

Acculturation and Consumer Behavior: A Theoretical Model

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Acculturation is an important concept for marketers who are willing to sell their sport products to consumers from particularly different cultures in multicultural markets. In such cases, marketers must learn the specific culture of their potential target market in order to find out if their sport products will be suitable to its members, and how they can best communicate the characteristics of their sport products to convince the target market to purchase them. Acculturation has been studied for more than half a century in sociology, psychology and the general marketing field, but not in the field of sport consumer behavior. The concept of acculturation in consumer behavior has been found to be significant in explaining the heterogeneous characteristic of a unique ethnic group (O'Guinn, Lee & Faber, 1996). Consumer acculturation is a sub-division of the general acculturation concept and consists of the attitudes, values and behaviors which collectively comprise consumer behavior (O'Guinn, et al., 1996). Moreover, researchers have recently realized a discrepancy in consumer behavior, which exists not only between ethnic groups but also within each ethnic group.

Today people live in a culturally dynamic society. Not only goods but also people flow from one culture to another, carrying different cultural concepts of goods and services as well as different cultural values and norms underlying the diversities of human behavior (Chen, 1993). The United States is becoming ethnically more diverse. Census figures for 2000 showed that one in every four Americans claim African, Asian, Hispanic, or American Indian ancestry, compared to only one in five in the 1980 census (Rossman, 1994). The Hispanic population has been observed as one of the fastest growing groups in the States, followed by the Asian population (Solomon, 1992). With an increasing minority population, the trend toward greater cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity is dominant in every aspect of American life. After years of stressing commonalities, the dominant U.S. culture has begun to acknowledge and affirm the diversity of cultures within its boundaries.

The influence of culture on consumer behavior has been noticed by previous researchers. Consumer behavior is "a function of ethnicity, social surroundings, and type of product" (Zmud, 1992). There are major cultural differences in the ways consumers represent motivation and behavior in the market. Hence, marketers have become aware of the need to be culturally conscious in their efforts to communicate with consumers of diverse cultural origins (Lee, 1993). A major contribution to the study of acculturation on consumer behavior from a psychological perspective is found in the work of John Berry. Acculturation refers to "cultural and psychological change brought about by contact with other peoples belonging to different cultures and exhibiting different behaviors" (Berry et al., 1992). Berry proposed a bi-dimensional model which speculates that there are four distinct variables of acculturation that can be recognized on the basis of the desire to maintain one's original cultural identity and the aspiration to maintain positive relations with the dominant group. Berry's bi-dimensional structure of acculturation has been widely applied in acculturation research and has been supported by empirical studies.

This model of the ethnic consumer acculturation process should help marketers better understand and predict ethnic consumer behavior by researching each stage of the acculturation process. Berry's study also provides a more concrete theoretical basis that can be utilized in other areas of marketing such as sport marketing by opening a way for more research on ethnic consumers in the acculturation process.

Past studies indicate that an individual's level of acculturation is related to a wide range of consumer behaviors; product innovativeness and product information transfer (Hirschman, 1981), consumption patterns (Kim et al., 1990), product evaluation (Lee & Um, 1992), information seeking behavior (Webster, 1992), attitude toward advertising (Lee, 1993), consumer decision making (Doran, 1994), shopping orientations (Ownbey & Horridge, 1997), and importance of product attributes (Kara & Kara, 1996). An overview of the previous studies reveals low acculturation groups tend to adhere more to the norms in consumer behavior in their original ethnicity than high acculturation groups. Acculturation in general has important theoretical implications and will provide a theoretical frame of reference through which to view multi-cultural marketing in sport. A greater understanding of the factors involved in building relationships with markets from a particular cultural background will enhance the ability to predict the amount of resources necessary to devote to marketing efforts.