person perception concept. Person perception is simply the process which comes into play when we are interacting with others in our environment, allowing us to understand and relate to them and leading to the formation of impressions (MacDougall et. al., 2016). The world comprises of ever-changing and complex stimuli which leads to cognitive short-cuts. These short-cuts aid in people's ability to process very limited information. Expanding on the idea that impressions of others are sometimes formed on the grounds of limited interactions and experiences, the study aims to examine the perceived problems in Dove's advertisement which received negative criticism. The study also seeks to explore how online users of Black Twitter reacted to Dove's Facebook advertisement. To accomplish this, the study will examine the 2017 Dove case, in which Dove's misstep ultimately raised questions about its brand's misrepresentational issues. Dove's three-second GIF showed that of a Black woman removing a brown t-shirt, only to reveal a White woman. The short ad was later removed, and the Unilever brand apologized. The economist Albert Hirschman once noted that having opinions might be essential to a person's well-being. A person should hold opinions of his own and cannot have self-respect without opinions that define and identify him (Chong & Druckman, 2007). However, personal opinions have shaped public perception of specific groups of people. For example, Baynes (2003) posits that Blacks are grouped in print and television ads, Whites, on the other hand, do not have to worry about white media absences or stereotypes for several reasons. The main reason is that negative stereotypes that do refer to Whites are usually isolated to some specific group of Whites. Whites are often viewed as individuals with specific nuances. However, Blacks are often viewed as exhibiting the same traits and characteristics across the entire racial group (Baynes, 2003).

Rooted in framing theory, the study proposes that advertisements are a means to help consumers form biased opinions about a group based on stereotypes. Further, humans are socially and cognitively conditioned because of the magnitude of influence that social media has. Racism in advertising has perpetuated stereotypes that have furthered racial oppression. The intimate historical and contemporary relationship between race and capital can be understood as beginning with racialized slavery within which human beings themselves were transformed into commodities (Ramamurthy et. al., 2013). The transactional occurrence of buying and selling of Blacks has normalized society's idea of subservience. The Dove case was selected for this study because of the following reasons: 1. The Dove ad directly addresses the representation of Black people, 2. The soap industry has a long-standing history of including Blacks in soap advertisements in which the Black skin needs to be cleaned, and 3. The ad was a popular online topic, which managed to garner the attention of the public on and offline; notable celebrities included. The emerging themes within the study will help to add to future research surrounding representation issues. By examining the reactions and perceptions of negative stereotypes of Blacks in advertising, this study will provide future researchers with a clearer understanding about the need for accurate depiction of Black people in ads. Further, this study seeks to provide future research with knowledge about why the accuracy of Blacks in ads should matter to society.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

According to Adage (2003), if African Americans were included in advertisements, there was a common recurring theme in which black skin needed to be washed so that it would be of a lighter, more “pure” hue. Over the years a number of stereotypes have developed concerning Blacks. Some of these stereotypes, e.g. natural musician and super athlete may have positive connotations; however, others, e.g. Sambo, Uncle Tom, sexual predator, smart-mouthed but clever adolescent, and welfare queen have primarily negative connotations. Research suggests that limited and inaccurate media content facilitates stereotypes of minority groups. Further, stereotypes regarding Blacks, impair intergroup relations because they cause people to view all Blacks as being the same rather than possessing individual traits and characteristics (Ward, 2019). To understand some of the major historical stereotypes about Blacks in advertising, it is important to explore the framing theory.

Framing theory

Goffman (1974), under the title of Frame Analysis proposed that people interpret what is going on around their world through their primary framework. This framework is regarded as primary as it is taken for granted by the user (Davie, 2010). The major premise of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from a variety of perspectives and be construed as having implications for multiple values or considerations. Framing refers to the process by which people develop a particular conceptualization of an issue or reorient their thinking about an issue (Chong et al., 2007). Americans are exposed to an abundance of advertisements daily which permeates society through magazines, television, billboards, and the internet. Framing focuses on the media’s ability to draw the public’s eye to specific and popular topics, then creates a frame

through which the consumer will comprehend the information. The fact that advertisements are so pervasive suggests that they may have a significant impact on society (Baker, 2005). As such, frames help people organize what they see in everyday life. Goffman calls frames the “schemata of interpretation,” a framework that helps in making an otherwise meaningless succession of events into something meaningful (p. 21). Through the concept of social phenomena, the behaviors of others shape how people view events and life occurrences. Further, framing could have significant connotations as frames highlight some aspects of reality while excluding other elements, which might lead individuals to interpret issues differently. The topic of racial bias is provided meaning and is eventually deemed relevant and newsworthy. Content consumers accept trending topics as timely and worth discussing, and out of the discussions come movements and social protests.

Framing theory and Blacks in Advertising

Since the advent of communication, the media has been able to persuade and influence individuals through newspaper, radio, and television. An individual can place different emphasis on various considerations about a subject. One’s frame in thought can have a marked impact on one’s overall opinion (Chong et al., 2007). As a result, the media’s influence has framed its consumer’s beliefs and ideas through select wording and imaging, especially with the use of Black minority groups in advertising. The idea of beautiful hair and skin color in advertisements is disassociated from the images shown of Blacks. According to Easter (2017) the discrimination against Black hair can be traced to slavery, when slave owners gave preferential treatment to those with “good hair” — a term still used today to describe black hair that more closely resembles European hair textures. Consequently, to better assimilate and achieve a higher status in society, Black people used techniques such as the hot comb, flat iron, and chemical relaxer to

straighten their kinky hair texture. In a content analysis of various studies about Black hair and the beauty standard, Lester (2000) states that even the term “relaxing” suggests that one’s hair is tight and kinky and needs to be loosened or straightened. “Kinky” carries with it, obvious negative associations of deviation from an established standard or norm. Blacks have notoriously chosen to conform to the American standard of beauty even when conforming meant putting themselves in a jeopardous position. For example, the very process of making a Black woman’s hair straight is potentially dangerous. Home relaxer kits come with bold warnings about chemicals in the relaxer that might, if not properly applied, cause skin and scalp burns and irritation, hair breakage and loss, and eye injury. Not only is the person applying the relaxer encouraged to wear gloves, but other warnings include not wetting, shampooing, brushing, or scratching the scalp for two to three days before using the relaxer, not applying the relaxer directly to the scalp, not pulling hair forcibly during the relaxation process (Lester, 2000). Despite the potential dangers, the Black hair care industry is saturated with products that are marketed to Black females.

Druckman (2001) stated that descriptive research on the concept of framing, approaches to the study of framing, and the effects of framing on public opinion, proposes that scholars examine how different frames cause individuals to base their opinions on different considerations with little attention to overall opinions (e.g., the focus is on how frames alter the importance of different considerations). Aunt Jemima is one of the more popular characters known for the stereotyping of Blacks in ads. Aunt Jemima was the first brand to use a Black person as a trademark; and the product's marketer was the first to promote the idea of giving a product away to attract new customers (Adage, 2003). The European ideology of Blacks in advertisements from the abolishment of slavery to the Civil Rights movement in the United States depicted

Blacks with an overly emphasized body frame, thick lips, and bulging eyes. Druckman (2001) explains that people turn to elites for guidance and they are, thus, selective about which frames they believe come from sources they perceive to be credible. In this way, consumers turn to advertisements for the media's interpretations on how the Black skin should be evaluated.

Stereotyping of Blacks in Advertisements

Existing research speaks to the portrayals of non-Whites in advertisements in the following ways: 1.) in the background, 2.) associated with fast food, liquor and automobiles, or 3.) as subservient to White authority figures (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000). Further, television commercials from 1967-1969 found that Blacks were used to sell actual products rather than as background figures but were rarely seen alone in an advertisement (Zinkhan et. al., 1990).

Advertisements that feature Blacks pigeonholed the group. Bristor, Gravois, and Hunt's (1995) study on Race and Ideology discussed the following six identified themes surrounding Blacks and television: objectification, marginalization or trivialization, camera distance, status/power balance, exposure time and cultural values. The aforementioned themes were used in the analysis of prime-time television commercials which serve to highlight problematic images of Blacks that persist in contemporary advertising. Although the numerical representation of Blacks in contemporary television advertising has improved in recent years, the potentially positive effects of including more Blacks in advertisements are often mitigated by subtle racist elements that suggest Black inferiority (Bristor et al., 1995). In the spirit of self-regulation, the authors suggest actions that the advertising industry could present more positive and varied portrayals of minority population. The research study concludes that arguably most advertisers are committed to portraying positive minority images. However, the continued presence of negative images

suggests that advertisers are often unaware that some of their advertisements can be perceived as demeaning or insensitive (Bristor et al., 1995).

The Effects of Stereotyping Blacks

Patton's (2006) study uses the Afrocentric and standpoint theories to shed light on the salience of the effects of societal definitions of beauty. Black women have challenged the advertised standard of beauty by defining their own beauty. Blacks have not always been framed in a positive way in advertising. The media's limited view about a particular group encouraged society to make judgment calls on who they think the Black group is. More importantly, because of the negative and inaccurate depictions of the ethnic group in advertisements, the study suggests that Blacks do not feel accurately represented in Dove's ad. To this end, it is important for marketers to consider that misrepresentations of Blacks has the ability to influence Black consumers' purchasing choices.

Additionally, inaccuracies as it relates to the misconceptions of the Blacks, has the potential for Blacks to view themselves in the same way in which they are represented in marketing. The importance of the study is reflective of the number of studies since the 1960s, that have highlighted the importance of minority groups and minority portrayals. Negative stereotypical depictions of minorities or their exclusion from advertisements in mainstream media has been found to have harmful social effects (Taylor, 1995). The residual effects of negative connotations have contributed to prejudice and inequities in an educational and occupational construct. For example, Taylor's (1995) study suggests that African Americans are often depicted as athletes or entertainers. The author further states that "children may see role models whose achievements are not realistic for most of the population" (p. 610). Magazine and television advertisements depict a decidedly European or North American context.

Advertisements are not proudly African. Moreover, a dominant culture is less willing to accept a minority group as adequately representing a full range of human characteristics and social status if the group is presented with inaccurate limitations. For the sake of diversity and promoting cultural competency among employees and consumers, the need to eradicate racial stereotyping in advertising should be a topic of discussion among all brands.

Frames of Blacks

Goffman (1976) posits that whether we pose for a picture or execute an actual ritual action, what we are presenting is a commercial, an ideal presentation under the auspice of its characterizing the way things really are. There is no such thing as unframed information, and most successful communicators are adept at framing, whether using frames intentionally or intuitively (Nisbet, 2009). In an 1890s advertisement (see Figure 1), Pears soap showed the image of a black boy getting into a tub of water. In a second frame, after he had used Pears, the boy had a white body, although his head, which had not been immersed in the soapy water, remained black (Adage, 2003). Another advertisement for Pears soap captured the words, “The White Man’s Burden”. In this advertisement an older Caucasian man is dressed in all white militia type attire, standing at the sink and below him are the words, “Pears soap is a potent factor in brightening the dark corners of the earth.” Over 100 years post the Pears’ soap ad, the Unilever company known as Dove received flak for its Facebook advertisement depicting a Black woman undressing from a brown t-shirt to reveal a White woman in a white t-shirt. One can deduce that not much has changed from the Black advertisements in the 1800s. The study is significant because according to Franklin (2014), the ongoing issue is that by and large, the Black community in the United States does not feel culturally represented in the \$177.8-billion-dollar advertising industry. Moreover, the images and words that appear in advertisements

marketing Black products are not reflective of the way Blacks see themselves. Although during the last five years there has been a strategic debate among marketers about the rapid growth of ethnic minority populations and talk of "minority-majorities", many marketers are missing their target in the messages that attempt to reflect the Black community (Franklin, 2014).



The original Pears' soap advert published in the Graphic for Christmas 1884.

Figure 1. Pears' Soap Advertisement

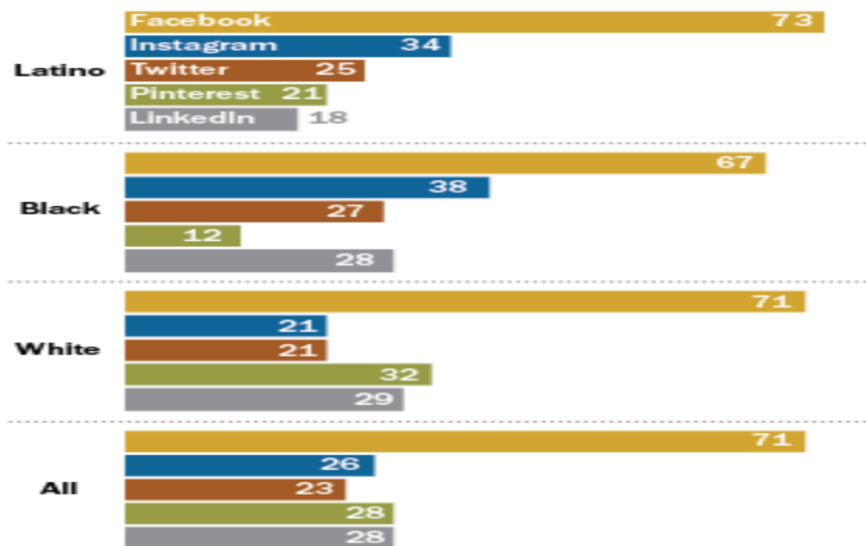
To address the problematic racial issues found in Dove's ad, which led to the perceptions and reactions of Black Twitter and Dove, the following three themes are discussed: 1. Black Buying Power, 2. Skin lightening and 3. representation. Alderton (2017) states that African American consumers now make up 13 percent of the U.S. population and spend more than \$600 billion every year. Annually, Blacks are spending thousands of dollars per household on beauty. As a result, a platform should be provided that positively reflect Black consumers to show that brands are committed to its Black consumers.

Digital Advertising

“Digital advertising, also called Internet Advertising (“Internet marketing”) is when businesses leverage Internet technologies to deliver promotional advertisements to consumers. Digital advertising includes promotional advertisements and messages delivered through email, social media websites, online advertising on search engines, banner ads on mobile or Web sites and affiliates programs” (Beal, 2017). Despite making up 51% of the population, women only feature in 33% of advertising. Women are rarely shown in positions of power, and when they are these roles are usually linked to seduction, beauty or motherhood (Roger, 2016). The success of many notable brands has been attributed to advertising, but it has also been described as a significant factor in the establishment and evolution of Western consumer culture, as seen in present day. To this end, failing to engage with the large issue of diversity could ultimately damage a brand’s identity. According to the Lloyds report, 65% of respondents say they feel more favorable toward a brand that reflects diversity in advertising, while 67% of those surveyed expect advertisers to represent the diverse aspects of society (Rogers, 2016). Moreover, opinions about a brand are subjective and therefore rely on a person’s individual personal experience with that particular brand. The use of digital marketing through social media has infiltrated people’s daily life with amazing rapidity to become one of the most important social platforms for computer-mediated communication (Arli, 2017). Social media Marketers are searching for ideas to base their marketing strategies on how to engage and influence their customers (Hoffman & Novak, 2012). Since social media’s inception, it has changed how consumers and marketers communicate with one another. With more online users taking advantage of daily social conversations, Twitter is a popular communication tool because it provides on demand information. Forsey (2019) states that:

“in 2006 Twitter, began as an SMS-based platform with a 140-character limit. Twitter has grown exponentially since. The micro-blog now accommodates 280 characters, and its purpose is ultimately to spread information fast through a “tweet”. Twitter can handle 18 quintillion user accounts and of the active Twitter users, 74% say they use the network to get their news; 38% of Americans who use Twitter are aged 18 to 29 years old; and 34% are females and 66% are males”.

Edison’s annual research showed Black people represented 25% of Twitter users, roughly twice their share of the population in general (Saint, 2010). Twitter is well-suited for mobile use, and its users are more engaged with the mobile Internet than the general population by a wide margin. Further, Twitter is a very popular communication tool among Blacks. The below image looks at social media use by race.



Note: Blacks and whites include only non-Hispanics. Hispanics are of any race.
 Source: Pew Research Center’s Internet Project September Combined Omnibus Survey, Sept. 11-14, 2014 and Sept. 18-21, 2014. n=1,445 internet users

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

As cited by Jens Manual Krogstad in February 2015.

Figure 2. Pew Research Center

Black Twitter

Black Twitter is a subculture within the Twitter platform, materializing through the creation of hashtags. These hashtags or “blacktags” tend to comment on black culture and society-at-large (Lee, 2017). Twitter’s popularity is credited to its large interconnection among groups. From interconnectivity comes Black Twitter, a tightly established and well-grounded subculture on Twitter. Black Twitter’s power and popularity amongst its users and viewers stems from its democratic participatory nature. Black Twitter often addresses meaningful social issues, which heavily focuses on racial bias and discrimination. According to Willis (2019), Black Twitter is the place where, for once, we can put to bed what the rest of the world thinks being Black means. For Blacks, Black Twitter allows them to celebrate the diversity of blackness that exists outside the context of whiteness. Black Twitter is a fun space that offers a sense of pride within the community of Blacks. Black Twitter is a safe space for Blacks to share stories that other people who look like them can relate to. Black Twitter certainly isn’t for everyone and it was never intended to be. Much of the storytelling by Blacks and for Blacks produces joy for others through laughter because of truth. To understand Black Twitter and its humorous antics, Willis (2019) posits that:

“understanding the jokes of Black Twitter isn’t always cut and dry. Coded language, often in the form of African American Vernacular English (AAVE) and other slang, signals users in the Black Twitter community and triggers "insider status." Without knowledge of references and slang, much of Black Twitter can become lost in translation — which is why the vast majority of Black Twitter isn’t seen by an outside audience. It’s within hashtags that Black Twitter truly comes alive, a place where jokes double as affirmative displays of identity”.

Black Twitter is comprised of Blacks occupying a public forum where they participate in good-natured banter. However, Black Twitter is not a separate social platform. Black Twitter affords influencers and online communicators with the ability to highlight issues of concerns

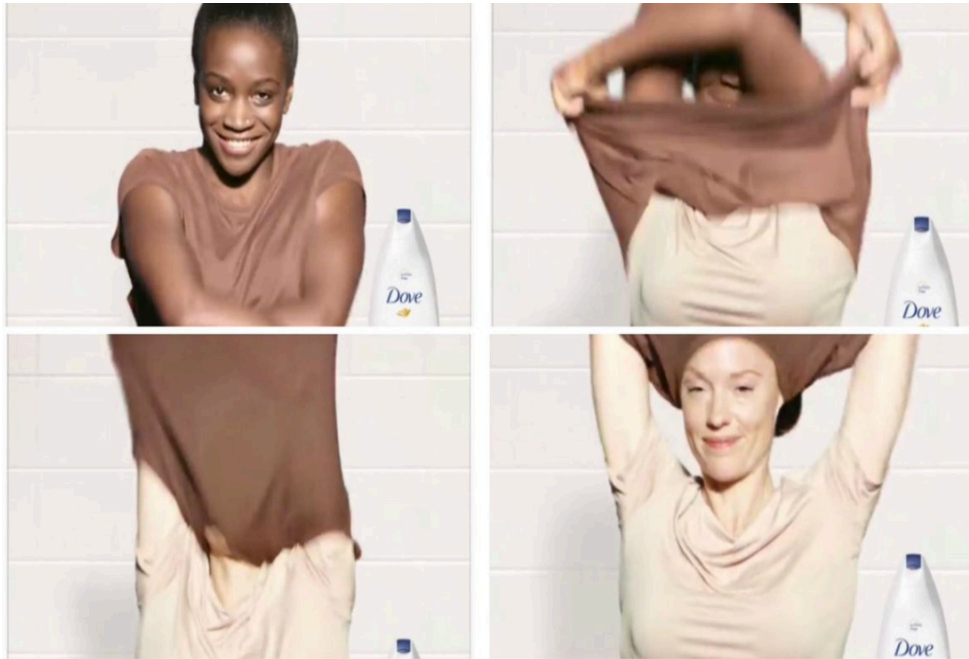
in black communities. The rhetoric found on Black Twitter is often analyzed by the media and the public. Although it is unclear who coined the phrase, “Black Twitter”, in 2010, technology columnist Farhad Manjoo observed that black users tended to be more socially active than others. “They follow one another more readily, they retweet each other more often, and more of their posts are @-replies — posts directed at other users” (Guo, 2015).

Chapter Three: Dove Case Study

Once known as the slave coast the sovereign modern-day country in West Africa is now known as Nigeria, a country rich in palm oil. Interested in palm oil, a British businessman by the name of George Goldie formed the United African Company in the 1870's in order to export Nigeria's natural resource. Nigeria's native chiefs were said to be deceived into signing agreements that gave Goldie's company exclusive rights to export palm oil, after initially agreeing that free trade would not be obstructed. The United African Company became Royal Niger Company and later The Niger Company Ltd. It was later absorbed by UNILEVER which still operates in Nigeria today (Tayo, 2019). On October 6, 2017, an ire-inducing advertisement was released by Dove, a Unilever personal care brand. The first image (see Figure 2) shows a dark-skinned Black woman in what appears to be a bathroom. A bottle of Dove body wash is visible in the lower right-hand corner of the ad, indicating that the picture is an ad for a Dove skincare product. In subsequent frames, the Black woman lifts the brown t-shirt that she is wearing over her head to reveal a smiling white woman (Wootson, 2017). It is important to note here that the full video included three women with differing skin tones; however, social media users compared the ad to more blatantly racist "whitewashing" ads from the 19th century (Rittenhouse, 2017). Offended by the Facebook advertisement, Black Twitter expressed their utter disgust and disapproval of the seemingly racist ad via Twitter, which quickly went viral.

Makeup artist Naomi Blake put together screen grabs of Dove's clip and shared it to Facebook (Schallon, 2017). Blake's Facebook post in Figure 4 stated, "so, I'm scrolling through Facebook and this is the #dove ad that comes up ... ok so what am I looking at," she wrote as the

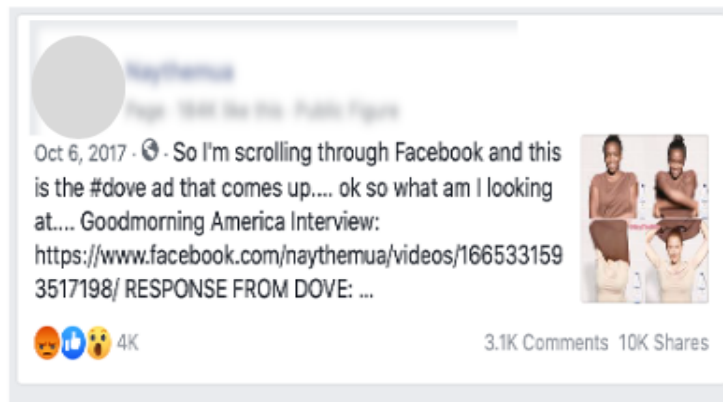
caption. Under the post, Blake was asked if people would be offended if the white woman had turned into a black woman. She said: “Nope, we wouldn’t and that’s the whole point. What does America tell black people? That we are judged by the color of our skin and that includes what is considered beautiful in this country.” She added that Dove’s marketing team should have known better and said, “the tone deafness in these companies makes no sense” (Slawson, 2017).



Facebook © 2020

Figure 3. 2017 Dove Ad on Facebook

In two short days, Blake’s post was shared more than 10,000 times and her compilation swiftly circulated around Twitter. Blake also shared a screen shot of a third woman featured in the clip, who makes a cameo after the white woman (the model doesn't appear to be Caucasian, but she is light-skinned), as well as feedback she left on Dove's Facebook page. "What's the message here?" Blake wrote in the comments. "Look at this from another person's perspective and ask them what does this ad mean?" She suggested Dove include more models with a range in ethnicity in the ad so its messaging couldn't be misconstrued.



Facebook © 2020

Figure 4. Makeup Artist’s Original Facebook Post

Post negative feedback of the advertisement from the online community of social media users, Dove released a statement on its Twitter page saying that the ad intended to depict each woman’s skin “after” they had used Dove’s moisturizing product. Many thought the ad was depicting the before and after of the product lightening the skin of the Black woman (Rittenhouse, 2017). Dove acknowledged that the brand missed the mark entirely (see Figure 5). Realizing that the brand’s apology was insufficient, Dove posted a longer tweet two days later formally apologizing for the insensitive advertisement. Included in the written apology (Figure 6) Dove stated that, “This should not have happened [,] and we are re-evaluating our internal processes for creating and approving content to prevent us [from] making this type of mistake in the future.” Responses to Dove’s racially insensitive clip of a black woman appearing to shed her body for a “cleaner” white version in a now-removed Facebook post promoting the brand’s body wash provided a reminder that the ad industry is still very much divided.



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 5. Dove’s Initial Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 6. Dove’s Apology Tweet

Chapter Four: Research Question

The objective of this study to identify emerging themes in Black Twitter's reactions to Dove's 2017 Facebook advertisement. For that purpose, more than 100 tweets were extrapolated and analyzed. In the end 32 tweets were selected for the purposes of the research. The author selected Twitter to conduct the research because it is a popular social media channel that is most heavily used by Black men and women, in comparison to other social mediums. Launched in 2006, Twitter is easy to use and allows users to stay in touch with friends and family, keep up with celebrities, and receive news on political social, global, and local news. To better understand Black Twitter's reactions surrounding the representational issues in Dove's ad, this study aims to answer the following research question:

RQ1: What themes emerged from comments contained on Black Twitter during the five days following the 2017 Dove ad?

The research question hopes to present the reactions of the Black online community to its readers in a way that is clear and easy to follow. In addition to providing understandable context, the research question provides brands with a conversation starter about representational issues surrounding Blacks.

Chapter Five: Method

This study will employ a thematic analysis, which is a qualitative research method. The use of said method allows the researcher to identify the perceptions and reactions of Black Twitter. Twitter is a useful social media platform to conduct the study because of its capacity to broadly propagate information to a large audience (Kim, Sung, Kang, 2014). Tweets will be examined following the release of the Dove ad from October 6, 2017 through October 11, 2017. The five-day period immediately following the ad's release reflects a time of heavy discussion of a perceived racial issue on Black Twitter.

Qualitative Research in Advertising

Qualitative research in advertising focuses on the role of qualitative analyses in revealing how ads are “read” by consumers. Qualitative advertising research can help us evaluate advertisements before, during, and after they appear. The introduction and rising popularity of the Internet and the interactive Web 2.0 have been major factors in the substantial change in advertising media methods, as well as advertising research media and methods (Belk, 2017). While quantitative methods answer factual questions such as who, what, where, and when, and how many; said method doesn't capture responses about why consumers are behaving as they are and what brand and ad meanings they are constructing with marketers and among themselves. In ordinary interaction, face to face or by telephone, people know how to behave in order to sustain or to cause a certain impression among their acquaintances (Braga, 2019). Qualitative ad analysis can take a variety of forms, including hermeneutic, semiotic, reader response, content analysis, and discourse analysis. According to Belk (2017), qualitative reader response method focuses on

how consumers interpret and respond to ads rather than how they are constructed or how they might be interpreted by a third party who is neither the ad's producer nor consumer.

Thematic Analysis

Alhojailan (2012) proposes that thematic analysis is:

considered the most appropriate method for any study that seeks to discover using interpretations, as it provides a systematic element to data analysis. Thematic analysis looks for common themes across the data. It is used to analyze classifications and present themes (patterns) that relate to the data. (p. 40).

This qualitative research was selected for the study to understand the perceptions and reactions of a group. In addition to discovering, thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information. The encoding requires an "explicit" code, which may be a list of themes (Boyatzis, 1998). Throughout the process of analyzing, certain themes were discovered in the collection of tweets. Themes are groups of codes that recur through being similar or connected to each other in a patterned way (Buetow, 2010). It is important to note that it was unknown what theme(s) would emerge from the research. However, the expectation for the study was that framing theory would guide the literature relative to stereotypes. Once the data collection was completed, the study applied the themes across the study. From the use of thematic analysis, social "facts" or observations seems to emerge (Boyatzis, 1998). This analysis is an accessible, flexible, and increasingly popular method of qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clark, 2012).

Procedure and Sample

The research focused on tweets in the earlier week of October of 2017, which totaled to 5 days of textual content. Due to the time restrictions of the study, it is not possible for the researcher to analyze every tweet that mentioned the Dove brand. As a result, the researcher conducted an initial search of tweets that included the words "Black Twitter" and "Dove" in the

same post. The search was conducted through Twitter's advanced search function, which allows for the search of specific words, hashtags, timeframes and etc. Two major searches and two elimination phases were conducted. The first search generated over 100 tweets and retweets; however, an exact number of tweets is unknown due to Twitter's sizable database. A second search was conducted as a way of collecting any missed tweets that included the words Black Twitter and Dove. Next, to reduce the study's sample size to a more manageable number, a smaller sample size of 100 tweets ($n=100$) were included in the first phase of elimination. Upon further analysis, tweets were eliminated from the dataset if the tweet included a different focus or irrelevant theme (e.g. off-color language and off topic comments). Half the number ($n=50$) of tweets were deemed permissible for the next phase of elimination. In the last elimination phase, the researcher used www.Random.org as the online number generator to randomly automate a number to be used for this study. Numbers 1 through 50 were entered into the online tool, and the generator produced the number 32. The new sample size of 32 ($n=32$) is used in this study. In keeping with thematic analysis, tweets were not specifically selected with a theme or themes in mind. The study's themes were identified once a new sample size was established. It is important to note that through the process of elimination and analysis, the study was able to move forward with 32 tweets because the tweets captured the essence of Black Twitter's reactions. As stated earlier, it is unclear how many tweets were published on Twitter during the October 2017 timeframe. This study is concerned about capturing the overarching themes in the comments. For the purposes of the research, tweets were included in the study if the following terms were mentioned: "boycott," "lightening of the skin," and "reverse racism." In addition, to eliminate some bias from the posts, the study included data from Black Twitter users who supported Black

Twitter's reaction to Dove's advertisement, as well as Black Twitter users who do not support the idea that Dove's ad was racially charged.

Chapter Six: Results

The goal of the research question was to determine the themes that emerged from Black Twitter’s reactions to Dove’s ad. After analysis, the following explicit themes were found to be the most prominent throughout the time period: skin lightening, representation, and Black Buying Power. In addition to the primary focus of the research, the tweets highlighted Black people’s views of self and why their opinion matters in the marketplace. Twitter user Figure 7 commented on her recognition of the value of the “Black dollar” in the retail industry. On October 8, 2017, the following post was tweeted, “We have to draw the line and take away our black dollar”.



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 7. Twitter Post

Skin lightening

In Figure 8 another Twitter user post suggested humor, but the post also highlighted the study’s skin lightening theme. Deeply rooted in racial overtones the Twitter user’s implication that by using Dove’s soap, a Black person will appear to be of a lighter complexion. Popular Black celebrities who seemed to have achieved fame donning their Black skin, later took to extreme skin lightening measures once they reached stardom level. Notable celebrities such as pop star Michael Jackson and retired baseball player Sammy Sosa

obtained a fairer complexion using bleaching agents (Hall, 2018). Skin bleaching or skin lightening isn't a new concept among Blacks. In fact, Jackson (2013) stated that "the process of skin bleaching/skin lightening is usually undertaken by an individual in a very deliberate way. Whether one uses topical creams or pills or injections, it is a very conscious and perhaps even a rigorous process". It is possible that the history of colorism is an attributing factor for some Black's insatiable desire to have lighter skin. However, local dermatologists say they are seeing more and more patients whose skin has been damaged by years of bleaching - most of the time irreversibly (Fihlani, 2013).

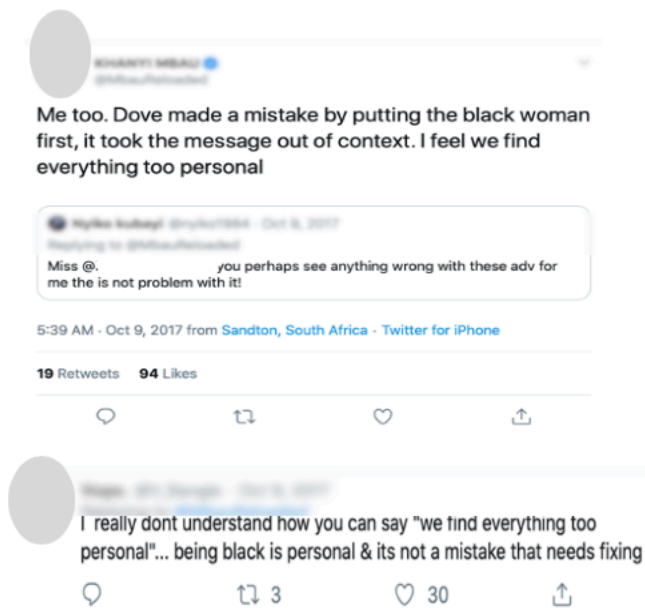


Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 8. Twitter Post

In an advanced search for #Dove and #BlackTwitter, the search yielded a string of responses under various tweets. South African television actress, Khanyi Mbau became the topic of discussion, as Mbau has been ridiculed in the past for the visible difference of her skin color. In Figure 10, Twitter user reacted to the skin lightening issue among people of darker skin. He stated, "someone did this and I ask myself how we would react to it since skin lightening is very common amongst South Africans. The user's reaction acknowledged a cultural issue among

Blacks. A Twitter user reacted to Black Twitter’s comments about Dove’s ad (see Figure 9). The online user tweeted, “Me too. Dove made a mistake by putting the black woman first, it took the message out of context. I feel we find everything too personal.” Black Twitter went into a frenzy over the online user’s comments. Tweets and memes (see Figure 11, Figure 12, and Figure 13) were used to express disapproval of the aforementioned tweet that supported Dove’s ad. Ultimately, the Twitter user received flak for supporting Dove’s ad and for skin bleaching. The color of the Twitter user’s skin in Figure 14 and Figure 15 are of very different skin tones. However, several Twitter users supported the online user’s skin lightening, which was evident by the 999 retweets and 2.7 thousand likes on the post (see Figure 15).



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 9. Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 10. Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 11. Twitter Post



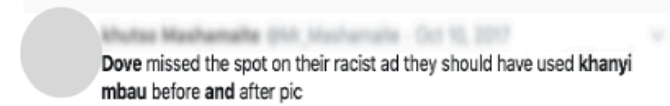
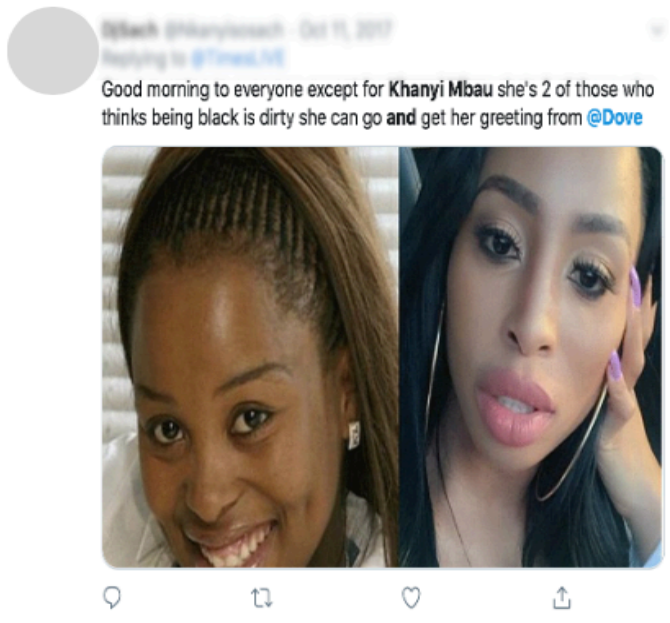
Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 12. Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 13. Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 14. Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 15. Twitter Post

In 2004, Dove kicked off a campaign for “Real Beauty”. It proclaims itself “an agent of change to educate and inspire girls on a wider definition of beauty and to make them feel more confident about themselves”. Dove’s online short films about beauty standards have been recognized with international advertising awards (Connor, 2017). However, despite Dove’s proclamation, the 2017 ad wasn’t the first time that Dove received criticism because of racist implications in its advertisement. Upset with Dove, Black Twitter posted Dove’s 2011 magazine ad (see Figure 17), which featured three women wrapped in towels; two of whom were white. The framing of the ad presented a gradient-like image that was placed on a backdrop behind the women. The women’s skin tones were displayed from darkest to light, the order in which they stood. The backdrop read, “Before and after”; the caption – “visibly more beautiful skin”. Unlike Twitter where posts are easily deleted by the user, removing content on the Internet is not as easy and seldom do online users forget old posts and articles. For example, a side-by-side collage of Dove’s 2017 GIF and its 2011 magazine ad (see Figure 16) was posted on Twitter. The Twitter user responsible for posting the image stated, “Okay, Dove...One racist ad makes you suspect. Two racist ads makes you kinda guilty.”



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 16. Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 17. Dove's 2011 Magazine Advertisement

The majority of Black Twitter reactions disagreed with Dove's ad; however, the following tweets made it known that not everyone on Black Twitter had a problem with the Dove ad. In a separate tweet (see Figure 18) that was posted by another user, the online user expressed that the Dove

video “wasn’t bad at all”. Similarly, in Figure 19 another Twitter user was unable to cancel Dove because the “Ph, moisture, and scent provided all too good to give up”. Despite the opposing views, Black Twitter continued to tweet their thoughts about Dove’s ad. On October 8, 2017, a couple of days after the viral tweets one particular Twitter user tweeted a side-by-side of Dove’s 2017 ad and a much older racist soap ad. The racist ad depicted a Black man’s face being washed by a White man. A Black Twitter user saw the collage and retweeted the original post with the question, “Y’all still bullying Dove?” (see Figure 20).



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 18. Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 19. Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 20. Twitter Post

Representation

Representation is a popular word in the advertising industry. Particularly, representation is capable of serving as a primary framework for marketers who should be shifting their attitudes and adopting representational images to reflect modern day society (Dan, 2020). Ultimately, consumers are looking to brands to be conscious in the brand’s representation of the consumers. However, Dan (2020) states that “the problem with advertising is that it yields to stereotypes or a stilted view of society and it lacks authenticity”. Nevertheless, brands are attempting to respond to the needs of their consumers by showcasing more diversity and inclusivity in their ads. For example, ThirdLove, is a women’s bra and underwear company which uses millions of real women’s measurements, not size templates, to create their products (ThirdLove, 2020). ThirdLove includes images of women of varying races, ages, and skin tones in its marketing to highlight the 80+ sizes of women’s undergarments that are sold. While brands are striving to be

more representational of their consumers, marketers are missing the mark because they fail to advocate for a dialogue with customers (Dan, 2020).

Previous research suggests that African Americans react favorably to advertisements and products that use African American endorsers (Lee, 1995). African American and Hispanics represent the largest ethnic minority populations in the United States, and these groups have been receiving a significant amount of attention from marketers (La Ferle, 2005). Although research since the 1960s has generally acknowledged improvements in the portrayals of minorities in advertising, scholars and practitioners alike still suggest a need for more frequent and more positive portrayals, along with a broader range of roles and a greater degree of accuracy in the portrayals of minorities (La Ferle, 2005). To reinforce said point, it is important to note that as Blacks become a major economic force, research show that their willingness or hesitancy to buy from or promote a brand is greatly shaped by the advertisement's representation of the group.

Adherence to the Euro American beauty standard has had and continues to have devastating effects on Black women. For example, Patton (2006) stated that mediated images of beauty have become more diverse (e.g., Tyra Banks, Naomi Campbell, Tomiko, Alex Wek, and Oprah Winfrey). However, the American society's idea of Black women as beautiful has been marked in advertisements as the oversexed jezebel, the tragic mulatto, and the mammy figure. Such standard pits Black women against the dominant cultural standard of beauty (Patton, 2006). Black Twitter responded to Dove's three-second ad by tweeting an image of Black women of varying skin tones, wearing their hair in its natural state and sporting huge smiles (see Figure 21). The post was captioned, "@Dove our girls don't need you." Another Twitter user shared their disdain for the Dove ad by tweeting a picture of a White woman disrobing to reveal a Black woman (see Figure 22). In Figure 23, a Black woman is depicted in a collage with a bottle of

what appears to be lotion. The word “DOVE” is handwritten on the bottle in blue marker. The first frame shows that woman undressing herself only to reveal that the last frame of the collage is a picture of the same woman. In support of the Black Twitter cause, a Black Twitter user tweeted “I was using #Dove [but] since black twitter said the company is “racist” I’ve stopped” (see Figure 24). Similar sentiments about Dove’s history of racist ads was expressed in Figure 25. The Twitter post stated that Dove isn’t trending on Twitter 4 great products, their trending because their ads are #Racist #BlackTwitter #BlackLivesMatter #Dove. Although not a discussed theme, the user’s willingness to boycott for a cause shows that people on Black Twitter could stop supporting a brand to stand in solidarity with other members. Furthermore, boycotting a brand starts social conversation about brand issues which if enough Blacks stop supporting a brand, the brand will ultimately see a decrease in revenue. Things brings us to the next theme represented in the study- Black Buying Power.

Black Buying Power

According to Oster (2017), a survey which involved over 1,500 marketers from the U.S., U.K., and Australia, 88 percent of U.S. marketers in the survey agreed with the statement “Using more diverse images helps a brand’s reputation.” A variety of factors contribute to a lot of product buying decisions. However, different racial and ethnic groups display distinctly different decision patterns, and advertisers should craft advertising strategies for particular ethnic groups for specific types of product (Kim, et. al., 2001). With this in mind the “for us by us” trend of Black-owned brands is profoundly impacting the Black path to purchase and consumer marketplace (Nielsen, 2019). Through this idea, Black Twitter’s perception about racial messaging in ads should matter because Blacks pay attention to how brands are speaking to them and about them.

While culture is at the center of the Black buying process, technology is of utmost importance. Through a tweet, Black Twitter provide marketers and consumers with an inside look at Black people's perceptions. From the standpoint of the consumer, Black Twitter has the ability to inform consumer's decisions about a product and its brand. From the brand's standpoint, Black Twitter offer brands clues on how to best approach the Black consumer. Post the 2008 recession, Black consumers represent the margin of profitability in most consumer product categories. As a result, now is the most opportune time for businesses to develop a strategy for increasing their share of the Black American market (Hayes, 2013).

Marketers and brands should understand Black people's multi-faceted buying process in order to appeal to the group. For example, marketers can appeal to the Black consumer by listening and engaging with them. As marketers engage with their Black consumers, they should develop a better understanding of what it means to be culturally competent, going beyond just putting Black people in ads for successful marketing campaign aimed at Blacks (Lamont, 2001). Marketers interpret the buying habits of Blacks as strongly guided by a desire to be recognized as equal in society. Seven years ago, the earned income of Black America was the 16th largest market in the world and was on the verge of surpassing the gross national income of Mexico (Hayes, 2013). Black Twitter is a fascinating resource for consumers and marketers because among many factors, the social networking site known as Twitter, is a resource that builds relationships, creates brand awareness, provides information and feedback, boosts sales, and promotes growth for a brand. With this said, the participatory nature of Black Twitter adds to the economic growth of brands.



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 21. Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 22. Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 23. Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 24. Twitter Post



Source: Twitter © 2020

Figure 25. Twitter Post

Chapter Seven: Discussion

Today, people solve problems by turning to the Web (Scott, 2010). Through the technological advancement of the internet, Twitter was born. Twitter is a necessary platform for open and unfiltered discussion about current issues. In 280 characters or less, consumers are able to voice their opinion on any given topic or issue. In this study, the main goal is to present the effects of Dove's 2017 Facebook advertisement based on Black Twitter's reactions. Throughout the study the following themes emerged: 1. Skin lightening, 2. Representation and 3. Black buying power.

Research Question

The research question examines the themes that emerged from Black Twitter's reaction following the 2017 Dove Facebook ad. Black Twitter expresses their thoughts about the Dove brand's history of publishing ads. The study presents findings that Black Twitter perceives Dove's ads as perpetuating negative stereotypes about Blacks. It is important to note that the exchange between user and brand has caused a tremendous shift in marketing over the last few years. This shift ultimately changed some aspects of marketing strategy. While Black Twitter garnered the attention of the masses, the online boycott was short-lived because the public and the media don't seem to savor topics for a long length of time. As a result, the collected number of tweets for the study were limited.

Nonetheless, the study's results and Black Twitter comments underline why Black Buying Power should be of importance to marketers. Walker (2018) posits that, not only do minority groups have huge spending power, but these groups are tightly knit communities that

have influence among their peers on social media. Moreover, the influence of Black millennials on their peers and in the media continues to steadily rise. However, Blacks do not feel that advertisements accurately portray them. The study ultimately suggests that the aforementioned statement may be true, given the use of historically racist soap advertisements and the portrayal of the Black skin as being unclean. The summation of the results concluded that, because the Black group has large buying power, which is beneficial to brands. Marketers should first seek to understand the culture of Black people if they want to include Blacks in ads. Black representation in advertisements means the inclusion of Black models of varying skin tones. Further, representation in the context of this study should be indicative of racially inclusive marketers, board and committee members, all of whom contribute to the discussion and understanding of Black culture.

Based on the research that was presented, Black Twitter's reactions to the 2017 Dove advertisement show power in online feedback. The hashtags #BlackTwitter and #Dove were used to aggregate responses about the Dove ad. The exact number of tweets that are housed on Twitter relative to Dove and Black Twitter is unclear because of the 2-year gap between the time of the initially published tweets and the research study's time period. A conclusion was made based on 32 selected tweets, where most of Black Twitter users perceived the 2017 Dove advertisement presented a representation issue. In addition, Black Twitter presented evidence of Dove's history of racist inferences in their ads.

Chapter Eight: Recommendations

Representation in advertising shapes how people see the world. As a result, research could benefit from applying the themes that emerged in this research to other bodies of work. The following takeaways offer marketers recommendations on how to best avoid representational issues in marketing campaigns: 1. Authentically understand the needs of Black consumers, 2. continuously evaluate the effectiveness of the brand's marketing strategies and 3. Rebuild the trust of Black customers and shift the norms.

Authentically understand the needs of Black consumers

To meet the needs of their target audience, brands must have a vested interest in diversity and inclusion practices. It behooves brands to understand that the needs of Black consumers differ from their White counterparts. Therefore, more research on accurately meeting the needs of Black consumers should be conducted in-house to better assess the needs of the Black consumer segment. The variation of skin color, hair textures, and facial structures make marketing beauty products to Blacks more complex than marketing beauty products to other racial groups. The complexity of the diverse look of Black people coupled with a growing number of representational advertising issues, Blacks have chosen to establish their own marketing firms in order to express their own views, create their own themes, and influence the images that are published. To this point, brands should elicit the help of experienced Black marketers and everyday Black consumers in order to understand the intricacies of Black people, but most importantly to understand why, historically, the ramifications of colorism and servitude

are understandably sensitive issues for Blacks. More accurate representation of the Black culture will reduce the deleterious stereotypes about Black people in advertisements. Lastly, brands are to understand that advertisements targeted at the Black audience do not brand their entire organization as a Black only brand. Rather, different campaigns target different markets.

Continuously evaluate the effectiveness of the brand's marketing strategies

Marketers recognize the significant spending power of Blacks. As such, brands stand to benefit a high profit. Bearing in mind the aforementioned, direct marketing to Blacks must start with achievable goals and objectives in order for brands to see a high profit. Key Performance Indicators are good predictors when establishing goals and objectives. In the case of the study, to evaluate the effectiveness of their marketing to Blacks by way of social media is by reach and engagement. Engagement reflects the effectiveness of a campaign because it measures how the content was perceived by online users. It is important for brands to input necessary variables on a consistent basis in order to reach their target audiences. Further, engagement is trackable, which is credited to online user's comments, brand awareness and social sharing. With the help of data and predictive analytics tools, marketers are able to examine aggregate data which then allows marketers to understand customer behavior. Modern day analytic tools give brands an edge on other companies. Said tools help to determine customers' likes and dislikes for a product by way of user comments on social media. Social media serves as an open forum for discussion on consumers' experience. If brands are able to appeal to their target audiences without offending their customers, customers are much more likely to financially support a brand. In the end, successful engagement will lead to brands designing products and services that meet the exact needs of the Black consumers, whereby efficacy is measured.

Rebuild the trust of Black customers and shift the norms

Blacks tend to experience barriers more deeply than other marginalized groups. In order to rebuild the trust of Black customers, marketers should focus on effectively identifying the racial divide in advertising, so as to eliminate barriers. Acknowledgement and active listening should serve as the impetus for intentional resolve of the ubiquity of racism in ads. Through intentionality, brands can begin to rebuild the trust of their Black customers. A shift in societal norms will take form once the narrative about the Black group is accurately highlighted, and more Blacks are included in advertisements which seek to represent Blacks. To experience better outcomes and change the narrative that Blacks are subservient people, advertisers must identify solutions to remove barriers.

There is a myriad of solutions to close the racial gap. One such solution is the exchange of online content; social exchange is an integral part of modern life. So much so, social transmission also has an important impact on both consumers and brands (Berger, et. al., 2012). While research shows that 70% of Millennials are more likely to choose one brand over another if that brand demonstrates inclusion and diversity in its advertising (Dan, 2020), good campaigns for inclusive marketing should extend far beyond “just” diversity. Real-life customers are wide in range. With this in mind, inclusive marketing should highlight customers’ obvious confidence in who they are, as well as their accomplishments. The impetus for implementing true change in advertisements is knowing what representational issues in ads look like. To its credit, social media aids in the identification of representational issues in ads. For example, users of Twitter provide brands with real-time feedback about advertisement campaigns. Based on the public’s response about a marketing campaign, brands are then able to determine if the campaign was a success or a failure. Equipped with the resources to track public feedback, marketers are able to

advance racial equity in advertisements by accurately portraying to the mass what has been shared to be true of Blacks. Correct imagery in globally published ads allows for a shift in norms to happen.

Chapter Nine: Limitations to the research

According to Baynes (2003), the identity of people of color is often two-pronged. The first prong involves the individual's personal view of him-or herself and the second derives from society's view of the racial group to which the individual belongs. Blacks have long been ridiculed and subjugated in advertising. However, Blacks in advertising were once invisible. Blacks were not hired to appear in ads and television. Instead, Whites dressed up and painted themselves as Blacks to degrade and humiliate Blacks. Later on, as advertising developed, so did the evolution of the Black image in advertising. The integration of Blacks in ads meant Blacks portrayed themselves in advertising to enforce negative stereotypes about Blacks' genetically inherited traits. Moreover, ads made Blacks the object of ridicule in advertised products such as Aunt Jemima's pancake mix and Pears Soap. Advertiser's overt racism and the distaste for Blacks has allowed the perpetuation of negative stereotypes in today's advertisements. Racist ads are harmful and mostly inaccurate. Most people have very little exposure to Blacks except through what they see in advertisements. This makes it difficult for society to see Blacks as being different from what is advertised in magazines and on television. Historically, prominent people of color have decried how society stereotyped them and believed that a correlation existed between media portrayals and their status in society (Baynes, 2003). These stereotypes are learned through limited, but bad experiences and interactions.

The Dove advertisement was popular on social media and multiple online news sources. However, tweets that were relevant to the 2017 Dove Facebook advertisement visibly decreased over a short time period. The quick dissolve of online topics is common for viral stories on social

media because there's always a new controversial tweet or fresh batch of memes on Reddit to choose from (Barrish, 2018). The discussion of the following themes: skin lightening, representation, and Black buying power should provide a start to healthy discussions among media agents about the need to abolish racist ads. To bring resolve to this complex human rights issue, Black people should be presented in advertisements in a fair and accurate way. As previously stated in the method, there were disadvantages to the research. Of the presented disadvantages, the major disadvantage is the limited number of tweets that were collected. Hence, the study would benefit from a longer observation and data collection period, which would allow for the discovery of more emerging themes. A wider range of themes would offer more insight into the reactions and perceptions of Black Twitter. Given this study's main goal of presenting Black Twitter's perceptions (through the use of tweets) about marketers and brands contributions to the idea that Blacks are dirty and subservient, this study did not meticulously dissect the imagery of the memes used in the tweets due to the study's time limitations. The potential for examining racist imagery in future studies could be grounds for research that examines the commonalities and differences of racist images in ads. The potential outcomes would provide data on contributing factors of Black's perceptions of themselves. Future studies centered around the framing of Blacks in digital advertising could also be further explored. To expand future qualitative research on this topic, researchers could gain from conducting in-depth interviews and surveys through focus groups. Future research could delve into the perceptions of Blacks on a more granular level, as it is important to study advertising in terms of connections with the lives of the consumers rather than using fixed questions about what they remember of advertisements and how much they liked them (Belk, 2017).

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