

The Impact of Online vs. Offline Acculturation on Purchase Intentions: A Multigroup Analysis of the Role of Education

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research is to determine the extent of online and offline acculturation preferences affecting purchase intentions within a minority ethnic community. This study investigates the role of social media as an agent in terms of how it influences acculturation and consumption. It also investigates the moderating role of education level. The findings highlight the significance of investigating language and friendship orientations and subsequent acculturation preferences. Empirical results confirm the impact of language and friendship orientations on enculturation/acculturation, which in turn impact purchase intentions. The results suggest differences among three groups in terms of their education level. The study discusses contribution to theory and provides future research directions, while offering useful practical implications for marketers.

Keywords: Online Acculturation, Offline Enculturation/Acculturation, Purchase Intentions, Education, Multigroup Analysis

1. Introduction

Consumer acculturation involves processes related to the learning of a new culture (Jamal et al., 2015). Prior research has investigated antecedents, processes and outcomes of consumer acculturation among ethnic minority consumers in an offline context (Askegaard, Arnould and Kjeldgaard, 2005; Kizgin et al., 2018a; Peñaloza, 1994). Such studies report preference for language use (inside and outside home) and social interactions (in the form of friendship orientations) as key drivers aligned with acculturation outcomes. Acculturation agents defined as “individuals or institutions who serve as sources of consumer information and/or models of consumption behavior” (Peñaloza, 1989, p.116) play an important role in determining the outcomes of consumer acculturation (Askegaard et al., 2005; Kizgin et al., 2018a; Peñaloza, 1994).

However, there has been a significant growth in the use of social media by ethnic minority consumers over the recent years. Scholars like Dey, Yen and Samuel (2020) argue that the convenience and connectedness provided by new media platforms promote assimilation, integration or acculturation beyond the users’ own community. This is because ethnic minority consumers can connect, socialize and widen their friendship networks via social networking sites facilitating strengthening of ties not only with in-group but also with out-group members. This allows them to break away from stereotypes (e.g., isolation and segregation) that are commonly associated with ethnic communities. This also helps facilitate their integration into the broader host culture and society.

Ethnic minority consumers also face a choice of using either their own ethnic language or majority language when using social networking sites. Together with their friendship preferences on social media, this choice can highlight and uphold the fact they are different from the majority or their desire and motivation to integrate certain elements of the mainstream culture. Such a choice can have important consequences for them in terms of their

psychological well-being and consumer acculturation. For example, Li and Tsai (2015) report that using social media in the English language helps Hispanics to develop strong orientation toward the American culture, while the use of social media in the Spanish language reinforces enculturation (i.e. heritage culture). Similarly, Kizgin et al. (2018b) show that preference of the host culture language has a positive effect on acculturation and a negative effect on enculturation.

While a recent work points to the complexity of acculturation given the significant rise in the use of digital technologies (Dey et al., 2020), research seldom considers the fact that ethnic minority consumers' acculturation experiences are shaped by interactions both in offline and online contexts. Accordingly, it is possible that ethnic minority consumers' choices on new media in the form of friendship and language preferences may impact acculturation strategies in the physical domain, which in turn, impact their specific purchase intentions. Support comes from Kizgin et al. (2018b) who report that ethnic minority consumers engage with online networks and take part in heritage consumer cultures. Research also testifies that cultural orientations influence consumers' purchase intentions, which are affected by the information they use through online social networks (Wang, Yu and Wei, 2012).

The degree to which an ethnic minority consumer acculturates to the host culture influenced by language and education may be a more important predictor of consumer behavior than country of birth (Ogden et al., 2004). Scholars recognize that little is known about how the specific role of online acculturation predicts acculturation preferences and subsequent consumption choices (e.g. Kizgin et al., 2020). We address this research gap by simultaneously investigating the effects of online and offline acculturation on ethnic minority consumers' purchase intentions. Despite the emergence of digital technologies, the role of online acculturation preferences shaping offline acculturation preferences and how this informs consumer behavior is limited (Kizgin et al., 2018b; Kizgin et al., 2020). Social media networks

may play an integral role in the lives of ethnic minority consumers and facilitate interactions with others with significant implications for consumer acculturation. Social media has become an aspect of day-to-day life, while it is worthwhile to examine the “interlocking networks of cultural consuming communities in market systems” (Kizgin et al., 2020, p.6). This research gap is addressed by investigating variations in online acculturation, acculturation/enculturation preferences and purchase intentions.

Moreover, characteristics of education influence the process of acculturation preferences (e.g. Makarova & Birman, 2016) and, therefore, education is seen as an important determinant of acculturation process (Berry et al., 2011). In terms of consumption choices, it is possible for better educated ethnic minority consumers to engage in information search behavior differently than lower educated ones. They may also rely less on the opinion of others when it comes to making specific consumption choices. This is because such individuals may become better informed and knowledgeable about existing product alternatives and, hence, can discriminate between relevant and irrelevant information more effectively and independently (Alba & Hutchinson, 1987, 2000; Johnson & Russo, 1984). However, little is known about the moderating effects of education level on the way online acculturation captured via friendship orientation and language use can impact off line acculturation. Moreover, we do not know if the relationship between acculturation and purchase intentions becomes stronger or weaker due to varying levels of education.

Accordingly, this research formulates two research questions: Firstly, to what extent ethnic minority consumers’ online acculturation preferences shape offline acculturation and how this in turn influences their purchase intentions? Second, what role ethnic minority consumer’s education level plays in explaining cultural orientations and consumption choices made by ethnic minority consumers.

