Consumer Acculturation of Young German Sojourners in New Zealand

Nina Brosius, University of Auckland

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Utilising a longitudinal research design, this consumer acculturation study investigates the differences of mundane everyday consumption from home to host country, explores the degree of cultural change and relevant coping strategies, and scrutinises the possible inclusion of social media into the existing acculturation agents.

OVERVIEW
In today’s globalised world it is easier than ever to move between different countries: “Contemporary population flows, cross-border exchanges and the international mobilisation of human resources” (Lyons, Hanley, Wearing et al. 2012) have led researchers from various fields to investigate global citizenship, transnationalism, and cosmopolitanism. Many consumer behaviour researchers have focussed on the consumer acculturation of immigrants from home to host country, however, only few have thoroughly investigated the temporary and voluntary country-shifting of sojourners (Berry and Sam 1997; Thompson and Tambyah 1999). Utilising a longitudinal research design, this research will concentrate on the consumer acculturation of young German sojourners in New Zealand.

RESEARCH CONTEXT
The computer-savvy Generation Y is more mobile than other generations - due to their age and often lack of responsibilities (i.e. caring for a family of their own), it is easier to live, work and travel in another geographical setting and culture than their home country. In New Zealand, each year approximately 4,500 young Germans (between 20-29 years old) enter the country on a one-year German Working Holiday Scheme Visa (2011). Many of those, mostly female, work and live as so-called Au-Pairs (‘nanny from overseas’) in Kiwi families to fully immerse into the local culture, improve their English and earn money for further travels in New Zealand. Unlike backpackers (Larsen, Øgaard and Brun 2011), gap year volunteers (Lyons, Hanley et al. 2012) and most tertiary international exchange students in the same age range (Brown and Graham 2009), Au-Pairs stay in and work for a New Zealand family in a fixed location where they need to integrate and adjust to the family’s customs, routines and mundane activities which may ultimately result in personal change. However, no research has been undertaken to investigate this unique group which provides strong grounds for studying Au-Pairs.

CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATION
The earliest definition of the term acculturation was coined in 1936 by the Subcommittee of Acculturation who defined it as comprehending “those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, with subsequent changes in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups” (Redfield, Linton and Herskovits 1936). Evaluating the literature on (consumer) socialisation, acculturation and cross-cultural consumer behaviour, Peñaloza (1989) found that consumer acculturation includes processes of consumer learning within a multicultural context and is defined as “the general process of movement and adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country” (Peñaloza 1994).

Cross-cultural psychologist John W. Berry called acculturating groups which incorporates differentiated cultural groups based on their mobility, permanence and voluntariness as can be seen in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mobility</th>
<th>Voluntariness of contact</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sedentary</td>
<td>Voluntary</td>
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<td>Ethnocultural</td>
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<td>groups</td>
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<td>Migrant Permanent</td>
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<td>Temporary</td>
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<td>Sojourners</td>
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<td>Asylum seekers</td>
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Table 1: Acculturating Groups (based on Berry and Sam (1997))
The most-studied of the above acculturating groups are immigrants who permanently and voluntary move to another country. Consumer behaviour papers predominantly published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* focus on immigrants such as Wallendorf and Reilly’s (1983) early work on Mexican immigrants and Oswald’s (1999) research paper on Haitian immigrants in the US. Other papers from the era have also mainly investigated immigrants moving to the United States (Hirschman 1981; Saegert, Hoover and Hilger 1985; Desphande, Hoyer and Donthu 1986; O’Guinn, Lee and Faber 1986; Mehta and Belk 1991; Peñaloza 1994; Peñaloza and Gilly 1999) whereas more recent papers have focussed on immigrants moving from and to Non-North American countries (Lindridge, Hogg and Shah 2004; Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard 2005; Luedicke and Giesler 2009; Sutton-Brady, Davis and Jung 2010; Chytkova 2011).

However, limited research has focussed on the other group of voluntary movers: Berry and Sam (1997) defined sojourners as short-term visitors staying temporarily in a host country for specific reasons, for example guest workers or missionaries. Their stay can be defined as temporary between-society contact and may have transformative potential indicated by a possibly increased cross-cultural understanding (Brown and Graham 2009). Somewhat similar to sojourners, tourists’ visits to a host country are voluntary and temporary, however, usually for a shorter period of time where key attractions and sites are visited and no full immersion into the local culture due to a lack of time and access is guaranteed (Berno and Ward 2005; Ward 2008; Bardhi, Ostberg and Bengtsson 2010; Bengtsson, Bardhi and Venkatraman 2010).

Investigating the phenomenon of cultural shock based on one type of missionaries, Oberg (1960) found that four stages of cultural change exist: An early honeymoon stage, a subsequent rejection stage, a following tolerance stage and lastly an integration stage. Some people will move quickly through all four stages whereas others might not experience all four stages individually due to for example more thorough preparations and clearer expectations (Peñaloza 1989; Jun and Ball 1993; Peñaloza 1994). Even though those stages have been adapted to consumer behaviour studies on immigrants (Peñaloza 1994) it is of great interest to examine if and to what extent these stages apply to the unstudied group of young German Au-Pairs. Further, it will be interesting to assess which coping strategies the participants use to counter issues such as homesickness in the rejection stage.

One well-cited study focussing on sojourners’ cosmopolitanism explores how affluent working professional expatriates from various countries acculturate in Singapore. Thompson and Tambyah’s (1999) participants were stationed at this location for a fixed period of time where they were included in special local cultural practices, events and rituals only when specifically invited by a member of the local community. Further, due to the transient nature of the visit and the time and effort commitment to their professional positions, it was nearly impossible to develop long-lasting friendships with locals and other expatriates based on shared histories of experiences. However, in order to be able to fully understand sojourners’ consumer acculturation, it needs to be looked at the mundane everyday consumption which “refers to those activities which constitute the bulk of life – preparing meals, relaxing, or getting to work - [and which] occurs while and as an integral part of negotiating these daily life-tasks” (Kleine III, Schultz-Kleine and Kernan 1992). Investigating Au-Pairs who stay in a host family and who are regarded as an integral part of it will provide greater insights into the mundane everyday consumption of sojourners and thereby, extend knowledge on this type of acculturating group.

Lastly, an integral part to acculturating in a host country are consumer acculturation agents which have been defined as “those individuals or institutions who serve as sources of consumer information and/or models of consumption behaviour” (Peñaloza 1989). Peñaloza (1989) established four consumer acculturation agents: Family, peers or friends, traditional mass media (incl. popular TV, movies and music), and institutions such as churches and schools. Overall, as those four acculturation agents either relate to the home or host culture, those two represent the overarching two acculturation agents (Peñaloza 1989; Peñaloza 1994; Oswald 1999; Lindridge, Hogg et al. 2004). However, considering them as not all-encompassing, Askegaard et al. (2005) introduced a third acculturation agent called transnational consumer culture which they describe as “transnational set of cultural ideas and practices” (Askegaard, Arnould et al. 2005). As Au-Pairs in this study will belong to the computer-savvy Generation Y, the influence of social media, such as Facebook and
YouTube, as additional and increasingly important consumer acculturation agent will be investigated.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this conceptual paper provides an overview of the literature on consumer acculturation and the aspects to be studied in this research. Only exploratory data has been gathered as of yet, however, by the time of the conference data collection in form of a longitudinal research design comprised of multiple semi-structured in-depth interviews with each participant will be well underway addressing the following three research questions:

1. Which coping strategies do sojourners employ when experiencing cultural shock in the host country?
2. How does sojourners’ mundane everyday consumption change when temporarily shifting to the host country?
3. Does social media play an influential part in the consumer acculturation process of sojourners?

Evaluating interview data using thematic analysis with the above research questions in mind will allow the researcher to derive at a rich understanding of the phenomenon. The alleged knowledge will help extend the limited consumer behaviour research on the acculturating type of sojourners and will further provide insights into the unstudied group of Au-Pairs. Specifically, investigating the influence of social media websites and networks on (young) consumers’ acculturation in the host country will provide useful insights for theory and practice. Adding them as contemporary acculturation agents will allow for a better understanding of consumer acculturation in today’s digital world. Practical implications may include the increased utilisation of social media websites for Au-Pair or Work-and-Travel agencies, tourism operators and global recruitment companies.

REFERENCES


Lindridge, Andrew M., Margaret K. Hogg, and Mita


