Culture’s Influence on Consumer Behaviors: Differences Among Ethnic Groups in a Multiracial Asian Country

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ABSTRACT - This study investigates the effects of culture on various aspects of consumer behavior in an integrative framework among the three ethnic groups in Singapore. Using the Hofstede’s (1980) cultural framework, differences in their cultural orientation are hypothesized. Then, for each cultural dimension, related consumer behaviors are identified and differences in those behaviors are hypothesized according to the predicted differences in each related cultural dimension. Although the results seem to suggest that culture may be one of the major factors that influence the consumption behaviors, the strong evidence for the link between the Hofstede’s framework and the related consumer behaviors is not observed in this study.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effects of culture on various aspects of consumer behavior in an integrative framework among the three ethnic groups in Singapore. Using the Hofstede’s (1980) cultural framework, differences in their cultural orientation are hypothesized. Then, for each cultural dimension, related consumer behaviors are identified and differences in those behaviors are hypothesized according to the predicted differences in each related cultural dimension. Although the results seem to suggest that culture may be one of the major factors that influence the consumption behaviors, the strong evidence for the link between the Hofstede’s framework and the related consumer behaviors is not observed in this study.

INTRODUCTION

As companies head towards a global market that deals with people from many different backgrounds and cultures, it has become essential for marketers to understand culture’s influence on consumer behaviors. The recognition of the importance of culture on consumer behaviors has led to an increasing amount of research across cultures (Sojka and Tansuhaj 1995). More significantly, many studies have succeeded in establishing links between culture and consumer behaviors (McCrank 1986). According to Wallace (1965), culture is the all-encompassing force which forms personality, which in turn is the key determinant of consumer behaviors.

Numerous cultural studies on consumer behavior have been conducted, especially in western context. In those studies, differences were found in consumption patterns between people of various ethnic groups (e.g. Saegert, Hoover and Hilger 1985) and various geographic subgroups that hold differing cultural values (e.g. Gentry, Tansuhaj, Manzer and John 1988). For instance, researchers have found differences in various consumer behavior aspects such as brand loyalty (Saegert et al. 1985), decision making (Doran 1994), novelty seeking and perceived risk (Gentry et al. 1988) across subcultures. Although past research has identified differences in various consumer behaviors across cultures, most of the past studies dissected consumer behaviors and each study examined one or two specific aspects in a piecemeal-based way. There has been relatively little effort to examine the culture’s influence on consumer behaviors in an integrated framework.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to investigate the effects of culture on various aspects of consumer behavior in an integrative framework. Using the Hofstede’s (1980) cultural framework, various consumer behaviors that could be influenced by culture are identified and mapped to the Hofstede’s cultural dimensions. Then, the influence of the cultural dimensions on the identified consumer behaviors is investigated in a multiracial Southeast Asian country.

SINGAPORE: A MULTIRACIAL SOCIETY

Although numerous subcultural studies were done in the past, most are done in the American or European context. Few have investigated ethnic effects in the Asian context. With major corporations seeking to move into Asia and sell to Asian consumers, it is surprising to note the lack of subcultural research in this region.

Singapore provides a good starting point for subcultural studies on Asian customers as it is a multiracial society of Chinese, Malays and Indians. During the years when Singapore was under British rule, the three ethnic groups lived separately from each other. They were encouraged to maintain their own unique culture and customs, religious values and way of life. Although national harmony has been emphasized, it has been encouraged to maintain each ethnic group’s own culture by the Singapore government since its independence.

The Chinese

The concept of ‘face’ or “public reputation” is a very important value in the Chinese culture in the context of interpersonal interaction and social exchange. A mirror reflection of the ‘face’ concept is the idea of gaining respect, or the concern for public reputation. The concept of ‘face’ points to an inner sense of worth which is experienced by the ego (Wong 1986; Wong and Ahuvia 1998). According to Hu (1944), the emotional impact of the loss of ‘face’ could constitute a real dread affecting the psyche of the ego more strongly than physical fear. Hence, the Chinese tend to place high importance on the protection of ‘face’.

In addition, the granting of ‘face’ and the maintenance of cordial

guanxi have been highly valued and widely practiced in the Chinese community, particularly in the business community (Tan 1986). According to Alston (1989), the term guanxi refers to the special relationship two persons have with each other. It is a relationship combined with reciprocity and connections. A practical consequence of guanxi is that personal loyalty is often more important than organizational affiliation or legal standards.

According to Bond (1987), loyalty is considered to be a virtue by the Chinese. The Chinese have been taught from young to place their loyalty to their family and kin. In the case of services, where there is interpersonal contact, Chinese consumers would tend to stay loyal to the same provider. This is because switching would render a loss of face to the provider, an unfavorable move that a Chinese customer would choose to avoid.

The Malays

Islam is regarded as an inseparable part of Malay ethnicity and is ingrained in its culture (Lj 1989). It has been reported that 99.6% of Malays are Muslims (Singapore Census of population 2000). The Qur’an, the revealed word of God provides definite guidelines for people in all walks of life to follow. The guidance is comprehensive and includes the social, economic, political, moral and spiritual aspects of life. It states clearly the halal (lawful) and haram (forbidden). To the Muslims, there is no compartmentalization between religion and secular aspects of life, rather they see life as an integrated whole and they aim to live out Islam in all areas of their life. Indeed, the cumulative institutionalization of Islamic values and practices in Malay life is the single most important influence on the development of Malay culture in Singapore presently (Tham 1985).

According to Bedlinton (1971; 1974), the Malay idea of rezeki, or belief in the predetermination of man’s economic destiny, results in fatalism and a “lack of will to go on striving.” As a result of placing their full trust in Allah to provide for them in times of need and distress, Malays are reported to avoid taking up insurance policies. To them, they only take it up if it is compulsory (e.g., car...
insurance). This element of fatalism is also perceived to be the likely explanation behind the lack of achievement orientation among the Malays (Li 1989).

The Indians

Caste ideas or beliefs still operate among members of the Indian community in Singapore despite the fact that the structural props supporting the caste system are no more there in its entirety. The central religious tenet of orthodox Hinduism was that men were not equal and have never been (Tham 1985). The inequality of men was explained in terms of the merits and demerits accrued in previous incarnations. Therefore, each caste was required to live according to its ordained way of life (dharma). However, in the contemporary and meritocratic society of Singapore, the caste system has little functional value except when Indians themselves use it as a cultural marker to distinguish their members (Wu 1982).

As compared to the Chinese and Malays, there exists much lesser marketing literature on Indian consumers in Singapore. One speculation for this lack of research pertained to their size as well as the vast diversity within the Indian community itself. The official category of “Indian” is actually composed of its many linguistic groups, Pakistanian, and Ceylonese. Besides this, it is the group with the greatest heterogeneity in religion (please refer to Table 1). Religion, like ethnicity influences behaviors by the rules and taboos it inspires. There is also suggestion that the Indian orientation has disappeared among a vast majority of the population, persisting only among the most elderly Indians. Even so, it appears in a remote idealistic sense, in the form of “nostalgia and emotional attachment of the place where they came from” (Arasaratnam 1979).

CULTURAL DIFFERENCE AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CONSUMER BEHAVIORS

Having reviewed the key cultural tradition of the three ethnic groups, the differences in cultural values and associated consumer behaviors exhibited by the ethnic groups will be analyzed using Hofstede’s (1980) cultural framework in this section.

Individualism-Collectivism

Family is important to all three ethnic groups, as is the case for most Asians. However, differing levels of collectivism could be detected among three ethnic groups in Singapore. The Malays see life as an integrated whole. According to Tham (1985), 53.8% of Malay respondents in his study listed loyalty to one’s culture and way of life as an important value in their culture. This same value was listed by 40% of Indian respondents. However, it was not named at all by the Chinese respondents. The Malays believe that their religion holds them together as a community and it is from Islam that they derive their collective identity (Lai 1995). This is evidenced by the fact that 99.6% of all Malays in Singapore have Islam as their religion.

The Indians maintain that family solidarity should be shared by all relatives (Arasu 1975), and all members of the family should be integrated into the community. In Singapore, social and religious functions relating to marriage, birth and death are treated as important occasions among the Indians and this practice helps to maintain family and community solidarity among Indians.

The Chinese in Singapore tend to remain loyal only to their immediate family. For instance, they are concerned with propagating the family name (Wu 1975). However, in a recent study on Singaporean values by Kau, Tan and Wirtz (1998), it was found that the emphasis placed by the Chinese on family is rapidly diminishing. Only 67.4% of Chinese respondents agreed with the statement: “My family is the single most important thing to me”, which was much lower than the percentages of Malays and Indians who agreed (78.2% and 80.2% respectively). When presented with the statement: “Conforming to social norms is very important to me”, 39.7% of Chinese respondents agreed with the statement as compared to 53.7% of Malays and 55.3% of Indians. This could be due to the influence of Western values, as well as an increase in affluence. Furthermore, many Chinese move out of their parents’ home when they get married, so there is the loss of intergenerational family togetherness. Those trends could account for the lesser emphasis on collectivism on the part of the Chinese. Hence, the following hypothesis is proposed:

H1: The Chinese will exhibit higher levels of individualism, compared to the Indians and the Malays.

Individualism-collectivism pertains to the behavior of people in groups, their relationships with others around them, and how they perceive themselves in relation to others. We can identify several consumer behaviors that could be related to the relationships between individuals and their interaction with the people around them. They are reference group influence (Childers and Rao 1992; Webster and Faircloth III 1994), information sharing (Hirshman 1981; Webster 1992), opinion leadership (Ownbey and Horridge 1997) and ethnocentrism (Shimp and Sharma 1987). Based on the assumption that individualism-collectivism is one of the fundamental cultural dimensions that influences the related consumer behaviors, it could be said that people from cultures high in individualism would be less influenced by reference groups, less likely to engage in information sharing, less likely to be opinion leaders and are less ethnocentric. Hence, the following ethnic differences are hypothesized:

H2a: The Chinese are less likely to be influenced by reference groups compared to the Indians and the Malays.

H2b: The Chinese are less likely to engage in information sharing compared to the Indians and the Malays.

H2c: The Chinese are less likely to be opinion leaders compared to the Indians and the Malays.

H2d: The Malays and Indians are more likely to exhibit ethnocentric behaviors compared to the Chinese.

Uncertainty Avoidance

The Malays, with their fatalistic nature and their belief that everything is predestined and out of their control, may rank the lowest in terms of uncertainty avoidance. This is because their trust in their religion allows them greater tolerance for ambiguity and risk. A study by Yeo (1997) found that the Malays had the lowest levels of brand loyalty and perceived risk as compared to the Chinese and the Indians.

The Chinese also seem to show a tendency of uncertainty avoidance. This could be attributed to the need of the Chinese to adhere to group norms in order to protect one’s ‘face’. This may result in more image consciousness among the Chinese when they select socially visible products. In addition, Buddhists or Taoists also have inclinations towards seeking religious divinations when it comes to making decisions in difficult life situations (Khoo 1996). This indicates that the Chinese may have a certain level of uncertainty avoidance inherent in the culture. However, the level of uncertainty avoidance, though expected to be lower than that of the Indians, is likely to be higher than that of the Malays. This is because only 64.4% of the Chinese are Buddhists or Taoists, compared to the 99.6% of Malay Muslims.
On the other hand, several studies have suggested that Asian Indians tend to have lower tolerance levels of ambiguity, risk and anxiety compared to subjects from America, Canada and Japan (Caranton 1974; Orpan 1983). A study by Ye (1997) confirmed this tendency by finding that Singaporean Indians placed an emphasis on product quality rather than brand when it came to making purchases. Hence, the following hypothesis is suggested:

**H3:** The Indians will exhibit the highest level of uncertainty avoidance, followed by the Chinese, then the Malays.

Uncertainty avoidance refers to how the unknown aspects of the future are dealt with. Extreme uncertainty causes anxiety and stress, and different people have different degrees of tolerance for such anxiety and stress. Different levels of uncertainty avoidance tendency could influence consumer behaviors that examine the ways people react in situations of uncertainty. Those behaviors could be perceived risk (Gentry et al. 1988), brand loyalty (Kanwar and Pagiavlas 1992; Hui et al. 1993), innovativeness (Hui et al. 1993; Tansuhaj et al. 1991), and information search (Garner and Thompson 1986; Hirshman 1983). These behaviors involve an element of risk, and therefore a culture that is high on uncertainty avoidance would exhibit consumption behaviors that may reduce this risk. Thus, people from such a culture would be likely to experience higher levels of perceived risk, more brand loyal, less likely to seek innovative products, and more likely to engage in information search. Thus, the following hypotheses are presented:

**H4a:** The Indians are likely to experience the highest levels of perceived risk in consumption, followed by the Chinese, then the Malays.

**H4b:** The Indians are most likely to remain brand loyal in their purchase of products and services, followed by the Chinese, then the Malays.

**H4c:** The Indians are least likely to seek out innovative products or services, followed by the Chinese, then the Malays.

**H4d:** The Indians are the most likely to engage in information search, followed by the Chinese, then the Malays.

**Masculinity**

It seems that there is evidence that sex role differentiation is still rather prominent in the Malay culture. Traditionally, Malay men want their wives to be submissive to the husband, and stay at home full-time to look after the children. This has not been changed much in modern Singapore. According to several studies, Muslim men still hold conservative socio-cultural attitudes regarding marriage. They feel that their authority in the house should not be challenged, and prefer their wives not to be graduates (The Straits Times 29/11/1995; 5/12/1995). Only 23.9% of Malay male graduates tied the knot with fellow graduates compared to the national average of 59.3% (The Straits Times 29/11/1995). Most of these men still prefer marriages arranged by their parents, and marrying down is the norm among them. These conservative attitudes are further evidenced by the fact that working wives make up only a third of all Malay couples, way below the figures of the Chinese and the Indians (The Straits Times 5/12/1995).

The Indians are becoming increasingly modernized compared to the Malays. Traditionally steeped in the notion that women belong in the house and should look after children full-time, this view is changing with increased education and achievements by the Indian community in Singapore. 40% of all married Indian women work, second only to the 41% of Chinese women (The Straits Times 3/5/1994). Traditional Chinese women tended to stay at home to look after the household and the children. However, this has been changed in Singapore, as statistics have shown. Many Chinese women today are economically independent and perfectly capable of looking after themselves. Therefore, both the Chinese and the Indians would not be high on masculinity.

However, in a local lifestyle study conducted by Kau et al. (1998), it was found that the Indians had the most liberal views on feminism compared to the Chinese and the Malays. 78.5% of them felt that a woman should have her own career, while 63.4% of Chinese and 59.1% of Malays thought so. An even more interesting point to note was that 37.9% of the Indians agreed with the statement: “Women are smarter than men”, while only 18% of Malays and 13.1% of Chinese felt so.

The above observations lead to the conclusion that the Indians have the most prevalent values regarding sex role differentiation, followed by the Chinese, while the Indians are the most pro-feminists. Therefore, the following hypothesis is developed:

**H5:** The Malays are likely to rate the highest on masculinity, followed by the Chinese, and then the Indians.

The cultural dimension of masculinity-femininity involves sex role differentiation and the dominance of either male or female values. This area of study is particularly of interest in the context of the cultural dimension of masculinity-femininity because sex role attitudes and perceptions are ascribed through cultural norms and these attitudes influence the household decision role structure and responsibility (Kim, Laroche and Zhou 1993; O’Connor, Sullivan and Pogorzelski 1985). Blood and Wolfe (1960) also stated that the degree of influence by either the husband or wife in a family decision is contingent upon the level of traditional marital values present in the family. It can be concluded that decision making in the family differs across cultures and is dependent upon the extent to which the couple’s values belong to the traditional patriarchal system where the husband dominates, or the more modern view of joint decision-making. Thus, people from cultures higher in masculinity are more likely to engage in husband dominant decision making because they believe that men should be in charge of the household.

**H6:** The Malays are the most likely to engage in husband dominant decision making, followed by the Chinese, and then the Indians.

**Power Distance**

The Indian religion of Hinduism states that men are not equal and have never been. This resulted in caste differentiation which may still exist informally in Singapore today, though not in its entirety. Similarly, the Malays, because of their fatalistic nature, willingly accept concepts of inequality and they accept that being born unequal is part of each person’s destiny in life and cannot be altered. The Chinese on the other hand, are not governed by any beliefs of this sort. Although all three ethnic groups share the values of respect for one’s elders and filial piety, there is evidence that these traditional perceptions of inequality result in different degrees of power distance among the three ethnic groups. According to Kau et al. (1998), when presented with the statement: “Respect for authority is important in our society”, 77.4% of Indian respondents agreed with the statement, followed by 72.2% of the Malays and 61.8% of the Chinese. Hence the following hypothesis is presented:
**RESULTS**

**Differences in Cultural Dimensions**

The results of ANOVA tests on the cultural dimensions show no difference among the three ethnic on individualism/collectivism (F=1.11, p=.33), uncertainty avoidance (F=91.91, p=.40), and power distance (F=12.12, p=.88), rejecting H1, H3, and H7. The three ethnic groups show significance differences on the masculinity dimension (F=17.79, p=.00). The pair-wise comparisons with Duncan test reveal significant differences among the three ethnic groups as predicted. Therefore, H5 is supported (Table 1).

**Differences in Associated Consumer Behaviors**

Although no significant difference is found on the relevant cultural dimensions, significant differences are found on the utilitarian reference group influence (F=6.37, p=.00), the information sharing (F=4.88, p=.01), the ethnocentric tendency (F=8.11, p=.00), and the brand loyalty (F=4.37, p=.01). As for the ethnic differences, the Malays tend to be more ethnocentric and to share information more than the Chinese and the Indians, whereas the Indians tend to be less brand loyal and less likely to be influenced by the utilitarian reference group information compared to other ethnic groups (Table 2).

It is found that the three ethnic groups differ in their family decision-makings. For grocery products, there is significant differences in means across the three groups for “when to buy” (F=2.42, p=.09) and “how much to pay” (F=6.52, p=.00). The pair-wise comparisons with Duncan test show that the Chinese and Indians wives dominate decisions of “when to buy” and “how much to pay” compared to the Malays. As for “where to buy”, the Malays and Indians were significantly more husband dominated than the Chinese, while the Malays were more husband dominated than the Chinese for the aspect of “what to buy”. It can be seen that the Malays were consistently more husband dominant in decision making than the Chinese. Thus hypothesis 6 was partially supported in grocery product category.

When it comes to major appliances, F-tests results again showed significant differences among the three groups for “when to buy” (F=5.14, p=.01) and “how much to pay” (F=2.66, p=.07). According to the pair-wise comparisons among the ethnic groups, the decisions of the Chinese and Indians were more wife dominated than the Malays for the aspects of “what to buy” and “where to buy”. In addition, the Chinese wives took part in more decision making than the Malays when it came to “how much to pay”. Again, the main differences found were those for the Chinese who were more influenced by the wife than the Malays. Therefore, hypothesis 6 was partially supported in major appliance category (Table 3).

**DISCUSSIONS**

Among the four cultural dimensions outlined by Hofstede (1980), the dimension of masculinity produces a significant difference among the three ethnic groups. The low masculinity rating for the Indians suggests that they have discarded traditional sex role ideas and are receptive to Western ideas of equality between sexes, and changes in gender roles. This can be seen from statistics which show that the percentage of working Indian women enjoyed the greatest increase of 12.6% among the three ethnic groups between 1980 and 1990 (Singapore Census of Population 1980; 1990). In addition, as the Indians become more affluent and enjoy greater achievements in their careers, the percentage of educated Indians also increases proportionately (The Straits Times 3/5/1994). Thus the Indians, especially the younger ones, find it easier to accept feminist ideas and values. On the other hand, the Chinese may still retain some of the traditional teachings that define...
### TABLE 1
Mean Cultural Dimensions Among the Ethnic Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural Dimensions</th>
<th>Chinese (n=83)</th>
<th>Malays (n=75)</th>
<th>Indians (n=73)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F-Prob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H1: Individualism</td>
<td>2.85</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: Uncertainty Avoidance</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>0.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5: Masculinity</td>
<td>3.00^a</td>
<td>3.35^b</td>
<td>2.62^c</td>
<td>17.79</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H7: Power Distance</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>2.49</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.88</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Different letters (a, b, c) indicate significant differences between groups at 0.05 level with Duncan tests.

### TABLE 2
Mean Consumer Behavior Ratings Among the Ethnic Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consumer Behaviors</th>
<th>Chinese (n=83)</th>
<th>Malays (n=75)</th>
<th>Indians (n=73)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F-Prob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>H2a: Reference Group Influence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational</td>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>0.97</td>
<td>0.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilitarian</td>
<td>3.02^a</td>
<td>2.96^a</td>
<td>2.64^b</td>
<td>6.31</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value Expressive</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.47</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2b: Information sharing</td>
<td>2.73^a</td>
<td>3.01^b</td>
<td>2.73^a</td>
<td>4.88</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2c: Opinion Leadership</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2d: Ethnocentrism</td>
<td>2.46^a</td>
<td>2.72^b</td>
<td>2.29^a</td>
<td>8.11</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4a: Perceived Risk</td>
<td>3.42</td>
<td>3.43</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4b: Brand Loyalty</td>
<td>3.17^a</td>
<td>3.15^a</td>
<td>2.84^b</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4c: Innovativeness</td>
<td>2.76</td>
<td>2.90</td>
<td>2.83</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4d: Informational Search</td>
<td>3.08</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H8: Opinion Seeking</td>
<td>3.02</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Different letters (a, b, c) indicate significant differences between groups at 0.05 level with Duncan tests.

### TABLE 3
Mean Family Decision Making Ratings Among the Ethnic Groups*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Decision Making Aspect</th>
<th>Chinese (n=83)</th>
<th>Malays (n=75)</th>
<th>Indians (n=73)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>F-Prob</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grocery Products:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to buy</td>
<td>4.05^a</td>
<td>3.60^b</td>
<td>3.96^a</td>
<td>2.42</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where to buy</td>
<td>3.88^a</td>
<td>3.61^b</td>
<td>3.58^b</td>
<td>1.70</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to buy</td>
<td>4.06^a</td>
<td>3.75^b</td>
<td>3.89</td>
<td>2.16</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much to pay</td>
<td>3.76^a</td>
<td>3.11^b</td>
<td>3.56^a</td>
<td>6.52</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Appliances:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When to buy</td>
<td>2.88^a</td>
<td>2.40^b</td>
<td>2.78^a</td>
<td>5.14</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where to buy</td>
<td>2.69^a</td>
<td>2.44^b</td>
<td>2.68^a</td>
<td>1.56</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What to buy</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How much to pay</td>
<td>2.77^a</td>
<td>2.40^b</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Different letters (a, b, c) indicate significant differences between groups at 0.05 level with Duncan tests.
Scales are rated from 1: “husband decided” to 5: “wife decided”
strict gender roles and this could be the reason why they were rated higher than the Indians in terms of masculinity. This is especially evident in the socialization of children where girls will be clothed in pink, boys in blue, and the girls will play with dolls and the boys with guns. As for the Malays, they still hold traditional attitudes which state that the wife has to be submissive to the husband, and women should not be graduates and should not work (The Straits Times 29/11/1995; 5/12/1995). This resulted in them rating the highest on masculinity.

However, the differences are not as evident in the other three cultural aspects. This may be due to the ethnic integration efforts done by Singapore government. After Singapore became independent in 1965, the government began to promote ethnic integration. A situation of common national identity was constructed. All the communities were accorded equal status and rights, and given the fullest freedom to preserve their distinct ethnic culture, heritage and identity.

Among the 10 examined consumer behavior variables that were assumed to be influenced by the cultural dimensions, significant ethnic group differences are observed on utilitarian reference group influence, information sharing, ethnocentrism, brand loyalty, and family decision making behaviors. Although significant, the differences do not support the hypothesized cultural influence on consumer behaviors except for the family decision making behavior. A possible interpretation could be that the cultural dimensions developed by Hofstede (1980) may lack their validity in explaining consumer behaviors because they were not developed in the context of consumer behaviors and practices. If this is the case, their applicability to consumer behaviors is questionable and we may need other cultural frameworks to find better links between culture and consumer behaviors. However, the link between the masculinity and the family decision making behavior suggests that the Hofstede’s cultural framework could be, at least in some aspects, a valid cultural framework within the Singaporean context of Chinese, Malays and Indians.

There are a few proposed directions for future research. Firstly, future studies should continue to investigate relationships between culture and consumer behaviors in order to come up with more specific relationships between them. To do this, future researchers should look into other cultural models than Hofstede’s (1980), which could help us to find better links between culture and related consumer behaviors. Similarly, consumer Behaviors other than the ones investigated in this study should also be examined in future research in order to develop a full picture of the way culture impacts Behaviors. This study should also be extended to specific products or services, and to more demographically diverse samples of Chinese, Malays and Indians.

REFERENCES


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