

# **“Who’s In? Who’s Out?”: Examining Attitudes Towards Baseball Advertisements on The Basis of Endorser Race**

**Brown, Brandon**

New York University, United States of America

brandon.brown@nyu.edu

## **Aim**

Scholars have attested that the African American market segment is not only robust in size, but stable in terms of economic growth (Simpson et al., 2000). Scholars have not only attested to this target market’s value, but have upheld this demographic as a worthwhile market for sport organizations (Akçay, Sable, & Dalgin, 2012). And while African Americans are a valued segment in the sports industry, there are still few organizations which have been able to successfully capture this market as a lasting consumer base. As such, this study intends to examine several factors which may be influential towards African American consumption decisions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

### ***Racial Identification***

Perhaps the most popular reason as to why African Americans choose to consume a given sport is the concept of identification. According to Carter and Helms (1988), racial identification is the extent to which a person has “positive, negative, or mixed attitudes toward their own racial or cultural group and their place in it” (p. 23). As an individual identifies her/himself as a member of a certain racial group, the individual will likely rely on the group for a sense of self-evaluation (Hunter & Joseph, 2010). Williams and Qualls (1989) suggest individuals who hold high identification levels are likely to consume products possessing features that are representative of one’s self.

Major League Baseball (MLB) is particularly unique to the African American audience, as it represents a sport which has a declining number of African American participants, but a rising number of Hispanic participants. While Hispanic Americans account for 31.9% of players, African Americans account for only 7.1%. If an organization such as MLB would like interest from African Americans on the basis of identification tactics, they may have an avenue to do so if African Americans perceive a sense of similarity from Hispanic American players. Conversely however, if African Americans perceive Hispanic Americans as part of an out-group (as some studies suggest) then MLB may be in danger of losing interest among African Americans. The purpose of this study was to examine differences in attitudes towards an advertisement based on advertiser race among African American consumers. In stating this, the author puts forth the following research questions:

**RQ1:** Will attitudes towards an advertisement differ upon seeing a baseball advertisement featuring an African American player, in comparison to seeing a baseball advertisement featuring a Hispanic player?

**RQ2:** Will attitudes towards an advertisement differ upon seeing a baseball advertisement featuring an African American player, in comparison to seeing a baseball advertisement featuring a Caucasian player?

**RQ3:** Will attitudes towards an advertisement differ upon seeing a baseball advertisement featuring a Caucasian player, in comparison to seeing a baseball advertisement featuring a Hispanic player?

### **Participants**

Given the study's purpose, data were collected from 307 ( $n = 307$ ) African Americans. Participants were recruited using two online platforms: Amazon's MTurk, and SurveyMonkey. Both platforms utilize incentive-based recruitment in order to generate participants. Both have been found as valid online platforms for data collection, and as appropriate platforms for academic research.

### **Procedure and Methods**

The current study was contextualized as an experimental design, where participants were asked to answer several questions in junction with viewing a baseball advertisement. As a means to address the study's purpose, participants reviewed one of three nearly identical advertisements which differed only in the racial make-up of the advertisement's endorser (African American, Hispanic American, and Caucasian as a control factor). After viewing the advertisements, participants were asked to indicate their attitudes towards each advertisement. In particular, the attitude towards the advertisement construct was measured utilizing a modified version of Gardner's (1985) scale.

### **Data Analysis and Results**

An ANOVA was conducted to determine the effects of endorser race on attitude towards the advertisement. With endorser race, a significant main effect was detected,  $F(2, 306) = 3.285$ ,  $p < .05$ . Subsequent post-hoc analyses indicate respondents' attitudes towards the African-American endorser advertisement ( $M = 4.916$ ) were significantly greater than attitudes towards the Hispanic American endorser advertisement ( $M = 4.419$ ) but were not significantly greater than attitudes towards the Caucasian American endorser advertisement ( $M = 4.873$ ). Attitudes towards the Caucasian American endorser advertisement were also significantly greater than attitudes towards the Hispanic American endorser ( $p < 0.05$ ). These results should be of concern to marketing strategists. Being that MLB has shown an interest in increasing the number of African American consumers, but is also seeing a rising rate of Hispanic players, the league will possibly be faced with one of two scenarios: either an opportunity to be appealing to African Americans on the basis of using Hispanic players for in-group similarity effects, or they will see a disassociation towards the sport from African Americans, on the basis of any negative out-group effects due to the growing number of Hispanic players. In that results suggest unkind perceptions of Hispanic endorsers, MLB may need to show concern for the latter.

### **References**

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