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Subjective social inclusion: A conceptual critique for socially inclusive marketing☆

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on an interdisciplinary theoretical background to define the new construct of subjective social inclusion and initiate a new theoretical framework of inclusive marketing. We define subjective social inclusion as a multi-dimensional construct comprising of acceptance, belongingness, empowerment, equality and respect. The proposed framework of inclusive marketing explains the potential effect of multi-ethnic embedded marketing communications on self-feelings of social inclusion by ethnic consumers, as well as the intervening effects of ethnic self-referencing, ethnic self-awareness, ethnic self-identification and self-congruity. The analysis shows that multi-ethnic embedded marketing communications may represent an effective means to more inclusive communication with ethnic individuals for the benefits of consumer wellbeing and marketing effectiveness. This paper initiates a new research agenda of marketing to disadvantaged individuals, with implications for future research, practice, and public policy.

1. Introduction

In recent years some marketers have been active in providing differentiated appeals to different ethnic consumer segments, with global brands such as Coca Cola, AirBnb and L'Oreal entering the local political and social debates and giving voice to their multicultural customers. This "deliberate effort by marketers to reach a group of consumers presumably due to their unique ethnic characteristics" is known as ethnic marketing (Cui, 2001, p.23), and it is motivated by the increased ethnic diversity across the world. In the US, the Census Bureau forecasts that by 2044 the ethnic minority population will become the numerical majority (Colby & Ortman, 2014). The buying power of US multicultural consumers reached $3.4 trillion in 2014, with a percentage increase twice higher than in the total population (Nielsen, 2015). In 2010, 13% of the total UK population was foreign-born (Office for National Statistics, 2012), while the purchasing power of the Black and Minority Ethnic population was estimated at £300 billion (IPA, 2012). It is hence pertinent to understand how marketers can adapt their communication strategies in order to effectively appeal to ethnic consumers.

Although positive effects of mono-ethnic marketing have been noted particularly in the area of congruence between endorser and target audience (e.g. Appiah & Liu, 2009; Karande, 2005; Khan, Lee, & Lockshin, 2015), negative consequences have been pointed out in the literature. Burton (2002) critiques ethnic marketing communications targeted at pre-defined ethnic groups for their use of broad racial and ethnic categories that ignore the variety within each ethnic segment and the myriad of ethnic identities that one may have. This, in turn, may engender underrepresentation of certain consumer segments, misunderstanding of cultural nuances, stereotyping and consumer prejudice (Davidson, 2009), or even exoticization and exclusion (Schroeder & Borgerson, 2005). These issues represent a threat to ethnic consumers' integration in the host society and the effectiveness of ethnic marketing communications.

Thus, an important research question and indeed a gap in the extant literature, is how ethnic cues can be best depicted in marketing communications in order to effectively reach the diverse audiences, ensure fair representation of ethnic consumers and trigger their positive feelings of being part of the society. Advancing research in this respect is beneficial for both ethnic consumers' psychological wellbeing and marketing effectiveness. To fill in this gap, the purpose of the current paper is twofold. First, we aim to provide an in-depth conceptualization of the construct of subjective social inclusion and justification for its importance to the marketing literature. Second, we join recent research streams that question the performance of ethnic marketing (Jafari & Visconti, 2014; Kipnis et al., 2012; Schroeder & Borgerson,

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2005), and propose new theoretical underpinnings of marketing communications aimed at enhancing ethnic consumers' inclusion in the host society and corresponding effectiveness of marketing efforts in ethnic consumer markets.

A review of the extant literature shows that there is a notable lack of consensus as to what "social inclusion" means at the individual, subjective level despite its widespread use at the economic, political and societal levels. This hinders the efforts for a more inclusive society and calls into question the effectiveness of "inclusive" policies in accurately reflecting the needs of their targeted groups. In the current paper, we propose to focus on subjective social inclusion as a multi-dimensional construct and define it as the individual's feelings of belongingness to a host society in which he/she feels accepted, empowered, respected and fully recognized as an equal member. Our theoretical positioning departs from past research that focused on ethnic marketing as a persuasion tool to explore the psychological and social mechanisms that underlie consumers' responses. We focus on ethnic consumers' subjective social inclusion as an important outcome of multi-ethnic embedded marketing communications and a constructive factor for effective marketing efforts.

2. Subjective social inclusion: conceptualization and definition

2.1. Subjective vs. objective dimensions of social inclusion

With a few exceptions, extant literature appears to encapsulate social inclusion mainly in terms of objective measures such as not at risk of poverty and deprivation (Engsted, 2013), proper living standards, access to education, work opportunities, housing, services for good quality health and marketplace, and being involved in the society (Eurofound, 2015; Hamilton, 2009; Williams & Windebank, 2002; World Bank, 2007). We argue that while objective dimensions of social inclusion represent important conditions for individual's feeling of being included, these conditions do not constitute the consequential subjective feeling of social inclusion. As Porter (2000) argues, the concept of social inclusion in the extant literature risks to omit the lived reality of marginalized individuals and focus more on the allocation and access to power and resources in a society. Indeed, the prevailing notion of social inclusion is "a policy which has its heart in the right place, but one that needs further examination" (Clegg, Murphy, Almack, & Harvey, 2008, p.91). Hence, we propose "subjective social inclusion" as an important concept in the wider domain of social inclusion, and provide a definition of subjective social inclusion that is exclusively focused on individuals' feelings of being included in the society.

2.2. Defining subjective social inclusion

The first step of the conceptualization process consists in the collection of representative definitions of the focal construct (Podsakoff, Mackenzie, & Podsakoff, 2016). For this we used the following data sources: the extant literature on social inclusion; relevant dictionaries; and previous operationalization and measurement scales for the concept of social inclusion. We adopted a social-psychological rather than an organizational perspective and expanded our search into mental health, disability, sociology, poverty, feminist and education literature. A collection of relevant definitions and descriptions from the extant literature can be found in Appendix A. These definitions/descriptions encompass objective and subjective aspects of social inclusion, but few seem to explicitly focus on feelings of social inclusion experienced by individuals. Following the recommended approaches in the literature (Gerring, 2012; Maynes & Podsakoff, 2014; Podsakoff et al., 2016), we scrutinized selected definitions/descriptions to extract meaningful attributes for our conceptualization of subjective social inclusion, resumed searching for new definitions once they became redundant, and extracted useful attributes based on the desired conceptual domain of subjective social inclusion (see Appendix A).

Most of the definitions identified in the extant literature include belongingness and social acceptance (e.g. Bailey, 2005; Baumgartner & Burns, 2014; Cobigo, Ouellette-Kuntz, Lysaght, & Martin, 2012; Hall, 2009; Simplican, Leader, Kosciulek, & Leahy, 2015; Wilson & Secker, 2015 - see Appendix A for details). Fredericks (2010) argues that belongingness experienced at an individual level brings about feelings on which inclusive societies are based. The feeling of belongingness is often associated with social inclusion and closely related to the notion of connectedness to others and wellbeing (Frederickson, Simmonds, Evans, & Soulsby, 2007). Social acceptance, or feeling welcome (Marino-Francis & Worrall-Davies, 2010), means that "other people signal that they wish to include you in their groups and relationships" (Leary, 2010, as cited in DeWall & Bushman, 2011, p.256). Social acceptance reflects society's willingness to embrace the individual, and the feeling of being accepted comes from the signals received from the reference group. Thus, the two attributes – belongingness and social acceptance – have direct relevance to the individual (the desire to belong to the mainstream society) and the society (the society's willingness to accept the individual), and represent two core dimensions of subjective social inclusion.

Another important attribute of social inclusion is empowerment that refers to a "process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power, which allows people to take action to improve their life situations" (Guttierez, 1995, p. 229). Empowered individuals are expected to have control over their lives, their decisions and the socio-political environment (Pires, Stanton, & Rita, 2006; Zimmerman & Warschausky, 1998). This concept is of particular relevance to ethnic individuals who experience vulnerability. Empowerment can be used as a means towards reducing stigma and powerlessness and increasing wellbeing (Molix & Bettencourt, 2010), hence, it is regarded as an indicator of social inclusion (Cherayi & Jose, 2016). Empowerment can be viewed from an individual perspective, depending on each individual's power to be in control, and an institutional perspective, depending on the sociopolitical environment of every country. In this researh we are mainly interested in psychological empowerment resulting from the individual's interaction with the society, and not the sociopolitical system of achieving it.

Equality has been a prevalent indicator of social inclusion in the public policy and law discourse (Collins, 2003), referring to fairness, justice, balance and sameness (Lunga, 2002). Similar to empowerment, equality can manifest at different levels of the society, from being equal before the law and having equal opportunities to having equal social relationships with a non-vulnerable individual (Chan, Evans, Ng, Chiu, & Huxley, 2014; Davys & Tickle, 2008; Zelenev, 2009). In the present research, we focus on the general feeling of being an equal member of the society as an integral feature of subjective social inclusion.

Some scholars regard respect and social recognition of the disadvantaged individuals as dimensions of social inclusion (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Ponic & Frisby, 2010). Hill (2000, p.59) defines respect as "something to which we should presume every human being has a claim, namely fully recognition as a person, with same basic moral worth as any other". According to Hill (2000), social recognition can fall under the broader conceptual domain of respect. Both constructs are extensively used in procedural justice research, communicating symbolic messages and acknowledgement of

Table 1
Dimensions of subjective social inclusion.

Attribute (feeling of…)	Definition
A1. Acceptance	One's feeling that other people wish to include him/her in the host society (adapted from Leary, 2010, cited in DeWall & Bushman, 2011).
A2. Belongingness	One's cognitive judgement of fit and emotional connectedness to the host society (adapted from Hagerty & Patusky, 1995; Lee & Robbins, 1995).
A3. Empowerment	One's feeling of control, contribution to and self-efficacy within the host society, being involved in decision making processes (adapted from Zimmerman, 1990; Zimmerman & Rappaport, 1988).
A4. Equality	One's feeling that he/she has equal opportunities and chances to make the most of his/her life in the host society (adapted from The Equality and Human Rights Commission, n.d. & The Equality Act, 2010).
A5. Respect	One's fully recognition as a person, with same basic moral worth as any other (Hill, 2000)

membership in a group (Donnelly & Coakley, 2002; Tyler, Degoey, & Smith, 1996). Similar to acceptance, feelings of respect are derived from the received treatment from others, and communicate information about acceptance, reputation and inclusion in a particular group (Cremer & Tyler, 2005; Huo, Binning, & Molina, 2010). Hence, respect can be regarded as one essential attribute of one's felt social inclusion.

We have identified the above five prototypical dimensions as the intension (essential properties) of the concept of subjective social inclusion. Our proposed definitions for each dimension are shown in Table 1. Following from the above, we define the concept of subjective social inclusion (SSI) as the individual's feelings of belongingness to a host society in which he/she feels accepted, empowered, respected and fully recognized as an equal member. We dissociate our definition from issues of poverty and employment but encompass a broad spectrum of feelings as a result of one's interaction with the society. This definition exclusively focuses on the subjective facet of social inclusion and is a timely response to numerous calls in the extant literature (Clegg et al., 2008; Cobigo et al., 2012; Wilson & Secker, 2015).

3. Towards a theoretical model of inclusive marketing communications

3.1. Importance of social inclusion for the marketing literature

Social inclusion can lead to positive conviviality of diverse groups in a society through enhanced belongingness, respect and social participation (Correa-Velez, Gifford, & Barnett, 2010; Oxoby, 2009), and to promote vulnerable individuals' wellbeing, happiness and life-satisfaction (Simplican et al., 2015). On the other hand, social exclusion can have a series of negative consequences on individual behavior, such as enhanced aggressiveness (Twenge, Baumeister, Tice, & Stucke, 2001), reduced cognitive performance (Baumeister, Twenge, & Nuss, 2002), reduced sensitivity to pain and emotional insensitivity (Baumeister, Brewer, Tice, & Twenge, 2007), decrease in prosocial behavior (Twenge, Baumeister, DeWall, Ciarocco, & Bartels, 2007) and a desire to withdraw from any future social contact with the agent that generated the exclusionary feelings (Richman & Leary, 2009). In this paper we focus on marketing communications since this area is most affected by lack of inclusiveness (Henderson & Williams, 2013). As Schroeder and Borgerson (2005) point out, exclusion in the form of leaving out certain consumer segments from the target market is one of the two main potential consequences of misrepresentation in ethnic marketing communications.

Excluding consumers from the target market through under- or misrepresentation in marketing communications can damage the reputation of the represented groups, transmit prejudicial and non-inclusionary messages (Bennett, Hill, & Oleksiuk, 2013; Tadajewski, 2012) and affect individual self-perceptions, self-esteem and social status (Bennett, Hill, & Daddario, 2015; Johnson & Grier, 2012). This, in turn, can motivate consumers to revolt against and be frustrated about the brand that poses the exclusionary threat (Kipnis et al., 2012), and cause loss in consumer buying power and market share (Bennett et al., 2013). On the other hand, consumers who feel part of a brand's target market display more favorable attitudes towards marketing communications of that brand (Puntoni, Vanhamme, & Visscher, 2011), and interpret it as acknowledgement and recognition of their presence in the broader society (Lamont & Molnar, 2001). Hence, it is crucial to understand how portrayals of ethnicity in promotional messages can enhance the viewers' perceived social inclusion in the society they live in, and how marketing firms could reach the optimal market more effectively by facilitating more inclusive communications in markets of increasing ethnic diversity.

While policy makers are calling for a more inclusive society and advocating for equality and integration of ethnic groups, scarce research has investigated the conceptualization of social inclusion as a key factor in providing effective and fair representations of ethnicity in marketing communications. For example, in a special issue of Journal of Public Policy & Marketing on marketing and social inclusion, no study clearly defines the core concept of social inclusion and investigates how marketing communications affect social inclusion despite the considerable merits in this special issue (Henderson & Williams, 2013). Moreover, numerous studies have addressed the importance of self-congruity in advertising settings, but this stream of research has yet to be extended into understanding how subjective social inclusion interacts with self-congruity and the effectiveness of marketing communications. Thus, we continue this initiative by clarifying the conceptual meaning of subjective social inclusion and proposing a new conceptual model of inclusive marketing communications.

In the following, we first establish the meanings of baseline concepts such as ethnicity and ethnic identity, and mono- and multi-ethnic marketing communications. Then, we address how ethnic expressions in marketing communications (mono- vs. multi-ethnic primes) impact the feelings of social inclusion that affect the effectiveness of marketing in a proposed model shown in Fig. 1.

3.2. Ethnicity and ethnic identity

Ethnicity can be conceptualized from a subjective and objective perspective (Laroche, Kim, & Tomiuk, 1998). While the objective formulation includes common cultural traits, national origin, language or social status as defining properties of ethnicity, the subjective perspective conceptualizes ethnicity as the process of self-identification with an ethnic

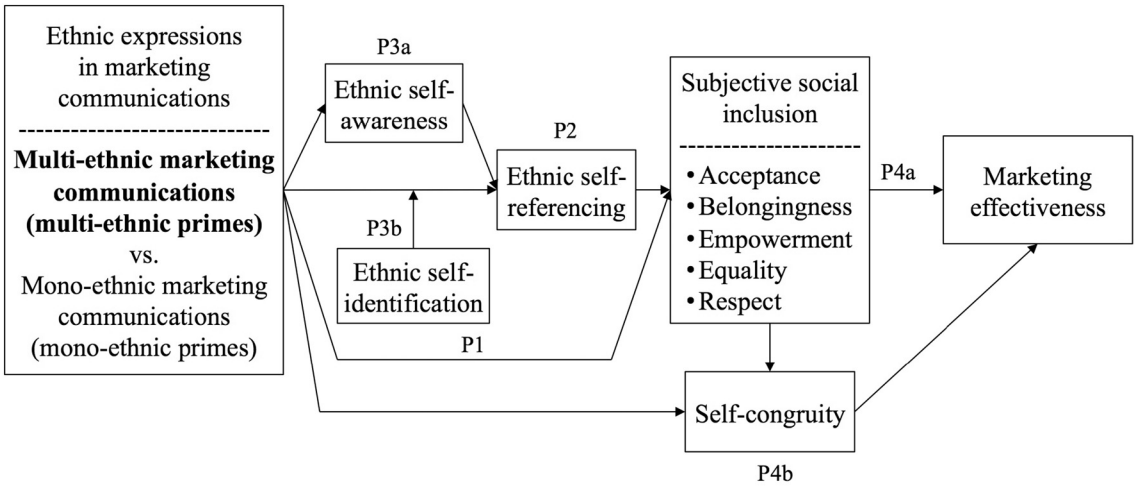

Fig. 1. Theoretical model of inclusive marketing.

group based on ethnic characteristics (Tajfel, 1982). The current paper takes the subjective perspective because the strength in affiliation to one's ethnic heritage varies across individuals who share the same ethnic ancestry. Moreover, an ethnic individual is likely to have multiple distinct identities that are prioritized subjectively for the need of different social contexts (Oswald, 1999), since ethnicity is a highly contextualized, situation-dependent concept (Stayman & Deshpande, 1989).

3.3. Mono- vs. multi-ethnic marketing communications' effect on subjective social inclusion

In the context of ethnic expressions in marketing communications, we define mono-ethnic marketing communications as the type of efforts by marketers using mono-ethnic primes as cultural representations from one ethnic background to reach a narrowly defined ethnic audience. By contrast, multi-ethnic marketing communications represent the type of efforts by marketers using multi-ethnic primes as cultural representations from more than one ethnic background to simultaneously reach ethnically diverse target audiences (adapted from Johnson & Grier, 2011). Mono-ethnic marketing is based on the assumption that ethnic individuals have a mono-ethnic identity in association with a mono-ethnic group (Cui, 2001; Visconti et al., 2014). Since in today's society individuals who share the same ethnic background may not necessarily share the same ethnic identity, this narrow view on ethnic-based segmentation and targeting may trigger inadvertent generalizations by overlooking the diversity within one ethnic group and reducing complex identities to singular pre-assigned ethnic labels (Cui & Choudhury, 2002; Davidson, 2009; Pires & Stanton, 2000).

Marketing communications are "socio-political artefacts" (Borgerson & Schroeder, 2002, p. 570) from which consumers draw their status in the host society. According to cultivation theory, depictions in media shape individual self-perceptions and social relations (Bailey, 2006). Individuals constantly judge whether they are accepted, respected and recognized by others by drawing on cues provided in media and advertising (Baker, Gentry, & Rittenburg, 2005; Tsai, 2011). Thus, when one's ethnicity is constantly excluded from marketing communications, there is a high risk that he/she will experience feelings of non-acceptance within the society. This, in turn, may engender belongingness and perceptions of fit within the host country.

Research has shown that multiracial individuals prefer to interact with people who acknowledge their multifaceted ethnic self (Remedios & Chasteen, 2013). Tsai's (2011) study shows that in striving for self-esteem and social inclusion, minority consumers seek self-validating meanings from the symbolic messages in the market place. Thus, individuals who internalize more than one ethnic identity need to have their multi-ethnic background recognized. In this respect, multi-ethnic marketing communications may have a higher probability of achieving realistic representations of ethnic diversity than mono-ethnic marketing communications. We argue that rather than focusing on dissimilarities between ethnic groups and individualizing them in marketing communications, marketing messages could benefit from more "normalized" portrayals without conspicuous subcultural signifiers, focusing on individuals as "whole persons whose cultural or ethnic background is only a part, if any, of her or his sense of selves" (Park, 2010, p.464).

According to the intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), enabling the connection and communication between two groups reduces the prejudice and the negative intergroup relations. Hence, by portraying cultural symbols or individuals of diverse ethnicity together, multi-ethnic primes in multi-ethnic marketing communications may enable the mental connection between individuals from otherwise disparate cultural groups and induce a superordinate identity in the minds of the ethnic and mainstream individuals, which can enhance the perceived inclusiveness in the society. This is in line with the common in-group identity model from social psychology, which postulates that building a common group identity decreases intergroup conflict through reduction of group boundaries and transformation of "us" and "them" in an overarching "we" (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Saguy, 2007; Gaertner, Dovidio, Anastasio, Bachman, & Rust, 1993). Thus, we postulate that multi-ethnic marketing communications embedded with multi-ethnic primes may represent an effective means of exerting a more positive effect on subjective social inclusion than mono-ethnic marketing communications with mono-ethnic primes.

P1. *Multi-ethnic marketing communications are likely to exert a more positive effect on subjective social inclusion than mono-ethnic marketing communications.*

However, there are several factors that influence this relationship. They are discussed in the following sections.

3.4. The mediating role of ethnic self-referencing

In this section we examine ethnic self-referencing as an intervening factor to the relationship in P1 since the self-concept is a focal point in subjective social inclusion. The self-concept is formed by a set of self-schemata, which are "cognitive generalizations about the self derived from past experience that organize and guide the processing of the self-related information contained in an individual's social experience" (Markus, 1977, p.63). These schemata are activated when an individual is exposed to personally relevant information (Hesapci, Merdin, & Gorgulu, 2016; Hong & Zinkhan, 1995). Research shows that when a consumer is exposed to an advert containing information that is relevant to him/her, he/she is likely to relate the information to his/her own self-concept, a cognitive process known as "self-referencing" (Debevec & Romeo, 1992; Lee, Fernandez, & Martin, 2002). Since self-concept represents "a multidimensional knowledge structure" (Martin, Lee, & Yang, 2004, p. 28), self-referencing can be established through different personal-relevant routes on different self-concept characteristics such as self-identified ethnicity.

The elaboration likelihood model shows that personal relevance motivates diligent processing of information to form a veridical opinion (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). Accordingly, we argue that if a consumer does not establish ethnic self-referencing with the connection between his/her own self-concept (i.e., self-identified ethnicity) and the ethnic prime cues in the advert, it is unlikely that he/she will engage in further elaboration of the advert at both affective and cognitive levels. For example, an Indian-embedded advert is unlikely to be read and interpreted at a cognitive and affective level by a Caucasian consumer, unless the latter connects the ethnic primes in the advert to his/her self-concept. Therefore, we propose that ethnic self-referencing plays the role of partially linking a consumer's interpretation of ethnic primes in multi-ethnic marketing communications to subjective social inclusion. This partial mediation by ethnic self-referencing acknowledges the independent effect of multi-ethnic marketing communications on the subjective social inclusion (as stated in P1), over and above the effect through ethnic self-referencing as a result of other factors such as the consumer's interest in the product features or brands in the advert.

P2. *Ethnic self-referencing partially mediates the effect of multi-ethnic marketing communications on subjective social inclusion.*

3.5. The role of ethnic identity salience

The conception of self along identity-oriented criteria is known as identity salience (Forehand, Deshpandé, & Reed, 2002). Ethnic consumers' ethnic identity salience is based on ethnic characteristics, which can be temporary (known as ethnic self-awareness) or stable (known as ethnic self-identification). Ethnic self-awareness (ESA) is "a temporary state during which a person is more sensitive to information related to his or her own ethnicity" (Forehand & Deshpandé, 2001, p.336). Forehand and Deshpandé (2001) show that consumers exposed to ethnic primes are more prone to categorize themselves based on ethnicity. Thus, we expect that multi-ethnic primes in multi-ethnic marketing communications act as a catalyst of ethnic self-awareness in ethnic consumers, prompting them to categorize themselves along ethnic criteria.

Moreover, research based on schematic incongruity theory suggests that advertising elements that are discrepant with consumer expectations (i.e., incongruent identity primes) are likely to prompt increased processing of ethnic content in the advert, hence enhancing ethnic self-awareness (Dimofte, Forehand, & Deshpandé, 2003; Forehand et al., 2002). Drawing on this view, we posit that multi-ethnic primes in multi-ethnic marketing communications may show schematic incongruity to some ethnic individuals, hence may trigger and enhance ethnic self-awareness. This is consistent with the sufficiency principle of the heuristic-systematic model of persuasion (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993): "individuals process additional information only when they are uncertain about their current attitudes toward a given topic" (Areni, 2002, p. 175). It is conceivable that mono-ethnic marketing communications' mono-ethnic primes may appear congruent with viewers of the same ethnicity, hence less effect of schematic incongruity. In addition, we expect that consumers who are higher in ethnic self-awareness are more likely to self-reference ethnic primes to their own self-concept since they are more sensitive to ethnic related cues. Therefore, we postulate that multi-ethic marketing communications prompt ethnic self-awareness, which in turn results in ethnic self-referencing. However, this mediation by ethnic self-awareness plays a partial role since ethnic primes in multi-ethnic marketing communication may engage in ethnic self-referencing through other factors over and above the effect through ethnic self-awareness.

P3a. *Ethnic self-awareness partially mediates the effect of multi-ethnic marketing communications on ethnic self-referencing.*

Ethnic self-identification (ESI) is a more enduring and inherent feeling than the temporary ethnic self-awareness (Deshpande, Hoyer, & Donthu, 1986; Donthu & Cherian, 1994). Hence, ESI exists before viewing an advert and is not expected to be triggered by the ethnic primes in the advert. High ethnic self-identifiers have been shown to have stronger preference towards advertising displaying their own ethnicity (Green, 1999). Thus, individuals with a higher level of ethnic self-identification are expected to express greater ethnic self-referencing with multi-ethnic marketing communications than individuals with lower levels of ethnic self-identification (Lee et al., 2002). It follows, therefore, that individuals are more likely to seek the connection between the ethnic primes in the multi-ethnic marketing communications and the ethnic-based self-concept through self-referencing if they have stronger, enduring and inherent feeling of attachment to their ethnic heritage. In other words, the relationship between multi-ethnic marketing communications and ethnic self-referencing is enhanced (moderated) when ethnic self-identification is higher.

P3b. *Ethnic self-identification moderates the effect of multi-ethnic marketing communications on ethnic self-referencing.*

3.6. Self-congruity and effectiveness of marketing

In the context of advertising, self-congruity is understood as the degree to which an advert's expressions coincide with the viewer's self-concept (Hong & Zinkhan, 1995). Given the multidimensional nature of self-concept (Gergen, 1971), it is foreseeable that consumers' self-concept contains elements of ethnic self-concept (i.e., self-identified ethnicity) and other self-concept characteristics (e.g., a manager, an intellectual, etc.). Numerous studies have shown that people's self-concept contains cognitive generalizations about the self (self-schema), and "external stimuli compatible with self-schema would be readily attended, encoded, comprehended and retained, in comparison with those stimuli that do not fit with it" (Hong & Zinkhan, 1995, p. 57).

Research on self-congruity shows that high levels of congruence between a product/brand/store/event image and consumers' self-concept lead to positive effects on a variety of consumer responses such as brand loyalty, increased persuasion and competitive advantage, or enhanced emotional brand attachment and cognitive elaboration (Aguirre-Rodriguez, Bosnjak, & Sirgy, 2012; Malär, Krohmer,

Hoyer, & Nyffenegger, 2011; Sirgy, Lee, Johar, & Tidwell, 2008). Drawing on these studies, we predict that individuals exposed to multi-ethnic marketing communications not only assess whether the ethnic primes are relevant to their ethnic identity through ethnic self-referencing, but also decode the advert's deeper-level symbolic meanings and peripheral cues (Petty et al., 1983) to assess the congruence of the communication imagery with their own self-concept in a wider range of characteristics. In other words, multi-ethnic primes in multi-ethnic marketing communications provide a wider range of expression stimuli for self-congruity. For example, a Chinese male consumer may find self-congruity with images of White American and Black African male business executives in a fashion advert if the Chinese consumer's ideal-self concept is a successful business executive in a global company despite the ethnic incongruity with the advert.

In addition, when multi-ethnic marketing communications have enhanced individuals' feeling of being included in the society, this feeling of social inclusion is more likely to open the consumer's cognitive and emotional channels for positive attitudes towards the products, brands and other marketing efforts. Subjective social inclusion is also likely to enlighten one's actual and ideal self-concepts and enhance the likelihood of self-congruity. Given the positive effect of self-congruity on advertising effectiveness (Hong & Zinkhan, 1995; Petty et al., 1983), it is perceivable that both self-congruity established from multi-ethnic (rather than mono-ethnic) marketing communications and subjective social inclusion will facilitate more consumers' positive responses to marketing efforts.

P4a. *Subjective social inclusion has a positive influence on marketing effectiveness.*

P4b. *Self-congruity mediates the effects of multi-ethnic marketing communications and subjective social inclusion on marketing effectiveness.*

4. Theoretical contributions and implications

Our study makes theoretical contributions on two main fronts: the social inclusion and the ethnic marketing literature. In this paper we provide the definition for the new construct of subjective social inclusion, which is exclusively focused on subjective properties of the concept, namely acceptance, belongingness, empowerment, equality and respect. These dimensions are conceptually distinct at the first-order level but are interrelated to jointly constitute the necessary and sufficient attributes of the higher-order construct of subjective social inclusion. This multi-dimensionality of subjective social inclusion provides clearly defined domain width and flexibility for further research that may address the issue of social inclusion and other factors at different conceptual levels. Our conceptualization can be useful for building theoretical models for diverse ethnic individuals in different socio-political contexts, and identifying narrower areas in which inclusive policies exceed or fail to meet their aims and objectives. Our conceptualization of subjective social inclusion answers to numerous calls in the extant literature and adds value and conceptual clarity to the broad domain of social inclusion. This definition and particularly the five individual dimensions could be used in further research to develop a measurement scale of subjective social inclusion, which can assist policy makers and researchers alike to identify the included and non-included individuals, and to estimate the impact of inclusive policies and actions employed. The definition can be subject to further scrutiny in order to identify its applicability to other groups of vulnerable individuals, such as individuals with mental health impairment, women or people with disabilities.

We contribute to the extant literature on ethnic marketing and ethnic consumer behavior by providing a framework of the effects of multi-ethnic marketing communications on individuals' felt inclusion in the host society. With the support of seminal theories such as the common in-group identity model (Gaertner et al., 1993) and the intergroup contact theory (Allport, 1954), our model suggests that an inclusive marketing approach with multi-ethnic marketing communications may benefit from focusing on fusion of cultural primes and congruence optimization, rather than focusing on individualized, isolated consumer segments based on ethnic homogenous characteristics. We particularly make a contribution to the self-image congruence research by extending the applicability of this concept to ethnic marketing communications. Future research could consider ideal and social self-congruity as another perspective in analyzing the role of congruity evaluation.

From a managerial perspective, if our model is attested by empirical data, the underlying theory will provide useful guidance for marketers and policy makers for designing inclusive marketing communications to prevent consumer alienation and improve the perceived social inclusion and welfare of vulnerable individuals in the broader society. Marketers and advert designers may draw on our model to identify focal areas and explore approaches to tap the strength of ethnic identity salience of the target market, and enhance the effectiveness of communication efforts through increased attention to situational ethnic salience and optimized self-congruity. For policy makers, our definition of subjective social inclusion can be adopted in a wide variety of research and practice.

5. Limitations and further research

Although this paper advances understanding of ethnic consumer research, empirical testing of our conceptual model is necessary to provide evidence for the plausibility and soundness of the proposed theory. The conceptualization of subjective social inclusion needs further scrutiny, particularly through empirical tests that could provide empirical support for the definition and conceptual dimensionality. Our collection of definitions and descriptions of social inclusion from the extant literature is not exhaustive and may be strengthened through meta-analysis techniques. Future research directions may include 1) conducting qualitative research with ethnic consumers to further explore the concept of social inclusion and its inherent dimensions; 2) developing a new measurement scale for the concept of subjective social inclusion based on the current paper's conceptualization; 3) identifying salient marketing communication factors that have direct impact on the perceived level of subjective social inclusion, such as product category, language, slogan, degree of ethnic embeddedness; 4) examining the causal effects of ethnic primes (e.g., multi- vs. mono-ethnic primes) on ethnic individuals' subjective social inclusion through controlled experimental procedures; 5) empirically testing the proposed model especially the mediation and moderation effects. Future research could also consider the adaptation of the current conceptual framework at different levels of vulnerability: sexual orientation, disability, gender, age or social status.

Appendix A. Sample of definitions and extracted key attributes

Source	Conceptualization of Social Inclusion	Extracted key attributes for Subjective Social Inclusion (Feelings of…)
Martin and Cobigo (2011)	Six domains of social inclusion: social relationships, leisure, productive activities, accommodation, informal support.	None (objective dimensions)
Wilson and Secker (2015)	"Inclusion operates on an individual or group level and relates to the extent to which people are *accepted* and *feel they belong within different social contexts*" (p. 2). "Social inclusion is a multidimensional concept encompassing physical aspects (e.g., housing), psychological aspects (e.g., *a sense of belonging*), social aspects (e.g., friendships), and occupational aspects (e.g., leisure)" (p. 2).	Belongingness and acceptance
Collins (2003)	"Social inclusion is a theory of how society can be integrated and harmonious. At its simplest, the theory is that if everyone participates fully in society, they are less likely to become alienated from the community and will conform to its social rules and laws" (p.24).	None (objective attributes)
Marino-Francis and Worrall-Davies (2010)	"Social inclusion is about each person taking part in society and *having control over their own resources*. It is also about a community that cares for its members, makes them *feel welcome* and *is willing to adjust to fit their various needs*" (p. 38).	Acceptance and empowerment
Slade (2009), cited in Coombs, Nicholas, and Pirkis (2013)	"*A person's right to participate as an equal citizen* in all the opportunities available, employment, education and other social and recreational activities" (p. 907).	Equality
Social Exclusion Unit (1998), cited in Chan et al. (2014)	"Inclusion in society is defined normatively as citizenship, having a job, home or financial security according to the norms of society, and *being part of, and identifying with, a community*" (p. 123).	Belongingness
Oxoby (2009)	"Inclusion is an aspect of how *one perceives her access to institutions and resources* in the decision making environment" (p.7).	Empowerment
Hong Kong Government (2012)	"Enhancing an inclusive society, so that all *individuals can enjoy equality and respect* in different areas of life" (online).	Equality and respect
Department for Education and Skills (2001), cited in Frederickson et al. (2007)	"Inclusion is about engendering a *sense of community and belonging* and encouraging mainstream and special schools and others to come together to support each other and pupils with special educational needs." (p. 106).	Belongingness
Silver (2010)	"Social inclusion can only be fully understood in relation to a particular vision of *membership, belonging, and social integration*" (p. 184).	Belongingness
Hall (2009)	"Includes three elements: involvement in activities, maintaining reciprocal relationships and *a sense of belonging*" (p. 171).	Belongingness
Simplican et al. (2015)	"Broad conceptions of social inclusion can involve *being accepted* as an individual beyond disability, significant and reciprocal relationships, appropriate living accommodations, employment, informal and formal supports, and *community involvement*" (p. 19).	Acceptance and belongingness
Cobigo et al. (2012) cited in Simplican et al. (2015)	"A person must (1) have a *sense of belonging in a social network* within which they receive and contribute support, (2) that they *experience a valued social role*, and (3) that they *are trusted* to perform that social role in the community" (p. 20).	Belongingness and social recognition
Baumgartner and Burns (2014)	"A key issue is that of belonging and acceptance. Being included and integrated within the community and society means that the *individual feels and experiences a sense of belonging to, identification with and acceptance by that community and society*" (p. 362).	Belongingness and acceptance

Westwood (2003) cited in Davys and Tickle (2008)	"Social inclusion is linked to the concept of equal opportunity, the individual is part of a social community where they were educated, raised and employed which *is felt to engender feelings of belonging, trust and unity*" (p. 3).	Equality and belongingness
Lamont (2009)	"Societies that are inclusive are societies that make room for the *social recognition* of a variety of groups. They are societies that sustain competing definitions of a worthy life and a worthy person, which *empower low-status groups to contest stereotypes and measure their worth independently of dominant social matrices*" (p. 151).	Social recognition and empowerment
Jansen, Otten, van der Zee, and Jans (2014)	"We conceptualize inclusion as a two-dimensional concept, which is defined by perceptions of *belonging and authenticity*" (p. 372).	Belongingness and authenticity
Donnelly and Coakley (2002)	Five cornerstones of social inclusion: *valued recognition*, human development, *involvement and ebgagement*, proximity, material wellbeing.	Valued recognition, involvement and engagement
Ponic and Frisby (2010)	Four dimensions: Psycological (*acceptance*, safety & trust, *recognition*); relational (*being welcomed, respect, support*); Organizational (addressing barriers, access to resources, ethic of care); Participatory (contributing, *having a voice, engaging in activities*).	Acceptance, safety, recognition, respect, empowerment, engagement
Kim, Shin, Yu, and Kim (2016)	"We regard social inclusion as a process of reaching active participation" (p. 29).	None (objective dimension)
Rose, Daiches, and Potier (2012)	"All of the young people's accounts of *feeling 'included'* were characterised by *a sense of informal, interpersonal acceptance*—to *feel included was to feel accepted by others*" (p. 261).	Felt acceptance

Note: Emphases are added by the authors of the current paper.

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