

**ETHNOCONSUMERISM AND
ETHNOCAPABILITY: AN
EVOLUTION OF TYPOLOGIES IN
RELATIONSHIP MARKETING**

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Abstract

A method of analysis is required to synthesise the consumer behaviour decision making processes of different segments in order to facilitate understanding in marketing. These multicultural sectors contain ethnic groups whose spiritual beliefs are no longer a sub cultural factor as usually assumed in western text. The significant growth in the overall ethnic influence changes the assumptions included in management, relationship marketing, service quality, customer satisfaction and relationship longevity. This vital evolution inspires change and progress from a pluralist to a genuinely multicultural global organisation. This paper reviews the factors for consideration in the growth of this market and provides a proposed paradigm for exploring relationship marketing in ethnoconsumerism.

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INTRODUCTION

THEORY BUILDING MODELS AND PARADIGMS

The evolution of present academic theory has a bias for the western theories of learning, epistemology and the use of paradigms. This paper, therefore, identifies problems with practice, research and theory. These problems include: paradigms, epistemology and management (Berrell and McPherson, 1995). These researchers state that: "the concept of paradigm has been used rather indiscriminately by theorists across the disciplines since the late 1970's" (p. 9). However, despite the proliferation of its use, its explanatory powers have now been corrupted with the emergence of post modernism as a theoretical perspective. A disregard of epistemological quality of knowledge and post modernist arguments encourage researchers to use it as a philosophers touchstone when seeking to justify the relationship between evidence and theory. Justification is predetermined by the paradigm selected rather than by appeal to sophisticated notion of good science. This requires the use of selected paradigms to attempt to present a coherent justification of conflicting research findings in a comprehensible holistic format for the use of the practitioner (Berrell and McPherson, 1995).

It is not, therefore, difficult to see that criticism by authors such as Greenfield (Greenfield and Ribbins, 1993) uses the concept of objectivity, reality and the importance of values 'to attack' the previous research (p. 18). These can be described as epistemological issues, ontological issues and axiological question concerning actions based on values. Whilst no research is perfect, it is a considerable improvement compared to no research at all. However, results need to be interpreted within the framework and reality that the sources of knowledge and data for research were influenced by the methodological approaches and paradigms used. This therefore creates significant questions of the reality of truth and the meaning of consumer behaviour as it turns from theory to knowledge with the experience of the individual surrounded by social groups and within a particular culture (p. 20). In a real or 'honest way', relating subject matter to the reader, this can then be viewed within the perspectives of the twentieth century philosophical traditions of: logical empiricism (positivism); interpretative theories (analytical, phenomenological and hermeneutic); and critical theory (neo marxist). Additional paradigms utilised in management and consumer behaviour include those of psychoanalytic, sociocultural, trait, learning and existential-humanistic paradigms, all based on western samples (Hergenbahn, 1984). In simple terms, truth may not have meaning unless context and values are included. This is fundamental to research and practical application.

It is thus that Habermas's (1971) concept that knowledge has to be considered within the interest served the viewpoint of the researchers and the intended readers. These views are further compounded by the differences between western and eastern mental models. Many eastern scholars have been educated by western inspired theories and hence a diluted concept of self-analysis has evolved. In terms of international business, at present with a shrinking globe, a synthesis of knowledge is taking place creating single philosophies for our planet. Examples are political approaches to work place and environmental issues.

McAllister and Irvine (2000) describe how Bank's (1994) study of ethnic identity utilises a six stages model which can be used to help teacher educators in understanding the progression along the construct towards global competency. The six stages are: 'ethnic psychological captivity, ethnic encapsulation, ethnic identity clarification, bi-ethnicity, multi-ethnicity and reflective nationalism, and globalism and global competency' (Banks, 1994, p. 228). This is relevant, in that, stage one describes how members of the dominant culture stereotype and internalise their beliefs and perceptions of the world. This progresses through reflection of one's own culture to the desire to function in more than one culture and eventually learning how to balance and utilise the required paradigm depending upon the context (Banks, 1994).

Following Jung's view of human nature, western consciousness is a historically conditioned, geographically limited factor does not represent all part of humanity (Bailey, 1960). Therefore, one should not exclude other kinds of consciousness. But as the synthesis of one world continues, the ways of the east will influence western paradigms and vice versa.

INTERNATIONAL MARKETING AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

Attempts have been made using subcultures 'sharing many of the behaviours of a dominant culture whilst also having a set of unique behaviours', based on nationality e.g. Greeks in Melbourne (Hawkins et al. 1994, p. 335). However, Asian Australians as an increasingly important market have 25 distinct ethnic groups and are difficult to target as a whole (p. 335). The marketer who violates these norms of behaviour and consumption patterns is sanctioned (p. 451). The concept of one universal does exist among the 25 distinct ethnic group mentioned earlier. That is, friendship, based on: personal relationship and trust, developed carefully and sincerely over time (p. 465). This affective rather than cognitive factor overcomes the problems of cultural difference and perception from a different nationality resulting in customer satisfaction.

ETHNOCONSUMERISM

Ethnoconsumerism studies consumption within a given social group or culture and its theoretical framework. This is not a method but a study of connections between cultural categories. This requires an understanding of the underpinning of events and actions (Costa and Bamossy, 1995, p. 28). This therefore reflects the concept that research is conducted on sample populations and may not be cross-culturally transferable in terms of place and time. Of particular relevance is that these western sample populations include Christian principles and values, not those of today's multicultural population (Wrathall and Townsend, 1997, p. 2).

The term ethnic has previously referred to cultural groups outside their nation of origin (e.g. Mexicans in America) but these are now part of our national culture and global, borderless world. Ethnic is also referred to in Webster's Dictionary (1986) as 'relating to gentiles not converted to Christianity'. Hence, ethnic usually refers to as a subset to the main culture while ethno refers to nation, people, or cast (p. 781). This also relates to cultural manners and the fact that total assimilation has not occurred and thus the need for inclusion of spiritual beliefs in the analysis of relationship marketing to insure organisation long term success based on customer assessment of satisfaction and loyalty (Czinkota et al., 1997, p. 120). In addition, there is a tendency for global organisations to assimilate rather than acculturate with an underlying ethnocentric philosophy.

The evolving literature on cross-cultural marketing research emerged as an extension of logical positivism. They also used however, the term sub-culture in discussing for example blacks and whites in America (Costa and Bamossy, 1995, p. 17) and are 'methodologically flawed with a parochial or ethnocentric view (p. 19). At this stage, 'cognitive maps' are still required (Stanfield cited in Costa and Bamossy, 1995, p. 128).

Ethnoconsumerism is thus a 'new paradigm to study cultural and cross-cultural behaviour' (Venkatesh, 1995, p. 26). This new paradigm for the study of cross cultural behaviour (Venkatesh, 1995) involves the work of Geertz (1983) concerning the natives point of view. This is not new, but has assumed certain epistemological significance in the post modern and post structuralist era (Zhu and Dowling, 2000)

What can be identified however is that the purchase decision involves service quality and customer satisfaction (cognitive and affective assessment) and that relationship strengths are vital components to consumer behaviour (Storbacka et al., 1994; Shemwell et al., 1998). This is similar to previous research concerning product image before consumption and subsequent evaluation of satisfaction. This is enforced by the relationship between self-congruity and functional congruity based on the perceived delivery of the

product or service (Sirgy and Su, 2000). Unless a multi-layered approach is taken, inaccuracies in data occur except in the most general of situations. One of these categories again is the affective one of friendliness or rejection. This is initially one of a cognitive assessment of a service quality and after consumption, satisfaction which is also affective (Storbacka et al., 1994 and Shemwell et al., 1998). Research suggests that the relationship between complete customer satisfaction and loyalty generates superior long term financial performance.

MANAGEMENT OF CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

The reason for the interest in the management of customer relationships is the link between service quality customer satisfaction and economic performance (Wong, 2000, p. 79). Specifically the importance of relationships strength and the antecedents in the form of the cognitive and affective components of quality evaluation (p. 80). The duration of the relationship is important to the strength and quality of the relationship and subsequent outcome levels of trust and commitment.

Relationship marketing is defined as "establishing, maintaining and enhancing relationships with customers and other partners, at a profit, so that the objectives of the parties involved are met by mean of a mutual exchange and fulfilment of promises" (Gronroos, 1990, p. 138). It includes relational bonds with the psychological and emotional attachments binding people together (Turner, 1970).

Relationship marketing has, therefore, emerged as a major focal point for business strategy during the past decade. This is because it is a unique common element among many different management theories as the first element in the focus on the process of doing business as part of the system of providing world class products and services. With different expectations, parameters and performance standards as relationships function around the world. "This knowledge is critical for understanding how relationships function in the increasingly interdependent global market place" (Schuster, 2000, p. 39).

In order to enable frequent interaction and survival during periods of change, cultural sensitivity, adaptability, tolerance for ambiguity and the ability to learn from experience will be required. This is the basis of ethnocapability.

RELATIONSHIP MARKETING FROM AN ETHNOCONSUMER PERSPECTIVE

The global market place whether by exporting or by internal diversity requires a multicultural perspective. The management of customer relationships is arguably more important with a multicultural market place than in a monoculture. This is because the need for trust between supplier and consumer is essential with increasing communication and consequently increasing possibilities for service disruption. In addition, the complexity of multicultural market research is such that whilst difference can be identified, they may not be easily be satisfied by product alteration. The consequent sensitive service delivery will require flexibility in terms of customer relationship and a tolerance for the ambiguity that may arise due to the diversity of simultaneous requirements.

We are changing from essentially traditional, non religious, rational western theories based on scientific research with rational business decisions (Mintzberg, 1973; Costello and Zalkind, 1963) compared to eastern wisdom founded in spiritually given guidance. For many people their religious beliefs are always with them. These non-negotiable principles directly influence the cultural ethics of their decision making. Specifically, whether their actions will be judged by other people or additionally by a higher order.

In the relationship marketing literature, trust and commitment is found to be the central concept in most customer relationships (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). This idea is relevant to the role of values in the decision making process, as this affects their choice among the perceived alternatives concerning attitudes and beliefs about social states of existence (Harrison, 1999, p. 110). These relate to: social, religious awareness

and are not always conscious as part of culture. Values include: happiness, lawfulness, harmony, integrity and loyalty. Intrinsic values are: pleasant feelings, satisfaction of desire, enthusiasm and contentment as part of personal values in consumer behaviour related to religious persons as described in the highest satisfying value (p. 123). This ethical approach includes the standards of human conduct and is directly relevant to inclusion of spiritual values as a core factor in ethnoconsumerism and relationship marketing from a spiritual perspective.

It is particularly important that organisations should not offend specific ethnic groups and create negative, affective assessment of service quality in the minds' of consumers, as this inevitably affects relationship longevity and long-term profitability (Storbacka, Strandvik & Gronroos, 1994).

With regards to relationship marketing and ethnoconsumerism, organisations not recognising the opportunity of Australia's multicultural society from which to learn and improve service will be second preference in the alternative choice decision process of consumer behaviour. The management of diversity to achieve competitive advantage is an opportunity to succeed or fail in the new millennium. Qantas, for example, realises this in reference to international cuisine and service (Stone, 1998, p. 708). It is particularly important that organisations should not offend specific ethnic groups and create negative, affective assessment of service quality in the minds' of consumers, as this inevitably affects relationship longevity and long-term profitability (Storbacka, Strandvik & Gronroos, 1994).

NEW PARADIGM OF ETHNOCAPABILITY

A new paradigm is required, recognising the inclusion of eastern consumer concepts as central to the purchase decision making processes. Essentially, whilst being related to rational processes, it is the essence of the non-rational environment of the core decision which requires consideration. These multicultural and different non-negotiable beliefs create a potential for conflict if analysed using western hierarchical models based on a place in time and geography. In isolation these are therefore no longer relevant. This management of diversity is a metamorphosis of global transformation combining the western rational analysis and eastern harmony using values to transcend the 'east-west' divide (Lessem, 1998, p. 45).

These new management global competencies and an international training policy as stated by DEET (1995) includes: analysing information, communicating ideas, working with others, problem solving among others and an eighth one being cultural understanding. The skills of the transnational manager include: global perspective, local responsiveness, synergistic learning and cross-cultural interaction (McNelly and Parry, 2000). These are similar to those of Adler and Bartholemew (1992) and Black and Gregersen (1999) who include: broad based sociability, cultural flexibility, cosmopolitan orientation and collaborative approach.

Taking this managerial technical competence into new domains is the essence of capability. Capability, in its simplest form, is a construct which applies to individuals and has been defined by Stephenson (1993) as 'having justified confidence in your ability to take appropriate and effective action, to communicate effectively, to collaborate with others and learn from experiences in changing and unfamiliar circumstances' (p.).

The development of globally competent managers (DeSimone and Harris, 1998; Spreitzer, McCall and Mahoney, 1997) is different from the past successful managerial competencies. This is because global competencies "requires being able to learn from experience" (p. 407). By definition, this is therefore global capability as it involves cognitive social learning (Bandura, yr), values, self-awareness and an active, not passive learning style. Spreitzer et al. (1997) have identified fourteen dimensions to predict international executive potential. These include eight end-state competencies with sensitivity to cultural differences and six learning-orientated dimensions including: uses feedback, is culturally adventurous, seeks opportunities to learn, is open to criticism, seeks feedback and is flexible. These future competencies (Allred, Snow and Miles, 1996) include: knowledge, international experience, self management skills, integrity and flexibility. This is similar to the five 'meta-abilities' of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1998) which are self

awareness, self regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills.

These international capabilities can be defined within ethnocapability. Ethnocapability is therefore the ability to transfer competence within one culture and perform effectively in a multicultural situation (Cairns, 1997a). This capability requires global knowledge, cross-cultural communication skills, flexibility, mindfulness, self-efficacy, appreciation of values and self managed learning (Guirdham, 1999, p. 211-214).

The description of much global or international facets of behaviour as "competencies" is a definitional stretch of the concept. Competence, as it is more regularly defined and theorised is basically a term which covers observable current skills based on current knowledge (Harris et al., 1995; Cairns, 1992).

'Key', 'generic' or 'global' as terms to modify or extend the competence concept to somehow move the idea beyond its basic roots are unfortunate in that they violate the theory base (behaviourism) and the clear conceptualisation inherent in competence as a concept (Cairns, 1997a).

This paper is suggesting that the concept of capability is broader and more flexibility orientated and thus appears to be applicable to this case. Ethnocapability is therefore offered here as an appropriate descriptor for the concept being presented.

This learning to learn about other cultures requires: knowledge, interaction, empathy, tolerance of ambiguity and the ability to analyse using a variety of paradigms including those from the east (Chen, 1998). This is the management metamorphosis of the future, progressing from the primal rational to the metaphysical, cultural and anthropological domains (Lessen, 1998).

These ethnic 'subcultures' of multiculturalism require recognition regarding management and consumer behaviour. A new synthesis is therefore required. Specifically, multicultural manners (Dresser, 1996), drinks, foods and religions. Whilst race and religion are not suitable market segments, they can be included in an overall model of management and decision making including resolving conflict in diverse work places.

The methods available to achieve an understanding of ethnoconsumerism and multicultural capability in the form of ethnocapability are:

1. Awareness and sensitivity to difference.
2. Dynamic processes for solving problems in relationships.
3. Adapting to internal and external change.
4. Integration and synergy

(Tropenaars, 1995)

CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the limitations of western theories based on observation and quantitative analysis identifies similar criticisms to those of eastern theories. The objective analysis of both categories of paradigms is that they are both inadequate in isolation but that the inclusion of eastern perspectives to a multicultural customer focus will be more relevant than either individually. To achieve the customer focus and trust identified in successful relationship marketing, a synthesis of eastern and western paradigms is required. DeBono (2000) considers that 90% of errors in thinking are due to inappropriate judgement and perception which is relevant to the situation. This expansion from knowledge to thinking and the inclusion of eastern concepts (Hofstede, 1994) are the function of the use of ethnoconsumerism.

Specifically, new paradigms and the practical adaptation of these by collaboration and sensitive respect for strength of diversity of different cultures. It is therefore essential for leadership to inspire this relevant area for learning. This means progressing from monolithic organisations which are usually ethnocentric towards

plural organisations which are usually polycentric with tendencies towards homogeneity and assimilation to the destination of the multicultural organisation which is geocentric, values diversity and is actively involved in acculturation (Harris and Moran, 1990). This needs more than reading and for genuine mutual understanding communication of a non confrontational type, possibly with the use of third parties to take advantage of the opportunities for Australia, especially after the Olympics.

This significant opportunity of translating cultural beliefs into a reframed ethnoconsumerism is the challenge for the new millennium.

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