

Editorial: One Size Does Not Fit All, Or Does It?

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AMERICA WAS ONCE REFERRED TO as a “melting pot,” a place where people of various nationalities, cultural, racial, and ethnic backgrounds came together and fused into a seemingly homogeneous society. The lines of national identities blurred as immigrants arrived, assimilated, and adapted to a new society. The phrase came into use with the 1908 debut of Israel Zangwill’s play of the same name.

Today, America is no longer referred to as a “melting pot.” Rather, it is a “salad bowl” where pieces come together in one setting, juxtaposed yet distinct. And together, the bowl yields complex, but harmonized flavors—each ingredient contributing its unique essence to the mix.

When did the country move from a melting pot to a salad bowl? Was it when the immigrants that passed through Ellis Island were no longer predominantly Europeans? Or when immigration patterns shifted to reflect movement across the globe, as it did in the latter decades of the last century? Or has the country always been a salad bowl?

The complexity inherent in American demographics is just one challenge for today’s advertising professional. As well as identifying exactly who they should be talking to, how advertisers best communicate with consumers is rapidly changing. Emerging media have become a blessing and a challenge to advertisers, heightening the flow of information between buyers and sellers, but, at the same time, increasingly shifting control over that flow in favor of the buyer, thus bringing in the era of permission marketing. No longer can a marketer push her wares on the consumer. If consumers don’t like it, they can push back.

Multicultural markets multiply the challenge—how to speak to different audiences, how to connect with diverse cultures, and, most importantly, how to listen to their needs. These markets also represent a tremendous opportunity. Oft-cited statistics show that diversity markets spend more than

one trillion dollars and account for nearly a quarter of spending on goods and services in the United States. Census projections show that by 2050, half of the U.S. population would be non-White (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004, “U.S. Interim Projections by Age, Sex, Race and Hispanic Origin”).

The featured articles on multicultural marketing in this issue of the *Journal of Advertising Research* reflect just that challenge—from Middle Eastern markets to Hispanic and Asian audiences, including the homosexual target audience. Our Viewpoint article from Dr. Felipe Korzeny highlights some of the reasons why multicultural marketing confuses and perplexes marketers.

He offers the observation that the persistence of the “salad bowl” comes from the larger society’s unwillingness to accept diverse groups into the mainstream. Ironically, this also characterizes many multicultural marketing efforts that are managed as “one-offs” rather than part of an integrated plan fused into the mainstream. Advertisers strive so hard to discover what makes these diverse markets different and, in the process, may have unwittingly led them to forget the fundamentals of effective marketing that have been learned from marketing to the mainstream.

Dr. Korzeny also points out that while it is important to understand the differences that characterize multicultural markets, there is the need to find the marketing forces that drive them together, the common ground. At the end of the day, out of many we are all one—consumer.

Pluralism, diversity audiences, and multicultural markets are today’s marketing buzz words, sharing equal time with emerging media, consumer touchpoints, experiential and one-on-one marketing. Sit for a few hours with the wise authors who have contributed to this issue and question your multicultural marketing approaches—call it a diversity reality test. Let me know what insights you have gained. 