Diversity, Ethnicity and Consumption
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Abstract: This paper aims to examine diversity and identity issues from a marketing perspective. The traditional marketing practice of segmenting markets could be viewed as the antithesis of diversity as it relies on identifying homogenous characteristics of a population. It is uneconomical and generally less effective to market to a broad range of consumers than to do so for a specific group with homogenous characteristics. However, segmentation is not possible without diversity. Segmentation requires the presence of substantial differences in consumer characteristics and behaviour in a population to be truly effective. Marketing and its relationship to diversity, however, extends beyond segmentation and into issues of an individual's sense of identity and belonging. The literature suggests that an individual's identity is expressed through consumption and this can include ethnic identity. With an increasingly diverse, multicultural society in many countries, it is timely to look more closely at cultural identity and its relationship to consumption. Hofstede's work on cultural characteristics inherent in a particular country, continue to be widely used in international business. However, cultural identity and characteristics attributed to individuals in their country of birth may change when they immigrate to another country. Acculturation in a host country affects how immigrants see themselves and wish to be perceived. This can be problematic for marketers attempting to segment and reach consumers on the basis of their ethnicity. If consumption is an expression of identity as the literature suggests, then marketing has a role to play in either influencing or responding to issues of diversity and identity in the population at large. This paper examines the current literature on consumption, consumer behaviour and ethnic identity.

Keywords: Ethnic identity, Diversity and market segmentation, Consumption and ethnicity

Introduction

Traditional marketing practices, such as segmentation, could be viewed as having an inverse relationship to the concept of diversity. Segmentation aims to identify individuals on the basis of similar characteristics (such as values and beliefs) to form homogenous groups that allow product offerings to be presented and delivered in the most cost effective way. However, diversity is also important for segmentation purposes. Segmentation requires the presence of substantial differences in consumer characteristics and behaviour in a population to be truly effective.

The concept of identity has a much more complex relationship with marketing. While marketing practices seek to use consumer identity as a variable when attempting to segment a diverse market, they also have a role to play in the formation of identity, including ethnic identity.

The characteristics that comprise ethnic (or cultural) identity have been the subject of ongoing attention by researchers. Personality, values and beliefs have been the main constructs used to identify unique characteristics of particular ethnic groups. The work of Geert Hofstede and Shalom Schwartz has contributed significantly to cross-cultural studies in these areas.

However, the ability to apply country specific characteristics to values, personality and beliefs has always presented challenges to researchers in terms of the validity and equivalence of the measuring instruments used. An increase in immigration and therefore, diversity within many countries presents new challenges to researchers that have not been addressed in any great detail by cross-national studies of ethnicity.

Increasing diversity is a global trend that is reflected in population statistics from Australia, Canada, the UK and the USA. For example Table 1 shows the increase in the proportion of permanent ethnic residents in these countries over the 1990s and into the 2000 era (the actual year in which statistics were obtained are in parenthesis):
Table 1: Increase in Proportion of Permanent Ethnic Residents by Country

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>% of ethnic residents - 1990’s era</th>
<th>% of ethnic residents - 2000 era</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

1 While the proportion of immigrants in the Australian population has barely changed, the composition of nationalities has become more diverse, and so too has their reasons for migrating (ABS & Hugo 2002).

Immigration is accompanied by acculturation processes that affect the way in which immigrants perceive their ethnic identities. Uni-dimensional theories of acculturation assume that immigrants will relinquish aspects of their previous culture in exchange for new cultural paradigms in their host country. However, recent times have seen the emergence of hybrid, bicultural individuals who are more inclined to retain their original cultural framework and switch between their ethnic identity and those of their host country as the situation warrants.

This can be problematic for marketers attempting to segment consumers in multicultural communities on the basis of their ethnicity.

The purpose of this paper is to present a synopsis of current issues in relation to consumption and ethnicity, in particular:

- Consumption as an expression of identity,
- Ethnic identity,
- Cross cultural research issues,
- Acculturation and its effect on ethnic identity, and
- Ethnicity as a variable for segmentation.

Definitions

Pires (1999), highlights problems with the interchangeable nature of terminology applied to ethnicity and cultural studies. Indeed the research examined in this paper uses the terms ethnicity, culture, cultural, multicultural and cultural diversity in the same context. Culture is considered to be a loose, fuzzy concept that is difficult to define (Pressey & Selassi 2002). However, Schönpflug (2001a) offers a concise and uncomplicated definition, ‘The term cultural may apply to traits acquired by any process of non genetic transmission, whether by imprinting, conditioning, observation, imitation, or as a result of direct teaching’ (Schönpflug 2001a:131).

The term ethnicity is closely related to culture but includes a genetic aspect, ‘in simple terms, ethnicity can be viewed as a characteristic of racial group membership on the basis of some commonly shared features. Ethnicity can also be described in terms of biological makeup of individuals and the extent to which genetic factors play a role in conveying aspects of ethnicity, including consumption behaviour’ (Aaker 1999, in Jamal 2003).

Weber (1960) serves to illustrate the circular nature of these definitions when describing ethnic groups as ‘those human groups that entertain a subjective belief in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of custom or both, or because of memories of colonisation and immigration, for example, culture’ (Weber 1968, in Lindridge & Dibb 2002:272).

Consumption as an Expression of Identity

Kozinets (2002) provides a broad definition of consumption as ‘the many human acts that people perform as they interact with the material world around them’ (Kozinets 2002:24).

According to O’Cass and McEwen (2004) the acquisition of material goods is considered to be one of the strongest measures of social success and achievement. These markers of social standing can be displayed conspicuously, to visually represent status [referred to as conspicuous consumption] (O’Cass & McEwen 2004) or serve a more underlying purpose of securing friendships and social acceptance (O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy 2002). An individual’s identity can also be expressed through the symbolic meaning of their material possessions and how they choose to relate to them (Dittmar 1992, in O’Cass & McEwen 2004) (Lindridge & Dibb 2002; O’Shaughnessy & O’Shaughnessy 2002).

The role of consumption in shaping identity and consumer behaviour has not been without criticism, particularly the level of materialism exhibited by consumers (Pachauri 2002). That is, the ‘importance a consumer attaches to worldly possessions’ (Berk 1985, in Eastman et al. 1997:54), and ‘judging own and other’s success by the number and quality of possessions accumulated’ (Richins & Rudmin 1994, in Eastman et al. 1997:54).

Dysfunctional behaviour such as shoplifting has been attributed to materialism (Tonglet 2001), along with the undermining of traditional values of work and citizenship (Stevenson 2002). From this perspective, the individualistic nature of materialism can be
perceived as being at odds with collective values such as family or religious values (Burroughs et al. & Rindfleisch 2002).

However, the perceptions of consumption related behaviour are reported to be influenced by cultural value systems (Burroughs et al. 2002; Lindridge & Dibb 2002). Some countries, adopt a more positive outlook to consumption perceiving the acquisition of possessions as empowering and self-enhancing (Burroughs et al. 2002).

The degree of status attributed to various products differs across cultures, depending on the meaning attached to the item (Belk 1988 in Eastman et al. 1997). The importance of meaning in consumption is closely aligned with ethnic identity, as a study of the consumption experiences of British Pakistanis illustrates:

‘Consumption of ethnic products, such as food and clothes, retained a sense of belonging to their ethnic group (identifiable with the difference-identity principle), while ownership of consumer durables was deemed as establishing links with British Caucasians...British Pakistanis’ buyer behaviour, in this situation, appears to be directly affected by their sense of ethnic identity’ (Jamal & Chapman 2000, in Lindridge & Dibb, 2002:272).

Ethnic Identity

Jamal (2003) presents two perspectives on identity. The first suggests that it is a complex internal process involving cognition, emotion and knowledge, whereas the second proposes that individuals construct their own identity by drawing on ‘heterogeneous elements taken from a diversity of cultural representations and practices’ (Jamal 2003: 1602).

Jasinska-Lahti & Liebkind (1996) suggest that ethnic identity requires an individual to firstly, label themselves as being of a particular ethnicity and to subsequently identify with others of the same ethnic group (Jasinska-Lahti & Liebkind 1999:527).

Domains that have been used to identify ethnic identity include:

• Language use and proficiency in the culture concerned (Laroche et al. 1996; Tsai et al. 2000);
• Affiliation with others of the same cultural/ethnic group (Laroche et al. 1996; Tsai et al. 2000);
• Participation in cultural related activities that represent the cultural group (Laroche et al. 1996; Tsai et al. 2000);
• Pride in being a member of the cultural group (Laroche et al. 1996; Tsai et al. 2000);
• Preference for the food of the particular cultural group (Laroche et al. 1996; Tsai et al. 2000);
• Spouse ethnic identity (Laroche et al. 1996; Nauck 2001);
• Mass media usage in the language of the culture (Laroche et al. 1998)
• Physical representations of the culture (objects, artefacts) (McIntosh et al. 2002); and
• Level of emotional attachment to icons representing the culture (Fung 2001; McIntosh et al. 2002).

The ethnic labels that an individual attributes to themselves are relatively enduring (Jasinska-Lahti & Liebkind 1999). However, the meaning attributed to that identity can change substantially over time (Phinney 1990) and the degree to which individuals consider themselves to have an ethnic identity can vary dramatically from one individual to another (Chung & Fischer 2001).

From a marketing perspective, the value of identifying the ethnicity of consumers lies in the ability to predict the consumption and buying behaviour of a group of individuals who share the same ethnic characteristics. Being able to do so increases the effectiveness of marketing communications and the ability to efficiently deliver product offerings to meet consumers’ needs.

The search for constructs that will allow consumer behaviour to be predicted is ongoing and the contribution of cross-cultural research in this regard is outlined in the next section.

Cross-cultural Research Issues

Personality type has long been considered a construct that can predict the behaviour of individuals. MacDonald (1998) presents an evolutionary perspective purporting that personality has evolved to suit the demands of local geographical environments over time. Thus, personality characteristics will differ according to geographical origins (MacDonald 1998).

Personality tests have been used to predict the behaviour of individuals and groups that share the same personality characteristics or traits. The most popular personality model, known colloquially as The Big Five, is based on the premise that the structure of personality can be reduced to five dimensions: Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism (Emotional stability) and Openness to change (experience) (Paunonen et al. 1996; Allik et al. 2004).

Equivalence of Measuring Instruments

The popularity of the Big Five, and personality test derivatives such as the NEO Personality Inventory (Costa & McCrae, 1985, 1992, in Paunonen 1996) may be related to its ability to transcend a variety of cultural differences in administration of the measur-
ing instrument and interpretation of results. Church & Lonner (1998), commenting on the value of cross-cultural personality tests conclude, ‘Considerable strides have been made in operationalizing the diffuse concept of culture in terms of selected cultural dimensions (e.g., individualism-collectivism, and independent vs interdependent self-construals)’ (Church & Lonner 1998:49).

Many researchers emphasize the importance of equivalence issues in quantitative cross cultural research (Church & Lonner 1998; Caprara et al. 2000; Myers et al. 2000; Cervellon & Dube 2002; Spini 2003; Allik et al. 2004). Byrne & Campbell (1999) explain, ‘we cannot overemphasize the importance of having a solid understanding of one’s data. Such knowledge derives not only from the rigorous preliminary screening and analysis of data but also from the recognition of possible cultural differences’ (Byrne & Campbell 1999:571).

Problems arise when the instrument of measurement is merely translated into another language without due consideration of cultural differences. There are likely to be problems in the way the questionnaire may be understood, or in interpreting the causes of behaviour measured as they are unlikely to be the same for all countries (Chun-Tung Lowe 1998; Paunonen & Ashton 1998; Byrne & Campbell 1999; Chudry & Pallister 2001). Construct, measurement and scalar equivalence is required to ensure that these difficulties are addressed. Van de Vijer & Leung (1996, 1997; in Eid 2003) summarize the three types of equivalence required (construct, measurement and scalar) for a measurement instrument to be considered valid, and therefore, suitable for use in cross-cultural settings:

Construct (structural) equivalence means that the same construct is measured in different cultures. Construct equivalence implies that different items measuring the same construct are structurally related in the same way in different cultures. Measurement unit equivalence deals with the question of whether a measurement unit (e.g., difference between two scale scores) is equivalent between cultures. The assumption of scalar equivalence is fulfilled if the measurement unit equivalence holds and the origin of the scale does not differ between cultures (Van de Vijer & Leung 1996, 1997; in Eid et al. 2003:195).

While the Big Five personality test is reported to be valid in measuring cross-cultural differences, some dimensions relating to non-Western aspects of personality were not included. The subsequent development of the Chinese Personality Assessment Inventory (Cheung & Leung 1998) to assess fundamental Chinese values identified another two dimensions regarding personality: Social integration/Cultural inwardness, and Reputation/Social morality values (Church & Lonner 1998).

Response Bias

Tests developed in one country can fail to achieve their aims in other countries. This can be due to cultural differences in the way individuals respond to the measuring instrument (response bias). (Church & Lonner 1998; Paunonen & Ashton 1998; Caprara et al. 2000; Cheung & Rensvold 2000; Schwartz & Bardi 2001; Van Hemert et al. 2001; Byrne & Watkins 2003; Eid et al. 2003; Allik et al. 2004; Smith 2004; Van Herk et al. 2004; Johnson et al. 2005).

Response bias can result in the following respondent behaviour:

- A belief that a higher score is a better score
- A preoccupation with individual defects and deficiencies
- Agreeing or disagreeing with almost every statement on the instrument (Cheung & Rensvold 2000)

While some of these problems can be ameliorated in the questionnaire design stage (Paunonen & Ashton 1998; Cheung & Rensvold 2000; Chudry & Pallister 2001; Van Hemert et al. 2001), they still represent the potential for inappropriate labelling of ethnic groups for marketing purposes or for other applications involving ethnic groups.

Values & Beliefs Research

Values are considered to be important in guiding the behaviour of individuals (Chun-Tung Lowe 1998). Values research, in a cross-cultural sense, has been heavily influenced by Hofstede’s (1980) national dimensions of culture. Hofstede’s seminal work entailed the following five indices of culture that could explain work related values across many countries: Power distance, Uncertainty avoidance, Individualism/Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity and Long-term orientation/Short-term orientation (Hofstede 1980).

The Collectivist-Individualist constructs have been the most widely used (Church & Lonner 1998; Caprara et al. 2000; Merritt 2000; Benet-Martínez et al. 2003; Van Herk et al. 2004; Bond et al., 2004; Johnson et al. 2005) in a variety of international business contexts (Merritt 2000).

sequently proposed that countries attribute different levels of importance to these value dimensions (Schwartz and Bardi, 2001).

However these approaches to understanding differences between countries have their limitations. Kurman & Ronen-Eilon (2004) argue that while values are useful in understanding culture, they have less to do with the practical applications of the theory and therefore the 'concrete, mundane behaviour' of individuals (Kurman & Ronen-Eilon 2004:202). The use of social axioms, or general beliefs about the world, is an alternative approach that provides researchers with an understanding of the day to day interpersonal societal functioning of individuals within a culture (Leung & Bond 2002; Kurman & Ronen-Eilon 2004).

As the majority of values research has focused on a country by country level, it lacks the detail or the understanding of cultural differences at a local in-country level (Chung & Fischer 2001), hence the research interest in social axioms highlighted by Kurman (2004). Indeed, the increasingly multicultural nature of communities in some countries is having an impact on cross-cultural research. For example, cultural diversity found in Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, Hong Kong and the USA, may preclude these countries from further usefulness in cross-cultural research, as they are no longer homogenous enough to enable cross-cultural comparisons with other countries (Chung & Fischer 2001).

As the literature illustrates, the study of cross-cultural differences and ethnic identity is complex and increasingly so when immigration factors are also taken into account. Research suggests that cultural identity and characteristics attributed to individuals in their country of birth may change when they immigrate to another country. Acculturation in a host country affects how immigrants see themselves and wish to be perceived by others. Therefore, an understanding of the acculturation process is an essential prerequisite for understanding ethnic identity and cultural diversity issues in general.

**Acculturation and its Effect on Ethnic Identity**

Stevens et al. (2004) provides a succinct definition of acculturation as 'a process that entails contact between two cultural groups, resulting in numerous cultural changes in both parties. In effect, however, the contact experiences have much greater consequences for the non dominant group members' (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits 1936 in Stevens et al. 2004:689; Berry 2001, in Stevens et al. 2004:689).

Berry's (1992, 1997) seminal acculturation model is quoted frequently in the literature (Larocco et al. 1996; Nesdale et al. 1997; Ward & Rana-Deuba 1999; Chung & Fischer 2000; Euler et al. 2001; Ben-Shalom et al. 2003; Snauwaert et al. 2003). The model outlines four possible acculturation strategies can result in an immigrant either: Integrating, Assimilating, Segregating or Marginalizing. Immigrants orient their own acculturation process through their level of involvement with members of other [local] cultures. The decisions made by immigrants in this regard are heavily influenced by the level of acceptance from the receiving society (Nauck 2001).

The terms assimilation and integration used in acculturation models require definition. Assimilation refers to a displacement of an original ethnic identity and the adoption of characteristics of the host culture. Integration implies that the immigrant possesses knowledge and understanding of the host country but does not relinquish aspects of their own ethnic identity (Kurman & Ronen-Eilon 2004).

Berry's model assumes a linear path in which immigrants are willing to discard their previous culture. However a more recent Unique Behaviour Model proposes that unique cultural styles can emerge through a blending of the immigrants old culture and their host culture (Quester & Chong 2001).

A summary of acculturation studies by Berry (2001) helps to illustrate the complexities of factors influencing the acculturation process. Early uni-dimensional assimilation approaches to acculturation have fallen out of favour (Birmann & Trickett 2001), with researchers preferring a more flexible approach (Larocco et al. 1996; Larocco et al. 1998; Chung & Fischer 2000; Knafo & Schwartz 2001; Quester & Chong 2001; Ben-Shalom et al.; Horenczyk 2003; Davies & Fitchett 2004). This multi-dimensional approach purports that immigrants are likely to develop their own unique cultural styles through a blending of their old culture and the host culture (Wallendorf & Reilly 1983, in Chung & Fischer 2000; Quester & Chong 2001). The blending of cultural styles suggests that these consumers will respond differently to marketing approaches than other residents of the host country.

The influence of acculturation on ethnic identity extends beyond the immediate effects on immigrants and into successive generations.

**Transmission of Values**

According to Pires (1999), some of the original cultural values of immigrants are retained in the host country through a process of generational transmission. The degree of retention depends on parenting styles and the type of values involved (Pires 1999).

Constructs or domains that are most likely to be transferred include political values, religious beliefs and lifestyle, value orientations, and general points of view regarding social constructs (Schönpflug 2001b).
Bicultural Identity and Frame Switching

Researchers have recently identified the emergence of individuals who possess dual cultural identities that enable them to engage in cultural frame switching in which they ‘move between different cultural meaning systems in response to situation cues’ (Benet-Martinez et al. 2002:493).

Cultural frame switching takes place when a bicultural individual is in a situation that requires them to make a decision requiring either a collective or individualist frame of reference. The individual needs to decide which cultural frame they should operationalize to effect the action required (Hong et al. 2003).

Cultural frame switching is activated by priming bicultural individuals with cues that remind them of their ethnic identity. In a study involving the exposure of Chinese American bicultural students to Chinese or American icons, Hong et al. (2003) found that these cues would activate cultural frame switching only if the situation was appropriate for them to do so; if they felt that a Chinese approach was required to solve the problem (Hong et al. 2003).

Interestingly, as far back as 1996, ethnicity was considered to be a fluid concept in which ethnic boundaries were continually changing (Laroche et al. 1998). When recent increases in immigration are combined with acculturation processes and the emergence of bicultural individuals, ethnicity could be considered as more fluid than ever. ‘Consumers are likely to conform neither individually nor as a group to any one specific segment or a category’ (Jamal 2003:1614). This has significant implications for marketing.

Ethnicity as a Variable for Segmentation

As stated earlier in this paper, one of the main aims of segmentation is to predict the buying behaviour of a group of consumers with homogenous characteristics (Bickert 1997; Dibb 1999, in Lindridge & Dibb 2002).

The domains or basis commonly used to segment markets include:

- Measurable - capable of being measured (Pires 1999; Tonks 2001);
- Stable – relatively unchanged over time (Pires 1999; Tonks 2001);
- Substantial – of a size that would render them profitable for the efforts expended in reaching them (Pires 1999; Tonks 2001);
- Accessible – segments can be reached by marketing communications (Pires 1999; Tonks 2001); and

Research opinion suggests that segmentation on the basis of ethnicity, particularly within a single country is problematic for the following reasons:

- The actual behaviour of consumers cannot be attributed specifically to ethnicity as other factors such as demographics may be involved (Pires 1999; Johnson & Garbarino 2001; Lindridge & Dibb 2002);
- The experiences associated with acculturation are very individual and as such, the effects of acculturation are difficult to apply to homogenous groupings (Davies & Fitchett 2004);
- Cultural differences may not be as powerful in predicting behaviour as some have claimed (Pires 1999; Pressey & Selassi 2002);
- Equivalence problems are difficult to overcome (Chudry & Pallister 2001); and
- A conceptual framework relating to the behaviour of ethnic consumers needs to be developed first (Chudry & Pallister 2001; IJRM Editorial 2002).

Perhaps marketing efforts in relation to ethnicity should be aligned with non traditional practices such as Tribal Marketing (Cova & Cova 2002) and focusing on the Cosmopolitan consumer (Thompson & Tambyha 1999; Cannon & Yaprak 2002), as these methods may be better equipped to deal with the consumer of the future described by Jamal (2003) ‘in a multicultural marketplace, marketers and consumers of different ethnic backgrounds coexist, interact and adapt to each other. In doing so, consumers act as skilled navigators who frequently engage in culture swapping to sample the many tastes, themes and sounds of different cultures’ (Jamal 2003:1599).

Conclusion

This paper has presented a synopsis of current issues in relation to diversity, ethnicity and consumption, in particular:

- Consumption as an expression of identity,
- Ethnic identity,
- Cross cultural research issues,
Acculturation and its effect on ethnic identity, and
Ethnicity as a variable for segmentation.

The role of marketing in shaping identity through consumption has been discussed at length by researchers, usually with negative implications such as materialism and conspicuous consumption leading the way.

However, this is a simplistic view that does not reflect the true relationship between marketing practices, consumers and society in general. The relationship is complicated further when ethnicity is taken into account. Attempts to use ethnicity as a basis for traditional methods of segmentation are problematic due to the changeable nature of ethnic identity, the effects of acculturation and the emergence of bicultural individuals.

The future direction of marketing in light of these developments is unclear but it would be reasonable to suggest that issues of ethnicity, consumption and marketing are far from resolved. However, they do present interesting opportunities for further research.

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