ETHNIC IDENTITY: UNDERSTANDING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES WITHIN A CULTURE

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Given the global nature of the present marketplace, and its accompanying complex multi-ethnic markets, one of the challenges faced by marketers involves understanding the different layers of cultural differences in order to better serve the resulting varying consumer segments. The purpose of this study is to take an important first step in gaining this understanding by exploring ethnic identity within the context of a single ethnic group in the U.S. market. By approaching ethnic identity using four ethnic segments (assimilated, ethnic, biculturals, and marginalizers), this study explores variation across these segments. Managerial implications and suggestions for future research are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary culture in developed nations is increasingly multi-ethnic and complex with overlapping boundaries and loyalties (Cohen 1978; Padilla 2006). Ethnic groups in developed nations continue to grow, with eighty percent of persons claiming ethnic ancestry from one of over 105 ethnicities within the United States alone (Census Online 2008). Culture connects people at multiple levels (material, ideological, and normative), reflects a group's worldview, and impacts attitudes and behavior (McCracken 1989). Yet culture is a multi-faceted construct. Within the marketing literature it has been defined in a number of ways (cf. Herskovitz 1948; Hofstede 1983; Keillor and Hult 1999), but it is generally accepted that a given culture is represented by a set of values. However, these values are intangible and open to multiple interpretations as well as being subject to change over time. In short, culture is clearly a fundamentally important theoretical construct, but not one that can be easily fit into the context of marketing. Given the global nature of the marketplace, with its accompanying melding of different cultures, perhaps now more than ever marketing research needs to address culture and

cultural differences in a context that is both theoretically sound and managerially practical.

Cultures will continue to change, overlap, and divide, resulting in numerous implications for consumption and marketing targeting strategies. The purpose of this study is to investigate ethnic identity and explore the different faces of one ethnic group through an emic (self-ascribed) multi-dimensional measurement of ethnic identity (cf. Berry et al. 2006). By disaggregating the ethnic identity construct into four segments (assimilated, ethnic, biculturals, and marginalizers), this study explores variation across segments within one sample and examines differing impacts on consumption. The managerial implications of the findings will be discussed and suggestions for future research presented.

NATIONAL IDENTITY AND ETHNIC IDENTITY: DIFFERENCES ACROSS & WITHIN CULTURES

In order to obtain a more defined approach to understanding "culture", marketing research has focused on the concepts of "identity"; most specifically national (cf. Keillor and Hult 1999) and ethnic identity (Deshpande et al. 1986; Xu et al. 2004). This "identity" perspective does not attempt to simply specify a discreet set of values unique to a particular culture. Rather, it also explores the degree to which individuals

within a selected cultural group identify with certain national and ethnic characteristics and beliefs. Cultures and nations across the global marketplace have a wide-range of characteristics, which may make each unique. However, a laundry list of these traits would be of little use. To be effective in another market, rather than focusing on differences, which are infinite, it is more constructive to focus on similarities that represent actionable market segments not individual consumers. Thus, there is the need to focus on the "core" traits that set a culture apart from another; its "national identity" (Clark 1990; Keillor and Hult 1999). The firms most likely to succeed in the current global market are the ones that can both identify and address these differences across cultures in order to achieve maximum competitive advantage.

Conceptually, national identity is built around the premise that a given culture is uniquely defined by a limited number of unique elements associated with that culture (Clark 1990). These unique elements, or "set of meanings", can be placed under the heading of one of four ingredients of national identity: 1) belief structure, 2) cultural homogeneity, 3) ethnocentrism, and 4) national heritage (Keillor and Hult 1999). Belief structure is the role that religion or supernatural beliefs play in cultural solidarity. Cultural homogeneity is the number of subcultures (e.g. ethnic groups such as Hispanic-Americans) that exist within a larger national culture. Ethnocentrism is the tendency to make cultural evaluations and attributions using the home culture as base line criteria. Finally, national heritage is the importance placed on historical figures and events in history, which reflect the culture's sense of its singularly unique history. Collectively, the degree to which members of a culture identify, or do not identify, with these constructs establishes the "national identity" of that culture and also allows for comparisons across cultures, enabling marketers to identify seemingly different markets in which a more standardized strategy may be viable as well as how best to "act local" within any one individual market.

Extending into differences within a national culture, this conceptualization of national identity is also based on the notion that these elements that characterize a nation's identity serve to tie together sub-cultures within national boundaries. Thus, the value of the national identity concept to marketing, in particular international marketing, is that it provides a basis for the identification of substantial and practical international segments rather than the ever-decreasingly sized segments which are likely to result from a cultural perspective that focuses solely on differences. In short, national identity represents a theoretical, yet practical, means for dealing with cultural differences across cultures.

This focus on identifying similarities, which can be aggregated in order to create substantial national market segments, is a valuable foundation for creating a global strategy. However, the multi-cultural nature of many countries means that to be truly effective within any one given market it is necessary to move down one step further and consider the role of ethnic identity in markets, which are multi-cultural in composition. Where national identity serves as a framework for addressing cultural differences across cultures, ethnic identity is focused on dealing with cultural differences within a culture.

The term ethnic identity, also referred to as ethnicity, has been used in existing literature to describe a global construct of ethnic group identification within a larger national culture that reflects both an external (etic) group characteristic (Saegert et al. 1985; Wallendorf and Reilly 1983) and an internal (emic) assessment of strength of identification (Hirschman 1981; Stayman and Deshpande 1989). Objective (etic) measures allow for outsider identification of an individual's ethnicity and include such facets of ethnicity as surname, language spoken, social interactions, religion, upbringing and background, and ethnic identification of the spouse (Hui and Kim 1997). Subjective (emic) measures rest on the assumption that ethnic individuals have a

clear understanding of their own ascription and strength of ethnic identification (Cohen 1978; Hirschman 1981). Ethnic identity, then, encompasses not only a membership group along the lines of national identity (Bourne 1956), but also how a person identifies with their cultural roots (Deshpande et al. 1986).

From a marketing perspective, ethnic identity has been shown to positively impact the rate of adoption of new products, level of information seeking, consumption information transfer, situational ethnic consumption, ethnic advertising effectiveness, ethnic food consumption, and ethnic entertainment (Hirschman 1981; Laroche et al. 1998; Stayman and Deshpande 1989; Xu et al. 2004) in numerous cultural contexts. In the current literature, ethnic identity has primarily been explored in terms of assimilation, biculturalism, and monocultural ethnicity, however few studies have considered all of these within the same research setting (cf. Lau-Gesk 2003; Zhang 2009).

As discussed above, taking into account the multi-cultural nature of many nations in the global market coupled with an increasing awareness of ethnic identity among the populace of these countries, marketers are currently faced with the problem of reaching these ethnic groups. This problem is compounded by the fact that these ethnic groups can be composed of very different segments: those identifying with 1) the ethnic culture (ethnic), 2) the host culture (assimilated), 3) both cultures (bicultural), or 4) neither culture (marginalizers). Understanding how persons of ethnic descent identify with ethnic and host cultures gives marketers insight into the different consumption patterns of multiple segments within one ethnicity, shedding light on potential targeting strategies.

THE FACES OF ETHNIC IDENTITY: HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Although early minority ethnic group research focused on the African American subculture (Akers 1968; Krugman 1966), the last 40 years

has seen the inclusion of other ethnic groups such as Hispanics, Asians, Jews, etc. (Forehand and Deshpande 2001; Hirschman 1981; Stayman and Deshpande 1989; Valencia 1985; Xu et al. 2004). The size and complexity of markets, composed of various subcultures, have led to research studies that look at factors such as an ethnic group's acculturation process and identification (Gans 1979; Phinney 1992; Umana-Taylor et al. 2002).

The acculturation process was traditionally viewed as a uni-dimensional model where mutual exclusivity of ethnic and host cultures was assumed. This "linear bipolar model" suggests that individuals lose features of their ethnicity as they take on features of the host culture, eventually assimilating into the dominant culture (Gans 1979; Gordon 1964). However, as early as 1924 it was postulated that although immigrants would become "Americanized" over time, they would also retain much of their distinctive cultural heritage (Kallen 1924), specifically in multi-cultural or multi-ethnic dominant cultures (Szapocznik and Kurtines 1980). Acknowledgment of acculturation as a process with multiple, independent dimensions (Berry et al. 2006; Phinney 1992) recognizes that assimilation to the host culture and retention of the ethnic culture happen simultaneously.

Strength of identification with either culture varies among individuals. Thus, individuals within an ethnic sample may include separatists (henceforth called ethnic), assimilators, integrators (henceforth called biculturals), and marginalizers (Berry et al. 2006). Ethnics maintain the ethnic culture and shun the host, often creating pockets of ethnicity within the dominant culture. Assimilators adopt the host culture and abandon the ethnic culture, wishing to dissociate from their ethnicity and immerse themselves in the dominant culture. Biculturals maintain or blend both cultures, either switching from one cultural frame to another or blending the two. Marginalizers identify with and maintain neither of the two cultures, choosing to dissociate with both in order to pursue a third culture. In understanding that

ethnic groups are not homogenous, marketers can gain a better understanding of differences in consumption patterns and preferences across groups.

H₁: Variation in self-ascribed Ethnic Identity will occur within a given ethnic group.

Defined as "an individual's sense of self within an ethnic group, and the attitudes and behaviors associated with that sense" (Xu et al. 2004, p. 94), ethnic identity consists of two parts: a sense of self (identity) and an outcome (attitude and/or behavior). Thus, an individual's ethnic identity impacts, or is reflected in, his/her consumption behavior. Research in ethnic consumption has shown ethnic identity as a factor in increased willingness to adopt new products and provide consumption information to others (Hirschman 1981), a shift in ethnic- and host-oriented consumption based on situations (Stayman and Deshpande 1989), favorable evaluations of ethnic advertising (Forehand and Deshpande 2001), and a shifting between cultural norms when language is "cued" (Briley et al. 2005).

While the majority of studies distinguish between host and ethnic behavior differences, some have begun to explore differences among segments within one ethnicity. Lau-Gesk (2003) looked at two types of biculturals (integrators and alternators) and their responses to persuasion appeals. Bicultural integrators were found more likely to blend the host or national culture with their ethnic culture and responded more favorably to dual-focused persuasion appeals (e.g., a national symbol and an ethnic spokesperson). Bicultural alternators, on the other hand, compartmentalize the cultures and were more likely to shift between two single-focused appeals (e.g., a national symbol or an ethnic spokesperson). Lau-Gesk's study is one of the few to examine differences across ethnic sub-segments, begging for further investigation of consumption variation across ethnicity segments.

Since individuals within one ethnicity are likely to show differences in ethnic identity, consumption differences across segments are also expected. One who identifies with the ethnic culture and separates himself/herself from the host society is likely to consume in a very different manner from one who abandons the ethnic culture to pursue the dominant. Specifically, differences in consumption can be expected with respect to biculturals, those who identify with two cultures simultaneously (Gomez and Fassinger 1994). Since biculturals adapt to and are comfortable with two cultural frames (Briley et al. 2005), they are likely to exhibit consumption in line with both ethnic and host cultures.

H₂ₐ: Variation in consumption will be seen across Ethnic Identity segments.
H₂ᵦ: Biculturals will show consumption patterns similar to both ethnics and assimilators.

METHODOLOGY

This study collected a "real world" sample of 175 Romanians living in the United States through an online survey placed on cultural and religious websites as well as phone interviews conducted by two persons of Romanian origin. Since language choice is an indicator of a person's ethnic identity (Laroche et al. 2005), the survey was offered in both English and Romanian. In order to ensure accuracy in the online portion of the survey, back-translation was employed where one Romanian national translated the survey from English to Romanian, while another cross-examined the surveys in both languages to ensure comparability.

The Romanian population in the United States is unique in that it is a geographically dispersed ethnic group held together by ethnic organizations (primarily cultural and religious). This structure differs from other large ethnic groups (e.g., Asian, Hispanic, etc.), which are found in geographic communities, but is representative of the majority of ethnic groups (e.g., Hungarian, Italian, Polish, Finnish, etc.)

that are found in the United States. As such, the Romanian ethnic group gives insight into the varying segments of ethnic identity by identifying persons who maintain differing levels of ethnic identity by choice rather than geographic necessity.

The data collection procedure was initiated through a link that was posted on several Romanian cultural and religious sites. Participants were introduced to the survey and, after indicating language preference, were directed to the appropriate survey. The ethnic identity construct used both existing and adapted measures from Valencia's (1985) Hispanicness scale and Singh's (1998) ethnic association scale.   The popular multigroup ethnic identity measure (Phinney 1992) was not used because this study sought to measure identity on two parallel measures: identification with ethnic culture and identification with national culture. An eight-item scale measured Romanian Identity (RI) and a similar eight-item scale measured American Identity (AI). Given the relationship between ethnic identity and food (Xu et al. 2004), four items related to food consumption (eating out, use of prepared foods, eating at home, food from scratch) were also included.   Assessment of the scales showed reliability for the Romanian Identity scale to be $r = .78$, the American Identity scale to be $r = .77$, and the four food consumption items to be $r = .72$. All items were measured using a 7-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Of the 175 total survey hits, 126 surveys were completed in entirety (71 percent) and were used to analyze final results. Respondents ranged in age from 14 to 84 years, fifty-seven percent of which were age 26 and older. Twenty participants took the survey in Romanian, while the remainder chose to take the survey in English. A majority (71 percent) of respondents were born in Romania, with twenty-four percent born in the United States and five percent born in neither country. Those born in neither country were included in the analysis as they lived in the U.S. and reported identifying with Romanian culture at some

level (e.g., through parents or a spouse). One hundred and four of the respondents completed the demographic portion of the survey instrument, sixty-eight (n = 70) percent have lived in the United States at least fifteen years, sixty-four percent (n = 66) were female, fifty-eight percent (n = 60) completed college or graduate school, and seventy-five percent (n = 78) reported being affiliated with other Romanians through religious organizations.

RESULTS

The first hypothesis postulated that self-ascribed Ethnic Identity would demonstrate variation within a single ethnic group. Prior research (c.f. Berry et al. 2006) suggests that up to four distinct segments may exist within any national ethnic group. These segments are: 1) Marginalizers, 2) Biculturals, 3) Ethnics, and 4) Assimilators.   Marginalizers do not strongly identify with either a national culture or an ethnic culture.   Biculturals identify to a relatively high degree with both cultures. Ethnics identify strongly with only the ethnic culture, in the case of this study a high RI and a low AI.   Assimilators identify strongly with only the national culture and generally ignore the ethnic culture (e.g., a high AI and low RI).

To explore the first hypothesis, ethnic identity was measured on two 8-item scales representing the two cultural dimensions: Romanian Identity (RI) and American Identity (AI). The scales were split at 4 (neutral) such that scores 1 to 3 = low identity and 5 to 7 = high identity. A "neutral" score (4) could be considered either "indifferent" or "ambivalent/ conflicting" (Priester and Petty 1996). As such, neutrality was assumed when the other cultural identity was low (marginalizers), while ambivalence was assumed when the other cultural identity was high (biculturals).   The level of Ethnic Identity was indeed found to vary within the Romanian ethnic group, supporting H_1. As shown in Table 1, four self-ascribed segments emerged: marginalizers (n = 14), biculturals (n = 67), ethnics (n = 32), and assimilators (n = 13).

TABLE 1:
ANOVA Results for Food Consumption

	Marginalizers (1)	*Ethnics (2)*	*Assimilators (3)*	*Biculturals (4)*	*F-statistic*	*Sig.*	*Post Hoc[**]*
Overall Food Consumption[*]	4.02	1.60	3.19	2.51	6.71	*0.001*	(1,2) (1,4) (2,3) (2,4)
Item 1: Eat/Order Out	5.25	1.73	4.25	3.75	7.18	*0.000*	(1,2) (2,3) (2,4)
Item 2: Eat Homemade Food	4.25	6.80	4.75	5.96	6.40	*0.001*	(1,2) (1,4) (2,3)
Item 3: Frozen/ Prepared Food	3.50	2.13	2.50	2.50	.67	0.57	--
Item 4: Eat Food from Scratch	5.33	6.67	5.25	6.25	3.18	*0.03*	(2,3)[***]

[*]Items 2 and 4 reverse scored to create an aggregate food consumption variable with all items in the same direction
[**]Tukey post hoc analyses, significant at .05
[***]Trend toward significance found

Hypothesis two examined the variation in consumption across the four ethnic identity segments, specifically looking at the consumption pattern of biculturals with regard to food, an important culture-specific consumption category (Xu et al. 2004). Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was employed to identify any significant differences across the four ethnic identity segments (F= 6.7, p < .01). The analysis revealed that the primary points of difference were between a) ethnics and all other identity segments and b) marginalizers and biculturals (see Table 1). Further analysis explored differences at the item level, finding differences across three of the four items: "I tend to eat or order out" (F= 7.18, p < .001), "I do not eat homemade food at home" (F= 6.40, p < .01), and "I do not eat food made from scratch/fresh ingredients" (F= 3.18, p < .05). Overall, the analysis showed a variation in food consumption across segments, supporting H_{2a}.

However, perhaps the most interesting finding was that biculturals were shown to be most similar to assimilators with regard to eating out but most similar to ethnics with regard to eating homemade food at home (see Table 1), supporting H_{2b}. This echoes past literature (Briley et al. 2005; Gomez and Fassinger 1994) suggesting the dual-culture identity of biculturals and their ability to operate comfortably across two cultural frames.

DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study sought to disaggregate ethnicity and conduct an initial exploration of the variations in consumption among ethnic segments. Overall, the findings support acculturation along two separate dimensions (Berry et al. 2006), discovering variations in Ethnic Identity that result in four segments (marginalizers, assimilators, ethnics, and biculturals) which vary in food consumption. Ethnics differ from other segments to a greater extent, supporting the notion that these "separatists" refuse to adopt the host culture and create a pocket of

ethnic identity within the national culture, which may substantially impact their behavior. Marketers should be cognizant of the fact that within an ethnic group, ethnics/separatists may not be reached by the same means (i.e., utilizing elements of national culture) as the other segments.

Another particularly interesting finding in this study is that biculturals show evidence of adaptation to both cultures. This group reported food consumption behavior consistent with both the national culture pattern (eating out) and the ethnic culture pattern (homemade food at home), supporting a dual-culture identity viewpoint. One important implication this finding suggests is that marketers may wish to explore this group's ability to act as a link connecting "mainstream" national culture-focused marketing to ethnic cultural pockets.

This study highlights the importance of recognizing that cultural differences exist not only across national cultures but also within these national cultures, most specifically in the form of ethnic identity. The results suggest that firms cannot use one over-arching ethnic segmentation strategy when operating in a multi-cultural market. Further, a deeper understanding of the composition of the degree to which an ethnic target market segment identifies with their ethnicity will provide guidance in terms of the extent to which a "tailored" marketing approach may, or may not, be required and the areas in which this tailoring must be performed.

STUDY LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The results of this study suggest several potential avenues for future research that would explore the importance to marketers of reaching different ethnic identities within a culture. Additionally, future research should consider distinguishing between different types of biculturals by using the theory of ambivalence or internal conflict (Priester and Petty 1996). For example, are bicultural alternators (Lau-Gesk 2003) more ambivalent than bicultural

integrators? Another area of relevant future research would be to explore more deeply other possible indicators of ethnic identity, beyond food consumption, such as events occurring in the home and host country. Finally, in order to most effectively apply the construct of ethnic identity in a marketing context it would be helpful to better understand what might prompt an individual to move from one category of ethnic identity to another, whether or not certain demographic characteristics exist that could describe each of the ethnic identity categories, and the point at which ethnic identity might give way to national identity. A clearer understanding of the nuances of ethnic identity could make it a powerful tool for success in multi-ethnic markets.

This study was limited in that it considered only ethnic identity within one ethnic group and in the context of a single dependent variable (i.e., food consumption). In order to more fully grasp the importance of ethnic identity within a national culture, the inclusion of multiple ethnic groups is necessary. In addition, the use of electronic surveys has the real potential to create a non-response bias, suggesting that future research should overcome this limitation through the use of multiple data collection methods. Finally, the use of multiple indicators of ethnic identity, beyond food consumption, should provide a more thorough understanding of ethnic identity as a means of describing a multi-cultural/multi-ethnic market environment. As discussed above, future research into the differences between ethnic segments, even across ethnic identities, will prove valuable to marketers creating multi-ethnic targeting strategies and help them understand the complex multi-ethnic markets of the global economy.

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