



The Influence of Art on Singaporean Tertiary Undergraduates' Acculturation Attitude towards Migrant Workers

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Abstract

The aim of the study was to find out how visual art could be effectively used in a social integration campaign among youth in Singapore. The study used both quantitative and qualitative methods with the aim of evaluating an art campaign's effect on Singaporean tertiary students' (N=113) attitude towards migrant workers in their country. Three factors were used to define the host society's acculturation orientation towards migrant outgroups: national identity, multicultural ideology and perceived consequences of immigration. Questionnaire survey was conducted among experimental and control groups before and after an art exhibition in which the plight of foreign workers were depicted using visual sketches. Only 'national identity' emerged significant in host society's treatment of migrants. Focus group discussions revealed that the artworks were differentially evaluated by the respondents: some felt the need to understand the migrant workers' issues more closely, whereas others completely failed to relate to the workers' conditions. Based on Elaboration Likelihood Model, it was observed that the respondents widely resorted to peripheral elaboration of the message, which resulted in minimal rational engagement with the core message. The study highlights the importance of interactive mediums and face-to-face sharing sessions as additional tools to make social integration campaigns effective.

Keywords: migrant workers, host society acculturation, visual art, social integration campaign, Elaboration Likelihood Model

Introduction

Studies from immigrant-destinations that are acclaimed for multicultural policies have reported how these host societies have often failed to imbibe the spirit of multiculturalism (Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker & Obdrzálek, 2000; Zick, Wagner, Van Dick & Petzel, 2001). In addition to governmental policies that support multiculturalism, conscious attempts to remind local communities about their multicultural foundation have often been required. Public communication campaigns on social integration are common in such regions where disparate immigrant and host communities come into regular contacts with each other.

The pluralistic-typological approach towards acculturation argues that just as immigrants acculturate to a society, the host society also adopts various strategies to acculturate with the migrants (Berry, 2001; Kim, 1989). This study evaluates the effectiveness of a visual art communication campaign designed to promote social integration of international migrants. The campaign targeted university undergraduate students in the host society, Singapore. In the first part of the study we explored whether the art campaign affected three factors related to host society acculturation, viz. national identity, perceived consequences of immigration and multicultural ideology. In the second part we analyzed, with the help of Elaboration Likelihood Model (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986), the processes involved in the changes, or the processes that obstructed the hypothesized changes in host society acculturation.

History of Multiculturalism in Singapore

Developed as a trade port during British colonial rule, since the 1820s modern Singapore has been a favored destination for groups of migrants from China, India and neighboring countries in Southeast Asia. The demographics of the first wave of immigration, which lasted until 1940s, is reflected in the recent census, with a resident population (3.8 million) predominantly Chinese (74.2%), followed by Malays (13.3%) and Indians (9.2%) (Sing Stat, 2013). However, in today's trans-border scenario, with an ever-increasing need for international migrants to boost the booming economy, migrant labor inflows are undergoing dynamic transformation. More than half the non-resident population (1.4 million), comprising migrant workers and international students, is on temporary permits (Sing Stat, 2013).

The latest migration influx has transformed the multi-racial, -religious and -ethnic fabric of Singaporean society into a complex mixture. Ministers regularly emphasize the need to welcome labor migrants to the island-nation so as to sustain economic growth (PMO, 2012b); committee reports recommend increased immigration as a measure to improve the low-fertility rate (1.2, against the replacement rate of 2.1) (NPTD, 2012); government-citizen discussion portals dedicate sections highlighting the need to integrate migrant groups to the host society and vice versa (REACH, 2012). Occasional eruption of conflicts between ethnic groups is resolved by government action, social rebuttal and self-regulation on the part of the more socially integrated sections of the population (George, 2011). However, animosity towards the guest workers from other Asian countries is increasingly an issue (Jacobs, 2012), with male, blue-collar migrants suffering the greatest amount of discrimination (Chang, 2010; Gopalan, 2010), despite their contribution to economic growth (Pang & Lim, 1982).

Literature Review

Acculturation is the phenomenon that occurs “when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936, p. 149). Recent research identified a bi-dimensional process of acculturation characterized by migrants or host society members showing varying levels of affinity towards their own culture, without being affected by their relationship with the new culture encountered (Berry, 2005; Navas et al., 2005). A typology of acculturation (see figure 1) is drawn up by answering the questions: 1) to what extent does one retain one’s own cultural identity; and 2) to what extent does one relate to other cultures. In the acculturation context of the host society, *Segregation* happens when the host society values its dominant culture more than establishing relationship between various cultural groups, whereas *exclusion* is a condition in which the host society neither promotes good relationships between cultural groups nor establishes a dominant culture of its own (Berry, 2005). *Melting pot* means the host society doesn’t have a dominant culture to impose on its members, but is affected by the variety of cultures that it accommodates, whereas *multiculturalism* denotes that the host society would like to uphold its own culture but at the same time, would like to promote a healthy relationship between various cultures.

Multiculturalism is considered the best acculturation strategy for the locals, as it accepts cultural diversity (Liu, 2007; Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker&Obdrzálek, 2000).

Figure 1: The typology of acculturation for non-dominant groups (Berry, 1997, p. 10)

<i>Two hypothetical questions on dominant society's cultural preferences and relationships</i>		Retain own cultural identity and preferences	
		Yes	No
Allow non-dominant groups to express themselves	Yes	Multiculturalism	Melting pot
	No	Segregation	Exclusion

For multiculturalism as a policy to succeed, the attitudes of dominant groups in the host society towards migrants need to be forward-looking, accommodative and reciprocal. However, studies in multicultural countries like US, Canada, Australia, Germany, Britain and Netherlands have demonstrated that despite governmental policy on multiculturalism, members of host societies often lack the enthusiasm to endorse the cultural diversity they have been forced to live with (Citrin, Sears, Muste & Wong, 2001; Ho, 1990; Zick, Wagner, Van Dick & Petzel, 2001). This points to the failure of governmental policies and outreach programs to influence the acculturation attitudes of the host society, which eventually results in the failure of multiculturalism.

In Singapore, although ethnic harmony is widely observed by the settled population, thanks to pro-active governmental policies and multicultural thinking among the citizenry, mainstreaming of guest-workers continues to be a source of friction (Chang, 2010; Chin, 2008). Guest-workers

at the lower strata, especially males, routinely face discrimination because of functional reasons: they are often held responsible for neighborhood crimes, for crowding public spaces like the rail and road transport, and the supermarkets (Mauris, 2011). Their life-styles have been so starkly contrasted with the host society's first world that the property adjacent to their dormitories is valued less in the market (Chen, 2009), leading to criticism of an emerging 'not in my backyard' syndrome among Singaporeans (PMO, 2012a). Research suggests that discrimination based on functional reasons can endure and lead to deep-rooted fissures between races and ethno-linguistic groups (Stephan, Renfro, Esses, Stephan & Martin, 2005). Thus, migrant workers are not only easily made scapegoats for the social ills of the host society, but eventually the stereotypes about them are reproduced and accepted amongst the locals as 'common sense' (Crush & Ramachandran, 2010).

The attitudinal attributes of host society towards migrants are important in the assessment of an acculturation scenario (Berry, 2005; Devereux & Loeb, 1943; Kim, 1989). During the acculturation process, changes have been observed in host society's expectations of how immigrants should acculturate, the perception of threat it has vis-à-vis the immigrants' presence, its perception of how to retain its cultural identity as well as its overall outlook towards cultural diversity (Berry, 2001, 2006; Ward & Masgoret, 2006). We focus on three factors of host society Singapore in order to evaluate its attitudinal change towards migrants: 1) sense of national identity and pride; 2) perception of consequences of immigration; and 3) overall multicultural ideology.

National identity can be defined as a sense of belonging to one's people and nation (Dekker, Malova & Hoogendoorn, 2003). National identity has been linked to perceived group competition, zero-sum competition, and negative attitudes towards immigration (Esses, Dovidio, Jackson & Armstrong, 2001).

Perceived consequences of immigration can either be positive or negative. For the purposes of this study we refer only to the perceived negative consequences of immigration, which can be defined as a zero-sum view on resources where the gains of immigrants equate to the losses of

the locals, as well as a fear stemming from the perceived threat posed by immigrants to society's economic well-being and social cohesion (Berry, 2001). Negative perceived consequences of immigration were related to ethnocentrism, authoritarianism, and the extent to which host society discriminates against immigrants (Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1977).

Multicultural ideology, the acceptance and recognition of many diverse ethnic cultures and support of equal status for all ethnic groups (Berry, 2006), is related to both low social dominance as well as positivity towards different cultures. It has been proven that high multicultural ideology leads to lower perceptions of threat and hence more favorable attitudes towards immigrants (Ward & Masgoret, 2006). Individuals who are low on social dominance tend to be more agreeable to having immigrants within the in-group (Berry et al., 1977).

Based on the review, the changes occurring in these three attitudinal factors as a result of the art campaign are hypothesized as:

H1: The art campaign on migrant workers among members of host society can change the level of national identity, perceived consequences and multicultural ideology.

Individual variations occurring in the three factors can be hypothesized based on the review of previous studies:

H1a: The art campaign decreases the level of national identity among host society members.

H1b: The art campaign decreases the perceived consequences among host society members.

H1c: The art campaign increases the multicultural ideology among host society members.

Art and Promotional Campaigns

Art, an abstract medium that allows the audience to weave meanings in tandem with their socio-historical situation as well as individual uniqueness, has been used in various public campaigns that aim greater social harmony and integration. America has a history of using art to push forward social reforms. Lewis Hine's photo essays on child labor during the industrial age touched the collective psyche, which eventually prodded civil society to fight against this social

evil (Smith-Shank, 2003). More recently in the 2008 American Presidential elections, the effective use of various art forms – fine art and digital art included –helped establish “a foundation for socially concerned inquiry” (Keys, 2010; p. 116). While art makes “the best tool for propagandist manipulation”, it can also be effectively used by a grassroots reformer to invigorate reforms in a country (Keys, 2010; p. 119). Similarly, art campaigns have been organized to enhance cultural harmony among different groups in host societies. The Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) showcased its support towards a minority community in Australia through the exhibition *Buddha: Radiant Awakening*, wherein the exhibition became both an art show and a “sacred site” encouraging visitors to learn about the culture through the appreciation of the art forms on display (Ang, 2005). In Singapore, while the government has focused on improving the working and living conditions of migrant workers, regulating the foreign employment sector, enforcing work safety and migrants’ health, its campaigns against discrimination have produced only limited results (Chan, 2011). Events and sharing sessions, organized by the government and the NPOs, attempt to facilitate communication between the local and migrant workers. Different art forms like film, photography, music and theatre are utilized in such events, albeit with limited results (Piper, 2005).

Plastic art has a proven ability to sub-consciously affect the audience, while interfering with cognitive perceptions through form and content (Tatler, Wade & Kaulard, 2007). The combination of aesthetic symbols used by artistic creations arouses emotion in the audience, change their perceptions, and often evoke feelings of empathy in them (Smith-Shank, 2003). The emotional connection constructed by an artistic creation with its audience encourages empathy (Bond, n.d.). In visual art, this empathic link can be established through dynamic and expressive visual patterns (Cupchik, 2007), which upon closer analysis is the connection between the artist and the viewer in a work of art (Lima, 1995). While art in its ideality can create empathy in audience, adulterated forms are often seen in commercial communication like advertisements. In the present study we focus on the use of fine art as a medium to improve the effectiveness of public campaigns on social integration.

ELM and Interpretation of Promotional Messages

Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) suggests that while dealing with persuasive communication, audience takes central or peripheral routes to process the message. Central processing is characterized by a rational engagement with the core arguments of the message, whereas peripheral processing involves a short-lived involvement with the affective cues (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

ELM has predicted consumer processing of central and peripheral cues both in unmediated spaces (Miniard, Sirdeshmukh, & Innis, 1992) and in traditional media advertisements (Frewer, Howard, Hedderley, & Shepherd, 1997). Studies have replicated the effectiveness of ELM in online advertising (Cho, 1999), whereas some have maintained that information processing “may well be different” in the case of Internet advertisements, as compared to other media (Karson & Korgaonkar, 2001).

Of greater importance to this study is how audience involvement in a particular message affects the choice of processing routes. Studies have observed a mediating effect for audience’ involvement on elaboration likelihood effects (Zaichkowsky, 1986). However, involvement has been found to have no effect on young people, in contradistinction to adults, while choosing between the central and peripheral routes of information processing (Te’eni-Harari, Lampert, & Lehman-Wilzig, 2007). Other factors that are found to be variously affecting the choice of information processing routes are attraction towards the advertisement (Scholten, 1996), personal motivation (Zhang & Buda, 1999) and prior knowledge of the message (Chebat, Charlebois, & Gelinascibat, 2001). We draw on from insights provided by these studies on elaboration likelihood effects on advertising effectiveness and adapt them to the situation of visual art campaign used in the study.

The art exhibition in the present study used paintings on foreign migrant workers in the form of portraits, profiles, abstract depictions of their work and life in Singapore, showing them in the background of their habitats (mostly dormitories) and professional spaces. Although persuasive in nature, the art campaign used in the study is markedly different from traditional advertising

campaign formats; unlike the latter, the art campaign appeals to the interpretive faculty of the audience and does not have a single goal of selling a product or a service. The art campaign aims to improve Singaporeans' attitudes towards foreign workers to encourage social integration in the society. Created by fine art students of (*university A*), under instructions from an art professor, the artworks met a minimum benchmark of quality.

In order to investigate the processes underlying changes or lack of changes in host society acculturation, we ask:

RQ1: How did the process of attitude change occur (or did not occur) as host society members engaged in the art campaign on multiculturalism?

Methodology

Research Participants

The experimental group consisted of 86 tertiary undergraduates from (*university A*) Communication Studies program, while the control group consisted of 30 tertiary undergraduates from (*university B*). The total sample for this research project consists of 66% female and 34% male at a mean age of 20 (range = 18--26). This follows the student demographic trend of communication schools in Singapore, where female students outnumber males at university level education in this discipline. The sample was predominantly Chinese (87.6%), followed distantly by Malay (4.4%), Indian (5.3%), Caucasian (1.8%) and others (0.9%). The ethnicity of the sample broadly reflects the demographic trend of resident Singaporean population. A majority of the respondents had an average or slightly higher than average standard of living based on the type of housing in which they lived.

Tertiary undergraduates were recruited for the study since it is considered a formative stage at which individuals establish attitudes and values on which to build long-lasting opinions. As a privileged group, the college-educated citizenry is found to be more socially liberal than those with less education (Hastie, 2007). Unlike the common people, university students supposedly have better cognitive abilities to appreciate art and grasp the subtleties conveyed. With the analytical minds developed during their careers, college students could take up the role of

opinion leaders in society as they mature. Hence, the selection of undergraduates in the study bears significance on future attitudes towards acculturation.

Research Design and Data Collection

The study followed a longitudinal panel design: Using a pre- and post-test design, the effects of an art exhibition featuring migrant workers on Singapore undergraduates were measured. Effects of the art exhibition were compared between the experimental and control groups. In order to assess the process of change, a focus group discussion was also conducted after the art exhibition.

Pre-test and post-test surveys were administered to both the experimental group of (*university A*) undergraduates and the control group of (*university B*) undergraduates, but only the experimental group was given the opportunity to view the exhibition. Since the art exhibition was held in (*university A*), which was 12 km away from (*university B*), it was unlikely that any of the respondents in the control group viewed the exhibition. The entire longitudinal study spanned five months, from October 2010 to March 2011. While administering the pre-test, all the participants were briefed about the purpose of the study, but were not told about the stimulus (the art exhibition), which was to be organized later. The (*university B*) students filled up the questionnaire online in both pre- and post-test phases. While all the respondents were granted an extra credit for one of their academic modules for completing the pre-test, a gift voucher for S\$ 5 was given to them for filling up the post-test.

Quantitative Measures

Quantitative data were collected using an adapted and localized version of the Mutual Intercultural Relations In Plural Societies (MIRIPS) questionnaire, widely known for its pluralistic conception of acculturation (Berry, 2010). The MIRIPS questionnaire has been used in acculturation studies among migrant workers as well as host societies, focusing on different variables depending on the intercultural context (Horenczyk & Munayer, 2007; Liu, 2007; Piontkowski, Florack, Hoelker & Obdrzálezek, 2000). Measures were developed for the three factors chosen for evaluation in the study: national identity, perceived consequences of immigration and multicultural ideology.

All responses were collected using a 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing “totally disagree” and 5 “totally agree”. Statements like “I think of myself as a Singaporean,” “Being part of Singaporean culture makes me feel happy” and “I feel that I’m part of Singaporean culture” were used to elicit responses related to the respondents’ *national identity*. The measure was created by taking the sum of scores for five items in the scale and was internally reliable (Cronbach’s alpha = .837). Responses for *perceived consequences of immigration* were collected using statements like “Immigration of foreign workers into Singapore increases the level of crime in Singapore,” “Immigration of foreign workers into Singapore tends to threaten Singaporean culture” and “With more immigration of foreign workers into Singapore, Singaporeans would lose their identity.” The measure was created taking the sum of scores for 10 items in the scale and was internally reliable (Cronbach’s alpha = .734). Statements like “We should help ethnic and racial minorities preserve their cultural heritages in Singapore,” “A society that has a variety of ethnic and cultural groups is more able to tackle new problems as they occur” and “We should do more to learn about the customs and heritage of different ethnic and cultural groups in this country” were used to elicit responses for the variable *multicultural ideology*. The measure was created taking the sum of scores for eight items in the scale and was internally reliable ((Cronbach’s alpha = .666).

Independent samples ‘t’ tests were conducted to evaluate whether the respondents from the experimental and the control groups registered different scores for pre- and post-tests.

Qualitative Data

Compassionately called *Everything in Context*, the exhibition of art sketches on foreign workers was held from Jan 31 to Mar 2, 2011 in an outdoor display area near (*university A*) communication school’s only lecture theatre. This ensured that each participant in the experimental group crossed the exhibition venue multiple times. In order to orient the experimental group to watch the art exhibition, teasers were launched on social networking site Facebook in the form of an image interpretation competition and a series of quotes from famous artists. Internet platform was used preparing the group to view and critically comment on the

upcoming exhibition. A half-page advertisement was placed in the students' newspaper of the university, to raise awareness about the exhibition prior to its launch. In addition, direct electronic mailers were sent to the experimental group inviting the respondents to the exhibition.

After the exhibition, 10 students from the experimental group were randomly selected to participate in two focus groups, with five each in each sitting. A deeper understanding on the respondents' perceptions and emotions towards specific artworks and the possible impact the artworks had on them could be achieved through the focus groups. These focus groups investigated the underlying process of attitude change that occurred as a result of the campaign. Both focus groups were audio-recorded and later transcribed.

The audio recordings of the qualitative data were examined using thematic coding, in which the information obtained were interpreted and categorized according to the “themes in the context of a theory or conceptual framework” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 11). Researchers listened to the recorded interviews and took note of the patterns of topics or issues that emerged in relation to the respondents' acculturation orientations and attitudes towards migrants.

Findings and Discussion

Independent samples ‘t’ tests

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis (H1a) that the art exhibition lowered the sense of national identity among experimental group, as opposed to those who did not view the exhibition. The test was significant, $t(111) = 2.119$, $p < .05$, and H1a was supported. Students who viewed the exhibition (experimental group) showed lower national identity as a result of viewing the exhibition ($M = -.2145$, $SD = .563$) as compared to students who did not view it ($M = -.0467$, $SD = .621$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means for the two groups ranged from .0169 to .5054.

An independent-samples *t* test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis (H1b) that the art exhibition lowered the perceived negative consequences of immigration among experimental group, as opposed to those who did not view the exhibition. The test was not significant, $t(111) =$

.157, $p > .05$, and H1b was not supported. Students who viewed the exhibition (experimental group) showed the same extent of negative perception towards immigration even after viewing the exhibition ($M = .0205$, $SD = .377$) as compared to those who did not view it ($M = .0067$, $SD = .504$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means for the two groups ranged from -.161 to .1886.

An independent-samples ‘t’ test was conducted to evaluate the hypothesis (H1c) that the art exhibition increased multicultural ideology among experimental group, as opposed to those who did not view the exhibition. The test was not significant, $t(111) = -.286$, $p > .05$, and H1c was not supported. Students who viewed the exhibition (experimental group) did not show any greater level of multicultural ideology after viewing the exhibition ($M = -.0693$, $SD = .46$) as compared to those who did not view it ($M = .0417$, $SD = .437$). The 95% confidence interval for the difference in means for the two groups ranged from -.164 to .2192. Results of independent samples ‘t’ tests are given in table 1.

Table 1: Mean Difference and Significant Difference between Experimental and Control Groups

Variables	Experimental		Control		M Diff**	Sig
	M Diff*	SD	M Diff*	SD		
National identity	.214	.563	-.047	.621	.261	.036
Perceived consequences of immigration	.02	.377	.007	.504	.014	.876
Multicultural ideology	.069	.460	.042	.437	.028	.776

Notes: N=113. $p < .05$ (one-tailed) from t-test comparison of means

* Mean difference of pre- and post-test scores for respective groups.

** Mean difference between experimental and control groups

Out of the three factors of acculturation attitudes tested in the study for their proneness to change in the face of an art campaign, only one – national identity of host society members – emerged to be significant. The second research question sought to reveal the underlying process behind the varying levels of change in the three factors studied. In the discussion that follows, an interpretation of the quantitative results as well as the qualitative data is done based on the ELM. To begin with, the qualitative data showed mixed responses from the students on how they understood and personally related to the problem of immigration and to the presence of migrant workers in the social spaces of Singapore. While some respondents said the issue of immigration had only minimum personal value for them, others approached it more sympathetically.

“[The subject matter] is something you don't really care about, like foreign workers, ...”

“...but maybe more can be done about [improving the plight of migrant workers in Singapore]... something that will empower [the workers], something more powerful enough to empower us to do something about it.”

Although not a clear division, the respondents broadly fell into two categories: those who watched the exhibition and those who did not pay sufficient attention to it, intentionally or otherwise. For those who watched the exhibition, questions like how they processed the message on social integration, what effect the campaign had on them, etc. were pertinent. Whereas, for those who did not watch the exhibition, frameworks like selective exposure and cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) are required to show how and why they avoided it.

Qualitative data suggest that those who viewed the exhibition processed the information following the periphery route.

“If it [subject matter] is something you don't really care about, like foreign workers, then I guess it won't strike you that much.”

The choice of the periphery route was linked to respondents' low level of interest in the subject matter as well as the low cognitive effort they put in to evaluate the artworks. Peripheral processing thus hampered their engagement with the core message depicted by the artworks, and motivated them to make a superficial evaluation of the aesthetics of the artworks.

“There must be a specific, like a certain level of interest, like if it strikes you then you take a look.”

“So I guess the problem lies with it [the art pieces] not coming out, not striking a person.”

Peripheral processing was also a stagnant form of evaluation such that it often restricted itself at the emotional level and never prodded the respondent to make an action-oriented evaluation of the message. ELM posits that a close scrutiny of the merits of any given argument occurs when chances of information processing or likelihood of elaboration is high in a person, whereby the individual forms a reasoned attitude, whereas when the likelihood is low, individuals shun the cognitive path and rely on the characteristics of the information such as credibility, attractiveness, and message quality (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Kosmidou, Theodorakis, Chroni, 2008). Expectedly, the attitudes changed through the peripheral route are found to be weaker than attitudes changed via the central cognitive route.

“It's interesting, but... If I see this or this, it's not attention grabbing enough I think.”

“No I really don't think it's very high in aesthetic value, I've seen some better pieces. This is about average.”

In creative works, there exists a fine balance between the artist's conceit, lucidity of the message and the relevance of the theme for the audience. As student creations, it was likely that message focus in the artworks was compromised for artistic imagination (Isham, Ekstrom, & Banks, 2010). The study was limited by the trade-off between clarity of communication and artistic freedom while deciding on the artworks. Unlike a traditional advertising campaign, where the meaning is conveyed in clear terms, the artworks in the present study were open to interpretation. Since different artists were involved in the creation of the artworks, the art exhibition lacked a unified message. Respondents raised the issue of extreme dark and bold colors on the art pieces, which would have stopped them from creatively engaging with the emotions of those depicted in the works (Maio & Esses, 2001):

“Some of them were quite disturbing;”

“Yar[buddy]... I think it’s a bit dark also... That’s why it evokes more, like, maybe, depressing.”

The respondents spent very little time – as little as five minutes on eight art pieces in some cases – viewing the art exhibition, which suggests that viewers relied on peripheral cues, like attractiveness and aesthetic quality, to evaluate the merit of the campaign message.

Respondents who took the peripheral route would have dismissed the importance of the artworks on the grounds that they were created by undergraduates majoring in art, and were “not really... professional.” In addition, owing to the abstract nature of most of the art pieces, the chances of respondents to ‘understand’ and interpret the messages were lower.

On a critical note, it may even not be possible to demarcate the message as the core (content) and the qualities of the medium (form) as periphery. Such a demarcation would only help repeat the traditional debate on form-content. Instead, we put forward a more complex psychological process within the respondents who did manage to interact with the message and the medium, but were not motivated to act on the basis of it. We argue that beneath the respondents’ expressive likes or dislikes of the issue of immigration and their preferences of the medium, there existed in them a conflation between the object of artistic depiction and the medium that was used to make the depiction.

“I’m not interested in this topic,... It does not strike my interest in general... I can appreciate it but it doesn’t mean that I will like it. I will just appreciate what the artist is trying to show from this point of view but it doesn’t mean I love it or am interested in it.”

Respondents found it hard to stay immune to the central theme of social integration depicted in the art work, but at the same time also slipped into the subjective position of a third person as they evaluated the quality and merit of the art works. Between those who openly acknowledged their dis-interestedness in the topic and those who were repelled by the perceived low quality of paintings, there remained a considerable number of respondents who presented a circular logic of message superseding medium, but only to later reverse this logic. We argue that this oscillation

of the two types of evaluating self of the art viewer – sometimes systematic and conscious and sometimes unconscious and spontaneous – was the underlying reason why a cognitive evaluation of existing acculturation strategy did not occur in the respondents.

“I think it’s more of a lack of what’s in it for me to look at it[this] kind of thing...”

Thus, two plausible explanations can account for the varying levels of change occurred in the threeacculturation factors: one, although the artworks did raise the sympathy level of the respondents towards migrant outgroups, the works were unable to prod them into critical self-evaluation or action; second, owing to the perceived shortcomings of the medium used, the questionable quality of the paintings, and the inability of the respondents to relate to the theme, the respondents failed to capture the message of the artwork, and this vacuum was later filled by most respondents with a peripheral interpretation of the medium-object combine. The data showed that both the explanations are equally valid.

On the other hand, some respondents admitted that they did not even notice the art exhibition, despite the fact that the display was organized in a high human traffic area for a month. It is possible that they sub-consciously avoided an appointment with the display, in view of the possible cognitive dissonance that the artworks would have produced (Festinger, 1957). An artwork involving migrant workers was thus taken to be immediately unappealing to the respondents’ personal tastes, repellent to their sense of aesthetics and seemed to produce cognitive dissonance in them. While those who took time to watch the exhibition struggled to reconcile the object of art depiction (the core message) with the quality of the medium/depiction (the peripheral details), those who did not watch the exhibition failed to reflect on both the aspects.

“But for me I’m not a very arty-farty person so I don’t do museums and whatever to go and, you know, appreciate.”

“You have people interested in advertising... if you put something of our interest we would stop and look lah. But for art, erm maybe not a lot of people are interested so they won’t really spend time.”

While the art exhibition in the open space failed to generate attention among some respondents, they contended that they were open to art displays in other mediums.

“I don't think you need to go to museums to like look at art like that. There is art everywhere, you know, art online...”

Visual art available on online spaces like deviantart, flickr and tumblr had high rate of reception among the respondents, which partly described their lack of attention for the art display in the offline space. In addition to selective exposure, a peripheral route of elaboration would have acted against the respondents' comprehension of the message.

We propose the following recommendations to make the campaigns on social integration effective: Firstly, if social integration campaigns can be buttressed with face-to-face interactions between disparate groups and communities, they are likely to produce better results. This will help generate constant pressure and motivation on the respondent to engage with the core message of any such campaign. As suggested by one of the respondents: *“something that will empower, something more powerful enough to empower us to do something about it. Maybe that's the kind of art pieces we are looking for.”* Secondly, online platforms have more credibility and appeal among youth in comparison to traditional open space exhibitions. Hence, the potential of online media needs to be tapped into while designing campaigns for the youth.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research was to understand how acculturation of the local communities with migrants occurs and to find the possible methods to enhance the process of social integration. This research has made three contributions to current theory and research. Firstly, we have shown that art campaigns are less effective to convey the message of social integration among the urban youth accustomed as they are to new media. In the case of undergraduates, the art campaign could only appeal to their peripheral evaluative capacities, without motivating them to assess the core themes in a message. In other words, the attitudinal change, effectuated by the art campaign, could only reduce sense of national identity among the Singaporean undergraduates and did not make any changes in their perceived negative consequences of immigration and

multicultural ideology. Further, as revealed by the qualitative findings, attitudinal change in national identity was less likely to trigger any corresponding action among the students helping mitigate the issues related to migration and social integration.

Second, the study showed how important it was to have host society's ego-involvement in issues like migrant welfare in order for it to take note of messages involving the migrant population. This is in tune to the results of a study on smokers, wherein people who low personal involvement with the theme had responded to the peripheral cues rather than to the central ones of the anti-smoking messages (Kosmidou, Theodorakis, & Chroni, 2008). Similarly, the study showed that in order to overcome the challenges of selective exposure, it is important to have messages that can engage audience at higher levels of cognition and perception. Longer duration art campaigns can alleviate the problem of selective exposure to a large extent.

Finally, the study cautions against the use of visual art with interpretative opportunities in promotional campaigns. There is always a fine balance between artist's creativity and the lucidity of message, especially for communication campaigns. Specificity of messages will be lost if promotional campaigns allow free-play of artistic creativity. The study showed that if the subject matter does not have personal relevance to the viewers, they are likely to go by peripheral cues at the expense of losing sight of the broad theme altogether. Consequently, it possibly becomes necessary to adopt additional interactive mediums and face-to-face sharing sessions that can bring disparate groups together for greater social integration.



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