

Consumer Acculturation of Latin American Visitors in Taiwan: A Study of Food and Clothing Products

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Abstract

This study seeks to determine the factors influencing consumer acculturation of Latin American student visitors in Taiwan for the product categories of food and clothing. This research found: (1) some variables of acculturation influence, marketing practices, and situation factors are significantly related to consumer acculturation; (2) four acculturation patterns are discovered and they coincide with Berry's (1997) typology; (3) visitors do not travel in family units, hence their food habits are less change resistant; and (4) visitors have low permanent residence intent, prompting them to bring along clothing that allows them to refrain from consuming host culture clothing.

Introduction

With growing interdependence between countries and cheaper and more accessible means of transportation, the world has and will continue to witness high levels of international migration. When individuals cross borders, they become exposed to a host culture that possesses norms and values different from the home culture, thus initiating the process of acculturation in which newcomers learn and adopt norms and values of a different culture (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007).

Culture and consumer behaviors exhibit a bidirectional relationship in that culture shapes consumer attitudes, behaviors, lifestyles, and needs

(Cleveland & Laroche, 2007), while consumption behaviors can eventually become a group's behavioral norms and be identified as part of the population's culture (Luna & Gupta, 2001).

When different cultures interact, individuals of the minority learn and adopt values and norms of a different culture, mainly the majority or host culture (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007; Laroche, 2008; O'Guinn & Faber, 1985). This process is called acculturation.

In the past, acculturation was regarded as a unidirectional process that consisted of individuals' inevitable absorption into the host/majority culture by acquiring their customs, attitudes, and behaviors while simultaneously shedding their original culture (Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006; Gordon, 1964; Laroche, 2008). Unlike the unidirectional view, cultural pluralism explains that immigrant groups not only learn and adopt aspects of the host culture, but they are also able to hold on to their cultural heritage (Berry et al., 2006; Phinney, 1990; Mendoza & Martinez, 1981; Mendoza 1989). This perspective allows individuals to identify with more than one culture and to alternate between two cultures because the "acquisition of an alternative culture's values and behaviors need not entail the shedding of the original or local culture's values and behaviors" (Cleveland, 2007).

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Numerous studies propose frameworks of acculturation patterns, such as Mendoza and Martinez's (1981) framework and Berry's (1997) framework. Berry's (1997) framework is based on two dimensions: cultural maintenance and contact/participation. The former refers to the degree to which individuals strive to maintain their culture of origin due to the perceived importance of the home cultural identity, while the latter refers to the degree to which individuals immerse or involve themselves into the host culture. A crossing of these two dimensions yields four acculturation patterns:

- (1) Integration occurs when both cultural maintenance and involvement in the larger society are pursued. They exhibit the behavioral patterns of the host culture, while also maintaining their native cultural identity (Berry et al., 2006; Laroche, 2008).
- (2) Separation/segregation is characterized by a high degree of cultural maintenance and low levels of involvement with the larger society to the extent of involvement avoidance. These individuals reject host culture norms and behaviors, but hold on to their native culture (Berry et al., 2006; Laroche, 2008).
- (3) Assimilation is the inverse of separation in which individuals have a low desire for cultural maintenance but a high preference for involvement in the larger society. Assimilation is usually present in individuals who abandon their ethnic identity in favor of host culture traits (Berry et al., 2006; Cleveland & Laroche, 2007; Laroche, 2008).
- (4) Marginalization occurs when the individual does not seek either cultural maintenance or involvement with the larger society (Berry et al., 2006).

At the consumer level, acculturation is defined as how consumers of one culture interact and are influenced by another culture (Lee & Tse, 1994) and how individuals acquire knowledge, skills, and behaviors appropriate to a consumer culture (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007; Peñaloza, 1994).

Peñaloza's (1994) study of the consumer acculturation of Mexican immigrants in the United States stresses the importance of perceived discrimination in consumer acculturation. Similar to general acculturation patterns, Peñaloza's study lists consumer acculturation outcomes as assimilation, maintenance, resistance, and segregation.

Lee and Tse (1994) explain that consumption exerts less consequential impacts on immigrant lives, allowing individuals to experiment, hence individuals may choose to adopt different acculturation models for different consumption habits. This explanation is in line with Laroche (2008) and Okamura's (1981) theories that the immigrants' perceptions of which communal identities and loyalties are appropriate in a given consumption context may influence the consumption acculturation degree in that given context. Thus, instead of following a specific acculturation pattern, immigrants may adopt a broad spectrum of acculturation patterns for their consumption habits (Lee & Tse, 1994).

For instance, food habits are especially long lasting and change resistant because the habits

themselves are meaningful behaviors of a culture, e.g. rituals (Fieldhouse, 1995; Laroche, 2008). In fact, by preserving home culture food consumption habits or eating the foods they ate at home, immigrants continue to honor their home culture traditions and reaffirm their ties to the culture of origin, whereas local food consumption helps individuals adapt to the host culture. Hence, diet is one of the most conservative and least acculturated aspect of life (Gulick, 1971).

On the other hand, clothing is a socially-conspicuous product category that communicates and creates identity (Chattalas & Harper, 2007). A person's choice of clothing also serves as a cultural expression of his/her style, gender, social class, and nationality (Peñaloza, 1994). Peñaloza's (1994) study of Mexican immigrants in the United States revealed that clothing choice was readily assimilated if American clothing were compatible with the immigrant's previous style of dress.

Given that international migration out of Latin America has rapidly increased during the last-half century (*World Economic and Social Survey*, 2004), researchers have explored and discovered pronounced change in Hispanic consumer behavior pattern due to exposure to a dominant majority culture (Chattalas & Harper, 2007). With the rise of China's economic development, waves of migration destined for Asia have increased. By 2007, more than 15,000 foreign students pursue their educational careers in Taiwan (Directorate-General of Budget Accounting and Statistics, 2007) from which more than 1,000 come from Latin America. This research will look at: how

the consumer behaviors of Latin American student visitors in Taiwan are influenced by the acculturating forces of the Taiwanese culture, how local marketing tactics influence acculturating forces and affect their consumption behaviors, how acculturation patterns vary across different product categories (food and clothing) in different situations, and whether acculturation patterns of Latin American student visitors in Taiwan align with Berry's (1997) proposed patterns of acculturation.

Method

Research Framework

The framework for this research is composed of acculturation influence variables, situational variables, and the marketing tactics variable. The acculturation influence variables are: language, media consumption, social interaction, cosmopolitanism, perceived discrimination, duration of stay, foreign travel experience, home country foreigner acquaintance, companionship during consumption, the salesperson's use of the visitor's home culture language(s), and promotion communication contents, such as advertisements, billboards, in-store displays, packaging, spokespersons, etc.

This study aims to discover how the independent variables influence visitors' preference for host brands and consumption behavior in the host culture, as well as how the visitors' preferences influence purchase intention and consumption behavior. Like other studies, the researcher also tests whether the independent variables influence consumption behavior.

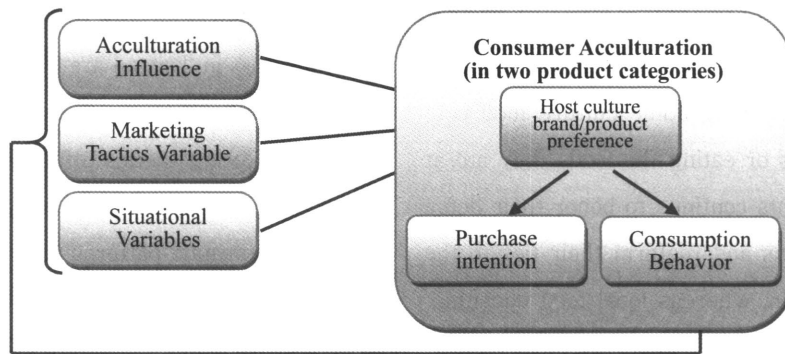


Figure 1. Research Framework

Measurement, Data Collection and Analysis

Based on literature review, the researcher developed questionnaire items for all related variables. The items of this questionnaire are measured in three ways: selection of frequency choices in intervals of 10%, self reported consumption frequencies, and Likert 5-point scales, with 1 representing “strongly disagree” and 5 representing “strongly agree.” The questionnaire was first drafted in English. Upon completion, the questionnaire was translated into Spanish by the researcher (who is a native speaker of Spanish) and back translated by a Latin American student from Guatemala. Web-based surveys employing the snowballing technique were used: respondents were invited via email and the social networking website Facebook and they in turn invited other Latin American foreign students in Taiwan to answer the survey. As an incentive, the researcher included the giveaway of a brand new 1G iPod Shuffle into the survey.

A sample of 98 respondents was reached, but two identified themselves as non-Latin Americans. Hence, a total of 96 valid surveys were collected. The researcher also conducted two

in-depth interviews that allow for acquiring complementary information that will allow for a better interpretation of the survey results.

Once all relevant data were collected, regression analysis is used to determine: the independent variables’ directional relationship with Taiwan brand preference and consumption intention, how brand preferences influence consumption intention, and how consumer acculturation varies between the two product categories. T-test analysis was then used to determine whether consumer acculturation for the two product categories varies. Afterwards, cluster analysis was used to identify the different acculturation patterns of this study, followed by one-way ANOVA to determine how the various patterns differ.

Results

Acculturation Influence Variable Analyses

Survey results indicate that Latin American visitors have low to moderate level of preferences and purchase intention for both Taiwanese food and clothing brands (means of 2.44 and 2.29, respectively; standard deviations of 1.024 and

0.994). Regression analysis and cluster analysis results indicate the following main findings:

- (1) Marketing tactics employing English, Spanish, or Latin elements result in less preference consumption of Taiwanese food products and brands;
- (2) Taiwanese companionship during consumption is positively associated with more preference and consumption of Taiwanese food and clothing brands and products;
- (3) Permanent residence intent and Taiwanese clothing preference and consumption are positively associated;
- (4) Taiwan media exposure is positively associated with Taiwan clothing consumption;
- (5) Cosmopolitanism is negatively associated with Taiwan clothing consumption;
- (6) Duration of stay is discovered to be negatively associated with Taiwan food brand consumption; and
- (7) Perceived discrimination displayed a negative relationship with Taiwan clothing style consumption.

Product Category Analysis

Paired sample T-test was used to verify whether consumption acculturation varied for the two different product categories. Results indicate that consumer acculturation is significantly different for the two products in terms of purchase intention and consumption. Purchase intention and consumption of food products/brands are higher than those of clothing, i.e. consumer acculturation is higher for food products than clothing products. Less clothing

consumption can be that clothes are durable goods and visitors can bring their clothing with them from their home countries. Foods are less durable; even if visitors bring food with them, their supply will soon run out and visitors will have to consume food products from Taiwan, which is why food consumption is higher than clothing consumption.

The researcher believes that past studies have shown that food consumption was less acculturated because they studied immigrants who lived in host cultures in family units. Furthermore, since the visitors studied in this research are students, they live in campus dormitories that do not have kitchens. This justifies less cooking, less consumption of home culture foods, and more consumption of host culture foods.

Cluster Analysis

To determine whether the respondents of this study can be divided in groups that share common properties, hierarchical cluster analysis was first performed. Clusters were classified using acculturation influence variables. Based on the coefficient percentage change of the agglomeration schedule, the researcher decided to generate four clusters. The researcher also grouped the variables into two big dimensions: contact with host culture and contact with home/other cultures. By assigning high and low degrees to the two dimensions, a four sector matrix is created. The four clusters are then plotted onto the matrix based on the respective degrees of host culture contact and home/other culture contact. Since the results are congruent with Berry's

acculturation patterns, the researcher uses said taxonomy to name these clusters.

From the four clusters, the first cluster exhibits high levels of contact with host culture (in terms of language use, media exposure, and social interaction intensity), and low levels of contact with fellow Latin Americans or other foreigners in host culture. Hence, this cluster is called the assimilationist cluster.

The second cluster exhibits extreme high levels of contact with Latin Americans and foreigners, very minimal contact with Taiwanese people, media, and language, and low levels of permanent residence intent. Hence, this cluster is called the separatist cluster.

The third cluster is characterized by the highest contact with the host culture (in terms of language, media, and people interaction), the highest contact with Latin Americans and other cultures, the strongest permanent residence intent, and the highest level of cosmopolitanism. Hence, this cluster is called the integrationist cluster.

The fourth cluster has minimal contact with host culture, little contact with Latin Americans and with other cultures, lower permanent residence intent, and the lowest cosmopolitanism score. Hence, this cluster is called the marginalizationist cluster. The differences of consumer acculturation among the four groups are presented in the following:

(1) Separatists and marginalizationists consume less Taiwanese food and clothing products when they are with non-Taiwanese individuals;

(2) Separatists are most responsive to marketing tactics that employ English, Spanish, or Latin components for both products;

(3) Separatists have the lowest Taiwan food brand preference;

(4) Assimilationists and integrationists have higher intentions of consuming Taiwan foods, whereas separatists and marginalizationists have less intention to try Taiwan foods;

(5) In both food product and brand consumption, assimilationists display the largest mean percentage, with integrationists following in lead, while separatists and marginalizationists display the lowest mean percentage;

(6) Integrationists have the highest consumption percentage for both Taiwanese clothing styles and brands, while separatists have the lowest consumption frequencies.

Based on these analyses results, it is clear that acculturation vary across clusters, with integrationists and assimilationists exhibiting highest levels of consumer acculturation and separatists exhibiting least consumer acculturation.

Discussion

In this study, the researcher discovered that many of acculturation variables mentioned in the previous literature does not exhibit significant relationships with consumer acculturation, although the influencing directions are as expected. Unlike past studies that focused on immigrants' consumer acculturation, this research focuses on visitors, who incorporated themselves

temporarily into the host culture with the intent of returning to their home culture after a certain period of time. Consequently, variables that influenced consumer acculturation on immigrants might have different effects on visitors due to the difference in the nature of their presence in the alternative culture.

For both Taiwan food and clothing preference and consumption, the researcher believes that the context of consumption plays a crucial role. For instance, it appears that being with Taiwanese companions during consumption allow visitors to be more exposed to the Taiwanese consumer culture. The close proximity to and frequent interaction with Taiwanese companions during consumption allow visitors to experience being a member of the Taiwanese consumer culture, thereby increasing Taiwanese food preference and consumption and Taiwan clothing preference. On the contrary, foreign companionship during consumption does not create that identity and might even foster an identity that deliberately segregates itself from the Taiwanese consumer culture identity, resulting in less consumption of Taiwanese clothing products.

Food

The researcher found duration of stay to be marginally negatively associated with Taiwan food consumption ($p < 0.097$). It seems that with increased time in Taiwan, visitors may experience a reinforced perception of the great difference between Taiwanese and Latin American cuisine and eating habits. Visitors may even experience an increased nostalgia for home

country foods, hence decreasing their consumption of Taiwanese foods.

On the other hand, it appears that when visitors have an increased preference for marketing tactics that employ English/Spanish mechanisms, a decrease in Taiwanese food product/brand consumption occurs. It is possible that Latin American visitors might expect brands that employ English/Spanish elements in their marketing tactics to be foreign brands, hence when local brands employ these marketing tactics, they will not be motivated to consume the products/brands, much less prefer them.

Clothing

Clothing is an expression of personal style and identity. A person's identity, i.e. self perception, and consequently his/her style of clothing are relatively fixed for most adults. According to these visitor interviews, Taiwanese clothing styles are very different from the American styles visitors frequently see at home. This phenomenon combined with their specific style preferences lead them to withdraw from consuming clothing in Taiwan. We found that permanent residence intent positively associated with Taiwanese clothing brand preference and consumption. Hence, the researcher infer that visitors who decide to reside permanently in Taiwan will be more open to different styles and are likely to increase participation in the host culture, thereby embracing Taiwanese styles and brands gradually.

This research discovered cosmopolitanism, i.e. the individual's willingness to engage with

different cultures plus his/her level of competence toward other cultures, to be negatively associated with Taiwan clothing brand consumption. Cleveland and Laroche's study (2007) reveal that individuals who have the qualities of cosmopolitanism are more acculturated to the global consumer culture. In fact, student interviewees prefer to consume global brands that are well known in global market, rather than Taiwanese brands. Hence, the more cosmopolitan one is the less Taiwanese clothing brand one will consume.

In terms of perceived discrimination, if visitors perceive themselves to be treated negatively or unfairly as a result of their ethnic background, they will react in the same way towards the host culture, i.e. be less receptive or non-receptive to the host culture. If discrimination is perceived, visitors may seek to increase cultural maintenance and affirm their own ethnicity, while withdrawing from host culture contact, both of which entail less consumption of Taiwanese clothing styles.

Product Comparison

Consumption and purchase intention of Taiwanese clothing style and brands are much lower than those of food products and brands. This reflects the highly visible, value-expressing, and conspicuous nature of clothing and its role in consumer acculturation. Because visitors possess the need to maintain and express their identity, acculturation for the highly visible and value expressing clothing is to a much lesser degree than the non-value loaded action of food

consumption.

In this study, not only do visitors express a high degree of willingness to consume Taiwan food products, but they also consume larger amounts of food/beverage products and brands. This finding is relatively different from past studies, in which immigrants use food consumption as links to their home culture by preserving their old consumption habits. The researcher believes that past studies (Fieldhouse, 1995; Gullick, 1971) researched immigrants who lived in host cultures in family units. Unlike those studies, this research studies visitors who are not accompanied by their family members in Taiwan, thereby leading to less cooking opportunities, i.e. less practice of rituals concerning foods.

Acculturation Patterns

The researcher discovered that the four acculturation patterns proposed by Berry (1997) are also found among Latin American visitors in Taiwan.

According to analyses results, contact with home and other culture individuals during purchase do not seem to have a deterring effect on integrationists and assimilationists for food product consumption. Separatists are responsive to marketing tactics employing Spanish/English/Latin components, whereas assimilationists are least responsive to such marketing tactics. It is possible that marketing tactics using Spanish/English/Latin elements invoke a sense of familiarity for separatists who have a strong desire to maintain contact with their home culture, thereby exerting a higher effect on these

individuals, resulting in their higher consumption of food and clothing products employing these tactics. Since assimilationists desire to become part of the host culture, these marketing tactics do not invoke the same sense of familiarity. In fact, they may even serve as a signal of non-local identity, thereby resulting in their unwillingness to consume such products.

Relative to its counterparts, separatists display the lowest level of consumer acculturation. In other words, these individuals seek to maintain their own cultural heritage and refrain from contact with the Taiwanese (host) culture, resulting in the least preference, purchase intention, and actual consumption of Taiwanese clothing and food products/brands. Assimilationists and integrationists display the highest level consumer acculturation for both food and clothing products. These two groups have the highest purchase intention, Taiwan brand preference, and consumption behavior for food brands and clothing styles and brands. Food product consumption is significantly higher for assimilationists.

Contribution to Academia and Future Research Suggestions

Unlike past researches of consumer acculturation that deals with acculturation influence variables and situational variables only, this research studies how marketing tactics by host culture products and brands affect visitors' brand preference, purchase intention, and consumption behavior. This research depicts a more comprehensive picture of influence of consumer acculturation by combining all the three sets of

influences.

By integrating the acculturation pattern and influence factors, this research provides a contingency framework for multinational companies to plan marketing strategies. For instance, individuals who display a strong need to maintain their cultural heritage, marketing tactics that are reminiscent of the home culture may increase the visitors' preference and consumption of host culture brands/products; but for individuals who do not have that strong desire of cultural maintenance, the employment of such marketing tactics will in fact lead to less preference and consumption of host culture brands/products.

This study provides further evidence of Berry's acculturation patterns. Future research may expand on this and discover whether the same relationship occurs in other countries and ethnicities. In addition, language did not appear to be associated with consumer acculturation in this study. This could be a result of the product categories studied. If products in which language is crucial for understanding, such as music, movies, or books, language may present a significant relationship with the consumer acculturation of those specific products. Hence, future research can expand into different product categories.

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