

Chapter 19

Consumer Acculturation and Implications for Brand Preferences

Rohini Vijaygopal
The Open University, UK

ABSTRACT

This research investigates whether established theories of acculturation are applicable to British Indians and what impact acculturation has on their consumer behaviour. After classifying British Indians according to the acculturation framework devised by Berry (1980), the chapter considers whether membership of these acculturation categories has a bearing on British Indians' consumer behaviour, as indicated by their brand preferences for a range of host and ethnic products and services. The findings reveal that separated consumers prefer ethnic brands more than host brands, assimilated consumers prefer host brands more than ethnic brands and integrated consumers have brand preferences falling between these two. Acculturation category thus has POTENTIAL for use as a segmentation variable. Demographic factors have also been shown to influence patterns of acculturation (Berry 1997). This study therefore also examines the relationships between different acculturation categories, demographic variables and preferences for a range of ethnic and host brands. Overall, this research provides some interesting insights about buying preferences of Indian diaspora (a developing country) in the UK and is particularly relevant from an International marketing perspective.

INTRODUCTION

Acculturation is an ancient and probably universal human experience. Inscriptions dating from 2370 BC show that the Sumerian rulers of Mesopotamia established written codes of law in order to protect traditional cultural practices from acculturative change and to establish fixed rules for commerce with foreigners (Rudmin, 2003, p. 9).

War and economic disparities between countries have historically been the cause of considerable migration. This has enabled the contact of two different cultures making acculturation an important phenomenon.

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The movement of workforces across the world has accelerated with the advent of technologies that are 'shrinking' the globe. Information technology is making it easier for cultures across time zones to be in touch with each other. Moreover, the extent to which organisations recruit skilled people from across the world is also leading to a greater migration of populations. Consequently, there are implications both for the individuals who migrate and their culture, as well as for the culture of the host nation.

During the last 60 years, an influx of people from former British colonies and elsewhere has altered Britain's demographic profile (Burton, 2002; Rudmin, 2003). Immigration of this kind leads to cultural interpenetration (Andreasen, 1990), as immigrants become acculturated and adopt cultural traits that differ from those with which they grew up (Emslie et al., 2007).

Redfield, Linton and Herskovits (1936, 149) define acculturation as "those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original culture patterns of either or both groups".

The changes in the cultural traits can influence immigrants' consumer behaviour (Engel et al., 1973; Hair & Anderson, 1972), resulting in product preferences and consumption patterns reflecting the acculturation status of these individuals (Maldonado & Tansuhaj, 2002; Rajagopalan & Heitmeyer, 2005; Takhar et al. 2010). Although the need to better understand subcultures is acknowledged (Burton 2002; Emslie et al., 2007; Nwankwo & Lindridge, 1998), there has been relatively little research examining the impact of acculturation on brand preference. What studies there are tend to focus on the process of acculturation itself, with less attention devoted to the relationship between the outcomes of consumption and cultural values (Lindridge 2001; Pankhania et al., 2007; Sekhon 2007). Consequently there are calls for more work examining broad acculturation outcomes and their influence on consumer behaviour (Odgen et al., 2004), and of the implications for targeting ethnic audiences (Sekhon & Szmigin, 2009).

Moreover, demographics, as well as being consumer characteristics, also influence consumers' lifestyles, which in turn have a bearing on patterns of acculturation (Maldonado & Tansuhaj, 2002). Various demographic factors have been mentioned in the literature as having a relationship with acculturation, including age, gender, income, education, religion, length of stay in the host country, generational status, profession, and nationality.

This research examines the outcomes of acculturation and the implications for consumption. British Indians, the largest ethnic minority population in the UK, are the focus here. The upward social mobility of British Indians is reflected in their emergence as one of Britain's wealthiest ethnic groups. The chapter investigates whether established theories of acculturation are applicable to British Indians, using this theoretical backdrop to understand what impact acculturation has on their consumer behaviour. The research also investigates how a range of demographic factors are associated with membership of particular acculturation categories

Several contributions to knowledge will be made in this book chapter. Firstly, the relevance to British Indians of established methods for assessing acculturation levels of immigrants are considered. Secondly, there is a contribution to what is known about the links between acculturation categories and consumption outcomes as well as considering the influence of demographic factors. Finally, there are implications for the strategy and tactics practitioners need to use to market their products and services to ethnic minorities in the UK.

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