Acculturation, Consumer Affinity and Identification with American Football

Abdullah Demirel, University of Massachusetts Amherst
Janet S. Fink (Advisor), University of Massachusetts Amherst

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Culture can have a strong impact on consumption behavior and McCracken (1986) suggests that consumption is partially a cultural phenomenon. The bidimensional model of acculturation suggests that individuals in culturally plural societies can maintain their original ethnic culture and adopt the values and behaviors of the larger society simultaneously and at varying degrees. While maintenance of the heritage culture is called ethnic identification, learning traits of the dominant culture is called acculturation (Berry et al., 1989; Berry, 1997). The relationship between ethnic identity, acculturation and consumer behavior has been investigated in several empirical studies (e.g. Josiassen, 2011; Laroche, Yang, Kim, & Richard, 2007; Laroche, Kim, Hui, & Tomiuk, 1997). However, the relationship between acculturation and identification with sports (Harrolle & Trail, 2007; Pons, Laroche, Nyeck, & Perreault, 2001) and sport consumption behavior (Ha, Hums, & Greenwell, 2014) has received less attention. Of these, most used very broad categorizations for their immigrant groups (e.g. Japanese, Chinese, Indians were considered as “Asian”); however, it seems likely that the different groups could acculturate differently. The current study embraces the bidimensional view of acculturation and introduces acculturation as a moderator to the relationship between ethnic identification and consumer affinity to USA among a specific ethnic population (i.e. Chinese living in the US). Consumer affinity, in turn, is expected to influence identification with American football, a nation-specific sport that carries significant meanings central to US culture (Jarvie, 2003), and behaviors related to the sport such as watching and attending games.

Consumer affinity is a very recent construct examined in the marketing literature and comprised of the dimensions of sympathy and attachment. It assesses consumers’ country-specific favorable feelings toward a particular foreign country (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Because individuals can form strong attachment and attribute strong emotional meanings to sports (Funk, 2008), it appears consumer affinity could be an influential variable for sport consumption. Further, Oberecker & Diamantopoulos (2011) called for future research to identify precursors of consumer affinity. This study responds to this call and examines the impact of ethnic identity. Chinese cultural values and norms seem quite different than those found in the United States according to Hofstede’s (1980) cultural dimensions. Thus, we sought to examine the relationship between Chinese descendants’ maintenance of their ethnic identity, acculturation, and consumer affinity to the dominant culture (i.e., USA). Therefore, in line with the bidimensional model of acculturation, the following hypothesis was developed:

H1. The relationship between Chinese identity and consumer affinity to USA will be moderated by acculturation to the USA culture such that the higher the level of acculturation, the greater likelihood will be that Chinese identity will be positively related to consumer affinity.

Consumer affinity has a positive impact on intentions to purchase, and actual ownership, of products from the affinity country (Nes, Yelkur, & Silkoset, 2014) and a negative impact on perceived risk of buying products of the affinity country (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). In line with this previous research, it is expected that there will be a relationship between consumer affinity to the United States and consumption of American football which is accepted as a uniquely American sport. The relationship between consumer affinity and consumption of American football is expected to be fully mediated by sport identification which is positively related to consumption behaviors such as watching sports on television, reading about sports, and attending games (Fink, Trail, & Anderson, 2002).

H2. Identification with American football will fully mediate the relationship between the consumer affinity and behavioral intentions related to American football.

A sample of 300 Chinese descendants, 18 years or older, living in the USA will be obtained via various cultural
associations in the Northeastern United States. Acculturation (7 items) and ethnic identity (6 items) will be adapted from the scales developed by Laroche et al. (1997) and Laroche et al. (2007), respectively. Identification with football will be measured with the scale developed by Robinson, Trail, & Kwon (2004), and the behavioral intention scale will be modified from Biscaia & Correia (2013). Consumer affinity will be assessed with Oberecker and Diamantopoulos' scale (2011). A CFA will be utilized to assess the psychometric properties of scale items and the proposed model will be tested with SEM.

Results will contribute to marketers’ understanding of sport consumers that possess a different cultural heritage from the host country. Results of this study may show that consumer affinity can be used as leverage for efforts to expand the popularity of American football to new segments. Other implications to theory and practice will be fully discussed in the presentation.