Acculturation and Consumer Behavior: A Theoretical Model

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ABSTRACT

With the diversification of the U.S. population and marketers' increasing need to target minority groups, researchers have undertaken studies of these minority groups and their consumer behavior. Two variables, the level of assimilation into the major culture and ethnic identification, are often used to individuals within these minority groups. This paper proposes a theoretical model of acculturation and consumer behavior. The model incorporates assimilation and ethnic identification in the broader framework of acculturation. Mechanisms through which acculturation influences consumer behavior are explored.

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INTRODUCTION

With increasing numbers of people immigrating into the United States every year, the American population is becoming more diversified. In 1997 alone, a total of 798,378 new immigrants entered the U.S. (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service 1999). The countries' three largest minority groups, the Blacks, Hispanics, and Asian Americans are growing much faster than Anglo Americans. In 1994, the Black population grew by 1.5%, the Hispanic population increased by 3.5%, the Asian population grew by 3.8%, whereas the white, non-Hispanic population grew by a mere 0.4% (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1995). The already considerable size of the minority groups and their fast growths open up a large potential market to the firms. Anxious to target these minority groups, marketers want to know how these ethnic groups differ from Anglo Americans and how individuals within a group differ from each other.

Studies have been undertaken to answer these questions. Whereas factors such as socioeconomic and demographic variables can be used to characterize these minority groups, most research has paid attention to the influence of cultural factors on minority individuals' consumer behavior. The two variables most often used to correlate with these minority consumers' behavior are assimilation into the mainstream culture (e.g., D'Rozario and Douglas 1999; Lee 1993; Ownbey and Horridge 1997) and ethnic identification (e.g., Stayman and Deshpande 1989). These studies found that individuals

with different assimilation levels and different ethnic identification tend to exhibit different behavior in consumption areas such as information search behavior, shopping orientation, and food consumption habits.

A review of these extant studies revealed several problems. First, although concepts such as acculturation, assimilation, and ethnic identification are frequently used, it is often unclear what these concepts really mean. Sometimes what is meant by acculturation is actually assimilation, whereas other times acculturation and ethnic identification are treated as synonymous. Such confusions over the concepts have also led to different operationalization of the constructs, which poses questions about both the validity of these studies and the comparability of the results from different studies.

Second, acculturation in many cases is taken to be equivalent to assimilation and is treated as a unidimensional construct (D'Rozario and Douglas (1999) is a notable exception). However, both psychological and sociological research has shown that acculturation is a multidimensional construct (Berry, Poortinga, Segall and Dasen 1992; Gordon 1964; Johnston 1963; Ward and Rana-Deuba 1999). Consumer researchers need to consider these multiple dimensions of acculturation, which may have different influence upon minority consumers' behavior.

Third, although empirical research has found that the acculturation process does have an influence on consumer behavior (D'Rozario and Douglas 1999; Khairullah and Khairullah 1999; Lee 1993), no systematic account exists that explains why and how acculturation influences consumer behavior. Such a systematic explanation is imperative if we desire a true understanding of the acculturation process and its influence on

consumer behavior. Consumer researchers should go beyond the mere observation that acculturating individuals do exhibit different consumer behavior and should explore the mechanism that leads to such differences (Costa 1995).

This paper tries to resolve the above problems through a theoretical model of acculturation and consumer behavior. In this model, we present some initial effort to explore the underlying relationship between acculturation and consumer behavior. An acculturating individual's consumption experience is understood from a consumer resocialization perspective and from the struggle between change and continuity of the individual's self-identity. The model also incorporates important environmental factors and individual characteristics and explains how they can influence the relationship between acculturation and consumer behavior.

Our model includes assimilation and ethnic identification in a broader concept -- acculturation. It is argued that acculturation is a multidimensional construct. One dimension of acculturation is the acceptance of the host culture or the mainstream culture. And the other dimension is the individual's maintenance of his or her original or ethnical culture, which is closely related to the concept of ethnic identification. A person adopting many aspects of the main culture does not necessarily has a low degree of ethnic identification, and vice versa. Different patterns emerge as individuals vary along these two dimensions. Having given a broad picture of our framework, we now turn to the concept of acculturation and the difference between acculturation and assimilation.

ACCULTURATION AND ASSIMILATION: CONCEPTS AND DIFFERENCES

Defining Acculturation

Formal studies of acculturation can be traced back to the work of Herskovits (1938). Since then research on acculturation has greatly prospered. This research has been mainly carried out by anthropologists, sociologists, and psychologists. Studies of acculturation in consumer research area started much later (Hair and Andersen 1973; Pruden and Longman 1972).

Acculturation has been defined differently in these areas. One widely cited definition of acculturation was given by the Social Science Research Council (1954, p.974): "…acculturation may be defined as culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems." O'Guinn, Imperia and MacAdams (1987) defined acculturation as "the process by which those new to a society adopt the attitudes, values and behaviors of the dominant host culture." Berry et al. (1992) interpreted acculturation as the cultural transmission experienced by an individual due to his or her direct contact with another culture. Within the area of consumer research, acculturation has been defined as immigrants' "acquisition of traits of the host culture" and "maintenance of traits of the culture of origin" (Laroche et al. 1997, p.34).

All of the above definitions are concerned with the changes an individual undergoes when in direct contact with a new culture. This is termed "psychological acculturation" by Graves (1967). The term is used in contrast with group-level

acculturation, which refers to a *whole group*'s structural, economic and other changes due to the group's contact with a new culture. Although an individual's acculturation contributes to and is influenced by group-level acculturation, the two do not always evolve in the same direction or in the same way. An individual may be highly acculturated, whereas the group he or she belongs to may be not acculturated at all. The reverse may also be true. As our focus here is on each individual consumer, we shall only discuss the individual-level acculturation. We shall not constrain ourselves to only psychological factors, as research has indicated that both sociocultural and psychological adjustments occur in the acculturation process (Ward and Rana-Deuba 1999).

Here we define acculturation as the changes in an individual's value, attitude, and behavior due to his or her direct contact with a culture other than his or her original culture. This acculturation is a long process and can go on for several years or even throughout a person's entire life. Different individuals may take different paces in this acculturation process. Some individuals may be completely assimilated into the host culture and lost their original cultural identity, while other individuals may integrate the host culture into their original culture. Therefore this acculturation process is highly individualized and is influenced by an individual's psychological traits as well as environmental and other external factors.

Having defined acculturation, it is useful to further distinguish acculturation from assimilation. Acculturation and assimilation are similar since they all refer to a process that happens when an individual is in direct contact with a new culture. But assimilation takes on a much narrower meaning than acculturation. Assimilation refers to the

adoption of the host culture *and* the loss of the original culture. It is a unidirectional process that goes from the individual's original culture to the new host culture. As one moves on in the assimilation process, he loses part of his original culture and acquires the host culture so that he or she will be indistinguishable from people in the host culture. Acculturation, on the other hand, does not necessarily presume the loss of one's original culture and does not always lead to the adoption of the host culture. It is a multidimensional construct, which is discussed next.

Multidimensional Nature of Acculturation

In most studies of acculturation by consumer researchers, acculturation is measured by some scale on various items pertaining to the respondents' acculturation process, such as language preference and knowledge about the host culture. A respondent's scores on all items are then summed up (or further averaged) to yield a single score of the respondent's acculturation level. This practice presumes acculturation to be unidimensional and therefore can be expressed by a single score. However, research in psychology and sociology has shown that acculturation is a more complex multidimensional concept.

Laroche et al. (1997) argued that acculturation consists of three dimensions: media exposure, social interaction and participation, and English language use with family members. The structure was supported by their test on Italian-Canadians. Although the study confirmed that acculturation is a multidimensional construct, their

exclusion of questions other than those related to these three factors makes their conclusion on the exact structure of acculturation only tentative.

Gordon (1964) defined seven interdependent yet distinct dimensions of assimilation: cultural assimilation, which he defines as acculturation, structural assimilation, marital assimilation, identificational assimilation, attitude receptional assimilation, behavior receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation. Although he focused on assimilation rather than acculturation, these components or dimensions can also be validly used to describe acculturation. When we talk about individual-level acculturation, however, some of the dimensions above can be excluded. Factors such as marital assimilation, attitude receptional assimilation, behavior receptional assimilation, and civic assimilation are more relevant group-level acculturation process and are not under an individual's control (D'Rozario and Douglas 1999).

Johnston (1963) distinguished between two aspects of acculturation, the behavioral part he called external assimilation and the attitudinal part named internal assimilation. Under this structure, the individual may take on the behaviors expected by the host culture, including speaking the language of the culture, dressing like most people in the culture do, and eating what these people eat. However, these actions may be done under certain obligations and the individual may not identify with the host culture at all. Johnson's internal assimilation is some way similar to the concept of ethnic identification we often use in consumer research, but it is the identification with the host culture rather than with the original culture as defined by ethnic identification.

Another widely used multidimensional structure of acculturation was proposed by Berry (1980). This framework pays more attention to the attitude an individual holds towards the host culture and the original culture. The two dimensions are the deemed importance of maintaining one's original culture and identity and the importance of maintaining relationship with other groups. The values individuals take on these dimensions vary continuously. Taking the extremes of the two dimensions, we get four different acculturation strategies. When it is considered important to maintain one's own culture as well as maintain relationship with other groups, an integration strategy will be adopted. When such a strategy is also accepted by the majority group, the outcome will be a pluralism society. When it is considered of value to maintain relationship with other groups but not important to maintain the original culture, an assimilation strategy will be used. The acculturating individual will gradually lose his or her original culture and identity and mix him or herself into the host society. When maintaining the original culture and identity is considered important but not so for maintaining relationship with other groups, the acculturating individual will adopt a separation strategy and will isolate him or herself from the influence of the host culture. When neither maintaining the original culture nor maintaining relationship with other groups is considered important, a marginalization situation will result. Often a third culture will appear. Based on the above framework, an acculturating individual's behavior will be based on the attitudes he or she has, which also predicts the stress the individual may experience in the acculturation process.

An obvious observation from the above is that different researchers have proposed different structures for the acculturation construct. Some look at purely behavioral variables (Laroche et al. 1997), some use purely attitudinal variables (Berry 1980), yet others combine both behavioral and attitudinal variables in the structure (Johnston 1963). Although these structures differ from each other, they all state that acculturation is *not* a unidimensional construct, but a multidimensional construct. Therefore, when a researcher states level of acculturation with a single score, the result may be biased and may not reflect the real influence of the different aspects of acculturation.

Therefore, it is very important for consumer researchers to define a clear multidimensional construct of acculturation and measure the construct accordingly. While different definitions of the dimensions of acculturation may be suitable for different research problems, at present, we will adopt Berry's (1980) two-dimensional structure of acculturation. This framework has been widely applied in acculturation research and has been supported by empirical studies (e.g., Berry, Kim, Power, Young, and Bujaki 1989; Berry, Wintrob, Sindell, and Mawhinney 1982). The two dimensions are also closely related to existing acculturation research in consumer studies. The deemed importance of maintaining one's own cultural identity can be easily associated with the frequently used concept of ethnic identification. Ethnic identification refers to which ethnic group an individual identifies with and how strong the identification is. A positive correlation can immediately be seen between ethnic identification and the importance of maintaining one's own cultural identity. An individual considering

maintaining his or her cultural identity important is likely to be more strongly identified with his or her ethnic or cultural group, while an individual strongly identified with his cultural group also tends to think it important to maintain this group's identity. Therefore, research on ethnic identification can be drawn upon to yield a better understanding of this dimension of acculturation.

Likewise, the second dimension, whether it is considered of value to maintain relationship with the majority group, is closely related to assimilation research. Although assimilation involves a loss of one's original cultural identity, which is not implied by this dimension of acculturation, the part of assimilation regarding the adoption of the host culture undoubtedly offers a good opportunity for understanding the relationship between the acculturating individual and the host culture. The whole body of research on assimilation and its effects on consumer behavior can be tactically integrated to the study of this dimension of acculturation, that is, the deemed importance of maintaining relationship with the majority group for the acculturating individual.

Although one may argue that other multidimensional structures may also be appropriate or may be more appropriate for understanding acculturation, we do not think the use of Berry's (1980) framework will produce much difference in our theoretical model compared with models adopting these other structures of acculturation. Our focus here is on the multidimensional *nature* of acculturation and its relationship with consumer behavior, which is the core of our theoretical model.

THE MODEL

Having clarified the concept of acculturation and its multidimensional nature, now we present a full view of our theoretical model (Figure 1). At the top of the figure, we have the two-dimensional structure of acculturation. Acculturation influences consumer behavior in two ways, through consumer resocialization and through the acculturating individual's self-management. Consumer socialization teaches the individual how to consume in the new culture. It can exert important influence on subsequent consumer behavior. Depending on what socialization agents are involved, the outcome of the socialization process can be both functional and dysfunctional. The other way acculturation can influence consumer behavior is through the maintenance and change of the acculturating individual's self-identity. The acculturation process obviously has a significant impact on the individual's self. It is very important for the individual to adapt to the changes while at the same time maintain an integrated self. The struggle between change and continuity in the acculturation process is reflected in the products the individual consumes and how he or she consumes. Individuals adopting different acculturation strategies will put different emphases on change vs. continuity and will tend to consume in a way that reflects this difference in emphasis.

Environmental factors and individual characteristics also play an important role in the acculturation process and in the relationship between acculturation and consumer behavior. For example, the working environment and the residential environment surrounding an acculturating individual shape the socialization agents the individual has

direct access to, which further influences the individual's socialization process and his or her consumption behavior.
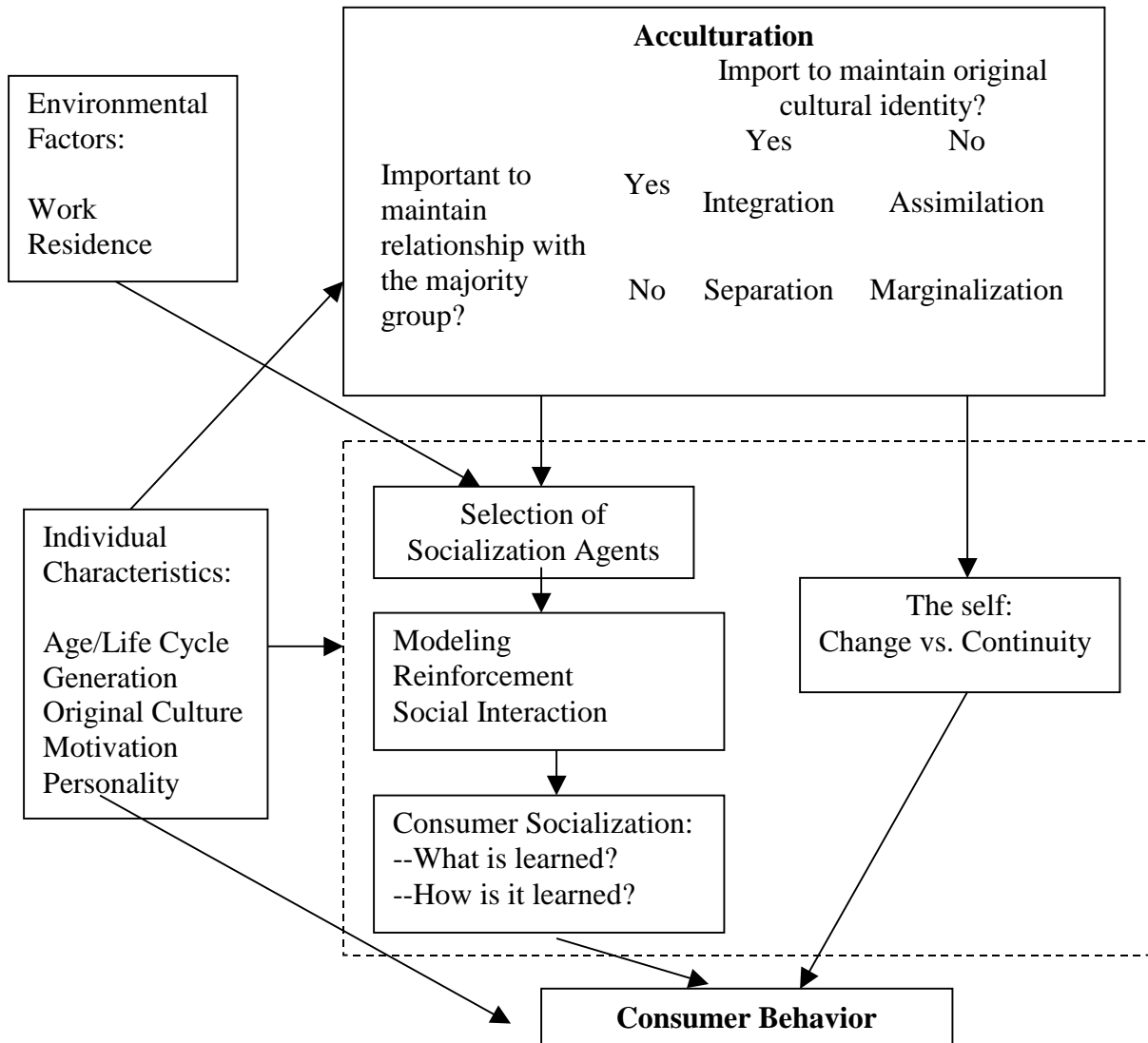

Figure 1. A Theoretical Model of Acculturation and Consumer Behavior

We shall elaborate on our model in three sections. In the first section, we will discuss how an acculturating individual learns to be a consumer in the new culture and how the acculturation process and environmental factors can enter into this socialization

process. Next we look at the changes an acculturating individual is likely to go through and how the individual copes with these changes in the self through consumption. In the last section, we will discuss the effects of environmental factors and individual characteristics on acculturation and consumer behavior.

Learn to Consume in a New Culture: Consumer Socialization Perspective

Upon immigrating into a new country, an individual starts a long journey of learning. Part of this journey is learning to consume in the new culture. In the new country, the individual may encounter products or services that are not available in his or her original country, or may find products or services been bestowed totally different meaning. Some of the consumption-related knowledge or skills the individual have acquired in the original country are no longer applicable here. For example, due to his or her unfamiliarity with the host country's currency and pricing system, the immigrant may find it difficult to judge the price of a product to be high or low. The immigrant may also find it hard to choose from an array of different brands, as he or she may have not heard about the brands at all, not to mention any experience with these brands. His or her past experiences with other brands are no longer useful because those brands he or she is familiar with are simply not available here. Therefore, an immigrant has to engage him or herself in learning to consume correctly and wisely in the new country. It is this learning process that renders the concept of consumer socialization important in accounting for acculturating individuals' consumption experience.

Consumer socialization has been defined as "the process by which young people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their effective functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward 1974). Although this definition as well as earlier consumer researchers has been predominantly focused on the socialization of children and adolescents as consumers, some researchers have already looked at adult consumers' socialization (e.g., Goodwin and Sewall 1992), or sometimes called consumer resocialization. Because a majority of immigrants are already adults when they come into the new country or at least have had some socialization that tend to be different from that in the host culture, they are very likely to undergo this resocialization.

Three approaches, cognitive developmental approach, interpersonal communication approach, and social learning approach, have dominated consumer socialization research (O'Guinn and Faber 1987). Among these the social learning approach is particularly relevant to an immigrant's socialization, since it emphasizes the influence of social interactions on the socialization process. A key concept in the social learning approach is socialization agents, the media through which values, attitudes, and knowledge are transmitted to the socializing individual. Four most important socialization agents, family, peers, mass media, and institutions, have been identified. Consumer socialization proceeds under the influence of these socialization agents through modeling, reinforcement and social interaction.

As the four socialization agents carry different intentions when they influence the socializing individual, the information and the influence an individual receives from them tends to be different. Family tends to have a profound influence on an individual.

During an immigrant's resocialization, family can either deter the process by carrying with it the traditional consumption-related values from the original culture, or accelerate the socialization by integrating the socialization experiences of all family members, therefore producing a bigger picture an individual may not be able to see by him or herself. In the case of marriage between an acculturating individual and a member of the host culture, family enables the acculturating individual to have intimate contact with the host culture in various aspects and accelerates the resocialization process.

Peer groups can be divided into peers from the original culture and peers from the host culture. Peers from the original culture share the same cultural background with the acculturating individual. Associating with them tend to preserve the individual's original culture, attitudes, and values. Excessive interaction with these peers may even make it possible for the individual to be isolated from the host culture, as may be the case for individuals living in a ghetto of his native people and have little contact with the outside world. Peers from the host culture, however, provide rich information related to consumption in the new culture. This information can be transmitted by conversation with these peers on consumption related issues, or can simply be obtained by the acculturating individual's observation of how these peers consume. Such interactions provide the individual with real and first-hand information on consumption in the new country and facilitate his or her adaptation into the new consumption environment.

Different from peer groups, mass media often depicts a distorted social reality. Media seldom provide knowledge related to direct consumption skills such as price and specific product information. On the contrary, mass media tend to depict conspicuous

consumption and life of the rich people (O'Guinn and Faber 1987). According to cultivation theory, people do take in the reality represented by the mass media despite the obvious bias in the presentation (O'Guinn and Faber 1991). For people who watch television a lot, they tend to form a perception of social reality biased towards that presented in television programs. As an acculturating individual lacks experience with the host culture, he or she may be especially vulnerable to the messages from mass media. Research has shown that acculturating individuals' perceived social reality of the host country is indeed biased towards that of richer life as often depicted in television programs (Lee 1989).

No such definite conclusions can be drawn on institutions, however, because of the diverse nature of different institutions. Institutions such as consumer protection organizations can help an acculturating individual to form a correct and efficient way of consuming in the host country. On the other hand, institutions associated with marketers, such as retailers, may at the same time mislead the individual.

The social learning approach to consumer socialization can help us understand how acculturating individuals learn to consume in a new country and why the outcome of this learning process often turns out to be different for different individuals. This difference in outcome is a result of the different impact each socialization agent has on an individual, which can come from the individual's voluntary as well as involuntary choice of the socialization agents.

Environmental factors pose restrictions on the socialization agents an acculturating individual is likely to be in contact with. An example of such

environmental factors is the acculturating individual working environment. Working in a company whose employees are mainly from the host culture and working in a company who employs people from the same cultural origin as the acculturating individual surely produce different sets of peers the individual directly contacts. Individuals without adequate access to host culture through the host country's people may have to rely heavily on other information sources such as mass media and family for advice on consumption.

The two dimensions of acculturation, the acculturating individual's attitudes towards the host culture and the original culture lead to his or her voluntary selection of socialization agents. An individual with a positive attitude towards the host culture tends to be more willing to consult information sources from the host culture, such as the host country's mass media, peers from the host country. An individual who sticks to his or her original culture and does not accept the host culture, however, may turn to family or peers from the original culture for advice. Empirical research has shown that individuals who are more structurally assimilated tend to consult friends, coworkers, salesperson and mere observation before purchase, whereas individuals less assimilated tend to turn to family for advice (D'Rozario and Douglas 1999).

These voluntary as well as involuntary choices of socialization agents to a great extent determines what the acculturating individual sees and learns about the consumption reality in the host country. These differences in learning further lead to different consumer behavior, such as processing advertisements differently or using different criteria in making purchase decisions.

Change versus Continuity: The Role of Products and Consumption

Change and continuity are two important themes of the self. It is through constant changes that the self develops. At the same time, to keep the self integrated and unified, there also needs to be certain continuity of the self during the changing process. This ongoing dialogue between change and continuity makes up the history of the self. Just as historical remnants make it possible for us to understand and partially reproduce historical events and the life of historical people, there are also certain things that symbolize an individual's past, present and future self. Both the individual's possessions and people around the individual make up the extended self (Belk 1988) and substantiate the history of his or her self.

Although many changes in self are trivial and may not even be recognized, other changes can be dramatic and can significantly alter the self. The changes an acculturating individual's self undergoes would belong to the latter. When an individual comes to a new country, he or she is very likely to experience dramatic changes through the acculturation process, especially when the individual's original culture is very different from the host culture. It is very important for the individual to adapt to the changes and at the same time to maintain the continuity of the self. Possessions play an important role in this self-management. On the one hand, acquiring new possessions or products, especially products strongly associated with the host culture, helps the self to transfer to the new culture. On the other hand, old possessions remind the acculturating individual of his or her past and provide the basis to go on as still the same self, therefore

soothing possible conflicts or stress brought by the changes. As very few old possessions can be carried when one travels abroad, these possessions are substituted by products from the original country or products symbolizing the original culture.

For individuals in different acculturation modes, the emphasis on change versus continuity will be different. For assimilationists, they will be eager to change themselves to the new identity as a member of the host culture. For them, products from the host country are often purchased and consumed to show belonging to the host culture. For integrationists, however, emphasis will be put on both change and continuity. Products from host country are consumed and absorbed, and at the same time products from the original country are equally cherished. Integrationists' consumption pattern will be expected to be a mixture of host country style and original country style. For separationists, since they stick to their old culture and cannot or are not willing to accept the new culture, they will be resistant to change as well as the products symbolizing such changes. For these individuals, products from the original country or products symbolizing the original culture will be treated with enthusiasm and bestowed significance these products may not have before. For marginalists, they neither care about maintaining their original culture, nor want to assimilate into the host culture. There is a change going on that forsakes the original culture but does not take on the host culture. Both products symbolizing the original culture and products representing the host culture will be rejected. As a third culture may emerge as a result of marginalization, marginalists will consume in a way that is consistent with this new culture, and a new consumption pattern characterizing this third culture may be formed.

Before we turn to the next section, it is necessary to point out that acculturating individual's resocialization and self-management are not two competing explanations of the relationship between acculturation and consumer behavior. Rather, they often take place at the same time and can be used to explain different aspects of the individual's unique consumption pattern.

Effects of Individual Characteristics

Individual characteristics can be divided into two broad categories: demographic and socioeconomic characteristics, such as age, gender and income, and psychological characteristics, such as motivation and personality. Predominant attention has been given to the demographic characteristics of acculturating individuals. Variables such as age, gender, and income have been used in empirical research mainly to present the profiles of the samples used and to demonstrate the external validity of the studies. Few studies, however, have paid attention to how these demographic and socioeconomic variables play roles in acculturation or consumer acculturation, and especially in the relationship between acculturation and consumer behavior. The effects of such demographic variables cannot be ignored. Weinstock (1964) found that religion and previous occupation in Hungary have significant influence on Hungarians' assimilation into American culture. Kuo and Lin (1977) also found significant correlation between age and education of Chinese-Americans and their ethnic identification.

Not only can demographic factors influence acculturation itself, they can also moderate the relationship between acculturation and consumer behavior. Age and life

cycle stage have been related to consumer socialization. At different ages and life cycle stages, people tend to learn different consumption-related knowledge and values and tend to interact differently with socialization agents (Moschis 1987). Gender can also influence the socialization process through different socialization agent choice and different contents of the mass media consumed (Moschis 1987). Socioeconomic factors may likewise influence an individual's access to different socialization agents and to different knowledge and values.

Demographic and socioeconomic variables can also moderate the interaction between acculturation and consumer behavior through the individual's self-identity. People at different ages or life-cycle stages and with different education levels tend to have different emphases on different aspects of the self. If an individual immigrates to a new country when he or she is relatively young, his or her self may not be very deep rooted in the original culture yet or may not even be mature enough. Change is not quite a problem for him or her, as young people tend to look more at the future. If the individual immigrates at a later life-cycle stage, however, he or she may feel a greater challenge in changing his or her self. As people grow older, they tend to look more at the past and tend to resist changes that would separate them from the past. Male and female also tend to have different self-perceptions, which prompt them to use different coping strategies when faced with changes. All these demographic and/or socioeconomic variables influence an individual's self-perception, his or her attitude towards changes in the self, and his or her ability to deal with such changes, which further influences the consumption style he or she adopts in the new country.

We have discussed how an individual's demographic and socioeconomic characteristics can influence his or her acculturation process and moderate the relationship between acculturation and consumer behavior. These characteristics are also well known to have a direct influence on consumer behavior itself. For example, males and females tend to process information differently and tend to be the family decision makers for different products and different decision variables (Davis 1970; Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran 1991). As our main focus here is on acculturation and its relationship with consumer behavior, we shall not dwell on such direct influences on consumer behavior in further detail.

Compared with demographic and socioeconomic variables, psychological factors such as motivation and personality have received far less attention in acculturation studies by consumer researchers. However, these factors are important antecedents of behavior and have significant influence on behavior. Without considering these psychological characteristics of an acculturating individual, we will not be able to fully understand his or her consumer behavior. Due to space limit, we will focus on one psychological factor, personality, to illustrate how psychological factors can play a role in acculturating individuals' consumption life.

Personality is defined as "a person's unique psychological makeup, which consistently influences the way the person responds to his or her environment" (Solomon 1994, p.623). Among the different approaches to personality research, trait theory has by far received the most attention in consumer research. Trait theory decomposes personality into a set of traits such as extroversion and agreeableness. Each trait has

unique implications on behavior. Consumer researchers have studies a variety of traits including neuroticism, extroversion, ascendancy and responsibility. Earlier researchers tried to associate these personality traits directly with consumer behavior. But inappropriate measures of personality and incompatibility between personality traits and consumer behavior studied have led to disappointing results. Personality is found to have either no influence on consumer behavior at all or only very weak relationship with behavior (Kassarjian 1971). Recently, researchers have explored alternative ways of associating personality with consumer behavior. Instead of directly influencing consumer behavior, personality traits are found to influence behavior through some mediating variables (Moordian and Olver 1997) and/or to moderate the relationship between situational factors and behavior (Holbrook and Olney 1995).

To appropriately incorporate personality into our acculturation model, we also need to consider the various paths these personality traits may influence acculturation and acculturating consumers' behavior. First, personality can influence an acculturating individual's consumption through acculturation. Weinstock (1964) found that Hungarian-Americans with higher achievement orientation are more assimilated. He also found manipulative and cynical tendencies to be significantly related to level of assimilation. However, he didn't find authoritarian tendencies, agreeableness, tendency to agree with incompatible items and extremity to have significant influence on acculturation. Weinstock's study is illustrative of the potential effects personality has on acculturation. But not enough empirical evidences have been collected to form a guiding theory as to what personality traits are relevant to acculturation process and what are not.

Once such a theory is available, consumer researchers may be able to have a better view of how some traits influence a consumer's behavior indirectly through the acculturation process. Consumer researchers can also contribute to the development of such a guiding theory by incorporating personality traits into their research design.

Second, personality can serve as a moderator variable on the relationship between acculturation and consumer behavior. We proposed two mechanisms through which acculturation can influence consumer behavior. Personality can affect both of the mechanisms. The influence of personality on an acculturating individual's self-concept and self-change is apparent, as personality itself is part of the self. We shall focus on how personality influences consumer socialization. In childhood and adolescence, personality is largely a consequence rather than an antecedent of socialization. For adults, however, psychological factors such as motivation and personality are relatively well formed and stable and are able to influence the socialization or resocialization process. The focus of socialization shifts from motivation to the attainment of ability and knowledge (Brim 1966). The outcome of the resocialization depends on what knowledge is obtained, how this knowledge is obtained, and how the knowledge is accepted. People with different personality traits may turn to different information sources (socialization agents). Take the sociability trait for an example. More sociable persons tend to have more friends and more close interactions with people outside the boundary of family. For them, a large percentage of knowledge obtained will be from peers. People with low level of sociability, however, may have to rely heavily on family and mass media for information. Not only the information can come from different sources, people with

different cognitive personality traits also show different information search depth and information processing (Haugtvedt et al. 1988; Schaninger and Buss 1984). Therefore, personality traits can influence the consume resocialization process an acculturating individual goes through, which leads to different consumer behavior.

To sum up, both demographic and psychological characteristics can influence an acculturating individual's consumption in a variety of ways. By incorporating these variables and their effects into our research design, we can not only gain a better understanding of acculturating consumers, but also increase the validity of our research.

DISCUSSION

The emergence of immigrants as a new market opportunity has led studies of immigrants' consumption behavior by both practitioners and academic researchers. Studying the immigrants' acculturation process and their consumption behavior offer us both a better view of this specific segment and a better understanding of the cultural dynamics underlying consumer behavior. In this paper, we presented a theoretical model that can help guide research in this area. The model proposes two paths through which acculturation can influence consumer behavior. One is through consumer resocialization an acculturating individual undergoes. The other is through the individual's self-management when faced with dramatic changes in the self often characteristic of the acculturation process. Environmental factors and individual demographic,

socioeconomic, and psychological characteristics can influence both paths and therefore moderate the relationship between acculturation and consumer behavior.

Several directions for future research can be immediately seen. First, most research has operationalized acculturation as a unidimensional construct. Future research should recognize the fact that individuals accepting the new culture do not necessarily throw away their original cultures. They can adopt a variety of acculturation strategies including separation and integration. Psychologists and sociologists have developed multidimensional measures of acculturation that can be adapted to consumer research. Consumer researchers can also integrate measures of assimilation and measures of ethnic identification to form a two-dimensional measure of acculturation. Both construction and validation of acculturation measures suitable for consumer research are needed.

Second, consumer researchers can study acculturating individuals' consumption experience from consumer resocialization perspective. Some research has been undertaken in this direction. Penaloza (1989) proposed a model of consumer acculturation based on consumer socialization. There are also studies on acculturating individuals' information searching behavior and their interaction with socialization agents such as mass media (D'Rozario and Douglas 1999; Lee 1989). We need more research that studies the influence of other socialization agents such as peers and institutions on an acculturating individual and how he or she interacts with them. Studies on mass media can also be carried further to learn acculturating individuals' media consumption pattern and how different patterns lead to different consumption-related perception, attitudes and values.

Third, how acculturating individuals manage their self-concept during the acculturating process and how different management strategies are reinforced and reflected in the individuals' consumption need to be explored. Consumer researchers have realized the significance of self-concept in consumption and have argued that possessions are part of an individual's extended self (Belk 1988). These concepts can be applied to acculturating individuals to find out how dynamics of the self are associated with consumer behavior.

Last, but not the least, consumer researchers should make more efforts to study how an individual's demographic, socioeconomic and psychological characteristics can influence his or her acculturation process and consumption. Researchers should go beyond measuring these variables only for testing external validity, but should also study these variables themselves as they may have important implications on how acculturating consumers learn and consume. Efforts should especially be made to identify variables relevant to consumer research and to establish measures of these variables. Statistical tests can be done to test these variables' moderating effects and their indirect effects on consumer behavior.

Study of acculturating consumers can offer us insight into immigrants' consumer behavior and consumer behavior in general. We hope that our initial effort to build some theoretical guidance for the field can stimulate consumer researchers' interest in this area. With more research undertaken, we shall expect to see deepened knowledge of acculturating individuals' consumption experience and a more comprehensive understanding of consumers.

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