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# Branding Beyond Prejudice:

## Navigating Multicultural Marketplaces for Consumer Well-being

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# **Branding Beyond Prejudice: Navigating Multicultural Marketplaces for Consumer Well-being**

## **Abstract**

Today's marketplaces are increasingly multicultural as more individuals negotiate complex cultural identities. Brands play a role in materializing individual identities – however, little is known about how culture-based brand appeals might affect consumers' identity dynamics, positively or negatively. The paper provides a framework and a model that examines the interaction between three different types of multicultural marketplaces (assimilation, separation, and mutual integration) and different voices that brands might use in their cultural appeals (Branding Ignorance, Branding Tolerance, and Branding Engagement). The model identifies how these different voices (strategies) might exacerbate consumer vulnerabilities in different types of marketplaces and provides recommendations for how to use culture-based branding appeals in a benevolent manner.

**Keywords:** multicultural marketplaces; culture-based branding; consumer vulnerability

## 1. Introduction and Motivation

“I can speak differentially as a psychologist, a man, a Catholic, a member of conservative Dutch family, but I can also speak as an American...” (Hermans and Kepmen 1998, p. 1118).

Today’s multicultural marketplace (MCMP) includes consumers from diverse cultural groups (groups that form and share common beliefs, values, attitudes and/or ways of life around a distinguishable aspect such as ethnicity, religion, nationality, residence in particular geographic regions or disability, sexual orientation, etc. – Broderick et al., 2011a). Some aspects of culture and identity are constructed and shared transnationally (Appadurai, 1996). Concurrently, intensive inter-cultural exchange in MCMPs also brings to light the differences in the unique features of cultures (Bauman, 2000). Adding to this complexity, cultural identity dynamics in MCMPs extend beyond demographic indicators such as race or ethnicity, with a large number of individuals negotiating self-identities between multiple cultural frames (Clark & Maas, 2009; Holliday, 2010).

Brands emerge as “cultural, ideological and sociological objects” (Schroeder 2009, p. 124) used by marketplace actors (companies and consumers) as referents for the establishment and performance of identities. Brands materialize ideas on global standards of living and, at the same time, depict meanings unique to different cultural groups (Strizhakova, Coutler, & Price, 2008; Yang, 2011). When lacking sensitivity to the complexity of cultural identity formation, these ideas and meanings may have detrimental effects on consumer self-evaluation and well-being. More pointedly, perceived failure of a given brand to recognize or be sensitive to individuals’ cultural identities may create or intensify prejudicial and discriminatory cognitions towards particular persons and/or exacerbate their vulnerability, that is, a sense of identity threat from the actors (social

institutions, other consumers) this brand represents (Broderick et al., 2011b). Threat perceptions harm individual consumers and fuel societal tensions by generating radical identity dynamics. These dynamics can range from measures to change or conceal identity (such as skin whitening) to withdrawal from or revolt against actors perceived to pose a threat (Maalouf, 2000). Conversely, careful alignment of brand identity with MCMPs' realities can create symbolic experiences of positive dynamics between (culturally) different groups.

In general, the need for frameworks that integrate managerial concepts of brand identity and image with the sociocultural processes shaping consumer identities is growing (Schroeder, 2009). One perspective pertinent to address is that of consumer well-being and identity dynamics in situations when portrayal of cultural similarities and differences in brand identity may (intentionally or unintentionally) not align with the social meanings of (cultural) similarity and difference in MCMP contexts.

This paper addresses this gap by developing a conceptual framework that integrates literature on branding and on consumer cultural identity formation within MCMPs differing in sociopolitical and inter-cultural dynamics. The proposed model of Cultural Branding Voice – Marketplace Alignment considers the effects on vulnerability and identity tensions of different voices that brands may adopt when using cultural appeals and provides recommendations to maintain balance between benevolence and effectiveness when developing brand identities in each type of MCMP. By considering the impact of different cultural branding voices on consumer well-being, the model makes an important contribution to the branding literature while identifying means of enhancing consumer well-being.

## **2. Theoretical background**

### *2.1. Brand identity and brand image: a dynamic relationship informing brand management*

Brand identity and brand image are two distinct yet interrelated dimensions of brand building. Brand identity entails the strategic efforts of firms to assign a brand with unique characteristics in a bid to achieve positive perceptions by target consumers (Nandan, 2005). Brand image refers to the “brand associations held in consumer memory” (Keller, 1993 p.3) derived from decoding and interpreting the brand’s positioning messages. Positivity of brand associations stems from functional and self-congruence. Functional congruence stems from perceptions of the extent to which a brand’s performance attributes (e.g., taste, quality, durability) match expectations from an ideal product in a given category (Sirgy & Johar, 1999). Self-congruence encompasses the extent to which perceived symbolic meanings associated with a brand’s image match one’s perception of self (Belk, 1988). When decoding the symbolic meanings of brands, a consumer assesses whether a given brand “is me”, “is what I want to be” or “is not me”. Consumers utilize these meanings to create or engage with imagined worlds or communities (Cayla & Arnould, 2008).

Recent frameworks recognize the significance of consumers’ input into a brand’s meaning and conceptualize brand identity management “as a dynamic process to which brand managers and consumers...contribute” (Da Silveira, Lages, & Simoes, 2011 p.6). Hence, brand identity management encompasses encounters between the two imagination domains: of firms’ brand managers and of consumers.

## *2.2. Cultural identity theory and multicultural marketplaces*

Cultural identity entails a person’s attempt to self-identify and be identified by others as a member of one or several cultural groups. Individuals use personal cultural characteristics to delineate the meanings of “who am I” and “who am I not”, “what is us” and “what are others” (Tajfel, 1974). The sense of self derived from identifying as a member of a

cultural group(s) helps people identify what is acceptable/non-acceptable for members of the group and judge the ideas and behaviors of non-members (Frideres & Goldenberg, 1982).

To understand cultural identity formation, one needs to look beyond demographic indicators. Individuals no longer rely solely on being “born into” a nation, race and/or ethnicity for cultural identity construal (Craig & Douglas, 2006; Phinney & Ong, 2007). MCMPs create “an interactional meeting place” where “multivoiced [cultural] dialogues” take place (Hermans & Kepmen 1998, p. 1118). These dialogues allow individuals to (re)connect to and/or (re)create a multitude of cultural realities through global mediascapes, technoscapes, and consumptionscapes (Appadurai 1996). In postmodern reality culture becomes a principal entity encapsulating human similarities and differences, including those based on generational and/or gender cohort, sexual orientation, physical ability/disability, body image, and psychological disorders (Lentin & Titley, 2011). Hence, this paper views cultural identity as a sense of self derived from emotional bonds with ancestral (national, ethnic, racial) and/or affiliative (non-ancestral) cultural groups (Jiménez, 2010; Oberecker, Riefler, & Diamantopoulos, 2008). Individuals often develop complex psychological motivations to select, retain, reject and participate in (re)creation of a culture or cultures for self-identity construal. Importantly, living in a MCMP does not necessarily motivate individuals to develop multicultural identities (Berry, 1980).

### *2.3. Cultural identity threat, vulnerability and coping as drivers of differential identity dynamics in MCMPs*

Threat perceptions greatly influence cultural identity dynamics. Perceived identity threat entails the anxiety of being overpowered (excluded), misperceived or misrepresented (ridiculed) on the basis of (cultural) difference (Stephan, Ybarra, & Bachman, 1999).

Perceptions of threat may evoke a state of vulnerability which leads individuals to develop coping strategies that alleviate the perceived threat (Baker, Gentry, & Rittenburg, 2005).

MCMP coping strategies encompass identity negotiations driven by the need to maintain or improve self-esteem in relation to emotionally significant cultural group(s). Coping strategies may be 1) “additive”: addition of certain “emotionally significant” groups while maintaining significance of current in-group(s), driving an integration of competences, ideas and behaviors of all favorable groups as a compromise) or 2) “subtractive”: (exclusion of certain “emotionally significant” groups, driving radical measures to oblige favorable groups by negating identification with unfavorable group(s) or to protect identity by either rejecting (avoiding) or overpowering (dominating) groups posing perceived threat (Kipnis, Broderick, & Demangeot, 2011; Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez, & Gibson, 2005).

The emotional significance of groups can change over time, as individuals compare sociocultural capital, power, and control held by groups in their MCMPs experiences. Individuals assess 1) the value of a given group(s) to one’s self-identity and 2) conditions (i.e., significance of identity reinforcement or change) required to maintain or achieve this enhanced perception. Whilst the former evaluation arises on an individual level, the latter strongly relates to perceived dynamics between the individual and marketplace actors (in-groups, out-groups, media, social institutions, and brands).

Discrepancies between individual attitudes and the perceived attitudes of other society members affect intra- and inter-group conflict and life satisfaction. They drive (re)evaluations of selected coping strategies. For instance, differences in acculturation strategies may increase family or peer tensions within immigrant groups (Waters, 1994); high levels of prejudice towards immigrants affect the evaluation of and attitudes towards socially-acceptable ways in which immigrants should adjust to living in a new society (Kosic,



Mannetti, & Lackland, 2005). Misrepresentation or exclusion of identity in material elements of culture (amusement parks, media, advertising) affect perceptions of social relations and distance and may lead to lowered self-evaluation or frustration with those perceived to generate misrepresentations (Yang, 2011). Cultural identity in a MCMP is sociopolitical in nature: identity tensions and vulnerability stem not from cultural diversity per se but from perceived threat of prejudice and discrimination inflicted for developing or maintaining a particular identity in a particular diversity context (Lentin & Titley, 2011). As sociocultural entities, brands must navigate the MCMP benevolently. At least they must avoid stimulating subtractive coping as a response to vulnerability exacerbated by culture-based brand appeals; at best they can provide transformational experiences that enhance identities through additive coping for every individual and group in the marketplace.

### **3. Conceptual framework: navigating a brand in multicultural marketplaces to avoid culture-based brand identity misalignment**

Brand managers and Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) recognize the increasing cultural complexity of today's marketplace. A world-wide survey of 1,734 CMOs reveals a consensus that a major challenge is rapidly changing marketplace demographics combined with an explosion of media channels and social media, and the resulting transparency of brands and organizations (IBM, 2011). Yet despite general agreement that cultural identities derived by consumers are diverse and complex, when attempting to address consumers, brands often face strong negative response from one or more cultural group(s).

Brand culture literature attributes misalignment between brand image perception and brand identity to the lack of synthesis between two domains of imagined cultural communities: managerial concepts of brand identity and sociocultural conceptions of inter-

group dynamics in MCMPs (Schroeder, 2009; Schroeder & Salzer-Morling, 2006). This misalignment may result in brand identities that are ill-fitted with individual and group identities in a given sociopolitical context. As described by Appadurai (1996), “one man’s imagined community is another man’s political prison” (p. 32).

### *3.1. Types of sociopolitical contexts in MCMPs*

The influence of perceived identity threat applies to both non-dominant (i.e., groups in a subordinate social or political position) and dominant populations (Verkuyten, 2005). By definition, the MCMP assumes sociopolitical governance of multicultural. Building on Berry’s categorization (2008), four types of sociopolitical conceptions of multicultural dynamics can exist:

- 1) Exclusion entails denial of rights by the dominant group to the non-dominant group(s);
- 2) Assimilation expects all non-dominant groups to abandon ideas and behaviors of (their) culture and adopt culture of the dominant group in exchange for societal acceptance;
- 3) Separation views non-dominant groups as separate subgroups, does not expect them to mix with the larger society, nor actively obstructs their freedoms to practice (their) culture;
- 4) Mutual integration views non-dominant groups as full active members of the larger society who adopt/adapt dominant culture while retaining (their) culture, and should also mix with and be accepted by the larger society.

This categorization highlights that MCMPs differ in whether governance of multiculturalism is based on denial or acceptance of difference. The categories represent two polar conceptions of governance: the first two “anti-difference conceptions” view difference as a problem which should be minimized; the last two “pro-difference conceptions” view difference as a beneficial resource for societal and personal enrichment and reinvigoration (Lentin & Titley, 2011). Within the anti-difference group, this paper focuses on assimilation only, since exclusion is less relevant to the marketing context.

Many societies navigate from one model of governance to another. For example, despite its historical Melting Pot rhetoric, the United States has a pro-difference approach, having failed to assimilate new immigrants. Most countries migrate from an ideal/philosophical assimilationist model to a more applicable/practical multicultural approach (Glazer, 1997). However, in many countries, growing public hostility of dominant populations towards immigrants marks the twenty-first century (Fetzer, 2000).

A return of the assimilation rhetoric may indicate the vulnerability of dominant populations (Brubaker, 2001). Concurrently, non-dominant groups’ reaction to discrimination may be: 1) to work towards integration into the dominant community and markets (additive coping) or 2) to strengthen communities that serve discriminated populations (subtractive coping) (Mandiberg & Warner, in press). While several variables may create identity threats and vulnerability, this paper focuses on threats created by culture-based brand appeals.

### *3.2. How Consumers Process Culture-based Brand Appeals*

Prior research demonstrates differential effects for persuasive messages across different cultural contexts (e.g., Han & Shavitt, 1994). A common explanation for these

effects rests on the accessibility (the activation of relevant knowledge) and diagnosticity (usefulness of the activated knowledge) of one's cultural identity. Accessible cultural identity is more likely to act as a frame of reference in evaluation of persuasive appeals (Aaker, 2000; Reed, 2002). Adapting the framework of Reed (2002) and Reed and Forehand (unpublished), three factors could influence the extent to which cultural identity might be made accessible: 1) contextual and social situations that make one more aware of their cultural identity; 2) cues or primes in the appeal that prompt accessibility of one's cultural identity; and 3) strength of association that one has with one's cultural identity.

First, contextual or social situation might make one's cultural identity more accessible through a self-referencing effect (Reed, 2002). For example, Deshpande and Stayman (1994) establish that the level of an individual's distinctiveness makes one's cultural identity more accessible or salient. This study shows that someone living as a minority (Hispanic minority in a select city of the US) is more likely to have their Hispanic status as accessible relative to an individual who lives within a community with majority status (Hispanic majority in a select city of the US). Thus, structural context (e.g., communities of recent immigrants) is likely to affect the accessibility and salience of one's cultural identity. Additional variables that might cue cultural identity include cultural holidays and events (Penaloza & Gilly, 1999), shopping companions or actors in the marketplace (LeBoeuf & Shafir, 2003), and cultural symbols, words, and images occurring separately from the appeal (Aquino & Reed, 2002; Forehand & Desphande, 2001).

Second, explicit and implicit cues in the brand appeal are likely to increase accessibility of one's cultural identity. This effect is well-established for a variety of cue types – cultural images (Forehand, Desphande, & Reed, 2002), spokespersons or actors (Appiah, 2001), and language (Dimofte, Forehand, & Desphande, 2004). However, this is where marketers often make egregious errors that lead to unfavorable reactions from both the

targeted minority and majority cultural groups (Brumbaugh, 2002; Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999).

The third factor is the strength of association that an individual has with their cultural identity (Reed, 2002; Reed and Forehand, 2011). When an individual's cultural identity is high in personal importance, this identity may be chronically accessible (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). A chronic cultural identity pertains both to individuals identifying with one (cultural) group and to those with multicultural identities. Multicultural individuals switch between cultural identity frames in response to cultural cues (Briley, Morris, & Simonson, 2005) and may be more amenable to diverse cultural stimuli (Zhang & Khare, 2009).

Prominence and novelty of an appeal's cultural aspects is likely a moderator of accessibility and evaluation. More prominent and novel cues generate greater attention and increased elaboration compared to cues that are less prominent or novel (Gardner, 1983). This effect operates differently for the in-group when compared to the out-group. Specifically, less prominent or novel cues activate the in-group's cultural identity more effectively (Brumbaugh, 2002). The in-group will be more likely to notice the less prominent cue, due to a higher level of chronic accessibility, and have the required cultural schema to process the cue's meaning. The out-group majority may not recognize the cue due to a poorly developed schema related to the in-group culture (Oakenfull & Greenlee, 2005). As cultural cues increase in prominence, both groups are likely to notice the cues and process their meaning. The in-group is more likely to receive highly prominent in-group minority cues more positively (Grier & Brumbaugh, 1999). However, the out-group majority may be confused and not understand the cultural cue due to their poorly developed sub-cultural schema (Brumbaugh, 2002).

### *3.3. Effects of brand identity (mis)alignment on consumer vulnerability and sociocultural tensions in MCMPs*

When cultural identities are accessible, they serve as an interpretive frame for evaluating culture-based brand appeals. The extent to which the appeal and brand aligns or is congruent with the cultural identity schema determines the nature of an individual's response to the culture-based brand appeal. The notion that congruency is important to evaluation is consistent with functional approaches to attitudes that posit objects are linked to personal identities (Shavitt, 1989). In general, one likely views attitude objects (brand images) that are congruent with one's self-identity as more relevant or diagnostic, resulting in more positive elaboration and affective responses. Research consistently confirms a congruency effect across contexts (Chattaraman, Rudd, & Lennon, 2009; Pullig, Netemeyer, & Biswas, 2005;). Incongruence, however, is not restricted to a neutral attitudinal response to a brand appeal. Appeals that are misaligned (seen as incongruent) with accessible identity frames are likely to generate negative affective reactions from consumers, including feelings of vulnerability (Friestad & Wright, 1994).

In culture-based brand appeals, a special form of misalignment is misrepresentation (i.e., discriminatory or prejudicial meanings ascribed to particular identities). Schroeder and Borgerson (2005) identify three types of misrepresentation: idealization (of depicted standards of beauty), exclusion (of certain identities), and exoticization (of certain identity characteristics). Consumer reactions to brand identity misalignment can be magnified by the contrast of how (cultural) difference is portrayed by the brand and the socio-political conceptions of difference in a given MCMP. In *pro-difference MCMPs*, stereotypical and/or condescending portrayal of cultural difference of certain groups may lead consumers identifying with the portrayed group to feel ridiculed and increase discriminatory cognitions of the co-residing out-groups. Equally, exclusion of certain identities may be seen as an

ideological stance supporting or promoting discrimination and prejudice. In *anti-difference MCMPs*, highlighting of cultural differences in certain identities becomes problematic, possibly even risky, since other stakeholders may interpret accentuation of difference as a threat to the national unity and nation building (Johnson & Grier, 2011). Conversely, greater alignment of accessible identities with brand identity is likely to result in enhanced judgments of appeal authenticity and brand legitimacy, the generalized perception that a brand's actions are desirable or appropriate (Kates, 2004).

#### *3.4. Key disconnects between conceptions of cultural identity and brand identity development*

Understanding that diversity exists appears to be not enough to responsibly navigate brand identities in a marketplace. Culture-based brand appeals benevolent in one MCMP may exacerbate vulnerability and sociocultural tensions in another. Hence, the most important task for brand managers lies not in establishing the multicultural composition of a marketplace but rather in correctly identifying and developing campaigns aligned with the dynamics of an MCMP. However, whilst acknowledging that multicultural demographic composition is a common characteristic of many marketplaces, extant literature neither provides brand managers with sufficient guidance on different MCMP contexts nor offers frameworks that allow forecasting of what types of culture-based appeals may generate alignment or misalignment in different MCMP contexts.

First, literature neglects the differential effects of variances in MCMP contexts on intra- and inter-group dynamics. Typically, most multicultural marketing studies rely on national settings that follow the integration conception of sociopolitical order (Martin, Lee, & Yang, 2004; Whittler & Spira, 2002). These studies implicitly assume that international generalization of findings is possible without reference to sociopolitical contexts.

Second, the psycho-sociological effects of culture-based branding appeals for non-target consumer groups receive little attention in branding literature. Yet increased media reach suggests that both target and non-target consumer groups encounter and decode culture-based branding appeals that are and are not intended for them, and negative depiction of branding appeals targeting one group of consumers may lead to unfavorable effects on other groups (Aaker, Brumbaugh, & Grier, 2000).

Third, extant branding theory remains largely underpinned by two outdated assumptions of cultural identity dynamics: 1) consumers' cultural identity negotiations being restrictively embedded within the boundaries of one's own ethnic and/or national communities (i.e., one's membership in a particular community determines one's identity) and 2) cultural values, norms, beliefs and practices within communities remaining constant "across time and spaces" (Arzubiaga, Artiles, Kind, & Harris-Murri, 2008 p.312). Consequently, brand management often remains restricted to the use of multiple demographic labels, omitting the more complex identities that consumers may develop.

For managers to maintain the required balance between effectiveness and benevolence when navigating brands in MCMPs, a new paradigm of multicultural marketing is needed, one that considers the impact of MCMPs' sociopolitical and cultural dynamics on individual consumers' identities and means of processing culture-based brand appeals.

#### **4. From Culture-Based Branding to Cultural Branding in Multicultural Marketplaces: A Conceptual Model**

As shown in section 3, culture-based brand appeals can evoke symbolic threats and contribute to intergroup anxiety. The proposed Brand Cultural Voice – Marketplace



Alignment Model (Figure 1) presents three types of MCMP cultural dynamics, details voices that branding managers can develop, and conceptualizes the responses of dominant and non-dominant groups to brands' culture-based "voices".

Figure 1 here

Specifically, the model rows detail three types of cultural dynamics (assimilation, separation, mutual integration). This paper conceptualizes that, under each of these marketplace conditions, the intensity of voluntary intergroup interactions, intergroup anxiety, and negative intergroup cultural stereotypes may vary from high to low and impacts differentially on the groups' perceptions of inter-cultural relations and engagement, resulting in different consequences for perceived identity threat and vulnerability. The model columns represent three types of culture-based brand voices that brand managers can develop, using cultural cues to shape brand identity. Figure 1 provides definitions of the voices; Table 1 below provides illustrative examples.

Table 1 here

Branding Ignorance is a brand identity that either incorporates cultural cues relevant only to the dominant cultural group (ignores cultural cues relevant to non-dominant groups) or portrays particular identities in a derogatory manner. For example, the *Lacoste* fragrance "Joy of Pink" campaign (launched in 2010 in the UK and France) uses three female models enjoying a shower of pink ribbons (<http://www.lacoste-parfums.co.uk>; <http://www.lacoste-parfums.fr>). While activating strivings for physical attractiveness, depicting models with fair skin can lower self-evaluations of consumers with darker skin: literature documents Asian consumers' conceptions of transnational beauty constructed through "white" imagination leads to consumption of skin whitening creams harmful to their health (Saraswati, 2010).

Branding Tolerance is a brand identity that incorporates differential cultural cues to appeal to a specific target segment within an MCMP identified at a demographic level (such as ethnicity or race). Branding Tolerance encompasses corporate acknowledgement of cultural diversity which results in the development of different advertisements as part of one campaign to appeal to multiple (dominant and non-dominant) consumer segments, using models, language and cultural meanings relevant to different ethnic, racial or other cultural groups. Examples include USA campaigns developed specifically for Hispanics (using Hispanic models and language) by leading brands such as *Dove*, *Nestle* and *Coca Cola* and *Nivea's* 2006 UK "Beauty Is" campaign featuring either White or African models in its several versions.

The Branding Engagement identity incorporates multiple cultural cues (models of different/mixed ethnicities, multiple languages etc.) within one advertisement, thereby acknowledging mutual integration of multiple cultural groups. Branding Engagement messages encompass culture-based appeals to mono and multicultural individuals of different cultural backgrounds simultaneously. For instance, *Nivea's* "Feel Closer" campaign features models of several ethnicities and skin colors in one copy and a strapline "A million moments of closeness". Similar examples exist in other MCMPs. Campaigns of several brands in South Africa attempt to reach out to multiple cultural groups in a single advertisement by using models of differing cultural backgrounds (*IBM*, *Air India*) to represent a certain universal symbolism of cultural and social harmony in post-apartheid South Africa (Johnson, Elliott, and Grier, 2010).

Finally, the nine model cells identify the vulnerability and identity dynamics implications of brands' cultural "voices", when they align/misalign with the sociopolitical and sociocultural context. The discussion focuses on the effects of misalignment between brand voice and MCMP context. Such misalignment happens when cultural cues activate a

cultural identity that some consumer groups perceive as non-accessible and/or non-authentic (Higgins, 1996) or less relevant for identity performance (Shavitt, 1989). Incongruence with the cultural identity schemas results in negative cognitive and affective connotations and evaluations of brand voice meanings and can generate perceptions of the brand posing a symbolic identity threat in dominant and/or non-dominant groups alike. These perceptions may aggravate consumer vulnerability and perceptions of discrimination or misperception, potentially increasing intercultural tensions.

Figure 1 indicates that, in Assimilation contexts, Branding Ignorance may lead to high vulnerability of non-dominant consumers and result in their greater alienation from the marketplace. Branding Tolerance, whilst reducing vulnerability of non-dominant consumers, may lead to an increase in vulnerability of consumers in dominant groups, potentially contributing to higher levels of social prejudice toward and tensions with non-dominant groups. Branding Engagement may similarly lead to increased vulnerability and inter-cultural anxiety within dominant consumer groups. Therefore, cultural cueing in brand voices is generally a highly risky strategy in Assimilation MCMPs. To achieve benevolence, managers should take great care when developing brand appeals and select one of the following alternatives: 1) minimize use of cultural cues that uniquely relate to one particular group or 2) if using cultural cues relevant to non-dominant groups, aim to develop less prominent or novel cultural cues (such as *Domino Pizza's* “Jess” advertisement) that only the target non-dominant groups will notice, due to chronic accessibility of the identity schema (Oakenfull and Greenlee, 2005).

In Separation contexts, Branding Ignorance appeals may also lead to increased consumer vulnerability within consumer groups. Branding Tolerance appears a better suited branding voice than Branding Engagement, since in this context groups accept diversity within the marketplace although voluntary mutual interactions and engagements are few.

However, when developing separate culture-based brand appeals for multiple target segments, one should avoid appeals that the consumers of a particular segment may interpret as illegitimate and, consequently, ridiculing or discriminatory when compared with the appeals aimed at other segments. The recent case of *Nivea*'s campaign illustrates this situation vividly. Launched in the USA under the umbrella term "Look Like You Give a Damn", the campaign includes two versions. Each features a man (a White model in one ad and an African American model in the other ad) replacing an un-groomed head with a more groomed version. The copy with the White model features a strapline "Sin City isn't an excuse to look like hell", while the copy with the African American model features a strapline "Re-civilize Yourself". The difference between the two straplines provoked a consumer outcry resulting in Nivea withdrawing all advertising and issuing a public apology (Nudd, 2011).

When developing culture-based brand appeals for several target segments, managers should consider: 1) carefully testing how both target and non-target consumer groups would interpret cultural cues and meanings of all adverts; 2) avoiding the use of brand appeals that may come across as illegitimate, that is, creating undesirable or inappropriate meanings/actions within the system of social and cultural norms, values and beliefs (Kates, 2004).

Finally, in Mutual Integration contexts, Branding Ignorance appeals are a highly risky strategy, since the likelihood of greater proportions of consumers in these MCMPs developing/maintaining multicultural identities (whether through mixed-ethnic/raced upbringing or affiliative relations) is high. Therefore, Branding Ignorance appeals are more likely not to achieve identity accessibility and congruence with consumer identity schemas and lead to greater feelings of vulnerability. While Branding Tolerance appeals in Mutual Integration MCMPs will reduce vulnerability of such consumers if they view the appeals

relevant to various cultural groups, greater alignment and effectiveness can occur with the use of Branding Engagement appeals. The Branding Engagement voice would signal brands' appreciation of consumers' cultural identity complexity and their achieved inter-cultural engagement.

## **5. Conclusion**

“This presents a unique opportunity to address the new consumer, not as a segment of a market, a minority, a majority, or other dividing classification, but as a human being....that forms a diverse [multicultural world]” (Ken Muench, draftFCB, Chicago, quoted in Aceves, 2011).

Marketplaces are increasingly multicultural and challenging. Understanding how to create effective and benevolent cultural appeals is an important issue for both brand managers and consumers. The overall framework proposed in this paper indicates that cultural identity accessibility may vary by context and situation. Cultural identity may be chronically accessible for some groups and individuals; for others, branding appeals prompt the activation. Once activated, one's cultural identity acts as a frame to evaluate any culture-based brand appeal. The extent to which activated cultural identity, the appeal, and the brand are aligned or congruent influences the well-being or vulnerability of different cultural groups. The success and cultural benevolence of brand voices depends on the MCMP context and the Cultural Branding Voice – Marketplace Alignment Model offers recommendations on the strategies brand managers may use to minimize risks of aggravating the vulnerability of certain cultural groups.

The model proposes a broader range of diagnostics of sociopolitical influences on development of consumer voices and the social effects of differing types of cultural cues on dominant and non-dominant populations. If perceived as a symbolic threat to cultural identities, branding appeals can aggravate vulnerability of target and non-target groups and lead to consumer revolt against the brand. The conceptualization aims to assist managers in the development of cultural cues that avoid producing a misalignment (and therefore a perceived identity threat) for any cultural group and consequently do not aggravate cultural tensions in MCMPs.

Out of necessity, the current paradigm of multicultural marketing is evolving. This paper aims to further progress towards a more benevolent approach, where brands speak with a true and honest voice to all consumers. The paper's key contribution is the consideration of how a brand's cultural voice suits the characteristics and inter-group dynamics of a given MCMP. Within the MCMP, brand managers must consider the dynamics between and among multicultural groups and identity tensions which individuals within the dominant and non-dominant groups may experience. Managers must also integrate this consideration with an understanding of how individuals process brand messages within a given group context. Due to the accessibility of information, brands are facing a forced transparency. As a further complication, individuals in some MCMPs are more multicultural themselves – retaining aspects of their own unique experience while integrating aspects of others'. Assumptions of cultural identity require updating, to better understand today's consumer and the MCMP in general. The new paradigm for multicultural marketing will integrate an understanding of sociopolitical aspects of the MCMP with an understanding of the complexity of the cultural identity process. To achieve benevolence in today's MCMP, brands and organizations will have to live honesty and transparency.

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**Figure 1. Brand Cultural Voice – Marketplace Alignment Model**

Brand “voices” and definitions	Branding ignorance	Branding tolerance	Branding engagement
<b>Marketplace contexts and cultural identity dynamics</b>	Cultural cues neglect non-dominant segments. Profiling of target market is restricted to dominant majority characteristics and signify exclusion of other groups.	Cultural cues signal target market (dominant or non-dominant). Profiling of target markets restricted to demographic segmentation and assumption of identity based on ethnic, racial and other forms of cultural belonging.	Cultural cues acknowledge multicultural (“hyphenated”) identities in dominant and non-dominant groups; and leverage emotional inter-group bonding and aim to obtain buy-in from several cultural groups.
	Advertising images use language, models and cultural meanings characterizing dominant majority.	Advertising images use models language and cultural meanings of the targeted cultural group.	Advertising images use multiple cultural cues and models of multicultural background, languages and cultural meanings.
ASSIMILATION	Dominant group response	Dominant group response	Dominant group response
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Low intensity of voluntary intergroup contacts</i></li> <li>• <i>High intergroup anxiety</i></li> <li>• <i>Strong prejudice from dominant groups and adaptation, resistance or withdrawal of non-dominant groups.</i></li> </ul>	<u>Alignment:</u> low symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluation/re-evaluation based on product attributes	<u>Alignment:</u> low symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluation/ re-evaluation based on product attributes	<u>Misalignment</u> (unless the cultural cues are “unnoticed” by dominant group)
	<b>Non-dominant group response</b>  <u>Misalignment:</u> high symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluation/ re-evaluation based on social symbolic meanings of the	<u>Misalignment:</u> (when exposed to ad targeted at other groups) increased symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluation/re-evaluation based on social meanings of the brand; further	<b>Non-dominant group response</b>  <u>Alignment:</u> low symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluation/re-evaluation based on product attributes  <i>Potential for vulnerability</i>

	<p>brand; further identity radicalization; marketplace alienation and/or brand avoidance</p> <p><i>High potential for vulnerability among non-dominant groups</i></p>	<p>identity radicalization</p> <p><b>Non-dominant group response</b></p> <p><u>Alignment:</u> decreased symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluations based on product attributes</p> <p><u>Misalignment</u> (when exposed to ad targeted at other groups)</p> <p><i>Potential for vulnerability among dominant and non-dominant groups</i></p>	<p><i>(prejudice, anxiety) among dominant group</i></p>
<p><b>SEPARATION</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Medium/high intensity of voluntary intergroup contacts</i></li> <li>• <i>Medium/low intergroup anxiety</i></li> <li>• <i>Progressive acceptance of cultural differences, although groups remain distinct.</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Dominant group response</b></p> <p><u>Alignment:</u> low symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluation/re-evaluation based on product attributes</p> <p><b>Non-dominant group response</b></p> <p><u>Misalignment:</u> potential increase of symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluation/re-evaluation based on social meanings of the brand; development of prejudice to dominant groups and identity</p>	<p><b>Dominant and non-dominant group response</b></p> <p><u>Alignment</u> : potential increase of symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluation/re-evaluation based on product attributes</p> <p><u>Misalignment</u> (when brand appeal seen as stereotyping)</p> <p><i>Generally low potential for vulnerability unless a group feels stereotyped or misperceived</i></p>	<p><b>Dominant and non-dominant group response</b></p> <p><u>Moderate misalignment:</u> potential increase of symbolic threat perceptions through association with other groups; brand evaluation/re-evaluation based on social meanings of the brand.</p> <p><i>Some potential for vulnerability among dominant and non-dominant groups</i></p>

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radicalization

*High potential for vulnerability among non-dominant groups*

## MUTUAL INTEGRATION

- *High intensity of voluntary intergroup contacts*
- *Low intergroup anxiety*
- *Affiliative relations between groups that are comfortable with cultural differences*
- *There may be no dominant group.*

### Targeted group response

Alignment: low symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluation/re-evaluation based on product attributes

Misalignment (potentially, when targeted group empathizes with groups ignored by the appeal)

### Non-targeted group response

Misalignment: potential increase of symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluation/re-evaluation based on social meanings of the brand

*High potential for vulnerability (experienced or empathized) among targeted and non-targeted groups*

### Targeted and non-targeted group responses

Moderate alignment: low symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluation/re-evaluation based on brand product attributes and social meanings of the brand.

*Low potential for vulnerability (experienced or empathized) among targeted and non-targeted groups*

### All group responses

Alignment: low symbolic threat perceptions; brand evaluation/re-evaluation based on product attributes

*Very low potential for vulnerability (experienced or empathized) among targeted and non-targeted groups*

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**Table 1. Examples of Branding Ignorance, Tolerance and Engagement “voices”**

<b>Brand</b>	<b>Marketplace</b>	<b>Description of the campaign</b>
<b>Branding Ignorance</b>		
Lacoste	France, UK	“Joy of Pink” campaign (2010) features ad with three white models surrounded by falling pink ribbons. While one of the models featured is Alexa Chung whose father is three-quarters Chinese, her appearance resembles the idealized representation of “white beauty”, even though of mixed-race origin.
EU enlargement	Several European	“EU enlargement” ad, shot in style of “Kill Bill” by Tarantino, features a White model confronting Chinese, African and Asian models that appear to be threatening. The White model then multiplies and the other models first lower their weapons and then disappear surrounded by multiple images of the White model which then turns into the EU symbol (circle of yellow stars)
Nike	USA	“Black and Tan” shoes launched by Nike in 2012 uses phrase “Black and Tan” which has strongly negative connotations in Ireland since it recalls a British paramilitary unit involved in violence against civilians in 1920s. Nike coincided release of shoes with St.Patrick’s Day.
Fair and Handsome	India	“Fair and Handsome” is an Indian brand of face whitening cream for men. The ad features a man who is unlucky with finding a relationship. His skin tone is markedly darker than that of his friends and girls he is trying to attract. After using the cream, the man is portrayed as having much lighter skin, and the girls in the street address him as “Hi, handsome”.
<b>Branding Tolerance</b>		
Dove (Unilever)	USA	Campaign launched in 2007 as part of “ViveMejor”, “a major digital, print, TV and retail Hispanic marketing program”. The Dove print advert features a Hispanic girl model, Dove logo and a strapline “Campana por la autoestima”.
Nestle	USA	Part of the “Construye El Mejor Nido” (“Create the Best Nest”) program. The advert features a new drink brand named ‘Aguas Frescas’ (under the Nestle logo) with three bottles with different flavours: “Jamaica”, “Horchata” and “Tamarindo”.
Coca-Cola	USA	The campaign is a Hispanic adaptation of ‘Open Your Dreams campaign’, as a continuation of the Coca-Cola Hispanic programs, to “ensure that we continue to strengthen our longstanding consumer relationships and build new ones,” (Katie Bayne, chief marketing officer, Coca-Cola North America). The advert features a Hispanic male model enjoying a break, drinking Coca-Cola.

Nivea	UK	“Beauty Is” campaign, launched in 2007 (using mobile marketing) features series of visuals under an umbrella strapline “Beauty Is...”, followed by different definitions of beauty (e.g., “Beauty Is Caring”, “Beauty Is a Good Feeling” etc). Each advert features either White, African or Asian models.
<b>Branding Engagement</b>		
Air India	South Africa	Advert copy features a mixed-ethnic family (White male model and Asian female model holding a mixed-ethnic baby model) and Air India logo
Dove	Several markets	“Campaign For Real Beauty” features series of ads, each ad features models of several races/ethnicities e.g., White, African etc)
Nivea	UK	“Feel Closer” campaign launched in 2011, features models of several ethnicities sharing a moment of closeness and a strapline “A million moments of closeness”.
Dominos Pizza	USA	The video-ad features Jess (who is gay) and a new “pizza tracker” service by Domino Pizza (consumers can review and rate pizzas made by Jess). The advert does not focus on Jess’s sexuality.

NB: Sources and references available on request.