

# **How Can You Activate ‘Incongruence’ in ‘Customized Communications’ Through African-American Stereotypes? Measuring ‘Customized Communication Incongruity’ in Advertising**

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*There has been a growing stream of research on advertising incongruity when targeting different cultures and stereotypes. We conceptualize that stereotypical activation through print advertisements generates Customized Communication Incongruity (CCI), leading to both positive and negative impact on ad-evoked feelings and overall brand equity. The research proposes and measures Customized Communication Incongruity (CCI) between the ad-message and commonly known African-American cultural stereotypes through ‘STAR’ framework [Stereotypes (S), Theme (T), Agreement (A) and Relevance (R)], which makes our research ‘first’ in the field of measuring advertising incongruity through stereotypes. We implement Structural Equation Modeling to examine the hypothesis measuring CCI and its effects on ad-evoked feelings and consumer-based brand equity. The research has strong academic and practical implications for researchers, academicians and practitioners as both positive and negative stereotypes were found to significantly impact ad-evoked feelings and brand equity.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the advertising and marketing communications field, there has been a lengthy stream of research regarding the depictions of African Americans in advertising and other forms of marketing communications (Bailey 2006; Cox 1970; Dominick and Greenberg 1970; Kassarian 1969; Shuey, King, and Griffith 1953; Taylor and Lee 1995). Despite the pressure from black interest groups to both increase the frequency with which black models are used and to improve African-American role portrayals in ads, as late as the 1990s, research on general magazine advertising indicated that a small percentage of magazine advertisements used black models, and that the percentage of blacks in ads trailed general population percentages (Stevenson and Swayne 2011). Advertisers have a strong influence on shaping consumer perceptions as advertisements have the ability to either help eradicate the negative perceptions of African-Americans, or they can facilitate pervasive stereotypes, which may increase racism. In the context of African-American advertising, Kern-Foxworth (1994) wrote: “Some of the earlier advertising featuring blacks was highly offensive and greatly exaggerated physical features. The mouth was opened unusually wide and filled with very large and/or carnivorous white teeth by exceptionally large, thick, ruby-red protruding lips. The eyes in these advertisements were most often seen uncontrollably with ecstatic fright.”

From the African-Americans perspective, the risky depiction of stereotypes may lead to advertising incongruity of finding themselves in the ads, which they don't approve. Schema-based research suggests that ads that do not match advertising expectations and that are incongruent with advertising expectations are more likely to draw consumers' attention and be processed more extensively than ads that match advertising expectations, thus providing a way for brands to stand out amidst the ad clutter (Loef 2002). In line with schema theory (Fiske and Taylor 1984, Fiske and Pavelchak 1986, Mandler 1982) and schema-based approaches in marketing (e.g., Sujan 1985, Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989), we define these advertising and behavioral mismatches between the depiction of advertising stereotypes, and consumer responses and expectations as "*customized communication incongruity (CCI)*". Advertising incongruity is enforced and activated through the presence of stereotypes applied as customized form of communications to the target consumer groups, leading to our conceptualization of CCI. We strongly argue that advertising stereotypes are purposefully used, depicted and activated by the advertisers to gain consumers' attention (whether positive and/or negative) leading to ad-evoked feelings, purchase intentions and impacting overall brand equity through CCI.

The purpose of our research is two-fold. First, it conceptualizes the advertising incongruity (mismatches) between stereotypical activation and the corresponding effects on the target consumer-groups as "Customized Communication Incongruity (CCI)". Second, the research explores the use of advertising stereotypes targeting African-Americans and investigates their responses, behaviors, attitudes and expectations towards the ads and brands through CCI. In subsequent sections, we define and measure CCI through STAR framework using African-American stereotypes. The research has strong academic and practical implications for future researchers and advertisers on the usage and activation of customized communication incongruity (CCI) in advertising through African-American stereotypes and studying the potential effects of CCI on African-American population for positive or negative impact on ad-evoked feelings, behaviors and overall brand equity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Stereotypes can be defined as socially shared sets of beliefs about attributes that are characteristic of members of a social category (Greenwald and Banaji 1995, p. 14). La Ferle and Lee (2005) explained that media employ stereotypes as a categorization tool to avoid ambiguity and favor easier cultural understanding. However, when the result is the application of predominately negative attributes to a racial group along with reinforcement through media, issues of discrimination and stigmatization come to the forefront (Cohen and Garcia 2005).

"In order to successfully navigate our complex social environment, we make use of stereotyping, group categorization, and other simplifying techniques (Valentino 1999)." There has been a lot of confusion and misrepresentation when dealing with African-American stereotypes in advertising. African Americans can have adverse effect to their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and even their level of achievement as a consequence of media stereotyping (Cohen and Garcia 2005). Black representation in the media has improved over the years in terms of roles. However, there are still many examples where negative associations are often connected with Black Americans. Representations of African-Americans in the advertising media "mold public opinion then hold it in place and set the agenda for public discourse on race (Campbell 1995)." The negative media images of blacks are not benign and often, these negative images of African Americans fuel public confusion through misinformation. When those images perpetuate myths and exaggerations, it is hardly surprising that the public maintains misinformed opinions (Melone 2003). People who report heavy television viewing are more likely to describe African Americans as "lazy and unskilled (Entman 1994)." Despite successful African American politicians and celebrities, the structural position of blacks in America has changed little (Spear 1999), and public policy continues to regard African Americans as "a 'problem people'...rather than as fellow American citizens with problems (West 2001)." This gives rise and strength to our conceptualization of "Customized Communication Incongruity (CCI)" through the use of negative and often misrepresented African-American stereotypes in advertising.

### Customized Communication Incongruity (CCI)

We define 'Customized Communication Incongruity (CCI)' as the advertising and behavioral mismatches between the depiction and activation of advertising stereotypes, and consumer responses, attitudes and expectations. Advertisers use the concept of CCI intentionally in media advertising in order to attract attention, recall and incongruity-related thoughts from both the target and general audience. The ads in Figures 1 and 2 illustrate a risky and misinterpreted stereotypical CCI depiction of African-Americans for well-known brands targeting the general population and not just the African-Americans. In two ads of Figure 1 by popular brands, the first ad shows an African-American female in an abnormally louder depiction and the second ad focuses more on the other ethnicities than the African-American male present in the ad. The second ad of Figure 1 illustrates "tokenism," a term used by academic researchers, which consists in minimizing a screen presence, by relegating the minority in a crowd scene for example (Bristor et al. 1995). On the other hand, Figure 2 shows three ads depicting African-American females in a completely unusual and uncharacteristic manner, leading to incongruent advertising and CCI.

**FIGURE 1  
CCI ADS DEPICTING AFRICAN AMERICAN STEREOTYPES**



Advertising Researchers feel that it is plausible to hypothesize that adaptation to important cultural values enhances the persuasiveness of advertising (Hornikx and O'Keefe 2009). Corpus analyses of advertising appeals in magazines (e.g., Han and Shavitt 1994), on television (e.g., Lin 2001), or on websites (e.g., Singh and Matsuo 2004) have reported that advertisements in a given culture are often likely to reflect that culture's values (cf. Cutler, Erdem, and Javalgi 1997). Many studies have compared the persuasiveness of an ad appealing to individualist values and an ad appealing to collectivist values for both American and Chinese audiences (e.g., Aaker and Schmitt 2001; Zhang 2004). The expectation has been that Americans will be more persuaded by (and will like better) an ad with an individualist appeal compared to one with a collectivist appeal, with the reverse expected for the Chinese. Yet, some researches yielded reverse results showing the positive impact of advertising incongruity to the target

group. The effect of targeted messaging on the unintended groups has also been researched in order to provide insight into resulting attitude formation (Aaker, Brumbaugh, and Grier 2000).

**FIGURE 2**  
**CCI ADS FEATURING AFRICAN-AMERICAN FEMALES WITH**  
**INCONGRUENT ADVERTISING**



Advertisers use ethnic models and loud (often, misrepresented) stereotypes since the general audience do not reject these ads. Ads targeting the African American market leads to higher recall by the African-Americans, featuring Black models (Whittler 1991), even if there are negative stereotypes and portrayals in the ads. Skin color bias research (Watson, Thornton and Engelland 2010) indicates that the advertising industry, music entertainment companies and magazine publishers ‘historically capitalize on the hierarchy of skin color that often exists among African Americans (Bristor, Lee, and Hunt 1995, 55) by frequently portraying light-skinned African-American female models as the standard of ethnic beauty (Baker 2005; Keenan 1996) and allegedly using digital lightening techniques on darker-skinned African-American female models in print ads (Asim 2005; Reaves et al. 2004). Many advertising researchers (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989, Stayman et al. 1992, Sujan and Bettman 1989, Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989, Sujan 1985) have hypothesized that if ads are incongruent with the brand schema, consumers will have (a) more thoughts in total and (b) more incongruity-related thoughts than if ads are congruent with the brand schema. Thus CCI usage leads to more thoughts, attitudes, reactions (responses) and feelings of arousal generated towards advertising.

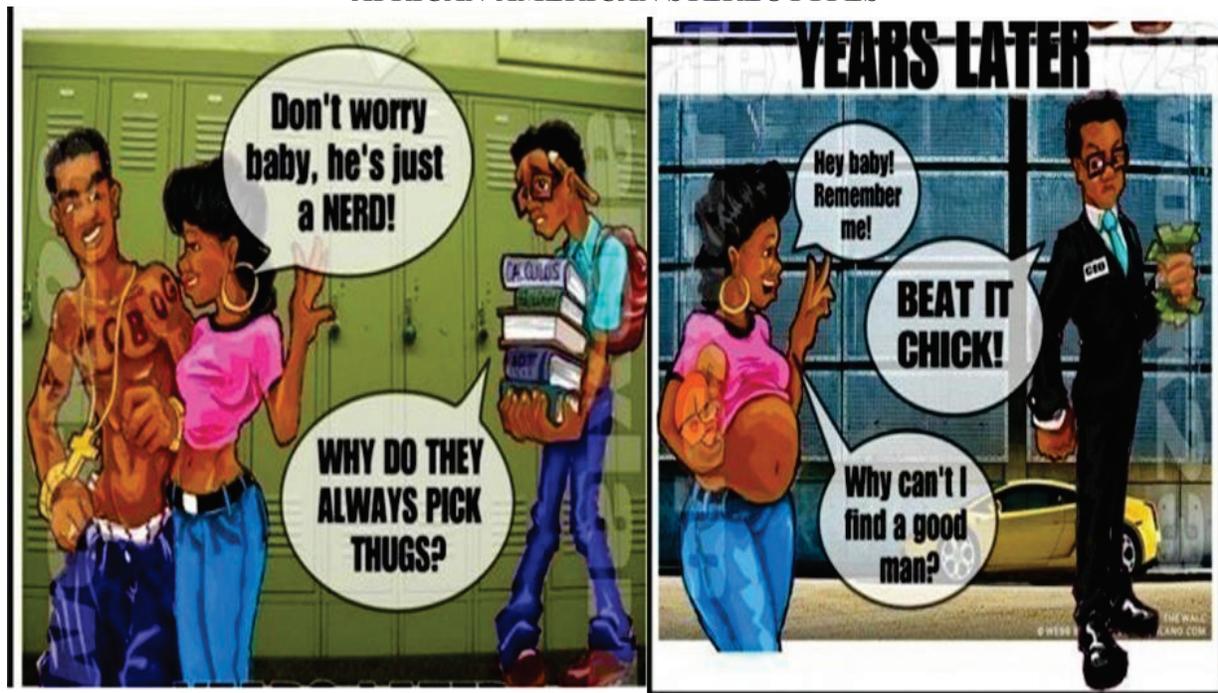
Another stream of research illustrates that blacks (and minorities in general) were often associated with predefined products (e.g., food, clothes, and shoes among others) and are absent in ads that promote high-value products, personal computers, computers supplies, electronics among others (Taylor et al, 1995; Kern-Foxworth 1994; LaFerle and Lee 2005). Taylor et al. (1995) wrote: “If African Americans or Hispanics Americans are stereotypically portrayed as uneducated, they are not likely to be depicted frequently in publications with highly educated readers, such as *Scientific American* or *Business Week*. In reference to products, a group perceived as uneducated is unlikely to be frequently portrayed as users or purchasers of technologically sophisticated products, such as electronic diaries or computer systems.” These are some of the negative effects of employing CCI in African-American stereotypical advertising along with other negative behavioral aspects of self-esteem, self-efficacy, and level of achievement.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

In the earlier sections, we have focused on our proposed concept of “Customized Communication Incongruity (CCI)” emerging from the over- and mis-representation of African-American stereotypes in advertising. Research literature is abundant on some of the earliest CCI depictions of blacks in advertising as entertainers and athletes. Quite often so, research has explained that white audiences view sports, or music, as acceptable occupations for blacks (Bowen and Schmid, 1997). While there may be positive portrayals of blacks conveying a positive message, it may also send the wrong message that this is the only field where they can succeed. Bristor et al. (1995) argue that this kind of portrayal may be dangerous in the sense that it may influence young blacks into thinking that sports and entertainment are the only viable options for them. Bowen and Schmid (1997) researched about the African-American stereotypes and wrote that "white models are portrayed in a variety of occupations and situations and the differences are used to amplify the product's versatility. Minorities deserve comparable consideration."

A very common African-American stereotype is depicted in the Figure 3. Even though it may arouse humor, yet it signifies the state of African-American society today. Bristor et al. (1995) observed the rarity of traditional, intact black families. Bang and Reece (2003) illustrated that blacks were almost never portrayed in traditional family settings. Coltrane and Messineo (2000) found that whites were most likely to be portrayed as spouses, and in a home setting. McLaughin and Goulet (1999) argued that the portrayal of single parent black women was meant to gain "the empathy, and subsequent patronage of this particular group."

**FIGURE 3**  
**CUSTOMIZED COMMUNICATION INCONGRUITY FEATURING**  
**AFRICAN-AMERICAN STEREOTYPES**



Figures 4 (Dr. Ben Carson: world's best pediatric neurosurgeon and Obama 2010 presidential campaign) highlight positive portrayals of African-Americans in advertising through achievement and higher education. Such portrayals are less common, yet they are existent.

Social Learning theory can be applied to our research on African-American stereotypical activation and depiction leading to customized communication incongruity (CCI). Social Learning theory is developed by Albert Bandura and states that people learn from observational learning. Knobloch-

Westerwick and Coates (2006) wrote: “Models for behavior can be observed in the immediate social environment, but in modern societies, a vast amount of information about values and behaviors is obtained from the symbolic mass media environment. Advertising messages form a large part of media content, portray actions in repetitive manner, and show rewards for these actions. These aspects should, according to social-cognitive theory, encourage onlookers to adopt behaviors seen in advertisements.” The other relevant theory to our research is cultivation theory by Gerbner (1970) that describes the impact of advertising effects on the conceptions of social reality. George Gerbner envisioned ‘cultivation’ as mass media’s ability to acculturate an audience through repeated exposure—the development of a mediated view. Audience members’ perceptions of reality are formed by the repeated portrayals of individuals and groups in the mass media, resulting in beliefs and attitudes that are shaped by mass media (including advertising) that may not represent reality (Gerbner et al. 1980).

**FIGURE 4**  
**POSITIVE PORTRAYALS OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS IN ADVERTISING**



Our CCI conceptualization is strengthened by Gerbner et al. (1980), who later refined initial Gerbner’s cultivation theory by identifying two different processes in cultivation theory: mainstreaming, “a homogenization of outlooks among otherwise divergent groups of viewers” (heavy use of mass media leads to the formation of similar views by dissimilar groups), and resonance, “cases of special salience and vulnerability to television messages” (through repeated mass media exposure, a specific group’s attitude formed from the many exposures becomes even stronger as it “resonates” or makes more sense to that specific group). Customized Communication Incongruity (CCI) happens when two cultivation theory aspects of ‘homogenization’ and ‘resonance’ leads to ‘incongruence’ in African-American advertising and communications through stereotypes’ activation, and becomes an accepted societal norm representing African-Americans.

Figure 5 provides our ‘Customized Communication Incongruity Advertising and Consumer-Based Brand Equity’ conceptual framework, illustrating the presence of CCI-based African-American advertising stereotypes leading to ad-evoked feelings and consumer-based brand equity, characterized by brand loyalty, brand awareness, brand associations and perceived quality (as indicators of brand equity).

In our research, customized communication incongruity through African-American stereotypes’ activation is illustrated through the STAR framework where STAR is an acronym for Stereotype (S), Theme (T), Agreement (A) and Relevance (R). ‘*Stereotype (S)*’ illustrates stereotypical activation and

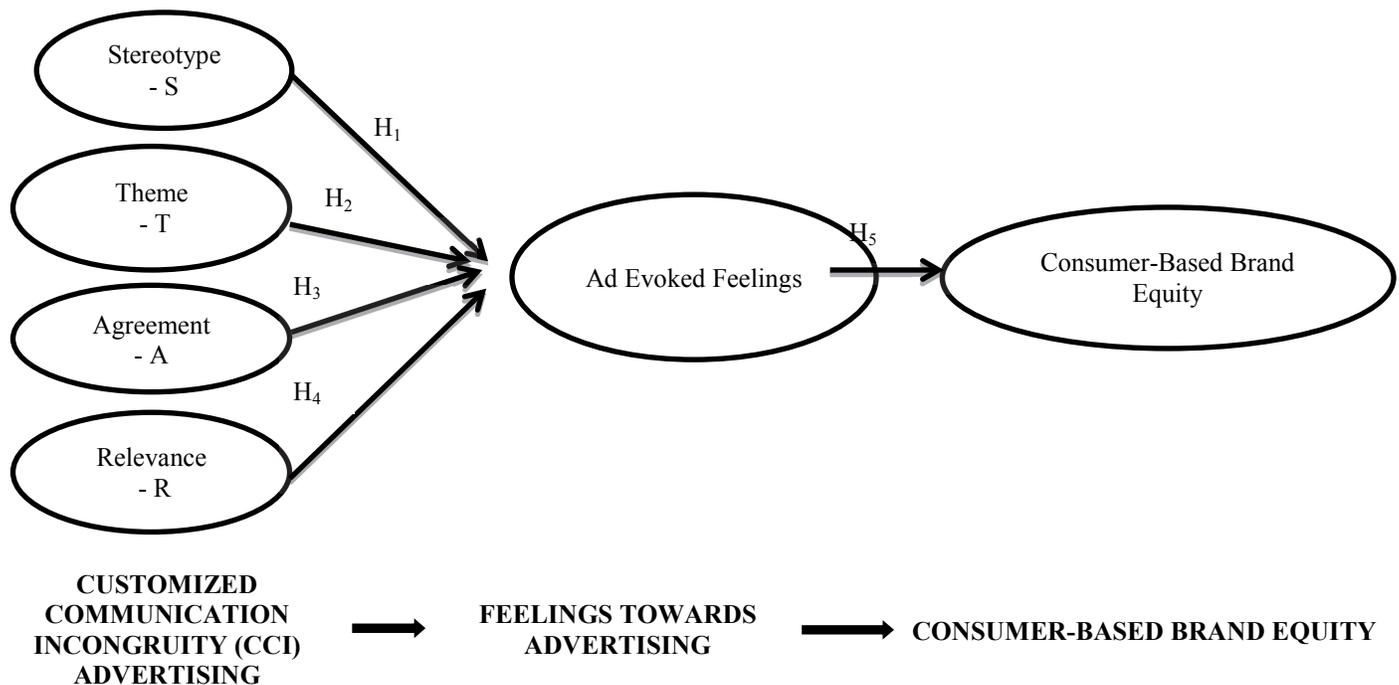
depiction of African-Americans in advertising. As discussed earlier, these stereotypes and portrayals can be negative (as shown in Figures 1, 2 and 3) or positive (as shown in Figures 4 and 5) portrayals; leading to corresponding negative or positive ad-evoked feelings. This results in the following hypothesis.

*H<sub>1</sub>: Negative stereotypical activation is associated with negative ad-evoked feelings while Positive stereotypical activation is associated with positive ad-evoked feelings*

Every ad has a **‘Theme (T)’** which can be represented by emotions in advertising like warmth, humor, eroticism, fear, anger, etc. The theme of an ad can also be simply informational without any emotions expressed in the ad. The ad may focus on product attributes, features and information, called hard-sell advertising appeals or may focus on behaviors, emotions and feelings generated in a real-life environment, called soft-sell advertising appeals. Soft-sell appeals lead to positive attitudes toward the ad (Okazaki, Mueller and Taylor 2010). Soft-sell appeals focus on the more general goal of creating a positive feeling (Mueller 1987) and lead to positive ad and brand cognitions (Geuens and De Pelsmacker 1998). This leads to the following hypothesis.

*H<sub>2</sub>: Themes with soft-sell (rather than the hard-sell) advertising appeals are more associated with positive ad-evoked feelings*

**FIGURE 5**  
**‘CUSTOMIZED COMMUNICATION INCONGRUITY ADVERTISING AND CONSUMER-BASED BRAND EQUITY’ FRAMEWORK**



**‘Agreement (A)’** and **‘Relevance (R)’** highlight agreement, relevance and support for CCI-based incongruent advertising targeting African-Americans. Kern-Foxworth (1994) noted that "using blacks in advertising has always been a strategy employed by advertisers." LaFerle and Lee (2005) explained that advertisers employ stereotypes as a categorization tool to avoid ambiguity and favor easier cultural understanding but they also stress the negative aspect of such method for ethnic members. Both academic and industry research points to a tendency among black consumers toward materialism and conspicuous

consumption, with high interest in product information and above average proportions of market mavens (Fortenberry and McGoldrick 2011). The concept of Customized Communication Incongruity (CCI) explains the incongruent ads depicting loud and risky (mis)representations of African-Americans through the stereotypical activation, which is atypical. Mandler (1982) states that incongruity leads to arousal and therefore consumers will attempt to resolve incongruity through schema-based processing. Moderate incongruity can be resolved through assimilation, and consequently arousal results in favorable evaluations; while strong incongruity cannot be resolved without restructuring schema knowledge, which is accompanied by negative affect leading to unfavorable evaluations (Mandler 1982). Evidence for Mandler's (1982) hypothesis has been found by several studies (Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989, Stayman et al. 1992). Since arousal potential of incongruity with the ad schema is limited (cf. Steenkamp, Baumgartner and Van der Wulp 1996), favorable consumer evaluations are likely to result.

*H<sub>3</sub>: CCI-based incongruent ads showing agreement to target consumers' ad schema lead to more arousal, and consequently positive ad-evoked feelings.*

*H<sub>4</sub>: CCI-based incongruent ads relevant to target consumers' ad schema lead to more arousal, and consequently favorable and positive ad-evoked feelings.*

Certain brands (e.g., Coca-Cola, McDonald's) are considered to possess "high brand equity," resulting in higher market shares and prices than competing products (Badenhausen 1996) and as a result, they enjoy high customer loyalty, name awareness, perceived quality, strong brand associations, and other assets (Aaker, 1991). Yoo and Donthu (2001) have coined the term 'consumer-based brand equity' to refer to the set of four brand equity dimensions or indicators of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty. Consumer-based brand equity is defined as "the value consumers associate with a brand, as reflected in the dimensions of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty" (Pappu et al., 2006, p. 698) and in the present research, brand equity refers to consumer-based brand equity. Although McCracken (1986, 1989) conceptualized the implications of meaning transfer for branding, the mechanisms he postulated have not been verified experimentally. There has been a considerable amount of researches available showing an impact of ad-evoked feelings on advertising responses (e.g., Aaker, Stayman and Hagerty 1986, Batra and Ray 1986, Burke and Edell 1989, Edell and Burke 1987, Holbrook and Batra 1987) but these researches did not study the consequent effects of ad-evoked feelings on branding. We propose that CCI-based advertising incongruity play an important role in creating consumer-based brand equity. In the context of the above, the following hypothesis is developed.

*H<sub>5</sub>: Ad-evoked feelings mediate the relationships between advertising incongruity (CCI) and brand equity.*

All the hypotheses developed in this section and illustrated in our 'Customized Communication Incongruity Advertising and Consumer-Based Brand Equity' Conceptual Framework in Figure 6, are tested in the subsequent sections.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

### **Study 1 (Pre-Test with 137 Student Respondents)**

Our primary goal in Study One is to develop an instrument called STAR framework to assess Customized Communication Incongruity (CCI). The sample consisted of 137 undergraduate respondents from a historically black university, all between 18 to 28 years old, and 83 of them were women (see Table 1). Approximately 88 percent of the participants were African Americans, and 60.6 percent were females. With respect to class rank, the majority of the participants were juniors and seniors. Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of our sample used in Study 1.

**TABLE 1**  
**DEMOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS (N=137) FOR STUDY ONE**

Sample Characteristics	% of the sample
Gender	
• Male	39.4
• Female	60.6
Ethnicity	
• African American	87.6
• others	12.4
College Rank	
• Freshman	0.7
• Sophomore	6.6
• Junior	30.7
• Senior	50.4
• Graduate Student	9.5
• Other	2.2

The study was confined to seven print ads depicting African-American stereotypes – three positive portrayals, three negative portrayals and one humorous stereotype depiction across the product categories of automobiles, technology and fashion brands. These product categories were relevant to the subjects because of their interest in these product categories. The research was executed in two stages as follows.

*Stage I – Qualitative Stage*

Initially 60 ads in relevant product categories depicting African-Americans were selected from ten health and fashion magazines (Seventeen, Shape, Men’s Health, Women’s Health, Oprah, Allure, Elle, Details, Lucky, and Cosmopolitan) for different issues in years 2010 - 2011. Fifteen academic experts in marketing and advertising were recruited as a jury and were asked to assess 60 ads on positive and negative stereotypical depictions of African-Americans. The experts had the required knowledge about stereotypes, advertising appeals and the intent of stereotypical use in advertising. We used Geuens and Pelsmacker (1998) research design of measuring subject-based perception of the ads and selected only the ads that were judged as positive and negative stereotypical depictions. A final set of seven (7) ads emerged from this stage after conducting the frequency counts. Out of 7 final ads, three ads were found to be positive stereotypical portrayal; three ads were negative stereotypical portrayal; while one ad had humorous stereotypical depiction. When the real ads are assigned to the different experimental treatments, they are high on external validity but low on experimental control, and hence, it is important to attribute the ads to the correct experimental category to avoid confounds (Geuens and Pelsmacker 1998).

**TABLE 2**  
**CCI, ADVERTISING AND BRANDING MEASURES' DESCRIPTORS**

CCI measurement on 1-5 agreement scale	Ad-Evoked Feelings or Primary Affective Reactions (PARs)	Consumer-Based Brand Equity
<p><b>STEREOTYPES (S)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a clear positive stereotype in this advertisement.</li> <li>• I agree with this stereotypical depiction in the advertisement.</li> <li>• I am one of the more popular persons in my daily surroundings.</li> <li>• I can see my friends in this advertisement.</li> <li>• This advertisement changes my initial impressions of the topic portrayed.</li> <li>• There is a clear negative stereotype in this advertisement. **</li> <li>• I grew up around situations/messages like this. **</li> </ul> <p><b>THEME (T)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I find this advertisement “corny” or “lame”</li> <li>• How funny is this advertisement?</li> <li>• I have to think about the advertisement before I laugh.</li> <li>• I would use this as a joke.</li> <li>• I like the advertisement but would not show it publicly. **</li> <li>• I can crack jokes at people this advertisement portrays or affects. **</li> </ul> <p><b>AGREEMENT (A)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This advertisement gives me motivation.</li> <li>• This advertisement supports my background.</li> <li>• I have similar experiences with the ad’s intent or message.</li> <li>• I can relate how much to this advertisement.</li> <li>• This advertisement agrees with my life goals.</li> <li>• I would want this for my family.</li> <li>• I agree with this advertisement. **</li> </ul> <p><b>RELEVANCE (R)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ad is completely out of the context for me.</li> <li>• I don’t agree with the advertisement at all.</li> <li>• I cannot relate with this advertisement at all.</li> <li>• This advertisement could be so much better.</li> <li>• This advertisement is old and has no “flavor”.</li> <li>• The ad is completely irrelevant to me. **</li> <li>• This advertisement doesn't motivate me. **</li> <li>• This advertisement is current with today’s interests. **</li> <li>• I would have understood this advertisement 3 years ago. **</li> <li>• I agree with the thought process behind this advertisement. **</li> </ul> <p><b>**Deleted Items</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Worried-carefree</li> <li>• Nervous-calm</li> <li>• Contemplative-impulsive</li> <li>• Critical-accepting</li> <li>• Cautious-adventurous</li> <li>• Dubious-confident</li> <li>• Pessimistic-hopeful</li> <li>• Callous-affectionate</li> <li>• Bad-good</li> <li>• Sad-happy</li> <li>• Insulted-honored</li> <li>• Indifferent-interested</li> <li>• Irritated-pleased</li> <li>• Unemotional-sentimental</li> <li>• Depressed-cheerful</li> <li>• Regretful-rejoicing</li> </ul>	<p><b>Brand Awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I can recognize this brand among other competing brands.</li> <li>• I am aware of this brand.</li> <li>• Some characteristics of this brand come to my mind quickly.</li> </ul> <p><b>Brand Associations</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is likely that this brand offer good value for money</li> <li>• It is likely that this brand would be technically advanced.</li> <li>• I like this brand.</li> <li>• I trust this brand as a manufacturer of (product category).</li> <li>• I would feel proud to own this brand.</li> </ul> <p><b>Perceived Quality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is likely that this brand is of high quality.</li> <li>• It is likely that this brand is of very consistent quality.</li> <li>• It is likely that this brand offer excellent features.</li> <li>• It is likely that this brand is very reliable.</li> </ul> <p><b>Brand Loyalty</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I consider myself to be loyal to this brand.</li> <li>• This brand would be my first choice.</li> <li>• I will not buy other brands if this brand is available at the store.</li> </ul>

**Stage II – Quantitative Stage**

We developed a 30-item CCI scale as provided in Table 2. Table 2 provides measures for CCI, ad-evoked feelings and consumer-based brand equity. The seven print ads were presented to a group of 137 students at a comprehensive historically black university in the southeastern part of the United States in random order of positive and negative stereotypical portrayals in order to avoid any potential order effects bias. If the ads were representing tangible goods, then it was easier for the respondents to answer

questions about buying the product or brand but for intangible goods' (technology infrastructure and socially conscious) ads, the respondents were given the cue that if they support the ad/brand then it is similar to raising funds and donations for the brand. The data in this pre-test was collected and analysed.

We conducted an exploratory factor analysis on the CCI scale comprising of 30 items and four factors of STAR framework emerged from the analysis. The four-factor model explained 81.96 percent of the variance. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.963 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Chi-Square value of 2135.306. Cronbach alphas for STAR framework were 0.94, 0.95, 0.84 and 0.85 respectively, proving reliability for the model. From the results of pre-test, we excluded 10 statements/ items for the STAR framework because their factor loadings were too low (<0.4). Finally we obtained 20 statements/ items questionnaire which measure CCI, consisting of 5 items for 'Stereotype', 4 items for 'Theme', 6 items for 'Agreement' and 5 items for 'Relevance'.

### Study 2 (Post-Test with 155 Non-Student Respondents)

A nonstudent sample of respondents took part in the Study Two. In total, 155 participants (91 women and 64 men) were approached on city streets, on public transportation, and in cafés. Table 3 presents the demographics for this sample. Trained interviewers were employed for the study who explained to the respondents that the investigation dealt with consumer responses to advertising. Participants examined the same seven ads as the student sample.

**TABLE 3**  
**STUDY 2 – NON-STUDENT SAMPLE DEMOGRAPHICAL CHARACTERISTICS, (N=155)**

Sample Characteristics	% of Sample
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	41.3
Female	58.7
<b>Age</b>	
17 - 20	14.2
21 - 25	16.1
26 - 30	18.1
31 - 35	14.2
36 - 40	10.3
41 - 45	16.8
46 - 50	6.5
61 and above	
<b>Ethnicity</b>	
African American	67.1
White (Caucasian)	25.4
Hispanic/Latino/ Spanish origin	1.3
Asian	3.1
American Indian / Alaska native	0.6
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0.6
Other	1.9

### Common Method Variance Tests

Because all constructs were measured using self-report measures, we examined whether common method variance was a serious issue. As recommended by Podsakoff and Organ (1986), Harman's one-factor test was performed. In this test, all survey items were entered together into an unrotated factor

analysis and the results were examined. If substantial common method variance is present, then either a single factor would emerge or one general factor would account for most of the total variance explained in the items (Podsakoff and Organ 1986). After entering all items into the factor analysis model, seven factors emerged from the analysis, and the first factor only accounted for 32 percent of the total variance. In addition, no general factor emerged from the factor analysis, thus providing support for the absence of such general bias in the finding (Matilla and Enz 2002). Thus, common method variance was not deemed a serious issue in this study.

### Measures

Table 2 (provided earlier) presents the descriptors for the measures of the constructs shown in Figure 6. Unless stated otherwise, we used a Likert-type response format for the survey items. We developed CCI measurement scale represented by STAR framework consisting of 20-items, pretested on 137 student respondents (study 1) and then on 155 non-student respondents (study 2). The primary affective reactions or ad-evoked feelings were measured on a 16-item semantic differential scale, assessing respondents' feelings as a reaction to seeing the stimulus (Brooker and Wheatley 1994). Brand awareness (3-items), perceived quality (4-items), and brand loyalty (3 items) were measured using Yoo and Donthu (2001) scales while brand associations (5-items) was measured using Aaker's (1991) instrument.

### Data Analysis

We tested the proposed 'Customized Communication Incongruity Advertising and Consumer-Based Brand Equity' conceptual framework presented in Figure 6 using structural equation modeling to evaluate the research hypotheses by using SPSS AMOS 20 (Arbuckle 2008, IBM 2011).

The covariance matrix was used as the input for the structural model. The following fit indices were used to assess the fit of the nomological network developed in Figure 1. The absolute fit measures, maximum likelihood ratio, chi-square statistic, and p-value provide a measure of the extent to which the covariance matrix estimated by the hypothesized model reproduces the observed covariance matrix (James and Brett 1984). The root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) was considered as it provides an estimate of the measurement error. The normed fit index (NFI) provides information about how much better the model fits than a baseline model, rather than as a sole function of the difference between the reproduced and observed covariance matrices (Bentler and Bonett, 1980). The comparative fit index (CFI) has similar attributes to the NFI and compares the predicted covariance matrix to the observed covariance matrix and is least affected by sample size. The two-step approach to structural equation modeling was employed (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). First, the measurement model was inspected for satisfactory fit indices. After establishing satisfactory model fit, the structural coefficients were interpreted.

**TABLE 4**  
**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS AND CORRELATION MATRIX**

Variables	Mean	S.D.	Stereotype	Theme	Agreement	Relevance	ADEF
Stereotype	12.62	3.11	1.000				
Theme	7.37	2.69	-.018	1.000			
Agreement	11.08	3.89	.568***	.196**	1.000		
Relevance	25.14	3.87	.241***	-.193**	.375***	1.000	
Ad Evoked Feelings	66.19	8.65	.572***	.157**	.467***	.065	1.000
Brand Equity	48.91	10.88	.662***	.035	.515***	.173**	.616***

\*\*\*P<0.001, \*P<0.1, \*\* P<0.05

## RESULTS

The means, standard deviations, reliability estimates, and Pearson zero-order correlations are provided in Table 4. Correlations were in the intended direction with positive and negative stereotypes demonstrating a significant relationship with most of the constructs in our model. For example stereotypes, agreement and relevance were significantly related to brand equity while stereotypes, theme and agreement were significantly related to ad-evoked feelings. The two-step approach to structural equation modeling was employed (Anderson and Gerbing 1988). First, the measurement model was inspected for satisfactory fit indices. After establishing satisfactory model fit, the structural coefficients were interpreted.

### Testing of Measurement Model

We performed confirmatory factor analysis on the six variables: Stereotypes, Theme, Agreement, Relevance, Ad-evoked feelings and Brand equity. We tried to assess overall fit of the model. First we find that the overall fit was not very good. Then we exclude 5 items (S5, T1, A5, A6, R5) which had the modification index is too high ( $>0.5$ ) and standard solution is too low ( $<0.4$ ), then we find a better overall fit. The measurement model shown in Table 5 provided an acceptable fit to the data when considering fit statistics. (Chi-square=383.847,  $df=258$ ,  $P\text{-value}=0.000$ ,  $\text{Chi-square}/df=1.488$ ,  $\text{RMSEA}=0.060$ ,  $\text{CFI}=0.917$ ,  $\text{TLI}=0.904$  and  $\text{NFI}=0.789$ ).

**TABLE 5  
MODEL FIT**

Model	Measurement	Estimate
Positive Stereotype Model	Chi-Square (df)	383.847(258)
	p-value	.000
	Chi-Square/df	1.488
	RMSEA	.060
	TLI	.904
	NFI	.789
	CFI	.917
Negative Stereotype Model	Chi-Square (df)	516.818(258)
	p-value	0.000
	Chi-Square/df	2.003
	RMSEA	.086
	TLI	.821
	NFI	.760
	CFI	0.858

### Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha coefficient is used to measure the internal consistency of each identified construct. The reliability of the construct is acceptable if Cronbach's  $\alpha$  exceeds 0.70 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham and Black, 1998). Cronbach  $\alpha$  coefficients are listed in Table 6 which shows that this research has achieved the high reliability (Cronbach  $\alpha$  are all above 0.76). The value of skewness is less than 2 and kurtosis is less than 7, which means that the data is normal, meeting the normality assumption (Curran et al 1996). As shown in Table 7, all of the estimated parameters of STAR indicators were statistically significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), indicating excellent validity. It means that the measurement model in our study has convergent validity.

Table 8 shows the discriminant validity. To assess discriminant validity, we made a series of Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) difference tests on the factor correlations among all the STAR constructs (Anderson and Gerbing 1998). This was done for one pair of variables at a time by constraining the estimated correlation parameter between them to 1.0 and then performing a Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ) difference test on the values obtained for the constrained and unconstrained models (Anderson and Gerbing, 1998). The resulting significant difference in  $\chi^2$  indicates that two constructs are not perfectly correlated and the discriminant validity is achieved (Bagozzi and Phillips 1982). As shown in Table 8, the unconstrained model is our measurement model. In our CCI measurement scale through STAR framework, we have 4 constructs. We constrained the correlation between any 2 constructs at a time and performed 6 tests. The Chi-square difference was calculated by comparing each of the new model with the unconstrained model (measurement model). Based on Table 8, all of the  $\chi^2$  differences in this study are greater than 3.84, which is a good evidence for discriminant validity.

**TABLE 6**  
**RELIABILITY**

<b>Variable/Items</b>	<b>Cronbach Alpha</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>
<b>Stereotype</b>	<b>0.764</b>				
A5		3.06	0.92	-.398	.361
P4		3.16	1.10	-.220	-.458
P1		3.28	1.00	-.443	.172
A1		3.12	1.05	-.095	-.179
<b>Theme</b>	<b>0.760</b>				
H2		2.32	1.12	.263	-.828
H4		2.73	1.11	-.093	-.633
H5		2.32	1.04	.189	-.696
<b>Agreement</b>	<b>0.875</b>				
S2		2.75	1.18	.086	-.840
S3		2.73	1.10	-.081	-.815
S4		2.80	1.17	-.056	-.926
R1		2.80	1.11	.088	-.325
<b>Relevance</b>	<b>0.761</b>				
S5		4.93	1.18	.047	-.699
S8		4.91	1.21	-.007	-.805
A6		5.23	.91	.267	.342
R6		5.19	1.10	-.179	-.338
P5		4.85	0.99	.158	.148

**TABLE 7  
CONVERGENT VALIDITY**

Path	Unstandardized Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	Standardized Estimate
A1 <--- STEREOTYPE	1.000			.778
A5 <--- STEREOTYPE	.721***	.070	10.292	.734
P1 <--- STEREOTYPE	.640***	.081	7.926	.614
P4 <--- STEREOTYPE	.977***	.078	12.486	.823
H2 <--- THEME	1.000			.599
H4 <--- THEME	1.197***	.192	6.228	.713
H5 <--- THEME	1.344***	.223	6.021	.865
S5 <--- RELEVANCE	1.000			.497
S8 <--- RELEVANCE	1.189***	.192	6.191	.576
A6 <--- RELEVANCE	1.264***	.242	5.223	.806
R6 <--- RELEVANCE	1.384***	.272	5.098	.735
P5 <--- RELEVANCE	.689***	.186	3.715	.412
S2 <--- AGREEMENT	1.000			.868
S3 <--- AGREEMENT	.953***	.069	13.838	.885
S4 <--- AGREEMENT	1.023***	.073	14.073	.894
R1 <--- AGREEMENT	.656****	.081	8.118	.622

\*\*\*p<0.001

**TABLE 8  
DISCRIMINANT VALIDITY**

Model	Chi-Square	DF	ΔChi-Square	ΔDF
Unconstrained Model	383.8	258		
Stereotype – Theme	482.0	259	98.2	1
Stereotype – Agreement	395.7	259	11.9	1
Stereotype – Relevance	398.9	259	15.1	1
Theme – Agreement	422.0	259	38.2	1
Theme – Relevance	498.1	259	114.3	1
Agreement – Relevance	405.6	259	21.8	1

### The Structural Model

After testing the measurement model, we proceeded to examine the proposed structured model and hypotheses. The main purpose of this study is to analyze the causal relationship of STAR framework and brand equity and the mediating effect of ad evoked feeling on this relationship. From the structural model we obtained results as illustrated in Table 9.

**TABLE 9**  
**RELATIONSHIPS AMONG STAR, AD EVOKED FEELINGS AND BRAND EQUITY**

Path	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	Critical Value	Standard Estimate	Hypothesis	Result
<b>Positive Stereotype Ads</b>						
<b>Stereotype-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	4.682	.650	7.206***	.763	Positive	Supported
<b>Theme-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	.085	.562	.151	.009	Positive	Not Supported
<b>Agreement-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	.396	.535	.740	.069	Positive	Not Supported
<b>Relevance-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	1.607	.826	-1.945**	-.155	Positive	Supported
<b>Ad Evoked Feelings-&gt;Brand Equity</b>	.443	.049	8.974***	1.098	Positive	Supported
<b>Negative Stereotype Ads</b>						
<b>Stereotype-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	-5.009	.794	6.306***	-.760	Negative	Supported
<b>Theme-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	.287	.492	.583	.033	Positive	Not Supported
<b>Agreement-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	.869	.599	1.450	.152	Positive	Not Supported
<b>Relevance-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	-1.623	.937	-1.733**	-.137	Negative	Supported
<b>Ad Evoked Feelings-&gt;Brand Equity</b>	.290	.032	9.004***	.945	Positive	Supported

\*\*\*P<0.001, \*\*P<0.05

*Positive Stereotypes Model*

Table 9 shows the path coefficient from stereotype to ad evoked feelings is positive and significant (4.682 with  $p<0.000$ ), which supports the Hypothesis 1 that positive stereotype has a positive direct effect to ad evoked feelings. The path coefficient from theme to ad evoked feelings is positive but not significant (0.085,  $P>0.05$ ), which does not support Hypothesis 2. The path coefficient from agreement to ad evoked feelings is positive but not significant (0.396,  $p>0.05$ ), which does not support Hypothesis 3. The path coefficient from relevance to ad evoked feelings is both positive and significant (1.607,  $p<0.05$ ), thus supporting Hypothesis 4. The path coefficient from ad evoked feelings to brand equity is positive and significant (0.443 with  $p<0.000$ ), thus supporting Hypothesis 5 that ad evoked feelings has a positive direct effect to brand equity.

*Negative Stereotypes Model*

Table 9 shows the path coefficient from stereotype to ad evoked feelings is negative and significant (-5.009 with  $p<0.000$ ), which supports the Hypothesis 1 that negative stereotype has a negative direct effect to ad evoked feelings. Hypotheses 2 and 3 are not supported similar to positive stereotype model indicating that theme and agreement do not affect ad-evoked feelings. The path coefficient from relevance to ad evoked feelings is both negative and significant (-1.623,  $p<0.05$ ), thus supporting Hypothesis 4 that negative stereotypes (relevance) leads to negative ad-evoked feelings. The path coefficient from ad evoked feelings to brand equity is positive and significant (0.290 with  $p<0.000$ ), thus supporting

Hypothesis 5 that ad evoked feelings has a positive direct effect to brand equity parameters of brand awareness, recall and brand associations. Brand loyalty and perceived quality dimensions of consumer-based brand equity are not significantly impacted by negative ad-evoked feelings.

*Nomological Validity*

Hypotheses 1 and 4 were supported because the paths from positive (negative) stereotypes were found to be significant leading to positive (negative) ad-evoked feelings for ‘stereotypes’ and ‘relevance’ components of CCI. Furthermore, Hypothesis 5 was fully supported and we found that ad-evoked feelings mediate the relationship between CCI and consumer-based brand equity. These hypotheses further established the nomological validity by examining the impact of our CCI constructs (STAR framework) on various dependent measures of ad-evoked feelings and brand equity. Nomological validity refers to the degree to which the construct, as measured by a set of indicators, predicts other constructs that past theoretical and empirical work suggests it should predict (Netemeyer, Bearden, and Sharma 2003).

**TABLE 10**  
**UNSTANDARDIZED VALUES BY GENDER FOR THE STEREOTYPE MODEL**

Path	Positive (Male)		Positive (Female)	
	Path Coefficient	Standard Error	Path Coefficient	Standard Error
<b>Stereotype-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	2.886***	.725	6.063***	1.151
<b>Theme-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	.246	.833	1.069	.906
<b>Agreement-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	.831	.598	-.708	1.096
<b>Relevance-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	-30.709	73.040	-.059	.886
<b>Ad Evoked Feelings-&gt;Brand Equity</b>	.482***	.104	.367***	.046
	Negative (Male)		Negative (Female)	
<b>Stereotype-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	-2.584**	1.032	-5.634***	1.177
<b>Theme-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	.397	1.005	-.009	.255
<b>Agreement-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	2.001***	.640	.861	.831
<b>Relevance-&gt;Ad Evoked Feelings</b>	-2.511***	.853	-1.945	1.920
<b>Ad Evoked Feelings-&gt;Brand Equity</b>	.403***	.065	.259***	.039

\*\*\*P<0.001, \*P<0.1, \*\* P<0.05

**Gender Differences**

We investigated the ad-message context and its meaning applicability to cultures and sub-cultures as a manipulation check and the way males and females interpreted CCI differently with respect to cultures (or sub-cultures) and repeated viewings of the same message. Table 10 displays the gender differences observed across the hypothesized structural equation model. The results show that males prefer

stereotypical depictions over females. Also, on repeated viewings of the ads showing African-American stereotypes, women encountered more negative feelings over men.

For the Positive Stereotype model, both males and females prefer positive stereotypes and the stereotypes significantly influenced ad evoked feelings. In turn, ad evoked feelings significantly influenced brand equity for both males and females. The paths from theme, agreement and relevance to ad-evoked feelings were not statistically significant for both males and females.

In the Negative Stereotype model, both males and females exhibited negative ad-evoked feelings to negative stereotypes ads, which in turn significantly influenced brand awareness and brand associations dimensions of consumer-based brand equity. Consistent to our previous findings in Table 9, brand loyalty and perceived quality dimensions of consumer-based brand equity are not significantly impacted by negative ad-evoked feelings. The paths from agreement and relevance to ad-evoked feelings were statistically significant for males. Males found the negative stereotypes ads more agreeable to their context than females. However, males found negative relevance to these negative stereotypes ads, thus leading to negative ad-evoked feelings. In the Female Negative Stereotypes model, only stereotypes was significant predictor of ad-evoked feelings; agreement, theme and relevance were not significant predictors of ad evoked feelings. An interesting finding of the male and female (positive and negative stereotypes) models was that negative stereotypes was found to be more agreeable with males over females but both gender showed a preference for negative stereotypical CCI ads leading to stronger brand awareness, recall and brand associations dimensions of consumer-based brand equity.

## DISCUSSIONS

There have been two research streams prevalent in advertising literature – one, which focuses on adaptation, persuasion and congruity of ad messages for targeted and customized communications (see, e.g., Hornikx and O’Keefe 2009, Agrawal 1995, Taylor 2005, Taylor and Johnson 2002); and the other, which focuses on developing ads that are incongruent with consumers’ expectations for extensive processing and positive (better) ad evaluations on consumers. Incongruent ads are created by advertisers and marketers to attract instant consumer attention and better brand recall. Goodstein (1993) and Olney et al. (1991) show that consumers watch ads with a unique execution longer than standard ads, and Heckler and Childers (1992) show that some types of incongruent ads are better recalled than congruent ads. Several studies have shown that incongruent ads are perceived to be humorous, and produce positive affective responses (Lee and Mason 1999, Alden, Mukherjee and Hoyer 2000).

CCI has provided a new qualifying dimension in our research study. The study was designed to provide a better understanding of advertising incongruity through CCI. This is our major contribution to the research literature, which relies on interdisciplinary insight and advertising incongruity framework for understanding advertising meanings, ad-interpretations and branding. We are also the *‘first’* in introducing and illustrating the impact of CCI (using STAR framework) through African-American stereotypes on brand equity parameters of brand awareness, brand associations, perceived quality and brand loyalty. In our study, we segregated ‘stereotypes’ into positive and negative stereotypes as mentioned in the earlier sections and found positive relationships between positive stereotypes and ad-evoked feelings; and ad-evoked feelings and brand equity. On the other hand, negative stereotypes lead to negative ad-evoked feelings in both men and women. Males found the negative stereotypes ads more agreeable but less relevant to their context than females. Contrary to our expectations, both positive and negative stereotypes significantly impacted brand equity.

An interesting finding of the male and female (positive and negative stereotypes) models was that both gender showed a preference for negative stereotypical CCI ads for brand awareness, recall and brand associations dimensions of consumer-based brand equity. This was particularly intriguing and captivating as the advertising research literature suggests otherwise where negative (and even positive) stereotypical depictions are risky and lead to negative ad and brand attitudes and behaviors (Fazio et al. 1995; Bargh, Chen and Burrows 1996; Chen and Bargh 1997). Our research shows a significant preference for the stereotypical depictions for better ad-evoked feelings and stronger consumer-based brand equity. Females

were found to dislike negative stereotypes over males but both gender preferred stereotypes for better brand awareness, recall and brand associations.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

In this research study, we proposed the concept of ‘Customized Communication Incongruity (CCI)’ using the STAR framework and further developed the measures of CCI using African-American stereotypes. The conceptualized CCI Advertising and Consumer-Based Brand Equity framework is further tested using structural equation modeling. Our study suggests that advertising incongruity can be better understood through the activation and depiction of African-American stereotypes, which impacts ad-evoked feelings and brand equity significantly. The study targets African-Americans both as stereotypical ad-subjects and as target population under study.

As is true of most empirical research, the current research has some limitations. First, the cross-sectional design of the study does not allow for causal inferences. Another limitation of the study was that all data were collected via self-report measures, which may lead to the problem of common method bias and inflated predictive relationships. However, as recommended by Podsakoff and Organ (1986) and detailed in the results section, we conducted Harmon’s One Factor test, which did not indicate that common method variance was problematic in our structural equation model. Lastly, we had a modest sample size. A future area of inquiry would be to disaggregate CCI using STAR framework for different ethnicities and examine its influence in the hypothesized model. Another interesting research avenue would be to compare the responses of racio-ethnic and cross-cultural groups to the current sample, since behaviors, attitudes and branding are distinct outcomes. We also believe that longitudinal designs are needed in this area to examine the behavior of these constructs over time.

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