

KEY ISSUES IN MARKETING MANAGEMENT

Multicultural Perspectives in Customer Behaviour

Edited by
Maria G. Piacentini and
Charles C. Cui

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ROUTLEDGE


Multicultural Perspectives in Customer Behaviour

With globalisation taking centre stage in the business world and multiculturalism affecting markets and societies, there is a need to understand the ways that customers respond to the changing marketplace from international and multicultural perspectives. This book is timely in addressing important themes raised in the most recent marketing literature, such as: global consumer culture, and the impact of Western culture on consumer behaviour in other countries; consumer acculturation processes, and the impact on identity conflicts and the strategies people use to manage them; globalisation vs. localised strategies, and the interaction of local and global influences on customer behaviour; climate change and global warming, the impact on consumer behaviour, and the implications for social responsibility; and cross-cultural customer research, including important methodological questions around the application of sociological, group-level measures to psychological, individual-level phenomenon in marketing contexts. The papers in this edition address those themes, reporting on studies from a range of countries, including Germany, Greece, China, and Austria, and a number of cultural groups in the UK.

These papers draw on quantitative and qualitative methodologies, reflecting the full range of methods employed in contemporary consumer research.

This book was originally published as a special issue of the *Journal of Marketing Management*.

Maria G. Piacentini is Senior Lecturer in Marketing at Lancaster University Management School, UK. Her research focuses on the consumption behaviour of vulnerable consumers, with specific interest in the coping strategies employed by consumers in difficult situations.

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Key Issues in Marketing Management



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First published 2012
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon, OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

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This book is a reproduction of the *Journal of Marketing Management*, volume 26, issues 11-12. The Publisher requests to those authors who may be citing this book to state, also, the bibliographical details of the special issue on which the book was based.

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN13: 978-0-415-62890-7

Typeset in Times New Roman
by Taylor & Francis Books

Publisher's Note

The publisher would like to make readers aware that the chapters in this book may be referred to as articles as they are identical to the articles published in the special issue. The publisher accepts responsibility for any inconsistencies that may have arisen in the course of preparing this volume for print.

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Introduction

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With globalisation taking centre stage in the business world and multiculturalism affecting markets and societies, there is a need to understand the ways that customers respond to the changing marketplace from international and multicultural perspectives. This special edition comprises a set of papers on the theme of 'Multicultural Perspectives in Customer Behaviour', emerging from the 6th Customer Research Academy Workshop Series (CRAWS) hosted by Manchester and Lancaster Universities in April 2008.

This special edition is timely in addressing important themes raised in the most recent marketing literature, such as: *global consumer culture*, and the impact of Western culture on consumer behaviour in other countries (Cleveland & Laroche, 2007); *consumer acculturation processes*, and the impact on identity conflicts and the strategies people use to manage them (Askegaard, Arnould, & Kjeldgaard, 2005; Jafari & Goulding, 2008; Oswald, 1999; Penaloza, 1994; Ustuner & Holt, 2007); *globalisation vs. localised strategies*, and the interaction of local and global influences on customer behaviour (Belk, 2006); *climate change and global warming*, the impact on consumer behaviour, and the implications for social responsibility (Lash & Wellington, 2007); and *cross-cultural customer research*, including important methodological questions around the application of sociological, group-level measures to psychological, individual-level phenomenon in marketing contexts (Bearden, Money, & Nevins, 2006; Lass & Hart, 2004; Salciuviene, Auruskeviciene, & Lydeka, 2005; Shavitt, Lalwani, Zhang, & Torelli, 2006; Singh, Kwon, & Pereira, 2003).

The papers in this special edition address those themes, reporting on studies from a range of countries, including Germany, Greece, China, and Austria, and a number of cultural groups in the UK. These papers draw on quantitative and qualitative methodologies, reflecting the full range of methods employed in contemporary consumer research.

Our opening paper, by Andrea Davies and James Fitchett, focuses on the processes of becoming part of a new culture, specifically how visiting residents in the UK for less than three months cope with cultural fracture (defined as the thoughts and feelings that individuals associate with an acculturation situation in which they must modify their previously held and accepted skills, expectations, behaviours, values, and competencies from 'home'). Davies and Fitchett examine the proposition that immigrant consumption may constitute an important type of cultural learning, an intriguing and original perspective on consumption in multicultural contexts. This is different from earlier

models of acculturation and consumption whereby a new culture is often considered an antecedent of acculturation and consumer competence. Rather, Davies and Fitchett demonstrate that consumption activities and attitudes facilitate the development of cultural knowledge and understanding, and indeed potentially aid those individuals as they cope with their experiences of cultural fracture. They also highlight the importance of understanding this issue alongside an understanding of materiality and possession centrality (i.e. how skilled and confident the individual is in aspects of consumption), and find that visitors possessing higher levels of possession centrality experience less cultural fracture than those with lower levels of possession centrality. Overall, they conclude that *'individuals who live in consumer cultures and have therefore developed abilities to read, encode, and interpret consumption symbolism are likely also to be better able to cope with the transnational movement'*. This has important implications for companies and organisations who serve consumers who are likely to spend extended periods of time in other countries (such as overseas students, business travellers, international teachers, etc.). For instance, apart from cultural factors identified in conventional marketing models derived from acculturation theories, marketers may benefit from researching such types of consumers' consumption experience, capabilities, and preferences in their home culture, and how these factors affect their response to a new cultural environment, and hence how companies could better serve their 'acculturated' consumption behaviours.

The paper by Rudolf Sinkovics, 'Mink' Leelapanyalert, and Mo Yamin explores consumer decision styles in Austria in comparison with reports about other countries in the literature. The authors argue that when approaching complex purchasing decisions, consumers' mental orientations characterise particular information search, learning, and decision patterns, which are crucial to the actual purchasing behaviour. In this context, the authors examine the concept of consumer decision styles and its measurement using the Consumer Styles Inventory (CSI) (Sproles & Kendall, 1986) in Austria (an unexplored country context). The authors concur with the view about the danger of simply using 'borrowed scales' (Douglas & Nijssen, 2003) in cross-national research and urge further replication and extension studies of consumer research instruments to minimise the detrimental effects of wrong conceptualisation and operationalisation. Despite the fact that replications are not very popular in marketing, consumer behaviour, and advertising research (Hubbard & Armstrong, 1994; Madden, Easley, & Dunn, 1995), they argue that from an epistemological perspective replications are vital to scientific progress (Collins, 1985; Evanschitzky, Baumgarth, Hubbard, & Armstrong, 2007) and make an important contribution to the advancement and generalisation of marketing results (Koçak, Abimbola, & Özer, 2007). Supported by this view, the authors explore the dimensions of CSI by replication of this instrument in the Austrian consumer context and compare their results with previous studies from Germany, the UK, the United States, South Korea, and China.

The dimensions of CSI have been found to deviate slightly in some studies. For example, the 'time-energy conservation' dimension is found in Korea and China, while 'variety seeking' is found in Germany. From their Austrian sample data and comparison with other studies, Sinkovics et al. report some interesting patterns from their analysis. For example, the dimensions 'Perfectionist', 'Brand Conscious', and 'Confused by overchoice' occurred in most countries, including the Austrian case. Their results confirm Mitchell and Bates's (1998) finding that 'confused by overchoice' occurs in most countries because of overloaded information and too many product choices (Klaussegger, Sinkovics, & Zou, 2007). An important point

raised by Sinkovics et al. is that *'issues observed in multicultural societies may not only reside within culturally diverse societies but can also arise in cross-cultural communication and understanding activate within a culturally homogenous society'*. The arguments and results from their study lend strong support to the view that marketing instruments must be validated by replications in the cultural contexts to be applied to, and marketers should not overlook the fact that homogeneity at a local scale such as Austria is not equivalent to the homogeneity at the global level, and, vice versa, heterogeneity perceived at the global scale should not be seen as exclusion of homogeneity at a local scale.

The third paper, by Laura Salciuviene, Pervez N. Ghauri, Ruth Salomea Streder, and Claudio De Mattos, pp. 1037–1056 has identified an important research gap where inconsistent findings are reported with regard to foreign brand names and their effects on brand preferences. To contribute to filling this gap, they employed the congruity and categorisation theories and examined the effects of incongruity between brand names in foreign languages and country of origin on hedonic perceptions and preferences of services. Salciuviene et al.'s study is timely and important in that marketers are challenged by the increasing diversity in conditions that dictate different consumer perceptions and choices. As the authors claim based on their review of the literature, country image's influence is higher than brand when consumers are not familiar with the brand. In such a case, it is expected that services from a country that has a hedonic image may be perceived as more hedonic than those from a country that has no perceptions of a hedonic image. On the other hand, the change of the market factors, such as the increasing use of the Internet and products being designed in one country but manufactured in another, has resulted in the diminishing importance of country boundaries, and hence the difficulty in identification of country of origin in consumers' perception of product and service. This has given rise to the importance of increasing attention to brand names, especially use of brand names in foreign languages.

Their findings suggest that: insurance services branded with French names are perceived as offering higher hedonic values than those with German or English brand names; services associated with a country with a hedonic image (e.g. France) are perceived as more hedonic; brand names in languages other than the language of the home country of origin (i.e. incongruence) increase consumer preferences for those services; and that incongruence between the language of a brand name and country of origin of utilitarian services leads to a stronger perception of the suitability of those brand names. The authors found the role of gender in choices of services branded in foreign languages is inconclusive and suggest further investigation.

The results from their study suggest that incongruence between a brand name in a foreign language and the country of origin (either home country or a foreign country associated with prior knowledge) of a service represented by this brand name may lead to increased perceptions (consistent with their prior knowledge) for the service represented by such a brand name. In other words, marketers need to be aware that the effect of the country of origin is not absent but functions in a different way through the association with the foreign language used with brand names. For academics and marketing practitioners, this study inspires attention to new important issues such as: whether or not the country-of-origin notion is still relevant in the current age of diminishing country boundaries in the product/service supply chain; how consumers gain their knowledge of the country of the language used in brand names; and how bilingual/multilingual consumers perceive brand names differently from monolingual consumers in a multicultural society or the global market.

A major theme in recent consumer acculturation studies has been that of identity conflicts and the strategies people use to manage them (Askegaard et al., 2005; Jafari & Goulding, 2008; Oswald, 1999; Penaloza, 1994; Ustuner & Holt, 2007). This is developed in a number of papers appearing in this special issue, including the paper by Amandeep Takhar, Pauline Maclaran, Elizabeth Parsons, and Anne Broderick. Their paper is about Indian cinema culture (i.e. Bollywood), and the paper focuses on the ways that the wider processes of globalisation and acculturation play out through this medium and how, in turn, this may impact on the identities of its young audience at the local level. This paper shows how Bollywood films function as a cultural medium through which it is possible to explore changing identities, values, and expectations of young British Sikhs negotiating a position for themselves. A novel methodology is adopted, drawing on the netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2002), but also combining offline interviews. The first author was immersed in the research site (an online Sikh matchmaking service) in the search for a partner herself. The Bollywood characters provide a way for these third-generation British Sikhs to self-categorise their social identity (Hogg & Terry, 2000; Turner, 1987), and in this way reconnect with this part of their social history and culture. Bollywood films enable a form of re-engagement with their Sikh values, which may be weaker for this group of third-generation British Sikh community members. For these young people, Bollywood film provides a powerful way for them to connect to their British Sikh ethnic identity, and facilitates their constructions of the romantic self. However, the participants were 'torn' between their Western selves (with the accompanying identity values that accompany being Western) and their more romanticised selves that aspire to the romance as presented in the Bollywood genre (a similar finding to that of Jafari & Goulding, 2008, in their study of consumption practices of UK-based young Iranians, and the conflicts and dilemmas they experienced between their Iranian and UK identities). For Takhar et al., these films represent the British Sikh ethnic identity as less uncertain than perhaps it is felt in their everyday lives, and the Bollywood films at times reflected some of their pressures and helped them to engage with the issues in their everyday life.

The paper also makes interesting contributions around social identity theory, and the authors conclude that Bollywood represents a 'subtle social function . . . a valuable narrative space of negotiation in which young British Sikhs can "re-moor" their ethnic identity'. Consumption of Bollywood offers an opportunity and place for young British Sikhs to explore and negotiate their conflicting identity positions, especially in terms of their possible and potential selves (Markus & Kitayama, 1991) and ultimately can lead to a 're-mooring' of ethnic identity.

On a similar theme, Julie Tinson and Peter Nuttall look at the fascinating phenomenon of the American high-school prom, and explore the ways in which this ritual has been adopted or adapted as part of youth culture in the UK. They demonstrate that the high-school prom in the UK is becoming increasingly integrated into the fabric of youth culture, an illustration of 'glocalisation' (global practices reworked to fit local contexts) that gives the young people in their sample an opportunity for differentiation from others. The major contribution of this paper is that it builds on the work of Kjeldgaard and Askegaard (2006) to demonstrate consumers' appropriation of globalising cultural rituals, and shows in more detail how youth culture is indeed a 'glocal' phenomenon that depends on a dynamic cultural process of adoption and adaptation. In doing so, they build on the emerging body of literature on this area, but in particular move beyond previous studies (e.g. Ger & Belk, 1996) that allude to globalisation and appropriation but have tended to provide

examples of brand-related products. This paper contributes to the understanding of appropriation by illustrating the extent to which homogenisation and heterogenisation are interconnected processes (Robertson, 1994; Robertson & White, 2005) and that there can be varying degrees of appropriation (e.g. global, local, or glocal) even for the same ritual practice. The authors provide insights into how the prom rituals are appropriated and adapted to fit with existing local practices, and emphasise that the US prom ritual has not completely replaced previous traditions associated with celebrating the rite of passage associated with leaving school. The authors add support to Giulianotti and Robertson's (2007) point that the creation of localities is a standard component of globalisation.

Tinson and Nuttall provide some intriguing insights into the prom, as performed in the UK context, commenting on the role of technology in supporting the way that performance is managed (especially in terms of displaying popularity and general social position), and providing additional insights into the role of performance authenticity in the context of the prom rituals and how young people negotiate authenticity (Arthur, 2006). Additionally, they comment on the role of agency in this context, that is, the ability of individuals and groups to transform and play with meaning (Ger & Belk, 1996). They develop understanding of adolescent agency through their focus on the way in which co-creation is influenced by both a dominant force (US producers) and conformist behaviour.

The sixth paper, by Katerina Karanika and Margaret Hogg, is entitled 'The inter-relationship between desired and undesired selves and consumption: The case of Greek female consumers' experiences'. The authors report on phenomenological interviews with Greek women, which focus on their consumption experiences that are linked to positive and negative aspects of the self. Greece represents an interesting empirical context as consumers' identity projects in Mediterranean and non-American cultures have been relatively neglected; and most consumer studies about identity projects and identity conflicts were conducted mainly with American consumers (e.g. Ahuvia, 2005; Cherrier & Murray, 2007; Fournier, 1998; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Murray, 2002; Thompson, 1996; Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Thompson Locander, & Pollio, 1990). The paper makes cross-cultural comparisons and reports similarities, as well as differences, in symbolic consumption in Greece and the United States. As expected, the Greek women in their study did experience identity conflicts, and this did shape their consumption experiences. However, in contrast with Ahuvia's work where US respondents managed to create a sense of self-coherence without solving their identity conflicts by combining conflicting standards through consumption of loved objects, the Greek respondents were more uncomfortable with the difficulties they faced in constructing a coherent sense of self and with their identity conflicts. These women strived to achieve a compromising balance between opposing identity positions (similar to the consumers in Thompson, 1996) or to compromise with one identity position while often aspiring to overcome the identity conflict in the future. The Greek women experienced the desire for a coherent self that often left them with a sense of 'baffled self' (Miller, 2009) when coherence was not attained. Interestingly too, Karanika and Hogg identified more ambivalence in the emotions surrounding consumption than previous work (Ahuvia, 2005; Cushman, 1990; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995), identifying a range of different strategies used to cope with their identity conflicts related to consumption.

The paper by Caroline Tynan, M. Teresa Pereira Heath, Christine Ennew, Fang Fang Wang, and Luping Sun reports their study that extends research on self-gift consumer behaviour (SGCB) into China, a cultural context that is distinctly different from other

contexts in which SGCB is examined in the literature. The authors have identified an important research gap where calls were made for understanding of SGCB in collectivist culture such as China and cross-cultural settings but no research in such contexts were reported in the literature. Based on their argument that the nature and role of SGCB is culturally specific, the authors attempt to reconsider and redevelop existing understandings of SGCB that have emerged from North America.

The authors point out that in Western societies, the self is not associated with obligations to fulfil the needs and expectations of others, and individuals are encouraged to be proud and reward themselves for their own achievements (Mesquita & Karasawa, 2004). By comparison, individuals in Chinese society are interdependent and self is a relational entity because the individual's social obligation to family and other networks is prime. The authors argue that the important aspects of Confucian cultures such as the human universals, face-saving, and shame and thought are crucial in explaining much behaviour in Chinese society. They also identify family orientation (Qian, Razzaque, & Keng, 2007), *guanxi*, *renqing*, face, harmony, and reciprocity (Zhou & Guang, 2007) as salient aspects of Chinese cultural values that influence gift-giving behaviours. Following from those important cultural aspects, the authors used interviews with consumers to establish the existence of self-gifting behaviour in China, particularly in the motivations for this behaviour in positive contexts, and further compared motivations for and the emotions associated with SGCB in the UK and mainland China.

From their interviews, the authors found SGCB existed in China and in the UK but with important differences in the preferred self-gift occasions, the gifts chosen, and the emotions experienced after self-gift giving. For example, they found Chinese SGCB to be particularly affected by the importance of the family, group-association orientation of the self, and the "face" concept. Contexts related to work, holiday, or receiving money are the main positive circumstances for self-gift giving. But for UK participants, these self-gifts are noticeably perceived as deserved by the self-attribution of the achievements, while for the Chinese, the gifts chosen are often not purely self-oriented. The findings from this study bear implications beyond SGCB. Interpersonal communication and relationship (i.e. Chinese *guanxi*) play a crucial role in initiating, facilitating, and sustaining business in China. For this reason, marketers targeting China may benefit from understanding important aspects of SGCB, as this study reported, for planning and executing communication approaches when interacting with Chinese customers.

The eighth paper, by Louise Canning and Isabelle Szmigin, 'Death and disposal: The universal, environmental dilemma', makes a very interesting contribution to this special issue by focusing on the disposal of the dead and relating this to environmental concerns in marketing and consumer behaviour. Few authors in the marketing and consumer behaviour have addressed issues around death and dying (few notable papers include the work of Bonsu & Belk, 2003; Gabel, Mansfield, & Westbrook, 1996; Gentry, Kennedy, Paul, & Hill, 1994; O'Donohoe & Turley, 2000, 2006), and yet decisions regarding the disposal of the dead do form part of the consumption cycle, and from a consumer culture theory perspective could be considered a 'neglected experiential, social and cultural dimension of consumption in context' (Arnould & Thompson, 2005, p. 869) worthy of further investigation. Discussing the disposal practices that dominate in different countries, the authors draw attention to the very real environmental challenges associated with the disposal of the dead. There are concerns around resources and substances associated with the disposal process (e.g. chemicals for embalment, wood for coffins, energy requirements for