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Exploring the Effect of Cultural Sensitivity in Public Relations Campaigns

An Honors College Project Presented to

the Faculty of the Undergraduate

College of Arts & Letters

James Madison University

by Amanda Nichole Christian

Fall 2020

Accepted by the faculty of the School of Communication Studies, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Honors College.

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PUBLIC PRESENTATION

This work is accepted for presentation, in part or in full, at the Fall 2020 Honors Symposium on December 11, 2020.

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Factor 1: Interaction Engagement The company in this article values a diverse clientele. The company in this article is open-minded to people from different cultures.
Factor 2: Respect of Cultural Differences The company in the article respects the ways people from different cultures behave. The company in this article respects the values of people from different cultures. The company in this article accepts the opinions of people from different cultures.
Factor 5: Interaction Attentiveness The company in this article is sensitive to the needs of people from different cultures. The company in this article is sensitive to culturally distinct clientele during an interaction.

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Variables	Measure Items	Cronbach's A
Pre-attitude	Negative/Positive Bad/Good Unfavorable/Favorable Unpleasant/Pleasant	.98
Perceived C.S.	The company in the article respects the ways people from different cultures behave. The company in this article respects the values of people from different cultures. The company in this article accepts the opinions of people from different cultures. The company in this article values a diverse clientele. The company in this article is open-minded to people from different cultures. The company in this article is sensitive to the needs of people from different cultures. The company in this article is sensitive to culturally distinct clientele during an interaction.	.98
Post-attitude	Negative/Positive Bad/Good Unfavorable/Favorable Unpleasant/Pleasant	.99
Supportive Comm.	I would say nice things about this company to others. I would talk positively about this company to others. I would recommend this company to others. I would be supportive when talking about this company.	.98
Purchase Intent	I would like to purchase products from the company. I would like to pay for products from the company. I would like to buy products from the company. I am interested in purchasing their products.	.99

Table 3: *Hypotheses Results* ……40

Hypothesis		
H1	Perceived cultural sensitivity + pre-attitude → Post-attitude	Supported
H2-1	Perceived cultural sensitivity → Supportive communication	Supported
H2-2	Perceived cultural sensitivity → Purchase intent	Supported
H3	Cultural sensitivity x origin → Post-attitude	Not supported
H4-1	Cultural sensitivity x origin → Supportive communication	Not supported
H4-2	Cultural sensitivity x origin → Purchase intent	Not supported

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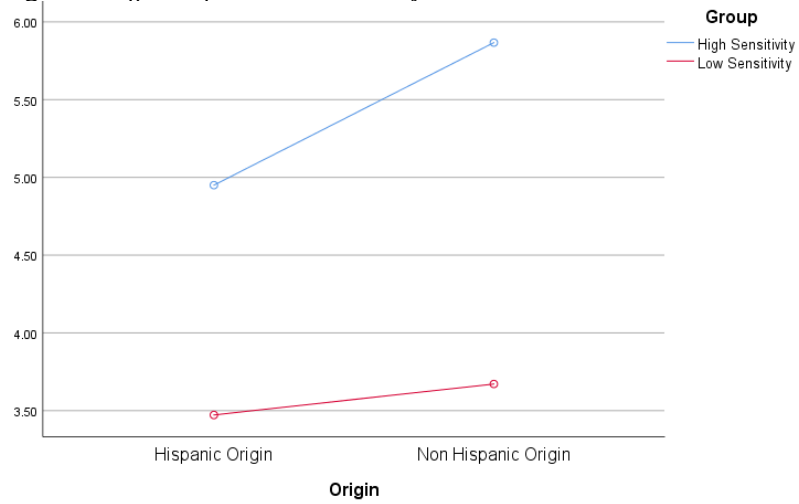

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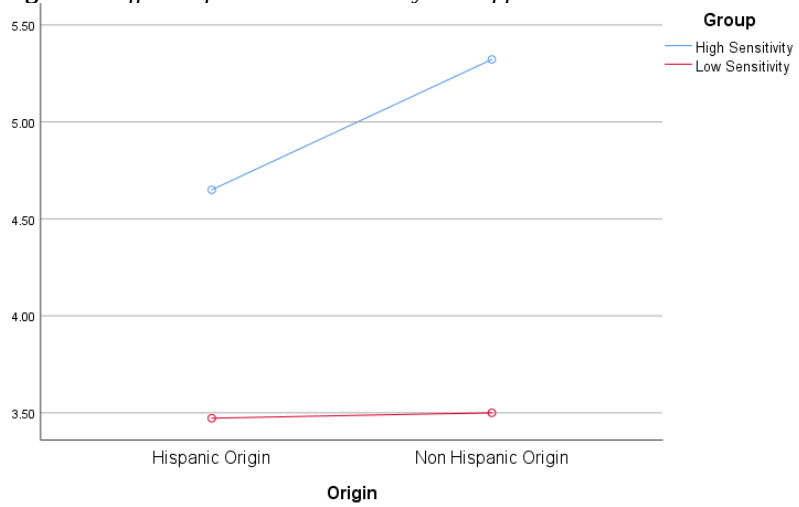

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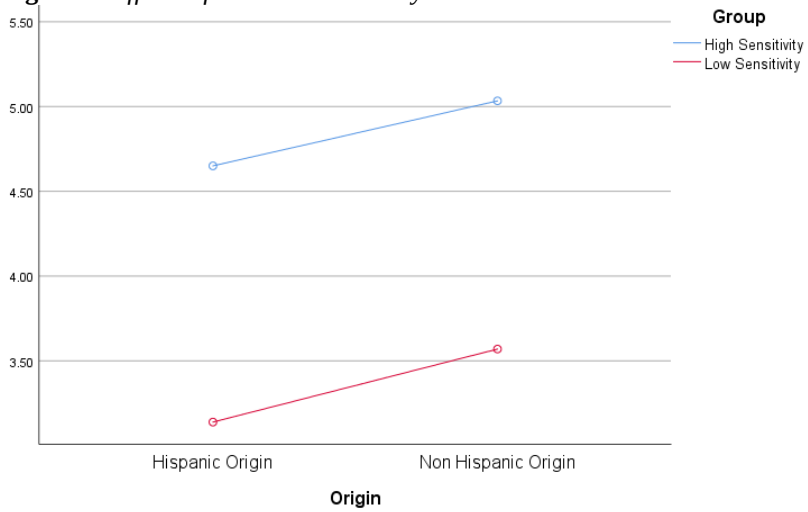

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This project will be presented at the Fall 2020 Honors Symposium on December 11.

Abstract

This study examines the importance of perceived cultural sensitivity on consumer attitudes and intent to support. Participants were randomly assigned to campaign messaging with a perceived high level of cultural sensitivity or a perceived low level of cultural sensitivity. Findings reveal that higher perceived levels of culturally sensitive messages generate more positive attitudes and increase the willingness of consumers to demonstrate supportive communication and intent to purchase. Other hypotheses comparing the response between two groups—self-identifying Hispanic and non-Hispanic respondents— aimed to distinguish the role origin plays in determining how important cultural sensitivity is to the perception of the organization. These hypotheses were unsupported indicating there were no significant interaction effects between origin and cultural sensitivity. Overall, when an organization utilizes more culturally sensitive campaign messaging, consumers will respond more positively and be more willing to support in the future. Limitations and suggestions for future research is included to further understand the role ethnicity and origin play in determining this importance.

Keywords: Cultural Sensitivity – Public Relations – Globalization – Localization – Segmentation

Introduction

Segmenting publics is generally a best practice in public relations. There are many approaches to segmentation and campaign specialization, and it can be based on a variety of factors and characteristics, including demographics, wealth, education level, type of community, cultural understanding and more (Berkowitz & Turnmire, 1994; Grunig, 1989). Public relations is in the business of building and maintaining relationships, and to do so, it is often critical that campaigns are culturally sensitive and directed toward the appropriate target public (Sha, 2006). However, previous research indicates that globalization is a growing trend championed by the United States in various fields for its cost-effectiveness and transcendent qualities (Freitag & Stokes, 2009). The trend is spreading to public relations, and practitioners find themselves at a crossroads between large-scale, generic messaging and localized messaging (Lim, 2010; Molleda & Laskin, 2010; Wakefield, 2001). The balance between these strategies has been difficult to find due to a lack in evidence-based guidance and competing opinions among experts in the field (Botan, 1992; Lim, 2010; Molleda & Laskin, 2010; Molleda and Roberts, 2008, 2010; Ovaitt, 1988; Wakefield, 2001).

Many studies directed at the balance between globalization and specialization deal with international cases, in which firms and practitioners must adapt their campaigns to reach new publics in a different country (Pelfrey & Molleda, 2007; Freitag, 2002; Taylor, 2000; Verˇciˇc, D., Grunig, L. A., & Grunig, J. E., 1996). While this research is important, the United States is a very diverse mix of varying cultures, languages, values and more. Even campaigns within one communities and diverse city centers—for example, New York City has a comparable percentage among White, Hispanic and African American people at 42%, 29% and 24% respectively (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019)—must be able to reach people with different

backgrounds who, as a result, may have different beliefs and understandings. Research also has not explored the repercussions of a company's perceived cultural sensitivity on likability and future willingness to support. Research often suggests at least some level of added cultural sensitivity and adaptation (Creedon & Al-Khaja, 2005); however, there are no evidence-based conclusions to support these measures as a long-term relationship investment. In order to find the balance in localization and standardization, research needs to explore how this impacts the overall future support of the company behind the messaging to argue for its importance.

Specifically, this study will investigate the relationship between perceived cultural sensitivity of campaign messages and how that correlates to respondents' overall perception of the company, including future intention to support. This exploration can help determine the appropriate balance needed between generalized campaign messages and hyper-segmented messages. The proposed study will provide empirical evidence to whether or not cultural sensitivity plays a role in reaching, and maintaining, target publics—enough to justify the localization of messaging. Further research could expand this topic by investigating more into what it means to be culturally sensitive, to what extent campaigns should localize to optimize benefits and lower costs, and how the company at hand impacts the importance of cultural sensitivity.

Literature Review

Public Relations in a Global Context

As technology advances and communication becomes increasingly interconnected beyond geographic boundaries, more is expected of public relations practitioners—particularly those who work in international markets or communicate with diverse populations (Capozzi, 2009). According to Kotcher (2009), companies that learn to adapt to new global markets, specifically those that have communicators who quickly learn new global communication landscapes, will have the most success in sales of goods and services. The trend and growth of globalization identifies a need for PR practitioners to "facilitate their organizations to function in diverse environments" (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Globalization has taken the business world by storm, and marketing efforts from large corporations spanning multiple countries attempt to reach more people with a singular message.

This development of an increasingly interconnected and integrated global economy, typically signaled by international growth of companies, is precisely what globalization is (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Freitag and Stokes (2009) believes the intersection of progress within the transportation and communication technology industries, global political changes in power and unique cultural differences both encourages and inhibits the development and application of globalized approaches in public relations practice. They explore the new, dynamic playing field and how practitioners have tended to ethnocentrically superimpose western culture principles as universal absolutes. Freitag and Stokes (2009) argue this approach is not likely to yield positive results because human connection is so intertwined with cultural and societal belief systems and understandings.

Another approach that has sprung from the trend of globalization is glocalization. Maynard (2003) defines glocalization as a sort of accommodation; meaning that companies have worldwide considerations when it comes to producing goods and services, but also have a responsibility to uphold the specific rules, conditions and customs of each country in which they operate. Multinational corporations, in this case, make an effort to decentralize distribution and development of various aspects of the business. For example, Coca Cola needed to make an effort toward glocalization if they wanted to cut tension and diffuse beliefs that the company was stuck in its American roots and still expanding internationally (Foster, 2008). Coca Cola responded by adding symbolic figures like the polar bear to emphasize strong cultural values such as family. However, many researchers do not think glocalization encapsulates enough. Morley (1998) first brought the phrase "think global, act local" to the public relations forefront. He explained that multinational firms need to fail in making superficial local adaptations in order to advance from early thinking (standardization) to the more nuanced think global, act local concept. Notably, he stated "mere customization, after all, is insufficient" (Morley, 1998, p. 29).

In recent years, researchers have equated globalization with the idea that because communication and technology are connecting global societies, countries are becoming more and more alike, therefore acquiring similar needs and expectations when it comes to campaign messaging. For example, Agarwhalet al. (2010) believes that global trends have led to the "heterogeneity of attitudes and behaviors of consumers within countries and, at the same time, increased commonalities across countries" (Ter Hofstede et al., 2002). National cultures have been known to endure and are still valid as collective identities (Hofstede, 1991); however, similarities develop across nations in beliefs and attitudes related to work practices and consumer behaviors. Adams and Markus (2004) added to this argument by identifying the growing

relevance of networks of communities within and across countries, creating similar values and lifestyles over time. This theory, and more broadly the topic of globalization, is important for this study because it will determine the level of specificity in communication required to not only reach an audience, but to gain their trust and support moving forward.

Pelfrey and Molleda (2007) and several others noted that globalization is an interconnected phenomenon marked by increasing interdependence, and replete with risks and benefits. They noted the most significant challenges of globalization plagued with increasing negative attitudes, deficiencies in world leadership and cross-cultural understanding, the rise of radical Islam, and the rise of China and Russia as "authoritarian capitalism regimes" (Pelfrey & Molleda, 2007, p. 35). Anderson (1989) coined and defined the terms international and global public relations. Noting the distinct difference between the two, he said:

> "International public relations practitioners very often implement distinctive programs in multiple markets, with each program tailored to meet the often-acute distinctions of the individual geographic market. Global public relations superimposes an overall perspective on a program executed in two or more national markets, recognizing the similarities among audiences while necessarily adapting to regional differences. It connotes a planning attitude as much as geographic reach and flexibility."

He advocated for the global approach: "Global, as opposed to multinational, businesses demand that programs in distinctive markets be interrelated. While there will always be local differences and need for customization, the programs will probably share more than they differ" (p. 413). Verˇciˇc et al.(1996) worked to develop a global theory of public relations, one that would find a middle ground between cultural relativism and ethnocentrism. Cultural relativism maintains that

public relations must be adapted in every society to fit the culture of that society, while ethnocentrism finds that a single theory is appropriate for all societies.

While these different theories shape the way we approach public relations, several studies look at the current state of competencies and abilities that practitioners have to handle diverse and global situations (Capozzi, 2009; Miller & Zogby, 2008; "PRSA's international symposium," 2004). The biggest need for practitioners has arguably been to avoid ethnocentrism and stay away from distancing words such as foreign, offshore, overseas, and abroad (Howard, 2001), to become multilingual, and to develop the communication skills required to effectively cross boundaries, both geographic and cultural (MacDonald & Bayerlein, 2004). More specific to skills and offerings, practitioners were encouraged to develop more wide-scaping environmental scanning skills, anticipate faster and quicker, invest more in risk and crisis communication, utilize emerging technology, and embrace diversity in all aspects of the organization (Pelfrey & Molleda, 2007; Rudan, 2005).

Furthermore, researchers find that globalization creates both opportunities and challenges for public relations practitioners. Because the public relations function creates, changes, and maintains relationships with publics, it can help an organization build new relationships, or strengthen existing ones, in international environments. But the ways in which organizations can effectively communicate with international publics are limited and dependent on a variety of cultural and societal influences. These influences affect communication and the ability for international organizations and the publics in host nations to connect (Taylor, 2000). Freitag (2002) argues that the increasingly globalized state of businesses and organizations makes it apparent that public relations practitioners need to be adequately prepared (in a variety of ways) if practitioners are going to further public relations excellence.

It is also critical to recognize that while global countries are different in culture, language, needs and other preferences, the same could be said for diverse countries like the United States. Much of research has been focused on the globalization of international markets; however, the United States has become increasingly diverse in the racial and ethnic make-up of its people (Gibson & Jung, 2002). Where it may be difficult connecting and building relationships with populations overseas, it is not always easy to connect and build relationships with intranational publics, either—particularly when demographics continue to shift. For example, African Americans constituted 12.7% of the population in 2000, which expects to grow to 14.6% in 2050; Hispanics in 2050 will be 24.4% of the U.S. population, compared to 12.6% in 2000 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004).

Consequently, organizations must determine the role cultural identities play in their marketing and segmentation plans (Sha, 2006). Which aspects of cultural identity serve as valid criteria to base the segmentation of organizational stakeholders in ways that extend communication practice and reach? Do they always serve as valid criteria? As both the world becomes more connected and globalized and the United States continues to diversify and reflect new population trends, it becomes increasingly important for public relations practitioners to be able to build and maintain mutually-beneficial relationships with people who come from different cultural backgrounds from themselves. According to Cook (2007):

> "As the world becomes more complex, diverse and connected, it also becomes more human, more real. . .. People are demanding authenticity. . .. It is our [PR practitioners] job to help find the authenticity at the core of our companies and clients, and to tell those stories to the world in words that will truly be heard" (p. 33).

Standardization vs. Localization in Campaigns

Something public relations practitioners must consider when showing appreciation for and recognizing various cultural groups within one market is that campaigns are not one size fits all and modifications will likely need to be made in order to reach specific groups (Grunig, 1989). While glocalization is used to describe the adaptation of a product or campaign in an international setting, localization can be used to describe the adaptation of a product or campaign within a country. Localization is defined just like it sounds: "the process of adapting a product or content to a specific locale or market" (Globalization and Localization Association, n.d.). This definition is not limited to just language—localizing may include modifying graphics and content to match preferences and needs, converting to local requirements or laws, and altering messaging to reflect different local culture. On the other hand, standardization describes a more generalized approach in which a campaign is created in a non-specific way to apply to a larger demographic. As the United States continually grows more diverse, it is important to weigh the strengths and weaknesses of using such an approach.

Global public relations scholars have long debated the utilization of standardization versus localization (Botan, 1992; Lim, 2010; Molleda & Laskin, 2010; Molleda & Roberts, 2008, 2010; Ovaitt, 1988; Wakefield, 2001). For two decades, researchers have argued on the basis of these terms as two ends of a continuum (Coombs et al., 1994) that should be balanced to enhance organizational effectiveness and efficiency (Lim, 2010; Molleda & Laskin, 2010; Wakefield, 2001). According to Coombs et al. (1994), globalization and localization should be viewed on a spectrum and not an either/or option. It should be a case by case basis, and in more simpler terms: "When there are similarities, standardize the practice. When there are differences, customize the practice" (Oviatt, 1988). Raval and Subramanian (2004) note the importance of

more culture-specific social marketing in fields such as public health and social services and explain how broad-brush strategies are mostly ineffective. However, in cases such as this, communication professionals are normally facing inadequate funding and resources. Another complication to this process are when international organizations are faced with a multitude of differences in geography, culture, politics, economy, communication (Molleda, 2009) and demands for transparency making it difficult to balance (Molleda et al., 2015).

Kotcher (2009) explained that although messages should be locally oriented, groups are also getting increasingly connected because of new technologies. He wrote: “Companies everywhere need to understand that they are always speaking to a global audience, and that messages conveyed to one group will be heard by another” (Kotcher, 2009, p. 35). Publics notice when an organization is acting in accordance with past behavior and in cultural communications, it is critical that the actions of an organization are felt as authentic. Curtin and Gaither (2007) noted the importance of coming across as authentic and implementing adaptations that make audiences' feel valued and understood, “[S]imply trying to adopt local values may not be the best strategy. When words are not consonant with previous actions, consumers may refuse to believe that a real change has taken place. Conversely, home audiences may feel betrayed,” (p. 126).

Kim (2005) deciphered between the culture-general approach and the culture-specific approach: the culture-general approach involves general characteristics of cultures that go beyond certain target cultures, and the culture-specific approach aims to achieve competence in a particular target culture. For example, empathy is found to be an indicator of communication competence across cultural groups (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2000), whereas knowing a specific language is a culture-specific ability. (Ni, Wang & De La Flor, 2015). Careful consideration of culture-general and culture-specific approaches may not be as accessible to

every organization. Oliveira (2013) explored some of the biggest barriers for companies in trying to produce different messages and different communication channels. She found that the cost involved, tight deadlines and small personnel were among the most frequent reasons why companies can't accommodate cultural differences in identity and needs in their communication strategies (Oliveira, 2013). While this may be true, in some cases, it may be better to prioritize more strategic messaging that will reach a more specific audience to begin with. Oliveira (2013) emphasized that when approaching community relations, it may be more effective to adapt to audiences' preferences; for example, giving a lecture at a neighborhood association meeting, rather than targeting the evening news.

Freitag and Stokes (2009) explain why multiculturalism presents several challenges to public relations, such as the need to be more precise in its efforts to reach target audiences while keeping global perspectives in mind. The researchers provide examples of ways to respond to the emerging multicultural society trend, including presenting bilingual information in a magazine or attempting grassroots campaigns. Sandra Macleod, CEO of Echo Research, compares the process of suiting local preferences to soup recipes: “As Heinz applies different recipes to its same name soups (depending on the country), so the public relations recipe needs to be altered” (Macleod 2005, “PR in Europe”). Ultimately, he argues that practitioners must develop local angles, build strong relationships, foster contacts, adapt to cultural tastes and target appropriate audiences (p. 283). Researchers also argue that adapting to obvious cultural needs is not enough. Berkowitz and Turnmire (1994) believe that an organization has to understand the range of public opinion and need, as well as “the social elements connected to those opinions” if they want to maintain positive relationships. When it comes to segmentation, markets are identified according to their communication needs and preferences, and a key to creating useful segmentations is to fully

understand different publics in order to effectively identify them (Grunig, 1989). Different levels of issue segmentation is required relative to the amount of community pluralism, which describes the centricity or diversity of a community (Tichenoret al., 1980). More pluralistic communities will see more competing ideas and needs, whereas less pluralistic communities generally require less segmentation because the range of opinions are narrower (Berkowitz & Turnmire, 1994).

Practitioners in agency and organization roles describe the impact of local communication strategies on campaign effectiveness (Molleda et al., 2015). In 2013, Elise S. Mitchell, president and CEO of Mitchell Communications Group, Inc. predicted that one of the top public relations trends would be localization (PRSA Staff, 2013). Hale (2013), director of corporate communications for Ford Asia Pacific and Africa, explained that localization enables multinational corporations to "avoid cultural pitfalls, understand local nuances and know what messages most resonate." While public relations practitioners continue to develop their own theories of localization that guide decisions about whether and how to localize strategies, researchers are still arguing about the conditions in which localization is necessary and the reasons that justify it (Schmid & Kotulla, 2011).

Wakefield (2009) proposes that multinational corporations should "think global and local and act global and local" (p. 10). This careful balance of the two is evident by the varying effectiveness of both standardized and localized approaches. Standardization promotes centralized and cohesive organizational units, therefore improving organizational efficiency (Molledaet al., 2015), and enables MNCs to accomplish organizational goals and objectives at a reduced cost across geographical borders (Molleda & Laskin, 2010). Particularly, in international contexts, a standardized approach to public relations programs can be less effective because it does not consider the social, cultural and political differences between home and host countries

(Botan, 1992). Lim (2010) believes localization enhances the ability of a campaign to reach a desired effect. Furthermore, localization allows organizations to adapt messages to address expectations and cultural sensitivities of local audiences (Lim, 2010; Molleda & Laskin, 2010). Crisis communication also benefits from a more localized approach because environmental scanning is conducted at the local level and relationships are built on a stronger foundation (Lim, 2010; Molleda & Laskin, 2010). However, it is critical to note the impact autonomy of public relations departments and localization strategies can have on inconsistent communication about the organization (Botan, 1992; Wakefield, 2011).

Molleda et al. (2015) also determine how factors that impact a company's ability to localize. The key question, which practitioners will have to answer for, is whether adopting a localized strategy will produce a significant return on investment (Molleda et al., 2015). The researchers created a five-step model that helps to determine whether it makes sense to implement localization strategies, such as asking if it is necessary, if there is enough time, money and resources, to what extent localizing is appropriate, which tactics will be most effective and what metrics can be used to evaluate such effectiveness. When looking at the second step (ability to localize), key factors include the size and resources available, the bandwidth of the public relations department and the degree of tapped collaboration (Molleda et al., 2015). While there are many factors influencing an organization's ability to localize, many factors naturally lead toward the utilization of standardized approaches.

Along with cost savings, consistency and centralization of messaging, and improved planning and control, standardization practices follow global trends of convergence among countries in terms of marketing strategies and distribution, technological advancements and growing advancements in product and services accessibility (Buzzel, 1968; Porter, 1986). Even

so, researchers tend to agree that complete standardization is not realistic, due to PR's location- and audience-specific nature (Newburry & Yakova, 2006). Obstacles include, but are not limited to, market conditions, restrictions, competition, cultural diversity, communication differences/preferences and different technical standards. When performed in excess, standardization can result in a company failing to respond to needs and instead alienating itself from local markets (Wakefield, 2009). Early researchers came to a similar conclusion that standardization and localization need to be balanced as two ends of a continuum, where neither end makes sense (Buzzel, 1968; Jain, 1989; Baalbaki & Malhotra, 1993).

With more social awareness and movements for equality arising, organizations feel pressured more than ever to need local adaptations. Wakefield (2009) supports the notion that local adaptations tend to be more successful in reaching specific demographics and target publics; however, organizations should avoid the line of thinking that simply modifying centralized products and messaging will be successful in reaching and influencing diverse groups of people. The “inside-out” view of the world is dangerous and inevitably leads to organizations serving their own interests, while ignoring the needs, interests and attitudes of those publics they are trying to reach (Wakefield, 2000). In order to establish authentic and mutually beneficial relationships, companies must be willing to adapt their communication tactics to truly match the needs and preferences of the given population, based on a variety of cultural and societal factors.

Definitions of Culture

In previous public relations research, scholars have primarily used culture to define characteristics and differences between countries and how that impacts the globalized industry. When culture is used to demonstrate the differences in a purely international context, researchers assume the lack of cultural differences within a nation. For example, Hofstede (1980) used the

term culture to designate national societies in his study, but he later indicated that the term may "be applied equally to other human collectivities or categories" (p. 26) including organizations, professions, families, and ethnic or regional groups. Contemporary sources define culture more loosely in order to include the forms of culture found in groups not limited by geographical boundaries. Merriam-Webster defines culture as the "customary beliefs, social forms and material traits of a racial, religious or social group; the characteristic features of everyday existence shared by people in a place or time; the set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterizes an institution or organization; the set of values, conventions or social practices associated with a particular field, activity or societal characteristic; the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

With culture, comes values, beliefs and different understandings of the world. Cultural values impact individuals' ways of thinking, judging situations and communicating (Hall, 1976). Especially in a global business environment, cultural understanding is essential for relationship building and maintaining, as well as successful communication between organizations and strategic publics (Oliveira, 2013). Oliveira (2013) concluded that professionals understood the demands of a global environment, but did not necessarily appreciate multiculturalism, lacking a full understanding of cultural diversity. The majority of respondents in the study recognized cultural influences, but they rarely addressed cultural differences head-on—indicating a disconnect or inconsistency likely stemming from a teams' lack of preparedness or resources.

Sha (2006) determined the definition of culture is at times too limiting, because it can lead to practitioners forgetting the non-homogeneous makeup of countries like the United States. She added "intranational public relations still may be intercultural in nature, and I believe that

effective intercultural public relations within one country must logically precede attempts to practice public relations across national boundaries" (p. 48). Intercultural communication refers to the "interaction between people of two different groups [ethnics, beliefs, etc.] or cultures" (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005, p. 155-156). This definition implies that intercultural communication occurs at two levels: interpersonal and intergroup. Gudykunst (2005) determined that interpersonal communication focuses on identities and relationships between interactants whereas intergroup communication is focused on identities and relationships between represented groups.

Intercultural communication competence (ICC) is "the appropriate and effective management of interaction between people who, to some degree or another, represent different or divergent affective, cognitive, and behavioral orientations to the world" (Spitzberg & Changnon, 2009). ICC is focused on the ability to interact with individuals with different group-level frames of references. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) further argued that cultural adjustment, assimilation, and adaptation can all be viewed from the lens of competence. Many scholars have developed arguments for why cultural competency is an important skill for public relations practitioners to attain, and furthermore, why education programs should incorporate this into curriculum. Specific research positions cases of racism and ethnocentrism to prove the need for cultural competency and cultural sensitivity as a necessary step in public relations training (Creedon & Al-Khaja, 2005). While practitioners choose the practices that they believe to be effective, or in other words, competent (Gudykunst, 2005), what they believe to be effective in one particular instance may not be when working with people from other cultures. Spitzberg and Changnon (2009) stated, "the objective of finding common purpose through mutually coordinated communication across cultures and languages continues to be a goal of many if not

most people, organizations, and nations" (p. 2). Indeed, many researchers have examined such qualities, aptly named as ICC (Arasaratnam & Doerfel, 2005; Chen, 2009; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2000).

International public relations practice also impacts intercultural competence moving forward. Freitag (2002) examined the idea that practitioners who were prepared to take on international assignments would be more likely to seek out those assignments and perceive their experience as more successful and satisfying. This self-gratification process eventually leads to more skills, competence and confidence acquired when working with others from different backgrounds. In turn, this rise in competence and confidence leads to more competitive and culturally competent practitioners in the marketplace, which is critical to the United States as an increasingly multinational environment (Freitag, 2002). Raval and Subramanian (2004) specifically tested intercultural competence in social marketing and found that comparing and contrasting values of a subcultural group with the dominant group, understanding the differences and how they present themselves in certain situations, and "examining cultural assumptions and value pattern" are critical for success of a marketing campaign.

Cultural sensitivity is often used hand in hand with cultural competence; however, most researchers believe cultural sensitivity takes it a step further. The Red Shoe Movement defines cultural sensitivity as "being aware that cultural differences and similarities between people exist without assigning them a value – positive or negative, better or worse, right or wrong" (Red Shoe Movement, n.d.). This definition emphasizes the ability to recognize differences without assigning any predisposed feelings about those differences. Chen and Starosta (1997) defined intercultural sensitivity as a person's "ability to develop a positive emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promotes appropriate and effective

behavior in intercultural communication" (p. 5). The key part of this definition is the understanding and appreciating leading to appropriate and effective communication, ergo cultural recognition leading to action. Cultural competence is the understanding part of cultural sensitivity and will, therefore, be a critical part of measuring cultural sensitivity.

Various fields, from health care to public relations, have explored the meaning of cultural sensitivity and the elements that contribute to its presence or lack thereof. For example, Bennett (1986) outlined the six stages of cultural sensitivity. These stages describe the developmental process of an individual's integration into a different culture in a variety of different ways. The six stages include: denial, defense, minimization, acceptance, adaption, and integration (Bennett, 1986). Denial, the first stage, ignores cultural differences. The defense stage follows an ethnocentric view so much so that he describes defense like this: "[Individuals in a new culture] feel 'under siege' by people that they stereotype in simplistic and negative ways, protecting themselves with a hardened boundary between themselves and the 'others'" (Bennett, 1986). The third stage, minimization, is the act of acknowledging differences in culture, but underrating the importance and salience of it. Previous research dealing with cultural competencies and sensitivities in the public relations field, finds that most practitioners fall in this stage because they are taught to recognize differences and adapt, but without understanding the importance of it. The acceptance stage requires a change in perspective because the individual finally understands that the cultural differences and experiences are dependent on the cultural context and not universal. Acceptance does not equate to a permanent alteration of values or agreement but does create tolerance and acceptance of different cultural views moving forward (Hammer et al., 2003). Adaption, the fifth stage, is the ability to use this understanding to look at differences based on culture and see how these differences operate based on other cultural perceptions.

Hammer et al. (2003) noted that people in the adaptation stage can engage in empathy, which allows them to see different perspectives and understand others' frame of reference. Integration is the final stage, and this has been reached when one is able to effortlessly shift between multiple cultures and evaluate norms based on both culture's views. According to Bennett (1986), integration occurs when an individual "intentionally makes a significant, sustained effort to become fully competent in new cultures."

Cultural empathy, open-mindedness and flexibility can be used to measure cultural sensitivity as well. It refers to "the ability to empathize with the feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of individuals from a different cultural background" (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2001, p. 286). On top of traditional empathy (having an acute perceptibility of others' needs), one must also acknowledge cultural backgrounds and orientations. Open-mindedness, another term central to sensitivity, refers to having neutral attitudes toward people who hold different cultural norms and values, free from prejudice (van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2001). This characteristic impacts a person's ability to learn and appreciate new cultures. Lastly, flexibility refers to adaptability in certain situations, particularly when dealing with individuals that may have different needs or preferences. As Niet et al. (2015) describes it, "flexibility reflects the repertoire of a person's behavioral set and easiness to adapt strategies as a situation requires." Cultural sensitivity, and the factors that make it up, is also key to identifying risk factors and minimizing the chance of potential crises because it impacts an organization's ability to monitor and understand the world around them. Lee (2004) found that cultural misunderstandings can worsen already acute crises. Furthermore, cultural characteristics have been found to affect "the importance regarded to crisis prevention and planning" (Oliveira, 2013, p. 257). Overall, culture and an individual's cultural identity is important for public relations practitioners to understand,

and past the topical level of understanding, because it has been shown to affect the way people behave and communicate.

Hypotheses Development

According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2009), the United States' Hispanic population will increase anywhere from 6.7 to 15 percentage points between 2010 and 2050. This increase in population percentage indicates a jump to 21 to 31% of the U.S. population. Furthermore, minority groups in general are expected to increase from 35 to 55% of the population by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). With growing diversity in the United States, it is critical for public relations practitioners to not only understand that there are different cultures found in the United States, but to be able to adapt to meet the needs and preferences of such groups.

Previous studies have explored the impact of globalization on public relations practitioners; however, most research focuses standardization and localization practices on international audiences. As previously established, the United States is becoming more and more diverse, which will require new techniques and understandings in an intercultural, national setting. The United States is also seen as a major driver in the globalization effort for its cost-effectiveness and ability to spread with little individualization effort; the question is, dependent on case-by-case ability and resources, will U.S. public relations practitioners take on a similar approach when working with diverse communities? Many researchers also study the importance of segmentation, as well as what characteristics should be considered when segmenting (Berkowitz & Turnmire, 1994; Grunig, 1989). Researchers generally agree that the more diverse and less pluralistic a community is, the more segmentation will be required. This helps practitioners decipher the merit of localizing messages to segmented target audiences; however, this doesn't tend to mean practitioners value the importance of such localization and the impact it has on communities.

Raval and Subramanian (2004) argued for why social marketers should be considering cultural values when shaping campaigns and revealed the consequences of ignorance. Not only is the United States becoming more diverse as a whole, but major U.S. metropolitan areas are also concentrated with diverse ethnic groups living in close proximity—meaning that localizing to meet location-specific needs won't be enough. “These areas have become an amalgam of subcultures with increasing diversity and ambiguity with multiple identificatory models, creating varying zones of meaning and cultural ambiguity of values” (Raval & Subramanian, 2004, p. 75). They conclude that if social marketers ignore the complexity and need for re-strategization, they won't reach their targeted audiences effectively or efficiently.

Much of previous research also revolves around intercultural competencies, which is helpful in establishing cultural sensitivity. Intercultural public relations also helps facilitate the process of stakeholder segmentation because “organizations are encouraged to learn the salient cultural identities avowed by the publics, rather than merely ascribing identities to various publics” (Sha, 2006, p. 61). By incorporating the importance of cultural identity and differences, practitioners can improve the ability of organizations to communicate in a culturally sensitive and effective manner, which is the purpose of segmenting stakeholders in the first place. Sha (2006) notes that intercultural public relations is an important conceptual framework that can help guide and structure public relations activities, and in a bigger sense, is a moral responsibility as “issues of culture and identity become increasingly prominent throughout the world” (p. 62). Furthermore, Derald Sue's theory of cultural competence helps offer suggestions for development of the field (Sue, 1991, 2001). Sue proposed that culturally competent individuals are able to better “identify cultural expectations, understand differences, and when necessary adapt behaviors” (Oliveira, 2013, p. 271). This framework (Sue, 1991, 2001) postulates that

culture identity is fluid (Morris, 2002) and is formulated by knowledge, values, and attitudes "learned through formal and informal membership in myriad groups" (Jameson, 2007). This theory, and similar research, finds that public relations efforts cannot be one-size-fits-all because even one particular cultural group is a moving target. Practitioners should strive to understand and learn more about cultural identities, including different needs and preferences, in order to reach and sustain new audiences.

However, this is easier said than done. With growing and ever-changing diversity in the United States, it may be difficult to localize and adapt strategies to each possible target public. Research has been done to explore the balance between standardization and localization in public relations practices (Botan, 1992; Coombset al., 1994; Lim, 2010; Molleda & Laskin, 2010; Molleda & Roberts, 2008, 2010; Ovaitt, 1988; Wakefield, 2001); however, there is a lack of direct links or case studies that measure the effectiveness of such practices. Standardization and localization of campaign strategies fall on a spectrum, and it may be unclear how culture-specific to go based on a myriad of reasons. Time, money, resources such as manpower and team capabilities all impact an organization's ability to find culturally sensitive adaptations to strategies (Molledaet al., 2015). Moreover, it remains unclear how an organization's perceived level of cultural sensitivity impacts a willingness to support the organization in the future. Whereas public relations efforts are typically difficult to measure in monetary values, will efforts deem cultural sensitivity positive in relationship-building and overall support? Understanding how cultural competence and sensitivity play a role in the success of public relations strategies, as well as the level of localization required to maximize effectiveness (Lim, 2010; Molleda & Laskin, 2010; Wakefield, 2001), is critical for developing and enhancing the practice of public relations. The proposed study aims to explore the relationship between a consumer's perception

of corporate cultural sensitivity and their intent to support the company in the future. Not only will this study help conceptualize important terms and strategies relevant to the public relations industry, but it will also provide implications for how to effectively cultivate relationships with diverse populations within the United States.

H1: The higher the consumer's perception of a company's cultural sensitivity, the more positive their attitudes will be toward the company.

H2-1: Consumers with a more positive perception of a company's cultural sensitivity will be more willing to show supportive communication.

H2-2: Consumers with a positive perception of a company's cultural sensitivity will be more likely to show purchase intent.

H3: As the company is perceived to be more culturally sensitive, Hispanic respondents are more likely to have a positive attitude toward the company, more so than non-Hispanic respondents.

H4-1: As the company is perceived to be more culturally sensitive, Hispanic respondents are more willing to show supportive communication, more so than non-Hispanic respondents.

H4-2: As the company is perceived to be more culturally sensitive, Hispanic respondents are more willing to show purchase intent, more so than non-Hispanic respondents.

Methods

This study employed a between-subject design with a single factor (cultural sensitivity: high - vs. low - message), which is useful for comparing different types of conditions (e.g., Keppel, 1991; Rifon et al., 2004).

Stimuli

The study used Kroger, a grocery chain in the U.S., as the subject of the stimuli. With nearly 2,800 stores in 35 states and annual sales reaching over 121.1 billion dollars, Kroger is one of the world's largest retailers. Due to its far-spanning reach, Kroger is known as "America's Grocer." Kroger was intentionally chosen not only because it is a well-known and far-reaching company, but also because has a relatively favorable reputation. According to the Spring 2017 Most Loved Brands list, U.S. respondents preferred to Kroger to any other nationwide grocer with a 53% favorability (Morning Consult Intelligence, 2017). Because prior studies reported that a distinctive corporate reputation(whether good or bad) plays a significant role in impacting public relations outcomes (e.g., Kim & Ferguson, 2019; Yoon, Giirhan-Canli, & Schwarz, 2006), this study tried to reduce the possible interfering effects of prior reputation by selecting a company with a relatively neutral reputation. The topic of "Making Food Fresh for Everyone" campaign (Kroger's effort to make fresh food more accessible) was selected. Specifically, respondents were presented with a press release announcing a new campaign regarding discounts, recipes and in-store samples in line with their company values.

To manipulate the level of cultural sensitivity, the stimuli reflected various levels of diversity and inclusion initiatives. Condition one demonstrates lower cultural sensitivity because it is simply announcing a new newsletter and in-store sampling service, and there is no mention of inclusion, empathy or intentionally valuing diversity, which are considered to be indicators of

cultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta, 1997; van der Zee & van Oudenhoven, 2000). Condition two demonstrates higher cultural sensitivity by including the same press release as condition one with the addition of such key elements. For example, recipes included in the newsletter will be internationally represented: “One recipe will use the product in a traditional American favorite and the other in a popular international dish.” Instead of just announcing diversity and inclusion as a core value, the press release indicates how Kroger plans to pair it with action: “Kroger recently added diversity and inclusion to their core values and will make hiring practices and leadership opportunities reflect that. Employees who serve samples on the weekends will be multilingual to create a better experience for the customers.”

A pretest was conducted with 18 participants to check the manipulations of the stimuli. Randomly assigned to the two conditions, each subject read the news release and then were asked to rate the level of perceived cultural sensitivity. The manipulation check included a one item question on a seven-point Likert scale: “The company adopts a cultural specific/sensitive approach,” in which respondents were asked to rate the statement from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Participants who were exposed to condition one (high cultural sensitivity) conditions perceived a significantly higher level of cultural sensitivity than those responding to condition two [$M = 5.8$ vs. 2.6, $F(1,29) = 26.22$, $p < .001$]. Because the manipulation was successful, the study used the developed stimuli for the wider experiment.

Data Collection

An experimental questionnaire was conducted to understand the identified variables of this research. An experiment was chosen because it will best compare the outcomes if two companies are perceived to have different levels of cultural sensitivity. By assessing and comparing the responses from Hispanic and non-Hispanic respondents, I was able to evaluate perception levels

of cultural sensitivity and its importance in future support. These findings were used to gather conclusions regarding the posed hypotheses.

The setting for data collection was in the form of an online questionnaire on Qualtrics. After clicking on the link, advertised through the JMU bulk email system or the SCOM SONA system, participants were presented with a consent form cover page, discussing the research and verifying age. The consent form outlined their rights and responsibilities as participants, including their privacy, their choice to participate or not, and how they would be treated. Participants were ensured that the survey is anonymous, and they would be treated fair and just. Once they sign this form, the questionnaire can be accessed and will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Then, after selecting whether they are Hispanic or not, the experiment site used a simple randomization function to assign students to a stimulus that demonstrated high or low cultural sensitivity. After reading the presented press release, participants were asked to measure the level of perceived cultural sensitivity and respond to the same questions regarding attitudes and intent to support. More specifically, the questionnaire will investigate theoretic relationships between variables and the outcomes within the given context.

Participants were recruited at a large university in the southeastern United States. The Hispanic population was targeted as a larger minority in and around the college campus because research indicates that minority populations tend to value cultural sensitivity and competencies because it impacts them more directly—language, values, representation and comprehension all matters when developing communication tactics for minority groups. Previous research has explored the relationship between Hispanics and cultural sensitivity, in particular. Karande (2005) found that when Hispanics feel authentically represented in advertisements, they respond more positively. Accommodation theory has also been used to explore the impact of cultural

adaptations (relating to target consumers) on Hispanic attitudes. Koslow, Shamdasani & Touchstone (1994) found that when perceived cultural sensitivity to Hispanic culture from the organization is identified and measured, Hispanic participants associated advertisements targeted to them more positively. Characteristics of cultural sensitivity include self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement and non-judgement (Chen & Starosta, 1997), and these are things that people from different backgrounds and cultures often appreciate or need. Whereas hypotheses one, 2-1 and 2-2 predict that a higher perceived cultural sensitivity positively affects attitudes toward a company and future likelihood to support, hypotheses 3, 4-1 and 4-2 suggests that Hispanic respondents will have an even more positive reaction. Thus, understanding Hispanic perceptions toward the importance of cultural sensitivity in campaign messaging is critical to understanding the effects of such programs.

The participants were recruited through the JMU bulk email system. Through the JMU bulk email system, approximately 28,000 people have been sent the experiment to participate in. Using quota sampling on Qualtrics, the online survey system, the maximum number of Hispanic respondents and non-Hispanic respondents that can participate is 175. 113 respondents participated in the experiment. Participants were distributed across the different experimental conditions fairly evenly: 50 (44.2 %) for high cultural sensitivity and 63 (55.8 %) for low cultural sensitivity. A total of 113 respondents participated in the experiment, with 42 (37.2 %) male, 68 (60.2 %) female and 3 (2.6%) unidentified respondents. Given that the gender distribution on college campuses was about 60 % female in 2005 and that the gender gap was projected to widen (Marklein 2005), the ratio was not over-representing female students. When asked their ethnicity, 431 (64.8 %) reported as Caucasian, 83 (12.5 %) reported as African American, 71 (10.7 %) reported as Asian, and 68 (10.2 %) reported as Hispanic/ Latino. When

asked their educational experience, 27 (23.9%) have earned a high school diploma, 62 (54.9%) have completed some college but have not obtained a degree, 14 (12.4%) obtained an associate's degree and 7 (6.2%) obtained a bachelor's degree. The average age of participants was approximately 21 years old (SD = 4.43).

Measurement

For this experimental questionnaire, different sets of questions were administered to understand the independent variable and examine the effects on the dependent variable. First, respondents selected whether they are Hispanic or non-Hispanic, in order to gather a maximum of 175 respondents each. After the participants were selected to continue, the dependent and independent variables were evaluated. Participants were then asked to rate their attitudes and intent to support Kroger to identify a baseline level of support.

After exposure to condition one or two, respondents were asked to identify the perceived cultural sensitivity of the message. The material for this variable comes from an existing measure but needed to be slightly altered to represent the variable more accurately. The existing measure (Chen & Starosta 2000) was used to develop and validate an intercultural communication sensitivity scale. While the original scale developed included five categories (interaction engagement, respect of cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, interaction attentiveness), for the purpose of this study, only measures of interaction engagement, respect of cultural differences and interaction attentiveness were used to evaluate Kroger. For example, the original statements looked like this, "I respect the values of people from different cultures." The questions and measures were adapted to this study by exchanging "I" statements with "The company in this article..." statements. Some original statements and factors, such as "I feel confident when interacting with other people from different cultures" found in the

interaction confidence factor, are not applicable for this study as individuals cannot answer on behalf of Kroger. This modification was done to specifically measure information found in terms of the respondents' perception of the company's attempt at being culturally sensitive (see below). Specifically, respondents were asked to identify how much they agree with modified statements on a seven-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Table 1: *Modified Cultural Sensitivity Measures*

Factor 1: Interaction Engagement The company in this article values a diverse clientele. The company in this article is open-minded to people from different cultures.
Factor 2: Respect of Cultural Differences The company in the article respects the ways people from different cultures behave. The company in this article respects the values of people from different cultures. The company in this article accepts the opinions of people from different cultures.
Factor 5: Interaction Attentiveness The company in this article is sensitive to the needs of people from different cultures. The company in this article is sensitive to culturally distinct clientele during an interaction.

Chen and Starosta (2000) tested and developed the Intercultural Sensitivity Scale (ISS), eventually identifying these five factors: interaction engagement, respect of cultural differences, interaction confidence, interaction enjoyment, interaction attentiveness. In the conceptualization process, they specified six elements that account for cultural sensitivity: self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement and non-judgement (Chen & Starosta, 1997). Based on these elements, they created a 44-item questionnaire which was used to determine the factor structure. After performing a factor analysis, five factors with eigenvalues of 1.00 or higher were extracted from the 44 items, and items with loadings of at least .50 with secondary loadings no higher than .30 were included. The first, second and fifth factors (interaction engagement, respect of cultural differences and interaction attentiveness) accounted

for 30.3% of the variance. These three factors were chosen for the purpose of this study because they could be altered to assess an organization's cultural sensitivity, instead of the respondent's own feelings; for example, interaction confidence and interaction enjoyment can only be assessed from an individual's personal standpoint. After strengthening the validity of the measures, Chen and Starosta (2000) developed a 24-item ISS with five factors which demonstrated high internal consistency with a .86 reliability coefficient. While the measures were slightly altered and restricted to applicable scale items, the reliability and validity of the measure is expected to be high. Additionally, in the conceptualization process, they specified six elements that account for cultural sensitivity: self-esteem, self-monitoring, open-mindedness, empathy, interaction involvement and non-judgement (Chen & Starosta, 1997). The six aforementioned elements that account for cultural sensitivity will be used to cultivate effective stimuli, specifically including or excluding the elements.

Attitude toward a company was evaluated using four items with a seven-point semantic differential scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .97$); good/ bad, pleasant/unpleasant, and favorable/unfavorable (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). The question used for the purpose of this study includes four statements on a bipolar matrix with a seven-point scale. Respondents were asked to rate "how they feel about Kroger" on the scale, and the four statements range from negative to positive, bad to good, unfavorable to favorable and unpleasant to pleasant.

The material used to measure respondents' intent to support also comes from an existing measure. Supportive communication intent was evaluated with four items using a seven-point Likert scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .86$): 'I would say nice things about this company to others', 'I would talk positively about this company to others', 'I would recommend this company to others', and 'I would be supportive when talking about this company' (Kim, 2017).

For measuring purchase intent, participants were asked to answer four items on a seven-point Likert scale (Cronbach's α = .96): 'I would like to purchase products/services from the company', 'I would like pay for products/ services from the company', 'I would like to buy products/services from the company', 'I am interested in purchasing their products/services' (Sen, Bhattacharya and Korschun 2006).

Table 2: *Measures Tested for Reliability*

Variables	Measure Items	Cronbach's A
Pre-attitude	Negative/Positive Bad/Good Unfavorable/Favorable Unpleasant/Pleasant	.98
Perceived C.S.	The company in the article respects the ways people from different cultures behave. The company in this article respects the values of people from different cultures. The company in this article accepts the opinions of people from different cultures. The company in this article values a diverse clientele. The company in this article is open-minded to people from different cultures. The company in this article is sensitive to the needs of people from different cultures. The company in this article is sensitive to culturally distinct clientele during an interaction.	.98
Post-attitude	Negative/Positive Bad/Good Unfavorable/Favorable Unpleasant/Pleasant	.99
Supportive Comm.	I would say nice things about this company to others. I would talk positively about this company to others. I would recommend this company to others. I would be supportive when talking about this company.	.98
Purchase Intent	I would like to purchase products from the company. I would like to pay for products from the company. I would like to buy products from the company. I am interested in purchasing their products.	.99

Results

Manipulation Checks

Manipulation checks were successful, as intended. The manipulation check results revealed participants perceived the stimuli under a high sensitivity condition perceived the level of cultural sensitivity significantly higher than respondents under a low sensitivity condition ($M = 5.58$ vs. 3.55, $F(1,127)=46.25$, $p < .001$).

Testing Hypotheses

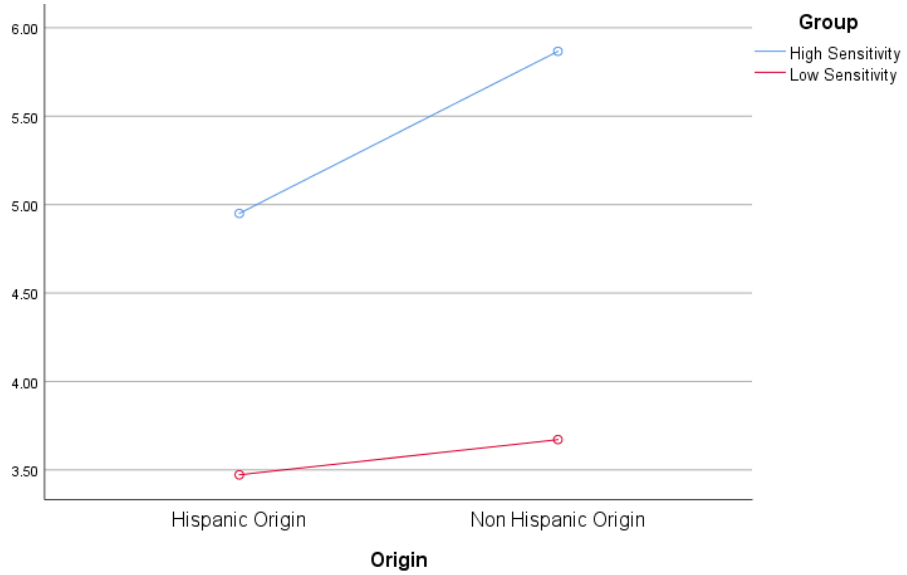
Hypothesis one tested the main effects of perceived cultural sensitivity on consumer attitudes toward a company. Participants exposed to a higher perceived culturally sensitive stimuli ($M = 5.546$, $SD = .846$) demonstrated a more positive attitude toward Kroger than those exposed to a lower perceived culturally sensitive stimuli ($M = 2.990$, $SD = 1.537$). The result showed a positive relationship and was statistically significant ($F(2,112) = .875$, $p < .001$), supporting the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2-1 examined the main effects of perceived cultural sensitivity on willingness to demonstrate supportive communication. A regression test was performed, and the results indicated a positive relationship and was statistically significant [$F(1, 112) = .760$, $p < .001$]. The hypothesis was supported as participants who reported a higher cultural sensitivity, also indicated a higher supportive communication intent.

Hypothesis 2-2 examined the main effects of perceived cultural sensitivity on purchase intent. A regression test was performed, and the results indicated a positive relationship and was statistically significant [$F(1, 112) = .716$, $p < .001$]. The hypothesis was supported as participants who reported a higher cultural sensitivity, also indicated a higher purchase intent.

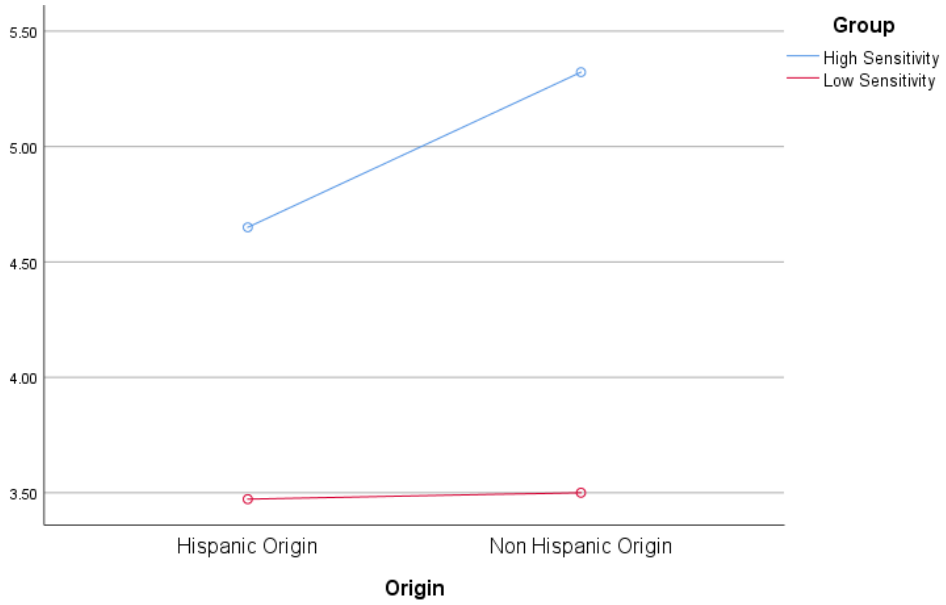
Hypothesis three compared the attitudinal response based on the perception of cultural sensitivity between Hispanic and non-Hispanic. A two-way ANOVA test was conducted to determine whether there are statistically significant interaction effects between the origin and different levels of cultural sensitivity on consumer attitudes toward a company. The results found no significant interaction effects (F(1,112)= .604, n.s.) using the origin factor. Results, regardless of origin, did find a significant main effect of perceived cultural sensitivity (F(1,112)= 15.83, p<.001).

Figure 1: *Effects of Cultural Sensitivity on Attitudes*



Hypothesis 4-1 explored the difference in impact of perceived cultural sensitivity on supportive communication among Hispanic and non-Hispanic participants. A two-way ANOVA test was conducted to determine whether there are statistically significant interaction effects between the origin and different levels of cultural sensitivity. There were no significant interaction effects between origin and cultural sensitivity (F(1,112)=.581, n.s.). While it was insignificant, the effects indicated the opposite result in which non-Hispanic respondents demonstrated a higher purchase intent than their Hispanic counterparts. Regardless of origin, there were significant main effects of cultural sensitivity across the board (F(1,112)=12.59, p <.005).

Figure 2: *Effects of Cultural Sensitivity on Supportive Communication Intent*



Hypothesis 4-2 explored the difference in impact of perceived cultural sensitivity on purchase intent among Hispanic and non-Hispanic participants. A two-way ANOVA test was conducted to determine whether there are statistically significant interaction effects between the origin and different levels of cultural sensitivity on purchase intent. There were no significant interaction effects between origin and cultural sensitivity ($F(1,112)=.003$, n.s.). While it was insignificant, the effects indicated the opposite result in which non-Hispanic respondents demonstrated a higher purchase intent than their Hispanic counterparts. Regardless of origin, there were significant main effects of cultural sensitivity across the board ($F(1,112)=10.152$, $p <.005$).

Figure 3: *Effects of Cultural Sensitivity on Purchase Intent*

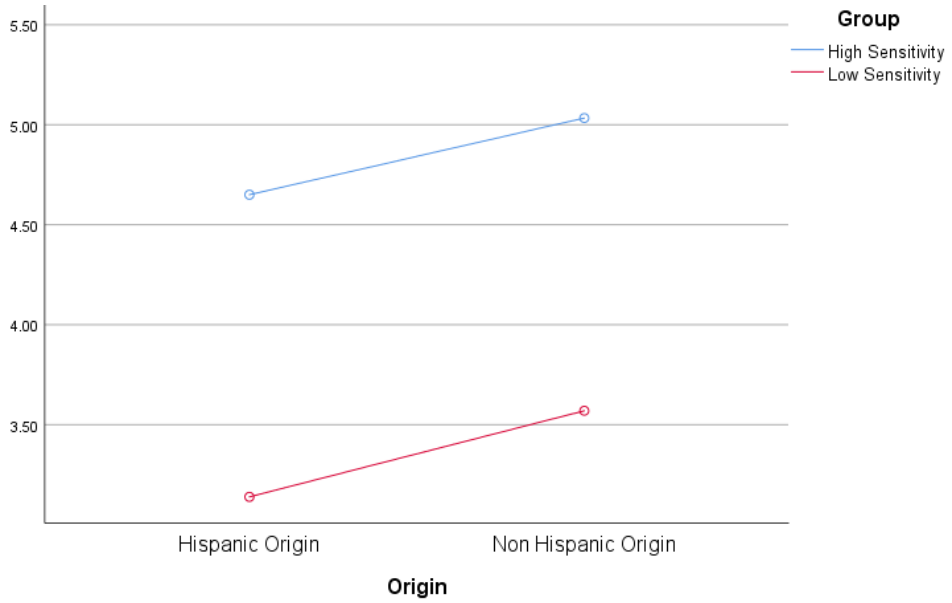


Table 3: *Hypotheses Results*

Hypothesis		
H1	Perceived cultural sensitivity + pre-attitude → Post-attitude	Supported
H2-1	Perceived cultural sensitivity → Supportive communication	Supported
H2-2	Perceived cultural sensitivity → Purchase intent	Supported
H3	Cultural sensitivity x origin → Post-attitude	Not supported
H4-1	Cultural sensitivity x origin → Supportive communication	Not supported
H4-2	Cultural sensitivity x origin → Purchase intent	Not supported

Discussion and Conclusion

With an increasingly interconnected world and diversity growing in the United States, it is widely agreed that communicators must be able to understand and adapt to meet needs of the culturally diverse. However, most research is centered on international public relations and not targeted within one particular community. Researchers agree that practitioners should be more culturally competent but disagree when it comes to finding the appropriate balance between standardization and localization or hyper-segmented messaging (Botan, 1992; Lim, 2010; Molleda & Laskin, 2010; Molleda & Roberts, 2008, 2010; Ovaitt, 1988; Wakefield, 2001). Cultural sensitivity is one measure that can be used to determine how segmented and localized a particular campaign should be—and this study, specifically, can help determine if adapting a message to be more culturally sensitive is worth it from a public relations standpoint. Given current events in the United States, growing diversity and inclusion initiatives and globalized public relations' campaigns, this study focused on the importance of culturally sensitive messaging in regard to how it affects consumer attitudes, supportive communication intent and purchase intent.

The findings reveal that a higher perceived culturally sensitive campaign material did yield in more positive attitudes and increased the likelihood of supportive communication and purchase intent. The stimulus with a high culturally sensitive rating generated an increase from pre-attitude to post-attitude and higher scores in supportive communication and purchase intent. The stimulus with a low culturally sensitive rating generated a decrease in attitude and produced lower scores in supportive communication and purchase intent. Generally, this study found that a message perceived to be culturally sensitive will directly influence ones' attitude and future intent to support. These findings support notions of previous research from Creedon & Al-Khaja

(2005), in which they found that some level of cultural adaptation and sensitivity is necessary to receive future support and positive attitudes. Still, previous research lacks empirical evidence to argue direct relationships between cultural sensitivity and support.

Another focal point of this study was to explore the difference between certain origin groups and how they respond to perceived cultural sensitivity. Hypothesis three, 4-1 and 4-2 proposed that a minority group, specifically of Hispanic origin, would appreciate and, therefore, respond more positively to a higher perceived cultural sensitivity. These three hypotheses were tested and not only found to be insignificant, but also produced the opposite intended results in all three categories (attitude, supportive communication intent and purchase intent). Non-Hispanic participants responded with more positive attitudes and intent to support when exposed to both conditions. These findings contradict previous research that argues minorities value cultural sensitivity more, resulting in more organizational support. Karande (2005) tested and compared how Asian–American consumers respond in terms of attitude toward the ad, brand and company, and intention to buy to perceived cultural sensitivity compared to White participants. Findings found a stronger positive relationship between Asian-Americans and their response than their White counterparts, and this data was contrasted with Hispanic's perception of ethnic identification. When Hispanics feel authentically represented in advertisements, they respond more positively—but authenticity is key (Karande, 2005).

According to Wakefield (2000), minorities and individual communities can view segmentation in a disingenuous way. They may feel they are being catered to for financial gain/support—not to actually meet their needs. Oliveira (2013) concluded that professionals learning to understand cultural differences wasn't the same thing as learning to appreciate them. Adapting to obvious cultural needs won't be enough to gain trust and develop relationships

(Berkowitz & Turnmire, 1994). They found that an organization has to understand the range of public opinion and need, as well as "the social elements connected to those opinions." Wakefield (2009) argued that organizations should avoid simply modifying centralized products and messaging, because this leads to organizations serving their own interests, while ignoring the needs, interests and attitudes of those publics they are trying to reach.

Accommodation theory has also been used to explore the impact of cultural adaptations on accomplishing communication objectives. Giles et al. (1991) defined accommodation theory as relating and becoming more similar to target audiences to achieve marketing goals. Koslow et al. (1994) found that an increased use of Spanish language in an advertisement was associated with negative attitudes, when it was not attributed to the perceived sensitivity of the advertiser. When perceived cultural sensitivity to Hispanic culture from the organization was accounted for, participants associated the advertisement positively. Torres and Briggs (2005) also used accommodation theory to explore the effectiveness of advertising targeted towards Hispanic consumers. They found that Hispanics who strongly identified with Hispanic culture responded more favorably to attempts at cultural adaptation. Therefore, it is important to note that not all participants who identify as Hispanic respond to cultural sensitivity in the same way. Several factors influence the way Hispanic respondents will respond to culturally sensitive initiatives.

Furthermore, there may be other trends and limitations that can account for these results. The current political and social climate likely factors into how participants view diverse backgrounds and perspectives. Black Lives Matter, and the increasing presence of diversity and inclusion initiatives, has forced society into reflecting on cultural sensitivity and competence more and more. As a result, non-Hispanic, White participants (73.4%) could be more aware and conscious of their privilege. According to an associate professor at the University of Central

Florida, Ann Gleig, “The killing of George Floyd by a white police officer, coupled with the Black Lives Matter protests that have swept across the world in its wake, have led many white people to question—some for the first time—their role and complicity in structural racism in the United States.” For advancing the generalization of study findings, future research should seek a larger sample size and Hispanic representation. Only 14 (12.4%) participants identified themselves as having a Hispanic origin. Due to accessibility of research participants, over 90% of respondents were college-age students, which could play a role in certain outcomes. College educated adults tend to be more liberal (Pew Research Center, 2015), which could help explain the stark, positive relationship between cultural sensitivity and attitudes/support. The 2015 study conducted by Pew Research Center found that as education increases, so does a left political lean (High school or less: 26% liberal; Some college: 36% liberal; College degree: 44% liberal; Graduate degree: 54% liberal). Not only will ethnicity play a role in the results, other demographics such as sex, age and education level will be important factors to consider.

Despite the limitations, this study has important theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, this research works to help balance standardized and localized campaign messaging by providing empirical findings that demonstrate if and how cultural sensitivity impacts consumer outcomes. The study finds that perceived cultural sensitivity is a useful tool to help determine how consumer attitudes and intent to support can change based on certain messages. Another major finding of this study is the relationship between origin and the effects of cultural sensitivity. It was proposed that a minority group, in this case Hispanic participants, would react more positively to highly perceived cultural sensitivity, demonstrating more positive attitudes and intent to support. Interestingly, these two-way ANOVA tests produced opposite results, though insignificant. This study shows that cultural sensitivity can be an important factor

in determining segmentation and localization of public relations' campaigns, and more research can be utilized to further explore the extent of its impact.

Future research could utilize a larger sample size and examine the effects of perceived cultural sensitivity among different demographic groups. This experiment should also be replicated with different types of organization. Participants may care about cultural sensitivity at varying degrees when the messaging comes from a grocery store, government association, small business, etc. Both conditions were crafted to include or exclude accepted measures of cultural sensitivity (Chen & Starosta 2000); however, more research could explore which specific tactics and forms of cultural adaptation are most important and effective. For example, a Hispanic participant may value language accommodation over the attempts of including Hispanic-origin dishes in their monthly recipe book. For organizations looking to appeal and reach more target audiences but also seeking to find a balance between standardization and hyper-segmentation, learning more about which characteristics are valued and needed over others will be helpful.

Public relations practitioners will find these results useful in understanding the impact of incorporating culturally sensitive materials in campaigns. This study provides empirical evidence that can be used to identify the importance of cultural sensitivity in terms of profit (purchase intent) and word of mouth (supportive communication), which can ultimately be used to convince the C-suite of such importance. When empirical data can demonstrate how public relations campaign messaging directly impacts financial and supportive outcomes, practitioners can justify more segmented and localized campaign efforts. While not all of the hypotheses were supported, the study did find that cultural sensitivity positively impacted attitudes and intent to support. Regardless of ethnicity, the group exposed to the high culturally sensitive material increased their attitude significantly ($M= 5.01 \rightarrow 5.78$) as opposed to the low culturally sensitive

material (M= 5.05 → 3.64). Similarly, the group exposed to the low cultural sensitivity material reported much lower supportive communication intent (M= 3.50) and purchase intent (M= 3.51) than those exposed to the high culturally sensitive material (M= 5.26; M= 5.00). This research can inform public relations' work and help provide a foundation for future research.

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Appendices

Condition #1- High Cultural Sensitivity

High Cultural Sensitivity
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kroger's Commits to Cultural Sensitivity to Make Food 'Fresh for Everyone'
The grocer's new campaign meets the needs of its culturally diverse customer base.

Kroger recently announced a new commitment to making food 'Fresh for Everyone,' particularly in their underserved and culturally diverse communities. The first effort to make fresh food more accessible to everyone is the Inclusive Kroger campaign.

Beginning next month, Kroger will disperse a monthly newsletter featuring discounted promotional items. Recipes will complement each product—including recipes for common international and ethnic dishes. The newsletter will be offered in four different languages: English, Spanish, Chinese and French, to accommodate the most widely used languages in Kroger communities.

"We recognize that our communities are growing more and more diverse, and Kroger is committed to not only meeting their varying needs, but also creating a more positive experience for each and every shopper," said Mike Donnelly, Kroger's EVP and COO.

To accompany the newsletter, stores will offer in-store samples of discounted items from noon to 4 p.m. on the weekends. Employees who serve the samples will be multilingual to create a more inclusive and welcoming experience for customers.

Kroger recently added diversity and inclusion to their core values and will make hiring practices and leadership opportunities reflect that. With the intention of mitigating cultural and linguistic barriers, they will meet customers where they are—whether it be in-store service, representation in recipes and food items, language accommodations and more.

The campaign is the first effort to support the new 'Fresh for Everyone' tagline. "Kroger chose Fresh for Everyone as our leading brand message because it is inclusive, clear and memorable, and supports our vision of serving America through food inspiration and uplift," Donnelly said.

More information on the 2020 Inclusive Kroger campaign is available at www.kroger.com/inclusive/newsletter.

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With nearly 2,800 stores in 35 states, under two dozen banners and annual sales of more than $121.1 billion, Kroger ranks as one of the world's largest retailers. The Kroger Purpose is to Feed the Human Spirit ™. In fulfilling this purpose, Kroger makes decisions based on its six core values: honesty, integrity, respect, safety, diversity and inclusion. Since adding Diversity

and Inclusion to its core values, Kroger has been recognized as a world leader. **Kroger ranks #8 on the Omni50 Diversity and Inclusion list, which recognizes U.S. corporations that are awarding the most and best business to diverse-owned suppliers and vendors.**

Condition #2- Low Cultural Sensitivity

Low Cultural Sensitivity
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kroger Appeals to American Values in Nationwide Campaign

The largest grocer in America, Kroger, is introducing a monthly newsletter that includes traditional, American foods at a discounted price for shoppers. The newsletter is the first initiative in the "Make America Fresh Again" campaign.

"Think macaroni and cheese, hot dogs, green bean casserole, pizza," said James White, Kroger's EVP and COO. "We want to take your family recipe and enhance it with fresh products. It's not about reinventing the wheel; it's about making tradition better and healthier."

Recipes will complement each product in the newsletter—incorporating it in traditional American meals. To accompany the newsletter, stores will offer in-store samples using the discounted items from noon to 4 p.m. on the weekends.

While other competitors like Trader Joes and Whole Foods try to build rapport with diverse communities by providing multilingual communications, offering ethnic food recipes and working diversity and inclusion into their goals, Kroger is going back to its roots.

"At the heart of it, blue-collar, white Americans make up the majority of our customer base and they always have," White said. "While other companies may be diversifying, we want to follow through with what the majority of our shoppers want."

More information on the 2020 "Make America Fresh Again" campaign is available at www.kroger.com/mafa.

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With nearly 2,800 stores in 35 states, under two dozen banners and annual sales of more than $121.1 billion, Kroger today ranks as one of the nation's largest retailers. The Kroger Purpose is to Feed the American Spirit ™. In fulfilling this purpose, Kroger makes decisions based on its four core values: honesty, integrity, respect and safety. Good, old-fashioned American values drive the companies' purpose.