



MINORITY

Author and marketing analyst Ola Mobolade says too many CMOs are still unprepared for coming shifts among American audiences.

by NICHOLE CHRISTIAN
photography by
JOE VAUGHN

Ola Mobolade seems to see the shifts almost before they occur. While a surprising amount of current marketing research focuses only on fully formed consumer trends, Mobolade, a managing director at Firefly (Millward Brown's qualitative research division), applies a scientist's eye to the social changes and patterns while they unfold. As a result, she's often ahead of the curve when it comes to charting consumer behavior, making the 32-year-old Mobolade a source-of-choice for dozens of major brands craving credible relationships with the youthful, multi-cultural audience she calls "the new majority."

Mobolade's provocative insights and street-level grasp of these crucial market segments is also at the fore of *Marketing to the New Majority*, a new book she co-authored with David Burgos, head of Millward Brown's Multicultural Practice. "We cannot assume that ethnic consumers are sitting around with their ethnicity top-of-mind," says Mobolade, who is also a featured blogger for the *Advertising Age* column "Big Tent." She recently shared with *Deliver* some of the reasons she believes the study of current consumer shifts and behavioral preferences can improve the effectiveness of direct marketers.

R U L E S

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DELIVER: How do you help marketers in your role at Firefly?

OLA MOBOLADE: I am primarily focused on qualitative marketing research, which is really about directly engaging consumers to elicit insights that help answer big business questions. Sometimes it's just about getting a deeper and broader understanding of specific consumer segments. Clients may come with a question such as "How do we connect with the young adult audience?" My job is to apply a research methodology appropriate to the question, anything from focus groups and one-on-one interviews to webcam-enabled telephone interviews and consumer ethnographies.

DELIVER: You've talked in your book and columns about those segments changing and how marketers must respond. What kinds of shifts are you seeing?

OLA MOBOLADE: I've been speaking at various conferences, and one of the things that people are surprised about is that we will be a majority minority nation by 2042 or 2050, depending on which demographer you speak to. It is the reality in many of our major markets already, especially when you consider the population under the age of 18.

One-third of the U.S. population is non-white, yet marketers are seriously under-spending against that ethnic population boom. Ethnic marketing isn't going away. It's evolving, and marketers have to evolve or miss connecting to their future consumers. When we look at child-focused media, it's already speaking to diversity and transculturalism in more advanced ways. It's introducing a mosaic of cultural influences into kids' language and lives without having to explain. The question I pose to marketers: What are you doing to understand your future consumers now?

DELIVER: What do these shifts mean in terms of messaging?

OLA MOBOLADE: We are hearing from consumers that there is a growing saturation problem within the digital medium, particularly when we think of e-mail. The line between what consumers consider useful marketing and spam is increasingly blurry. While there is some value to hearing about a specific event via a marketer you trust, consumers are taking less time to discern the value message. They're starting to view a lot of online and e-mail marketing as static — white noise on the way to their preferred destination.

As a result, we're seeing a little bit of a trend of brands not connecting as well as they'd like to online, and that creates an opportunity to supplement in more direct, tactile and less cluttered approaches.

DELIVER: So what role do you think mail plays in boosting a company's marketing, either as a supplementary medium or stand-alone channel?

OLA MOBOLADE: I think mail offers a real opportunity for a lot of brands to reinforce their online messaging — especially brands where consumers are engaging with a product or there is a related retail

experience. For example, it's an opportunity to leverage existing positive associations of a brand and to reinforce the idea that there is a brick and mortar location. For many with heavy online presence, mail still offers a great way to increase a sense of consumer fulfillment.

DELIVER: Are there recent campaigns that you consider model in their approach to direct mail integration, particularly as they pertain to what you term in your book as "new majority" segments?

OLA MOBOLADE: I think what the U.S. Census did (in a mail/digital campaign designed to urge participation) was amazing. It's absolutely a gold standard. They were literally tasked with reaching every demographic group. They not only had a message that was consistent across all groups, they also managed a level of creative execution that showed understanding of ethnic nuances in the language. They worked with a number of ethnic agencies to identify what made sense for each group. They had a very clear North Star. They knew in which direction they wanted to go. A campaign of that size is a luxury most marketers will not have — but it does show how essential and valuable research on the front end can be to figuring out the best way to speak to consumers.

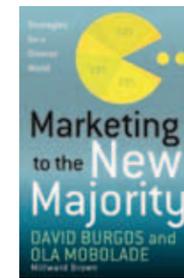
DELIVER: What advice do you offer to brands as they launch campaigns aimed at multicultural consumers?

OLA MOBOLADE: The biggest lesson for marketers is in understanding that advertising for ethnic consumers, or new majority segments, still has to practice sound and effective marketing principles. It has to be relevant and resonant. Including an ethnic face or imagery doesn't alone drive relevance.

We assume that it's a cue to consumers when, for example, they see an African American or Asian face. But we are in such an evolved point in the social landscape that the consumer doesn't exactly assume the advertising is targeted because it features non-white talent. When an Asian man goes to buy cereal, he's not consciously thinking, "I'm an Asian man looking for ethnically targeted cereal."

DELIVER: Along with becoming more ethnically diverse, this new majority is younger, more communications savvy. But younger consumers are also tougher to engage. Any words for marketers trying to reach them?

OLA MOBOLADE: There are rules of engagement that brands are breaking all the time, particularly when trying to reach Millennials. They are "transcultural." Yes, they might be born into a certain culture — but they create their identities based on a mosaic of social cultures. We see it in subculture trends like Japanese anime. We see it in hip-hop. We can't limit ourselves in the types of creative content that we're going to include. You have to really speak to their interests and lifestyles. 



Want to hear more from Ola Mobolade? Visit delivermagazine.com/ola for a video where the marketing maven discusses the importance of reaching a young, multicultural audience and how direct mail can make it happen.



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