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Advertising and Changing Demographics

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Europe
RENÉ ROMER

Is European advertising a mirror of the demographics of the European societies? The answer seems to be no. But is it? The limited number of cases where advertisers do promote their products and services to Asian, Arab, African, or Latin American Europeans most probably reflects the importance that European nations attach to integrating these various ethnic communities in their societies.

The European landscape is changing rapidly. Europe has become an immigration continent – a continent in which the Judaeo-Christian and humanist traditions are enriched with new Islamic and Hindu dimensions. Many European citizens have not yet adapted to these rapidly changing demographics.

The increasing cultural diversity of European consumers also impacts businesses. Candy producers like Haribo and Van Melle are substituting their meat-produced gelatine with alternative substances making it suitable for the halal and kosher markets. Several financial companies now market targeted insurance and investment products such as funeral insurances to cover the



A still from an advertising campaign by the Dutch Railways.

transport of the deceased abroad – for those of the relevant faith, the ritual washing of the body before transport is included. Some health insurers cover the costs for male circumcision, while a few banks offer Islamic investment products. However, in most instances such fundamental adaptations will not be required. What is needed, however, is adapting the ways in which we advertise for these products.

Why have fundamental adaptations in advertising not taken place? Why is cultural diversity in advertising considered on an incidental rather than a structural basis? A possible explanation could be that advertisers have for too long been looking at what separates ethnic communities instead of what binds them. The consequence is that marketers end up with too many niche markets. Since advertising budgets do not allow for addressing every niche market efficiently, marketers focus on the most substantial segments: in other words, 'the average consumer'. And the average consumer in Europe is predominantly white.

Advertising and Changing Demographics

Ethnic marketing

On a small scale, targeted marketing and communication towards specific ethnic communities was introduced in Europe in the early 1990s. Ethnic marketing consultants advised advertisers to develop targeted ethnic campaigns because the different communities were said to be too different from the regular consumer. Marketers were advised, for example, 'not to use the white colour in advertising for the Moroccan community, because white is the colour of mourning'. Amongst the other suggestions were that 'Caribbeans consider yellow to be a colour of happiness'; 'young blacks think blue is a dull colour'; and 'in print advertising for the Turkish community one should use a lot of pictures and few words'. Ethnic marketing agencies often promoted their businesses by emphasizing the differences between communities.

In recent years, we notice a change in the way we tend to look at the markets. Marketers start to realize that a growing number of Asian, Arab, African, or Latin American Europeans are *primarily* Europeans. They might be Europeans with a double orientation – an orientation towards the country of residence and an orientation towards the culture of the country of birth or their (grand)parents' birth – but they *are* Europeans. Many are born and raised in Europe. They go to school in Europe, fall in love, get married, and raise children, all *inside* Europe – not as Asians or Africans, but as *European* citizens.

As European citizens, people watch Arab and Asian television networks such as Al-Jazeera, Zee TV, or B4U, but these same Europeans enjoy BBC, Sky, ZDF, Antenne 2, or TVE. An Asian-British citizen may watch the Asian-British networks Prime TV and Reminiscent TV, but on the same evening pick up BBC's news headlines. As Europeans, consumers read the *Daily Jang*, *Nimrooz*, *Sing Tao Daily*, or *al-Ahram*, while these same Europeans read *The Independent*, *Bild Zeitung*, *Le Figaro*, or any other European newspaper. It is not uncommon for a Turkish-Dutch citizen to start the day by reading both the Dutch *Metro* newspaper and the Turkish daily *Hürriyet*. Indeed, diversity has become the core of European societies.

Local values

As we have seen here, the European consumer becomes more diverse by the day. But the majority of those in the European advertising sector tend to look at the consumer as white, or at least as Caucasian. Even the ever-increasing local ethnic media landscape in many European countries is not considered by most advertisers as worth spending part their media budgets on.

If advertisers do end up focusing on the biggest segments, as we have seen before, can they not give a more balanced representation of Europe's changing demographics in their general advertising? Yes they can, and a small but growing number of advertisers already do manage to cope with the multicultural dilemmas with which they are faced.

In many countries, advertisers use local values to promote their products and services. But do these traditional local values still do their job in a culturally diverse society? Do such values appeal to those with 'foreign' ethnic roots? In most cases, the answer is no. In the Netherlands in the early 1990s, the peanut butter brand Calvé used the motto 'Who has not grown up with Calvé?' For millions of Dutch citizens with a non-Dutch ethnic background, it was easy to say 'I did not grow up with Calvé!' A few years later, the motto was changed into 'How tall do you want to grow?' Without abandoning its brand value 'energy to grow', it suddenly extended its target audience to include ethnic communities that had not grown up with Calvé peanut butter.

A European dream?

Sometimes, however, local values can work: the 'American dream', for example. Before 9/11, the American dream was indeed a dream for many – but not all – ethnic cultural communities in and even outside the United States. Is there such an equivalent in Europe for the American dream: a European dream, or a British, French, or Dutch dream, which is universal for all ethnic cultural communities living in Europe? The question, unfortunately, cannot be answered positively. This does not, however, obstruct advertisers in finding universal values. Diesel jeans' motto 'for successful living' has been effective in many countries and for many cultures. The 'family values' of the global brand Western Union Money Transfer is another fine example.

As we have just seen with Calvé peanut butter, our good examples are not limited to global brands only. In recent years we have seen some excellent advertising campaigns for local brands, going one step further than Calvé. The Dutch mobile phone brand Ben is one. Ben promotes values of 'individuality' and 'straightforwardness'. In advertising, these values are always linked to individuals, whether they are white or black, Muslim or Christian, young or old. Ordinary people are the heroes of communication. Amongst the many interesting examples, two television commercials certainly stand out.

The one commercial shows a young Muslim girl in front of the mirror before leaving the house. She is binding her hair together and puts on her scarf, while her father is proudly glancing at her. After covering herself, she picks up her mobile to go. But before she leaves, she slips her mobile into a phone pouch, protecting both herself and her precious phone. In another commercial, we see an office department. All employees are quietly working on their computers. Suddenly one employee receives an sms message. After reading the message, the man starts dancing around the department waving a Turkish flag. Apparently, the Turkish national football team has just won its latest match. When putting the flag away and taking his seat again, he kisses his mobile and starts working.

Another brand-awareness commercial that stands out is that of the Dutch cheese

brand Uniekaas. Their motto 'unique cheese for unique people' successfully matches the traditional Dutch values represented in butter and cheese with all Dutch citizens of a foreign mother tongue. In the commercial we find an Arab-Dutch family having breakfast while the mother tells the child what mothers in the Netherlands traditionally do: 'first you have a savoury sandwich, then you have a sweet sandwich'. Of course, the mother speaks in Arabic. The motto remains the same: 'unique cheese for unique people'.

In other European countries we find interesting examples as well. In the United Kingdom, targeted services in a number of Asian languages were promoted by radio commercials and print advertising in five different Asian languages. The British Army made use of famous Asian personalities such as Naseem Hamed to create the image of a dynamic, modern, and young organization for which to work. Other famous Asian and Afro-Caribbean British were cast to promote products and services as well, such as Meera Syal, Ian Wright, and Frank Bruno. In France a chatting Asian-French woman was cast to promote the Tchatche service of France Telecom. The SNCF (the French Railways) made use of testimonials of commuters with a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds. The children's fashion brand Natalys cast a young black child for its advertising, while Universal Music contracted Jamel Debbouze and Omar et Fred as spokespersons.

These are some examples of commercials where the advertising sector is apparently far ahead of politicians when it comes to the acceptance of cultural diversity as the new standard in the European societies. Unfortunately, these are still exceptions. Just like Europe, the advertising sector as a whole does not yet mirror the changing European demographics as an integral part of their business. These examples are proof, however, that the advertising world can play a major role in presenting a European society that has changed forever. Even though there have been setbacks since 9/11, the growing diversity in European societies cannot be put to a halt. Most large advertising agencies are located in Europe's major cities such as London, Paris, and Amsterdam. These are all cities in which the population is growing more diverse by the day and since the 'colour' of the workforce in Europe's leading advertising agencies is likely to change sooner rather than later, advertising will in the future most definitely adapt to these new European realities.

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