The Relationship between Consumer Decision-Making Styles and Acculturation: A Study of Korean American Amateur Golfers

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The United States (U.S.) is currently an integrated, dynamic, culturally diverse society. The past few decades have seen a dramatic increase in ethnic and cultural diversity in the U.S. In 1980, according to the 1980 Census, one in every five Americans claimed African, Asian, Hispanic, or American Indian ancestry; by 2006 that percentage had increased to one in three American (Rossman, 1994; U.S. Census Bureau, 2006). Exposure to the increasing minority population's diverse characteristics of culture, ethnicity, and language has induced lifestyle changes for all Americans. As people from one culture interact with those from another, they create a multicultural perspective that embraces different cultural values and also introduces varied cultural concepts of goods and services to a society (Chen, 1993). For years, marketers have attempted to understand the behavior of ethnic consumers. Knowledge of consumer behavior is a prerequisite for marketers to reach their target market more efficiently and effectively. Based on these understandings of the subtleties and cultural manifestations of ethnic groups, marketers can develop and implement various marketing strategies that fit the needs of their customers. Marketers in American sport businesses are not exempt from responding to consumer diversity (Armstrong, 2007).

Acculturation is a complex interactional process influential in explaining the heterogeneous attributes of a distinctive ethnic cohort (Padilla, 1980). The concept of consumer acculturation, a subset of the broader notion of acculturation, refers to the process exhibited by consumers as they adapt to new attitudes, values, and behaviors in the purchasing process (O’Guinn, Lee, & Faber, 1996). Recently researchers have recognized that differences in consumer behavior exist not only between but also within ethnic groups. This study addresses the issue of multicultural marketing in relation to golf clubs by assessing the relationship between Korean Americans’ acculturation processes and their consumer decision-making styles (CDMS) which is defined as “a consumer’s mental orientation toward making choices for product purchasing in the market place” (Sproles & Kendall, 1986, p.268).

The purposes of this study are: (a) to determine whether Korean Americans exhibit cultural differences among themselves throughout the process of acculturation according to pre-dispositional variables such as socioeconomic status (SES) and gender; (b) to investigate the CDMS of Korean Americans across stages of the acculturation process, from less acculturated (high Korean identity) to moderately acculturated (bicultural identity); and (c) to determine the CDMS of Korean Americans according to pre-dispositional variables such as SES, gender, and golf skill.

The defined target population for this study was Korean American amateur golfers residing in Southern California. Due to the limited numbers within the target population who have experience playing golf, non-probability sampling that is in line with purposive sampling techniques was used to obtain representative samples, consisting of 306 Korean American amateur golfers. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) and multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) were the statistical techniques used for analyzing the data and testing the hypotheses.

The results of hypothesis testing revealed five significant differences among ten hypotheses formulated: (a) in the acculturation process among Korean Americans with differing occupational statuses, $F (3, 290) = 4.59, \text{Msc} = .22, p = .004$; (b) between less acculturated and bicultural groups, Wilks $\Lambda = .942, F (7, 298) = 2.63, p = .01$, for CDMS variables of novelty consciousness, $F (1, 304) = 8.86, p < .001$ and brand loyalty, $F (1, 304) = 4.19, p = .04$; (c) among educational level categories, Wilks $\Lambda = .900, F (14, 594) = 2.30, p < .001$, for CDMS variables of novelty consciousness, $F (2, 303) = 4.31, p = .01$ and style/technology consciousness, $F (2, 303) = 6.73, p < .001$; (d) among income level categories, Wilks $\Lambda = .911, F (14, 594) = 2.03, p = .01$, for CDMS variable of style/technology consciousness, $F (2, 303) = 3.05, p = .049$; and (e) among golf skill level categories, Wilks $\Lambda = .758, F (14, 594) = 6.29, p < .001$, for three CDMS variables of quality consciousness, $F (2, 303) = 10.99, p < .001$, price consciousness, $F (2, 303) = 3.81, p = .02$, and style/technology consciousness, $F (2, 303) = 15.37, p < .001$.

Tests of this study’s hypotheses have showed that less acculturated and bicultural Korean American consumers display different consumer decision-making styles. One major implication of these findings could be that marketers targeting Korean American consumers should refrain from treating Korean Americans as one single group. In addition, findings from hypotheses’ tests have
demonstrated that particular consumer decision-making styles are more closely linked to Korean American consumers than are other consumer decision-making styles according to different factors of their acculturation level, educational level, income level, and golf skill level respectively.

This presentation will discuss the results of this study in terms of managerial and theoretical implications. First, the results may prove valuable to retail managers and to the golf industry located in Southern California that targets Korean American consumers, offering an improved understanding of how people from ethnic cultural backgrounds become American consumers during the process of acculturation. Such an understanding could improve marketers’ strategic planning decisions which enhance the ability to predict the amount and type of resources necessary for marketing efforts. Second, this research may provide a socio-cultural frame of reference through which to view multicultural marketing in sport.