Ethnicity and Marketing:

The Rise of the Minorities

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Author Note

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As part of the twenty-first century, race and ethnicity often may not be the first topic one thinks of when the term “marketing” is brought up in conversation. However, determining one’s target audience and the best method of reaching that audience is vital in the world of marketing. This paper will explore the new potential markets that are arising as the minorities in the United States are growing in number and buying power. Specifically in the fashion and cosmetic world, Asian-Americans and African-Americans are a growing target audience as the stereotypical white definition of beauty is ever-changing and evolving as strides are being made towards equality. This paper will give a background on different ethnicities and then uniquely apply that information to a specific company, CoverGirl cosmetics.

**Background and History**

After the 2010 census, there were visible signs of growth within the ethnic minorities in the United States. Terence Shimp (2010) gives the U.S. Census Bureau’s projection for the population of the United States for 2010, stating, “White, not Hispanic [at] 64.3%, Hispanic, of any race [at] 15.3%, Black, not Hispanic [at] 12.9%, Asians [at] 4.6% and Others [at] 2.9%” (p. 118). Shimp (2010) gives the ethnic group predictions showing the ethnic minorities making up 47.0% of the United States’ population. With this said, it is clear that the minorities in the United States possess a valuable market.

However, the problem remains that many companies have failed to utilize these potential markets. Shimp (2010) reports, “The total spending power of African-Americans is considerable, totaling nearly $800 billion in one recent year” (p. 119). However, despite these impressive figures many companies have neglected to communicate with their African-American target audience. Similarly, marketing
communicators have ignored the largest growing minority in the U.S., the Hispanic Americans (Latinos). Shimp (2010) writes that companies fail to advertise to their prospective target audiences in proportion to their size. This same neglect applies to Asian-Americans – many of whom feel neglected and somewhat under-represented in the fashion industry. Fashion art director Frank de Jesus remarked, “I wish there were more girls of color and Asian girls” (as cited by Kearney, 2007) after being unable to find an Asian model for “Sabyasachi.” Companies have much to lose by continuing to not fully engage minorities. Research by WARC shows that Asian-Americans are most likely to “like” a social ad after seeing it as well as to go out and buy the product (“Ethnicity Affects Social Media Ads,” 2012).

**CoverGirl Cosmetics**

Currently, under President Marc Pritchard’s leadership, CoverGirl sits at the #1 mass-market share position in Canada, the United States, and Switzerland (“Marc Pritchard, President, Global Cosmetics,” n.d.). Added to that, the global business has grown 40% in the past three years as well as increasing in global market sales by more than 15% in the last two years (“Marc Pritchard, President, Global Cosmetics,” n.d.). CoverGirl is a non-ethnic brand, meaning it does not sell/market its products to one primary ethnic audience.

In the company’s beginning, many of the representatives, termed “Cover Girls,” represented the white ideal of beauty – blond hair and fair skin. Examples of these include the following: Jennifer O’Neill, Cheryl Tiegs, and Faith Hill. In fact, all the Cover Girls were white until Lana Ogilvie became the first Black Cover Girl representative (“Lana Ogilvie,” n.d.). The company currently boasts of three African-
American representatives (Queen Latifah, Janelle Monae, and Pat McGrath), two white representatives (Pink and Ellen DeGeneres), and one American Hispanic representative (Sofia Vergara). However, noticeably missing from the Cover Girls is any woman of Middle Eastern, Native American, or Asian decent. (Hispanics are barely covered, as Vergara is a Columbian native.) As the numbers continue to rise in favor of the growing minorities, it would be well-advised for the company to take this into consideration when choosing its next “Cover Girls.”

**Debate**

Part of the debate surrounding the issue of ethnicity when it comes to modeling is whether models of a certain ethnicity really do reach the target audience of the same ethnicity better than that of a different one. Or should all models be able to reach a target audience regardless of their ethnicity? Ashley Mears (2009) in her study of cultural production and the reproduction of culture in fashion found that commercial fashion is far more diverse than editorial fashion. Mears (2009) concluded that when it came to fashion, such as that in New York, the topic of fashion was viewed in terms of commerce rather than art for the elite white society. “Cultural ideas about gender, race, and class are inextricable parts of the institutionalized production processes and contentions, they are institutionally reproduced,” states Mears (2009) as she admits to a certain type of racism.

Studies about ethnicity and how ethnic groups respond to models of the same ethnic background are still relatively new. Shimp (2010) found that African-American models appealed to African-American consumers. Another study by Meyers (2011) showed that skin tone did affect models and the audience’s opinion towards the product and model. The research reconfirmed that African-American consumers responded better
to an ad featuring a Black model with relatively similar skin tone (Meyers, 2011). This is not to say companies should completely ignore the white population, but rather they should consider multiple ethnic backgrounds and markets when marketing a product to target audiences.

**Conclusion**

By applying the above knowledge on minorities and their market potential to CoverGirl cosmetics, one may observe how ethnicity could play an instrumental role in marketing and how it could continue to impact the company. By adapting to change and being aware of the complex environment rather than avoiding change and fostering a static environment, CoverGirl must continue to promote representatives (Cover Girls) of varying ethnicities. They would do well to market their products to differing ethnicities with models of differing ethnic backgrounds, as well as making specific campaigns to key target audiences. (For example, if the company used a Hispanic American model, such as Jennifer Lopez, an ad in English would appeal to a mainstream audience where the same ad only spoken partially or completely in Spanish would help target the American Hispanic/Latino audience.)
References


