

Chapter 10



MAINSTREAM MULTICULTURALISM



What's the Trend?

After years of being ignored niche demographics, multicultural citizens and their cultures find new widespread acceptance through growing integration of diverse ideas and people in entertainment, products and politics.

If the Kardashians get replaced as reality television's family to watch in 2016 ... it may be the Keswanis that do it.

On the most basic prerequisite level, the California based Indian family has plenty of natural family drama to pull from. The heads of the family are "doctor dad" Anil and "momager" Vaishali who left a career as an optometrist to manage the exploding social media popularity of her son "Big Nik." Nik, who suffers from a rare form of dwarfism, has managed to build a loyal following of more than 2.5 million fans for his Vine videos. Rounding out the made-for-reality-TV family are his 15 year old aspiring beauty pageant star sister Sarina and 6 year old "transgender princess" sister Devina (originally born Dev).

Riding a strategic marketing wave generated by People magazine's prediction that they will become "America's new obsession" – their

popular new web series launched in 2015 (on People.com) and was called *The Keswanis: A Most Modern Family*.

The Keswanis seem perfectly scripted to challenge our long standing beliefs and stereotypes about multiculturalism in entertainment, but if you watch several of the short pilot webisodes even their story is surprisingly, well, normal. And that is the truth at the heart of this trend of *Mainstream Multiculturalism*.

When AdAge magazine interviewed NBC Entertainment President Jennifer Salke about this rise in diversity on TV, she shared what she had heard reflected back in focus groups from their audience: “I am so sick of the word ‘diverse’ ... our kids don’t think about words like ‘diverse.’ Instead it’s all just ‘mainstream.’” What is now called “mainstream” took years to arrive at this point.

Outsiders Get Inside

Multiculturalism in the past was a favorite device used in television and films to tell outsider “fish out of water” style stories (like the 2002 film *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*). The bias still seems evident in popular programs like *Blackish* and *Fresh Off The Boat*, which both feature central characters struggling to fit into the world around them – yet the stories have also shifted dramatically.

In *Blackish*, Anthony Anderson’s main character of Andre (Dre) is an African American advertising executive in an industry that has traditionally lacked diverse leaders. His antics in the show, and its title of “Blackish,” are based on the challenges he encounters in embracing his new culturally blended family and his own evolving identity as a black man.

Fresh Off The Boat takes a nostalgic look at the immigrant struggle to fit in back in the 90s from the modern perspective of a first generation Chinese teenager played by Hudson Yang. The show is narrated by the grown up version of this character, who represents the Millennial/GenXer of today who has grown up with a far more blended cultural identity.

The theme in both stories is that diverse stories about outsiders are no longer about the hilarity of being outsiders, but rather about the

hilarity of being insiders. In other words, diversity in entertainment is going thoroughly mainstream. Even *My Big Fat Greek Wedding* is getting a newly integrated update in March 2016 with a sequel produced nearly 15 years after the original, featuring the same characters dealing with a troubled teenage daughter who typifies this new “blended” generation.

This mainstreaming of the outsider may be evident in entertainment, and it is a logical place to start with discussing this trend – but Mainstream Multiculturalism extends far beyond movies and television. Far reaching parts of our lives, from eating to elections, are now reflecting this new reality and businesses of all kinds will need to have a strategy to react in 2016.

Cultural Condiments

When Huy Fong Foods, maker of the popular Sriracha hot sauce, finally opened their factory doors in April of 2014 – it was dubbed by some media as a “Willy Wonka” moment. Rather than being inspired by finding his successor, though, the 69 year old founder David Tran was trying to make a point.

Just a few months earlier, local council representatives in Irwindale, California had filed a lawsuit declaring the factory a “public nuisance” after a handful of residents had complained about “stinging fumes” causing asthma, heartburn and teary eyes. The move caused a partial shut down of the factory and triggered worldwide attention.

Tran’s decision to invite the media in to see the factory (and its environmentally safe processes) was a shrewd PR strategy which eventually led to the lawsuit being dropped just over a month later. Yet the case also led to an unexpected side effect – a US-wide panic from consumers over the fear that their beloved sriracha sauce may no longer be available.

The panic led thousands of consumers to hoard bottles of their precious sauce, and cemented the cult popularity of Sriracha that had been growing for more than a decade. Though Tran keeps sales figures secret, it is estimated that the company is now worth more than \$60 million and that they sell more than 20 million bottles a year. The brand has also become a centerpiece in the dialogue happening in food circles today

about the growing multicultural influence on the consumer palate of the future.

In November of 2015, *Fast Company* chronicled this multicultural evolution of the condiment aisle, sharing that “exotic flavors have quietly crept into restaurants and supermarkets ... resulting in an explosion in hot sauce sales, which have grown by more than 150% since 2000—more than ketchup, mayonnaise, mustard and barbecue sauce combined. The fiery condiment is now the foundation of a billion-dollar industry.”

Desperate to retain their market share, even the traditional mainstays of the grocery aisle are fighting back with new exotic creations of their own. The nearly 150 year old Tabasco brand has launched their own sriracha, chipotle and habanero flavored versions. Heinz has sriracha and jalapeno flavored ketchup and A1 Steak Sauce comes a spicy chipotle flavor. Spice maker McCormick even named Japanese 7 Spice as a flavor trend to watch for 2015.

The evolution of our palates is one symbol of mainstream multiculturalism – but it is only a small slice of the overall shift. There is also a shift taking place in politics in business, brought to life most recently by the early moves of the charismatic young prime minister of Canada.

“Because it’s 2015”

For most politicians, their most memorable tag lines will typically come as part of their campaigning efforts or on the debate stage when confronting their opponents. For newly elected Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, that line came less than a week into his administration when he introduced his 30 person cabinet – the first ever to include a gender balanced 15 men and 15 women.

When asked by the media why gender equality was so important, he answered simply “because it’s 2015.” The words struck a chord and his press conference and simple answer quickly went viral online. In the process, he became a champion for diversity and the symbol of a new kind of politician who would be willing to do more than simply talk about creating more diversity.

This model of team diversity is one that some forward thinking businesses are trying hard to match as well.

Almost every Fortune 500 large brand has some type of diversity and inclusive hiring initiative aimed at attracting a more diverse workforce. Carnival, the parent company for nine different cruise lines is one recent example. In the past two years, seven of the nine heads of the different lines have been replaced. Among the newcomers, *BusinessWeek* reports, “four are now women, one is black and one is gay, a big change in a business that was an offshoot of the European, male-dominated shipping industry.”

The strategy at Carnival was to intentionally a way to foster a “diversity of thinking,” as CEO Arnold Donald described it. “I guarantee if you get a diverse group of people aligned around a common objective with a process to work together, they will out-engineer, out-solution a homogeneous team 90 percent of the time and created things none of them alone would have created.” The strategy has been working as Carnival’s share price rose 53% during Arnold’s first year on the job, and net income during that period rose 15% as well.

Over the past year this connection between diversity of hiring and success has created pressure to change in many other industries as well. In one example from the world of higher education, Yale University administrators responded to student demands by pledging to do more to encourage faculty diversity through a \$50 million dollar initiative.

The point of view they all routinely share is to remind the world that the demographics of the next generation are slowly shifting and our culture is becoming more and more blended with multiple ethnicities mixing together. This blending is causing a dramatic shift in the \$200 billion beauty industry as well.

Ethnic Beauty

In the early 1990s, Somali born supermodel Iman was approaching the peak of her career. Once described by fashion icon Yves Saint-Laurent as his “dream woman” – she appeared on dozens of magazine covers, in feature films and was even invited to play the queen Cleopatra in Michael Jackson’s iconic music video for the song Remember The Times.

Iman was also a pioneer in the world of ethnic beauty, founding her own self branded cosmetics firm in 1994 focusing on difficult to find shades for women. For most of the two decades since that time, the world of ethnic beauty products was driven by niche companies like Iman's – mostly created by entrepreneurs dissatisfied with the limited selection of mainstream beauty products.

M·A·C Cosmetics, for example, was founded by a photographer and a beauty salon owner in Canada frustrated by the lack of colors that would shoot well with photography. Fashion Fair was a cosmetics brand created for women of color by the late Eunice W. Johnson and eventually became the largest Black-owned cosmetics company in the world.

Meanwhile large brands like Lancôme, Avon and Cover Girl experimented for years with reaching more diverse audiences through creative advertising and spokesmodel deals with “ethnic” celebrities like Salma Hayek (Avon) or Lupita Nyong'o (Lancôme).

So what is different today? In 2016, the longtime separated niche of ethnic beauty will no longer be seen as separate.

Oru Mohiuddin, a senior analyst at the Euromonitor International beauty desk, sees this trend clearly supported by the numbers. In a prescient blog post from 2013, she predicted that “ethnic beauty is poised for a boom,” citing examples of increased R&D spending on developing lines for a wider range of consumers.

There are plenty of industry examples to support her theory. Yves Saint-Laurent's Le Teint Touche Éclat foundation reportedly spent nine years researching over 7000 global skin tones before finally launching their “perfect” 22 shades to reflect the full range of skin tones from around the world. L'Oréal recently relocated its multicultural beauty research to its main innovation hub in New Jersey. The brand also acquired Niely Cosméticos in Brazil and is opening an innovation center in Rio by the end of 2016.

The shift is even affecting brands founded to offer options to ethnic women in the first place. Brands from Cover FX, Fashion Fair and Carol's Daughter (all brands first started to cater to ethnic customers) are now expanding to target a broader audience regardless of ethnicity. Even Iman Cosmetics has noticed the shift, recently using more Asian,

Latina, Middle Eastern and Native American models in their ads and testing products on a broader range of women.

As Iman told *Women's Wear Daily*, "I was admittedly comfortable with Iman Cosmetics being identified as a beauty brand that filled the gap for black women because it was deeply personal for me. However, as we gathered more information about the game we were in, we started to shift into the more holistic vision that we are known for now throughout our positioning and advertising: Women of all skin tones want to look good when they rule the world."

Why It Matters

In 2015 the world saw a range of pioneers like Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau and Somali-American supermodel Iman commit to the idea that multiculturalism was no longer something that describes the outsiders in our culture. Through evolving entertainment, food and culture – we are now starting to see the influence of ethnicity change the way that we see our world today. It is powering a shift in how the younger generations view themselves and a far more inclusive view of those who they consider part of their culture ... no matter how different they look. Over 2016, this blending of culture will continue to offer new opportunities for fresh thinking when it comes to diversity in marketing messages, the range of new mashup-style products and services people will crave, and what it truly means to belong to any group or culture.

Who Should Use This Trend?

For years multiculturalism and diversity have been seen as something to worry about for the future. Audiences were changing, customers were evolving and cities were getting more blended. This point of view is officially outdated. Audiences have *already* changed. The implications of this are important for anyone in an industry that still holds onto the older assumptions about who a target audience is or where they come from. If you are in an industry has longstanding biases about the demographics of common customers, this trend should be a more urgent call to change

your thinking and prepare for a future where those old assumptions break down and shift profoundly.

How To Use This Trend

- ✓ **Rethink your imagery** – One of the areas that is most easy to reveal unintended bias is in the imagery we choose to use for describing what we do and who we do it for. A key way to start thinking about this trend on a very small level is to run an audit of all the communications materials you use and what types of people are illustrated in them. Across print materials, websites, advertising and anywhere else – the question to ask is whether the diversity reflected there truly reflects the diversity in the world around your business. If not, focus on changing it.
- ✓ **Hire for unexpected diversity** – It is one thing to decide that you will hire someone with a different background than the rest of your team. It is another to give someone a chance who comes from outside your industry or has a diverging point of view shaped by having a cultural background unlike your own. Part of the challenge with building a more diverse workforce is seeing that diversity not as a checkbox to be marked – but rather as a unique element of someone's overall qualifications to be a valuable member of your team.