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# Discrimination of African-Americans in Marketing Content

## African-Americans and Their Role in Advertising

Racism is a powerful word with a powerful meaning. Whos to say whats racist and whats not. In a way its subjective. Everyone is entitled to his or her own opinion. Sometimes people see or believe the same things and sometimes they dont. Whats really important though is how people react to these things in which they deem racist. But thats not our focus here.

What we want to know is how prejudice is society against African-Americans. More specifically, does racism play a part in advertising? Wilkes and Valencia (1990) conducted a study on Hispanics and Blacks in television commercials. They looked at the incidence and importance of these groups in commercials. Wilkes and Valencia found that both groups were underrepresented with respect to their proportion of the population.

They also found that the number of Hispanics and Blacks in commercials is increasing. Dominick & Greenberg (1968) reported blacks in only 5 percent of advertisements. Gerbner, et al (1981) reported that blacks were in 20 percent of commercials. But Sterns, et al (1987) reported that 11 percent of ads contained blacks. So in comparison to Sterns, et al, Wilkes and Valencias findings are correct with respect to the percentage of ads with blacks. Wilkes and Valencia report just under 17 percent of ads contain blacks.

In accordance with some of those in society who claim that racism is not as bad as it used to be, I hypothesize that the number of ads containing African-Americans will be higher than that of Wilkes and Valencia. I also hypothesize that the number of ads containing African-Americans will be a fair representation of the proportion to the number of African-Americans in the population, which is 12 percent. My final hypothesis is African-Americans are not disproportionately delegated to minor roles.

We counted advertisements in four magazines. The advertisements we used in our research all came from nationally distributed magazines. We chose Maxim, Mens Health, People, and Entertainment Weekly. Each of these magazines, we think, represents a certain/different aspect of society. Entertainment magazine represents the entertainment industry. We chose Maxim because it is one of the first and only magazines geared towards men. Mens Health was picked because we think that health is something people of all races are interested in. We chose People because we thought that it represents society as a whole compared to other magazines. We had total of 157 advertisements.

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In choosing the magazines for this study we felt we could receive a fairer representation of what we are studying if we excluded magazines that were predominately African-American. So we chose magazines in which we thought were more mainstream, as compared to those which are geared more towards a specific kind of activity. Whether the activity be rap music or tennis or dancing.

As for coding the advertisements we had 3 rules: 1) more than half of the person must be in the ad to count, just faces count, and limbs dont count, 2) cartoons dont count, 3) stadium crowds, or an overwhelming number of people in the background dont count.

One disagreement arose over coding and it was over movie ads, television show ads, and DVD ads. I counted these advertisements while my partner didnt. We discussed it and in the end we decided to count these types of advertisements.

In our study I recorded a total of 370 characters and my partner recorded a total of 321 characters. Regarding the total number of African-Americans compared with non-African-Americans, we agreed 95% of the time. We agreed 100% of the time when deciding which character was a major one and which was a minor one. Our agreement rate concerning the number of ads with African-Americans was 98.25%.

We found 20% of all the characters in ads were African-Americans. The number of African-Americans in major roles compared to all non-African-Americans in major roles was 17%. African-Americans represented 23% of all minor roles. We found 68% of all characters were in major roles and 32% of all characters were in minor roles.

In comparison with Wilkes and Valencia we found that our chi-square was statistically insignificant,  $X^2(1) = .19$ ,  $p = .70$ . Upon further analysis, this does not support my hypothesis that the number of African-Americans in advertisements has increased since the time of Wilkes & Valencia (see table 1). We compared our chi-square to the US census data, which tell us that African-Americans make up 12% of the population. These findings do not only support my hypothesis of a fair representation but in fact shows that African-Americans are over represented in advertisements (see table 2). Our chi-square was statistically significant,  $X^2(1) = 26.22$ ,  $p = .001$ .

We also compared the distribution of African-Americans and others into major and minor roles. We found that our data was statistically insignificant,  $X^2(1) = 1.47$ ,  $p = .30$ . This computation rejects my hypothesis that African-Americans are not delegated to minor roles. But if you look at the data (see table 3) you will see that there was almost an equal amount of African-Americans delegated to major and minor roles.

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The purpose of this research was to try and determine whether or not racism plays a role in advertising. When we compare data with Wilkes & Valencia, there appears to be less African-Americans in advertisements found in our study than in theirs. In our comparison to the proportion of African-Americans in the advertisements and their representation of the population, we found that African-Americans were over represented in the magazine advertisements. The last hypothesis that was proposed was that African-Americans were not more likely to be in a minor role than in a major one. We found that they were not more likely to be in one than the other. There was almost equal numbers representing both major and minor roles.

There is reason to believe that our research had some flaws, which affected our outcome. Perhaps there were more African-Americans on television, which is what Wilkes & Valencia used, than in magazines, which is what we used. It is possible that one of our magazines had a disproportionately large number of African-Americans, which helped push the numbers up, therefore manipulating the data. Maybe if we had used the method of simple random sampling our results would differ and show something else. That would have given all magazines out there a fair chance of being selected instead of us just picking magazines in which we thought represent society well. In conclusion it is the validity of our research is unclear.

Why do advertisers use the people they do? Do advertisers use white people because someone thinks that that is the norm? Do advertisers use African-Americans because they feel that if they dont they are being racist? Or do advertisers use who they do because the advertiser thinks that that person represents what they want the ad to represent regardless of race? For these answers further research is needed. But what we can deduce from our results is that there are less African-Americans in ads today then there was in 1989. Even though they seem to be pretty well represented in accordance with their percentage of the population.

If the number of ads with African-Americans has declined over the past thirteen years than I believe that society is racist. If there is a claim made that society is not as racist as it once was then why are African-Americans under represented in ads? If society isnt racist then there should be more African-Americans in ads. But there isnt.

If future studies can show that African-Americans are in more advertisements then they used to be, then it could be argued that society is not racist. Future studies would need to be less biased and more random than our study.

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