Standardization or adaptation?

Ethnic marketing strategies through the eyes of practitioners and consumers in Flanders

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Abstract

Considering the growing interest of marketers to communicate with ethnic minority groups in an increasingly more diverse society and the limited empirical work on ethnic minorities as consumers, this study aims to explore the way in which ethnic marketing practices are perceived by both practitioners and ethnic minority consumers in Flanders. By means of structured in-depth interviews the opportunities and limitations of ethnic marketing in a small, though multi-ethnic, society are evaluated. On the one hand, the study shows that young adults with ethnic origins feel particularly positive about their recognition and inclusion as a 'new' target group in the market. On the other, both practitioners and ethnic minority consumers articulate their reservations about the economic benefits, the social impact and desirability of adjustments in advertising messages in order to target ethnic minority consumers.

Keywords: ethnic marketing, ethnic minorities, consumption, communication

Introduction

Due to several immigration flows in the 20th century, mainly consisting of guest workers, Belgium has become a country of integration, even though this was not recognized until recently. Today, besides the European (Dutch, French, Italian and Spanish) nationalities, the Moroccans (66,838) and Turks (29,603) represent the largest non-European communities in Flanders and Brussels. This increasing cultural diversity cannot only be observed in population figures, it is also apparent in the marketplace where the demands for certain products and services are being altered. Furthermore, the increasing buying power of ethnic groups has stimulated interest in ethnic marketing in Flanders. In order to appeal to a wider variety of consumers with increasing buying power and different ethnic-cultural backgrounds marketers might need to reconsider their

traditional segmentation and communication strategies to fulfill the changing and emerging needs of the consumer market (Wilkinson and Cheng, 1999).

However, fine-tuning the level of adjustment in marketing and communication to ethnic groups without losing ground among mainstream consumers remains the major challenge for marketers. On the one hand, standardized messages might not sufficiently appeal to ethnic minority consumers; on the other, advertisers might lose ground with mainstream consumers if too much adaptation is implemented. Furthermore, ethnic marketing strategies demand a certain knowledge of the specific norms and values of the target group, as communications might also yield opposite effects if cultural or religious sensitivities are not taken into account (Hofstede, 1998; Wilkinson and Cheng, 1999).

Although ethnic marketing strategies, often referred to as 'multicultural marketing' or 'black marketing', are well-known in the United States of America, these are far less common in European countries and regions such as Flanders. Several characteristics of Belgian society at large attribute to the limited number of successful practices and empirical studies in ethnic marketing. The relatively small groups of ethnic minorities in Flanders cannot be compared that easily to the numerically large groups of 'African Americans', 'Hispanics' and 'Asian Americans' in the US (Census, 2008). Compared to American standards, the Flemish market is not only a relatively small market, it is also very heterogeneous; comprising a variety of ethnic origins, generations, religions, values and lifestyles. Moreover, Belgium is a multilingual country with large French- and Dutch-speaking communities in Walloon and Flanders, plus a smaller German-speaking community. Not only does this mean that most advertisers have to develop communications in several languages, the sharp divisions between the communities in Belgium also complicate the processes of integration encountered by ethnic minorities, for instance, leading to identification with Belgium and/or with their community of residence (De Raedt, 2004).

Given the lack of direct empirical research to date, this exploratory study attempts to map the attitudes towards and perceptions of emerging ethnic marketing strategies in Flanders. Using in-depth interviews with practitioners as well as young adults from ethnic minority groups, this paper focuses on the opportunities and pitfalls in ethnic marketing. Based on the theoretical background in the next section and a brief description of the methodology, several questions are addressed: Do ethnic minority consumers have specific consumption needs thus making it useful to segment by ethnic origin? Do we need to adjust advertising communication? Finally, preliminary conclusions are drawn and sugges-

tions for marketing practitioners and researchers are given in order to come to a better understanding of emerging ethnic marketing practices in a demographically changing environment.

Theoretical background

In this study we look for cultural segmentation criteria and factors that determine the level of adjustment that is needed in marketing within a culturally diverse market. Doing so, we try to move beyond the traditional marketers' perspective on ethnic marketing strategies by examining the cultural meanings of consumption and the dynamic relationships between consumers and the marketplace. Therefore, the objectives of this study can be placed within consumer culture theory, as "*CCT explores the heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader sociohistoric frame of globalization and market capitalism*" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 869). Recent studies of ethnic consumer behavior (e.g. Peñaloza, 1994) have shown the complexity of targeting ethnic minority consumers by their socio-demographics, ethnic identification and product use, as consumers move between ethnic identities. So, in this section we first look into segmentation of consumer markets and more specific strategies within ethnic marketing practice. Then we will take a closer look at consumer acculturation and the role of culture-specific features such as generational differences and religion. Finally, some literature that translates cultural differences into communication preferences is briefly reviewed.

Ethnic marketing strategies

According to Belch and Belch (2004), the process of target marketing contains four basic steps: 1) identifying markets with unsatisfied needs; 2) segmenting these markets; 3) selecting segments and; 4) positioning the product or service. However, with the fragmentation of the consumer market (Prins, 2006) it is becoming more and more important to identify consumers with similar needs. The traditional segmentation techniques strictly based on socio-demographic features (e.g. gender, age and product usage) have therefore been complemented by psychographic research and segmentation by lifestyles (e.g. Vyncke, 2002). A focus on cultural-specific features might contribute to this, as general research on consumption and culture shows that culture influences lifestyle as well as consumer behaviors and attitudes (Cleveland and Laroche, 2007; Berkman, Lindquist and Sirgy, 1997; De Mooij, 2004; Pires and Stanton, 2000; 2002). However, segmentation of markets along cultural and eth-

nic lines is problematic as both ethnic groups and culture are hard to define. Although literature suggests that cultural values do manifest themselves through buyer behavior (Belk, 1984; McCracken, 1986; Mehta and Belk, 1991), the similarities in consumer behavior between ethnic groups often raise important issues regarding the feasibility of ethnic marketing strategies (e. g. Lindridge and Dibb, 2002).

Furthermore, ethnic marketing can be defined and applied in different ways ranging from total standardization (no modifications), advertising adaptation, product adaptation (e. g. cosmetics) to ethnic marketing, i. e. using a totally new marketing mix (e. g. ethnic food) (Cui, 1997). In order to find out which strategy should be followed, more information is needed on the demographics, media uses and consumer behaviors of different ethnic groups if marketers really want to see, hear, smell and feel what is going on in society. However, not all products (e. g. refrigerators) and services need to address ethnic minorities differently than they address majority consumers (Cui, 1997). It is argued that marketers do not necessarily have to adjust all elements in the marketing mix to speak of ethnic marketing; according to this view only adjusting advertising communications is also enough to be able to speak of 'ethnic marketing'.

In line with this René Romer (2002) has introduced three ethnic marketing approaches into Dutch marketing practice: '*Etnomarketing*', diversity marketing and urban marketing. Following the '*etnomarketing*' approach, companies adjust their products and/or services as well as their advertising messages to the specific characteristics and needs of cultural or ethnic groups, using either mainstream or ethnic media. Diversity marketing, as a more inclusive alternative, is gaining popularity. Where '*etnomarketing*' stresses the differences between ethnic groups, diversity marketing is looking for similarities that might bind different groups. Within the diversity marketing approach, ethnic minority groups are not looked at as a different segment, but as a part of the mainstream market. Urban marketing pays the least attention to ethnic cultural differences by placing a particular urban lifestyle at the center of the development of marketing communications. 'Urban' refers to metropolitan youth culture which we know from American suburbs and which has influenced youth cultures all over the world. Urban contains music styles (hiphop, rap, R'nB), street art (graffiti), break dancing, clothing and sports (skating, basketball and street soccer); but a clear definition is lacking (Romer, 2002).

Acculturation and religion in relationship to consumption

Acculturation refers to a process of cultural change that occurs when different cultures are in contact over a longer period of time (Berry,

2001). More specifically, this involves changes in the rituals and behaviors, and economic and political situations of different groups in society. In other words, the more the values and attitudes of immigrants become like those of the majority, the higher the level of acculturation (Laroche et al., 1997). Furthermore, it should be noted that acculturation is a process of mutual influence: Changes might occur within both majority and minority groups, although most changes are experienced by ethnic minorities (Berry, 2001). Assimilation occurs when all the values, attitudes and behaviors of the host country are incorporated by the minority. Research demonstrates that generational differences often determine the level of acculturation (Berry, 1997). This might help marketers to identify which ethnic minority consumers need specific attention in product development and communication strategies. Since many first-generation migrants have maintained most of their lifestyles from their country of origin, they often speak their mother-language and tend to prefer products that relate to their ethnic identity, they are well-served by ethnic marketing strategies. Second- and third-generation migrants are often raised, educated and integrated in the 'host' country and often seem assimilated. The latter show less interest in ethnic products and services, as they pursue the mainstream lifestyle, which makes them less attentive to ethnic marketing strategies and communications (Cui, 1997; Xu, et al., 2004). However, it must be noted that also mainstream products can be appropriated by ethnic consumers to express their ethnic identities, such as the use of brands as status symbols within specific ethnic communities (e. g. Luedicke and Giesler, 2008).

Religion is another concept which is strongly related to ethnic identity. Individual consumer behavior is often shaped by the religious convictions of the consumer (Bonne and Verbeke, 2008). This is particularly true for food consumption (Musaiger, 1993; Bonne and Verbeke, 2008). Of course, the impact of religion on consumption varies from religion to religion and in the degree to which the consumer practices his/her religion by following certain rituals and rules. For instance, Judaism and Islam prohibit pork and meat which is not ritually slaughtered, while in Hinduism and Buddhism taboos on pork and beef exist. Food prescriptions in Islam follow a set of dietary laws stipulated by the five pillars of Islam, which determine whether food is 'halal' (i. e. permitted) or 'haram' (alcohol, pork, blood, dead meat and meat which has not been slaughtered according to Islamic rules). Besides religious motives, also health, respect for animal welfare, religious identity, and the degree of acculturation also play a role in the adherence to religious dietary prescriptions (Bonne and Verbeke, 2008).

Culture and communication preferences

Both product preferences and communication preferences are shaped by cultural differences (De Mooij, 1998; Gudykunst, 1998; Hall, 1976; Singelis and Brown, 1995). In general we expect to find different communication preferences among different ethnic groups (cfr. Hall, 1976).

Various studies demonstrate that although minorities increasingly use mainstream media, ethnic media are complementary ingredients in the media menu of ethnic audiences (La Ferle and Lee, 2005; Jeffres, 2000; d'Haenens et al., 2004; d'Haenens and Gezduci, 2008). Apart from the general media usage, some studies have focused on the use of more specific types of communication among ethnic groups. Donthu and Cherian (1992), for example, demonstrate that cultural factors explain a great deal of Hispanics' coupon usage: Those with strong Hispanic identification use fewer coupons, because they are more brand loyal and have ethnic pride, in addition, they are less responsive to in-store marketing tactics. Other studies show that the placement of an ad (whether in mainstream or ethnic media) is important as well. It has been proven that black minorities develop more favorable attitudes towards black-oriented media and its contents than they do for mainstream media (Aaker, Brumbaugh and Grier, 2000; Appiah, 2001).

Although many minority groups, in particular those from the second and third generation, sufficiently speak the dominant language of the host country, studies have shown that minorities generally appreciate messages in the language of their home country (Hofstede, 1998; Cui, 1997). The message draws attention, of course, but even people who do not speak the language of the host country are engaged with the ad (Verheggen and Spangenberg, 2001). Therefore communicating in other languages might increase the involvement of ethnic minorities with the advertised product or service (Koslow, Shamdasani and Touchstone, 1994).

Other studies focus on the portrayal of ethnic minorities and involve their representation in mainstream media. Generally, an under-representation of ethnic minority groups as well as their stereotypical portrayal has been found (e. g. Bristor, Lee and Hunt, 1995; Henderson and Baldasty, 2003; Koeman, 2007). Moreover, the cultural cues (Bristor, Lee and Hunt, 1995) used in advertising are predominantly elements from a white and Western culture. Nevertheless, the inclusion of ethnic models in advertising occurs more often these days. In line with the identification theory (Kelman, 1961) studies point out that the perceived similarity positively affects the belief of the intended audience or target market (Aaker, Brumbaugh and Grier, 2000; Appiah, 2001). For instance, black people who strongly identify with black characters are more inclined to

believe they are the targeted audience for media with black characters and they evaluate these media more positively. In addition, this leads to a more favorable attitude towards the ad and the product too (Aaker, Brumbaugh and Grier, 2000). Research by Green (1999) found that people who strongly identify with their own culture also evaluate advertisements more positively when their group is clearly represented in the ad or when racial cues are incorporated (cfr. Holland and Gentry, 1997; 1999).

Research questions and samples

Samples

This paper contributes towards the growing body of marketing research that examines the opportunities to modify marketing strategies in the pursuit of ethnic minority consumers. In order to compare the visions of practitioners with the experiences and opinions of the ethnic minority consumer, two samples form the basis of this study.

So as to gain as much insight as possible from marketing practice, a range of experts, working in creative advertising agencies and media agencies was selected. A total of 16 advertising professionals from diverse agencies in Flanders and Brussels agreed to participate, including board members, strategic planners, account managers and creative directors.

In addition, young adults with diverse ethnic minority backgrounds were contacted through a snowball-method, which resulted in 20 interviews with young adults between 18 and 31 years old (average age 22.5) living in the various provinces of Flanders. Given the relative autonomy and independence of this age group, the young adults were expected to be more involved and aware of their own purchases and consumer decisions than other age groups. Furthermore, young adults with foreign backgrounds speak Dutch well enough (which is not always the case with older generations) to reflect on the consumer needs and preferences in their ethnic community. Most participants were female (65%) and half of them had university education or are currently enrolled. The consumer sample was not intended to be representative of ethnic minorities in Flanders; it rather aimed at ethnic diversity within the sample. Young adults from a variety of ethnic groups were interviewed as informants on their own communities, such as the Moroccan, Turkish, Congolese, Cape Verdean, Nigerian, Surinamese and Lebanese communities. The bulk of our sample consists of Moroccan ($n = 8$) and Turkish ($n = 4$) minorities, as they make up the numerically largest ethnic minority groups in Flemish society.

In both samples, interviews were carried out using similar interview guides devised from existing literature. All conversations took place in March and April 2008, had an informal and open character to ensure a deeper understanding, and lasted 45 minutes on average for the practitioners and 25 minutes for the young ethnic minority consumers. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed following the principles of grounded theory.

Research questions

First of all, we look for differences and similarities in consumer behavior among majority and minority groups to assess whether ethnic origin is a viable segmentation variable; in other words, whether it is feasible to speak of 'ethnic consumers' or not. To shed light on this first question, the specific needs of ethnic consumers are sought. For instance, the experts are asked whether they perceive differences between ethnic majority and minority members in their consumption; either in general, based on their expenditure or by religious conviction. Ethnic minority consumers are asked whether they see differences in their own (and their community's) consumption needs compared to the consumption patterns of Flemish consumers. Specific attention is paid to generational differences as the level of acculturation and religiousness often differ between first-, second- and third-generation migrants, and previous studies have shown the relevance of these cultural-specific features for consumer behavior.

Second, the communication preferences, such as the need for specific media or communication styles and formats, are assessed by both practitioners and ethnic consumers. Some questions focus on the media use of minority consumers as they are important to media planners in selecting the right media to find and reach ethnic groups. Other questions focus more on the execution of advertising messages; the use of different languages and ethnic minority models in advertising are expected to attract the attention of ethnic minority consumers and to positively affect their attitude towards an advertisement.

Third, the ideas behind more specific strategies within ethnic marketing – depending on the level of product or advertising adjustment – are evaluated by both consumers and practitioners who are provided with general descriptions of 'etnomarketing', diversity marketing and urban marketing strategies: "Etnomarketing specifically targets ethnic minorities and involves tailored communications. This demands a sound knowledge of the ethnic-cultural group as different groups may demand different approaches"; "Diversity marketing departs from the 'non-exclusion' principle, communicating to a wide and diverse audience (including ethnic minorities). This demands pre-testing of your communica-

tion materials with various groups”; and “Urban marketing appeals to a certain life goal and/or urban feeling that transcend ethnic origins. In many cases ethnic minorities are involved in the development of communications”.

To summarize, the following main research questions structure the results of this study:

1. Can ethnic origin be used as a market segmentation variable in Flanders?
2. Which communication preferences are identified as relevant to successful ethnic marketing communications?
3. Which level of standardization/adaptation is recommended by practitioners and ethnic minority consumers?

Results

The ethnic consumer does not exist

In line with previous research, it becomes clear that generalizations about ‘the’ ethnic consumer are unfeasible as the cultural-specific characteristics of consumers, such as their level of acculturation and religion, should be taken into account. According to the interviewed professionals as well as the young adults with ethnic backgrounds, it is this heterogeneity that makes it so difficult to come to clear-cut conclusions about differences and similarities between majority and minority groups.

Jan^{*1}: *“A target market with Maghreb origins (or any other ethnic group you can think of) entails such great diversity; though they share the same skin color, greater differences often exist among them than there are between them and white people”.*

Nevertheless, practitioners as well as ethnic minority consumers pointed out the existence of some ‘ethnic’ products and services, in particular special packages in mobile telephony (i. e. Ay Yildiz and Ilaycom) were mentioned that make cheaper phone calls to the country of origin possible. Most ethnic minority consumers confirm the use of certain ‘ethnic’ products, mainly for utilitarian reasons, although others also point out other (more emotional) consumer motives, such as indulging nostalgia or maintaining bonds with the country of origin. Some respondents, like Meryem, even point out a direct link between their consumer behavior and their ethnic identity:

Meryem^Δ: *“Very much [attracted by ethnic products], since there’s a connection you can not refute. Even though I was born here, I directly notice them as they belong to my personality”.*

Generational differences

It follows that generational differences have to be taken into account when it comes to affiliations with the country of origin and the country of residence. In general the practitioners believe that first, second and third generation immigrants are characterized by different consumer behaviors, but they also admit a lack of knowledge to confirm this feeling.

Tim*: *“Anyway, we are dealing with generations which are not assimilated and generations which are assimilated, speak the language, know the local culture ... So, that’s why it so hard to find proper segmentation criteria ...”*

Ethnic minorities themselves are not in agreement about their preferences for cultural products. According to the young adults in the interviews, the first generation seems more interested in products from the country of origin and the ethnic origin of the people who sell these, while they themselves have less interest in product origin. However, it must be noted that respondents were specifically asked about the use of ethnic products and differences in consumption patterns compared to majority consumers. Therefore, the adoption of mainstream products to express ethnic identities, as shown in other studies, was not addressed by our interviewees.

Karim^Δ: *“I would not say that I would go to a store because it is run by a Moroccan. I would rather go there because it offers some personal advantages. For instance, they are better informed or know more about my backgrounds. Therefore they can make me better offers tailored to my personal needs and demands”.*

Thus, before deciding on their strategies marketers should be aware of the level of acculturation of their target groups, because ethnic bonds with the country of origin and its culture are important to ethnic minority consumers and influence the way they look at products, brands and advertising. Defining ethnic groups by ethnic origin alone is not sufficient as we will see later on too.

Religion as an ethnic marker

In addition to the level of acculturation, our respondents with ethnic backgrounds confirm that religion is one of the most important factors behind the consumption of ethnic products, as their religion offers guidelines for the way they should live their lives. In particular the consumption of food was addressed by Muslims:

Yasmina^Δ: *“Depending by which religion you live, there are differences [in consumption] ... if I look at Muslims who need to nourish themselves with halal food, marketing strategies should be adjusted to that ...”*

Emre^Δ: *“Well, yes ... Because we are culturally different and I do believe that this influences our consumption. Also by religion, of course, that shapes our consumption too: For instance, halal meat”.*

Consequently, practitioners consider religion as a more useful marker than ethnic origin. For them Islam unites a large group of different ethnic groups and it provides specific opportunities, such as travels to Mecca, which was pointed out by a practitioner with Moroccan roots:

Saïd*: *“Considering that Muslims should undertake the pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in a life-time and that this involves large expenses ... I mean, traveling to Mecca is a long-distance travel with many related activities and rituals at the site. This creates opportunities for tour operators to organize certain ‘all-in packages’. I see a future in that”.*

Besides the marketing of ‘halal’ food and travels to Mecca, the promotion of specific financial products related to ‘zakat’ (charity)², was mentioned. It becomes clear that religion can serve as an important marker for consumption, but only for a limited range of product categories. This leaves few opportunities for ethnic marketing by religion and calls for a deeper knowledge of religious convictions and rituals as well as a lot of creativity in product development.

Advertising communication preferences

Although most consumers and practitioners argue that adjusted communication is not always needed, several considerations are brought up to recommend adjusted communication. These particularly relate to the language proficiency of ethnic minorities, their media uses and the identification with ethnic models in advertising.

Language: Lost in translation?

There is general agreement that messages in the language of the country of origin at least attract attention, even if your first language is Dutch. Furthermore, adaptation of the language is seen as particularly practical for older generations who still wish to communicate in the language of their country of origin.

Karim^Δ: *"... I fluently speak a Berber language, which does not really exist as a written language, so it would be difficult to use [in advertising]. Arabic does not apply to me, but it would be ideal for the older generation that does not speak Dutch. It would be easier for everyone if you can choose between both languages: Arabic and Dutch".*

Meryem^Δ: *"Yes, it is always funny, when you are in Belgium and you read something in Turkish. I believe that is attractive ... Well, we do look selectively at things, and I immediately notice those things. If there is a small sentence in Turkish, no matter how small it is, I will notice it immediately, because that is the connection to my home country and my mother tongue. You also pay attention to it longer, like 'mmmh ... why is that written in Turkish?' And you also have, yes, more interest in that particular product".*

For practitioners language is one of the concerns in designing successful campaigns, particularly in Belgium this is a difficult and expensive job, as the country consists of a Dutch-speaking and a French-speaking region (besides a small, and often neglected, German-speaking region). This disadvantage is already apparent in communicating with majority groups in Belgium, let alone for communicating with ethnic minorities who speak different languages. Although communication in different languages is expensive and minorities are often expected to learn the language of the host country, translations are deemed necessary in some cases (particularly in non-profit and informational campaigns).

Wim*: *"Once we have selected the media channels, we decide on which language to use ... we communicate in two languages: Dutch French and their mother tongue. We believe migrants should be open to our culture and that they should learn our language over time. We also know that many of them find this difficult and that they feel more comfortable with their own language, therefore we also provide print media in their language: Turkish, Moroccan[-Arabic], Chinese, Romanian, and Russian ..."*

Saïd*: *"In ethnic marketing one should not only pay attention to the classical P's (product, place, etc ...). In addition, a person who speaks the language and knows it inside-out should be involved. For instance, for a native Arabic-speaker it is quite evident to point out mistakes or sensitive issues in campaigns, but you will have to find the right person to do so".*

Here we find diverging opinions between practitioners and ethnic consumers when it comes to language use. Although ethnic minorities find the choice between Dutch/French and their own language appealing and in particular for first generation migrants, practitioners are reluctant to provide campaigns in different languages for the extra translation costs or the recruitment of ethnic personnel.

The need for simplicity and proximity in media and messages

Due to the small market, few ethnic media exist in Flanders leaving limited possibilities for the development of ethnic media, such as separate magazines or television channels and for ethnic marketing campaigns.

Ingrid*: *"I fear that ethnic media are far too expensive for such a small market. Ethnic magazines and television channels are not profitable, although new media, like www.KifKif.be [a multicultural portal website], might offer some possibilities to reach [ethnic] youth ..."*

In our interviews both consumers and practitioners generally believe that the media uses of minority and majority consumers are similar nowadays. The two main distinctions between majority and minority groups addressed by our respondents are (1) the use of specific channels that are physically close to the ethnic consumer; and (2) the comprehensiveness of the content. In other words, proximity and simplicity are two key factors.

Wim*: *"Well you notice that we, the majority, are tremendously influenced by posters, commercials, print ads, direct mailing, you name it ... All the typical marketing tools. In contrast, ethnic communities are more fond of proximity, all things close to them ... Finding a leaflet or a brochure in their own shops is therefore more effective than putting out large posters in the street ..."*

Karim^Δ: *"... advertisers should not place ads in upscale or difficult magazines; the difficulty level has to be low. So yes, it has to be easy*

and foremost it has to circulate in their area, where they are. For instance it is better to advertise on television and in mosques etc., than in newspapers”.

Identification with ethnic diversity in advertising

Although ethnic minorities are more often portrayed these days, a need for more frequent and more positive images of ethnic minorities remains desirable (Taylor and Stern, 1997; Knobloch-Westerwick and Coates, 2006). As long as advertising messages are too far from (their) reality, minority groups will not be able to identify with the advertised product or brand. It might even lead to unfavorable attitudes or rejection (Cui, 1997; Pires and Stanton, 2000; 2002; Romer, 2002; Wilkinson and Cheng 1999). The responses of most ethnic minority consumers support the finding that ethnic advertising models have stronger appeals to ethnic minorities. The inclusion of ethnic models is particularly important because it offers a feeling of being acknowledged by advertisers; it helps them to identify with the product and it recognizes their bonds to their country of origin.

Yves*: *“Marketing communication is becoming a part of popular culture. So if that culture is diverse, then our communication strategies should reflect diversity as well”.*

Anne^Δ: *“I believe it [the inclusion of ethnic minority models in advertising] is important: finding yourself in it, the feeling of being represented”.*

However, it should be noted that the type of product often remains a determining factor; the use of ethnic models is the most effective for ‘race-based’ products (Green, 1999). One out of four of the ethnic consumers stress the importance of the product in relation to the use of ethnic models. If the product is specifically targeted at ethnic minorities, then the use of ethnic models is legitimate in their eyes. By contrast, if it involves mainstream products, targeting majority and minority consumers, then the ethnic origin of advertising models is trivial.

Evaluation of ethnic marketing strategies

Although some consumers are rather positive about ‘etnomarketing’, practitioners mainly question the success of such strategies, because it does not work for all ethnic minority consumers. In addition, ethnic

consumers have several reasons for disliking this strategy too. In a sense they do not like being labeled and addressed by their ethnic origins or the language they speak. Especially not, when one tries to assimilate to the host culture:

Mehmet^Δ: *“Ethnic minorities will feel addressed by it, because it is in their own language and it refers to their own culture ... language and culture are very important to us. Even though the Belgian nationality is written on my passport, I feel more like a Turkish boy. Yes, we are rather proud of our country and culture, and yes we would feel more appealed by our own advertisements”.*

Jan*: *“... I believe a lot of ethnic minorities are struggling with their identities and for some of them it [etnomarketing] will be some sort of recognition, because it refers to certain values. Others might reject it as something they do not want to be associated with anymore”.*

Linda^Δ: *“They should not focus too much on foreigners in a sense of giving in to the wants and needs of minorities. You are abroad with a certain purpose; you are not in Belgium to play the Surinamese, that’s just not possible. If I would like to do that, I should stay in Surinam instead of here. Okay, I do understand that a lot of people came here to build a better life, but ... adjustment can do no harm”.*

Some consumers consider this categorization process the most negative aspect of ‘etnomarketing’, since it is so strongly focused on differences between ethnic groups in society that stereotypes are maintained. In line with this, Chetkow-Yanoov (1999) has argued that ‘etnomarketing’ might even raise barriers between majority and minority groups in society or even contribute to intolerance among mainstream consumers, as they realize they have to share their country with other ethnic groups.

Emre^Δ: *“If they focus too much on the differences of a specific target group, they also start to stigmatize. The boundary is hard to define”.*

Yasmina^Δ: *“If there are ads with ethnic minorities, then the most ridiculous clichés are used. When I am thinking of a Muslim for instance, then I think of a long beard and a turban ... really, some characteristics are exaggerated, which leads to counter-effects”.*

Mehmet^Δ: "... if advertisers also start to make Turkish advertisements, those [xenophobic] people will feel threatened ... I often hear people around me say: 'when we are treated in a special way, they have a problem with it'. With advertising in Turkish they will feel injured even more".

Both practitioners and ethnic consumers consider the second strategy, diversity marketing, as the most effective and appropriate in the current Flemish context. Practitioners believe that a further acculturation of ethnic minority and majority consumers in the long run will make 'ethno-marketing' redundant. Ethnic consumers however stress that an inclusive approach leaves them with more freedom to give their own meanings to consumer products and advertising messages in accordance to their ethnic identities at that time.

Meryem^Δ: *"I prefer pointing out similarities, because blending in actually is the most important thing we are trying to achieve. Integration is very important as well as maintaining our own personalities. Diversity marketing might contribute to this"*.

Finally, some practitioners believe that references to urban feelings and lifestyles exceed ethnic lines and might therefore provide ways of reaching both majority and minority youth. However, it is noted by one of our interviewed ethnic consumers that an urban marketing strategy might be based on stereotypical images and therefore cause unintended effects.

Linda^Δ: *"on the one hand [urban marketing] is okay as it involves black and white youth; on the other hand it looks as if black youngsters are only good at sports. And that's it. You will never see a black boy portrayed as a math nerd or something like that, he will always be typecast for sports ..."*

Regardless of the strategy, increasing ethnic diversity in advertising always risks using stereotypical imagery. Bringing more 'color' into advertising does not guarantee positive perceptions of advertising by minority consumers. Future research should shed more light on which cues are at play in the identification process between consumers and the advertising models they are confronted with. Both qualitative research methods and quantitative experiments can contribute to the assessment of the effectiveness of various advertising strategies and the similarities and differences between majority and minority groups.

Discussion

Both ethnic diversity and the buying power of ethnic groups are increasing in Flanders, leading to a growing need for effective intercultural communication in both public and private sectors. However, ethnic minority groups stand out in their absence in marketing plans. Based on a general lack of knowledge and the fear of making mistakes, practitioners are reluctant to address this issue. Many marketers see ethnic minorities as a 'minefield' in which the smallest misstep can have major consequences for the effectiveness of their campaigns (Romer, 2002; Blanton, 1993; Lynn, 1995). Practitioners are confronted with unpredictable reactions to different levels of adjustment in marketing strategies and ethnic marketing strategies remain controversial: On the one hand, minority groups might be offended by the lack of knowledge of their specific needs and values, while, on the other hand, the majority group might not approve communications targeted at ethnic minority groups, for instance in a different language. Although ethnic minority groups do have differing consumption needs, few 'ethnic' products are actually appealing to them. Only products that strongly relate to religious convictions seem to be suitable for strict ethnic marketing strategies as defined by Cui (1997), i.e. adjustment of both product and advertising. Segmentation by ethnic origin alone is clearly not sufficient, as other cultural-specific features, such as religion and various degrees of acculturation among first- and second-generation migrants turn out to be more important markers for the consumer behavior of ethnic minorities. The small scale of the Flemish market further limits the economic possibilities of '*ethno-marketing*' too. However, the results on communication preferences point out that actually few adjustments in communications are needed, in particular for second-generation migrants since most of them speak Dutch and show higher levels of acculturation. This does not mean that their roots may be overlooked. Ethnic minorities' attention is still attracted by words and symbols from their mother tongue or other cultural cues referring to their bonds with the country of origin. Consequently, both practitioners and ethnic consumers tend to prefer less rigid forms of ethnic marketing, i.e. diversity and urban marketing strategies. An inclusive approach may not only be recommended to deal with the diversity among ethnic minority groups, but also to the heterogeneity within Belgian society as a whole, where different cultural identities exist between the Flemish, Walloon and Brussels communities. Although more ethnic diversity in advertising is generally advocated to enhance integration and tolerance in society, some critical notes to the increased portrayal of ethnic minorities have to be made as well. The fear of counter-effects, as indicated by practitioners, is well-founded as it was

confirmed in our interviews with young adults with ethnic backgrounds. Overall, the dilemma of standardization versus adjustment of both services/products and communications remains: In order to find the right balance, marketers should not be afraid to “go out there” and get in touch with their target market. Focusing on similarities, without neglecting ethnic differences seems to be the current challenge in Flemish marketing practice. The education and recruitment of ethnic minorities in advertising and communication agencies might be a first step in reducing the chance of blundering and will at least take away a lot of the existing insecurity among practitioners.

It is impossible to formulate clear-cut guidelines that are applicable to all cases in the emerging ethnic marketing practice from this exploratory study. To further disentangle the paradox of standardization versus adaptation (attracting ethnic minorities without scaring off majority consumers) this study should be complemented with other samples of both majority and minority consumers, taking different age groups, generations and ethnic origins into account. The use of different media and information sources in the consumer decision process should also be examined further, as our results suggest the relative importance of word-of-mouth and other sources next to mainstream media and advertising within ethnic minority communities. On a more conceptual level, further research should also try to come to clearer definitions of the meaning and use of ethnic marketing strategies in European advertising practice, as many concepts, such as ‘ethnomarketing’, diversity marketing, urban marketing and multicultural marketing are in use. Comparing good and bad practices in different countries by means of content analyses might be a first step to grasping what ethnic marketing entails in Europe. Besides a better understanding of advertising practice, the personal and collective meaning of consumption for consumers should remain on the research agenda as well. For instance, the importance of nostalgia in the motivations of ethnic minority consumers seems relevant to examine. Currently, further research is being conducted on the advertising beliefs and attitudes of ethnic minority and majority youngsters in Flanders, to examine the role of cultural-specific and socio-demographic features in their perceptions of advertising strategies, such as humor, erotic imagery and ethnic or cultural representations in advertising. It is argued that a combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods can substantially contribute to our empirical knowledge; by embracing different methodologies such as interviews, focus groups, surveys and content analyses more voice can be given to consumers within global and multicultural markets and consumer culture theory can be further developed.

Notes

1. Quotations of practitioners are indicated with *, while ethnic minority consumers are referred to by the symbol ^A.
2. The word 'zakat' refers to one of the five pillars of Islam and encompasses the rule of setting aside a proportion of possessions for those in need as well as the voluntary giving of alms ('sadaqa').

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