

# Marketing to Asian Americans: The Impact of Acculturation and Interpersonal Influence on Ethnocentric Consumer Preferences

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## (Abstract)

The acculturation of ethnic minorities is an increasingly important issue. This paper explores the role of two factors which may be related to Asian Americans' development of preferences for ethnic or non-ethnic shopping: level of acculturation and susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Several prior studies have found that strength of ethnic identification (a measure of level of acculturation) accounts for differences in consumption patterns among immigrant groups. The results of this study suggest that ethnic identification is not a unidimensional construct. Instead, two construct, ethnic identification and consumer socialization are found to be related to the level of influence exerted by culturally consistent in-group than "American." A strong positive relationship is found between ethnic identification and ethnocentric purchasing preferences. In contrast, no significant direct relationship between level of consumer socialization and ethnocentric preferences is found. Implications for marketers are discussed.

Key words: Consumer Acculturation, Consumer Socialization, Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence, Ethnic Identification, Ethnocentric Consumer Preferences.

## I. Introduction

Marketers are increasingly interested in the consumption behavior of identifiable ethnic groups. Increased interest coincides with growing populations of ethnic minorities in the United States, due in large part to changes brought about by the U.S. Immigration Act of 1965 (Boyd, 1977). Under this law, the focus of immigration policy shifted from strict

national origin quotas to a seven category preference system which favored potential immigrants who: 1) already have relatives in the United States and thus, can join a family on arrival, and/or 2) are employable in skilled occupations. The result has been an increase in the proportion of immigrants coming from non-European countries, especially Asia and Latin American. Many studies indicate that Hispanic and Asian-American populations are growing at substantially higher rates than the rest of the U.S. population. Given current trends,

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by the year 2000, more than 25 percent of the U.S. population will be composed of distinct ethnic minorities (Hall, 1990).

These groups of "new" American consumers represent substantial buying power, yet little is known regarding their ability and desire to buy as do other Americans. Considering that many have roots in cultures where consumption choices are comparatively limited and/or radically different from traditional western practices, research is needed describing how immigrants "learn" to become consumers (Tse, Belk, and Zhou, 1989). Given marketers' desire to understand and appeal to these growing groups, continued study of their consumption processes is warranted.

Asian-Americans were considered to be a relevant group to study, since there are currently 7.3 million members of this group living in the USA, and the number of Asian-Americans is growing at a faster rate than that of any other minority group (Dunn, 1992). By the year 2020, forecasts call for the Asian-American population to exceed 20 million and to represent 8 percent of the U.S. population (Ong, 1994). These figures suggest that it is a relevant group to represent ethnic subculture and immigrant behavior, since previous research suggests that it takes four to five generations for ethnically distinct immigrants to assimilate largely into one "American" group (Benski, 1994).

The purpose of this paper is to explore factors which may be associated with the development of ethnocentric consumption preferences. In particular, the study focuses on

how immigrants' level of acculturation and susceptibility to influence impacts purchasing preferences among a sample of Asian-American consumers. Hovland's two-stage theory of influential communication provides a theoretical framework that appears highly applicable to the process of consumer acculturation (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). It suggests that individuals within these ethnic groups may look to influential others (family, friends, etc.) for guidance in behavior. Given current immigration laws and a tendency for ethnic groups to have multigenerational living arrangements, this research seems highly relevant. Thus, interpersonal influence becomes a key variable explaining various purchase behaviors.

The remainder of the paper begins with a discussion of the process via which immigrants become immersed in a new consumption environment. This is followed by a review of the literature on the consumption patterns of ethnic groups. Next, a brief description of susceptibility to interpersonal influence construct is presented. Hypotheses are then developed based on Hovland's two stage theory. The methodology of the study will then be described. A discussion of results summarizes our findings and suggests directions for further research.

## II. Background

Learning to Consume in the United States  
New immigrants to the United States face a

variety of difficulties in adapting to American society. Gold (1989) notes that many immigrants have difficulty adjusting to new residential patterns and sex roles as well as to a new language, culture, and economy. In studying Soviet Jewish and Vietnamese immigrants, Gold noted that members of immigrant families attempting to make these adaptations frequently experience intergenerational conflict, role reversals (as women and children enter the workforce), and status loss. Along with their sources of stress, immigrant consumers must make decisions regarding purchasing behavior.

Generally, the consumer socialization process is a stressful endeavor (Wallendorf and Arnould, 1988; Mehta and Belk, 1991; Belk, 1992). However, new immigrants must learn necessary consumption habits of a new country (Lee and Tse, 1994). Among other consumption activities, immigrants must adjust to new transportation systems, housing arrangements, health care providers, and food availability and acquisition procedures.

Lee (1992) posits a three-stage development process as being necessary for an individual to become an effective consumer (Lee 1992):

He/she must know the expectations of the role of being an effective consumer.

He/she must be able to meet the role requirements.

He/she must have the desire to behave accordingly.

It is notable that immigrants face special vulnerabilities in proceeding through this

development process.

One specific difficulty many immigrants face in adapting to the new consumption environment is a language barrier. Language issues come in to play with regard to both learning expectations and the ability to meet social role requirements (Taft, 1977). The American food products (e.g, eggs, red meat, caffeinated beverages, white bread) actually exceeded that of either Mexicans or Americans, suggesting "over-assimilation." Saegart, Hoover and Hilger (1985) found Hispanics to be more price conscious and prefer more familiar stores in comparison to Anglos.

In many cases, studies have examined whether the level at which an individual identifies with an ethnic subculture impacts consumption related behaviors. O'Guinn and Meyer (1984) and Shoemaker, Reese and Danielson (1986), for example, found a positive relationship between high Hispanic identification and reliance on Spanish language media sources. High Hispanic identifiers also report relatively high reliance on family members, peers, radio and billboard advertisements, and low reliance on print media, product labels and Consumer Reports for information (Webster 1992). In addition, Hispanic families in America tend to evolve into a less husband dominant type of decision style as ethnic identification decreases (Webster 1994).

In terms of coupon usage, Donthu and Cherian (1992), found that weak Hispanic identifiers are much more likely to be heavy

coupon users than are strong Hispanic identifiers. Kaufman and Hernandez (1992) and Penaloza (1994) report a strong positive relationship between ethnic identification and the desire to shop at small, local stores. Collectively, these studies suggest a relationship between how strongly an individual identifies with an ethnic group and their consumption patterns and sources of influence.

A limited number of studies address Asian-American consumption. Lee (1993) and Lee and Tse (1994) investigated the relationship between acculturation processes and media usage among Asian-Americans. The latter study found that recent immigrants tended to follow media patterns similar to those of their original country and that whether these habits changed over time (to become more like the host country) was dependent on the source of information involved. Stayman and Deshpande (1986) employed both Chinese and Mexican American subjects in a study suggesting the influence of ethnicity on the ethnic identity construct and provides a base of knowledge on relationships between acculturation patterns and consumption processes, one area that has not been explored in depth is the influence of interpersonal influence on subcultural consumption patterns. Given that the influence of other in-group persons (along with the media and social institutions) has been identified as one of three primary forces influencing consumer acculturation patterns (Penaloza, 1994), the lack of prior research on interpersonal influence on subcultural populations

represents a void in the literature.

### Consumer Acculturation Conceptualization

A key construct employed in most of the studies cited as a measure of the level of consumer acculturation is ethnic identification. This construct has been used to capture the level to which an individual acts and feels a part of a specific ethnic subculture rather than part of the mainstream of default culture. Prior studies have operationalized ethnic identification as an encompassing unidimensional construct. For example, home language usage choice provides a common operationalization (e.g., Webster, 1994). Alternatively, Valencia (1989) provides multiple items useful in assessing an individual's "Hispanicness."

However, we believe that one item measures may not reflect the potential multidimensional nature of consumer acculturation. Mendoza (1989) notes that the degree of immersion into a new culture should be considered separately from the degree of retention of customs one retains from a native culture. The logic is that an individual can become assimilated into a new culture yet retain customs from a native culture. To the extent this is so, "ethnic identification" is distinct from "consumer socialization" (into the new culture). At a basic level, ethnic identification represents a more subjective component of capturing one's attitude or attachment to a native culture, and consumer socialization is a more objective component occurring more naturally with

increasing time and multicultural interactions with a new mainstream society. In theoretical terms, the consumer socialization dimension is designed to measure the level of dexterity an individual has functioning within an overall culture (Ogden, Ogden and Schau 2004). Drawing on the Ward (1974) and Ziger and Child (1969) definitions of consumer socialization, we define the construct as it applies to immigrants as "a process by which immigrants, through interaction with other people and /or exposure to media sources, acquire the skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as effective consumers in the marketplace."

While the underlying nature of each acculturation construct suggests negative covariation, the two dimensions are likely to be quite distinct. An individual may learn and adopt usage of a new language, yet still retain high identification in other cultural matters such as religious orientations and cultural customs. Thus, in this study, level of acculturation is operationalized as a multidimensional construct consisting of separate socialization and identity constructs.

### The Role of Interpersonal Influence

Assuming that immigrants rely on interpersonal influence as a source of learning, susceptibility to interpersonal influence will play an important role in their consumption preferences. For consumers in general, susceptibility to interpersonal influence reflects the influence others' opinions and behaviors

have on an individual's consumption behavior. The construct's role in other areas of consumer behavior has been supported empirically by numerous studies (e.g., Murali, Laroche and Pons, 2005; D'Rozario and Choudhury, 2000; Cohen and Golden, 1972; Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Bearden and Rose, 1990; Childers and Rao, 1992).

In their study of the measurement of susceptibility to interpersonal influence, Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel (1989, p.473) defined the concept as follows:

"The need to identify with or enhance one's image in the opinion of significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, and/or tendency to learn about products and services by observing and seeking information from others."

In devising and validating a measurement scale for susceptibility to interpersonal influence, two related but distinct types of influences were revealed: normative and informational. Normative influence refers to a tendency to conform to the expectation of others (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). This would include an individual's desire to enhance self-esteem by making purchase decisions consistent with close family and friends' preferences. Thus, through the process of identification, an individual adopts the behavior or opinion of another person to foster his or her self-image (Park and Lessing, 1977). More simply, normative influence can

reflect the desire or individuals to comply with others' expectations to avoid punishments or receive rewards ((Park and Lessing, 1977; Bearden and Etzel, 1982). In general, the greater the similarity (i.e., demographics, lifestyle, etc.) between a recipient and a sender of information, the more influence is exerted (Moschis 1976).

Information influence relates to the tendency of individuals to accept information conveyed by others as reflective of reality (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955). Informational influence can be exerted either through active information search from knowledgeable others, or through individual observation of others' behavior. Several studies support informational influence's effect on consumer evaluations (e.g., Park and Lessing, 1977; Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Babin and Griffin, 1995).

Cox and Bauer (1964) note that individual concern potentially low self-esteem is related to willingness to comply with others in an effort to avoid social disapproval. Given the cultural barriers and identity search that immigrants go through in the acculturation process, they would seem to fit this profile. Thus, the potential role of interpersonal influence in the consumption processes of immigrants is the focal point of this study.

### III. Hypotheses

Consumer Socialization and Susceptibility to

#### Interpersonal Influence

Consumer socialization implies that learning takes place. In the case of ethnic subgroups, particularly recent immigrants, language and culture barriers may inhibit learning. Thus, the role of influential others becomes important in communication patterns of behavior necessary to fulfill one's role as a consumer within an unfamiliar culture. Hovland's two-stage theory of influential communication offers viable explanation (Hovland and Weiss, 1951). Members of the ethnic subculture who are not yet socialized to American consumption habits may not perceive credible or useful sources of objective information via common media and thus, acquire disproportionately high portions of information from family and ethnically consistent friends. The idea of heavy reliance on in-group referents for new immigrants is consistent with Penaloza's (1994) observation that recent immigrants tend to rely heavily on in-group referents. Thus, the facilitating role of interpersonal communication is to communicate with influential within ethnic subcultures, and these influential, in turn, communicate with larger numbers. Because of the situation the immigrants is put in, (living in a different culture with different consumption patterns and speaking a non-native language), those new to the country and/or not comfortable in English may have to rely on interpersonal influence from in-group referents. Thus:

H1: There is a negative relationship between consumer socialization and susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

### Ethnic Identification and Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence

In addition to the consumer socialization effects, ethnic identification may affect susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Based on their close affiliation with the ethnic group, immigrants who are high identifiers are likely to be confident that they are engaging in appropriate consumption behaviors. As a result of their belief that their consumption behaviors are appropriate both in the context of being a member of an ethnic group and in the context of being a recent immigrant, it is likely that high identifiers will not be highly susceptible to interpersonal influence. In contrast, low identifiers, unsure of what acceptable norms of behavior in the new society (both in the context of being a member of an ethnic minority and being a resident of the USA), may be more susceptible to the opinions of others, both from the in-group and from others. Thus:

H2: Strength of ethnic identification is related negatively to susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

### Consumer Socialization / Ethnic Identification and Ethnocentric Purchasing Behavior

A major objective of his study is to examine factors related to ethnocentric consumer preferences. As noted earlier, several prior studies have examined the purchasing patterns of ethnic populations. Often, a goal of these studies has been to examine whether the minority group exhibits preferences and

behavior similar to (or different than) U.S. society at large.

Lee and Tse (1994) indicate that there are three primary models of consumer acculturation processes. The first is the traditional assimilation model, which suggests that as individuals become more experienced in a culture, they become more similar to those in mainstream society. The second model is overshooting, which suggests that as immigrants adapt to the new culture's consumption patterns, they may actually develop more extreme preferences than that of the majority. A final model is ethnic affirmation, which suggests that members of the minority group reject the consumption patterns of the majority and, instead, choose to retain their own consumption values.

Since prior studies have produced conflicting findings as to which model is dominant, we suggest that considering consumer socialization and ethnic identification separately may add insight on the process by which immigrants either accept or reject majority norms. Here, we will employ the level of consumer ethnocentrism as a measure of whether immigrants are adopting the majority norm. Ethnocentric consumption preference is defined here as the extent to which the immigrant prefers ethnically consistent alternatives (i.e., the extent to which they prefer purchasing ethnic products and shopping at ethnic stores; see Balabanis, George and Adamantios 2004; Orth and Firbasova 2003; O'Casey and Lim 2002;

Netemeyer, Durvasula and Lichtenstein 1991; Shimp and Sharma 1987).

It is our prediction that consumer socialization will be negatively correlated with consumer ethnocentrism while ethnic identification will be positively correlated with consumer ethnocentrism. The rationale for consumer socialization is that as consumers become more comfortable in the U.S., over time they will tend to become less ethnocentric and more mainstream in their purchasing patterns. In contrast, for ethnic identification, the logical prediction is that high identifiers (those who are the most emotionally attached to the ethnic culture) will tend to be those who are the most ethnocentric in their purchase preferences and thus, less likely to adopt main stream consumer conduct. Thus:

H3: There is negative relationship between consumer socialization and ethnocentric preferences.

H4: There is a positive relationship between strength of ethnic identification and ethnocentric preferences.

#### Interpersonal Influence and Ethnocentric Consumption Preferences

Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence plays an important role in shaping purchase preferences in general (Bearden et al., 1989; 1990). In the case of immigrants, Hovland's two stage theory would suggest that those who are susceptible to interpersonal influence would be more prone to exhibit ethnocentric consumption patterns based on

mimicking their primary referents, who are generally family and members of the same ethnic group (Penaloza 1994). To be effective in serving as a communication link, influential are likely to be more socialized than those that are learning from them. However, influential are still members of the ethnic subculture. Therefore, although they facilitate in allowing consumers to learn important consumption related behaviors are likely to be influenced by their ethnic background. The result is a positive relationship.

H5: There is a positive relationship between susceptibility to interpersonal influence and ethnocentric preferences.

Further, interpersonal influence is likely to facilitate relationship between the exogenous constructs and ethnocentric consumer preferences. Consistent with the individual hypotheses above, consumers with less deep roots in American culture will be especially prone to look at homophilous referent's behavior for guidance in how they should act. The result is that in addition to direct relationships of consumer socialization and ethnic identity on ethnic consumers' ethnocentric consumer preferences, indirect relationships can be expected. For example, while ethnic identity may directly influence preferences, interpersonal influence may also facilitate an effect as a consumer observes others and decides to behave in an associative or dissociative manner. Thus, susceptibility to interpersonal



influence is expected to partially mediate relationship between exogenous constructs and preferences by serving as a "generative mechanism" causing indirect effects (Baron and Kenny 1986, p. 1173).

H6: Susceptibility to interpersonal influence mediates relationships between consumer socialization and ethnic identity and ethnocentric preferences.

## IV. Methodology

### Respondents and Procedure

Subjects were recruited from an Asian run department store in a portion of a large northeastern US city which is largely populated by Asians. A team of six Asian students was recruited to conduct personal interviews with the respondents. Once a subject agreed to participate, one member of the student team conducted the interview. Respondents were given their choice of responding to the survey in either their native language or in English. Since the team of Asian students was comprised of individuals of 6 separate nationalities (Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Cambodian, Japanese, Filipino), no respondents were lost due to an inability to communicate in a preferred language. The sample was drawn based primarily on convenience; however, the students were instructed to recruit respondents from multiple Asian ethnicities. In order to ensure equivalence

of survey instruments, each version of the questionnaire had undergone a translation and back translation process. Subjects were asked a series of questions regarding: influences on their purchase behavior; the nature of their purchase behavior; their level of ethnic identification; and some demographic information. Upon completion of the project, a total of 126 questionnaires were available for analysis. A wide range of nationalities were represented, with no single nationality accounting for more than 25 percent of the sample. The average age of respondents was 25.7 years, with a standard deviation of 7.0 years. Fifty-eight percent of the respondents were female and 42 percent were male. The average reported number of years in the United States was 12.5 and all but 12 respondents (9.5 percent) were not born in the United States. Those not born in the United States were secondgeneration Americans and were relatively young compared to other subjects. Given that assimilation is thought to occur over multiple generations, these respondents were retained.

It should be noted that "Asian-American" as used in this study refers to individuals whose ancestry is rooted in Southeast Asian countries, including China, Taiwan of China, the Philippines, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. Individuals from other parts of Asia, including the former Soviet Republics, India, Saudi Arabia, and other Middle Eastern countries were not included in the study. The fact that there is considerable diversity among the

different Asian ethnic groups included in the study is reflective of the investigation of consumption patterns of immigrants in general, rather than any one narrowly defined ethnic group. Additionally, approaching this market as a whole, rather than dissecting it into smaller segments, is consistent with the treatment used by advertising firms, including L3, the only full-service Asian-American advertising firm in the United States (Lam, 1995).

### Measurement

#### *Consumer Socialization and Ethnic Identification.*

Numerous studies have measured the extent to which an individual "belongs" to an identifiable ethnic group(e.g., Hirschman, 1981; Deshpande, Hoyer and Donthu, 1986). Initially, most used simple one item indicators of ethnic identification, such as surname of the individual, paternal ancestry, language spoken at home, or area of residence (Deshpande, et al., 1986; Wehster, 1994). Some researchers have suggested using multiple indicators including items such as years in the U.S. and language usage (Segal and Sosa, 1983).

One such attempt is a multi-item scale measuring "Hispanicness"(Valencia, 1989). Bearden et al. (1993) document its recent use. This scale was adapted to the study context and used here to assess "Asianess"(i.e., the level of acculturation of Asian immigrants). Changes made to the scale involved changing items to reflect Asian rather than Hispanic holidays and eliminating one item that pertained quite specifically to Hispanic culture.

<Exhibit 1> shows the finalized scale. One item simply assesses the time that an individual has spent in the United States. Another assesses self-report competency in English using a 4-point scale. A similar item assessed language preference in the home. The final two items assessed self-report identification with reported ethnic subculture and the frequency with which Asian holidays were celebrated by the individual. The latter two items are hypothesized to represent "ethnic identification" and were assessed using five point scales.

#### *Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence.*

Susceptibility to interpersonal influence was measured using a standard measure developed by Bearden et al. (1989). The measure consists of eight items hypothesized to represent normative influence and four hypothesized to represent informational influence. Responses were collected using a five-point Likert format.

*Consumer Ethnocentrism.* Five items were generated to assess the extent to which respondents' purchasing behavior was different from that of typically American purchasing behavior. The items were patterned after the short version of the CERSCALE (Shimp and Sharma, 1987) modified for applicability to different cultures (Netemeyer et al., 1991). A scale validation process resulted in three total items, each collected on a five point scale. The remaining scale items measured the tendency of the individual to: 1) purchase imported food items; 2) indicate that their ethnic background influences their shopping

behavior; and 3) shop in small neighborhood stores rather than large supermarkets. The last item was developed based on prior research findings which show that ethnic minorities tend to be more prone to shop at small stores (e.g., Seagart, et al., 1985; Kaufman and Hernandez, 1992; Penaloza 1994). Respondents scoring highly on the scale were considered ethnocentric in that it indicates preferences consistent with their ethnic background. <Table 1> presents correlations among items used in this analysis.

## V. Results

### Measurement Results

*Acculturation.* Given that others have proposed that acculturation level is a unidimensional concept, exhaustive measurement analyses were undertaken to support separate, but correlated, consumer socialization and ethnic identification factors. Preliminary factor analysis, using Kaiser's rule as an extraction method, indicates that the self-expressed ethnic identity and participation in Asian holiday celebration items loaded on a separate factor than did the other three items. Additionally, principal components analysis using a one factor solution suggested that each of these had a comparatively low loading on single factor.

Confirmatory factor analysis (using LISREL

<TABLE 1> Individual Item Correlations

NF1	NF2	NF3	NF4	NF5	NF6	NF7	NF8	EC1	EC2	EC3	CS1	CS2	CS3	CI1	CI2
.00															
.60	1.00														
.46	.30	1.00													
.54	.42	.48	1.00												
.55	.51	.44	.59	1.00											
.51	.65	.47	.51	.62	1.00										
.63	.54	.40	.53	.57	.57	1.00									
.63	.61	.54	.62	.57	.68	.66	1.00								
.33	.24	.15	.24	.20	.26	.29	.33	1.00							
.31	.18	.24	.29	.24	.24	.32	.30	.42	1.00						
.28	.14	.18	.23	.18	.21	.14	.15	.40	.46	1.00					
-.16	-.07	-.32	-.34	-.17	-.10	-.15	-.21	-.23	-.04	.04	1.00				
-.14	-.15	-.14	-.20	-.18	-.08	-.17	-.19	-.30	-.10	-.05	.53	1.00			
-.10	-.10	-.17	-.19	-.17	-.02	-.06	-.13	-.14	-.18	-.05	.36	.30	1.00		
.01	-.04	.08	.08	-.05	-.17	-.12	.06	.26	.12	.24	-.24	-.22	-.06	1.00	
.11	-.04	.07	-.01	-.08	-.04	-.03	.00	.23	.09	.28	-.10	-.04	-.11	.42	1.00

NF= Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence

EC=Consumer Ethnocentrism

CS=Consumer Socialization

CI=Cultural Identity

VII) revealed that a two factor model ( $\chi^2_{df=4} = 0.48; p = .976$ ) corresponding to separate but correlated factors fit the data better than did a unidimensional model ( $\chi^2_{df=5} = 6.75; p = .25$ ). The corresponding  $\chi^2$  difference test is significant ( $\chi^2_{df=5} = 6.75; p = < .05$ ), supporting the superiority of the two-factor model. Additionally, the estimate of correlation between the two factors is modest in size ( $\phi_{2,1} = -.18, p < .10$ ), suggesting it is best assessed by considering both an individual's strength of ethnic identification and level of consumer socialization into the new culture.

*Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence.* Measurement results suggest that the Bearden et al. (1989) scale holds up quite well in this sample. Confirmatory factor analysis supports the hypothesized two-dimensional representation ( $\chi^2_{df=53} = 87.6; p = .002; GFI = .88$ ). The overall results and loading estimates are quite similar to previous scale applications with one exception (cf. Bearden et al., 1993). The estimated correlation between the normative and informational dimension is considerably higher than in previous applications ( $\phi_{2,1} = .68; p < .001$ ). Although a two-factor model remains superior to a one-factor model, the high correlation may cause problems in attributing effects to one dimension or the other in subsequent models. Given this consideration, the prominence of the normative dimension in previous scale applications (cf.

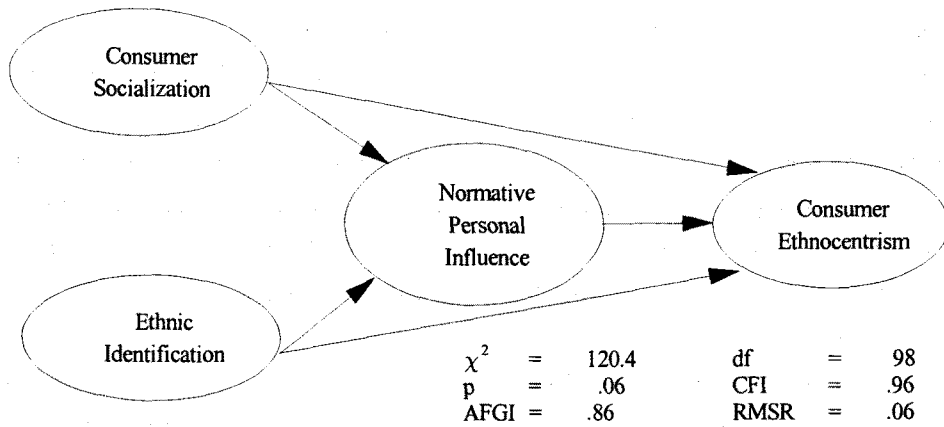
Bearden, Netemeyer and Mobley, 1993), and the fact that we do not expect information and normative dimensions to have different effects on the dependent variable, only the eight items comprising the normative factor are retained for further analyses.

*Ethnocentric Consumer Preferences.* The three items retained to measure an ethnocentric shopping style displayed adequate consistency. Coefficient  $\alpha$  for this scale equals .70, and the item-total correlations range from .50 to .53. Thus, these three items were retained in further analyses.

Overall, measurement results suggest a structural model consisting of two exogenous and two endogenous constructs, one of which serves as mediator. Exogenous constructs consumer socialization and ethnic identity are represented by three and two items, respectively. The mediator, normative interpersonal influence, is indicated by eight measured variables and consumer ethnocentric preferences are represented by three items. The following section describes the results of testing the structural model formed by the research hypotheses.

### Overview Results

<Figure 1> depicts the path model corresponding to the hypotheses, along with the structural path coefficients using structural equations analysis. Given that the model presents a mediating role of normative interpersonal influence and the fact that interval data are involved, this seemed an appropriate analytical



<Figure 1> The Role of Interpersonal Influence

<TABLE 2> Standardized SEM Parameter Estimates

	Construct			
	Consumer Socialization ( $\xi_1$ )	Cultural Identity ( $\xi_2$ )	Susceptibility to Int. Influence ( $\eta_1$ )	Ethnocentric Shopping ( $\eta_2$ )
Matrix				
$\Lambda_Y$				
CS1	.91			
CS2	.65			
CS3	.40			
CI1		.89		
CI2		.45		
$\Lambda_Y$				
NF1			.76	
NF2			.71	
NF3			.59	
NF4			.71	
NF5			.74	
NF6			.78	
NF7			.77	
NF8			.85	
EC1				.68
EC2				.65
EC3				.64
$\Gamma$ (to)				
$\eta_1$	-.41	-.27		
$\eta_2$	-.09	.53		
$\eta_1$				
$\eta_2$			.63	

NF= Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence      EC= Consumer Ethnocentrism  
 CS= Consumer Socialization      CI= Cultural Identity

approach (Baron and Kenny, 1986). Table 2 summarizes the parameter estimates resulting from the analysis for both the measurement and structural models.

The overall model produced an overall  $\chi^2$  goodness of fit statistic of 120.4 with 98 degrees of freedom ( $p=.06$ ). The corresponding goodness of fit index (GFI) is .88 the comparative fit index (CFI) is .96 (Bentler, 1990; Marsh, 1994), and the root mean squared residual (RMSR) is .06, all suggesting an acceptable fit to the data (cf. Netemeyer et al., 1991; Marsh, 1994). The model explains 20 and 50 percent of the variance in susceptibility to interpersonal influence and consumer ethnocentric shopping behavior, respectively. Given the hypotheses listed above, our interest in the mediating role of interpersonal influence, and a saturated theoretical model (e.g., confirmatory and theoretical model are constrained similarly), we now focus on interpreting the structural parameter estimates.

*Hypothesis One.* Hypothesis one predicted a negative relationship between consumer socialization and susceptibility to interpersonal influence. As shown in Figure 1, a significant negative path exists between the consumer socialization and normative susceptibility to interpersonal influence ( $\gamma_{1,2} = -.41, p < .01$ ). This finding supports hypothesis 2 suggests that those who have been in the country longer and are more comfortable in English (i.e., are more socialized) are less susceptible

to interpersonal influence.

*Hypothesis Two.* Hypothesis two predicts a negative relationship between ethnic identification and susceptibility to interpersonal influence. The path estimate representing this relationship is ( $\gamma_{1,1} = -.27, p < .05$ ) significant and negative. Thus, H2 supported.

*Hypothesis Three.* Hypothesis three predicted a direct negative relationship between consumer socialization and ethnocentric purchasing behavior. However, the direct path between these two constructs is insignificant ( $\gamma_{2,1} = -.09$ ) when the effects of consumer identification and interpersonal influence are controlled. Thus, H3 is not supported.

*Hypothesis Four.* Hypothesis four predicts a positive relationship between ethnic identification and consumer ethnocentrism. As shown in Figure 1, the associated path is consistent with this prediction ( $\gamma_{2,2} = .53, p < .01$ ), supporting H4. Collectively, the findings for hypotheses four and five suggest that ethnic identification impacts consumer ethnocentrism more than does consumer socialization.

*Hypothesis Five.* Hypothesis five predicted a positive relationship between susceptibility to interpersonal influence and Asian consumers' ethnocentric purchasing behavior. As can be seen in the Figure 1, this path is both positive and significant ( $\beta_{2,1} = .63, p < .01$ ). Thus, respondents reporting greater reliance on referents also reported more ethnocentric shopping behavior, supporting H5.

*Personal Influence as a Mediator (H6).* A

first test of mediation was performed by estimating a model suppressing indirect effects of the exogenous constructs on consumers' ethnocentric preferences. If no mediation is present, allowing only direct paths should not significantly reduce fit. The  $\chi^2$  goodness of fit statistic, with 100 degrees of freedom, increased to 131.1 ( $p = .02$ ), providing a significant  $\chi^2$  difference statistic ( $\chi^2 = 10.7$ ,  $df = 2$ ,  $p < .005$ ). This result is consistent with H6.

More specific results also were examined. In the original model shown in Figure 1, the direct path between consumer socialization and ethnocentrism shown ( $\gamma_{2,1} = -.09$ , ns) is insignificant despite an apparent association as indicated by the Pearson Product Moment correlation between the constructs ( $\gamma_{2,1} = -.21$ ,  $p < .01$ ). This result also is consistent with the role of a mediating construct (Baron and Kenny, 1986). That is, the influence of the socialization element is understood only through its impact on susceptibility to

normative interpersonal influence. Specifically, the total effect of consumer socialization on consumer ethnocentrism is accounted for almost entirely by the indirect path through interpersonal influence ( $-.26$ ,  $p < .05$ ). In contrast, the effect of ethnic identification is more direct ( $\gamma_{2,2} = .53$ ; indirect path =  $-.17$ ). Thus, particularly with respect to the socialization/ethnocentrism relationship, susceptibility to normative interpersonal influence acts as a mediator.

## VI. Discussion

### Summary

The research presented here explores the role of interpersonal influence on immigrant shopping behavior. Our findings suggest the following:

- 1) Two dimensions of consumer acculturation, level of consumer socialization and strength of

<TABLE 3> Pearson Correlation (Uncorrected) Between Constructs

Construct	Correlation with:			
	NF	EC	CS	CI
Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (NF)	1.00			
Consumer Ethnocentrism (EC)	.38 <sup>a</sup>	1.00		
Consumer Socialization (CS)	-.27 <sup>a</sup>	-.21 <sup>a</sup>	1.00	
Cultural (old) Identification (CI)	-.08	.29 <sup>a</sup>	-.20 <sup>b</sup>	1.00

<sup>a</sup> $p < .01$ , <sup>b</sup> $p < .05$

ethnic identification, each affects susceptibility to interpersonal influence and consumer ethnocentric shopping preferences somewhat uniquely.

2) Consumer socialization is associated with reduced susceptibility to interpersonal influence. The key finding for ethnic identification, reflecting more of an emotional attachment to an original culture, is that it contributes directly to more ethnically consistent consumer preferences.

3) Susceptibility to normative interpersonal influence mediates relationship between key ethnic variables and ethnocentric shopping behavior. This suggests an important role for interpersonal influence in understanding immigrant consumer acculturation.

These findings are particularly noteworthy in light of the observation of Bearden and Rose (1990) suggests that an important question for consumer researchers to investigate is the conditions under which normative influence are likely to contribute to the formulation of behavioral intentions. Findings presented here suggest that among Asian-American immigrant populations, individuals who have lower levels of consumer socialization will be more susceptible to interpersonal influence, and, in turn, will be more likely to engage in ethnically consistent ethnocentric purchase behavior. The mediated nature of this relationship suggests that 'new' consumers develop more 'American' preferences not through socialization itself, but because they

become less reliant on in-group referents for norms of behavior.

The extent to which respondents identified with their original culture did not relate to susceptibility to normative personal influence as strongly as did consumer socialization. Interestingly, the path coefficient representing this relationship is significant ( $t=1.65$ ;  $p<.05$ ), but negative instead of positive. This may suggest a pattern of behavior consistent with ethnic affirmation. Among those who are strong ethnic identifiers; consumers appear to be concerned with retaining aspects of the ethnic culture. Future research might consider classifying new generational consumers along these dimensions. The resulting classification (high socialization-high identifiers, high socialization-low identifiers, etc.) might moderate relationships found here and in other studies.

### Implications for Marketers

From a marketing standpoint, the findings suggest alternative ways of influencing Asian-Americans. The pattern of relationships revealed here suggests that consumers relatively low in socialization into Americanculture are likely to be influenced primarily through the opinions and behaviors of referents. While Hovland's two stage theory of influential communication may not hold overall, it appears to fit the situation presented here. For example, retailers offering ethnic shopping alternatives that may appeal to immigrants (such as in many areas of southern California)



should target influentials within the ethnic community as they appear key in influencing greater numbers. Alternatively, retailers hoping to persuade immigrant consumers to a more "American" also should understand the key facilitating role played by interpersonal influence within ethnic communities.

Our findings suggest that more socialized immigrant consumers can likely be reached effectively via mass media. To reach immigrant consumers who are highly socialized and low in ethnic identification, it is likely that traditional mass media approaches frequently used by retailers, it might be advisable to adopt a customized approach. Such an approach might include advertising in specialized newspapers, magazines, and other media designed for the ethnic group, using the group's native language in the advertisement, and using ethnic advertising themes. In terms of the product offering, the retailer might need to offer ethnically consistent alternatives that foster, rather than inhibit, ethnocentric purchasing behavior.

While consumer socialization's overall impact on ethnocentric shopping behavior is negative, ethnic identity appears to affect it positively. Since the ethnic identity has less influence on interpersonal influence, and since that influence is negative, the role of influentials in communicating with high ethnic identifiers is diminished. Rather, these individuals may need to be communicated with directly. This presents a challenge for retailers wishing to

appeal to this segment. The strong direct relationship with ethnocentric shopping behavior suggest that this is an attractive segment for retailers offering ethnically consistent shopping alternatives.

Most notable concerning this effect, however, is that it operates independently from consumer socialization. This finding suggests that the basic acculturation pattern immigrants will follow varies based on strength of ethnic identification. Simply stated, those who do not identify strongly with the ethnic culture will tend toward assimilation with the mainstream in their assimilation processes. Meanwhile, those are strong identifiers will exhibit consumption patterns more consistent with ethnic affirmation.

### Limitations

The research presented here is limited by a number of factors. First, the sample consisted only of Asian-Americans with shallow generational roots in the United States. While some elements of acculturation processes may be similar across different cultural context, other ethnic groups may behave differently. Second, our results cannot provide deep insights on the nature of specific types of reference group influence. Because of our focus on recent immigrants, who tend to be influenced primarily by in-group referents (Penaloza 1994), our results should be interpreted as reflecting the susceptibility to interpersonal influence from homophilous

influential. Further research is needed on the relative influence of family and friends and on the potential increase in influence from members of other groups among members of subsequent generation of the ethnic group. The latter research direction would set up potential moderating relationships where the direction of influence on consumer preferences may depend on the ethnicity of the influential. Third, there is a potential for interpersonal influence to also influence felt ethnic identity. That is, the nature of causality between these constructs should be examined more closely. Ideally, a longitudinal study using a more representative sample of recent ethnically diverse minority members would be useful in validating results presented here.

### Conclusions

This paper adds to the scant literature on how Asian-Americans learn to be consumers in the United States. Our findings suggest that interpersonal influence plays a key role in this process. As immigrants assimilate (i.e., spend more time here, acquire English skills, etc.), they are less likely to rely on others' behaviors and opinions for guidance in establishing shopping preferences. An interesting proposition following from this finding is how much recent immigrants begin to rely on marketing communications targeted at mass audiences as their reliance on interpersonal influence decreases. The paper also suggests that acculturation, at least among Asian-Americans,

is a more complex construct than thought previously. This suggests that future measurement attempts at capturing ethnic distinctiveness should be undertaken with multidimensionality in mind. Additionally, other researchers may expect differential findings with respect to an identity and a socialization dimension of acculturation.

### End Notes

The items were standardized to provide a common metric prior to analysis. Additionally, Thurstone scaling was used on the English preference item to insure interval level data.

Initial reliability analysis proved marginal for the five item scale( $\text{Alpha} = .60$ ). Maximum likelihood factor analysis revealed that three items had comparatively low loadings compared to the other three (i.e., .46, .22). Thus, those items were dropped from the scale for purposes of analysis.

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EXHIBIT 1

Strength of Asian Identification Scale

Ethnicity \_\_\_\_\_

How strongly do you identify with the  
ethnic group listed above?

Very weakly

Weakly

Somewhat

Strongly

Very strongly

Would you say you speak English:

Not at all

Not well

Well

Very well

4) If you had the chance to communicate  
with someone in English or another language,  
which would you prefer to converse in/

1) Other language

2) Other One

3) English

a) How long have you lived in the United  
States? \_\_\_\_ years.

b) What is your age? \_\_\_\_ years.

6) How often do you celebrate Asian  
holidays (e.g., Lunar New Year, Tet, Chusok)?

1) Never

2) Sometimes

3) Often

4) Always

Notes: Item 1 was used for identification  
purposes and was not used in computing  
summary scores.

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〈국문초록〉

## 문화변용과 대인영향력이 민족중심적 소비자 선호도에 미치는 영향에 관한 연구 - 아시아계 미국인을 중심으로 -

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소수민족집단의 문화변용은 최근에 매우 중요한 마케팅 연구분야로 각광을 받고 있다. 본 연구는 아시아계 미국인들의 민족중심적 혹은 비 민족중심적인 쇼핑선호도를 개발할 때 영향을 미치는 두 가지 변수인 문화변용과 대인영향력에 대한 민감도의 역할을 파악하는 것을 목적으로 한다. 기존의 연구들은 문화변용의 수준으로서의 민족정체성이 다양한 이민집단 간의 소비패턴의 차이를 가장 설득력 있게 설명할 수 있다는 것을 지적한바 있다. 본 연구의 결과는 민족정체성이 단일차원의 변수가 아니라고 제안한다. 민족정체성과 소비자사회화가 '미국인' 정체성 보다는 소수민족 자체내의 문화적 배경에 의해 영향을 받는다는 것을 발견했다. 민족정체성과 민족중심적 구매선호도간에는 매우 강한 긍정적인 관계가 있는 것을 발견하였다. 반면에 소비자사회화와 민족중심적 선호도간에는 유의한 직접적 관계를 발견할 수 없었다. 마케터들을 위한 관리적 시사점들이 제안되었다.

주제어: 소비자 문화변용, 소비자 사회화, 대인영향력에 대한 민감도, 민족정체성, 민족중심적 소비자 선호도

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