



Targeting without alienating on the Internet: Ethnic minority and majority consumers



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ABSTRACT

The authors draw on the phenomenon of processing fluency to develop a memory-based account of target and nontarget market effects related to consumer evaluations of culture-specific website designs. The test of the study's hypotheses relies on longitudinal experimental data from Tunisian minority and French majority consumers in France. The psychological mechanisms that drive website evaluations appear to differ for the two populations. French majority consumers are alienated by culturally incongruent website design, but this negative effect is alleviated by repeated exposure. Tunisian minority consumers tend to prefer website design with a French look and feel, and repeated exposure enhances this effect. The results from an explorative post hoc study echo these findings and suggest that effects of culture-specific website design on consumer website evaluations are contingent on the website product category.

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1. Introduction

Marketplaces worldwide are increasing in ethnic and cultural diversity of consumers. This creates a challenging situation for marketers who must rethink their targeting strategies (Grinstein and Nisan, 2009; Holland and Gentry, 1999). An identifiable stream of research on “targeting without alienating” (Johnson and Grier, 2011) therefore tackles whether and when targeting ethnic minority and majority consumers with culture-specific advertising makes good business sense. Studies show that culture-specific advertising can generate unfavorable reactions in some consumers who consider that they are not being targeted or may feel alienated (Aaker, Brumbaugh, and Grier, 2000; Torres, 2007). However, such evidence remains inconclusive (Johnson and Grier, 2011). Some investigators report that cultural or ethnical (dis)similarities between the ad and the viewer do not account for variations in consumer responses to the ad (Aaker et al., 2000; Antioco, Vanhamme, Hardy, and Bernardin, 2012; Brumbaugh, 2009; Karande, 2005; Lee, Fernandez, and Martin, 2002) or that consumers may prefer ads that are culturally dissimilar to themselves over culturally similar ones (Brumbaugh, 2002).

To contribute to this debate the authors examine ethnic minority and majority consumers' evaluations of website cultural congruity (WCC). A website has high WCC when it displays cultural markers of a

target culture in terms of typical colors, symbols, heroes, or rituals (Bartikowski and Singh, 2014; Cho and Cheon, 2005; Luna and Gupta, 2001; Luna, Peracchio, and De Juan, 2002). The authors propose a memory-based account of WCC effects in which they differentiate two dimensions of processing fluency: conceptual and perceptual. The test of the hypotheses relies on longitudinal experimental data from Tunisian minority and French majority consumers in France. Johnson and Grier (2011, p. 253) call France an “ideal multicultural marketing laboratory for targeting without alienating” because of the particular context that favors integration of immigrants and imposes cultural assimilation.

The study complements and extends previous research in several ways. First, it offers insights into target and nontarget market effects of culture-specific website design. A large body of research almost concordantly suggests that consumers respond positively to higher levels of WCC, but no study tests these effects for ethnic minority consumers. Such insights are particularly relevant because of the increasing importance of the Internet to reach ethnic minority consumers (Becerra and Korgaonkar, 2010). Moreover, nontarget market websites are just one click away and can be easily reached by members of both ethnic minority and majority consumers. Second, the study offers new insights beyond what is known on the psychological processes that drive ethnic minority and majority consumer evaluations of culture-specific marketing communication. Extant studies use cross-sectional designs and emphasize the important role of cultural memory to explain target and nontarget market effects (Aaker et al., 2000; Antioco et al., 2012; Brumbaugh, 2002; Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999; Johnson and Grier,

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2011). However, no study manipulates this memory experimentally. Therefore, by considering two dimensions of processing fluency and testing the theoretical model with longitudinal data, the authors respond to Brumbaugh's (2002) call for more research on alternative modes of processing of culturally targeted marketing communication. Third, by focusing on WCC as a central variable, the current study broadens the scope of previous research that used models with different ethnicities to study target and nontarget market effects (Antioico et al., 2012; Johnson and Grier, 2011; Karande, 2005; Lee et al., 2002). Hence, the authors heed Johnson and Grier's (2011) suggestion to examine other cultural cues, such as culturally typical symbols or material objects. Finally, the authors explore the findings from their experimental study in a qualitative post hoc test. The results echo the importance of considering repeated exposure or habituation effects and suggest that effects of culture-specific website design on consumer website evaluations are contingent on the website product category.

2. Conceptual background and hypotheses

2.1. Targeting ethnic minority consumers on the web

Does marketing communication across cultures involve “the same accommodation issues when it is directed at national sub-cultural groups, as it does when directed at cultural groups across national borders” (Holland & Gentry, 1999, p. 68)? If yes, then the bulk of extant research into culture-specific website design suggests that higher levels of WCC improve consumer website evaluations in terms of perceived website usefulness, ease of use, attitudes toward the site, as well as use or purchasing intentions (Baack and Singh, 2007; Cyr, 2008; Lynch and Beck, 2001; Singh, Fassott, Chao, and Hoffmann, 2006; Singh, Furrer, and Ostinelli, 2004; Vyncke and Brengman, 2010).

These studies do not only share remarkably similar results but also they resonate regarding countries or geographical regions as cultural units and make implicit assumptions about cultural homogeneity within nations. In particular the globalization literature suggests the inappropriateness of consumer segmentation in terms of countries (Cleveland, Erdoğan, Arıkan, and Poyraz, 2011; Cleveland and Laroche, 2007; Watson, Lysonski, Gillan, and Raymore, 2002). Ongoing globalization and rising migration make it “increasingly difficult to identify the ‘ethnic’ core of a culture due to cultural contamination” (Craig & Douglas, 2006, p. 323). Ethnic minority consumers are broadly diffused among majority populations and share cultural bonds with both, members of their own ethnic culture and members of the host culture (Jamal, 2003; Jamal and Sharifuddin, 2014). Their expectations and cultural values may be best understood in terms of amalgams of ethnic and host-country cultures, habits, and traditions. Thus, designing websites to effectively target ethnic minority consumers is unlikely as simple as recycling websites that have been designed to target them in their home countries.

2.2. Processing fluency

To portray a theoretical framework for explaining WCC effects, the authors draw on the processing fluency phenomenon, which according to Alter and Oppenheimer (2009, p. 219) is a “ubiquitous metacognitive cue in reasoning and social judgment”. Processing fluency is “the ease with which information flows through the cognitive system” (Reber, 2012, p. 223). Greater levels of fluency lead to higher levels of affect, preferences, and perceptions of truth (Reber and Schwarz, 1999), as well as to favorable physiological reactions, such as the activation of the zygomaticus major muscle, the so-called smiling muscle (Winkielman and Cacioppo, 2001). For example, Alter and Oppenheimer (2006) show that shares from companies with more fluent or easy-to-pronounce company names or ticker codes (e.g., KAR versus RDO) perform significantly better on the stock exchange during the week following initial public offering. On the contrary, less fluent

processing leads to more negative reactions. Processing fluency can be conceptual or perceptual in nature (Hang and Auty, 2011; Lee and Labroo, 2004).

Conceptual fluency is the ease with which a stimulus comes to mind and pertains to the processing of meaning through semantic associations (Hamann and Squire, 1996). Higher conceptual fluency affects the formation of brand consideration sets and is positively related to affective judgments and choice decisions (Lee, 2002; Lee and Labroo, 2004; Nedungadi, 1990). One of the earliest demonstrations of conceptual- or retrieval-based fluency is Tversky and Kahneman's (1973) “availability heuristic”, which posits that things are perceived as more important and believable when people can think about them and associate meaning to them. Accordingly, Martindale, Moore, and Borkum (1990) show that the subjective perception of meaningfulness of a visual stimulus counts solely as the dominant reason explaining an individual's liking of the stimulus. Similarly, Hamann and Squire (1996) show priming effects in tasks in which relationships between studied items and test cues are conceptual (semantic or associative) rather than perceptual, suggesting that positive attitudinal judgments emerge when a stimulus's meaning can be easily grasped and associated with what has been learned in the past. In this sense, cultural knowledge is explicit memory that shapes cognitive evaluations of culturally laden stimuli (Aaker et al., 2000; Brumbaugh, 2002; Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999; Johnson and Grier, 2011).

However, perceptual fluency is the ease with which consumers identify a target stimulus on subsequent encounters (Bornstein, 1989; Jacoby and Dallas, 1981). Zajonc (1968, p. 15) states that “mere exposure is a sufficient condition for attitude enhancement”. Repeated stimulus exposure can enhance ease of processing, render stimuli more accessible in memory, and facilitate recognition (Whittlesea, Jacoby, and Girard, 1990; Winkielman, Schwarz, Fazendeiro, and Reber, 2003). For example, Kunst-Wilson and Zajonc (1980) showed study participants meaningless geometric shapes and found that liking of shapes increased as a function of (simple) exposure frequency. Repeated encounters with a stimulus can facilitate stimulus processing even without conscious awareness of the previous experience (Schacter, 1987; Whittlesea, 1993) and lead to an “illusion-of-truth effect”, meaning that people are more likely to believe what they have heard or seen before (Reber and Schwarz, 1999). Indeed, advertising research has repeatedly shown that even a single repeated exposure can significantly enhance consumer liking of the ad or the brand (Anand and Sternthal, 1990; Tellis, 1997).

Differentiating conceptual from perceptual fluency extends previous studies that offer cognitive explanations of WCC effects, such as Luna et al.'s (2002) theory of cognitive resource matching or Singh et al.'s (2006) usability and usefulness account of culturally adapted web content. It also extends previous studies that explain target and nontarget market effects of culture-specific marketing communication based on similarity perceptions between the viewer and the ad (Aaker et al., 2000; Antioico et al., 2012; Brumbaugh, 2002; Grier and Brumbaugh, 1999; Johnson and Grier, 2011). Hence, the argument the present study attempts to advance is that WCC affects consumer website evaluations not only through conscious cognitive processing but also through habituation or unconscious processing that may emerge from repeated website exposure. Considering repeated exposure is also practically highly relevant. For example, consumers who do price or product comparisons frequently surf the same websites again, whether they liked them or not on a first exposure.

Notably, fluency effects exist independently of one's cultural values or felt ethnic identity (Alter, Oppenheimer, Epley, and Eyre, 2007). Memory-based difficulties in understanding cultural content, or nonfluent processing, generally functions as a cognitive alarm that triggers senses of risk and concern. For example, Rubin, Paolini, and Crisp (2010) show that a bias against immigrants exists simply because immigrants do not belong to a salient category of people and are therefore more difficult to process cognitively — independently of the evaluator's

ethnic identity. This may explain why some studies report that ethnic identity may not well account for ethnic minority consumer evaluations of culture-specific advertising (Antioco et al., 2012; Johnson and Grier, 2011; Lee et al., 2002).

2.3. Hypotheses

This study conceptualizes consumer website evaluations in terms of three key antecedents of online behavior: trust toward the e-vendor (Schlosser, White, and Lloyd, 2006), attitude toward the website (Chen and Wells, 2002), and purchasing intentions (Poddar, Donthu, and Wei, 2009). The three independent variables – ethnic affiliation, WCC, and repeated exposure – are part of the experimental design. Fig. 1 illustrates the subsequent theoretical developments.

Hoebel (1966) described culture as an integrated system of what has been learned in the past that is characteristic of the members of a society. Culturally learned stimuli come to mind more readily and their meanings are more easily grasped than stimuli that are perceived as foreign. Accordingly, higher levels of WCC may increase website evaluations because of what has been culturally learned and the semantic or associative connections that are more easily made. In addition, the perceptual fluency account of the mere exposure effect (Whittlesea et al., 1990; Winkielman et al., 2003; Zajonc, 1968) suggests that repeated website exposure leads to more positive website evaluations.

H1. Higher (as compared to lower) levels of (a) WCC and (b) repeated exposure lead to improved website evaluations.

Effects of repeated exposure on website evaluations may not be monotonic. Boredom may set in with raising exposure frequency, leading to a decline in website evaluations (Bornstein, Kale, and Cornell, 1990; Lee and Labroo, 2004). This is also reflected in the well-known saying “familiarity breeds contempt”. At repeated exposure levels, particularly complex stimuli or ads receive more positive evaluations than simple ones (Anand and Sternthal, 1990; Bornstein, 1989; Tellis, 1997). Hence, if low WCC websites are conceptually more difficult to process and less well evaluated (see H1a), then they should benefit more from higher levels of repetition than high WCC websites.

H2. Repeated website exposure enhances website evaluations particularly for low WCC websites.

Effects of WCC and repeated website exposure may work differently for ethnic minority and majority consumers. Members of the two groups presumably hold different knowledge about the two cultures (Aaker et al., 2000; Brumbaugh, 2002; Holland and Gentry, 1999).

Majority consumers are more likely habituated to and more familiar with mainstream marketing communication than with (foreign) ethnic-specific communication. By contrast, the knowledge ethnic minority consumers have about both, their own ethnic- and the majority culture should facilitate processing of either website design. They more likely may also assimilate majority-specific website design as a matter of habituation to the environment they live in. Therefore, as compared to majority consumers, ethnic minority consumers are more likely to experience high conceptual fluency on both high and low WCC sites. Moscovici (1980) calls this difference between members of ethnic minority and majority groups an “asymmetry in compliance and conversion”.

H3. Ethnic affiliation moderates the effect of WCC on website evaluations such that higher levels of WCC lead to more positive website evaluations for majority than for ethnic minority consumers.

The combined effects of WCC and repeated website exposure may work differently for ethnic minority and majority consumers. Based on the arguments that particularly complex or unfamiliar stimuli receive more positive evaluations at repeated exposure levels (see H2), and that ethnic minority consumers process culturally incongruent websites more fluently than majority consumers (see H3), repeated exposure should attenuate negative effects of low WCC websites particularly for majority consumers. In other words, what consumers learn from repeated exposure should attenuate nontarget market effects of culturally incongruent website design, and this attenuating effect should be more distinctive for majority than for minority consumers.

H4. Repeated website exposure is more effective to attenuate negative effects of low WCC sites for ethnic majority than for ethnic minority consumers.

3. Study

3.1. Experimental design

The study relies on a $2 \times 2 \times 2$ between-subject design with study participants from two ethnic groups in France (Tunisian minorities versus French majorities), two versions of WCC (culturally congruent to the Tunisian versus the French culture), and two levels of website exposure (single versus repeated).

The categorization of informants into ethnic minority and majority consumers relies on their self-classification in terms of nationality and cultural affiliation (Johnson and Grier, 2011). Informants with a double

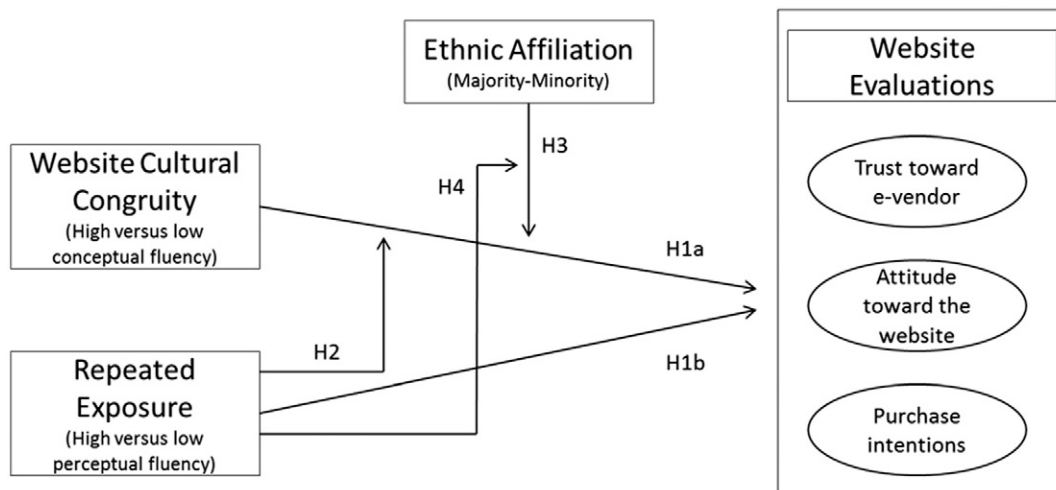


Fig. 1. Research model.

nationality, a bicultural affiliation, or a nationality that differs from their cultural affiliation are not considered. This aligns with Riggins's (1992) view of an ethnic community as people with a common culture, ancestry, language, history, religion, or customs. This group comprises modern-day immigrants, as well as descendants from previous generations, who have kept their ethnic nationality and continue to affiliate to the minority culture. Presumably, these people strive to maintain their ethnic cultural traditions "while at the same time adapting or renegotiating them to fit into present day society" (Holland & Gentry, 1999, p. 67).

A mock website that mimics an online retail shop of consumer electronics in France served as the WCC stimulus. Consumer electronics are among the most popular products that consumers purchase online (www.payvision.com) and belong to a category of "culturally free products" (Cleveland, Papadopoulos, and Laroche, 2011). Arguably, this category can isolate potential interactions with WCC that may emerge in relation to culturally laden categories, such as ethnic clothes or food. The mock website displayed the invented brand name LTLC and promoted altogether 117 products in seven subcategories (computer, peripherals, consumables, MP3, games, software, and digital cameras).

One version of the mock website featured cultural markers of the Tunisian culture (WCC_{minority}) and the other version featured cultural markers of the French culture (WCC_{majority}), with otherwise identical content. The WCC_{minority} site used design elements that are reminiscent of the Tunisian culture, such as a dominantly red color (the Tunisian national color) together with typical symbols and Tunisian references. The WCC_{majority} counterpart used French national colors (white, blue, and red) along with typical French symbols and pictures of well-known French references. On the WCC_{minority} site, the LTLC brand name was displayed in red, with a squiggle font (oriental style); on the WCC_{majority} site, LTLC was displayed in blue color, with a rectilinear font style. Both website versions used the .fr country code top-level domain to suggest that the company operates in France.

The manipulation check involved WCC evaluations from 33 French (49% female; 73% are 34 years or younger) and 31 Tunisian (58% female; 74% are 34 years or younger) consumers. They evaluated WCC of the two website versions with three items ($\alpha > .7$) on 5-point Likert scales (see Appendix 1). The WCC composite scores show that participants from both cultures perceived the WCC_{minority} site as more culturally congruent to the Tunisian culture than the WCC_{majority} site, and inversely the WCC_{majority} site as more culturally congruent to the French culture than the WCC_{minority} site. Paired-sample t-tests show that these mean score differences are highly significant ($p < .01$) for all four pairs (ethnic affiliation \times WCC), in support of the effectiveness of the WCC manipulation.

3.2. Data collection

The authors recruited study participants over social media network sites. Online questionnaire links were posted on large minority online communities such as "Les Tunisiens à Paris" (Viadeo.fr) or "La communauté Tunisienne en France" (Facebook.fr), and respectively on mainstream French online communities. The participants entered randomly one of the four treatment conditions (WCC \times repetition) and were asked to browse the assigned website to gather product and purchasing information. The instructions stated that the mock website is an online shop in France under construction (no real purchase could be made). Participants in the low perceptual fluency condition (only one exposure) filled a French language questionnaire that measured the variables of interest on their first (and only) visit of the mock website. Participants in the repeated exposure condition were first asked to respond to some filler questions. We recontacted them four weeks later and asked them to browse the same website again and answer the questions that measure the three dependent variables.

The measures for the dependent variables came from previous studies and were adapted to the present context (see Appendix A). The

scales underwent a translation and back-translation procedure with two bilingual (English–French) speakers, and were pretested and refined with data gathered from a convenience sample of 30 graduate students and two colleagues. The whole data collection lasted approximately six months, during which responses were gathered from 150 French (54% female; 76% are 34 years or younger) and 151 Tunisian (51% female; 61% are 34 years or younger) study participants.

3.3. Measurement evaluation

Multi-group confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with the two ethnic subsamples as groups served to evaluate the measurement properties. One item of the 6-item trust scale showed a poor factor loading ($\lambda < .5$) and was excluded from the subsequent analyses (see Appendix A). The measurement model with the remaining items achieved a good fit (RMSEA = .08, SRMR = .06, CFI = .92, $\chi^2/df = 3.14$). All indicators load in both groups strongly and significantly ($p < .01$) on their respective target factors. As Table 1 shows, the Cronbach's alpha values (α) and composite reliabilities (ρ) are greater than .8 for all scales, and the average variances extracted (AVEs) are greater than .5, suggesting convergent validity for these constructs (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988). According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), discriminant validity exists if a construct's AVE is greater than the squared correlations of this construct with other constructs. This condition is fulfilled for all but one pair of constructs (trust toward the e-vendor and attitude toward the website) (Table 1). We additionally examined discriminant validity for these two constructs by constraining their estimated correlation to 1.0 and performing χ^2 difference tests (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Bagozzi and Phillips, 1982). The unconstrained model produced a significantly ($p < .01$) lower χ^2 value than the constrained model, in support of discriminant validity. Additional examinations of cross-cultural measurement invariance support full metric equivalence of the measures. Such a high level of measurement invariance is rarely supported in cross-cultural settings (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). It may be achieved in the present study because French is for both groups a well-known and dominant language of communication.

3.4. Hypotheses testing

The test of the hypotheses relied on a series of analyses of variance (ANOVA) with composite scores of the three dependent variables and the three experimental variables as factors. The cell means related to the hypothesized effects appear in Table 2.

Overall, the results indicate non-significant effects of WCC on all three dependent variables: trust (3.33 vs. 3.38; $F(1, 293) = .267$, $p > .05$), attitude (3.39 vs. 3.53; $F(1, 293) = 2.06$, $p > .05$), and purchase intention (2.51 vs. 2.72; $F(1, 293) = 3.1$, $p > .05$). Hence, H1a receives no support. Again overall, the effect of repeated website exposure is

Table 1
Descriptive statistics, correlations, and average variance extracted.

	Number of items	Mean	SD	α	ρ	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>French majorities (N = 150)</i>								
(1) Trust toward e-vendor	5	3.08	.77	.84	.85	.53		
(2) Attitude toward the website	5	3.09	.84	.84	.85	.64	.53	
(3) Purchase intentions	4	2.18	1.14	.97	.96	.37	.41	.89
<i>Tunisian minorities (N = 151)</i>								
(1) Trust toward e-vendor	5	3.63	.83	.89	.89	.61		
(2) Attitude toward the website	5	3.83	1.05	.94	.95	.72	.79	
(3) Purchase intentions	4	3.06	.98	.95	.95	.29	.36	.82

Notes: Values on the diagonal (in italic) are AVEs; values below the diagonal are correlations from the CFA.

Table 2
Website evaluations as a function of the experimental manipulations.

Ethnic affiliation	WCC	Exposure	Trust	Attitude	Purchase intentions	n
French majorities	WCC low	Single	2.6 (.76)	2.6 (.83)	1.63 (.85)	41
		Repeated	2.97 (.6)	2.96 (.63)	1.86 (.94)	33
		Total	2.81 (.7)	2.76 (.77)	1.73 (.89)	74
	WCC high	Single	3.42 (.64)	3.4 (.64)	2.78 (1.28)	44
		Repeated	3.24 (.85)	3.43 (.97)	2.36 (1.04)	32
		Total	3.34 (.74)	3.41 (.79)	2.61 (1.2)	76
Tunisian minorities	WCC low	Single	3.51 (.57)	3.51 (.94)	3.16 (1.09)	42
		Repeated	4.25 (.58)	4.65 (.61)	3.42 (.28)	33
		Total	3.83 (.68)	4.01 (.99)	3.28 (.84)	75
	WCC high	Single	3.22 (.83)	3.27 (.97)	2.67 (1.1)	45
		Repeated	3.71 (.97)	4.19 (1.0)	3.08 (.94)	31
		Total	3.42 (.92)	3.64 (1.08)	2.84 (1.05)	76
Total	WCC low	Single	3.1 (.78)	3.06 (1.0)	2.4 (1.24)	83
		Repeated	3.61 (.87)	3.81 (1.05)	2.64 (1.05)	66
		Total	3.33 (.86)	3.39 (1.08)	2.51 (1.16)	149
	WCC high	Single	3.32 (.74)	3.33 (.82)	2.73 (1.19)	89
		Repeated	3.47 (.94)	3.8 (1.05)	2.71 (1.05)	63
		Total	3.38 (.83)	3.53 (.95)	2.72 (1.13)	152
	Total	Single	3.22 (.77)	3.2 (.92)	2.57 (1.22)	172
		Repeated	3.54 (.9)	3.8 (1.05)	2.68 (1.04)	129

Notes: Values are mean scores (SD inside the parentheses).

positive for all three dependent variables. The mean score differences are significant for trust (3.22 vs. 3.54; $F(1, 293) = 14.99, p < .01$) and attitude (3.2 vs. 3.8; $F(1, 293) = 39.16, p < .01$) but not for purchase intention (2.57 vs. 2.68; $F(1, 293) = 1.08, p > .05$). Hence, H1b receives support for two out of the three dependent variables.

H2 stated that repeated exposure enhances website evaluations particularly for low WCC websites. As expected, the mean score differences between single and repeated exposures are larger for low than for high WCC sites, notably for trust (3.61–3.1 = .51 vs. 3.47–3.32 = .15), for attitude (3.81–3.06 = .75 vs. 3.8–3.33 = .47), and for purchase intention (2.64–2.4 = .24 vs. 2.71–2.73 = -.02). The WCC \times exposure interaction is significant for trust ($F(1, 293) = 4.42, p < .05$), but not for attitude ($F(1, 293) = 2.06, p > .05$) and not for purchase intention ($F(1, 293) = 1.23, p > .05$). Hence, although the effects are in the expected direction for all three dependent variables, the statistical tests suggest only partial support for H2.

With H3 we assumed the strength of WCC effects on website evaluations to be stronger for majority than for ethnic minority consumers, which is clearly supported for all three dependent variables. The interactions between cultural affiliation and WCC are highly significant for trust ($F(1, 293) = 28.65, p < .01$), for attitude ($F(1, 293) = 25.58, p < .01$), and for purchase intention ($F(1, 293) = 28.45, p < .01$). Inspections of η^2 for the two cultural groups suggest that the WCC effect sizes are consistently stronger for the French majorities than for the Tunisian minorities for all three dependent variables, namely for trust ($\eta^2 = .11$ vs. .07), for attitude ($\eta^2 = .15$ vs. .04), and for purchase intention ($\eta^2 = .14$ vs. .05). Although these results support H3, the direction of the effects is opposite to the predictions made in H1a. The data shows strong positive effects of high WCC for French majority consumers, namely for trust (3.34–2.81 = .53; $F(1, 146) = 20.41, p < .01$), for attitude (3.41–2.76 = .65; $F(1, 146) = 26.40, p < .01$), and for purchase intention (2.61–1.73 = .88; $F(1, 146) = 25.47, p < .01$), but consistently negative effects for Tunisian minority consumers for trust (3.42–3.83 = -.41; $F(1, 147) = 6.46, p < .01$), for attitude (3.64–4.01 = -.37; $F(1, 147) = 5.20, p < .01$), and for purchase intention (2.84–3.28 = -.44; $F(1, 147) = 7.24, p < .01$). Hence, both Tunisian minorities and French majorities prefer electronics websites with a French look and feel. We explore this unexpected result in the qualitative post hoc study.

Finally, H4 suggested that negative effects of low WCC will be attenuated by repeated exposure, in particular for majority consumers. For the French majorities, the data reveals significant WCC \times exposure

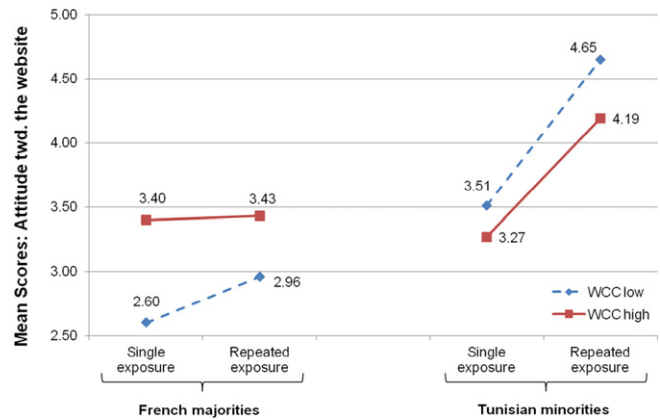


Fig. 2. Attitude toward the website as a function of the experimental manipulations.

interactions in the expected direction for trust (2.97–2.6 = .37 vs. 3.24–3.42 = -.18; $F(1, 146) = 3.93, p < .05$) and for purchase intention (1.86–1.63 = .23 vs. 2.36–2.78 = -.42; $F(1, 146) = 3.63, p < .05$). The effect is also in the hypothesized direction for attitude, but the interaction is statistically not significant (2.96–2.6 = .36 vs. 3.43–3.4 = .03; $F(1, 146) = 1.75, p > .05$). By contrast, for the Tunisian minorities, the WCC \times exposure interaction is non-significant for any of the dependent variables, notably for trust (4.25–3.51 = .74 vs. 3.71–3.22 = .49; $F(1, 147) = 1.03, p > .05$), for attitude (4.65–3.51 = 1.14 vs. 4.19–3.27 = .92; $F(1, 147) = .57, p > .05$), and purchase intention (3.42–3.16 = .26 vs. 3.08–2.67 = .41; $F(1, 147) = .22, p > .05$). In combination, the results suggest support for H4 because repeated exposure attenuates negative effects of low WCC sites for French majority consumers, but there is no such effect for Tunisian minority consumers (Fig. 2). It appears that the psychological processes that are activated by WCC and repeated website exposure work very differently for members of these two groups.

4. Post hoc study

Some unexpected results from the experimental study require further explorations. Why do both Tunisian minority and French majority consumers prefer electronic retail websites with a French look and feel? Can the same effect be expected for websites that sell culture-laden products, such as traditional Tunisian food, clothing, furniture, or handicrafts? The post hoc study was set up to answer these questions and gain further insights into how consumers think about culture-specific website design.

To ensure a deep understanding, the authors recruited 16 consumers (eight French and eight Tunisians, all living in France) as informants who agreed to conduct a 30-min individual interview during which they were exposed to four experimental websites. The websites varied with respect to the product category (consumer electronics versus typical oriental products) and culture-specific design (French versus oriental-looking). The number of pages (each website had four pages), the navigation logic, and the way products or services were presented were kept constant for all sites in order to avoid response biases related to these technical aspects.

Half of the informants first surfed the two versions of the electronic retail website and the other half first started with the two versions of the site with oriental products. The interviews were conducted by two trained research assistants. The interview procedure followed closely Zhou and Belk's (2004) reader-response approach to study global and local advertising appeals. Informants were allowed to surf the websites as long as they wanted and to look at them as many times as they wanted. The interview started after exposure to the first category. When respondents provided no more new responses they were asked to surf the two website versions of the other category and the interview

continued. The interviews were unstructured, but began by asking the informants to tell what they thought about each website. Follow-up probes sought to learn whether informants liked or disliked each site, which version was preferred, whether there were any confusing aspects, and most important, why they gave the answers they gave.

Overall, the results suggest that website design preference is contingent on the product category ($p < .05$): for electronics, all eight French and five Tunisian informants clearly preferred the French design. The results were almost in the opposite direction for oriental products with all eight Tunisians preferring the oriental design and four French preferring the French design. Hence, although the majority of respondents (81%) preferred the French design for electronics (exact binomial p (two-tailed) = .022), the oriental design was preferred by most (75%) for the websites with oriental products (exact binomial p (two-tailed) = .077). In addition, Fisher's exact test reveals that these preferences are not contingent on the informants' cultural affiliation ($p > .05$), in particular for electronics ($p = .199$) (confirming results from the experimental study, see H1a) or for oriental products ($p = .077$).

The main arguments in favor of the French design for electronics relate to service and product quality (e.g., "I think that the French website offers better after-sales services"), usability aspects (e.g., "The French design looks more sober and does not distract me from searching information"), feelings of trust (e.g., "I fear that the oriental-looking site sells counterfeit products"), as well as habituation effects (e.g., "I am not used to seeing Arabs sell electronics in France"). Three Tunisian respondents who preferred the oriental design noted that they felt more attracted by the site's warm colors and that Tunisian references suggest "cultural openness and tolerance of a firm that operates in France".

For the websites with oriental products, the Tunisian informants repeatedly noted that the French design "does not make sense" or is "unsuitable for typical oriental products". French informants credited the oriental design for enabling them to "virtually travel and visit an oriental bazaar", which suggest to them that "the products are more authentic". Both French and Tunisian respondents expressed concerns about the oriental website's service competences and online payment security. They argued that the French design "looks more serious and more transparent", and encourages them "to buy in France instead of in a foreign country". In particular the French informants noted that the French design "looks more familiar, which makes it easier to use", again supporting the important role of habituation memory for consumer website evaluations. Interestingly, one Tunisian informant noted that typical ethnic food products, such as Harissa (a red spicy sauce) or dates are of best quality when they are bought in French stores in France. This, according to the informant, is related to the production and quality selection processes that are controlled by French companies in Tunisia.

5. Discussion

5.1. Summary and implications

The study sheds light on how Tunisian minority and French majority consumers respond to culture-specific website design, in particular, and the role of memory to explain these responses in general. Two dimensions of processing fluency – conceptual and perceptual – are proposed as psychological mechanisms to study target and nontarget market effects in multicultural marketing. The experimental results with electronic retail websites show that majority consumers are alienated by culturally incongruent website design, but ethnic minority consumers are not. This asymmetry resonates with different sets of cultural knowledge held by the two groups, which enable conceptually fluent processing to different degrees. Repeated exposure enhanced website evaluations for both groups, in line with the perceptual fluency account. Repeated exposure also alleviated nontarget market effects for majority consumers. A similar finding, in terms of habituation memory, occurred from the qualitative post hoc study. Firms that are unsure about

whether culturally adapted website design is needed may simply consider spending marketing dollars to enhance awareness and encourage consumers to visit a website again. They may counterbalance these costs against the costs for creating and maintaining culture-specific website designs.

The post hoc study also suggests that WCC effects are contingent on the product category. Website design that aligns with the majority population tends to be preferred for electronic retail websites, but for ethnic products a typical ethnic design seems more appropriate. These results are not clear-cut, but they suggest that some product categories are more predestined to culture-specific marketing communication than others. Future research should explore category effects in greater detail. In many instances cultural differences between ethnic minority and majority consumers are so strong that culturally differentiated communication is indispensable. For example, France's huge Muslim population is a big business for producers of halal food and halal food certification (cf., [Jamal and Sharifuddin, 2014](#)). The holy month of Ramadan is characterized by innovative and aggressive marketing to Muslims. Particularly for religious themes, the important role of culture-specific communication simply cannot be ignored.

A definite recommendation of whether or not marketers should target ethnic minority and majority consumers with culture-specific website designs cannot be given, although it seems that higher WCC levels are generally more important to majority than to ethnic minority consumers. Multicultural websites that depict symbols and values of culturally diverse populations simultaneously may represent a golden mean. However, more research is needed to clarify this idea ([Johnson and Grier, 2011](#)). Most important, it appears clear and evident from the experimental study and the explorative post hoc test that repeated exposures and habituation memory matter a great deal. In this sense, the findings deliver new insights beyond what is known from extant cross-sectional studies into target and nontarget market effects of culture-specific advertising and studies into WCC effects in general.

5.2. Limitations and avenues for future research

The study is subject to several limitations that offer opportunities for additional research. First, as in most experimental studies, the results are threatened by a number of biases and errors that may reduce external validity. Replications in other countries and with other ethnic groups, particularly outside of France, are encouraged. Second, the experimental manipulation of perceptual fluency may have provided participants with an opportunity to think about the stimulus. Strictly speaking, the study design failed to isolate unconscious processing and habituation memory from other repeated exposure effects that potentially led to cognitive processing. It is practically difficult to avoid such effects in experimental tests because consumers must surf and interact with websites to experience them. Future studies may use different exposure sequences or vary exposure frequencies to deliver further insights ([Anand and Sternthal, 1990](#); [Tellis, 1997](#)). Tachistoscope techniques may be employed to provide stronger tests of unconscious processing in relation to target and nontarget market effects of non-interactive culture-specific advertising.

Ethnic minority and majority consumer responses to culture-specific marketing communication may be influenced by various factors that are not considered in the present study. These include feelings of ethnic identity, patriotism, ethnocentrism, or minority consumer levels of acculturation. Some authors deemphasize the role of minority consumer ethnic identity ([Antioco et al., 2012](#); [Johnson and Grier, 2011](#); [Lee et al., 2002](#)). Future studies should consider that consumers may identify with multiple cultural identities simultaneously ([Alden, Steenkamp, and Batra, 2006](#); [Cleveland and Laroche, 2007](#); [Cleveland, Papadopoulos, et al., 2011](#)). Authors should also focus on the reasons why ethnic consumers move to a foreign country. Migrants frequently strive to enhance their living conditions; in some cases, they may reject ethnic cues that remind them of unfavorable experiences in their home

country or culture, such as bad living conditions or religious persecution. Finally, Winkielman et al. (2003) studied relationships between mood and the desire for fluency. They found that happy people are less interested in familiar, fluent stimuli (abstract visual patterns) than sad people. This suggests that effects of WCC-based fluency may be contingent on people's life satisfaction, an assumption that future research may test.

Appendix A

Construct and measures	Source
Website cultural congruity (WCC) This website reflects typical French aspects. The images, colors, and symbols on this website are linked to France. It seems to me that this website was specifically developed for France.	Singh et al. (2006)
Trust toward the e-vendor My needs and desires appear to be important to this company. This company seems to really look out for what is important to me. This company appears to try hard to be fair in dealings with others. Sound principles seem to guide this company's behavior. (excluded item) I think this company is very well qualified in the field of e-commerce. I think that company has specialized knowledge for online transactions.	Schlosser et al. (2006)
Attitude toward the website This website makes it easy for me to build a relationship with this company. I would feel comfortable in surfing this website. I would like to visit this website again in the future. I think I would be satisfied with the service provided by this website. I feel surfing this website is a good way for me to spend my time.	Chen and Wells (2002)
Purchase intentions It is likely that I will purchase through this site in the near future I expect to purchase through this site in the near future. I intend to purchase through this site in the near future. I will definitely buy products from this site in the near future.	Poddar et al. (2009)

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