The Role of Acculturation in the American Football Consumption Behavior of Asians

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For a number of reasons, (e.g., studying, immigration, business), moving into a new society is a naturally and rapidly increasing phenomenon around the world, particularly in pluralistic societies such as the United States. Within pluralistic societies, sport has played critical role in helping immigrants understand a new culture and enter mainstream society (Coakley, 2009). While many scholars have examined the relationships between cultural variables (e.g., acculturation and ethnic identity) and participation in recreational sports and physical activities (e.g., Golditz, Stoddard, Emmons, & Sorensen, 2006; Kim, Lee, Kim, Ko, & Green, 2007; Marquez & McAuley, 2006; Stodolska & Alexandris, 2004) there has been limited research on spectator sports.

According to population estimates of the U.S. Census Bureau (2008), the total population of people of in the U.S. who said they are Asian or Asian-related races numbered 14.9 million, making it the second fastest growing segment in the US. Furthermore, the Asian population’s purchasing power is anticipated to increase over 600% from $116 billion in 1990 to $697 billion in 2014 (Humphrey, 2009). In spite of its significant place in the US market, relatively little attention has been paid to Asian sport consumers in the US sport market (Ko, Claussen, Rinehart, & Hur, 2008). In addition, previous studies on ethnic minority groups in sport marketing and management have focused solely on African Americans (Armstrong, 1998, 2002a, 2002b; Armstrong & Peretto Stratta, 2004) and Hispanics (Harrole & Trail, 2007, 2010; McCarthy, 1998). Thus, in order for sport organizations in the US to increase revenues and expand fan bases, there is a need to study for Asian population’s sport consumption behavior.

Acculturation is often regarded as one of the most important and widely used constructs in understanding various behaviors and attitudes of newcomers (e.g., immigrants, international labor, international students) in a host society (Phinney, Horenezyk, Liekind, & Vedder, 2001). According to Berry (1990), acculturation is defined as the process of learning that occurs when individuals with a different cultural background are exposed to a new society/culture. The focus of acculturation is on the change of behaviors and attitudes when two different cultures interact with each other. Berry (1990, 1997, 2003) proposed four different acculturation strategies/patterns based upon a bi-dimensional model of acculturation: (a) integration, (b) marginalization, (c) assimilation, and (d) separation. According to the bi-dimensional model of acculturation, the maintenance of ethnic identity and behaviors is ‘independent’ from the development of mainstream cultural identity (Berry, 1990). Integration occurs when newcomers maintain cultural identity and behaviors in both a heritage and host society, whereas marginalization occurs when they neither maintain cultural identity and behaviors from the heritage society nor accept those from the host society. Assimilation strategy takes place when newcomers do not retain cultural behaviors and identity of their heritage society while accepting those of a host society. Lastly, separation strategy occurs when newcomers accept their own cultural behaviors and identity while not accepting those of the host society. Based upon Berry’s acculturation model, Pons, Laroche, Nyeck, & Perreault (2001) noted that newcomers can adapt to a new cultural environment by acquiring traits of the host culture through sport event consumption. Specifically, Pons et al. (2001) found that particular sports have been identified and consumed as ethnically specific, such as ice hockey for Canadians and soccer for Italians. In addition, Harrole and Trail (2007) found that acculturation significantly influenced identification with American football among Hispanics.

The two previous studies (Harrole & Trail, 2007; Pons et al., 2001) were grounded in Berry’s bi-dimensional model of acculturation. However, the studies were limited to accounting for the four different types of acculturation strategies which are key components of the bi-level acculturation model. Furthermore, American football is regarded as a sport possessing attributes of American society, such as competitive spirit. Consequently, the purposes of the current study are to investigate the effects of acculturation strategies/patterns on (a) identification with and (b) consumption behavior for American football among Asian populations living in the United States. Using Berry’s (1990) four types of acculturation strategies, the following two hypotheses will be tested:

Hypothesis 1: Asian populations having integration and assimilation strategies are more likely to identify with American football than those with separation and marginalization strategies.
Hypothesis 2: Asian populations having integration and assimilation strategies are more likely to consume American football than those with separation and marginalization strategies.
Data collection is currently underway in a large Midwestern city in the U.S. Participants are Asian adults, including Asian Americans and Asian international students. Mall intercept methods are being utilized at several places in the city, such as university libraries, shopping malls, Asian grocery stores, and Asian cultural and student centers. The participants are being asked to complete surveys containing the 14-item modified Acculturation Index (AI; Ward and Keedy, 1994); the 3-item Points of Attachment Index for American football (PAI; Trail, Robinson, Dick, & Gillentine, 2003); the 6-item consumption behavior for American football (four items derived from Trail et al., 2003 and two items created by the author); and several demographic questions, including gender, age, generational status, and length of residency in the U.S.

Once data collection has ended, the data will be analyzed using SPSS/PSAW 18. A reliability analysis will be conducted using Cronbach’s a and then the researchers will analyze descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations) for scales used in the study. To test the two hypotheses, two separate analyses of covariances (ANCOVAs) will be conducted. The independent variables in the two ANCOVAs will be four types of acculturation strategies: integration, marginalization, assimilation, and separation. The dependent variable for the first ANCOVA will be identification with American football, while the dependent variable for the second ANCOVA will be consumption behavior for American football. The effects of gender, length of residency in the U.S., and generational status will be controlled as covariates in each ANCOVA based on previous studies (Lee, 2006; Tsai, Ying, & Lee, 2002, Wann, 2002).

Despite being one of the fastest growing populations and the potential buying power of Asian populations living in the U.S., these populations are under-researched compared to other ethnic minority groups (Ko et al., 2008). Thus, the results of the study will help sport marketers better understand sport consumption behaviors among Asian populations. Furthermore, considering that one of the primary objectives of sport marketers is to segment various sport consumers based on sociodemographics and psychographics, Berry’s four different acculturation strategies give sport marketers great insight into developing marketing strategies appropriate for Asian consumers. Thus, Berry’s acculturation model would play a role as a new tool for market segmentation. More detailed results of the analysis and implications of this study will be presented and ideas for future research will be discussed.