Born Free but Not Identity-Free: A Moderated Mediation Model of Ethnic Self-Identification, English Advertising Attitudes, and Advertising Trust

A.T. Roux*[a] and A. Potgieter [b]

[a]Department of Marketing, Logistics and Sport Management, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa, rouxat@tut.ac.za
[b]Nelson Mandela University, Department of Marketing Management, adele.potgieter@mandela.ac.za

This study explores generational differences in ethnic self-identification, language preferences in advertising, and trust in advertising in South Africa's multilingual, post-colonial context. Although ethnic cues in advertising have been widely studied, limited research has examined language preferences and generational identity negotiation.

Drawing on Social Identity Theory and Ethnolinguistic Identity Theory, the study compares Millennials with older cohorts.

Data were collected through an online survey of 704 respondents from six language groups and analysed using multigroup structural equation modelling. Measures included ethnic self-identification (Phinney, 1992), attitudes toward English advertising (Mehta, 2000), and trust in advertising (Soh, Reid, & King, 2009), assessed on 7-point Likert scales.

Overall, age moderates the relationships between ethnic self-identification, attitudes towards English-language advertising , and trust, highlighting the evolving role of language in identity expression within multilingual markets. Millennials show more complex, technology-mediated responses to language and advertising trust.

The findings challenge assumptions of homogeneous ethnic markets and highlight the need for age-sensitive advertising strategies in multicultural, emerging economies.

Keywords: Generational marketing; Millennials; ethnic self-identification; English language advertising; advertising trust; multilingual marketing; South Africa