Towards an Understanding of Media Usage and Acculturation

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ABSTRACT

This investigation focuses on the role of the media in the acculturation processes of Maghrebs in France. It seeks to assess the extent to which the media are an agent for acculturation in this specific immigrant population. We carried out thirteen in-depth interviews with a varied sample group, using an interpretative approach. We considered three types of media in this research: the ‘French’ media, the ‘Arab’ media, and the ‘ethnic’ media produced in France but directed at the Maghrebs. Results are then presented and discussed. The limits of this research are underlined, and some future openings for research are proposed.

INTRODUCTION

Immigration is a study topic for human and social sciences. Demographers thus take an interest in population movements; historians are interested in the spread of cultures and in colonisations; anthropologists see immigrants as ‘the others’; and sociologists investigate the social transformations brought about by the arrival of immigrants. More recently, marketing researchers have become interested in immigration, initially because immigrants represent a market and because understanding the acculturation process is key to penetrating that market, but also from a point of view of transformative research, since this understanding makes it possible to improve immigrants’ well-being. Most studies of consumer acculturation have studied immigrants in the US, while relatively less attention has been paid to immigrants living in Europe (e.g. Askegaard et al. 2005; Lindridge et al. 2004; Jamal 2003). France has the highest rate of immigration in Europe (INSEE, 2006). Immigration in France, which originally was chiefly motivated by economic considerations, is now motivated more by family reunification. According to INSEE, main-land France had 4.9 million immigrants in mid-2004, representing 8.1% of the population. In light of France’s republican and egalitarian tradition and its chosen position as a strong and centralising nation state, immigration is currently a hot topic for debate (Hetzel 2003). The recent creation of the ‘Ministry of Immigration, Integration, National Identity and Co-development’ has been seen by some as going against the founding principles the French Republic, intended to be universalist and egalitarian. The debate is heating up even further with the increasing emergence of ‘communitarian’ behaviours or the protest movements in the suburbs of major cities that have large immigrant populations.

The media is playing a part in this change. Thus, France has seen the recent appearance of newspapers and magazines (such as Amina, Jeune Afrique, Salama, Arabies Magasine and Yasmina) and radio or television stations are specifically targeted at ethnic populations. This rapid growth in the number of media making use of the ethnic variable as a criterion for defining their target market raises numerous questions. In particular: which role will these media play in the acculturation process for immigrants? Marketing literature presents the media as an essential agent for acculturation, but this significance is supported by little empirical work. This article is intended to assess the extent to which the media constitute an agent for acculturation in a specific immigrant population: that of Maghrebs in France. According to INSEE (2006), maghrebin immigrants are the largest immigrant population in France (with the exception of intra-EU immigration). They represent a growing market for marketers, since in 2005 the number of immigrants originating from the Maghreb was 1.5 million, 220,000 more than in 1999 (+17%). The fact that the Maghreb is composed of three countries (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia) means that it represents certain homogeneity of cultural identity. This shared culture is first and foremost based on the Berber origin of most of the region’s inhabitants—even if many of them do not speak Berber. In addition, all the inhabitants speak Arabic (a language that has been spoken in the region for thirteen centuries) in classical and/or dialect form. Classical Arabic is essentially a vehicle for Islam, the religion shared by Maghrebs and for official institutions such as schools and the public administration. However, dialectal Arabic is the mother tongue and language used in everyday life by the majority of Maghrebs. Finally, these three countries share a common history with France, linked initially with colonisation (19th and beginning of the 20th Century) and then to immigration (essentially since 1960). The majority of French people tend to react to this strong shared identity by stigmatising these three countries on account of their ‘Arab-Muslim’ identity, and this stigmatisation in turn reinforces the ‘homogeneity’ of Maghrebin identity in France.

In order to study the role of the media in the acculturation process of Maghrebs in France, we will first adress to the theories of acculturation and the role that the media play in this regard. We will then present the methodology and the main results of our qualitative study. Finally, we will end this article with a discussion, including the main limits of this research and the avenues of research.

Immigration and research into consumer behaviour

Most research into consumer behaviour studies the process by which individuals adapt to a culture different from their own, by concentrating on two phenomena: assimilation and acculturation. Research employing the assimilationist approach studies how individuals adjust to a new culture by how quickly they appropriate elements of that new culture, at the expense of their own culture of origin (Deshpande et al. 1986; Hirschman 1981; Kim et al. 1990; Wallendorf and Reilly 1983). Since the 1990s, research has concentrated on the acculturation approach. According to this doctrine, different individuals adapt to different extents and borrow elements from their own culture of origin as well as from their host culture (Berry 1980; Jun et al. 1993; Mendoza 1989; Peñaloza 1994). More recent work has focused on the ‘swapping’ between the culture of origin and the host culture, and this movement has given rise to

1This research is supported by the French “Agence Nationale de la Recherche” (ANR).

2INSEE is the French National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies.

3The significance of its proximity to classical Arabic depends on the sociocultural position of the speaker.

However, all this research takes the work of Berry (1980) as its source, which assigns different degrees of acculturation to individuals based on the extent to which they associate themselves with their culture of origin and their host culture. There are therefore four modes of acculturation: assimilation, integration, separation and marginalisation (Berry 1980). Integration is the situation in which immigrants partially maintain the cultural integrity of their ethnic group and partially demonstrate an increasingly marked participation in their new society. In this situation, immigrants retain their identity and certain other of their own cultural characteristics (languages, dietary customs, religious festivals, etc.) whilst simultaneously taking part in economic, political and legal structures with the other ethnic groups in the new society. On the other hand, immigrants are considered to be assimilated if they abandon their cultural identity in favour of that of the host society. They do not wish to retain their cultural identity and actively seek contact with the host culture. Separation describes the situation of individuals who do not seek to establish relations with the dominant community and who wish to keep their cultural identity. They preserve their culture of origin and their practices and keep themselves apart from the dominant group. Marginalisation is where immigrants lose their identity (often as a result of assimilationist policies practiced by the dominant group) but yet do not have the right to participate in the running of institutions and the life of the dominant group.

For some researchers, acculturation manifests chiefly at a behavioural level. The authors first addressed linguistic preferences (Hui et al. 1992; Valencia 1985), particularly at work, at school, within the familiar or in situations where there is confrontation with the media, together with shopping behaviour. Other works (Gentry et al. 1995; Jun et al. 1993; Laroche et al. 1991; Valencia 1985) have studied the choice of neighbourhood (ethnic/non-ethnic) and friends, the celebration of religious festivals and the choice of holidays and social activities, together with the issue of mixed marriages. Peñaloza (1994) stresses however the limits of an approach that measures the degree of adherence or integration of a minority to a dominant culture without examining the nature of this process, and omits to take account of the influence of marketing strategies on the process of adaptation amongst the populations studied. That author states that in a globalised world with porous frontiers, the presence of transnational consumers and products has an effect on local consumer cultures. In the host society, some immigrants tend to consume products attached to their culture of origin, thereby displaying ethnic consumption, whereas others appropriate or do not hesitate to opt for products representing the dominant culture; they thus demonstrate a considerable degree of cultural change and are progressively becoming more and more acculturated, at the expense of their culture of origin. The individual characteristics of immigrants (demographic, geographic, linguistic and the date of their arrival) are determining factors in the process of consumer acculturation, as are the various agents of acculturation: family, friends, religious institutions, the media and the institutions of the culture of origin and the host society (see Ogden, Ogden and Schau 2004). Within this context of acculturation, this paper will concentrate on the specific agent of the media.

THE MEDIA: AN AGENT OF ACCULTURATION?
Since the inaugural work of Nagata (1969 in Lee 1989), many researchers (Hui et al. 1998; Lee 1989; O’Guinn and Faber 1985; O’Guinn et al. 1986; Kim, Laroche et al. 1990; Peñaloza 1994, etc.) have presented the media as a crucial element in the acculturation process. However, relatively little research (Kara and Kara 1996) has been devoted to studying the impact of the media on acculturation.

The media can have an effect on two levels. On the one hand, they enable immigrants to become symbolically familiar with their host society (Lee 1989). This is however not a question of intense, concrete contact with the new society. By making use of the radio, the television, magazines, newspapers, cinema, theatre, museums or lectures, immigrants can acquire certain closeness to the host society (Tzu 1984). They learn which products they ‘must use and own’ in order to be properly looked on as a member of the dominant society (O’Guinn et al. 1985; O’Guinn et al. 1986). This is especially important where the immigrants do not have a comfortable command of the language of the host country. Television can be a solution to this problem, since images enable a relative understanding to be gleaned (Lee 1989). Garcia (1982) has shown the preference of Mexican-Americans for the media over and above other agents as a source of information and advice. Similarly, Lee (1989) shows that television is perceived by Chinese immigrants in the USA as a reliable source of information and an easily accessible agent of acculturation when learning the lifestyle and values of the host country. Indeed, Lee and Tse (1994, 68) write that: “exposure to mass media, […] contributed to attitudinal and/or behavioral change. It appears that acculturating individuals’ adoption of the majority norms may be related to their exposure to mass media”.

Moreover, immigrants seek to remain in contact with their country of origin via forms of media that are relevant to their ethnic cultural community. This research can be interpreted as the need to return to the well-known and the familiar, and as being linked to the pleasure of hearing one’s language of origin or of coming back into contact with familiar cultural elements. It may also be a question of the need to stay informed of what is going on in the country of origin. This research into contact via the media is not limited to the initial phase of arrival in the host country. In their consumption of ethnic media, immigrants can seek out this contact even several years after their immigration. In their work on immigrants from Hong Kong to Canada, Lee and Tse (1994, 68) report that: “even after living in Canada for at least seven years, the long-time immigrants spent 41% of their media time on ethnic media”.

Over the course of immigrants’ settlement in the host society, they are bathed in an intensive consumption of dominant media, at the expense of ethnic media. Immigrants are therefore simultaneously in contact with the media from the host country and the media from their country of origin. The media should thus be distinguished more precisely according to their target language and their relationship with Maghrebin immigrants. As part of this research, we will consider three types of media.

- the ’French’ media: French-language television channels, radio stations, newspapers and magazines targeted at the French population living within the country;
- the ‘Arab’ media from the countries of origin: Algerian, Moroccan and Tunisian national newspapers from the countries of the Maghreb that are sold in France and channels; and radio stations broadcast from Arab countries such as Al-Jazeera. These media are essentially targeted at the populations living in the Maghreb or in Arab countries.
- ‘Ethnic’ media produced in France but for the Maghrebin minority in France. These media cover subjects of interest to the Maghrebin community living in France.

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4Only television, radio and the press will be considered here, since cinema and posters are of very secondary importance as media.
How do Maghrebin immigrants living in France consume these different media, and to what extent do these media contribute to their acculturation process? This was the key question addressed by this research.

**METHODOLOGY**

In order to answer these questions, it would have been limited for us to restrict ourselves to a quantitative study of the consumer behaviour of Maghrebin immigrants in France. It is not sufficient to know whether these immigrants are aware of the different media and whether they consume them; the method of that consumption and the relationship these immigrants have with the media—the way they integrate them into their life and their identity—must also be known. A qualitative approach was therefore required. We decided to carry out in-depth interviews with a varied sample group of Maghrebin immigrants in France, using an interpretative approach.

We carried out 13 in-depth interviews of an approximate length of 90-120 minutes with Maghrebin immigrants aged between 19 and 54; 12 of these immigrants are from the middle class backgrounds, and one is from lower class. In total, thirteen people were approached for a total of 21 hours and 26 minutes’ interview time. We favoured variety of information over choosing a representative sample of the population. For this reason we opted for a theoretical sampling process by trying to vary the gender, age and generation of the people involved. The theoretical sampling was achieved after the 13th interview, since the accounts received displayed a considerable degree of diversity and the last interviews contributed relatively little new information (Glazer and Strauss 1967). This figure is higher than the minimum recommended by McCracken (1988) and is within the range of 3-20 interviews for interpretivist research (Fournier 1998; Thompson and Haytko 1997).

Our interviews were carried out in the north of France, a region marked by an initial economic Maghrebin immigration for the purpose of working in the textile or mining industry; these immigrants were subsequently joined by the immigration of their families. The Maghrebin immigration is in fact the result of multiples waves of migration motivated by economic, political or family considerations. According to INSEE data (1999), Algerians form the majority of Maghrebin immigrants in France (44%, or 574,208 immigrants), followed by Moroccans (40%, or 522,504 immigrants) and then Tunisiens (16%, or 201,561 immigrants). Over the course of their settlement in France, Maghrebins have spread throughout the whole of France. Of the thirteen people, nine are Algerian, two are Moroccan and two are Tunisian. The sample is composed of seven women and six men. Seven arrived in France at various ages and have been living in France for between 5 and 44 years; they form the first generation. The others, born in France, are deemed to be the second generation. We took into account their place of residence in France and their background (rural/urban) in their country of origin.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed in their entirety. The interviews touched on several aspects pertaining to the dominant culture and the culture of origin (their arrival in France, the story of their immigration, and their current life in France). In terms of life in France, the interviews sought to understand the immigrants’ sociability, their cultural practices in the host country, their consumption of media and how they perceive, identify and define themselves in French society.

The relationship with the media was studied via different themes. The respondents were asked to speak about programmes they watched, stations to which they listened and newspapers and magazines that they read. The discussion on the media led the respondents to voice the reasons that drive their choices of the French or Arabic media.

Some of them are of an identity concern:

“I watch French TV because I’m French, because it’s my life, because France is my country.” (Faiçal, 23 years old, 2nd).

Others are related to nostalgia to the language:

“It’s nice to watch Tunisian TV from time to time, to hear people speaking with Tunisian accents, but that’s the only reason.” (Kamel, 23 years old, 2nd).

Whereas for some immigrants, the media choice is a sign of their acculturation in the host society:

“I’ll never switch on an Arab channel, ever. To start with, I don’t understand literary Arabic, and also because I prefer to watch French TV, because I’m French and that’s all there is to it.” (Faiçal, 23 years old, 2nd).

We analysed the comments of our thirteen respondents using an interpretative approach. By alternating between the specific case of each interview and the interviews taken as a whole, and by making use of literature, we sought to understand the role of the media in acculturation, and whether this role appears as major as the literature stemming from research done in non-French-speaking contexts suggests (Jamal 2003; Kim and Kang 2001; Lee and Tse 1994; Peñaloza 1994; Samad 1998).

**MAIN RESULTS**

The profile of media consumption shown by the interviews as a whole does not seem to depart significantly from that of the French population as a whole. Television is a very widespread medium and was appreciated to varying degrees in the interviews, with some people criticising the choice of programmes available, but everyone watched it (with the exception of students who did not have a television set in their student accommodation, but who nevertheless had the opportunity to watch it whenever they returned home to their family). In the minds of the respondents, it is thus the most significant medium in the minds of the respondents. Radio is seen as a medium to be used as an accompaniment, to be listened to in the car, or in the background at home, but also a medium that enables people to stay informed (the news station France Info). More people are familiar with the press than actually read it: the respondents cited titles of daily newspapers and magazines, but then said that they read newspapers only very occasionally, with the exception of the free ones given out in the metro. People seem to be more regular readers of magazines, since magazines address the interests of their readers (Femme Actuelle, France Football, Sciences et Vie, etc.). Finally, the younger respondents referred to the internet: some visit newspaper sites to read the news, and others use it to find Arab music.

We will focus on three types of media as defined above: French media, Arab media and ethnic media, by following the comments made by our respondents more closely than we will follow their consumer behaviour itself.

With regard to French media, which are the media consumed most heavily by all the respondents, comments on television showed two opposing viewpoints. For some people, the choice of a programme or a French channel was simply a matter of personal taste, and bore no connotations of integration or involvement in French society.
"Sometimes there are good programmes on, with good guests, so I watch them. It depends on the programme. When there is something I like on one of the channels, I’ll watch it. I like M6 on Sunday nights when there is something good on like ‘Zone Interdite’ or something like that; it depends on the programme. If there’s a film on that I like, I’ll watch that too." (Louiza, 26 years old, 2nd)

“I put on any channel at all, really, and I fall asleep in front of it after half an hour.” (Rachida, 52 years old, 1st)

“Actually I channel-hop; I don’t have a favourite channel either but I guess I watch M6 the most because I think it’s the channel that shows the most entertainment programmes.” (Nourah, 20 years old, 2nd)

Others have a more all-encompassing view of the consumption of French television channels and associate it with a strategy of integration. Television characterises the society that is accepting them and they find it perfectly understandable to incorporate it into their media habits, since they feel themselves to be members of French society. It is via this form of communication that the respondents are in contact and in step with their surroundings and what makes up their daily lives. This is what Peñaloza (1994) calls an agent for acculturation.

“French channels are about my life after all, since they mean something to me and they talk about what is happening in France. I feel more affected by what is happening in France, and France is important to me because it’s my country, and I spend more time following events in France.” (Dorsaf, 35 years old, 1st)

These media represent their present-day and everyday life in a country that most of them think of as their own.

“Things about the French system, because I do live in this country, after all, I feel it important to follow the French media in order to be aware of things even if only from a political and administrative point of view, in society.” (Lynda, 23 years old, 2nd).

Some people go further and appear aware of the role played by the French media in general, and television in particular, in their acculturation process.

“It depends how you think of yourself and which attitude you adopt. If you think of yourself as once an immigrant, always an immigrant, you’re obviously going to be interested by everything to do with your home country, so as long as it’s about your home country, you’re happy, which is not at all the case for me. Or you might think to yourself that you’re here but you’re different; for example, I’m here but I’m different, but first and foremost I’m here, so obviously whatever goes on in France is of interest to me.” (Dorsaf, 35 years old, 1st).

The newspapers and magazines that are read cater more for the interests of their readers: older people read daily regional newspapers, students read the economic press, and football fans read sports journals. With regard to the radio, some people listen to it very occasionally, whereas others mentioned a list of stations to which they listened, but comments on the radio were very limited, and the immigrants did not seem to attach any particular importance to it.
With regard to Arab media, the role discovered was different. These constitute an invaluable source of information on political events and on troubles and unrest, both in the world at large and more specifically in Arab countries in particular. This preoccupation with politics was shared by all the respondents, although their comments were particularly alarmist with relation to Algeria. All respondents relied mainly on the Arab channels in order to avoid being cut off from the Arab-Muslim world.

“Al-Jazeera is an information channel, so they take the time to go into things in detail, and to examine issues from different angles and discuss them at length, so you don’t take what they tell you at face value: it does more than just present the information; there are analyses and everything; so it’s very important, when you think that on the other hand it’s not a channel... I mean it doesn’t do all that because it’s an Arab channel, or because it’s a famous channel; it also presents analyses about the Israelis and the Americans and everything. It does nonetheless handle information in a way that seems objective to me; in any case they give everyone the right to express themselves.” (Dorsaf, 35 years old, 1st)

“I watch Tunisian television, and a bit of Al-Jazeera to find out what’s going on in the Middle East.” (Kamel, 23 years old, 2nd)

Arab television also has another function entirely: as an integrator within the family itself. For the second generation, who do not always have a good command of Arabic, watching television with those from the first generation is an essential form of sharing. The process of acculturation is different between the 1st generation and the 2nd generation, which creates a distance between parents and children. French and Maghrebin societies keep these groups apart by virtue of the specific experiences that each of them has had: children have not experienced what their parents have in their country of origin, and parents do not experience what their children are going through on a daily basis. Young people are aware of this distance and try to diminish it by watching Maghrebin television with their parents from time to time, particularly during religious festivals (Ramadan). They use Algerian or Moroccan television as a means of bridging the gap between themselves and the first generation, even though some admit that they do not understand everything or that the content is of no interest to them. For the respondents from the second generation, it is a question of ‘respect’ for their elders: they symbolically try to be close to their parents, to share some aspects of their parents’ original culture to which these young people are not accustomed in their daily lives. Thus, the country, which can sometimes be a source of differences between the two generations, can sometimes be a means of reuniting them.

“I only watch it when my father watches it; I wouldn’t switch on something like that myself.” (Faïcal, 23 years old, 2nd),

“When my parents are around and I feel like spending some time with them. There are programmes in Arabic on the Algerian channel, and there are sketches, that I sometimes watch with them, or alternatively when something major is happening in Algeria or whatever, or when my parents tell me that such-and-such is happening.” (Louiza, 26 years old, 2nd)

Arab television is also a cultural echo for people who live in France but are very attuned to their culture of origin. It is also a means of heightening the sensitivity of children to certain cultural aspects, such as their language of origin, that they only rarely get the opportunity to hear in the home. Religious festivals are particularly appropriate occasions:

“We all end up watching during Ramadan because the whole family comes together for dinner. There are some nice things on in Ramadan, so we watch as a family, and it’s enjoyable.” (Louiza, 26 years old, 2nd)

“Arab channels are an insight. I’m more interested in what’s going in in France, and of course what’s going on in the world, although now the world has become a village, but it’s really a matter of choice. France is important to me because it’s my country, so events in France are the ones I follow the most regularly. Arab channels are an insight as well as an entertainment; they are an insight into a world that is no longer my world but that still has something to offer me, as well as meeting my cultural expectations and expectations in terms of information, and they mean I can stay in touch with the pace of life going on over there, of which I’m still a part in a way.” (Dorsaf, 35 ans, 1st)

However, this attitude was not shared by all the respondents; some made less consistent use of the Arab media because they had got accustomed to their life in France in terms of culture, specifically their consumer culture.

The situation is basically the same with regard to newspapers, with the added issue that a command of written Arabic is required. Immigrants who read newspapers written in the Maghreb or in Arab countries and ‘imported’ to France do so because these newspapers present information in a different way from French newspapers. Comments from these immigrants share the same underlying search for a connection with their identity is present in their comments. Finally, with regard to radio, no respondent mentioned any stations broadcast from the Maghreb or from any Arab country as forming part of their listening habits.

With regard to ethnic media, the situation is different, because television is absent from the choice of media available. There is no channel targeted specifically at Maghrebins in France. The analysis covered solely newspapers, magazines and radio stations. These media appear to be relatively poorly known, especially the press. No respondent mentioned any ethnic magazines without being prompted. Most of them were completely unaware of their existence. However, the media targeted at a Maghrebin public in France are both numerous and (above all) varied. Some are information magazines, others are women’s magazines and yet others discuss culture. They are targeted at Maghrebins from France, not just Maghrebins who live in France. These magazines represent the Maghrebin community in France and cover current affairs and social topics such as mixed marriages, relationships between ‘Maghrebin’ women and ‘French’ men and discrimination, as well as cultural activities including music, cinema or shows intended for Maghrebin audiences from France, not to mention articles on beauty products sold in France and made from plants that come from the Maghreb. Their content therefore differs radically from that of the Arab media, which discuss the life of Maghrebins living in the Maghreb. When respondents learned of the existence of these newspapers and magazines, they immediately showed an interest.

“I could identify with the feelings they talked about, and with their way of thinking, because I’ve got a side to me like that.” (Lynda, 23 years old, 2nd),

“Ah, now that’s interesting; that way we can stay informed about other things than the regular news about all the troubles
and everything going on back at home. Like here, for example—look, they’re talking about cookery, and since I like cooking and everything, it’s very interesting to watch the recipes and things, all the things you can watch.” (Zora, 54ans, 14th)

With regard to ethnic radio, only the radio station ‘Pastel FM’ was mentioned by the respondents in their comments. ‘Pastel FM’ is a formal communication medium for France’s Maghrebin community. This station addresses some aspects of Maghrebin culture, chiefly cinema and music. Information on the release dates for films at the cinema (such as for the film Indigène, which was mentioned by several respondents) or concerts by Maghrebin groups is given out via this radio station. However, the majority of ethnic information is transmitted via informal networks, which use word of mouth and social connections. These informal networks are used almost exclusively to transmit information about religious events (demonstrations of solidarity, social debates on religious themes, etc.) and the celebration of religious festivals. For most Maghrebins in France, the ethnic cultural activities in which they are involved are connected with religion and the practice thereof.

**DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This research worked from literature on ethnicity in marketing and focused on the potential role of the media in the acculturation process of Maghrebin immigrants in France. The results obtained largely corroborate the earlier work done in this field. The media have a strong presence in the life of this immigrant population, and above all are very varied: alongside traditional French media, this population consumes Arab media (chiefly television programmes, more rarely newspapers, and hardly ever the radio) and marginally consumes ethnic media, despite the fact that these media are theoretically targeted at them. The media definitely play a role in acculturation, which takes two complementary forms: the French media enable Maghrebin immigrants to gain a better understanding of the society in which they live, whereas the Arab media give them the opportunity to remain in contact with their country and culture of origin. Encouraging as these results are, they do however raise numerous questions, which we will discuss in this last section. First of all, however, the unique aspects of our research need to be set out, since this is the first study of its kind on Maghrebins in France in marketing literature; previous research has dealt with Mexican (e.g. Garcia 1982) or Chinese (e.g. Lee 1989) immigrants in a North American context.

The first unique aspect is the Arabic language, which lends itself very poorly to the written press. It is not uncommon for a spoken language to differ from its written equivalent, but with Arabic, a Moroccan, a Tunisian and an Algerian will all speak a very different dialect from the language they will find printed in a newspaper or a magazine. There is therefore a considerable problem in terms of making newspapers accessible, since a certain degree of education is required. Classical Arabic thus makes it more difficult to maintain links with the culture of origin. On the other hand, the use of classical Arabic promotes communication across national frontiers, and enables Maghrebins to follow programmes broadcast by an Egyptian or Saudi channel. Moreover, classical Arabic is strongly linked to Islam. The second-generation immigrants who participated learned Arabic either within the French school system (as a foreign language) or, more frequently, in schools dedicated to Islam, since a fluent command of Arabic is essential in order to read the Qur’an. This situation is by no means exceptional; for example, Hebrew is linked with reading the Bible in the Jewish faith, but it also has repercussions on relationships with culture. Thus, one of the female respondents who rejected Islam as a religion ended up rejecting Arabic as a language as well, and as a result found herself cut off from the culture entirely. Finally, the last unique aspect of this research pertains to the historic relations between France and the Maghreb in a colonial context. French was the language of the elite in these three countries, and a large number of people in the Maghreb still speak the language, including the current political and economic elite. Needless to say, this makes French extremely important as a language, and enables second-generation immigrants who do not speak the relevant national dialect to enter into contact with their family or with certain media published in French (e.g. the Le Matin newspaper in Morocco). It goes without saying that the combined effect of these elements makes it difficult to extend this research to other immigrant populations in other countries without taking the necessary precautions.

The first question raised by our results pertains to the actual content of the media that are intended to transmit a vision and the behavioural codes of the host society. Thus, a number of our respondents mentioned that they chiefly watched American series on television (Columbo, Desperate Housewives, One Tree Hill, etc.). As Hirschman (1988) showed in her work on the competing series of ‘Dallas’ and ‘Dynasty’, series such as these do illustrate codes and methods of consumption, but these codes are completely different from French codes. In addition, the respondents highlighted, totally consistently, the difference between the Egyptian series broadcast on Maghrebin television and the methods of behaviour—not to mention the expressions—observed in those societies. First-generation immigrants however appear relatively enthusiastic consumers of this type of programme, certainly more so than their descendants. Although we reasonably can state with regard to information and news that the medias of each of the countries—the country of origin and the host country—participate in a process of acculturation between the two cultures, numerous television programmes tend more to broadcast a ‘universal’ or generic culture, using American society and culture as its reference.

The second question relates to the similarities and differences observed between the consumption of media within the French population and that within the Maghrebin immigrant population. Of course, since an interpretative approach is being used, this does not involve making a quantitative comparison; rather, the determining factors for the consumption of media must be established. Cultural capital, and thus to a certain extent social class (Bourdieu 1984), appear to be essential elements in terms of determining the consumption of media amongst both French people and immigrants. Although television reaches all populations, the number of media consulted increases in proportion to the level of education, and the media become more diverse: newspapers and the internet play an increasing role, and the type of channels watched changes. Age is another dividing factor: older people (generally first-generation immigrants) say that they read the regional press (La Voix du Nord in our study), whereas younger people use the internet to look for information.

The third question relates to the issue of ethnic media. These seem to be largely unfamiliar to respondents, particularly with regard to magazines and newspapers. Two reasons can be put forward to explain this unfamiliarity: either these ethnic media have not benefited from sufficient publicity and distribution, or they genuinely do not respond to a latent need in the Maghrebin immigrant population. The second scenario obviously raises questions of its own: does it indicate that being a Maghrebin immigrant in France

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5 A French film about North African soldiers sent to liberate France from Nazi occupation during World War II. The five actors are all descendants of Maghrebin immigrants.
today does not confer any particular status and does not give rise to
any requirements sufficiently specific to create an independent
need for media? This question needs to be examined in more detail.

Finally, the central question raised by this research is that of
the relationship between acculturation and media. Should the media
be considered as an agent of acculturation or rather as an indicator
of it? The literature insists that the former role is correct; our
research indicates that the latter concept is also worth consider-
ation. However, it is not so much the quantity of media consumed
as the type and variety of these media that counts when assessing
the degree of acculturation. The quantity of media consumed is in fact
linked to the cultural capital of the individual concerned and it
increases in proportion to the level of education. Variety here must
be defined as a recourse to media that fall within the different
categories we identified during this research: French, Arab and
ethnic. Separated immigrants are more likely to consume Arab
media, whereas assimilated immigrants will restrict themselves to
French media. Consumption of the broadest variety of media will
most likely be observed amongst integrated immigrants, who will
simultaneously consume French media (because they feel affected
by what goes on in France), Arab media (in order to stay in contact
with the Arab-Muslim culture) and ethnic media (because they have
to face problems specific to them). Furthermore, the generation
effect must be taken into account: for people who arrived in France
as adults (1st generation) and whose mother tongue is Arabic, the
acculturation of these individuals seems to be indicated by their
consumption of French media. For young people born of immigrant
parents (2nd generation), on the other hand, who can speak and read
French more spontaneously, it is more their consumption of Arab
or ethnic media that acts as a gauge for acculturation. The develop-
ment of a gauge for assessing the degree of acculturation via the
variety of media consumed thus appears to be a promising topic for
future research work.

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