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Homeless Abroad, Homeless at Home: The Conundrum of Globalisation

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Abstract

Forces of globalization have brought about profound changes in the way consumers the world over view their identity. For many, consumption becomes one of the key avenues through which they can reterritorialize themselves. Consumption for the purpose of reterritorialization has interesting implications for marketers. Goods and services designed and promoted to restore consumers' sense of identity will resonate well with today's deterritorialized consumers. This premise has macromarketing and micromarketing implications.

Key Words: Globalization, deterritorialization, identity, consumer choice, promotion

Introduction

*Forsaking the birthplace to sow new roots
To start afresh, build a home anew
A quality life that is better I view.
My heart stays back, for bonded am I
To the ways of the people, my kith and kin
They who understand the tempest within.*

-Bhavna Rai

The verse above eloquently portrays the sentiments of immigrants who have chosen to stay away from their home country. In a United Nations press briefing, the world body's top population demographics official warned that with more and more people leaving their homes, a key challenge for our world in the twenty-first century would be finding better ways to manage migration (United Nations, 2004). Today, the number of people residing outside their country of birth stands at an all time high of 175 million, more than double the number a generation ago. For some, expectation of a better quality of life becomes the key determinant for deciding to live away from their country of birth. For many others, migration is forced due to war, discrimination within the country of birth, or due to natural calamities. Regardless of whether migration is chosen or thrust, those interested in issues such as quality of life and social welfare need to question whether migrants who forsake their home country enjoy a better quality of life in another country. Marketing practitioners and scholars also need to explore ways whereby they can design marketing mixes that enhance the quality of life of migrants.

The World Health Organization defines quality of life as "the individuals' perceptions of their position in life, in the context of the cultural and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns." Disparity in "cultural and value systems," between what is and what was, poses serious identity crisis that could undermine any superficial gains in quality of life for the immigrant. For instance, most expatriates working abroad make more money than they would in their country of origin. They probably own all the trappings of material success, be they the latest in digital TVs or MP3 players, the latest iphone or the fanciest of cars. Many, particularly those within the "knowledge economy," can boast of being the proud owners of sprawling suburban homes in the most exclusive gated communities.

However, these gains are often accompanied by serious threats to the migrant's cultural identity. Our cultural identities "reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us... with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meanings" (Xie, 2005, p. 396). Mercer (1990) notes that identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent, and stable is displaced by feelings of doubt and certainty. Doubt and uncertainty intensify with globalization.

Globalization has become a buzzword that has spawned new thinking in business theory and practice, and become the staple for countless academic debates. Various conceptualizations as internationalization, universalization, liberalization, Westernization, and modernization, there exists a smorgasbord of definitions to suit every discourse (Scholte, 2000). The one conceptualization that seems particularly relevant to our paper, and absent from most business literature, is to depict globalization as deterritorialization (Basch, Schiller, & Blanc, 1994). The term deterritorialization, sometimes characterized as "globalization from below," addresses the largely negative aspects of globalization, a topic most management scholars and business practitioners would rather not address. Yet, business and marketing scholars interested in researching issues such as happiness, quality of life and peace at the global level will find much value in distilling and dissecting the phenomenon of deterritorialization.

What is Deterritorialization?

Deterritorialization involves a process of detachment of social and cultural practices from specific places, thereby blurring the natural relationship between culture and geographic territories. A 'territory' is understood as the environment of a group (e.g., pack of wolves, a tribe, or a herd of elephants). It is constituted by the patterns of interaction through which the collective secures a certain stability and location. The environment of a single person (the social environment, personal living space, and lifestyle) can also be seen as a territory in the psychological sense, from which the person acts and returns to. In times of modernity, territorialization involved a superior power (typically the state) excluding or including people within geographic boundaries, and controlling transboundary access and exchange. Such territorialization provided citizens of a state with stability and a feeling of being centered. The move away from

modernity and toward contemporary globalization has weakened the salience of the nation state, and in so doing, seems to have upset the territorialization process. Anthony Giddens (1990) defines globalization as “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that the local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa.” Thus, one of the key manifestations of globalization is depriving people of their isolation and territorial cohesion, thereby creating a serious threat to their identity or sense of being.

Identity, according to Erikson (1959), implies perception of one’s own continuity and coherence in time. It is a combination of genetic and cultural components that evolve through time. In underscoring the vital importance of identity, Erikson (quoted in Geregán, 1991, p. 38) remarks, “in the social jungle of human existence there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity.” Human identity reflects not only the evolution of genes, but also the evolution of memes or transferable ideas. These ideas, by definition, involve cultural values and practices, most notably language and religion, which until recently, had been largely territory bound. Deterritorialization for the immigrant often translates into an identity crisis that demands expeditious resolution.

Disruptions of geographical relocation and the dwindling role of the nation state have now left increasing numbers of people feeling deterritorialized. As Castells (1997, p.3) writes, “In a world of global flows of wealth, power, and images, the search for identity, collective or individual, ascribed or constructed, becomes the fundamental source of social meaning. This is not a new trend since identity, and particularly religious and ethnic identity, have been at the roots of meaning since the dawn of human society. Yet identity is becoming the main, and sometimes the only source of meaning in a historical period characterized by widespread destructuring of organizations, delegitimation of institutions, fading away of major social movements, and ephemeral cultural expressions. People increasingly organize their meaning not around what they do but on the basis of who they are.”

Ubiquity of Deterritorialization

To counter the effects of deterritorialization, Diasporas seek participation in causes and activities that would help restore a semblance of reterritorialization. For many, the

nature of the quest is relatively sedate, such as creating or subscribing to ethnic Websites, joining a cultural society to network with others from the same ethnic community or region, or a reinvigorated interest in ethnic language, dance, and rituals.

Unfortunately, some migrants resort to more extreme solutions for identity restoration. Paul Collier, director of the World Bank's Development Research Group writes, "Diasporas sometimes harbour rather romanticized attachments to their group of origin and may nurse grievances as a form of asserting continued belonging. They are much richer than the people in their country of origin and so can afford to finance vengeance. Above all, they do not have to suffer any of the awful consequences of renewed conflict because they are not living in the country. Hence, they are a ready market for rebel groups touting vengeance and so are a source of finance for renewed conflict. They are also a source of pressure for secession" (Collier, 2000). Recent events such as the balkanization of Czechoslovakia and the on-going conflict between the government and the ethnic Tamils in Sri Lanka bear testimony to Collier's observations.

Around 3 percent of the world's population comprises of first generation migrants. However, it would be a mistake to assume that the remaining 97 percent who live and work in their country of birth are secure in their sense of identity. Forces of globalization render the original territory, the motherland, the hamlet, deterritorialized as well. Few regions are immune to the effects of world media, movies, music, and business. By infusing multiple and diverse influences on previously staid and territory-bound societies, globalization and deterritorialization are working to spread the identity crisis the world over.

A good exemplar is India. Over the last fifteen years, things and beings of foreign origin are increasingly permeating the Indian culturescape, thus embedding new desires, prompting irrational comparisons, and blurring people's concepts of grace and beauty. The smallest of Indian villages are increasingly bombarded with imagery from *The Bold and the Beautiful*, *CNN*, and *MTV*. Pizza and burger joints dot the cityscapes offering the middle and upper classes Western cuisine presumed to set apart the elite consumer from the proletariat. George W. Bush receives more news coverage than either the Indian president or the prime minister and the antics of Paris Hilton increasingly compete for airwaves with gossip about Aishwarya Rai's marital life.

India is by no means an outlier when it comes to the consequences of globalization. The onslaught of deterritorialization is ubiquitous as is the urge to reterritorialize.

Reterritorialization in the previously indigenous communities can take many forms -- attempts to revitalize languages on the verge of extinction (as evidenced by the native Hawaiians' use of the Internet to revive their language), seeking secession from the nation state (as witnessed in Basques seeking independence), and demanding more autonomy on linguistic or religious grounds (as seen in Quebec or Kashmir) -- illustrating the public ones. For most people, attempts at reterritorialization involve less formal, personal pursuits such as a rekindled interest in cultural practices in the form of ethnic attire, the arts, and, most notably, religion.

Attempts to reterritorialize at home, not unlike the reterritorialization attempts of Diasporas, sometimes have extreme and negative consequences. With their identity in peril, many natives, mostly underprivileged, resort to extreme measures of reclaiming territory. Making immigrants a target of scapegoating, igniting fanatic religious fervour, and propagating ethnic violence are often the consequences of deprived or diffused identity. As research by Wilson (1999, p.1) concludes, "Immigrant bashing is partially a reaction to the 'deterritorialization' and increasing delegitimization of the nation state as a viable 'encapsulating' entity."

Arjun Appadurai, the pre-eminent anthropologist, goes one step further, prophesizing the rise of ethnic violence to accompany increasing globalization. Through in-depth study of ethnographic material from Central Africa, Europe, India, and China, Appadurai illustrates that bodily violence between social intimates is a form of vivisection and goes on to assert that the conditions for such extreme violence may partly lie in the deformation of national and local spaces of everyday life by the physical and moral pressures of globalization (Appadurai, 1998). Under the social uncertainty unleashed by the forces of globalization, Appadurai argues, violence can create a macabre form of certainty, thus becoming a brutal, frequently used technique of differentiating between "them" and "us."

Marketing Implications

While the impact of deterritorialization on identity is negative, the prospect of reterritorialization opens up many opportunities for marketing practitioners and scholars. Deterritorialization has thus far received scant attention in marketing literature. The little research that does exist in this area seems confined to marketing goods and services to immigrants (cf. Elias & Greenspan, 2007; Coulter, Price & Feick, 2003; Holland & Gentry, 1999). Involvement of marketing scholars in understanding deterritorialization has implications for micromarketers as well as macromarketers.

At the practitioner level, plentiful opportunities exist to design and promote products that are aligned with the identity pillars of those experiencing deterritorialization. For example, The Yad Mordechai Apiary in Israel successfully capitalized on its original trademark—a bear eating honey—when appealing to immigrants from the former Soviet Union. The bear is one of the central characters in popular Russian folktales (Elias & Greenspan, 2007), and invoking this character in the company's print ads reinforced the identity of newly migrated Russian Jews to Israel. Making implicit or overt connections with the cultural heritage of deterritorialized populations will endear the product to those seeking reterritorialization (Kale, 2005). For example, cosmetics formulated from ingredients used in the ancient Ayurvedic system of medicine in India are finding great appeal in the country, particularly within the cosmopolitan segments of the population.

There is considerable evidence to suggest that consumers the world over are increasingly turning to spirituality as an antidote to deterritorialization (Arnould & Price, 2000; Kale, 2004). However, when invoking spirituality for selling products, the marketer needs to tread carefully. Some consumers may detest the use of spiritual appeals in marketing while others who belong to a different spiritual path may feel alienated. Nonetheless, spirituality offers a fertile ground in which marketing campaigns can be strongly and ingeniously planted (Kale, 2004).

Global companies will do well to adapt a part of their product line to the cultural ethos of consumers within specific markets. The Maharaja Burger and the Kiasu Burger, introduced by McDonalds in India and Singapore respectively, are good examples. Many Western casino companies proactively adopt the principles of Feng Shui when

designing their properties in Far Eastern markets. Likewise, the growing interest in spiritual tourism and travel undertaken for discovering one's roots are indicators of growing consumption for re-establishing one's identity.

Constraints of space prevent us from discussing in more detail ways in which marketers can effectively use identity appeals in product design and promotion. As yet, there is no known empirical study that has investigated product strategies or advertising campaigns in the context of deterritorialization. The little research that does exist on the topic comprises largely of qualitative studies using small samples (cf. Arnould & Price, 2000). As deterritorialization gains momentum with each passing day, such research should find a universally receptive audience. Research and application of deterritorialization-related marketing has the potential to have a direct and discernable impact on people's quality of life, and should therefore constitute a priority area for macromarketers. When authentically implemented, marketing practices grounded in solid deterritorialization-related research will help alleviate people's sense of rootlessness and facilitate a stronger sense of self.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of globalization is here to stay. While delivering economic benefits, it also creates deep existential crises in the hearts of many. Globalization and deterritorialization go hand in hand, for globalization is not simply the coming together of various peoples forming a harmonious tapestry; for many it entails worldwide fragmentation and a loss of identity.

We live in a global world, but each of us has our identity derived from our culture, our ethnicity, and our traditions that predate contemporary times. The World Health Organization concurs that our cultural and value systems play an important role in defining our quality of life. Marketers have the opportunity to provide real value to the deterritorialized by designing and promoting products in a manner that restores and reinforces consumers' identity. Doing so will not only improve the bottom line for the sellers; it will also make a palpable difference in the quality of life of consumers.

Thus far, research on consumer identity and marketing is conspicuous by its absence. Investigating the linkages between globalization, deterritorialization, and identity loss has vital macromarketing as well as micromarketing implications. We urge the scholarly community to urgently explore the phenomenon of consumer identity and its implications for marketing.

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