

THE INFLUENCE OF HISPANIC TEENAGERS ON PURCHASE DECISIONS: CROSSCULTURAL AND GENDER DIFFERENCES

SALIL TALPADE, State University of West Georgia
MEDHA TALPADE, Clark Atlanta University

A cross cultural comparison between Hispanic and Anglo-American teenagers in terms of their influence on product purchases was conducted in this study. Results revealed that Hispanic teenagers had lower levels of influence than their Anglo-American counterparts, on the purchase of durable items for the family, but their influence was similar on the purchase of durable items for themselves. Hispanic males had higher levels of influence than Hispanic females on the purchase of products for the family but lower levels of influence on the purchase of groceries. There were no differences between Hispanic females and Anglo-American females on the purchase of groceries although Anglo-American females had higher levels of influence on the purchase of durable family items. There were also no differences between Hispanic and Anglo-American males in terms of products bought for the family.

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Hispanic population, currently estimated at 28.6 million, has been growing rapidly in recent years. This increase is expected to continue into the future, with a 37% increase (from 25.5 million to 34.9 million) from 1995-2005. By the year 2010, the Census Bureau reports, this group will number roughly 40 million, which will make it about the same size as the African-American population. Industry experts estimate that the purchasing power of overall Hispanic community is currently \$228 million and will swell to \$400 billion in less than four years. Marketers have begun to recognize the importance of this emerging segment and have directed media campaigns and developed products targeted at Hispanics. For example, Coke, Pepsi, Allstate, Nationsbank, etc. have developed specific commercials targeted at Hispanics and Campbell soup has introduced a Mexican chili-pepper soup.

At the same time, a combination of various social and demographic factors has led to a significant increase in the amount of teenager influence in family decision-making in the general population. This increase has been documented by several market research agencies (e.g., Teenage Research Unlimited in Andreoli 1996; and Lester Rand Inc. in Oberndorf 1997). Teens in the U.S. currently spend about \$100 billion a year on products purchased for themselves, and play an increasingly important role in shaping family purchases. By some estimates, teenagers influence more than \$256 billion in purchases (Redhead 1997). Marketers have recognized the importance of teenagers and are designing promotional campaigns and products aimed at them (e.g., Polaroid has developed the "Cool Cam" with teenagers in mind, and Mastercard, Sears, Seven-Up, and Heinz and many others have developed commercials specifically aimed at teenagers).

Several academic studies have been published on teenager influence in family decisions. Most of these have focused mainly on the nature of their influence in family purchase decisions (e.g., Belch, Belch and Ceresino 1985; Foxman, Tansuhaj, and Ekstrom

1989a and 1989b; Palan and Wilkes 1997), the effects of social and demographic variables (e.g., Lackman and Lanasa 1993; Beatty and Talpade 1994), and methodological issues (e.g., Mangleburg 1989; Talpade and Talpade 1995; Bosma, Jackson, Zijsling and Zani 1996).

On the other hand, there has been very little research done on Hispanic teenagers and their influence on product purchases. Most studies investigating Hispanic household decision-making have mainly focused on husband-wife roles in the decision process and on a cross-cultural comparison of such roles (Huszagh and Murphy 1982; Imperia, O'Guinn, and MacAdams 1985; O'Guinn, Imperia, and MacAdams 1987; and Webster 1994).

This paper seeks to extend and this stream of research by focusing on Hispanic teenagers and providing a cross cultural comparison of teenager influence in Hispanic and Anglo-American teenagers. Measurement and methodological issues are discussed, and hypotheses are developed based on cross-cultural and gender comparisons. Data was collected using a sample of Hispanic and Anglo-American teenagers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Most early studies of household purchase decision-making focused on the relative influence of husbands, wives, and children on various product categories, in terms of decision stages and subdecisions (e.g., Berey and Pollay 1968; Szybillo and Sosanie 1977; Atkin 1978; Nelson 1979; Filiatraut and Ritchie 1980; and Roberts, Wortzel and Berkeley 1981). A few recent studies have focused more on teenagers (e.g., Belch, Belch, and Ceresino 1985; Foxman, Tansuhaj, and Ekstrom 1989a and 1989b; Lackman and Lanasa 1993; Beatty and Talpade 1994; Palan and Wilkes 1997), and on resolving some of the conceptual and methodological problems present in this area of research (e.g., Mangleburg 1989; Talpade and Talpade 1995; Bosma, Jackson, Zijsling and Zani 1996).

In summary, these studies have concluded that children's influence varies by the type of purchase decision, as well as by decision stages and subdecisions. Children have a higher influence on purchase decisions affecting them, but their influence is lower on issues involving how much to spend, where to buy, and at the final decision stage of the buying process (Szybillo and Sosanie 1977; Nelson 1979; Belch, Belch, and Ceresino 1985; Beatty and Talpade 1994). Their influence on major purchase decisions increases with age (Szybillo and Sosanie 1977; Filiatraut and Ritchie 1980; Jenkins 1979; and Darley and Lim 1986; Palan and Wilkes 1997) and with perceived product importance (Beatty and Talpade 1994). Older teenagers, teenagers who are employed longer hours outside the home, and teenagers in single-parent households have higher levels of influence on grocery trips (Talpade, Beatty, and Talpade 1993). Children's perceptions of their influence usually do not match their parents' perceptions of this influence, with children seeing their role as more important than parents do (Belch, Belch, and Ceresino 1985; Kim, Lee and Hall 1991; Beatty and Talpade 1994).

In terms of marital roles in decision-making in Hispanic households, and a cross-cultural comparison of these roles, studies have shown that Hispanic families tend to have a more traditional role orientation. Imperia, O'Guinn, and MacAdams (1985), found that Hispanic families tend to be more husband dominant in decisions regarding major purchases while Anglo-American families tend to be more joint decision oriented. Huszagh and Murphy (1982) found a negative relationship between income and the influence of the husband, while O'Guinn, Imperia, and MacAdams (1987) found that Hispanic wives' perceptions of equality in decision-making related positively to acculturation. Webster (1994), studied it from the point of view of ethnic identification and found significant differences among households with strong Hispanic ethnic identification in most of the decision stages for a variety of product categories. A significant positive relationship was also revealed between ethnic identification and husband dominance in decision-making.

METHODOLOGY

The sample for this study consisted of 123 Hispanic and 128 Anglo-American high school seniors from the San Antonio area. These teenagers were contacted through their schools and answered the questionnaires while in school. Although a total of 172 teenagers of Hispanic origin were surveyed, 49 were classified as low in terms of Hispanic ethnic identification and were therefore not included in this analysis.

A high level of ethnic identification was used to categorize teenagers as "Hispanic" in this study because households in the U.S. Hispanic population have different levels of acculturation, depending on their length of stay in the U.S., their education levels, social class, and income, and the geographic areas in which they live. Since such acculturation translates into similarities in consumer behavior with the dominant Anglo-American culture, researchers (e.g., Webster 1994) have found that the most appropriate way to categorize a person as Hispanic is to use a measure of ethnic identification.

Ethnic identity is related to the extent to which an individual relates to the ethnic subgroup, including a sense of common customs, language, religion, values, morality, and etiquette. Although several objective and subjective measures have been used in the literature, two of these measures, language spoken at home, and Hirshman's (1981) self-identification measure, have been judged to be the most appropriate, given the nature of the Hispanic subculture. Webster (1994), finding a high correlation between the extent to which Spanish was spoken at home and Hirshman's self identification measure, used the language spoken at home as a surrogate measure of ethnic identification. Using the same rationale, this study also used the extent to which Spanish was spoken at home as the primary measure of Hispanic ethnic identification.

In terms of the household decision-making process, previous research has suffered from several conceptual and measurement problems (Mangleburg 1989). Beatty and Talpade (1994), and Talpade and

Talpade (1995), attempted to resolve some of these problems by conceptualizing teenager influence as "the extent to which he/she has engaged in various acts or activities which have contributed to each of the stages of the decision process", and by developing a multi-item measure of such influence. This multi-item measure consists of a 9-item scale which measures influence on two perceived decision stages initiation and final decision.

The present study used this 9-item scale to measure the relative contribution of teenagers in the purchase of durable items for the family and for themselves. Relative contribution was measured in terms of nine decision-making activities (Table 1) on a 7-point response scale ranging from "I did not contribute at all" to "The entire contribution was mine". Respondents were first asked to check those products which were purchased in the past year from a list of products adopted from Beatty and Talpade (1994). They were then asked to indicate which of these products was purchased most recently and to answer the influence questions in terms of this most recently purchased product. The following products were included in the list - a T.V., a V.C.R., a stereo system/component, a telephone, an answering machine, and furniture. This list had been developed by Beatty and Talpade (1994) based on previous studies and pilot studies with teenagers. Respondents were required to go through this procedure for two purchase decisions - a durable family purchase and a durable teenager purchase.

TABLE 1
Items in the Influence Scales

Initiation Stage:
(1) Bringing up the idea to buy the product.
(2) Getting people to realize that this product was needed.
(3) Realizing that the product would be useful to have.
(4) Getting others to start thinking about buying the product.
Decision Stage:
(1) Visiting the store(s) to look for different brands/models of the product.
(2) Examining different brands/models of the product at the store(s).
(3) Picking up the product from the store.
(4) Deciding on the brand/model that was finally purchased.
(5) Deciding on which store to actually buy the product from.

Teenager influence on grocery items was also measured using a scale developed by Talpade Beatty and Talpade (1993). This scale measured influence on grocery purchases on the bases of responses to questions concerning who actually made the ten most recent trips to the grocery store. Response choices included: the teenager alone, the teenager along with some other family member(s), or some other family member(s). Responses to these items were weighted and then summed together to obtain estimates of influence on grocery trips.

HYPOTHESES

As mentioned previously, most studies on husband-wife roles in purchase decision-making among Hispanic families have found a positive relationship between ethnic identification and husband dominance in decision-making for major purchases, and between the wives' perceptions of equality in decision-making and the level of acculturation.

These findings showed that the traditional sex role orientations found in Hispanic-American families by previous cross-cultural researchers also extended to the area of purchase decision-making. Murillo (1971) found that the Hispanic-American subculture not only adheres to a very traditional sex-role orientation, but is particularly resistant to change. In this subculture, male-female relations are based on strongly-held beliefs in the superiority (biological, intellectual, psychological, and social) of the male. The female is socialized to be a mother and a wife and her social relationships and duties are confined to the home (Gonzalez 1982).

Some of the early studies on Anglo-American family purchase decision-making (e.g., Bernhardt 1974, Davis and Rigaux 1974) also found that a traditional sex-role orientation existed in Anglo-American families at that period in time. They confirmed that such an orientation lead to a high degree of specialization of influence based on the kinds of products purchased (for example, the husband was the dominant influence on products such as insurance, automobiles, and television, whereas the wife had more influence on the purchase of products

associated with the homemaker role such as appliances, groceries, and cleaning products), the husbands were also likely to be the dominant influence on the more important decisions (i.e., price and the final decision to buy) whereas the wives had more influence on minor decisions like color and suggesting the purchase.

These aspects are in sharp contrast to the current trends towards shared responsibilities, which represent a blurring of the traditional gender roles found in the modern Anglo-American culture. Woodside and Motes (1979) and Park (1982), did a comparative study of how these changes have affected family decision-making roles in Anglo-American families, and found a significant move towards either joint or egalitarian roles in the decision-making process for most products and in most decision phases.

Assuming that the family role orientations in purchase decision-making extend to the teenagers in both Hispanic-American and Anglo-American households, we would expect to find a traditional role orientation in the influence of Hispanic teenagers and a modern role orientation in the influence of Anglo-American teenagers on purchase decisions. These role orientations are likely to lead to significant cross-cultural and gender differences in influence.

In terms of durable products purchased for the household, Beatty and Talpade (1994) found some gender differences in the amount of influence even in Anglo-American teenagers. Males tended to have marginally higher levels of influence on durable family purchases. Keeping in mind the Hispanic cultural orientations towards traditional gender roles, and the dominance of males in most important purchase decisions, it would seem logical to assume that male Hispanic teenagers will have higher levels of influence on durable products purchased for the family. Our first hypothesis therefore was as follows:

H₁: Male Hispanic teenagers will have higher levels of influence on the decision-making process for durable items purchased for family use than will female Hispanic teenagers.

Further, given the patterns of influence in families with a traditional role orientation, it would seem logical to assume that teenagers in such families are probably not going to have as much power and influence over purchase decision-making as teenagers in households with modern role orientations. This would mean that Hispanic teenagers overall might not have as much influence in the purchase decision-making as Anglo-American teenagers, and that these differences will also be apparent in gender specific terms, with male Hispanic teenagers having lower levels of influence than male Anglo-American teenagers and female Hispanic teenagers having lower levels of influence than female Hispanic teenagers. Our second hypothesis was therefore in three parts as follows:

- H_{2(a)}: Hispanic teenagers overall will have lower levels of influence in the decision-making process for durable items purchased for family use than will Anglo-American teenagers.
- H_{2(b)}: Male Hispanic teenagers will have lower levels of influence on the decision-making process for durable items purchased for family use than will male Anglo-American teenagers.
- H_{2(c)}: Female Hispanic teenagers will have lower levels of influence on the decision-making process for durable items purchased for family use than will female Anglo-American teenagers.

The other aspect of a traditional role orientation is gender specific roles and dominance on the purchase of products associated with that role. Females living in households with such orientations are more likely to have an influence on products traditionally associated with the feminine role, such as groceries. This has been found to be true even in the general population. For example, Hauser (1986) reported that in a national sample of 1,079 teenage girls surveyed, more than half said they did the weekly grocery shopping for their family. Talpade, Beatty and Talpade (1993), in studying Anglo-American

teenagers, found that female teenagers had higher levels of influence on groceries than male teenagers. Our third and fourth hypotheses were therefore based upon these differences in the role of females within the Hispanic subculture and across the two cultures.

- H₃: Female Hispanic teenagers will have higher levels of influence on grocery purchases than male Hispanic Teenagers.
- H₄: Female Hispanic teenagers will have higher levels of influence on grocery purchases than female Anglo-American teenagers.

Some studies have also found that teenagers from different cultures and different countries in fact tend to be more similar to each other than are their parents when it comes to purchasing products for themselves (Fortune 1993; Redhead 1997). These similarities have been attributed to similarities in teenager lifestyles resulting from a globalization of the marketplace with global brands and marketing strategies. This similarity is most likely to be manifested in terms of influence on durable products which the teenagers buy for themselves. Our fifth hypothesis was therefore as follows:

- H₅: There will be no differences in the amount of influence, on the purchase of durable products bought for themselves, between Hispanic and Anglo-American teenagers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A t-test was used to test the first hypothesis and to compare the differences in means between Hispanic males and females in terms of their influence on the purchase of durable items for the family. The results indicated a significant difference ($\alpha \leq .05$) between the two groups in the amount of influence they had on the purchase of durable items purchased for the family, at both stages of the decision process, initiation and final decision.

These results, supporting the hypothesis, would seem to indicate that the traditional role orientations observed in Hispanic husband-wife decision-making

do extend to the teenagers, at least in terms of their influence on durable family purchases.

The three parts of the second hypothesis comparing cross-cultural differences in overall terms and in gender specific terms were also tested using t-tests. The results showed that Hispanic teenagers overall had significantly ($\alpha \leq .05$) lower levels of influence than Anglo-American teenagers in terms of influence on durable family purchases, at both stages of the decision process. Hispanic females also had significantly ($\alpha \leq .05$) lower levels of influence than Anglo-American females, at both stages of the decision process. However, there were no significant differences between Hispanic males and Anglo-American males at the initiation stage of the decision process and the influence of Hispanic males was only marginally lower ($\alpha \leq .10$) than that of Anglo-American males at the purchase stage of the decision process. The first and third part of this hypothesis was therefore supported while the second was not.

These results seem to indicate that the overall differences in influence were mainly because of the differences in the influence of Hispanic females, in terms of influence at both the stages of the decision process. Overall, the results do provide further support for the existence of a traditional sex role orientation in Hispanic households with lower levels of female influence in important purchase decisions. The effects of male dominance in important purchase decisions seem to overwhelm the tendency to give lesser power and influence in general to children in traditional households. Hence we find very few cross cultural differences in terms of the influence of males, with Hispanic male teenagers having almost as much influence on durable purchase decisions as Anglo-American male teenagers.

T-tests, were also used to test the third and fourth hypothesis, and to compare the differences in means between male and female Hispanic teenagers, and between female Hispanic and Anglo-American teenagers, in terms of their influence on grocery purchases. The results supported the third hypothesis, showing that female Hispanic teenagers had significantly higher levels of influence than male

Hispanic teenagers. However, there were no significant differences between female Hispanic teenagers and female Anglo-American teenagers. The fourth hypothesis therefore was not supported.

The results of the test of the third hypothesis serve to provide more support for the existence of a traditional role orientation in Hispanic households. However the results of the fourth hypothesis seem to imply that there is still somewhat of a traditional role orientation, at least in terms of grocery purchases, even in Anglo-American households. Female teenagers in these households still have high levels of influence on products, such as groceries, associated with the female role. These results are also in keeping with earlier findings which showed that more than half of female teenagers in the nation did the weekly grocery shopping for their families (Hauser 1987), and that female Anglo-American teenagers had higher levels of influence on grocery purchase than males (Talpade, Beatty and Talpade 1993). Perhaps the differences in female teenager influence might be more apparent if the Anglo-American teenagers were also categorized on the bases of traditional vs. modern role orientations.

The fifth and final hypothesis concerning the differences in influence on durable products purchased for themselves was also tested using t-tests. The results supported the hypothesis, showing that there were no differences in influence between Hispanic and Anglo-American teenagers in terms of these products, at both stages of the decision process. Further t-tests, comparing influence in gender specific terms also showed no differences in influence. The mean levels of influence in all cases were fairly high.

These results would seem to support the argument that when there is a high level of involvement on the part of the teenagers, as there would be in the case of durable products bought for themselves, then that involvement overshadows any cultural or gender differences.

CONCLUSION

U.S. marketers spent less than \$300 million targeting Hispanics in 1997. This was a fairly small percentage of their total spending on promotions (\$160 billion). However, this trend is rapidly changing. Marketers are realizing that the increase in the U.S. Hispanic population and in their spending power makes it essential for marketers to better understand and target this segment. The North American Free Trade Agreement (N.A.F.T.A.) has also resulted in a tremendous increase in the marketing activities of U.S. firms in Mexico. An understanding of cross cultural differences and research on the influence of Hispanic household members on purchase decisions is therefore a priority for marketers.

This study provides at least an initial perspective into this issue. The results presented here provide support for the existence of a traditional sex-role orientation in teenagers in Hispanic households. This traditional sex role orientation translates into some very definite cultural differences between Hispanic and Anglo-American teenagers in their level of influence on purchase decisions.

Hispanic teenagers had lower levels of influence than did their Anglo-American counterparts on the purchase of durable items for the family, but their influence was similar on the purchase of durable items for themselves. Hispanic males had higher levels of influence than Hispanic females on the purchase of products for the family but lower levels of influence on the purchase of groceries. There were no differences between Hispanic females and Anglo-American females in their influence on the purchase of groceries purchases although Anglo-American females had higher levels of influence on the purchase of durable family products. There were also no differences between Hispanic and Anglo-American males in terms of products bought for the family.

These findings have significant implications for product development and promotions of products targeted at the Hispanic segment. For example,

marketing managers would place lower emphasis on teenagers in the Hispanic segment than on their Anglo-American counterparts in terms of the development and promotions of products targeted at the family, and male Hispanic teenagers would be given higher emphasis than females in terms of family purchases. Teenage females in general, however, should be considered an important segment for grocery products. And finally, for teenager products, there should be fewer differences in terms of products and promotional programs between Hispanic and Anglo-American teenagers.

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