

Specific inferior and superior role portrayals in multi-racial television advertisements

De la Rey van der Waldt

The attitude analysis of specific inferior and superior role portrayals is a direct result of the article published in *Communicare* (1988: 49-54) on general role portrayals. The respondents analysed role portrayals of models in 12 different multi-racial television advertisements. The results indicate important differences in the perception of these roles. Finally an original model of role perception is put forward.

Van der Waldt (1988:49) stated that the diversity of approaches to the analysis of advertising has led to the discussion and application of Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison, Grubb & Grathwohl's (1967) theory of self-concept related to product consumption, Sarbin & Allen's (1968) role theory and lastly Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning. Results indicated (Van der Waldt, 1988:53) that these theories clustered together separately under four different factors. All except Bandura's social learning theory clustered under a particular factor. It seems therefore important to pay more attention to this theory.

Theoretical perspective

Fullagar (1980), Fullagar & Barling (1983), Lunz (1983), Basson (1986) and Van der Waldt (1986) explain that Bandura's (1977) social learning theory may provide a more efficient framework for predicting and explaining consumer behaviour. The research conducted by Fullagar & Barling (1983: 18-22) shows that perhaps one of the most important determinants of learning is the race of the observer: "This was found to be a strong factor in motivating behaviour, but only in terms of the interaction between the observer's race, the product and modelling properties" (1983:21).

This is consistent, as Fullagar & Barling (1983:21) indicate, with the social learning stress on the situ-



De la Rey van der Waldt is a lecturer, dept. of Communication, Fort Hare, Ciskei.

ational specificity of behaviour, and the continual reciprocal interaction between observer, the model and the product. From this it could be anticipated that the race of a person may influence his or her perceptions and values. In line with this, the race variable is the most important biographical variable in the prediction of role portrayals, the portrayal of the South African lifestyle as depicted in television advertisements and lastly for the prediction model for the comparison with television models. Stanley (1982:137) argues that from a marketing point of view, communication can (1) inform, (2) persuade, or (3) do both. With regard to the models portrayed in television advertisements, Luntz (1982:13) explains that the purpose of advertising is to reinforce (in an implicit or explicit manner) the model's behaviour of purchasing the advertised product.

Aim of the study

The study sought to indicate any differences in role perception through the use of t-test analysis. Hoel & Jessen (1977:227) explain that this test is particularly suitable for comparison of two sample averages. In this case the averages of the black (n 116) and the white (n 116) race groups were compared. Another purpose of this survey was to indicate specific differences of inferior and superior role portrayals in specific television advertisements.

Elucidation of concepts

INFERIOR ROLE PORTRAYAL: An inferior role portrayal is defined as a role which does not fall within a person's framework of reference and is a role with which the individual does not want to be associated.

SUPERIOR ROLE PORTRAYAL: A superior role portrayal is defined as a role with which a person would like to identify, it falls within the individual's framework of reference, it portrays a high self-concept and enjoys the respect of others.

Hypotheses

As a result of the findings reported in *Communicare* (Van der Waldt, 1988:49-54) where it was indicated that the factor analyses revealed different interpretations of the variance by each race group, the following two hypotheses were set up:

- 1 Black and white respondents have different perceptions of the role portrayals in the advertisement.
- 2 The differences will be more significant when one race group fulfils a superior role and another an inferior role within the same advertisement.

Sample

(i) STUDENTS

The populations were drawn from the two departments of communication at the University of Fort Hare and the University of the Orange Free State. Using the convenience sampling technique (Jenkins, 1982:88 and Groenewald, 1981:26) 116 students from each department were drawn, which brings the total population (N) to 232.

(ii) TELEVISION ADVERTISEMENTS

All the multi-racial television advertisements which were broadcasted on TV1 and TV4 during the weeks of 26-31 May 1986; 14-19 and 21-26 July 1986 were used. A total of twelve were recorded during this period. These advertisements were: BP, Blaupunkt, Bostik, Jet

Stores, Mobil, Pick 'n Pay (a), Pick 'n Pay (b), Castello Ginger Fizz, Holiday Inn, Simba Nibble Sticks, KO-Sport and Wilson's XXX Mints.

A prerequisite for selecting these advertisements was that individuals from different races should appear in these advertisements. This was the case in all advertisements except Bostik, where the different race groups appeared separately within the advertisement.

Method

The respondents had to complete the questionnaire on a specific advertisement after they had been exposed to it twice. The concepts were explained to them and there was no time limit on the questionnaire.

Table 1
Acceptability of advertisements in general

Item	Race	x	s	t	df	p
1	B	3,41	0,98	8,25	228,07	0,00 **
	W	2,30	1,07			
2	B	3,72	0,58	12,72	182,15	0,00 **
	W	2,32	1,03			
3	B	1,49	0,87	-9,01	226,87	0,00 **
	W	2,59	0,98			
4	B	3,06	1,00	-1,23	218,48	0,22
	W	3,20	0,79			
5	B	3,3	1,00	1,23	218,90	0,22
	W	3,1	0,80			

- 1: I like advertisements where black and white actors appear separately.
- 2: I like advertisements where only white actors appear.
- 3: I like advertisements where black and white actors appear together.
- 4: I like advertisements where only black actors appear.
- 5: If the actor is from a different race than myself, the advertisement is not acceptable to me.

* p 0,05

** p 0,01

RACE: B = Black W = White

ANSWER	: VALUE
1. definitely agree	: 1
2. inclined to agree	: 2
3. inclined to disagree	: 3
4. definitely disagree	: 4

Measuring instrument

A complete summary of the role portrayals in the given advertisements were made. These items were then incorporated into a four point Likert-type questionnaire with a forced answer, i.e. either in favour or not in favour of the statement (Anastasi, 1976:517-520). The categories were: (i) definitely agree; (ii) inclined to agree; (iii) inclined to disagree and (iv) definitely disagree. All the questionnaires were used, because all had been correctly and completely filled in.

Results

The level of significance of the difference in the table summaries are indicated in the following manner:

(i) * = p 0,05 and (ii) ** = p 0,01. In other words

p 0,05 is significant at the 95% level and p 0,001 is significant at the 99,9% level.

On the sensitive race issue a few statements were put forward, as explained in table 1. Statistically significant differences occurred with the first three statements (items). These items were all significant at the 99,9% level. The black respondents tended to disagree more than their white counterparts over separate appearances of actors with different skin colours. (x = 3,41 & 2,30) They also tended to disagree more with advertisements where only white actors appeared (x = 3,72 & 2,32). On the statement: I like advertisements where black and white actors appear together, the black respondents reacted more positively than the white respondents (x is respectively 1,49 and 2,59).

Table 2
Acceptability of specific advertisements

Advertisement	Race	x	s	t	df	p																																																																																																										
BP Petrol	B	2,41	1,13	11,10	147,30	0,00 **																																																																																																										
	W	1,16	0,43				Blaupunkt	B	1,96	1,04	1,29	224,51	0,20	W	1,79	0,89	Bostik	B	1,47	0,67	-2,09	213,11	0,04 *	W	1,69	0,89	Mobil	B	2,39	1,13	3,46	114,18	0,00 **	W	1,91	0,96	Jet Stores	B	1,57	0,87	-1,57	229,27	0,31	W	1,68	0,82	Pick 'n Pay (a)	B	2,32	1,06	8,22	186,83	0,00 **	W	1,38	0,63	Pick 'n Pay (b)	B	2,09	0,96	-7,57	183,66	0,00 **	W	1,31	0,55	Castello Ginger Fizz	B	1,72	0,97	-2,15	229,86	0,03 *	W	1,99	0,99	Holiday Inn	B	2,75	1,13	10,84	181,82	0,00 **	W	1,45	0,64	Simba Nibble Sticks	B	2,67	1,09	4,57	222,73	0,00 **	W	2,07	0,91	KO Sport	B	1,28	0,54	-4,20	188,88	0,00 **	W	1,68	0,89	Wilson's XXX Mints	B	1,27	0,55	-4,22	178,35
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* p 0,05

** p 0,01

Table 3
Ascribed roles in these advertisements

Role ascribed to the models	Race	x	s	t	df	p																																																																																																																																																																																										
Black petrol attendant as inferior	B	1,67	0,99	-7,81	230,00	0,00 **																																																																																																																																																																																										
	W	2,69	0,99				White dancer as superior	B	2,72	1,09	-1,80	226,28	0,07	W	2,96	0,96	Black mine worker as superior	B	3,27	1,00	1,69	216,90	0,09	W	3,07	0,78	Black nurse as inferior	B	2,59	1,11	-6,12	195,73	0,00 **	W	3,34	0,71	White buyer as inferior	B	3,22	0,81	-0,68	227,62	0,50	W	3,29	0,73	White game ranger as superior	B	1,97	0,99	-8,28	227,63	0,00 **	W	3,00	0,89	Black game ranger as superior	B	2,86	1,00	-1,12	225,80	0,27	W	3,00	0,88	Black builder as inferior	B	2,07	1,15	-7,86	207,17	0,00 **	W	3,09	0,81	White farmer as superior	B	1,91	1,05	-7,03	226,37	0,00 **	W	2,93	0,83	Black tractor driver as inferior	B	2,02	1,14	-8,29	192,07	0,00 **	W	3,05	0,71	Black postman as inferior	B	2,07	1,13	-7,63	209,18	0,00 **	W	3,05	0,81	Black teacher as superior	B	1,88	0,92	-5,95	227,11	0,00 **	W	2,64	1,03	White fireman as inferior	B	2,82	0,94	-2,74	226,83	0,00 **	W	3,14	0,83	White radio DJ as inferior	B	3,46	0,73	-0,20	223,37	0,85	W	3,47	0,61	White helicopter pilot as superior	B	1,73	0,97	-6,89	228,5	0,00 **	W	2,66	1,06	Black female singer as superior	B	1,67	0,92	-4,13	228,94	0,00 **	W	2,19	0,99	White waitress as inferior	B	2,51	1,02	-1,83	227,46	0,07	W	2,74	0,94	Black waiter as inferior	B	1,95	1,08	-5,09	220,51	0,00 **	W	2,60	0,87	White holidaymakers as superior	B	1,47	0,81	-4,85	216,25	0,00 **	W	2,07	1,04	White shop-keeper as inferior	B	2,51	1,18	0,12	224,38
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	W	3,07	0,78				Black nurse as inferior	B	2,59	1,11	-6,12	195,73	0,00 **	W	3,34	0,71	White buyer as inferior	B	3,22	0,81	-0,68	227,62	0,50	W	3,29	0,73	White game ranger as superior	B	1,97	0,99	-8,28	227,63	0,00 **	W	3,00	0,89	Black game ranger as superior	B	2,86	1,00	-1,12	225,80	0,27	W	3,00	0,88	Black builder as inferior	B	2,07	1,15	-7,86	207,17	0,00 **	W	3,09	0,81	White farmer as superior	B	1,91	1,05	-7,03	226,37	0,00 **	W	2,93	0,83	Black tractor driver as inferior	B	2,02	1,14	-8,29	192,07	0,00 **	W	3,05	0,71	Black postman as inferior	B	2,07	1,13	-7,63	209,18	0,00 **	W	3,05	0,81	Black teacher as superior	B	1,88	0,92	-5,95	227,11	0,00 **	W	2,64	1,03	White fireman as inferior	B	2,82	0,94	-2,74	226,83	0,00 **	W	3,14	0,83	White radio DJ as inferior	B	3,46	0,73	-0,20	223,37	0,85	W	3,47	0,61	White helicopter pilot as superior	B	1,73	0,97	-6,89	228,5	0,00 **	W	2,66	1,06	Black female singer as superior	B	1,67	0,92	-4,13	228,94	0,00 **	W	2,19	0,99	White waitress as inferior	B	2,51	1,02	-1,83	227,46	0,07	W	2,74	0,94	Black waiter as inferior	B	1,95	1,08	-5,09	220,51	0,00 **	W	2,60	0,87	White holidaymakers as superior	B	1,47	0,81	-4,85	216,25	0,00 **	W	2,07	1,04	White shop-keeper as inferior	B	2,51	1,18	0,12	224,38	0,91	W	2,49	1,01																
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	W	3,34	0,71				White buyer as inferior	B	3,22	0,81	-0,68	227,62	0,50	W	3,29	0,73	White game ranger as superior	B	1,97	0,99	-8,28	227,63	0,00 **	W	3,00	0,89	Black game ranger as superior	B	2,86	1,00	-1,12	225,80	0,27	W	3,00	0,88	Black builder as inferior	B	2,07	1,15	-7,86	207,17	0,00 **	W	3,09	0,81	White farmer as superior	B	1,91	1,05	-7,03	226,37	0,00 **	W	2,93	0,83	Black tractor driver as inferior	B	2,02	1,14	-8,29	192,07	0,00 **	W	3,05	0,71	Black postman as inferior	B	2,07	1,13	-7,63	209,18	0,00 **	W	3,05	0,81	Black teacher as superior	B	1,88	0,92	-5,95	227,11	0,00 **	W	2,64	1,03	White fireman as inferior	B	2,82	0,94	-2,74	226,83	0,00 **	W	3,14	0,83	White radio DJ as inferior	B	3,46	0,73	-0,20	223,37	0,85	W	3,47	0,61	White helicopter pilot as superior	B	1,73	0,97	-6,89	228,5	0,00 **	W	2,66	1,06	Black female singer as superior	B	1,67	0,92	-4,13	228,94	0,00 **	W	2,19	0,99	White waitress as inferior	B	2,51	1,02	-1,83	227,46	0,07	W	2,74	0,94	Black waiter as inferior	B	1,95	1,08	-5,09	220,51	0,00 **	W	2,60	0,87	White holidaymakers as superior	B	1,47	0,81	-4,85	216,25	0,00 **	W	2,07	1,04	White shop-keeper as inferior	B	2,51	1,18	0,12	224,38	0,91	W	2,49	1,01																										
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* p 0,05
** p 0,01

According to the results the following two statements: *I like advertisements where only black actors appear, and if the actor is from a different race than myself, the advertisement is not acceptable to me*, did not indicate any significant differences.

In this table (the acceptability of the advertisement) the Blaupunkt and Jet Stores advertisements did not indicate statistically significant differences. A possible reason for this could be that the models in the Blaupunkt advertisement fulfil one role, (i.e. that of a dancer). The dance role as such could be perceived as neutral. Colfax & Sternburg (1972:9) and Bush, Solomon & Hair (1977:21) discussed these kinds of roles and concluded that it could not be achieved by individual accomplishment. Either the individual had the ability to become a good dancer or not.

In the Jet Stores advertisement the main focus of role portrayals centered around the playful babies and small children depicted. Children and babies can be seen as neutral without any status attached to these age-groups. It seems as if age here does not have any significant meaning.

In the BP petrol advertisement a black petrol attendant helps a white motorist to receive petrol. The difference in acceptability of this advertisement is significant (p 0,01). In the Bostik advertisement different spokesmen appear separately in different shots and not simultaneously in one shot. This also gives a significant difference (p 0,05) in the acceptability of the advertisement.

The Mobil advertisement portrays a white singing female and three black petrol attendants washing windscreens. This indicates a significant difference in acceptability (p 0,01).

The two Pick 'n Pay advertisements portray general work situations in South Africa. And it is especially in these two advertisements where most differences occurred. Both show a significant difference of acceptance (p 0,01).

The Castello Ginger Fizz advertisement (p 0,05) shows a white waitress serving all races, whereas the Holiday Inn advertisement (p 0,01) shows a black waiter serving a white family.

Simba Nibble Sticks also shows a significant difference (p 0,01) where a multi-racial teenage group buys its favourite product from a white store-keeper.

The KO Sport deodorant advertisement shows three women participating in a 100m sprint. Another significant difference in acceptability occurred here (p 0,01). The Wilson's XXX Mints advertisement emphasises a white waiter in atten-

dance upon a multi-racial public at a sports gathering. The black and white acceptance of this advertisement is also significantly different (p 0,01).

According to the results in table 3, no significant differences are attached to the following roles: A white dancer, black mine worker, white buyer, black game ranger, white radio dj, a white waitress, and a white shop-keeper.

Significant differences in the perceptions of black and white respondents towards the following roles took place. (In all cases p 0,01): black petrol attendant as inferior; black nurse as inferior; white game ranger as superior; black builder as inferior; white farmer as superior; black tractor driver as inferior; black postman as inferior; black teacher as superior; white fireman as inferior; white helicopter pilot as superior; black female singer as superior; black waiter as inferior; and lastly white holiday-makers.

Both hypotheses 1 and 2 were essentially confirmed. The results of the t-tests do however have certain implications.

Discussion

Generally speaking it can be argued that blacks in this sample are more favourably disposed towards multi-racial advertisements. It also seems as if the white sample is more favourably disposed towards a white-dominated cast in television advertisements. One can also argue that the black sample is not very critical in its evaluation of an advertisement, when the general scores in Table 2 are considered. A question that may be asked in this regard is whether or not both these samples are attentive for inferior and superior role portrayals in television advertisements.

Ruhly (1976:22) amongst others, explains that ethnocentrism plays a very important role in the interpretation and judging of other groups values, cultures and races. It seems as if this variable may also have influenced the respondents in their answering. In addition, it can be argued that no race group wants to be portrayed in blue-collar occupations.

According to the results it is clear that black and white respondents perceive inferior and superior role portrayals differently. It is not the aim of this article to analyse the perception of different occupations, but it seems fair to assume at this point that a particular status is attached to a particular occupation. If one sees a role and status as one variable, one can make the following assumptions:

Assumption (i): It seems as if it is a reality that most white and black persons feel whites tend to

be portrayed more in higher-status occupations and blacks tend to be portrayed more in lower-status occupations in television advertisements.

Assumption (ii): When a person evaluates a role in a television advertisement, the matter of status of the occupation comes to mind.

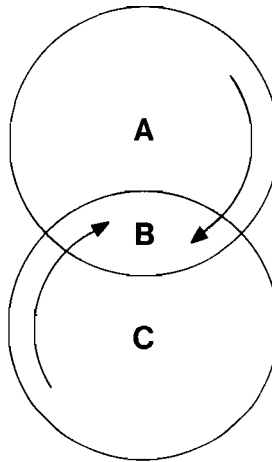
Assumption (iii): The viewer's race grouping will

eventually determine what status he will attach to the role portrayal in the television advertisement, and that assumption (i) will play a role here.

In view of the afore-mentioned assumptions an original model has been compiled whereby this aspect has been visualised schematically. Figure 1 gives an explanation of the role perception model.

Figure 1
Role perception in television advertisements

Superior role portrayal



Inferior role portrayal
(within a given context)

- A = Perception field of a white individual
- B = Perception field where white and black overlap
- C = Perception field of a black individual

When a white person analyses a black waiter's role portrayal in a given television advertisement, then he involuntarily compares the black waiter to the black population in general and the general occupations they occupy on television or in reality. This will mean that a white person will rate the black waiter at the given point B. In other words, the white viewer will probably look at the black waiter from point C (the lowest status in role portrayal).

From this, the white viewer may think that the black waiter has an honest and meaningful occupation. He may even think the waiter has a good

occupation.

If the black viewer has to analyse the same role portrayal, he will involuntarily compare the waiter with the general role portrayals of white employers. As a result the black viewer will most probably rate the waiter very low. It seems that the black viewer will judge the waiter from point A which is the lowest status in role portrayals.

This model is closely related to Festinger's (1954) theory of social comparison in the sense that: a white person compares himself with his own group and especially with those who are "better" than himself. The black viewer, on the other hand, is so

over-exposed to the superior role portrayals of the white actors that he can compare himself with these actors. Seemingly the results pointed out by Van der Waldt (1988:49-54) show the black respondents factor analysis indicates that the social comparison factor accounts for more than 30% of the total variance.

If one makes a further assumption, this helps to explain this model even further: Following De Lozier (1976:115) and Snyder & De Bono's (1985: 586) results, one may assume that the black viewer may have an inferior self-concept because of his constant exposure to inferior role portrayals. This in turn may affect his consumer and purchasing behaviour. As a result one can argue further that a person with a lower self-concept is more easily persuadable than a person with a higher self-concept.

In this model the viewer should also be placed within the context of his perception field. His skin-colour may influence his self-concept and his perceptions of other people. In this regard race may be the most important demographic variable in role perceptions.

One of the main limitations of the study is the use of a student sample for the research. Slama & Tashchian (1985:72) discuss the problem that most consumer behaviour research has been done with upper middle-class (often student) subjects who tend to be more highly involved with purchasing than other groups. The present study also used a student sample, which may influence the results.

Conclusion

The model of role perception should not be seen as a fixed and final proposal. The study of role portrayal components of marketing communication and consumer behaviour offers a rich field for researchers who wish to increase the level of predictability of their interactional investigations. The following recommendations are put forward:

- 1 In examining the stereotyped roles of models in multi-racial advertisements, the researcher, communicationologist and advertising practitioner can adjust the existing strategies by being more attentive towards the feelings and perceptions of inferior role portrayals.
- 2 The advertiser should rather aim to limit role or even eliminate differentiation within multi-racial advertisements. Cohen (1970:7) and Jumphyre & Schuman (1984:552) recommend that black and white models should be portrayed in equi-

valent roles.

- 3 A further recommendation is to limit role differentiation within one race group so as to overcome the problem of stereotyped role portrayals, rather than to perpetuate it especially in a racially sensitive consumer market. For example, it is advisable to portray one race group in a specific advertisement in blue as well as white collar occupations. It is not recommended to portray one race group in a blue collar occupation and another in a white collar occupation within the same advertisement. This could lead to a stereotyped portrayal and eventually product resistance.
- 4 A re-evaluation and a more in-depth analysis of Festinger's social comparison (1954) theory as applied to the black consumer market, since it seems as if the black respondents tend to compare themselves more frequently to depicted advertising models (Van der Waldt's 1988 factor analysis indicates this tendency).
- 5 Closely related to the afore-mentioned recommendation, a re-evaluation of the self-concept marketing segmentation technique as applied to all races in Southern Africa should be considered. Corder (1976:19 & 1986:15) explains the relevance of this technique since it offers an important motivational link between personality and choice of product. Corder (1986:15) explains: "Materialism becomes motivation . . . (people) are aware of the impression they create and are concerned about how others perceive them . . . Status and personal image are important; in particular there is a need to be treated with respect, both at home and at the work place." One may also add: Treated with respect in the depiction of role portrayals in advertising.
- 6 Further attention should also be paid to the non-verbal effects, which are often ignored in marketing communication (Bonoma & Felder, 1977: 169 and Haley, Richardson & Baldwin, 1984:12). Television advertisements consist of complex settings, actors, cognitive messages, symbols, music, sounds and motions. As Haley, Richardson & Baldwin (1984:12) explain, these elements may say more to the viewer than the cognitive message that the advertiser usually intends to deliver: "For most of these areas standard codes are not available. However, it would seem that their development deserves to be assigned a high priority."

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