

Cultural identities in Marketing and Branding: Appreciation vs. Appropriation

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ABSTRACT

Cultural identities play a pivotal role in the realm of marketing and branding, serving as unique markers that distinguish individuals and communities. This research delves into the nuanced relationship between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation in marketing, highlighting the potential benefits and pitfalls of each approach. Through a comprehensive analysis of existing literature and real-world case studies, this study illuminates how cultural identities are leveraged in brand development. The research underscores the ethical considerations surrounding the use of cultural identities, emphasizing the need for brands to navigate this landscape with sensitivity and respect. By understanding and appreciating the rich tapestry of cultural narratives, brands can foster genuine connections with a global audience, ensuring success and respect in the global marketplace.

Keywords: Cultural Identities, Brand Development, Cultural Appropriation, Cultural Appreciation

1 Introduction

Cultural identities are akin to unique fingerprints that distinguish individuals from one another, reflecting diversity and richness. These identities offer immense potential for building robust brands and establishing meaningful connections with target audiences [1] This research delves into the intricate dynamics between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation within the realm of marketing and their consequential impacts. This study aims to shed light on this crucial subject, dissecting how cultural identities are utilized in marketing, while also addressing the challenges and opportunities they present.

1.1 Research Problem

Brand development and marketing walk an ethical tightrope with the use of cultural identities. These identities, while representing an excellent chance for brands to be distinguishable and resonate with their audiences on a profound level, also represent a very careful balance in avoiding pits related to, of course, cultural appropriation [2]. Ethical marketing does not just understand but does justice to the fine line between celebration of cultural diversity and exploitation. The challenge is to use these elements of culture in a manner that does justice to their place of origin and expresses genuine respect, not, in this case, to be reduced to just marketing tools. This research thus sets out to find just how brands may be able to tap into cultural identities in an effective and ethical manner that will lead to increased market presence without crossing over to appropriation.

1.2 Objectives

The primary objective of this research is to critically examine the utilization of cultural identities in marketing and branding. This overarching goal encompasses the following sub-objectives:

Explore the Significance of Cultural Identities in Brand Development and Marketing: This research aims to elucidate why cultural identities serve as pivotal elements in brand development and marketing.



Analyze the Complex Relationship Between Cultural Appreciation and Cultural Appropriation: This study will delve deeper into the intricate dynamics between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation within the context of utilizing cultural identities. Investigate the Impact of Leveraging Cultural Identities on Customer Interactions with Brands: This research seeks to explore the direct consequences of incorporating cultural identities on customer interactions with brands.

2 Methodology

In the pursuit of unravelling the complex dynamics of cultural identities in marketing and branding, this research adopts an analytical approach grounded in a meticulous exploration of existing literature and a series of pertinent case studies. The methodology delineated here is designed to foster an understanding of the topic at hand, facilitating a comprehensive analysis. Definitions and background: The initial phase of the research involves a systematic literature review, where a range of scholarly articles, journals, and books will be scrutinized to gather substantial information on the topic. This stage is pivotal in establishing a theoretical framework that underpins the entire study. The literature review will focus on works published by renowned authors in the field, such as Smith (2020), Johnson & Lee (2018), and others cited in the background section, to ensure the credibility and relevance of the sources. Case Study Analysis: following the literature review, the research will delve into a detailed analysis of various case studies that epitomize both the appreciation and appropriation of cultural identities in marketing and branding. This segment will involve a critical examination of real-world instances where brands have either succeeded in respectfully leveraging cultural identities or faltered by indulging in cultural appropriation. The case studies will span different industries and geographical locations to offer a diverse and comprehensive perspective. This research adopts an analytical approach, drawing conclusions from an extensive analysis of existing literature and pertinent case studies. Data will be collected through a thorough review of prior research and case studies centered on the utilization of cultural identities in marketing and brand establishment.

3 Background

Starting with define for the main items Culture (1) encompasses a wide array of values, customs, traditions, language, arts, sciences, religions, customs, and social perceptions that profoundly shape the identities of both societies and individuals. It functions as the backdrop that molds how individuals perceive the world and their interactions within it[3]. These cultures undergo continuous evolution over time, primarily driven by the interactions between individuals, communities, and different cultural backgrounds (Johnson & Lee, 2018). In essence, culture constitutes a comprehensive framework of beliefs, values, and practices that intricately shape our perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours. Cultural identity :serves as an integral component of culture, representing the collective identity shared by specific groups of individuals[4]. It encompasses the factors that unite individuals while setting them apart from others within society [5]. These factors encompass elements such as language, customs, traditions, religion, social perspectives, beliefs, and values. Cultural identity provides insight into how individuals connect with particular groups and how they define themselves within a specific cultural context.

Understanding culture and cultural identities is paramount when contemplating their use in marketing and brand development. Appreciating the interactions between various cultures can serve as a wellspring of enrichment and diversity[6], yet it may also give rise to challenges and conflicts[7]. Marketers must exhibit cultural sensitivity and recognize that the cultural identities of both individuals and groups can be exceptionally delicate, necessitating profound respect and appreciation [8]. Branding is the process of steps in the brand of a product or service to hold it, full of strong distinctions. It forms jointly with the product or service identity. the key components as The brand name and the logo are very critical; they serve as important identifications and help in the differentiation of the brand from competition [9]. Also brand message is that which communicates a story and ideas that the brand would like to communicate to its audience, creating a distinct narrative [10]. In addition, color and visual style are very critical, setting the visual tone and identity of the brand [11]. Lastly, the image and texture use symbols, imagery, and the

physical feel of the product to heighten the tactile experience for consumers [12]. The importance of branding in marketing and business success, point above all points. Effective brand strategies point toward product differentiation, basically vital with regard to the aspect of distinguishing the respective product or service from the competitors in a highly populated market [13]. A strong brand builds consumer confidence, which could expand the base of consumers and increase outreach to products [14]. Branding also guides the attention of the customers and leads their decision-making towards given products or services [15]. This, in turn, fosters more interest and curiosity, hence luring the customers to unveil the associated brand benefits [16]. Customers will finally develop loyalty towards a known and well-trusted brand, which secures a customer base that is long-term in relation to the developed brand [17].

4 The Importance of Cultural Identities in Marketing and Branding

Studies indicate that cultural appropriation can elicit negative responses from individuals, especially when the appropriator belongs to a different cultural group. Researchers have found that African Americans express more negativity toward individuals engaging in the appropriation of elements from their culture compared to behaviours that are not considered cultural appropriation. The results suggest that responses to cultural appropriation largely depend on the degree of similarity between different cultural groups [18].

The study reveals tension between cultural appreciation and cultural appropriation, as individuals attempt to justify their consumption of cultural differences through various strategies, including reorganization, restriction, reframing, and providing reasons [19].

5 The Impact of Using Cultural Identities on Customer Interaction with Brands

This impacts greatly on the effectiveness of marketing and advertising if the cultural identities are incorporated into customer dealings. From this point of view, the approach can bring about a huge impact on customer behavior and reactions toward campaigns that integrate cultural elements. If cultural identities were fully integrated into branding, for instance, among other things, using cultural symbols in adverts that speak to the target audience, hence ensuring much interaction and relation between them. This approach particularly brings a feeling of high involvement, wherein customers see their culture and values as reflected by the brand [20]. This kind of relationship can further create an intense belonging and loyalty from the consumers. Indeed, when a brand manages to represent the cultural identity of its customer in the right manner, it does ensure that the same group not just stays loyal to the brand but also increases the chances of repeat purchase [21].

Moreover, using culturally sensitive marketing strategies may see the percentage of response from customers as well as the overall sales go up. The adverts that factor in such cultural aspects not only capture attention more but also enhance positive actions like the click on adverts, sharing content, or making purchases [22]. This heightened level of engagement can translate directly to increased sales, but in a more wise use of cultural identities than to make brand-enhanced sales but rather craft a positive brand reputation. It is a known fact in marketing that when a brand is perceived as diverse and multicultural, more diverse audience segments are likely to feel that it is a better fit for them, hence enhancing the overall market appeal and reputation of the brand [23], [24].

6 Cultural Appreciation vs. Cultural Appropriation

Analysing cultural appreciation versus cultural appropriation is an important aspect to consider when using cultural identities in marketing and branding. There is a significant difference between respect and appropriation of cultures, and this can greatly impact customer interactions and the brand's reputation. Cultural appropriation involves using elements of a specific culture by individuals from another culture without respecting or appreciating the values and traditions of that culture [25]. Often, this is done disrespectfully or offensively. This negative usage can have a significant impact on the brand's reputation and its relationship with the audience. For example, using cultural elements without permission or appreciation of the targeted culture can evoke discontent and anger among the target audience [26].

On the other hand, cultural appreciation refers to deep recognition, respect, and appreciation of cultural elements. When a brand uses cultural identities in a way that shows genuine appreciation and respect, it can positively enhance its relationship with the audience. Customers may feel that the brand respects their history and values, making them more likely to interact with and support it [27]. Studies have indicated that cultural appropriation can be a complex process depending on the relationships between different cultural groups. These matters related to cultural appropriation can manifest in various fields such as arts, fashion, and design. Specific instances of cultural appropriation can be intricate and potentially controversial, depending on social and cultural relationships [28].

The historical practice of cultural borrowing, as a form of interaction between cultures across eras, was initially grounded in respect and acknowledgment of the contributions of previous cultures. For example, in the Middle Ages, there was significant borrowing of artistic and literary works from Greek and Roman culture in European culture, considering these two cultures as sources of civilization, knowledge, and art. This cultural borrowing reflected respect and recognition of the cultural contributions of the previous cultures [29], [30]. Over time, some of these borrowings began to turn into cultural appropriation when elements from other cultures were used inappropriately or disrespectfully. For example, using elements from a particular culture in product designs or marketing campaigns without respecting the rules and values governing that culture can be considered cultural appropriation. This type of behaviour can trigger criticism and protests from the target audience and harm the brand's reputation [31].

While cultural borrowing can be positive when it expresses appreciation and respect for the targeted culture. For instance, cultural borrowing can encourage positive cultural interaction and contribute to promoting understanding between different communities. If cultural identities are used in a way that demonstrates appreciation and respect, it can be beneficial for the brand and its relationship with the audience [32].

7 Case studies of Using Cultural Identities in branding and marketing

7.1 Cases of cultural appropriation:

The examples I mentioned indicate cases of cultural appropriation where cultural elements from specific cultures were used without respect or appreciation for these cultures. Here is more information about these cases:

The Sikh Turban at Gucci's 2018 Fall Show: In this case, Gucci showcased a version of the Sikh turban in its 2018 Fall fashion show during Milan Fashion Week. The turban is an integral part of the Sikh identity, holding significant religious and cultural importance. The use of this item in a fashion show without an understanding of its religious and cultural significance to Sikhs could lead to disrespect and disregard for their culture. figure[1].

YSL's Spring 2002 Collection "Inspired" by "Africa": In this case, designer Yves Saint Laurent presented a haute couture fashion collection in his Spring 2002 fashion show, which was supposedly inspired by "Africa." It's worth noting that this collection was originally shown in 1967. The use of African culture by a European designer without appreciation for the history and cultural heritage of the African continent can be seen as cultural appropriation, sparking controversy and dissatisfaction.

The Use of Native American Headdresses in Dior's Fall 1998 Collection: In this case, Christian Dior included traditional Native American headdresses in its Fall 1998 "Diorient Express" collection, designed by John Galliano. Incorporating this element without regard for Native American culture and history can be considered cultural appropriation and a violation of the cultural and heritage rights of this community. figure[2]



Figure 1: *The Sikh Turban at Gucci's 2018 Fall Show*, **Figure 2:** *The Use of Native American Headdresses in Dior's Fall 1998 Collection*, **Figure 3:** *Jennifer Lawrence's Dress with Dior*[33]

Jennifer Lawrence's Dress at the 2019 Oscars: This dress, considered a form of cultural appropriation, was worn by actress Jennifer Lawrence at the 2019 Oscars ceremony. The dress was designed to resemble traditional Mexican dresses and featured colorful floral patterns and distinctive embroidery reminiscent of traditional Mexican handicrafts. Some people viewed this dress as a form of cultural appropriation of Mexican culture, as it was presented without proper respect or acknowledgment of Mexican traditions and traditional arts.figure[3].

The reason for the significant outrage over this dress is that it was used as part of a high-end fashion collection without involving or appreciating Mexican designers or local artisans with expertise in these traditional arts and crafts. Some argued that Dior should have actively shown respect and recognition for the cultural source of this dress and encouraged collaboration with Mexican artisans. This dress sparked considerable controversy in the media and on social platforms, leading to discussions about the concept of cultural appropriation and the importance of respecting and appreciating other cultures when using elements from them in fashion or any other context.

7.2 Cases of Cultural Appreciation:

In the world of fashion, where trends come and go with remarkable speed, some brands have chosen a different path. They combine traditional craftsmanship with a strong commitment to sustainability, creating unique fashion pieces that tell stories of culture, heritage, and ethical production. Three such brands are Sheena Sood's Abacaxi, Nakta Designs, and Azza Fahmy Jewelry.

Abacaxi: Sheena Sood, the creative force behind Abacaxi, draws inspiration from the natural world. Her designs are a fusion of elements, including tie-dye, quilted textures, mesh panels, balloon sleeves, and more. Abacaxi isn't just about clothing; it offers a range of accessories, such as seashell hair accessories and beaded face masks. What sets Abacaxi apart is its unwavering commitment to ethical production. The brand collaborates with artisans and makers from around the world. These partnerships include small independent ateliers in India, a woman-owned factory in Peru specializing in knit and crochet, and community makers in Oaxaca, Mexico. The brand goes beyond fashion; it celebrates traditional hand-crafted textiles and collaborates with skilled artisans and weavers, striving to preserve ancestral heritage crafts at risk of disappearing.

Abacaxi's dedication extends to its choice of materials. The brand primarily utilizes natural fibers like organic cotton, regeneratively-grown cotton, linen, silk, and alpaca. These choices are not only eco-friendly but also considerate of the wearer's well-being. Natural dyeing processes are employed, reviving ancient practices that benefit the ecosystem. Moreover, Abacaxi embraces upcycling and repurposing, transforming sari material and tees into new designs. Sustainability and inclusivity are at the heart of Abacaxi's design philosophy, with a focus on creating pieces that are meant to last for seasons, if not generations.

Nakta Designs: It takes a different artistic route, collaborating with women artisan communities in Kyrgyzstan. Their specialty lies in crafting beautiful and durable home goods from Kyrgyz wool, with a particular focus on shyrdaks, traditional Kyrgyz felt carpets. Many of Nakta's artisans have spent their entire lives mastering the craft of shyrdak-making. Nakta Designs aims to provide economic opportunities for these highly skilled artisans, most of whom reside in remote and challenging mountainous regions of Kyrgyzstan. Purchasing a shyrdak from Nakta Designs directly contributes to the sustainable development of small businesses led by talented women artisans in low-income, rural communities.

Beyond commerce, Nakta Designs plays a crucial role in preserving Kyrgyz cultural heritage. The creative process of shyrdaks was included in UNESCO's List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safekeeping in 2012. Nakta Designs is on a mission to promote this invaluable process, showcase its beautiful products, and honor the talented women who keep this cultural heritage alive.

Azza Fahmy Jewelry: Is a testament to the endurance of ancient jewelry-making techniques. Located at the intersection of tradition and innovation, her Jewelry boasts intricate craftsmanship that has endured for thousands of years. Each piece of jewellery is a masterpiece, conveying a personal and unique story to its wearer. Craftsmanship at Azza Fahmy is a legacy passed down through generations. Skilled gold and silversmiths operate within the ancient Ottoman hierarchy of master, trainer, and trainee. This ensures that the craft is preserved authentically, with young craftsmen learning from the masters. Azza Fahmy's jewelry often revolves around central inspirational motifs or poems, bearing personal messages for the wearer. Calligraphy is one of their unique signatures, along with the pioneering combination of silver and gold, including chains and hand-piercing.

Translating intricate motifs into wearable art involves traditional jewelry techniques like hand-piercing, where sketches within a piece are carefully sawed. This meticulous process demands highly skilled craftsmen and often takes days or weeks to complete a single piece. Her Jewelry's commitment to preserving traditional techniques and infusing them with cultural inspirations is evident in their creations. Each piece is not merely jewelry but a work of art with a unique story.



Figure 4: one of Azza Fahmy products , **Figure 5:** artisans working Nakta project

8 Conclusion

The relationship between cultural identities and the marketing and branding sphere is much more complicated and requires a strategy based on sensitivity and discernment. The brand has to negotiate this complex landscape with deep understanding and respect for diverse cultural narratives that unlock potential and open the way for the possibility of fostering real relationships with a larger global audience. In this effort, brands should veer away from the hurtful paths of cultural appropriation, for this error can ruin, to a huge extent, the brand image and loyalty and trust that consumers have. Would have far-reaching implications, since this affects the brand reputation and sustains these damaging stereotypes, cross-cultural misunderstanding. And conversely, As we venture through an age with a level of interconnectedness like never before, the importance of brands championing the cause of cultural appreciation only becomes more paramount. This will enable them to develop relationships with their consumers built on respect and understanding and hence result in a brand story that is so successful and respectful in the world market. At the end of the day, the path that will best define branding success in this modern, globalized world is going to run through an understanding and respect for the cultural identity tapestry that marks us in the first place. Brands that hold this kind of ethos have an opportunity not to create a reputation only but to allow a landscape where diversity is celebrated, and every cultural identity is honored.

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