

# **New Directions in Researching Ethnicity in Marketing and Consumer Behaviour: A**

## **Wellbeing Agenda**

**Aliakbar Jafari**

Department of Marketing, University of Strathclyde, UK

**Luca M. Visconti**

Department of Marketing, ESCP Europe, France

**Aliakbar Jafari (corresponding author)**

Department of Marketing, University of Strathclyde, Sir William Duncan Building, 130

Rottenrow Street, Glasgow, G4 0GE, UK – Telephone: +44 141 5483768

Email: [aliakbar.jafari@strath.ac.uk](mailto:aliakbar.jafari@strath.ac.uk)

## **Abstract**

This special commentary section proposes new directions in researching the nexus of ethnicity and wellbeing under three themes of: (1) mobility and shifting identities in relation to place; (2) empowerment and identity performance in relation to the virtual space; and (3) religious conflicts in relation to markets and spaces of consumption. The three short essays in this collection are geared towards accelerating research on ethnicity in marketing and consumer behaviour. They problematize the very nature of ethnicity in relation to space and how ethnicity is performed in different spaces by looking at the issues of social relations, transformations, and conflict. They suggest potential areas of enquiry, particularly for new (Ph.D.) research projects, policy-focused research grant applications, conferences/seminars/workshops, and also classroom activities and teaching purposes.

**Keywords:** ethnicity, wellbeing, mobility, shifting identities, place, power relations, the Internet, transformation, conflict, religion

To date, research in marketing and consumer behaviour has generated a wealth of knowledge on the intersections between ethnicity, markets, and consumption. A review of the existing literatures on ethnicity reveals three overarching conceptual trajectories. First, ‘acculturation’ studies (Berry, 1980, 1997) have examined how border-crossing influences consumers’ and businesses’ multiple interactions with one another (e.g., business-to-business, business-to-consumer, consumer-to-consumer relationships), with market contents (e.g., consumptionscapes and servicescapes), and also with different political, ideological, and sociocultural institutions (e.g., states, ideological systems, cultural conventions, and social constructs). In one way or another, such interactions shape market structures, contents, and behaviours (for a literature review, see Luedicke, 2011). Second, following Shimp and Sharma’s (1987) conceptualization of ‘consumer ethnocentrism’ in marketing, researchers have embarked on studying how ethnicity dynamics influence individual and organisational preferences (acceptance or rejection) for certain market offerings (e.g., brands, products, and services) in cross cultural business-to-consumer and business-to-business contexts (for literature summaries, see Grier, Brumbaugh and Thornton, 2006; Shankarmahesh, 2006; Zolfagharian et al., 2014; Nguyena and Nguyen, 2014). Third, within the broad domain of ethnic marketing, scholars have investigated how marketing can be operationalized with a view to serving certain market segments based on their ethnic characteristics (e.g., Nwankwo and Lindridge, 1998; Halter, 2000; Burton, 2000; Cui, 1997, 2001; Piresa et al., 2011; Lindridge, forthcoming).

In all these scenarios, ethnicity is both mediated and performed through marketplace resources. That is, ethnicity becomes visible and ‘enacted’ through different ‘practices’ (Warde, 2005) of consumption, production, symbolic exchange, business networking, resistance, and more (Luedicke, 2011; Demangeot et al., 2013). A performative view of ethnicity offers significant implications for researching a variety of ethnicity-related

phenomena. Such a stance acknowledges that since ethnicity is constructed, felt, experienced, and acted upon in a social environment (Demangeot et al., 2013), there are consequences that affect the whole social context in which ethnicity is performed. In other words, and from a Weberian (1978) ‘social action’ perspective, when enacted, ethnicity can highly determine the nature and direction of various interactions between different social actors (e.g., citizen-consumers, businesses, states, and sociocultural institutions).

In 2002 Dawn Burton highlighted this performative aspect of ethnicity. In her intriguing *Marketing Theory* essay, she called for a critical multicultural marketing theory that would focus on social transformation, conflict, and struggle. These issues—Burton argued—are becoming increasingly important to researching ethnicity in marketing and consumer research since ethnoscares (which consists of migrants, sojourners, tourists, refugees, exiles, and guest workers) (Appadurai, 1996) are rapidly changing cultural and socioeconomic landscapes across the world. She contended that cultural categories such as ethnicity should be studied primarily with a view that culture itself is not static; rather, it is a dynamic entity which is socially constructed, both spatially and over time. This implies that ethnicity is also dynamic; it is experienced and performed as a result of multiple intersections between sociocultural, political, ideological, and economic structures in different social spaces (Visconti, forthcoming) and should therefore be longitudinally examined as a “product of history, power, culture and ideology” (Burton, 2002, p. 210). Burton also cautioned against ‘apolitical’ and ‘non-conflictual’ conceptualisations of culture, ethnicity, and identity in marketing and consumer research, a view that also Askegaard and Özçaglar-Toulouse (2011, p.217) endorsed by inviting to maintain “a critical distance to the luring essentialization of culture” in which ethnicity has been traditionally studied.

Burton’s stress on the ‘spatial’ dimension of culture is a critique of rigid and reductionist conceptualisations of the phenomenon (e.g., broadly used ethnic categories such

as whites, blacks, Hispanics, and Asians) which assume the presence of a ‘monolithic identity’. A spatial view of culture acknowledges the existence of ‘multiple’ (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), ‘reflexive’ (Giddens, 1991), ‘interconnected’ (Beck, 2000), and ‘temporal’ (Bauman, 1997) identities that are (re)shaped and ‘operationalized’ over time in different spaces: “physical geographic space, social space with respect to the patterning of social relations over space, and experiential spaces in a non-geographic symbolic sense” (Burton, 2002, p. 222). A spatial approach to culture, therefore, highlights the importance of studying culture based on “differences-in-relation” (Burton, 2002, p. 211); that is, given the dynamism of identity, differences (and similarities) between ethnic groups should be analysed in relation to the conditions of the spaces in which ethnicity is made salient and performed. This approach also acknowledges that there are imaginary and experiential spaces in which ethnicity can be lived out and performed. For example, to avoid race, gender, and religion related stigmatizations, people may choose to switch between different ethnic communities available in different social spaces (Morton et al., 2003).

More recently, Luedicke (2011) reiterated Burton’s critical analysis of cultural representations such as ethnicity and her call for addressing the pressing issues of social transformation, conflict, and struggle. In his article, he commented on two main limitations of extant acculturation and ethnicity literatures consisting in their migration-centrism and lack of engagement with policy implications. Recently, Visconti et al. (forthcoming) further advocated the need for bridging ethnicity research with social policy. In their critical essay, they reviewed extant literature on consumer ethnicity over the past three decades and proposed that the advancement of research on ethnicity requires a revised vocabulary that would take account of meso/macro forces affecting ethnicity (de)construction and individual/collective wellbeing. Visconti et al.’s proposition is particularly important in the sense that it draws attention to the complexities of intersections between multiple forces that

influence ethnic performativity in varying social spaces. Recognition of the spatial nature of ethnicity—they argue—offers myriad opportunities for studying ethnicity beyond the limited macro boundaries of national border-crossing and instead examining how ethnicity dynamics influence wellbeing in micro spaces in everyday life mundane situations (e.g., marketplace, work, school, and family).

This special commentary section in *Marketing Theory* contributes to such an on-going debate on ethnicity in marketing and consumer research.

### **The origin and purpose of this special commentary section**

In our call for contributions for the ‘Immigration, Culture, and Ethnicity’ track of the Fourth Transformative Consumer Research Conference held at Lille, France during 24–25 May 2013, we intended to generate substantive research questions and delve into new theoretical horizons that inform future research with a wellbeing agenda. We were particularly interested in generating new ideas that would help problematize the very nature of ethnicity in relation to space and how ethnicity is performed in different spaces. One useful way of pursuing this objective was to look at the issues of social relations, transformations, and conflict which are manifested through ethnic performativity in different spaces of markets and consumption.

An international team of thirteen researchers on ethnicity worked closely together over two days of intensive dialogical discussions. Amongst many other subjects that emerged from brainstorming, three overarching themes were collectively identified as significantly influential for furthering the boundaries of research on ethnicity: (1) mobility and shifting identities in relation to place; (2) empowerment and identity performance in relation to the virtual space; and (3) religion and religious conflicts in relation to spaces of markets and consumption. Focus on ‘wellbeing’ guided our discussions in terms of relating the themes to policy implications and pressing issues that tangibly affect social relations. With regards to

the expertise and research interests of track participants, researchers paired in three groups, each developing a short essay highlighting trajectories for future research on their chosen topic, which follow our editorial article.

Developing these *short* essays has helped concisely weave interdisciplinary literatures together and precisely propose as many research questions as possible that would accelerate research on ethnicity in marketing and consumer behaviour. These essays are not meant to answer research questions; rather, they are intended to suggest potential trajectories for novel research on ethnicity with direct implications for personal and collective wellbeing. The research agendas these essays provide can thus inspire new (Ph.D.) research projects, policy-focused research grant applications, conferences/seminars/workshops, and also classroom activities and teaching purposes. Critical in essence, these essays also caution against the often oversimplifications of ethnicity in the positivistic research paradigm that conceptualizes the phenomenon as a static feature of culture.

### **Contributions in this special commentary section**

In the first article, Demangeot, Broeckerhoff, Kipnis, Pullig, and Visconti argue that increased mobility and changing places render relatively stable notions of ethnicity outdated. They develop their thesis based on the concept of ‘place’ rather than geopolitical boundaries of border-crossing. They conceptualize place as a changing landscape in which ethnicity is felt, expressed, and negotiated (Lipsitz, 2007; Visconti, forthcoming). Anchored in theoretical insights from human geography and urban studies (e.g., Massey, 1994; Groat, 1995), they establish that there is a symbiotic relationship between spatial entities (i.e., places) and people; that is, a place gives meaning to people’s sense of identity and people’s identity gives meaning to a place. As such, increasing mobility means shifting identities as people construct and negotiate multiple identities in different places. Ethnicity, therefore,

becomes a mutable entity that is performed based on the situations of the given place. As such, the authors call for examining the consequences of mobility and shifting ethnicities for wellbeing of consumers in their social relations within the contexts they temporarily reside. In particular, they deem research on intra/inter-ethnic conflicts in consumptionscapes and servicescapes—where ethnicity is negotiated and performed—a priority.

In the second article, Lindridge, Henderson, and Ekpo propose the notion of virtual ethnicities to argue that the Internet offers new spaces for achieving wellbeing by avoiding offline spaces of market transaction in which people can be stigmatized, discriminated, or socially excluded based on their ethno-racial characteristics. The Internet provides people with a web of social relations and interconnectivities (Beck, 2000) in which they can feel empowered to perform their ethnicity and participate in markets and consumption spaces. They can ‘resist’ the politics and ‘ideologies’ of multicultural (marketing) strategies (e.g., segmentation) (Burton, 2000) that paradoxically replicate ethno-racial stereotypes. The Internet also avails people with ‘experiential’ and ‘imaginary’ spaces (Burton, 2002) in which to achieve wellbeing by pursuing leisure and identity shifts. By switching identities between offline and online spaces, they can enjoy an ‘interactive form of sociality’ (Jafari et al., 2013) and strategic cosmopolitanism (Kothari, 2008) within their chosen social spaces and networks. Based on these accounts, the authors invite researchers to further investigate the motivations and consequences of using virtual spaces and their implications for wellbeing in ethnicity research.

Finally, Jafari, Özhan Dedeoğlu, Üstündağlı, Regany, and Batat address issues of religious conflicts in multi-ethnic/cultural spaces of markets and consumption. The authors highlight the politics of religious identities (Jafari, 2012; Ger, 2013; Suerdem, 2013) to argue how enactment of instrumental religiosity contributes to increasing tensions in human societies. They view religious conflicts as manifestations of ethnocentric claims to political

authority. In their analysis, markets and consumption constantly produce cultural signs and highly symbolic social spaces in which ethno-religious differences become increasingly visible through market practices and representations. Such practices and representations, however, are the result of “social struggles over signifiers and the signified” (Burton, 2002, p. 2011); that is, what ethno-religious meanings markets and consumption spaces convey to different ethnic groups with varying religious perceptions both of themselves and towards others. As Pechmann et al. (2011) indicate, ethno-religious conflicts produce new prejudices amongst different ethnic groups. The authors also argue that with the rise of alternative, hybrid, and transcultural religiosities and spiritualities (Gauthier and Martikainen, 2013), the traditional boundaries of ethnicities are becoming more permeable. All these dynamics, the authors argue, have significant implications for ethnicity research in marketing and consumer behaviour.

### **Acknowledgments**

We are grateful to Professor Pauline Maclaran for her understanding of the importance of bringing wellbeing into ethnicity research in marketing and consumer behaviour and for allowing us space to offer this special commentary section. We are also thankful to the participants of the Immigration, Culture, and Ethnicity track of the Fourth Transformative Consumer Research Conference for their dialogical discussions and also critical evaluations and insightful comments throughout the peer review process.

### **References**

Appadurai A (1996) *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- Askegaard S and Özçaglar-Toulouse N (2011) Still crossing borders: Migration, consumption, and markets. *Consumption Markets & Culture* 14 (3): 217-222.
- Bauman Z (ed) (1997) *Postmodernity and Its Discontents*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Beck U (2000) *What is Globalization?* Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Berry JW (1980) Acculturation as adaptation. In Padilla AM (ed) *Acculturation: Theory, Models, and Some New Findings*. Boulder: Westview Press, 9–26.
- Berry JW (1997) Immigration, acculturation, and adaptation. *Applied Psychology* 46 (1): 5–34.
- Burton D (2000) Ethnicity, identity, and marketing: A critical review. *Journal of Marketing Management* 16 (8): 853–877.
- Burton D (2002) Towards a critical multicultural marketing theory. *Marketing Theory* 2 (2): 207–236.
- Cui G (1997) Marketing strategies in a multi-ethnic environment. *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice* 5 (1): 122–134.
- Cui G (2001) Marketing to ethnic minority consumers: A historical journey (1932-1997). *Journal of Macromarketing* 21 (1): 23–31.
- Demangeot C, Adkins NR, Mueller RD, Henderson GR, Ferguson NS, Mandiberg JM, Roy A, Johnson GD, Kipnis E, Pullig C, Broderick AJ and Zúñiga MA (2013) Towards intercultural competency in multicultural marketplaces. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 32 (Special issue): 156–164.
- Firat AF and Venkatesh A (1995) Liberatory postmodernism and the reenchantment of consumption. *Journal of Consumer Research* 22 (3): 239–267.
- Gauthier F and Martikainen T (2013) *Religion in Consumer Society: Brands, Consumer and Markets*. Surrey: Ashgate Publishing Limited.

- Ger G (2013) Islamic marketing at the nexus of global markets–religions–politics and implications for research. *Marketing Theory* 13 (4): 497–503.
- Giddens A (1991) *Modernity and Self Identity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Grier S, Brumbaugh AM and Thornton C. (2006) Crossover dreams: Consumer responses to ethnic-oriented products. *Journal of Marketing* 70 (2): 35-51.
- Groat LN (1995) *Giving Places Meaning*. London: Academic Press.
- Halter M (2000) *Shopping for Identity: The Marketing of Ethnicity*. New York: Random House Inc.
- Jafari A.(2012) Islamic marketing: insights from a critical perspective. *Journal of Islamic Marketing* 3 (1): 22-34.
- Jafari A, Taheri B, and vom Lehn D (2013) Cultural consumption, interactive sociality and the museum. *Journal of Marketing Management*, 29 (15-16): 1729–1752.
- Kothari U (2008) Global peddlers and local networks: Migrant cosmopolitanisms. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 26 (3): 500-516. Lindridge, AM (forthcoming). Ethnic minority market segmentation: is it really feasible? In: Jamal A, Peñaloza L and Laroche M (eds), *The Routledge Companion on Ethnic Marketing*. London: Routledge.
- Lipsitz G (2007) The racialization of space and the spatialization of race: Theorizing the hidden architecture of landscape. *Landscape Journal* 26(1): 10–23.
- Luedicke MK (2011) Consumer acculturation theory: (Crossing) conceptual boundaries. *Consumption, Markets & Culture* 14 (3): 223–244.
- Massey D (1994) *Space, Place and Gender*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Morton FS, Zettermeyer F and Silva-Risso J (2003) Consumer information and discrimination: Does the Internet affect the pricing of new cars to women and minorities? *Quantitative Marketing and Economics* 1 (1): 65-92.

- Nwankwo S and Lindridge A (1998) Marketing to ethnic minorities in Britain. *Journal of Marketing Practice: Applied Marketing Science* 4 (7): 200–216.
- Nguyena TTM and Nguyen TD (2014) Enhancing business relationship quality through cultural sensitization. *Journal of Relationship Marketing* 13 (1): 70–87.
- Pechmann C, Moore ES, Andreasen AR, Connell PM, Freeman D, Gardner MP, Heisley D, Lefebvre RC, Pirouz DM, and Soster RL (2011) Navigating the central tensions in research on at-risk consumers: Challenges and opportunities. *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 30 (1): 23–30.
- Piresa GD, Stantonb J, and Stanton P (2011) Revisiting the substantiality criterion: From ethnic marketing to market segmentation. *Journal of Business Research* 64 (9): 988–996.
- Shankarmahesh MN (2006) Consumer ethnocentrism: An integrative review of its antecedents and consequences. *International Marketing Review* 23 (2): 146–172.
- Shimp TA and Sharma S (1987) Consumer ethnocentrism: Construction and validation of the CETSCALE. *Journal of Marketing Research* 24 (3): 280–289.
- Süerdem A (2013) Yes my name is Ahmet, but please don't target me. Islamic marketing: Marketing Islam™? *Marketing Theory* 13 (4): 285–295.
- Visconti LM (forthcoming) Emplaced ethnicity: the role of space(s) on migrants' acculturation. In: Jamal A, Laroche M and Peñaloza L (eds) *The Routledge Companion on Ethnic Marketing*. London: Routledge.
- Visconti LM, Jafari A, Batat W, Broeckerhoff A, Dedeoglu AÖ, Demangeot C, Kipnis E, Lindridge A, Peñaloza LN, Pullig C, Regany F, Ustundagli E and Weinberger MF (forthcoming) Consumer ethnicity three decades after: A TCR agenda. *Journal of Marketing Management*.

Warde A (2005) Consumption and theories of practice. *Journal of Consumer Culture* 5 (2): 131–153.

Weber M (1978) *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*. In Roth G and Wittich C (eds). Berkley, CA: University of California Press.

Zolfagharian M, Saldivar R, and Sun Q (2014) Ethnocentrism and country of origin effects among immigrant consumers. *Journal of Consumer Marketing* 31 (1): 68–84.