

Marketing to Ethnic Minority Consumers: A Historical Journey (1932-1997)

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This study provides a historical survey of the research on ethnic minority consumers and related marketing issues and includes more than two hundred articles and books dated from 1932 to 1997. Quantitative analyses of longitudinal data reveal several historical transitions and the amount of research activities in various subject areas, thus providing an overview of the history and recent development in this area. Content analyses identify the key research topics, theoretical propositions, and empirical findings. It further explores directions for future research and provides suggestions for marketing educators, researchers, and practitioners.

Due to the increasing importance of ethnic minority consumers in the United States, there has been a growing interest in ethnic marketing in recent years. Minority consumers, including African Americans, Asian Americans, and Hispanics, comprise 25 percent of the U.S. population and are expected to approach 50 percent around 2050 (McDermott 1994). The purchasing power of the three groups combined presents a trillion-dollar growth market (Stuart 1998). Their heightened ethnic consciousness has made them attractive market opportunities. At least half of the *Fortune* 1000 companies have established some sort of ethnic marketing program (Brill 1994).

Meanwhile, an increasing number of researchers have examined the factors that influence the consumption-related behaviors of ethnic minorities. However, conspicuous by its absence is the lack of review of literature on ethnic consumers and related issues in marketing publications. Several authors attempted to explore the development in this area (Gilly 1993; Smith 1993). Gilly's (1993) study included four major marketing journals during a two-year time span based on a search of a computer database. Smith's (1993) paper cited two dozen journal articles, conference papers, and doctoral dissertations since the 1970s. They covered a very short period of time and a limited number of sources and appeared only in conference proceedings. As ethnic minorities continue to grow as part of

our economy, marketers are seeking effective ways to reach these consumers. Thus, a more inclusive study that provides an up-to-date account on the research of ethnic consumers would help researchers and practitioners understand the state-of-the-art development in the area and seek directions for further study.

The tremendous interest in ethnic consumers is only a recent phenomenon. The absence of intermittent reviews does not lend an opportunity for a coherent understanding of the progress in this area. Nonetheless, an examination of past research is an important step toward a better understanding of ethnic consumers and a necessary catalyst for further development of this burgeoning area in marketing. Thus, this study attempts to document the development of this area, including historical transitions and recent activities. Content analysis identifies the concepts, issues, and theories. The study discusses the major topics, propositions, and conclusions of studies in various topic areas. Last, it explores implications for marketing educators, researchers, and practitioners and proposes directions for future research.

METHOD OF RESEARCH

This literature review and analysis focus on scholarly studies of ethnic minorities in marketing publications. Literature search is limited to those studies that examine ethnic (in terms of race, nationality, language, and religion) consumers in a macrocultural environment and how these ethnic characteristics affect consumption behavior and interact with marketing functions. Ethnic marketing is referred to as the deliberate effort by marketers to reach a group of consumers presumably due to their unique ethnic characteristics. The research focuses on studies of major racial minority groups in the United States (i.e., African Americans, Hispanics, Asian Americans, and Native Americans), including those studies

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of other ethnic groups who are compared with these ethnic minorities.

The search for relevant literature included several major databases of business publications. The major databases used in this study include *ABI Inform Global (Proquest)*, *Ebscohost*, and *Wilsonweb*. The editorial policy for inclusion of journals varies from one database to another, largely depending on the scope and emphasis of the database. *ABI Inform Global (Proquest)* includes 1,538 academic journals in social sciences and humanities, while *Ebscohost's* academic database has more than 1,200 journals. Within any database, inclusion of a journal depends on the first year of its publication and the year in which the journal became available in digital format. Some journals, such as the *Journal of Marketing* and *Journal of Retailing*, date back to 1971 in *ABI Inform*. Together, they covered more than 200 marketing-related journals and literally tens of thousands of published works.

The keywords used for search in the databases include the following: (1) *culture, subculture, multicultural, race, minority, ethnic, ethnicity, consumer, consumption, attitude, and income*; (2) *African American, Black, Negro, Hispanic, Latino, Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Asian American (Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Filipino, and Indian)*; and (3) *marketing, advertising, pricing, distribution, and retailing*. The search also extended to library holdings of hard copies, microfilms and microfiches, annual indices of journals, and the reference sections of these publications. Books, authored or edited, from various publishing houses were also included. Published proceedings of various marketing-related conferences, whenever available, were also included in the search. That proved to be difficult as no library holds a complete collection of all conference proceedings, especially those published in the early years. Although the search was by no means exhaustive and may have missed some noteworthy contributions, the results are largely representative of the research in this area. Actual content of each article was reviewed, including its essential concepts, research design, results, and conclusions. Classification of these publications is based on the above-mentioned keywords in the titles and abstracts of articles.

QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Historical Trend

The extensive search resulted in a bibliography of 222 empirical studies, research articles, and books dated from 1932 to 1997, covering a time span of sixty-five years. While most of the literature comes from refereed academic journals, conference proceedings also made great contribution, mainly from three academic organizations in the field: the American Marketing Association, the Association for Consumer Research, and the Academy of Marketing Sciences. The

trend data reveal several distinctive periods over time, which largely reflect social and demographic changes in the country (see Figure 1). There had been marketing activities aimed at ethnic consumers, and there were a number of economic studies of ethnic minorities in the early 1900s. However, the first scholarly research that focused on minority consumers was published in 1932—*The Southern Urban Negro as a Consumer* by Edwards (1932). The next study did not appear until 1953. Between 1932 and 1963, there were a limited number of studies of ethnic minorities.

After the beginning of the civil rights movement in the 1960s, economic conditions of minority consumers became a concern in American society. As equal employment opportunity programs nationwide began to bring members of minority groups many opportunities previously unavailable to them, several marketing scholars investigated access to goods and services by ethnic consumers and discrimination in the marketplace. Marketers were also under much pressure to consider integrated advertising (Boynton 1965). These historical events were reflected in the increasing number of studies of minority consumers, from one publication in 1964 to eleven in 1972 (see Figure 1). The highlight of this period is a series published by the American Marketing Association in 1968: "A New Measure of Responsibility for Marketing."

Starting in 1973 with the beginning of the affirmative action program, the number of published works dropped to 2 and remained relatively flat in the next ten years until 1982, averaging 4 publications per year. That is slightly lower than the average 5.6 publications per year from the previous five years (1968-1972). Andreasen (1980) noted the loss of momentum and research interest in "disadvantaged" consumers among the marketing academe. Thus, major historical events such as the civil rights movement and affirmative action programs appear to have affected the level of interest in ethnic consumers and research activities among marketing scholars during this period (see Figure 1).

The year beginning in 1983 marked a renewed interest in researching minority consumers. The 1980 census data indicated the high growth rate of the minority population, particularly Hispanics, and an emerging middle class among them. This attracted the attention of marketers and researchers alike. In light of increasing diversity in American society, the number of published works grew dramatically in the following fourteen years, from eight publications in 1983 to twenty in 1996. Again, the 1990 census data suggested that minority populations were growing rapidly and would comprise 50 percent of the U.S. population shortly after 2050. Such findings spurred tremendous interest in studying ethnic consumers. Between 1993 and 1997, as race relationships and multicultural diversity became a focus in national politics, research on ethnic consumers reached a high point, averaging seventeen publications per year. In fact, two-thirds of all the articles on ethnic consumers included in this review have been published since 1983.

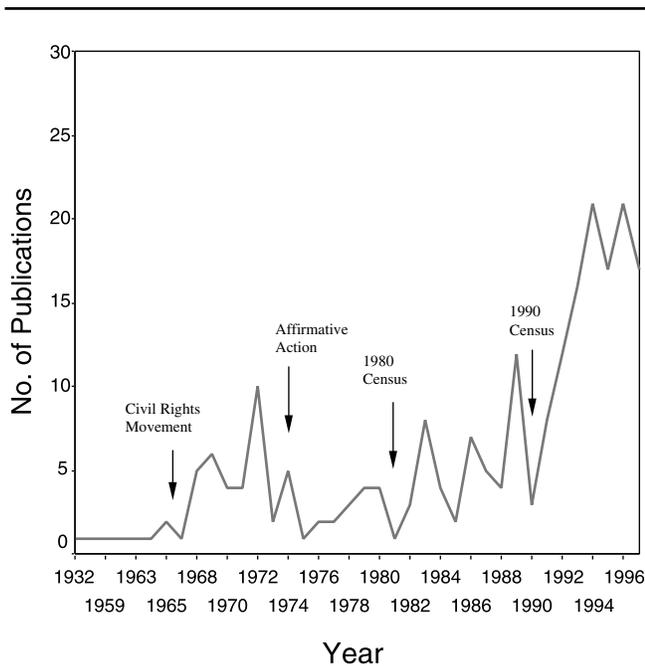


FIGURE 1 NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS OVER TIME: 1932-1997

Over time, the number of publications on marketing to ethnic minorities has increased in a linear fashion (Figure 1). While the number of regular journal articles has increased over time, special issues of journals, special conference proceedings, and books all have contributed to the upsurge in recent years. If all the conference proceedings and trade publications by private industries were included, the level of research activity in this area would be much greater. The number of academic marketing journals was very limited before 1950s, mainly the *Journal of Retailing* and *Journal of Marketing*. Thus, the increasing number of published works on ethnic consumers is also consistent with the great expansion of the marketing-related journals in recent decades.

Studies of Ethnic Groups

Overall, marketing researchers have focused on the following aspects of ethnic consumers in their investigations (see Table 1). A large percentage of studies (53 percent) investigated the consumer behavior of ethnic minorities, particularly their consumption patterns, responses to advertising, and media usage. Advertising portrayals of minorities constitute 22 percent of the published works. These studies tracked the number and proportion of minorities in advertising and examined the role (principal vs. background), occupation, and social status of minority models in various advertising media. Another area of study included the ethnicity of minority consumers, strength of ethnic identification and affiliation, and their impact on consumer values, attitudes,

media usage, and perceptions of product attributes (9 percent). Conversely, acculturation and assimilation of ethnic minorities, who were actively immigrating to the United States, were also extensively examined (7 percent). Ethnic consumers' responses to advertising and promotion constitute 6 percent of the publications. A number of studies focused on other topics such as marketing education, religion, and research methods (Webster 1996).

Among the major ethnic minorities in the United States that are the key focus of a study, African Americans are the most studied group, consisting of 37 percent of the published works with eighty-two publications (see Table 1). Hispanic consumers come in second in terms of the amount of research activity, representing 22 percent with forty-eight studies. Only 7 percent of the publications, sixteen studies total, specifically address Asian American consumers. Another 32 percent of studies include two or more ethnic groups or examine ethnic marketing in general. The "others" category includes Jewish and Anglo-European consumers. Although many articles referred to white/Anglo-Americans, they were not the focus of these studies but were compared with ethnic minorities. Among all the published works, there was only one study that focused on Native American consumers (Miller, Wilson, and Keup 1993).

In terms of research topics, there are some noteworthy variations across ethnic groups. With respect to African Americans, a large number of studies ($n = 41$) focused on the portrayal of blacks in advertising and advertising responses to black models in comparison with those of Caucasians (e.g., Bush, Hair, and Solomon 1979). A number of studies also investigated the impact of the use of black models on consumers' perceptions of product attributes and sales responses (e.g., Faber and McCarthy 1987). Consumption behavior of African American consumers was the subject of thirty-one articles (e.g., Latour, Henthorne, and Williams 1989). More recently, a number of studies also examined the ethnicity and ethnic identification of black consumers (e.g., Williams and Qualls 1989). Black consumers' responses to advertising and promotion, such as coupon redemption, were the subject of several recent studies (e.g., Green 1995).

Among the forty-eight publications on Hispanic consumers, consumption behavior of this ethnic group was the subject of twenty-eight studies. In contrast, only a few studies examined portrayals of Hispanics in advertising (e.g., Taylor, Lee, and Stern 1995). Six of these publications examined the ethnic identification of Hispanics and its impact on consumer responses to advertising and promotion (e.g., Donthu and Cherian 1994). Another six publications focused on the acculturation of Hispanic consumers. A subsegment of this group—Mexican Americans—was sampled more often than others. A number of studies examined the advertising and promotional responses of Hispanic consumers, particularly coupon usage (e.g., Hernandez and Kaufman 1991).

TABLE 1
STUDIES OF ETHNIC GROUPS

Topics	Asian American	African American	Hispanic	More Than One Group	Others	Total, n (percent)
Acculturation	6	0	6	4	0	16 (7.2)
Consumption	8	31	28	49	2	118 (53.2)
Ethnicity/identification	1	5	6	8	1	20 (9.0)
Advertising portrayals	1	41	2	4	0	48 (21.6)
Response to advertisements and promotions	0	4	6	3	0	13 (5.9)
Others	0	1	0	4	0	5 (2.3)
Total						
Number	16	82	48	72	3	222
Percent	7.2	36.9	21.6	32.4	1.4	100

By comparison, the number of studies on Asian American consumers is relatively small ($n = 16$). Eight publications examined the consumption patterns of Asian Americans. A number of published works dealt with their acculturation and its impact on information acquisition and media usage patterns (e.g., Lee and Tse 1994). Only two studies addressed consumer responses to Asian models in advertising (Taylor, Lee, and Stern 1995). A number of studies also compared Asian Americans with other ethnic minorities (Delener and Neelankavil 1990). Compared with other ethnic groups, the breadth of topic areas in studies of Asian American consumers is limited. Although many studies did not focus on Caucasian consumers, they were frequently contrasted with ethnic minorities in terms of consumption patterns and values (e.g., Cagley and Cardozo 1970). A number of studies compared white consumers' response to ethnic models in advertising with that of blacks (e.g., Whittler and DiMeo 1991). Among other ethnic groups, the search located only one study that examined the ethnicity of Jewish consumers (Hirschman 1981) and one study of Native American consumers (Muller, Wilson, and Keup 1993).

QUALITATIVE ANALYSES

Until very recently, research in this area has been sporadic and lacked systematic review and development. In response to the societal discourse on racial relationships and major historical events such as the civil rights movement and the affirmative action program, these studies tended to focus on different topics at different periods. For instance, earlier studies examined pricing, advertising portrayals, and consumer responses to minority models in advertising. Meanwhile, studies of ethnic consumers' responses to advertising and promotion, acculturation, ethnic identification, ethnic marketing strategies, and ethics have appeared in more recent literature. Thus, over time, marketing scholars' perception and approach to research issues in ethnic consumer behavior and marketing underwent significant transitions, largely

paralleling the three stages of feminist research in marketing: thematic, problematic, and practical stages (Stern 1993).

The Thematic Stage

In the "thematic" stage, researchers were primarily concerned with identifying various research questions (Stern 1993). Several issues dominated research of the earlier period. First, early studies suggested that ethnic minorities were underrepresented in advertising (Kassarjian 1969). Thus, conscious marketers were concerned primarily with the number or the proportion of ethnic consumers represented in advertising. Over time, researchers found that there had been an increasing number of "people of color" in various media, representing different ethnic groups in advertising (Wilkes and Valencia 1989). Some researchers also examined the role portrayals of minorities in content analyses of television and magazine advertisements and found that portrayals of minorities in advertising became more diverse and positive over time, and more minority models appeared in major roles and skilled jobs (e.g., Taylor, Lee, and Stern 1995). Over the years, many traditional stereotypes of minorities have either been abandoned or updated.

Another research issue of many earlier studies was that minority consumers were underserved by marketing. As racial integration was under progress in American society, many members of minority groups moved to urban areas. Parke Gibson (1969), a black marketing professional, explored the market potential among African American consumers in his book *The \$30 Billion Negro*.

Yet, discrimination and limited employment opportunities created social problems such as urban poverty and the ghetto. That led to urban revolts in the late 1960s. Some studies took the "societal marketing" approach and addressed minorities as disadvantaged consumers. Several authors explored whether African Americans paid more for grocery products than white consumers and found only inconsistent results (e.g., Sexton 1971). From the 1960s to the late 1970s, several studies explored how to improve marketing in inner-city

areas. A number of books were published on this subject (e.g., Andraesen 1978).

Third, researchers also debated how to market to minority consumers in relation to the majority population, particularly in the area of advertising. Racial integration and integrated advertising were not without controversies. From the 1960s to the early 1970s, marketers were divided in the two approaches: directly appealing to ethnic consumers versus mass marketing in the hope that minorities could also be reached. As more minorities appeared in television and print advertising, some marketers felt wary about associating their products with ethnic consumers, for fear that this association was going to alienate their white patrons and result in “white backlash” (Barban and Cundiff 1964). Some advertisers were reluctant to feature mixed casts or exclusively minority models in commercials when the same product was also advertised to the Caucasian audiences (Barban 1969).

Some authors believed that lack of effort or reluctance to appeal directly to ethnic consumers might not be the result of lack of interest but that of apprehension and expertise (e.g., Boynton 1965). To address this concern, later studies of African Americans in advertising primarily focused on the black and white differences in responding to the presence or portrayals of blacks in print advertising and promotions (e.g., Bush, Gwinner, and Solomon 1974). Several empirical studies found that white audiences did not react differently or negatively to an integrated commercial or advertisements with an all-black cast (e.g., Pitts et al. 1989). They suggested that fear of the risk in associating products with minorities was largely unfounded. Although a number of studies suggest that white consumers in general do not react negatively or are simply indifferent to black models in advertising, recent research suggests that white consumers’ response to black models in advertising has to do with their level of prejudice (Whittler and DiMeo 1991). Today, the same research question has reemerged with more Hispanic and Asian models in advertising (Taylor, Lee, and Stern 1995).

The Problematic Stage

In the “problematic” stage, research attention shifted from seeking evidence in the content of advertising to identifying problematic practices in marketing to minorities and their underlying causes (Stern 1993). The basic premise in many studies is that ethnic minorities are not only different from the overall market but also very heterogeneous within themselves. Thus, many researchers have gone beyond the observed differences and focused on the social and cultural factors that affect ethnic consumer behavior, emphasizing the ethnicity and ethnic identification of minority consumers (e.g., Valencia 1989; Williams and Qualls 1989). They suggest that these observed behavioral differences reflect cultural differences, thus necessitating differentiation rather than standardization in the marketing mix aimed at an ethnic group (Wallendorf and Reilly 1983). Such heterogeneity and

diversity have a significant impact on the effectiveness of various ethnic marketing programs.

Some early researchers questioned the necessity of creating separate advertisements for different groups of consumers. For instance, Barban (1969) found that advertisements with only black models did not seem to enhance an advertiser’s image greatly among black consumers. Yet subsequent studies found that black consumers actually perceived advertising with black models projected a higher quality image (Kerin 1979). Several authors have suggested that because ethnic consumers have unique values and beliefs, they are more receptive to advertising focusing on their aspirations and strongly advocate culture- and value-based approaches to communicating to ethnic consumers (Cui 1997; Williams and Qualls 1989).

Marketing scholars also examined media usage patterns of ethnic consumers with intensive interest. A number of studies found that minority consumers held more positive attitudes toward advertising in all media types (e.g., Durand, Teel, and Bearden 1979). These studies found that minority consumers used more television and radio, read less magazines and newspapers, and looked more favorably on television and magazine advertising (Soley and Reid 1983). While television and radio were very attractive among black youth and Hispanics, Asians used more print media. Minority consumers were also found to be more brand loyal than white consumers (Saegert, Hoover, and Hilger 1985). These findings led some to believe that general television advertising would be able to reach minority consumers and there was no need to create separate marketing programs. However, recent studies suggest that ethnic consumers have unique media usage patterns and information search behavior, thus warranting differentiation in communication strategies (e.g., Green 1995). Media usage behavior is important in determining acculturation and ethnic identification, which in turn influence advertising responses and perceptions of product attributes (O’Guinn and Faber 1986).

Ethnic consumers’ distinctive response to promotions was another subject of extensive research. Initial studies of coupon usage by ethnic consumers attributed the low redemption rate by minority consumers to their attitudes toward convenience and saving money, personal pride, and perception of coupon usage. They also found that ethnic consumers valued familiar stores and friendly personnel (Saegert, Hoover, and Hilger 1985). While there are clearly differences in consumers’ attitudes toward such behavior, it is unclear whether these differences are based on cultural differences or due to institutional and information barriers to coupon usage, such as reduced availability of coupons or less knowledge of coupon usage (Green 1995). Overall, studies of ethnic consumers’ media usage behavior and responses to advertising and promotion provide meaningful suggestions for media planning (general media vs. ethnic media), advertising messages (use

of ethnic models), and promotional mix strategies (coupon vs. in-store promotion).

While inconsistent findings have been attributed to variations in research design and methodology, there has been a continuous debate whether some of the seemingly unique product needs and discrepant consumption behaviors can truly be attributed to ethnic background or may be actually due to other socioeconomic factors such as income, education, and social class. Confounding of ethnicity with income has been a common mistake (Moschis 1987). There is some evidence that when income and social class are controlled for, differences between ethnic consumers and their Caucasian counterparts are often less pronounced than originally thought (Feldman and Star 1968). Therefore, it is advised that before targeting ethnic consumers, firms should determine whether a particular need or preference can be attributed to ethnic background instead of some other social or economic factors (Moschis 1987).

Attempting to resolve the apparent inconsistencies, a number of researchers explored the diversity within ethnic groups and examined the effects of situational and intervening variables such as strength of ethnic identification, acculturation, income, and product category. In fact, twenty-nine of thirty-three studies (88 percent) of ethnic identification and acculturation and their impact on consumer behavior and marketing responses were published after 1982. Several authors studied the impact of ethnicity and ethnic identification on consumption patterns and responses to media and promotions (Lee and Tse 1994; Williams and Qualls 1989). Ethnic identification has been found to influence consumers' attitudes toward various marketing practices, even after income and social class are controlled for. Many ethnic consumers, especially the high identifiers, demonstrate a stronger preference for products that emphasize their ethnic identity and cultural heritage (Donthu and Cherian 1994).

The acculturation of ethnic immigrants and its impact on media usage and marketing responses represent another area of interest. The level of immigrant acculturation has been found to affect shopping orientations, language and media use, brand loyalty, advertising responses, perceptions of product attributes, attitudes toward marketing practices, and husband-wife decision making (Faber and McCarthy 1987; Lee and Tse 1994; Wilkes and Valencia 1989; Webster 1994). Targeted marketing based on the level of acculturation can improve message accuracy and effectiveness of ethnic communication programs.

The Practical Stage

In the recent "practical" stage, studies of ethnic consumers have begun to focus more on seeking practical solutions to remedy the existing problems in this area of research. Although ethnic marketing has become increasingly popular, many marketers still feel wary of this approach. Marketing researchers have sought a more holistic understanding of the

complexity of ethnic marketing and focused on theory integration or applying existing theories from marketing and other fields to ethnic marketing.

A number of studies have proposed to segment various ethnic markets based on acculturation, media usage, and psychographic variables. Several other studies have focused on the decision-making processes of ethnic consumers based on the level of acculturation (Webster 1994). The impact of ethnicity and acculturation also varies across product categories. Several researchers suggest that the impact of ethnicity is more important in low involvement and personal products (Cui 1997). A number of authors suggest that by understanding how acculturation and ethnic identification affect responses to advertising and promotion, marketers can adapt their strategies and improve performance (Roslow and Nicholls 1996).

While most studies have focused on majority-minority differences, intracultural variations, and developing measurement scales, theory development has been limited in the research of ethnic marketing. In the debate over approaches to marketing to ethnic consumers, several recent studies have adopted theoretical perspectives that support differentiated marketing strategies to reach ethnic consumers. Whittler and DiMeo (1991) suggest that the perceived similarity between advertisers and audience has a great impact on the effectiveness of advertising and recommend the use of ethnic models in advertising. Perceived similarity can greatly improve symbolic role identification of ethnic consumers. Recent studies suggest that since ethnic consumers put more emphasis on store personnel and certain product attributes, which are often different from those sought by the majority, marketing mix adaptation is needed for reaching ethnic consumers.

Another group of researchers elaborated ethnicity as a dynamic and complex concept (Stayman and Deshpande 1989). Cultural distinctiveness theory suggests that ethnic consumers in a location where they are a significant minority would consider a spokesperson of their own ethnic background more credible than consumers of the same ethnic group in a place where they are a significant majority (Deshpande and Stayman 1994). For better understanding of this issue, further research needs to examine multiple factors, including ethnicity, income, education, and product type, and to clarify the interactions among them and the unique contribution of each factor.

Early studies suggested that the traditional model of acculturation via a linear progressive learning process could help explain the differences in attitudes and perceptions of ethnic consumers (Faber and McCarthy 1987). Many people believe that immigrants come to the United States in pursuit of the American Dream and thus learn quickly the basic consumption-related attitudes, knowledge, and skills. Yet recent studies suggest that the traditional theory can no longer accommodate the dynamic process of acculturation found in many studies. Wallendorf and Reilly (1983) find that consumption

behavior of immigrants is not simply a medium point between their home culture and that of the new country. Some of them have actually internalized the previous pattern prior to entering the new society. In addition, depending on personal orientation, there are several alternative results of this process: assimilation, integration, isolation, and marginalization (Penaloza 1994). Thus, validity of the "one-way" process of acculturation becomes questionable. A more holistic view that examines the dynamic process of the culture shock/stress/adaptation faced by many immigrants has meaningful implications for ethnic marketing strategies.

Studies to date have identified various factors that differentiate ethnic groups from the overall culture. Yet it is much less clear to what extent a marketer should differentiate its marketing mix for ethnic markets. Cui (1997) examined past practices of marketing to ethnic consumers and proposed four orientations: traditional approach, integrated approach, separated approach, and multicultural marketing. He also adapted the framework of standardization versus customization strategies in international marketing to the U.S. domestic market and provided guidelines for ethnic marketing strategies. Thus, this model has implications for both product and communication strategies for reaching ethnic markets.

Meanwhile, the increasing attention given to ethnic consumers by some marketers, such as alcoholic beverage and cigarette manufacturers, has created much controversy. As several firms attempted to target minority consumers with unwholesome products, a number of studies examined the ethical dilemma and complexity in targeting ethnic consumers, including harmfulness of products and vulnerability and sensitivity of an ethnic group (Sautter and Oretskin 1997; Smith and Cooper-Martin 1997). These authors suggest that targeting harmful products to minority consumers is particularly unethical because of the vulnerability of a group and the disproportional negative effects from consumption of such products on that group (Smith and Cooper-Martin 1997). While they have attempted to identify the linkage between differential marketing intensity and consumers' health, the psychological effects of unethical marketing practices are more difficult to prove.

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

Analyses of longitudinal data suggest that research on ethnic consumers has been increasing over time in a linear fashion and seems to coincide with major historical events such as the civil rights movement and affirmative action during the early period. Although the first such publication appeared in 1932, research of ethnic consumers did not gain its momentum until the late 1980s. The recent years (1993 to 1997) represent an upsurge of publications on ethnic consumers and related marketing issues. These studies of African Ameri-

cans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans have examined a number of important ethnic factors associated with these ethnic minorities, including their consumption patterns, acculturation, ethnic identification, advertising portrayals, and responses to advertising and promotion. Many studies have generated practical implications for marketing management, including advertising, marketing research, promotion, retailing, and research methodology.

Quantitative analysis reveals that more studies have been conducted in this area than what previous reviews suggested. Although this finding is more encouraging than anticipated, the number of studies of ethnic minorities is still small compared with the overall amount of published works in marketing research journals and literally hundreds of articles in practitioner publications. A previous study of major marketing journals from 1988 to 1992 found that only 0.6 percent of all articles concerned minority issues (Gilly 1993). Fortunately, there has been a growing interest among marketing researchers to organize and promote research in this area. Special conferences, special issues of journals, and books that focus on ethnic marketing all reflect this trend. An increasing number of journals have published special issues dealing with ethnic marketing.

Preliminary content analysis suggests that the research activities and topics vary across ethnic groups and over time, reflecting the priorities and major issues that concerned the educators and practitioners during those periods. Early studies from the 1960s and 1970s primarily focused on African American consumers, their portrayals in advertising, effects of integrated advertising, and the alleged discrimination in product availability and pricing. Starting from the 1980s, Hispanics and Asian Americans also became the subject of many studies, including topics such as acculturation, ethnic identification, media usage, and advertising and promotion responses. The literature also underwent several historical transitions in research orientations and perspectives, from identifying research problems and investigating the underlying causes to seeking practical solutions and theoretical integration. Research topics have evolved over time, shifting from examining the portrayals of minorities in advertising to studies of ethnic factors and how they interact with various marketing functions and affect the effectiveness of ethnic marketing programs. Recent research topics have become more diverse, including treatment of ethnic consumers in marketing education, theories of ethnic consumer behavior and marketing responses, and ethical issues in ethnic marketing.

Although this review is rather inclusive, it is by no means exhaustive. Readers should note the following limitations. First, since this review only includes published works in major academic journals, it does not account for works by private research firms or unpublished manuscripts and theses. Second, there are many culture-specific, intercultural, cross-cultural, and comparative studies. Although they do not

deal directly with ethnic marketing in a macrocultural environment, these publications can be of great value to marketing researchers.

Directions for Future Research

This literature review is limited to a historical overview and succinct discussion of various issues. It does not attempt to draw conclusions from previous studies for a particular research area. Meanwhile, given the number of studies and diverse sources of publications, this review can help researchers understand the historical evolution of ethnic consumer research and serve as a starting point for integrative literature reviews of various topic areas. This review can assist doctoral students with their dissertation projects. Meta-analytical reviews are possible for some selected topic areas in which researchers have been active, such as ethnic identification and acculturation and responses to advertising and promotion, and may shed some light on some of the inconsistencies in the existing literature.

As ethnic minority consumers become increasingly important in our economy, there is a definite knowledge gap in this area. Marketing educators need to devote more resources to diversity issues in terms of research agenda, faculty development, and recruitment of minority doctoral students and encourage more rigorous theoretical research and empirical studies of ethnic consumers (Andreasen 1980; Gilly 1993). Special conferences, special sessions, special issues, and special interest groups would all help encourage research in this area. Research efforts and findings by practitioners also need to be recorded and integrated into future literature reviews.

Marketing researchers have made limited progress in studying ethnic consumers. Existing research and limited theory development have focused on the approaches and strategies for marketing to ethnic minorities vis-à-vis the mainstream market. Yet several research questions remain unsolved and require further probing. First, most inferences about marketing and consumer behavior are based on studies of the majority population. As we contemplate marketing strategies to reach minority consumers, many marketing principles and generalizations concerning American consumers derived from previous studies need to be checked for ethnic variations. Future research needs to address several fundamental issues in ethnic marketing. On the aggregate level, a related question is whether ethnic groups constitute distinct markets separate from the macromarket that warrant differentiated strategies from marketers. On the individual level, ethnic consumers continue to mingle with elements of the macroculture. The multicultural nature of our society requires a theory of consumer behavior that takes into account individuals' multiple and even mixed identities.

Upcoming research is also challenged to resolve some of the apparent inconsistencies in previous studies, such as in coupon redemption and advertising responses of ethnic

consumers. Major methodological issues related to ethnic consumer research, including sampling, research design, and instrument development, ought to be identified and researched. Guidelines are needed to include samples of ethnic minorities in future research and to improve the applicability of research findings to the entire spectrum of the marketplace. Comparative, parallel, and replication studies and surveys using stratified samples are particularly needed. Continuous empirical study and knowledge development in this area will help improve education and practice of marketing in a multiethnic society.

Marketers need to account for cultural diversity if they plan to remain as viable players in the marketplace that has become increasingly pluralistic. To improve marketing to ethnic consumers and avoid marketing blunders, their characteristics such as language, culture, and ethnicity must be studied and incorporated into marketing plans and programs. Collaboration among marketing educators, researchers, and practitioners can be fruitful in generating knowledge that has strong managerial implications for performance-enhancing strategies. Marketing researchers and educators can play a key role in knowledge development and in helping corporate America improve its cultural competency, marketing strategies, and performance in a multiethnic marketplace.

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