

A MULTIVARIATE STATISTICAL APPROACH TO SOCIALIZATION AND CONSUMER ACTIVITIES OF YOUNG ADULTS: A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF ETHNIC GROUPS IN AMERICA

NITISH SINGH, California State University, Chico

MIKE C.H. CHAO, Baruch College, CUNY

IK-WHAN G. KWON, Saint Louis University

A model is proposed and tested showing how social structural variables and socialization agents impact the consumer activities of diverse ethnic young adults. Based on survey responses from 89 African Americans, 69 Asian Americans, 82 Caucasian Americans, and 52 Hispanics, the results show that the consumer activities of different ethnic groups are influenced by different socialization variables. Implications for marketers include the need to be aware of how the consumer socialization of young adults differs that from adolescents. In addition, marketers need to use different socialization agents when targeting different ethnic groups.

INTRODUCTION

The 2000 Census reveals that America today is both demographically and ethnically a very diverse society. One of the emerging consumer segments in America is the young adult population (ages: 22-34), which constitutes approximately 51 million consumers. More than 34 percent of these young adult consumers belong to different ethnic groups, with 17 percent Hispanic, 13 percent African American and five percent Asian American (U.S. Census 2000). Together they represent a major consumer segment with significant buying power and are widely recognized as Generation X (Mitchell 1999). Thus, it is in the interest of marketers to understand and effectively target this segment of the population. However, in the marketing literature little research has been done to explore how this ethnically diverse young adult segment seeks market information and develops consumption-related skills (Bush et al. 1999). The broad objective of this study is to explore how various socialization influences impact the acquisition of consumption-related

skills by ethnically diverse young adult consumers with the consumer socialization framework being used as the major research foundation. A multivariate statistical model is used to achieve our objective.

It is increasingly being recognized in the consumer socialization literature that consumption-related skills are important for young consumers to adequately process market information, make informed buying decisions and effectively respond to marketing stimuli (Moschis and Moore 1979; Mangleburg and Bristol 1998; Clark et al. 2001). Previous research has explored how socialization influences impact acquisition of consumption-related skills among children and adolescents (Moschis and Churchill 1978; Moschis 1981; Shim 1996; Mangleburg and Bristol 1998; Singh et al. 2003), but has not investigated how acquisition of consumption-related skills among ethnically diverse young adults takes place, even though the literature suggests that consumer socialization is a continuous process that evolves throughout the lifetime of an individual and differs between ethnic groups (Moschis and Churchill 1978; Moschis and Moore 1979; Smith and Moschis 1985;

Moschis 1987; Singh et al. 2003). Thus, this study specifically explores how socialization influences impact consumer activities, a specific consumption-related skill, of Asian American, African American, Hispanic and Caucasian American young adults.

BACKGROUND LITERATURE

Consumer socialization is the process by which individuals develop consumption-related skills, knowledge and attitudes throughout their lifetime (Moschis and Churchill 1978; Moschis 1981 and 1987). Researchers in the field have used the consumer socialization perspective to study various facets of consumer behavior among children and adolescents (for a detailed review see John 1999). Specifically studies have looked into how consumer socialization impacts children and adolescent learning of consumption-related skills such as attitude towards advertising (Mangleburg and Bristol 1998; Bush et al. 1999), market place knowledge (Clark et al. 2001) and decision-making styles (Moschis and Moore 1979; Shim 1996). In this study, we specifically focus on how the consumer socialization process impacts the participation of ethnic young adults in consumer activities.

Moschis and Churchill (1978) define consumer activities as activities that relate to effective (socially desirable) consumer behavior. More recently Palan (1998) refined this definition by adding “the frequency of engaging in rational and efficient consumer activities” (pg. 341). Thus, consumer activity basically explains how sophisticated the consumer is in terms of making rational and informed consumption-related decisions. Studying the consumer activities of young adults is important because to be an effective consumer it is not enough to just understand the role of money in the exchange process, it is also important to learn a wide variety of shopping skills like comparing prices, seeking market information and retail store knowledge and evaluating different brands (John 1999). Consumer activity enables consumers to be aware of marketing practices

and effectively interact with the market place. From the public policy point of view, it is important that young adults, specifically those from ethnically diverse backgrounds, learn consumption-related skills that can help them to function as knowledgeable consumers. However, little research has been done to study the socialization process among ethnic young adult consumers (e.g., Bush et al. 1999), even though ethnicity has been widely recognized as an important segmentation variable in marketing (Hirschman 1981; Donthu and Cherian 1992 and 1994; Cui 1997 and 2001; Appiah 2001). Some studies have even proposed that socialization influences will vary across ethnic groups (Moschis 1987; Delener and Neelankavil 1990; Bush et al. 1999; Kim and Kang 2001; Singh et al. 2003), but a comprehensive and comparative analysis of socialization’s impact on consumer activities among ethnic young adults has not been completed. Thus, using the consumer socialization framework, we explore the impact of socialization on the consumer activities of two under-researched consumer groups, namely young adults (ages: 22-34) and ethnic groups in America.

CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION

Most socialization research stems from two basic models of human learning, the cognitive developmental model and the social learning model (Moschis and Churchill 1978). The premise of the cognitive developmental model is that learning is basically a cognitive-psychological process of adapting to a dynamic social environment throughout an individual’s lifetime (Moschis and Moore 1979; Moschis 1987). Based on this approach, socialization is a life long process that continues beyond adolescence well into maturity. In fact, there have been some studies that have explored socialization issues among adults and the elderly (Smith and Moschis 1985; Moschis 1987; Bush et al. 1999). It has been proposed that the cognitive developmental model is useful in predicting individual’s knowledge and ability to function as an effective consumer (Moschis and Churchill 1978).

In contrast to the cognitive developmental model, the social learning model views learning as a process, wherein individual develops attitudes and beliefs through constant interaction with the external social environment (Moschis and Churchill 1978; Bush et al. 1999). Based on this approach, individuals learn consumption-related skills with the help of socialization agents like family, peers and media and the social environment in which they are located (social class, gender, education and race).

The learning of consumption-related skills (consumer activities) among young adults can be seen as both a social learning process and a cognitive developmental process of adjusting to the young adult stage of the lifetime. According to Moschis and Moore (1979), both of these approaches complement each other and effectively explain the effect of consumer socialization on consumer learning. Thus, we use both approaches as the basis for our study. Based on the cognitive developmental model, we incorporate the lifetime position (young adults) variable in our study, and using the social learning theory we incorporate socialization agents, social structural variables and consumer learning properties (consumer activities) as a part of our model.

In addition to using the above two theories as a basis for this study it is also proposed to use the theory of interpersonal susceptibility (Refer: Bearden et al. 1989). According to this theory, there are normative and informative interpersonal influences that impact how we socialize and learn from the environment. Normative influences involve a desire to conform to the expectations of the people in a group (Bearden et al. 1989; Mascarenhas and Higby 1993), while informative influences involve "a tendency to learn about products and brands by observing others and seeking information from others" (Bearden et al. 1989, pg. 474). Thus, interpersonal influences are received from socialization agents either by observing or by conforming to their behavior (Mascarenhas and Higby 1993).

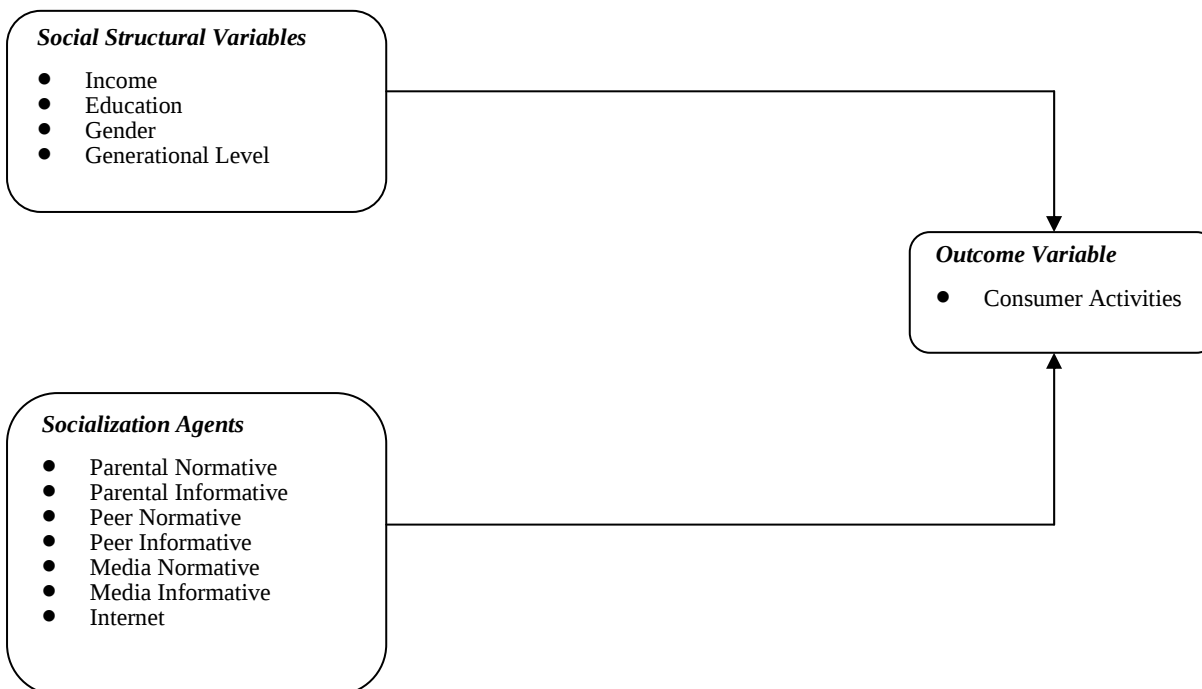
Based on the cognitive developmental model, social learning model and the theory of interpersonal susceptibility, we propose to study consumer socialization and consumer activities of ethnic young adults on three main sets of variables. (1) Social structural variables: income, education, gender and generational level of ethnic young adults. (2) Socialization agents: examined in the study include parent, peer and media normative and informative influences and the influence of the Internet. (3) Outcome variable: include the consumption-related skills learned from the socialization process. In this study we explore the impact of socialization process on consumer activities of ethnic young adults as proposed in Figure 1.

HYPOTHESES

Socialization Agents

Parents: Studies have shown that parents and family communication have a significant impact on the development of children's consumption-related skills (Ward 1974; Moschis and Moore 1979; Moschis 1981; John 1999; Rose et al. 2003). Among adolescents parents are also seen as an important consumer socialization agent. In fact, Moschis and Moore (1979) found that adolescents prefer parents twice as much as other socialization agents as a source of consumer information. Parental socialization helps the development of utilitarian motivations for consumption among teens (Churchill and Moschis 1979; Moschis 1987; Shim 1996; Mangleburg and Bristol 1998). Furthermore, the role of parents changes as children mature, from being a disciplinarian to a counselor to a friend (Moschis 1987). As adolescents mature they are more susceptible to informative influences than normative influences when making consumption-related decisions (Moschis 1987; Mascarenhas and Higby 1993). Thus, it can be proposed that the consumer activities of ethnic young adults will be impacted more by informative parental influence than by normative parental influence. Accordingly, the following hypothesis will be examined.

FIGURE 1
A Conceptual Model of the Impact of Consumer Socialization
on Young Adults' Consumer Activities



H₁: Normative parental influence will be negatively related to the consumer activities of ethnic young adults and informative parental influence will be positively related to the consumer activities of ethnic young adults.

Peers: There is a significant body of evidence in the consumer socialization literature showing the positive impact of peer influence on the expressive and affective aspects of consumption among children and adolescents (Moschis and Churchill 1978; Mascarenhas and Higby 1993; John 1999). However, little research exists as to how, with increasing age, peer influence impacts consumer learning (John 1999). In the marketing literature most of the studies regarding peer influence among adults are about reference groups in the context of purchasing situations and not from the socialization perspective (Moschis 1987). Although there is some evidence to suggest that peer influence among adults positively impacts consumption-related skills like attitudes toward

advertising (Bush et al. 1999). It has also been shown that as adolescents mature they use peer influence more as a source of market knowledge to critically evaluate advertising and market information (Moschis 1987) and rely less on normative peer influences (Mangleburg and Bristol 1998). Thus, it is proposed that normative peer influence will have a negative impact on consumer activities and informative peer influence will have a positive impact on the consumer activities of ethnic young adults.

H₂: Normative peer influence will be negatively related to the consumer activities of ethnic young adults and informative peer influence will be positively related to the consumer activities of ethnic young adults.

Media: Studies have shown that media strongly influence consumer skills and consumption among youth (Moschis and Churchill 1978; Delener and Neelankavil 1990; Mascarenhas and Higby 1993; Mangleburg and Bristol

1998). However, little is known about the role of media influence in adult socialization (Moschis 1987). Some studies have shown that media is used as a source for marketplace information and is instrumental in developing skeptical attitudes toward ads and teens use media more as an informative sources of influence than as a normative source of influence (Mascarenhas and Higby 1993; Mangleburg and Bristol 1998). Thus, based on the limited evidence it is hypothesized:

H₃: Normative media influence will negatively impact the consumer activities of ethnic young adults and informative media influence will positively impact the consumer activities of ethnic young adults.

The Internet: Peterson and Merino (2003) propose that some consumers may consciously modify their information search behavior to take advantage of the Internet's benefits, while other consumers may unconsciously modify their information search behavior in response to the Internet, whereas still others may not modify or change their information search behavior at all. There is some evidence to show that young adults are using the Internet as a significant source of market information. For example, a survey by Opinion Research Corporation found 67 percent of young adults in America use the Internet to gather key market information, compared to the national average of 46 percent (Pastore 2002). Thus, the Internet will help young adults to gather market information and develop rationale and efficient shopping behaviors.

H₄: Internet usage will be positively related to the consumer activities of ethnic young adults

Social Structural Variables

Education: In the socialization literature education has been shown to help young consumers learn economic competence and function as good citizens (Moschis and Churchill 1978). In the case of young adults,

little is known about the effect of education on their socialization, although consumer behavior research suggests that education helps the development of consumer cognitions and skills (Moschis 1987). Thus, it is hypothesized:

H₅: Education level will positively impact the consumer activities of ethnic young adults.

Generational level: There exists little research on the role of generational level on consumer socialization and consumer learning. Studies have investigated the role of acculturation on socialization and development of consumption-related skills (Lee 1993; Ownbey and Horridge 1997). It has been shown that acculturating individuals wanting to adjust to a new environment actively seek market information and develop critical consumption-related skills, but when they get more acculturated they tend to develop predictable shopping habits and brand loyalty. Thus, young adults of the first generation who are still acculturating will show more consumer activism compared to young adults of latter generations.

H₆: Generational level will negatively impact the consumer activities of ethnic young adults.

Gender: Little research exists on the impact of gender on consumer socialization (John 1999). Shim (1996) found that adolescent boys were more quality conscious in their purchase decisions and showed brand loyalty, while girls were more price-conscious in their decision-making. Furthermore, males have been shown to hold more materialistic attitudes toward their consumption behavior and females tend to perform more socially desirable consumer behaviors (Moschis and Churchill 1978). Thus, males who are more materialistic in their consumption attitudes, show more brand loyalty and are more quality-conscious will have lower consumer activity levels compared to girls who shop around and are more price-conscious.

H₇: Gender will significantly impact consumer activity among ethnic young adults.

Females will show higher levels of consumer activity compared to males.

Income: Literature suggests that individuals coming from higher income families tend to be more brand-loyal and income level does not impact market information seeking among teens (Moschis and Moore 1979). Shim (1996) found that individuals from higher social class display more quality-consciousness, novelty seeking behavior and brand loyalty. Thus, ethnic young adults from higher income families will not actively seek market information and compare prices and will depict lower levels of consumer activity than ethnic young adults coming from lower income families.

H₈: Income levels will be negatively related to the level of consumer activity among ethnic young adults.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample for the study was 292 ethnic young adults (Ages: 22-30 years) from a mid-western university. A mail survey was implemented in two rounds and questionnaires were sent to 1,200 subjects belonging to different ethnic groups including Caucasian Americans, African Americans, Hispanics and Asian Americans. The survey instruments were pre-tested before implementation. To enhance response rates, pre-addressed and postage paid reply envelopes were enclosed, and a follow-up reminder was sent after two weeks of the mailing. To check for non-response bias, we checked for significant differences in responses from the first round of mailing and the second round of mailing based on conventional process (Armstrong and Overton 1977) and no statistically significant differences were observed. In total we received 292 responses (response rate: 24.3 percent), out of which there were 89 African Americans, 69 Asian Americans, 52 Hispanics and 82 Caucasian Americans.

Measures

The measures were operationalized using previously established scales in the consumer socialization literature. A Likert-type five-point scale was used to record the responses. For normative (three items) and informative peer (four items) influences, the scale developed by Bearden et al. (1989) and later tested by Mangleburg and Bristol (1998) was used. The coefficient alphas were .80 for normative and .66 for informative peers respectively. Some of the representative items in the normative peer scale included "It is important that my peers approve of the store where I buy," "I achieve a sense of belonging by buying the same brands my peers buy" and some items in the informative peer scale included "I always talk to my friends about prices and quality before I buy," "To make sure I buy the right product, I often watch what my friends buy." The parental normative (five items) and informative (three items) scales were adopted from Mascarenhas and Higby (1993). The scales had reliabilities of .81 and .71 respectively. Some items in the parental normative scale included "I always shop with my parents" and "My parents decide all my shopping needs." Items in the parental informative scale included questions like "I often discuss my purchase plans with my parents" and "When I don't understand prices and quality I consult my parents." For media normative (three items) and informative (two items) also we adopted the scales from Mascarenhas and Higby (1993). The normative and informative media scales showed a reliability of .57 and .51 respectively. Some items in media normative and informative scales included "I buy only those products/brands that are advertised on T.V, radio and magazines" and "I always look at the ads before I buy." The scale to measure the role of the Internet as a socialization agent was developed and tested by the researchers. The five-item scale was found reliable at .78. Some of the items included in this scale were "I consider the Internet as a good source of product information" and "I feel comfortable buying

products on the Internet.” The scale to measure consumer activities (seven items) was adopted from Palan (1998) and showed a reliability of .80. Some of the representative questions used to measure consumer activity include “I plan how to spend my money,” “I compare prices and brands before buying something that costs a lot of money” and “I carefully read most of the things they write on packages or labels.” To measure social structural variables like income, gender, generational level, race and education we used standard demographic scales.

RESULTS

To study the impact of consumer socialization variables on the consumer activities of African Americans, Asian Americans, Caucasian Americans and Hispanics a multiple regression analysis was performed. The overall regression equation consisting of all races shows that consumer socialization variables are a significant predictor of the consumer activities of young adults (adjusted R square= .202; $F=7.695$; $p<.000$). The parental influence (both normative and informative) on the consumer activities of young adults was found to be insignificant. Thus, as shown in Table 1, Model 1, Hypothesis 1 is not supported. In terms of peer influence, normative peer influence was marginally negatively related to consumer activity ($t= -1.870$; $p<.062$) and informative peer influence did not show any significant impact on consumer activity. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is partially supported. Media influence seemed to be significantly related to consumer activities of young adult consumers. As mentioned in Hypothesis 3, normative media influence negatively impacted consumer activity ($t= -3.093$; $p<.002$), while informative media positively impacted consumer activity ($t= 4.798$; $p<.000$). The Internet as a socialization agent was also found to positively impact the consumer activities of young adult consumers, as per Hypothesis 4 ($t= 2.212$; $p<.028$).

In terms of social structural variables it was found that females showed higher levels of consumer activity than males and gender was positively related to consumer activity as hypothesized ($t= 2.860$; $p<.005$). The results also showed that educational level positively impacted consumer activity, thus supporting Hypothesis 7 ($t= 2.315$; $p<.021$). Generational level did not seem to have any significant impact on the consumer activities of young adults, but income level did show a negative impact on consumer activity as argued in Hypothesis 8 ($t= -2.625$; $p<.009$).

By Ethnic Groups

To measure the impact of socialization variables on consumer activities of ethnic young adults from different ethnic groups' perspective, we modeled separate regression equations by race. The regression model for African Americans was found significant (adjusted R square= .172; $F= 2.666$; $p<.006$) and the major socialization influences impacting their consumer activities were normative and informative peer influences (informative peer influence was slightly significant: $t= 1.734$; $p<.065$) and income level. Among Asian Americans (adjusted R square= .191; $F= 2.461$; $p<.014$) the socialization variables having a significant impact on consumer activities were the Internet and income level. For Hispanics (adjusted R square= .172; $F= 1.960$; $p<.050$) media informative and income level were the main variables significantly impacting consumer activity. Finally, among Caucasian Americans (adjusted R square= .254; $F= 3.509$; $p<.001$) media normative and media informative and gender seemed to determine consumer activities. These results clearly show that the socialization influences impacting consumer activities are different for different ethnic groups. To further understand how consumer socialization variables impact consumer activities of different ethnic groups, we present an extended discussion by race.

TABLE 1
Regression Results

Model 1: including all ethnic groups^a

	<u>Young Adults' Consumer Activities</u>		
	Standardized Coefficients	T-value	P-value
Normative Peer	-.127	-1.870	.062**
Informative Peer	.042	.633	.528
Parental Normative	.054	.621	.535
Parental Informative	.073	.880	.380
Normative Media	-.213	-3.093	.002*
Informative Media	.300	4.798	.000*
Internet	.129	2.212	.028*
Gender	.164	2.860	.005*
Education	.136	2.315	.021*
Generational Level	-.052	-.931	.353
Income	-.148	-2.625	.009*

Model 2: African American^b

Normative Peer	-.359	-2.648	.010*
Informative Peer	.243	1.734	.065**
Parental Normative	-.038	-.217	.829
Parental Informative	.099	.616	.540
Normative Media	-.197	-1.609	.112
Informative Media	.040	.346	.731
Internet	.138	1.298	.198
Gender	.146	1.445	.152
Education	.141	1.350	.181
Generational Level	-.077	-.694	.490
Income	-.254	-2.486	.015*

Model 3: Asian American^c

Normative Peer	.085	.665	.509
Informative Peer	.085	.691	.493
Parental Normative	.061	.366	.716
Parental Informative	.206	1.306	.197
Normative Media	.037	.265	.792
Informative Media	.040	.290	.773
Internet	.310	2.442	.018*
Gender	.160	1.283	.205
Education	.190	1.580	.120
Generational Level	-.059	-.493	.624
Income	-.305	-2.578	.013*

Model 4: Caucasian American^d

	<u>Young Adults' Consumer Activities</u>		
	Standardized Coefficients	<u>T-value</u>	<u>P-value</u>
Normative Peer	-.148	-1.325	.189
Informative Peer	-.159	-1.329	.188
Parental Normative	.149	.959	.341
Parental Informative	-.013	-.092	.927
Normative Media	-.300	-2.356	.021*
Informative Media	.590	4.824	.000*
Internet	.032	.285	.777
Gender	.188	1.818	.034*
Education	.045	.431	.668
Generational Level	.005	.045	.964
Income	-.094	-.927	.357

Model 5: Hispanics^e

Normative Peer	-.173	-1.113	.272
Informative Peer	.145	.821	.417
Parental Normative	.095	.359	.721
Parental Informative	-.314	-1.147	.258
Normative Media	-.340	-1.676	.102
Informative Media	.674	3.963	.000*
Internet	.144	.958	.344
Gender	.231	1.496	.143
Education	-.090	-.571	.571
Generational Level	.003	.019	.985
Income	.292	1.814	.048*

*Significant

**Slightly significant

a. Adjusted R square= .202, F= 7.695, P< .000

b. Adjusted R square= .172, F= 2.666, P< .006

c. Adjusted R square= .191, F= 2.461, P< .014

d. Adjusted R square= .254, F= 3.509, P< .001

e. Adjusted R square= .172, F= 1.960, P< .050

DISCUSSION

African Americans

Based on the literature, African American youth have been shown to be less influenced by parental influences (Moschis 1987; Bush et al. 1999) in terms of developing consumption-related skills. One reason could be that African American youth tend to be exposed to non-family socialization agents early in their life (Moschis 1987). Furthermore, according to Moschis (1987), African American youth are less likely to interact with their parent about

their consumption matters. In this study, the influence of parents on the consumer activities of African American young adults was also found to be non-significant. In terms of engaging in rational and efficient consumer activities, media and the Internet seem also to have no significant impact among African American young adults. This could be because African American young adults use media more for value-expressive or symbolic consumption (Kim and Kang 2001) than for developing skeptical and rational attitudes towards marketplace knowledge (Bush et al. 1999). In terms of peer influence, the results show that African

American young adults use peers more as an informational rather than normative influence in their consumer activities. This could be because greater independence from parents translates into greater dependence on peers for development of consumption-related skills (Moschis and Moore 1979). African-American youth, according to Don Coleman Advertising (Chicago), display more independence, self-reliance and less normative influence. Finally, the results also reveal that African American young adults coming from families with lesser income levels show higher consumer activism. This is understandable as lesser disposable income translates into more comparison shopping and making rational rather than value-expressive judgments when shopping so as to spend the money wisely. For example, studies have shown that young adults from lower socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have lesser materialistic attitudes and are willing to differ consumption gratifications compared to young adults from higher social class (Moschis and Churchill 1979; Moschis 1987).

Asian Americans

Asian Americans have been shown to be very family-oriented and inclined to value tradition and parental authority (Yau 1988; Childer and Rao 1992; Ownbey and Horridge 1997; Kim and Kang 2001(b)). According to Wanla Chang of Asia Link Consultancy (*The Wall Street Journal* June 18, 2004), to Asian parents their children are a centerpiece and the key reason for many of their personal goals, thus parent have been shown to be an important socialization agent for Asian American children and adolescents. Among all the four groups of races, Asian American shows the highest parental normative influence in this study (Mean: Asian American = 2.044, Caucasian American = 1.920, Hispanic = 1.827 and African American = 1.627; $F=6.116$; $p<.000$). However, parental influence on the consumer activities of Asian American young adults was found to be non-significant. This could be because with increasing age, individuals use more informative sources of influence and learn

consumption skills more by observation rather than by compliance to others (Moschis 1987). Thus, as adolescents mature towards young adults they are less dependent on normative family influences and interact more with informative media to seek market information (Moschis 1987). The results of this study reflect this proposition as Asian Americans make more use of the Internet as a significant source of information to guide their consumer activities. In fact, the Internet and the income level seem to be the only two important socialization influences affecting consumer activity among Asian American young adults. This could be linked to greater Internet access in Asian American households (Horowitz Associates 2003) and the importance of education and higher income levels among Asian American families (Delener and Neelankavil 1990; Mitchell 1999).

Hispanics

The consumer activities of Hispanic young adult consumers seem to be most impacted by media informative influence and income level. In general Hispanics have been shown to be heavy users of T.V and radio, partially due to Spanish programming (Peneloza and Gilly 1986) and to use media as an important source of consumer information (Ramirez 1983; Delener and Neelenkavil 1990; Kim and Kang 2001(b)). Even though parental and peer influence have been found to significantly impact the socialization of Hispanic youth (Hoyer and Deshpande 1982; Childer and Rao 1992), they do not impact the learning of consumer activities among Hispanic young adults. This could be again due to the lifetime position. Studies find that as Hispanic youth mature into young adults, they are more independent from their families and rely more heavily on mass media sources for learning consumer skills. For example, a recent study by Kim and Kang (2001(b)) found that Hispanics are less influenced in their purchase decision by their peers and co-workers and are more influenced by media.

Caucasian Americans

The results show that, like Hispanics, Caucasian Americans also seem to use media as an important source of information to guide their consumer activities. The media has been shown to be an important socialization agent among Caucasian Americans (Bush et al. 1999). For example, Caucasian American youth have been shown to use mass media as an important source of information to develop brand preferences (Moschis 1987). On the other hand, unlike African Americans and Hispanics, they are less susceptible to advertising as a normative influence (Shim 1996; Bush et al. 1999). The results of our study clearly demonstrate this argument, as normative media influence negatively impacts consumer activities of Caucasian young adults ($t = -2.356$; $p < .021$), while informative media influence positively impacts consumer activities of Caucasian young adults ($t = 4.824$; $p < .000$).

In summary, the results clearly show that different ethnic groups are influenced by different socialization variables in terms of determining their consumer activities. Another interesting finding is that levels of consumer activities displayed by young adults from different ethnic groups and Caucasian Americans differ significantly (Mean: Asian American = 3.876, Hispanic = 3.863, African American = 3.828 and Caucasian American = 3.409; $F = 7.316$; $p < .000$). Caucasian American young adults seem to show the lowest levels of consumer activity orientation. This could be because Caucasian young adults in this study have higher mean family incomes (Mean: Caucasian American = 2.24, Asian American = 2.04, Hispanic = 1.75 and African American = 1.55; $F = 15.67$; $p < .000$) and the general regression model in this study seems to support the fact that income is negatively related to consumer activity.

This study also sheds light on how young adults differ from adolescents in their consumer socialization. For example, the impact of parents on socialization and the consumer

activities of young adults is not significant in this study; however, previous studies have found that parental normative and parental informative influences are most pronounced among teens (Moschis and Moore 1979; Mascarenhas and Higby 1993; Shim 1996). This study also shows that normative influences are negatively related to consumer learning among young adults, although previous studies show that children and adolescents are more susceptible to normative influences than young adults (Moschis 1987; Mascarenhas and Higby 1993). Thus, socialization and consumer learning not only differ by race but also by where the individual is positioned in his or her lifetime.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to extend the current research on consumer socialization and the consumer activities of children and teens to ethnic young adults. The results of this study suggest that when marketing to young adults, marketers need to be aware of how the consumer socialization of young adults differs from that of adolescents and to not consider adolescent and young adults as one uniform segment of the population. Marketers also need to target different socialization agents when reaching different ethnic groups. For example, mass media can be an appropriate way to influence the consumer activities of Caucasian and Hispanic young adults, while among Asian Americans the Internet seems to be the preferred source of market information and for African American young adults peers are the main socialization influence on consumer activities. Furthermore, the results suggest that young adults tend to be less receptive to media normative influences and rely more on media informative influences. Thus, advertising geared toward this segment of population should be more informative and persuasive than based on normative suggestions. Marketers also need to consider demographic variables when

attempting to reach the young adults, as the results of this study suggest that females tend to be higher on consumer activism than males and young adults from lower income backgrounds tend to show higher consumer activity than young adults from higher income backgrounds.

Limitations

The findings of the study should be interpreted in light of some limitations that restrict the scope of this research. First, based on the consumer socialization literature, we found enough evidence to include only a limited set of socialization variables and there might be more socialization influences that impact the consumer activities of young adults. For example, the role of workplace socialization, the influence of spouses or domestic partners, the importance of role models and the affiliation to clubs, societies and interest groups are some socialization influences that are under investigation in the literature, but not included in this study. Another limitation of the study pertains to classification of young adults under different ethnic groups based on their choice of ethnicity and not the degree of their ethnic identification. Future research can investigate the impact of ethnic identification on consumer socialization and the development of consumption-related skills. Also, the focus of this study was on consumer socialization variables and it did not explore how socialization influences may vary by product class and purchase situations (high and low involvement product situations). Future research can explore how consumer susceptibility to socialization agents and consumer activity may vary by product class and purchase situations. Finally, there is little research done on the consumer socialization of young adults, adults and the elderly, even though it is recognized in the literature that consumer socialization is a continuous process. Future research can provide valuable insights into how consumer activities and the socialization influences vary throughout alifetime.

In conclusion, we hope that this study has provided new insights into consumer socialization and the consumer activities of ethnic young adults and paved the way to further explore socialization issues among ethnic young adults.

REFERENCES

- Armstrong J. S. and T. S. Overton (1997), "Estimating Non-response Bias in Mail Surveys," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 16 (August), 369-400.
- Appiah, O. (2001), "Impact of Ethnic Identification on Adolescent's Evaluations of Advertisements," *Journal of Advertising Research*, 41, 7-22.
- Bearden, W. O., R. G. Netemeyer and J. E. Teel (1989), "Measurement of Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 15, 472-480.
- Bush, A. J., R. Smith and C. Martin (1999), "The Influence of Consumer Socialization Variables on Attitude toward Advertising: A Comparison of African Americans and Caucasians," *Journal of Advertising*, 28, 13-24.
- Childers, T. and A. Rao (1992), "The Influence of Familial and Peer-based Reference Groups on Consumer Decisions," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 19(2), 198-211.
- Churchill, G. A. and G. P. Moschis (1979), "Television and Interpersonal Influences on Adolescent Consumer Learning," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 6(June), 23-25.
- Clark, P. W., C. A. Martin and A. J. Bush (2001), "The Effect of Role Model Influence on Adolescents' Materialism and Marketplace Knowledge," *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 9(4), 27-36.
- Cui, G. (1997), "Marketing Strategies in a Multi-ethnic Environment," *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, 5, 122-134.
- ____ (2001), "Marketing to Ethnic Minority Consumers: A Historical Journey (1932-1997)," *Journal of Macromarketing*, 21, 23-31.

- Delener, N. and J. P. Neelankavil (1990), "Information Sources and Media Usage: A Comparison between Asian and Hispanic Subcultures," *Journal of Advertising Research*, 30, 42-52.
- Donthu, N. and J. Cherian (1992), "Hispanic Coupon Usage: The Impact of Strong and Weak Hispanic Identification," *Psychology and Marketing*, 9, 501-511.
- _____ and _____ (1994), "Impact of the Strength of Ethnic Identification on Hispanic Shopping Behavior," *Journal of Retailing*, 70, 383-393.
- Hirschman, E. C. (1981), "American Jewish Ethnicity: Its Relationship to Some Selected Aspects of Consumer Behavior," *Journal of Marketing*, 45, 102-110.
- Hoyer, W. and R. Deshpande (1982), "Cross-cultural Influence on Buyer Behavior: The Impact of Hispanic Ethnicity," in *Educators' Conference Proceedings*, Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association
- John, D. R. (1999), "Consumer Socialization of Children: A Retrospective Look at Twenty-Five Years of Research," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 26, 183-213.
- Kim, Y. K. and J. Kang (2001a), "Effects of Asian Americans' Ethnicity and Acculturation on Personal Influences," *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, 23, 43-53.
- _____ and _____ (2001b), "The Effects of Ethnicity and Product on Purchase Decision Making," *Journal of Advertising Research*, 41, 39-48.
- Lee, W. N. (1993), "Acculturation and Advertising Communication Strategies: A Cross-cultural Study of Chinese and Americans," *Psychology and Marketing*, 10, 381-397.
- Mangleburg, T. F. and T. Bristol (1998), "Socialization and Adolescents' Skepticism toward Advertising," *Journal of Advertising*, 28, 11-21.
- Mascarenhas, O. A. and M. A. Higby (1993), "Peer, Parent and Media Influences in Teen Apparel Shopping," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 21, 53-58.
- Mitchell, S. (1999), *Generation X the Young Adult Market*, Ithaca, NY: New Strategist Publications Inc.
- Moschis, G. P. and R. L. Moore (1979), "Decision Making among the Young: A Socialization Perspective," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 6, 101-112.
- _____ (1981), "Patterns of Consumer Learning," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 9, 110-117.
- _____ (1987), *Consumer Socialization: A Life-cycle Perspective*, Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- _____ and G. A. Churchill (1978), "Consumer Socialization: A Theoretical and Empirical Analysis," *Journal of Marketing Research*, 15, 500-609.
- Ownbey, S. F. and P. E. Horridge (1997), "Acculturation Levels and Shopping Orientations of Asian-American Consumers," *Psychology and Marketing*, 14, 1-18.
- Palan, K. M. (1998), "Relationships between Family Communication and Consumer Activities of Adolescents: An Exploratory Study," *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, 26(4), 338-349.
- Ramirez, M. III (1983), *Psychology of Americans: Mestizo Perspectives on Personality and Mental Health*, New York: Pergamon Press
- Pastore, M. (2002), *Americas Young Adults Turns to Net*. Available at: www.cyberatlas.com
- Penaloza, L. and M. C. Gilly (1986), "The Hispanic Family- Consumer Research Issues," *Psychology and Marketing*, 3, 291-304.
- Peterson, R. A. and M. C. Merino (2003), "Consumer Information Search Behavior and the Internet," *Psychology and Marketing*, 20, 99-121.
- Rose, G. M., V. Dalakas and F. Kropp (2003), "Consumer Socialization and Parental Style Across Cultures: Findings from Australia, Greece and India," *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, 13(4), 366-376.
- Shim, S. (1996), "Adolescent Consumer Decision Making Style: the Consumer Socialization Perspective," *Psychology and Marketing*, 13, 547-569.

- Singh, N., I. W. Kwon and A. Pereira (2003), "Cross-cultural Consumer Socialization: An Exploratory Study of Socialization Influences across Three Ethnic Groups," *Psychology and Marketing*, 20(10), 867-881.
- Smith, R. B. and G. P. Moschis (1985), "A Socialization Perspective on Selected Consumer Characteristics of the Elderly," *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, 19, 74-96.
- Untitled (2000), U.S. Census Bureau: *United States Census 2000*. Available at: www.census.gov/main/www/cen2000.html.
- Untitled (2003), Horowitz Associates: *Urban Markets in the U.S.* The Multicultural Resource Center. Available at: www.cabletvadbureau.com/mmrc
- Ward, S. (1974), "Consumer Socialization," *Journal of Consumer Research*, 1 (September), 1-14.
- Yau, O. H. M. (1988), "Chinese Cultural Values: Their Dimensions and Marketing Implications," *European Journal of Marketing*, 22, 44-57.