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Black Consumer Reactions to “Integrated” Advertising: An Exploratory Study

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and
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Marketers who pioneered advertising in which blacks and whites appear together in more or less socially intimate situations took a number of risks. This article reports a study of why advertisers use integrated advertisements and how some black consumers are reacting to these ads. The study has implications for message strategy and suggests directions for further research.

THERE are nearly 25 million black people in the United States today.1 Blacks will become an increasingly important segment of the total market in the decade ahead because they have a higher birth rate than whites and are a younger people.2 At present blacks command some $30 billion of purchasing power annually. Their incomes, though low relative to whites, are rising steadily.3 Negroes are moving in large numbers from the South to the North and are concentrating in major cities. They are becoming better educated and are developing a measure of self-confidence and pride as they progress economically.4 Consequently, they are becoming more discriminating as consumers, relying less on brand labels as marks of quality or value.5 Their buying patterns have been changing so rapidly that many advertisers are perplexed and are searching anxiously for “the right way” to reach them.6

One expedient which has been used most noticeably on television is so-called integrated advertising, in which blacks and whites appear together in more or less socially intimate situations. The first advertisers who used this tactic risked “backlash” from whites, who might view integration as undesirable, and product boycott from blacks, who might view it as hypocritical.7 The purpose of this study was (1) to learn why some of these pioneers took this risk; (2) whether blacks attributed the rise of integrated advertising to the same causes as advertisers; and (3) how black consumers were reacting to the tactic.

The Challenge to the Advertiser

Some advertisers and their advertising agencies have been hesitant to adopt a practice which might create as many problems as it would solve; they have been waiting to see what results might

find their way into print. At the same time, pioneers have been understandably reluctant to go on record as individuals since this might affect their competitive positions. Perhaps more important, since adequate feedback is difficult to obtain, particularly in a time of rapid social change, few results are documented. Moreover, what might be true for the advertiser of one product might well have no validity in the case of another. Consequently, little has been published and advertisers continue to face a dilemma. If they adopt the current trend unsure of their tactic, they may alienate a great number of potential buyers; if they do not, they may suffer competitive loss.

Further complicating the advertisers’ predicament is the dispute whether or not black consumers constitute a “special market” calling for special treatment. Both white and black proponents of the “special market” concept reason that blacks will respond more readily to appeals which reach them through newspapers, magazines, and radio stations operated primarily for black people and which use the black man’s idioms of speech and music.8 Opponents of this concept argue that the black man’s market decisions are made not on racial or sociological but on economic grounds and therefore he may just as well be approached through the general media.9 What makes it easy for some to agree with this view is the fact that the black community’s economic lot has been improving and the black man’s buying patterns are changing. There may be truth on both sides of the argument as suggested by the studies of Bauer et al. who conclude that black consumers not only constitute a “special market” but segregate themselves into two groups within that market. There are those who strive for material possessions which characterize the standard of living of middle-class whites, and those who do not. Thus, these two groups are referred to as the so-called “strivers” and “nonstrivers.”10

The advertiser has to consider certain opinions whether general or special media are used. According to W. Leonard Evans, the black man does not identify with situations portrayed in the mass print media; what he needs is assurance and confidence that the product is for him, that his business is wanted.11 This requires believable ads and attainable products.12 Mrs. John Milhouse remarks that “slice of life” situations must be slices of black, not white, people’s life.13 The black housewife in the kitchen of what is ostensibly her own $75,000 home is anomalous. The black man is waiting to be approached in “the right way.” To some this means through black spokesmen, for the black man must believe in the spokesman as well as the brand.14 It helps too, Jackie Robinson says, if the black persons featured in ads have made a contribution to the life of the black community through civil rights efforts or professional sports.15

Is integrated advertising the right way? The few opinions on record might lead some to whisper a guarded perhaps. D. Parke Gibson declared two years ago that integrated ads had little or no effect on the black man’s buying patterns and that his

9 Same reference as footnote 3.
12 Paglin, same reference as footnote 4.

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reaction to them was "neutral." However, Metzendorf Advertising in the same year reported that both blacks and whites had reacted "favorably," and with no appreciable difference, to two color ads for an automobile and a lipstick. One ad had white models and the other was integrated. The ads were tested in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles; both verbal and nonverbal reactions were noted.17

In a recently published study which was conducted in Chicago under rigorous sampling and interviewing conditions, Barban found that 121 white and 125 black middle-income residents generally responded "in an evocatively favorable way" to ten different magazine advertisements for a popular brand bourbon, a major service organization, a menthol cigarette, and a soft drink.18 In some ads the models were all white, in others black and white, and in still others all black. White residents reacted least favorably to all-black ads, more favorably to all-white ads, and most favorably to integrated ads. Blacks evaluated the integrated and all-black ads "about equally" and showed slightly less preference for all-white ads. Black respondents were consistently more favorable in their evaluations of all the ads than white respondents. Although the study did not take into account overall company image, brand image, or sales response, Barban concludes that middle-income blacks in Chicago can apparently identify readily with ads containing white models. Middle-class whites, moreover, responded in a decidedly favorable way to even the most socially intimate scenes in the integrated ads.19 Because his sample might have contained a disproportionately high percentage of "strivers" among the blacks, Barban cautions against applying his findings beyond the universe of his respondents. He suggests, furthermore, that there is need for research on how age, sex, education, and income, among other things, affect one's receptivity to integrated advertising.20

Thus, the advertiser is challenged by his competition, the difficulty of obtaining reliable feedback, the sensitivity of the consumer to the implied or manifest content of advertising messages, and the published results of a few studies of integrated advertising. The Metzendorf and Barban studies focused on reactions to specific ads. The research project described in this article focused on the black man's reaction to integrated advertising as a tactic, not on specific ads. It, therefore, provides another perspective from which to assess the effects of integrated ads as a marketing device and as a factor in the shaping of social accord.

Survey Design and Procedure

Companies which pioneered in the field were identified by the full-page integrated advertisements they had placed in two nationally distributed magazines from 1959 to 1968. The authors asked the advertising directors of these companies and the agents handling their accounts for permission to conduct interviews by telephone at mutually convenient times. Five of the ten companies and their five respective, different advertising agencies consented to be interviewed. In products and services the five companies conveniently happened to be quite diverse. The purpose of interviewing both advertiser and agency was to secure a possibly more complete set of impressions of each company's experience. In the final analysis, each pair appeared to be in substantial agreement, though agency executives referred the authors back to the companies for information on responses to integrated ads from the public. To encourage candor, the authors promised not to disclose the sources. The request indicated information was needed on when and why the companies had begun to use integrated advertising, specifically what things they hoped to accomplish by it, and what measures of effectiveness they were using. During the actual interviews, which were conducted in March, 1969, each of the three principal researchers used an identical schedule of questions which had been tested earlier on local advertisers to eliminate ambiguity. The telephone interviews lasted a minimum of 13 and a maximum of 22 minutes.

When the survey of advertisers was complete, attention was directed to black consumers. Originally, a set of semantic differential scales was to be used, but in testing the instrument it was found that more than 80% of those who were willing to participate checked only the extremes of the bipolar adjectives. In addition, most of those who refused to participate gave as their reason "not wanting to write anything down." Accordingly, the instrument was limited to two fundamental questions which were administered orally; the interviewer waited for the answer to the first question before asking the second. The questions were phrased as follows: "Until just a few years ago, advertisers did not often use black people in their ads. Today we see quite a number of ads in which black and white people appear together. Why do you think advertisers are using ads like this? . . . How do you feel about ads like this?" The interviews took place in the vicinity of five large shopping centers in integrated communities of Los Angeles. The interviewer approached black people at random. He stated he was gathering opinions on advertising and requested permission to ask two
questions. The interviewer did not persist if the person was unwilling to submit to the interview. He asked the questions when permission was granted, recorded the responses, if any, requested the occupation and age of the respondent, and thanked him. Two of the three principal researchers, each an experienced interviewer, gathered almost 90% of the responses; the remaining responses were gathered by three inexperienced interviewers, one of whom was black. No substantial difference was noted between the responses gathered by the black interviewer and those gathered by the other members of the team. In all, 109 respondents—43 males, 66 females—were interviewed. Their ages ranged from 14 to 70 as shown in Table 1. By occupation, 42 were wage earners, 37 were housewives, 6 were professionals (including one aerospace engineer), and 6 were students; of the remaining respondents, 5 were retired and 13 refused to state their occupations.

**What the Advertisers Told Us**

This section reports representative answers to the questions asked the advertisers and their advertising agencies.

**Q:** What were some of the reasons why you decided to integrate your ads?

**A:** The compelling reason, beyond any doubt, was our desire to sell more of our products and services to black people, who are a very large segment of our potential market. In addition, we were well aware of our social responsibilities; it seemed to be the thing to do. Incidentally, since we’ve done so, we’ve had less trouble recruiting competent black people to work for us.

**Q:** What kinds of response have you had from white people and what have you done as a result?

**A:** Except for a few complaints back in 1963 and 1964, we have received favorable comments from people who have taken the time to write to us. Even if the comments were negative, we very probably would not change our policy today. We don’t intend to back away from our social responsibilities by reducing the number or changing the content of our integrated ads.

**Q:** How have black people been reacting to your ads? Have you some indication from sales response in black communities?

**A:** We have received very little feedback from black people, but what little we have received has been positive. When the ads we placed in the black press drew favorable responses, we increased their number and size. We must admit, however, that we have not been able to get a good measure of sales response in ghetto areas. We have no way of knowing whether increases or decreases in sales can be attributed to our integrated ads or to greater buying power, product quality, or any of a hundred other variables.

**Q:** Have you involved black people in the creation of your integrated ads?

**A:** Ideas for our ads come from creative staff members, whether they be black or white. We have asked black staff members to react to these ideas, and in one case we consulted a black advertising agency; in another case, the staff of Ebony was very helpful. A few of us have not consulted blacks in any way about these ads.

**Q:** Do you construct your integrated ads with a particular segment of the black consumer market in mind?

**A:** The market for our products and services is so big, there is no point in trying to reach a specific segment.

**Q:** What segment of the white community do you believe is most receptive to integrated ads?

**A:** For the most part, we have no basis for reply. Some of us believe that whites living in the North and on the West Coast are more receptive than those living in the South; one of us believes that the Midwestern white is more antagonistic than any other. Probably the younger generations and persons in the middle and upper socioeconomic groups are the most receptive, but we have no data to substantiate these opinions.

**Q:** How do you select the black people who appear in your ads?

**A:** The ideas and objectives of the ad determine what age, sex, or other characteristics of the model may be appropriate. We make no effort to include blacks whose appearance might be regarded as more attractive or acceptable to whites. Sometimes we use our own employees. Children are always good, black or white, and of course blacks “who have made it” in business or science, and especially in sports, are effective.

**Q:** Was pressure from competitors a factor in your decision to use integrated ads?

**A:** No, the ads are a natural consequence of social change and movement. There’s a rich market to be tapped out there. In the early 1960s a number of us agency executives per-
suaded some clients to use integrated ads for the sake of sales. In recent years, clients have been coming to us with requests for ethnic ads.

Q: Do you believe integrated advertising would have developed when it did without the thrust of the civil rights movement?

A: It developed prior to the active civil rights movement, but there is no doubt that recent activities and pressures from both black and white groups have accelerated its pace. We believe that integrated ads would have increased in number even if there had been much less emphasis on civil rights.

Q: What reactions have you had from churches, civil rights organizations, and black power groups?

A: We have had our quota of both critical and complimentary letters. Some people regard the ads as progressive or forward-looking. But it's difficult to know what we've heard, if anything, from these groups because their letters don't all come to this office and we have no way of knowing how many other offices within the company are getting letters.

Q: Have you had any pressure from agencies in the government to adopt integrated advertising?

A: Indirectly, through the civil rights legislation of the last several years, yes. Otherwise, no.

In summary, the advertisers indicated the following: "We decided to integrate our ads because we wanted to reach more members of the black community and because we have a desire to contribute to the development of social accord. Although we have done little research on the effects of the tactic, we believe we should continue using it. In general, we seem to be getting favorable responses from both whites and blacks. We don't feel we're under any particular pressure from government or other organizations to do this, though we recognize that civil rights activities have been instrumental in moving the power structure."

What the Black Consumers Told Us

This section contains representative answers to the questions asked black consumers. The responses to the first question, "Why do you think advertisers are using integrated ads?" are classified in six categories, as shown in Table 1. A few respondents named more than one cause.

Typical of the statements assigned to the several categories were the following:

Economics: "They want more money out of the black man."—"If they didn't, we'd boycott them."—"There are too many black people with too much money for them to forget about."—"They realize the profits which can come from the black man."

Social Pressure: "Civil rights legislation has forced them to do it."—"They just can't put the Panthers and the like down."—"The government makes them."—"So many Christians from all over want it."

Undecided: "I wouldn't know."—"I have no idea."

Humanitarianism: "They know how we don't get fair treatment and are trying to do something about it."—"They act like true Christians and love their brothers."—"They know it's the right, moral thing to do because we deserve to be part of America."

White Race Characteristics: "It's just more of the white man's greed."—"Whitey's scared like

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**Table 1**

**Frequency of Response in Six Categories of "Causes" of Integrated Advertising Identified by Black Consumers (By Age and Sex of Respondents)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total Respondents</th>
<th>Economics</th>
<th>Social Pressure</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Humanitarianism</th>
<th>White Race Characteristics</th>
<th>Miscellaneous</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14-19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>13</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60+</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percentage of Responses: 33.98 30.36 14.29 10.71 8.93 1.78
always. A black face scares him. He's got black faces on television to keep us from burning him out.”—“This is nothing new. Whites always try to keep blacks down. This is just one more way.”—“They feel guilty in what they've always done to us.”

Responses to the second question, “How do you feel about integrated ads?” also are classified in six categories, as shown in Table 2.

Typical of the remarks assigned to the several categories were:

**Positive:** “It makes me feel good to see a black man or woman in an ad. It shows that things are getting better.”—“I smile. I know that God's people are going to get on together after all these years.”—“Good. Like to see more of it.”

**Negative:** “I don't like it. Nobody's telling it right. Those people on the commercials don't live like anybody I know. It's all phony.”—“You know what? It makes me sick.”—“I get mad. It's the tokenism.”

**Ambivalent:** “I don't know. Sometimes it turns me on, and sometimes it turns me off. It depends on the ad, I guess.”—“You take one kind and it's OK. But others are bad news. I can't say if I like it or not. It all depends.”

**Neutral:** “I couldn't care one way or the other.”—“Who cares? It's all the same.”—“What's different? I don't look at color. I look at the product.”

**Undecided:** “I haven't given it any thought. I don't know how I feel.”

In summary, the majority of the black consumers interviewed attributed the rise of integrated advertising to economic and social pressures exerted upon the advertisers. Fewer than 11% saw humanitarianism as a motive. Although the majority said their feelings about integrated advertising were positive, more than 7% were ambivalent and more than 27% expressed negative feelings.

### Analysis of Black Consumer Responses

The significant number of negative feelings expressed by the black respondents in this study prompted an analysis of the relationship between positive or negative responses and age, sex, and occupation as variables. Sex and occupation were found to have no significance with respect to either the perceived motives of advertisers or the respondents' feelings about integrated advertising. Age, likewise, had no relationship to perceived motives, but it proved to be most significant with respect to positive or negative responses as shown in Table 3.

A rather sharp breaking point appeared to be between negative and positive feelings at about age 30. Respondents 29 and under tended to express negative reactions; respondents 30 and over tended to express positive reactions. These relationships were significant at the 0.001 level in a Chi-square test.

No clear relationship was found between answers to the question about the advertisers' motives and answers to the question about the respondents' feelings. The respondents' reactions to integrated advertising appeared to be independent of their perceptions of the reasons why advertisers introduced it. For example, a respondent might say that the greedy white man was just trying to get more money out of the black community, but he might add that he felt good when he saw it because in the long

### Table 2

**Table 2**

**Frequency of Response in Six Categories of “Feelings” About Integrated Advertising Expressed by Black Consumers (by Age and Sex of Respondents)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age Group</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total Respondents</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Ambivalent</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Undecided</th>
<th>Miscellaneous</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>14-19</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>37</td>
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<td>30-39</td>
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<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>50-59</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>60+</td>
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<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
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<td>Percentage of Responses</td>
<td>45.87</td>
<td>27.52</td>
<td>7.54</td>
<td>7.34</td>
<td>4.59</td>
<td>7.34</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 3

**Table 3**

**Positive and Negative Responses by Age of Black Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Totals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Under 30</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 &amp; Over</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
run integrated advertising would help the black man's cause.

Conclusions
Advertisers and black consumers appear to be in substantial agreement that the primary motive for introducing integrated advertising was economic. To be specific, the advertiser was interested in selling his goods and services to more people, and in particular to more black people.

Most of the black consumers who were interviewed did not perceive the advertisers' avowal of humanitarianism as another major motive for integrating their ads. Instead, they named civil rights and black power pressures as important contributing factors. A number of them consider integrated advertising to be tokenism and attribute its appearance to greed.

Of the variables related to the feelings of the black consumers who were interviewed about integrated advertising, age seems to be the most significant. Respondents under the age of 30 were more likely to express negative feelings than those who were 30 or older. The authors surmise that older people are more accepting because integrated ads are visible evidence of social changes which they have long awaited. Younger people are perhaps waiting to see the evidence of a more thorough-going social change than one reflected in the institution of advertising alone. It would appear that advertisers, and indeed all others who seek to influence the thinking of black people, should give careful consideration to the problems of communicating with younger black people.

Pioneers in the field of integrated advertising apparently are interpreting the absence of adverse criticism from black people to mean that black consumers in general are reacting favorably to their ads. They admit that they have little concrete evidence of a scientific nature to substantiate their view. It seems significant that well over a fourth of the black people interviewed in integrated communities, where one might expect a bias in favor of integrated ads, expressed negative feelings about them. When the number who were ambivalent is added to the above, the reason to question the advertisers' optimism grows stronger. It is tempting to conjecture how the findings might have varied if the authors had attempted to segment black respondents into "militants" and "nonmilitants," or if they had interviewed an equal number of whites, segmenting them, perhaps, into "liberal" and "conservative."

It seems reasonable to speculate that advertisers today are in a unique position to influence significantly the future relationships of blacks and whites in America. There is need for continued research on the effects of such variables as age, education, income, and membership in organizations, to name a few, on the receptivity of blacks and whites to integrated and, indeed, all other kinds of advertising.

MARKETING MEMO

The Sales Problem of New Products . . .

Introducing new products requires a special type of industrial selling. The idea that salesmen can handle something new on the side went out with the peddler. We are not running a "what do you want to buy" grocery store. And none of us would put up very long with a salesman who had a personal business as a sideline. Why should we give him a corporate sideline? If we pay extra compensation for the sale of a new product, the main product lines may well be neglected. If we do not, the salesman will sell what he sells most easily, the products he knows best.