City, Consumption and Interculturalism

Short Abstract:

With the rise of interculturalism as an alternative paradigm to the dominant multicultural integration policies in immigration countries, the importance of cities, as landscapes of intercultural interactions and consumption has become more and more important. This study aims to investigate how cities and city-related consumption practices play a role in immigrant consumer acculturation, an area that is largely overlooked in previous research. A hermeneutic approach is used to analyse and interpret the data collected through semi-structured interviews with 18 Iranian immigrants who live in Dortmund, Germany. The findings show how immigrant consumers' involvement in city-related consumption practices provides them with a set of resources to navigate within the hosting society and develop a sense of belonging to the city, beyond the dichotomy of the home and host countries. This is especially evident in the case of collective forms of consumption, such as football fandom, that involve intercultural interactions.

Keywords: Interculturalism, city, consumer acculturation

Introduction and Research Aim

In the light of the so-called paradigmatic shift from multiculturalism (i.e. tolerating and institutionalising ethnic diversity) towards interculturalism (i.e. facilitating intercultural interactions and socialisation) (Mansouri & Modood, 2021), the role of cities in the creation of more cohesive societies has received increasing attention in the diversity management studies and policies (Schiller, 2012; Zapata-Barrero, 2020). From an interculturalist perspective, cities are regarded as the site of intercultural communication and an active player that can bring people together for positive and constructive interactions.

Despite this, cities, as landscape of consumption (Zukin, 1998) and intercultural interactions (Zapata-Barrero, 2020), have received limited scholarly attention in consumer research, especially in 'consumer acculturation' strand of research. The study of ethnic minority integration in consumer research has been mostly addressed in consumer acculturation studies wherein a robust body of knowledge is developed on the relationship between ethnicity and consumption patterns (e.g. Deshpande, Hoyer, & Donthu, 1986), consumption and identity projects (e.g. Askegaard, Arnould, & Kjeldgaard, 2005; Cruz & Buchanan-Oliver, 2020) as well as in relation to the functioning of the broader sociocultural processes such as social class (Üstüner & Holt, 2007), and neoliberal multiculturalism (Veresiu & Giesler, 2018).

In more recent studies, a relational configuration of consumer acculturation has been advanced that focuses on the interactional aspect of consumer acculturation (Luedicke, 2015; Veresiu, 2020). In this view, consumer acculturation is regarded as "a market-mediated form of relational configuration through which immigrants and indigenes willingly negotiate competing and changing sociocultural conditions". (Veresiu, 2020, p. 343). However, the role

of cities as places that facilitate and/or confine these interactions and negotiations has received limited attention.

Addressing the identified theoretical gap in the literature, this study aims to uncover how cities, as site of consumption and intercultural interactions, can play a role in the creation of more cohesive societies in immigration countries, particularly through providing a resource for ethnic consumers' identity work. We ask: how do city and city-related consumption practices are experienced by immigrant consumers and what are the acculturative outcomes of these experiences? We investigate this issue in the context of Iranian immigrants residing in Dortmund, an immigration city in western Germany.

Background: Interculturalism
It is discussed that we are witnessing a paradigmatic shift in integration theories and policies from multiculturalism to interculturalism, As a direct response to the shortcomings of multiculturalism (Zapata-Barrero, 2020). The domination of multicultural policy paradigm in European countries has been partially accounted for the formation of parallel societies at the heart of European societies (Bagguley, 2015). Although multiculturalism does not directly foster seclusion, narrowing down integration to the issues such as providing equal opportunities and accepting/tolerating the 'other', or forcing integration through legal frameworks and official language, for example, has led to the formation and operation of mechanisms of exclusion (Bouchard, 2011). Moreover, a lack of attention to the more symbolic and subjective aspects of integration (e.g. developing 'a sense of belonging' to the hosting society) in multicultural policymaking has placed multiculturalism under suspicion of promoting segregation (Zapata-Barrero, 2017).

Interculturalism, as an alternative paradigm to multiculturalism, is basically a project of constructing a civic culture that is founded upon cultural diversity and promoting intercultural interactions in public spaces (Zapata-Barrero, 2017). Interculturalism is based on three premises. First, the dialogic, relational and reciprocal nature of interculturalism warrants a policymaking that is directed towards the whole society and not merely target immigrants and ethnic minority groups (Bouchard, 2011). Second, interculturalism in essence is an urban phenomenon (Zapata-Barrero, 2020). City spaces are viewed as the site of interculturalism – active players in integration processes through facilitating intercultural interactions and dialogue (Schiller, 2012; Zapata-Barrero, 2017).

Third, the core premise of interculturalism is that beyond focusing on the basic rights, such as the freedom of bearing the culture of origin, the focus here is on intercultural interactions and dialogue, which seems to be largely underestimated in the multicultural paradigm (Zapata-Barrero, 2017). Therefore, in this view, ethnic minorities not only should have the right to define themselves in relation to their ethnic background, which is the basis of the multicultural policy paradigm, but also the opportunity to define themselves in relation to the hosting society through positive and constructive intercultural interactions. The third premise refers to the less attended, symbolic and subjective aspect of integration in multiculturalism, the creation of a sense of belonging, the identification with the hosting society (Zapata-Barrero, 2017).

The interrelationship between city spaces and consumer identity has been addressed in recent years in marketing and consumer research. For example, researchers have underscored the role of city spaces in consumers' identity work regarding sustainable activism and resisting capitalist processes (Lloveras et al., 2018; Vicdan and Hong, 2018). Moreover, previous

studies have highlighted the excluding and alienating functioning of city spaces, especially for consumers with lower levels of economic, social and cultural capital (Saatcioglu and Corus, 2016; Castilhos, 2019).

The third premise of interculturalism (i.e. intercultural interaction and identity construction) provides a theoretical foundation for the current study in order to investigate how cities and city-related consumption practices can come into play as a resource for identity construction amongst ethnic minorities.

Methodology
Adopting an inductive approach in which the emerging theory led the direction of the data collection, we used semi-structured, in-depth interviews for the purpose of data collection. Eighteen interviews and seven follow-up interviews were conducted between February and November 2018 with first-generation Iranian immigrants residing in Dortmund, Germany. A hermeneutic approach was adopted in order to analyse and interpret the data (Thompson, 1997), which began with conducting the first interview. The data was subjected to intratext and intertext readings and an iterative back and forth between the part and the whole in interpretation of the data, that is the hermeneutic circle (Thompson, 1997; Arnold and Fischer, 1994).

Findings
The findings indicated that for some participants, the construction of a sense of belonging to the city acts as a bridge to cross the boundaries between the home and the host counties.This sense of belonging is mostly constructed and embodied through various forms of consumption practices. For example, the city-related identity is evident in Ali's football fan behaviour. Ali is a 70-year-old Iranian immigrant who has been living in Dortmund for 50 years. When he was asked about whether he will support Iran and/or Germany national teams during the 2018 World Cup, he responded reluctantly, 'neither of them'. However, his eagerness in supporting Borussia Dortmund football club as a representative of 'his city' highlights how local identity can even go beyond ethnic and national identity in immigrants' identity work:

> Ali: [when I go to the stadium,] I am not a fan who always sings and chants. I watch the match. If they play well, I enjoy, if they don't, I cannot do anything. I am [just] an ordinary fan. Well, [of course] I become very sad [if they lose]. They are [representing] our city. [For me,] they should always win. I become very happy [if they win]. But when they lose, like this week, well, what can I do?

Relatively strong ties to Dortmund are also reflected in Mojdeh's narratives of the self. As a 54-year-old Iranian woman residing in Dortmund for 33 years, Mojdeh talks about her ties to Iran very passionately. For example, she describes: "Each time when I go to Iran, it is like entering into a different world; every cell of my body feels happy". Whilst such an emotional attachment to Germany is not evident in her identity narrative, her relationship and affiliation with Dortmund, as "her city", seems to be a different story: "when I went to Iran [for the first time] after 5 years [of staying in Germany] … when I laid in my old bed in my parents' house, I suddenly missed Dortmund. [I missed Dortmund] because my house was there, [because] my life was there". Her affiliation and care about Dortmund are not only limited to nostalgic feelings when she is away from home, but also in supporting local businesses and economy by not shopping online, as much as she can:

> I try to avoid online shopping as much as I can … It was two or three days ago that I wanted to buy one of these Bluetooth speakers. I checked the prices online. I knew I could find a better deal online, but I went to a shop … I showed the price on the website [to the salesperson] and I said to him 'this is their price'. He said, 'I cannot offer you that price, but five Euros higher than that'. I replied 'sure! For me, 5 Euros is nothing if it helps this business running and you keeping your job'.

Whilst the focus of previous studies on immigrant and ethnic consumers is largely on the relationships to the home and host countries (Cruz and Buchanan-Oliver, 2017, 2020; Jafari and Goulding, 2008), the findings of this study underscore the relationship to the city as an important source of identity construction amongst immigrants. The findings highlight the important role of city in participants' identity narratives, which is embodied in collective consumption practices, such as festivals, carnivals and football fandom.

Previous research has theorised that consumption practices, especially, and more effectively, in their collective forms, perform as boundary-making practices in order to create in-group and out-group distinctions based upon consumers' economic, social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Weinberger, 2015; Seregina and Weijo, 2016). In other words, such consumption practices, as the embodiment of cultural and social capital, function as criteria for inclusion and exclusion in various social spheres (Lamont and Lareau, 1988). The findings presented above indicate that acquiring city-related capital, which is mostly obtained through intercultural interactions, empowers and encourages participants to take part in the city-related activities and social spaces, and develop a sense of belonging to the hosting society.

Implications for Theory
The findings of this study underscore the important role of the city in participants' narratives of identity, which is mostly constructed and expressed through collective consumption practices. Collective-consumption practices, not only as embodied experiences of city (Everett, 2008) but also as important resources for identity construction, enable immigrant consumers to dispute various forms of exclusion mechanisms and boundaries that prevent them from developing a sense of belonging to the host country (i.e. Germany).

These findings extend the boundaries of consumer research beyond the dichotomy of the home and host countries. Previous studies have mostly focused on the home and host countries (Cruz and Buchanan-Oliver, 2017; Jafari and Goulding, 2008) or broader transnational processes (Askegaard et al., 2005; Veresiu and Giesler, 2018) as the sources of identity construction amongst immigrant consumers. The findings of this study advance scholarly understanding of the interrelationship among spirit of a city, city-related collective consumption practices and residents' identity (Green et al., 2018), and calls for further investigation on this important topic, especially in the context of immigration and integration.

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