

Word of mouth, brand loyalty, acculturation and the American Jewish consumer

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Abstract

Purpose – The intent of this article is to explore if there is a difference between American Jewish consumers and American non-Jewish consumers in the use of word of mouth and brand loyalty in response to the purchase of durable goods (automobiles). Additionally, this article aims to explore if there is a difference in the use of word of mouth and brand loyalty among American Jews with differing levels of acculturation.

Design/methodology/approach – This article utilizes survey data obtained from over 400 respondents with analysis performed using regression and chi-squared analysis.

Findings – This study shows no significant difference in brand loyalty and word of mouth between all American Jews and American non-Jews, however, a significant difference between highly acculturated American Jews and low-aculturated American Jews was found.

Practical implications – The article helps firms plan their marketing strategy in terms of how they will utilize word of mouth where American Jewish consumers comprise a significant part of the target market. Additionally, this research helps firms understand the context of brand loyalty in terms of looking at ethnic groups.

Originality/value – Little research on Jewish consumer acculturation has been published in the last 25 years. The spending power of the American Jewish consumer is significantly larger than that of the rest of the American population, which makes the study of this group particularly valuable.

Keywords Acculturation, Brand loyalty, Ethnic groups, United States of America

Paper type Research paper

An executive summary for managers and executive readers can be found at the end of this article.

Introduction

The connection between ethnicity and consumer decision making is especially important among the American Jewish population as Jewish ethnicity is believed to exert a stronger effect on individual behavior when compared to other ethnic groups in the USA (Heinze, 1990; Herman, 1977; Hirschman, 1981; Joselit, 1994). Furthermore, it has been found that American Jewish consumers show a comparatively high degree of product information seeking prior to the purchase decision (Heinze, 1990), and have generally stored (and are able to activate) more pieces of consumption-relevant information when compared to the general American population (Hirschman, 1981). It has been over 25 years since the last look at Jewish consumer behavior (Hirschman, 1981). This paper looks to begin the update of the Jewish-related literature in marketing, and also explore the degree to which the Jewish cultural mores of the twentieth century are still alive and relevant today.

As immigration continues to be on the rise in the USA, and immigrants account for a growing proportion of the consumer goods market, understanding the consumer acculturation process and how it affects purchasing decisions is now more important to marketers looking to understand better the key

demographic segments of their target markets. Thus far, most normative studies are of Hispanics (Bellenger and Valencia, 1982; Deshpande *et al.*, 1986; Donthu and Cherian, 1994; Hernandez and Kaufman, 1991; Hoyer and Deshpande, 1982; Kaufman, 1991; Kara and Kara, 1996; O'Guinn and Faber, 1985, 1986; Ogden, 2002; Penaloza, 1994; Ueltschy and Krampf, 1997; Webster, 1992, 1994) and African Americans (Bauer and Cunningham, 1970; Sexton, 1972; Barry and Harvey, 1974; Whittler *et al.*, 1991), most likely because they clearly comprise a majority of the “non-European” or “non-Anglo” population in the USA. Additionally, there have been acculturation studies of consumers from the Pacific and of Asian-Americans (Cui and Vanscoyoc, 1993; Ellis *et al.*, 1985; Lee and Tse, 1994; Kang and Kim, 1998; Oswald, 1999; Tan and McCullough, 1985), as well as from India (Tse *et al.*, 1989, Khairullah, 1995). Short of Hirschman's (1981) study that related some selected aspects of Jewish ethnicity to consumer behavior, almost no attention has been focused on a comparatively affluent group of Americans – American Jews. While the largest wave of Jewish immigration to the USA occurred from 1880-1950 (Joselit, 1990, 1994), there have been newer waves of immigrants from the former Soviet Union and former Warsaw Pact nations. These newer Jewish immigrants are generally found to live in large ethnic areas in large communities near major cities (UJC – Jewish Virtual Library, 2002).

The unique norms and values that categorize a given ethnic group have been infrequently considered, especially in regards to the Jewish population in the USA. The American Jewish population has quickly amassed itself into a cultural group that wields a great deal of purchasing power, and is predominately found in the upper socioeconomic classes (Herman, 1977; Hirschman, 1981; UJC – Jewish Virtual Library, 2002). Because socioeconomic status held by an

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individual may be a significant aspect of overall purchasing power, the issue of Jewish ethnicity, acculturation, and consumer response is a significant one for marketers. The year 2000 median income of the Jewish household was \$54,000 (UJC – Jewish Virtual Library, 2002). Because of this strong buying power, the American Jewish consumer population may have the option of using their purchasing power to reflect their values and beliefs. This is distinctly different from consumers who do not wield economic power, and therefore have little choice in the product decision process, other than to purchase the most cost-effective alternative available.

Objective

How does the consumer decision-making process, in terms of durable goods, differ between the Jewish subculture and the American culture, and does the level of acculturation affect this process?

Literature review

The purchase decision and physical product

The purchase decision regarding a physical product and its relation to ethnic identity has been established in the literature among other ethnic groups. Tse *et al.* (1989) examined the role of possessions in people's lives and how these possessions may factor into a sense of a person's "cultural identity." They determined that possessions do play an important role in ethnic identity. Similarly, Ogden (2002) found the same results regarding the beliefs about possessions for Hispanic consumers living in the USA with regard to house paint purchases. Even relatively low involvement products such as convenience food have also been examined in relation to ethnicity (Laroche *et al.*, 1998).

Jewish demographics in the USA

The American Jewish population is distinct from the US population as a whole in that the former is more affluent and commands much more purchasing power than the rest of the nation (UJC – Jewish Virtual Library, 2002). There are currently 2.9 million Jewish households in the USA that comprise 6.7 million people. Adults age 18 and over are 81 percent of the Jewish population. The median age of American Jews is 41, whereas the median age of the US population is 35 (UJC – Jewish Virtual Library, 2002). While many Jews immigrated to the USA between 1880-1950, there has been a recent "second wave" of Jews that have immigrated, post-Soviet collapse (Joselit, 1994) who also wield a great deal of purchasing power (UJC – Jewish Virtual Library, 2002).

What makes the American Jewish population attractive to marketers is the fact that the American Jewish consumer has a great deal of buying power. In part, this is due to a higher education level of Jewish consumers. The increased education level has led to higher-paying jobs (UJC – Jewish Virtual Library, 2002). One-quarter of Jewish adults age 18 years and old has received a graduate degree, and 55 percent have earned at least a bachelor's degree. Among non-Jewish Americans, only 5 percent have earned a graduate degree and 28 percent have earned at least a bachelor's degree (UJC – Jewish Virtual Library, 2002). Furthermore, 62 percent of Jews are employed, and the majority of employed Jews work in management positions or professional/technical positions

(compared to 46 percent for non-Jews) (UJC – Jewish Virtual Library, 2002).

In terms of income, the median household income for the American Jewish population is \$54,000 (UJC – Jewish Virtual Library, 2002). This is significantly higher than the \$42,000 median income reported by the US Census Bureau for all American households. Additionally, only 19 percent of all Jewish households are defined as "low income," compared to 29 percent of all US households (UJC – Jewish Virtual Library, 2002).

Culture and the American Jewish consumer

While American history textbooks usually refer to the USA as the "great melting pot," most researchers in the area of culture seem to suggest that the USA is more like a "tossed salad" or "mosaic," where there is more focus on individual identity, and where subcultures still play an important, if not dominant, role in cultural identity (Hofstede, 1984; Ogden, 2002). While there is an American culture, that culture is composed of bits and pieces of the cultures from which it has acquired its members.

It is well known that culture affects the way consumers behave (Clark, 1990; Hall, 1977; Hirschman, 1985; McCracken, 1988). In order to define culture properly in the terms of this particular study, the present study enlists operational definitions from the area of psychology. Gordon (1964), defines culture as:

[...] the social heritage of man – the ways of acting and the ways of doing things which are passed down from one generation to another.

Hofstede (1984, p. 21) views culture as "collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group to another".

For purposes of this study, Judaism is not labeled as a religion, but rather as a culture. There are many reasons for this:

- Post-Diaspora, the Jewish population is actually comprised of five distinct religious "sects" that vary greatly in terms of religious belief (Donin, 1991; Kertzer, 1996).
- Post-Diaspora, Jews never found themselves fully integrated into their new society. Whether religious or not, Jews were exterminated in the Holocaust simply because of their "bloodline." Jews in much of Eastern Europe post-1500 were never fully assimilated into the host culture, in many cases living in *shetels*, on enclaves that were comprised only entirely of Jews (Heinze, 1990). A similar practice was found for Jews in the USA, largely starting in 1880 (Heinze, 1990; Joselit, 1990, 1994).
- Jewish scholars have written extensively on the topic about "What is a Jew?" The leading thought is that Jews are indeed one culture (Heinze, 1990; Kirman, 2006). Many Jewish people who are secular in every way tend to describe themselves as "secular Jews" (Kirman, 2006). Many Judaic scholars have been unable to determine where the dividing line between "Jewish" the culture and "Judaism" the religion resides (Kirman, 2006). Unlike other religions, one does not accept a specific creed or statement of faith in order to be considered a "true member" of the group (Kirman, 2006). There is no excommunication in Judaism. While some Jews might consider themselves part of a race (which is subject of great debate), it is clear that Jews do fall into the definition

of a subculture within the larger American culture, which Hedbig (1979) defines as a set of people with a distinct set of behavior and beliefs that differentiate them from a larger culture from which they are part.

- According to Sklare and Greenblum (1967), when one is born a Jew, one is born into a culture and a religion simultaneously. Although as an individual, a Jewish person may choose to adhere either to the culture, religion, or both or neither, the correlation between the two has been found to be very high for Jewish populations (Herman, 1977). According to Hirschman (1981, p. 103), "One set of values is promulgated both by informal social interaction and religious instruction; therefore, the individual experiences greater normative consistency. This congruence between culture and religion stands in contrast to conditions prevailing in some other ethnic groups." Hirschman illustrates this point by using the Irish as an example. Irish ethnicity may be very different depending on whether or not one is Protestant or Catholic. Jewish ethnicity is rather unique when compared to other ethnic groups because of its multi-dimensional nature, as Jews came from various countries in Europe with various skills. Jews in the USA found themselves living in rather isolated pockets of major cities in the twentieth century for various reasons (Heinze, 1990; Joselit, 1990, 1994) and with that, a unique and cohesive subculture formed. Even today, many Jews are found in concentrated areas near major cities (UJC – Jewish Virtual Library, 2002).

As can be seen, while the amount of religious diversity is certainly present, the Jewish people clearly meet the definition of a culture according to Hofstede and Gordon (1978). They are a "collective" that distinguishes themselves from other groups.

Acculturation

The concept of acculturation in social science is defined as those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with another (or other) group(s), with subsequent changes taking place in the original cultural patterns of either or both groups (Redfield *et al.*, 1936). The first major revision of the definition of acculturation in sociology took place in 1954 when the Social Science Research Council (Palmer, 1954, p. 974) defined acculturation as:

[...] culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems.

Padilla (1980) revised these earlier definitions by stating that acculturation is really the modification of a group by adapting to, or borrowing traits from, another culture. Penaloza (1994) took the sociological definition of acculturation and applied it to marketing, stating that consumer acculturation is the general process of movement and adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country. Ownbey and Horridge (1997) have defined acculturation as the process of learning and adopting cultural traits, different from the ones with which the person was originally reared. It has been found that the process of acculturation occurs simultaneously at both the group and the individual level (Berry, 1980). Additionally, Olmedo (1979) has suggested that acculturation is measurable within a reasonable degree of reliability and validity.

Recent research has linked acculturation (although in varying degrees of strength) and level of ethnicity to the consumer purchase decision, as in Ogden's (2002) work regarding the Hispanic consumer living in the USA (which further opens up the idea of a link); and also in Ganesh's (1997) study of the ethnic Indian-American consumer.

Debate and criticism in consumer acculturation studies

The first article to criticize acculturation methodology significantly in consumer behavior research was Hirschman (1981) in which she indicates that a majority of studies were both *post hoc* in nature and relied too heavily on the possibly flawed lack of self-identification of respondents. In most studies, factors such as last name (Hoyer and Deshpande, 1982) or place of residence (Saegart *et al.*, 1985; Wallendorf and Reilly, 1983) were the basis for identification. Many scholars have agreed that this is often too simplistic – especially in a society like the USA where inter-cultural marriage is on the rise, and American cities and neighborhoods become show increasing levels of diversity. With this in mind, many scholars have pushed for strong degrees of self-identification in acculturation studies (Hirschman, 1981; Valencia, 1985). These proponents argue that ethnic self-identification reflect the intrinsic beliefs and values of the individuals being studied (Hirschman, 1981; Valencia, 1985).

Additionally, there is a school of thought that believes in the phenomena of situational or felt ethnicity. Coined by Stayman and Deshpande (1989), situational ethnicity is based on the notion that the acculturation process may vary depending on the context in which the actual behavior occurs. What this means is that individuals may feel differently in different daily-life contexts – and these roles and experiences may affect the level of acculturation (O'Guinn and Faber, 1985), so that in one situation, a person may feel "very Jewish" and that in another situation, the same person does not feel "very Jewish" at all.

As can be seen there are some differences in the study of acculturation and ethnic conflict in the literature, but generally, little has been written about either topic. Further, little attention has been paid to the American Jewish Consumer. Taken together, this identifies a niche in the aggregate literature. This new research stream will provide support for not only further study of acculturation and the consumer purchase decision (and how it relates to ethnic conflict) but will also yield significant managerial implications for producers and consumers who have been involved in ethnic conflict and live in market economies where consumers can choose what brand of product they wish to use. The further study of acculturation will give better informed information for marketers who may or may not believe that the USA is becoming more of a "mosaic" and less of a "melting pot."

Jewish acculturation study in the marketing literature

As mentioned earlier, up to this point there have been sparse studies about the American Jewish Consumer – let alone any that deal with acculturation. Hirschman (1981) introduced the study of the American Jew to the marketing literature in which she identified relationships between Jewish ethnicity and identity and levels of consumer innovativeness. The primary results of her work indicated that ethnicity may indeed be a useful determinant of consumption patterns, and

that ethnic norms may influence competency in making the purchase decision. These two conclusions were key in spurring the prevalence of culture and ethnicity studies in marketing.

Hirschman's (1981) study also found that Jewish ethnicity positively related to:

- childhood information exposure;
- adult information seeking;
- transfer of consumption information; and
- divergent processing ability and the capacity for activating consumption information.

These results suggest that thought about purchase and buying decisions among Jews can occur earlier than the rest of the population, additionally it implies that Jews very much share their experiences about their purchases with others.

The key limitation of the Hirschman study is that the results come from a sample that is largely one of convenience (for the New York City area). While in 1981, New York City clearly had the largest Jewish population in the USA, there were (are) other areas in the USA with significant Jewish populations as well. These populations might show some difference in terms of both acculturation and the response of the dependent variables studied. New York City is an extremely densely populated area where one Jewish sect can literally take up multiple city blocks – in fact many streets in these dense areas have street signs in Hebrew and contain actual boundary lines that signify a “Jewish neighborhood” (Joselit, 1990). Because of this strict cohesiveness and closeness, these New York City groups might show differences in information sharing, learning and even information gathering when considering information coming from outside the densely populated area. It would be helpful to have a study that looked at Jewish consumption behavior outside of the New York City area – especially in a study that was comprised of both urban and suburban Jews.

Given the large degree of economic power among American Jews, the further study of this group is of particular importance. It has been close a quarter decade since the Hirschman study, and the economic power of Jewish consumers still exists. Additionally, time has seen the growth of the Jewish population in new geographic areas such as Baltimore and Northern Virginia.

Research question

Measurement of acculturation constructs

The early acculturation marketing studies were rather simplistic in terms of determining what factors needed to be examined in attempting to determine what comprised acculturation. Padilla (1980) used two to factors measure the degree of acculturation, which were cultural awareness and ethnic loyalty. The cultural awareness factor was comprised of the respondent's cultural heritage (as well as the cultural heritage of his/her spouse (if applicable) and parents), language preference and social behavior. Ethnic loyalty was comprised of pride in ethnicity and perceived discrimination. Between Padilla and the early 1980s there were not many acculturation studies published, however, there was discussion of what should be used as factors in sociology. Berry (1980) indicated that in order to measure acculturation properly, one should perform independent measurement at the group level in terms of history and

purpose of contact. At the individual level, he advocated independent measurement of interpersonal experiences.

Post-1985, there have been some paramount studies that focused on acculturation and the measurement of acculturation (Hirschman, 1981; Laroche *et al.*, 1998; Ogden, 2002; Penaloza, 1989; Valencia, 1985). Based on this literature, many factors (and their varying degrees) are considered when attempting to measure acculturation. These factors include: religion, language usage, ethnicity, length of time in the host nation, media usage, reference groups, miscegenation, and communications with the host nation. Additionally, intermarriage, identity and culture have also been used as factors in a majority of acculturation studies (Ogden, 2002; Laroche *et al.*, 1998; Lee and Um, 1992; Penaloza, 1989; Suinn *et al.*, 1987; Valencia, 1985). Furthermore, the Behavior Acculturation Scale (Szapocznik *et al.*, 1978) was devised to measure an acculturation dimension related to language proficiency, preference, and use along with behaviors related to tradition, customs and cultural identification.

Acculturation research has also identified that the construct is closely linked with various traits and behaviors of individuals. Leong and Tata (1990) found that acculturation level was a key influencer of the occupational values of Chinese-American children. Additionally, Gim *et al.* (1990) linked acculturation, gender, and ethnicity with the types of concerns Asian-Americans experience living in their daily lives.

While the literature can sometimes present the usage of only a number of the aforementioned factors, and there has been some debate as to which of those figures are best to use in study, there have been some generally-agreed on generalizations about the construct. These two widely-accepted generalizations are that; acculturation itself is primarily used to determine the extent to which a person has:

- adapted a new culture; and
- changed behavior related to that culture (Ward and Arzu, 1999).

There have been some acculturation scales developed specifically for measuring subcultures in the USA, including Hispanics (Ogden, 2002; Penaloza, 1989, 1994; Valencia, 1985), and Asians (Lee, 1993; Suinn *et al.*, 1987).

Measurement of consumer acculturation level

Acculturation level for this particular study was measured using a slight derivative of two of the more common ethnicity and acculturation scales, developed by Hirschman (1981) and Valencia (1985) respectively. The Hirschman and Valencia scales have been found in much of the acculturation literature that deals with the diverse American population (Ogden, 2002). The Valencia scale is included in a version of the *Handbook of Marketing Scales* (Bearden *et al.*, 1993). The premise behind the use of these scales in relation to the group currently under study is that some Americans are more “Jewish” than others.

The derived acculturation scale is used have to measure a number of specific factors, including:

- strength of ethnic identification;
- language;
- miscegenation;
- length of time involved in American culture;
- media sources; and
- marital relationships.

The main assumption in this study is that ethnicity influences consumer purchase decisions, which are moderated by the degree of acculturation experienced by the consumer, and the type of product being purchased. The moderating effects of acculturation degree and product characteristics for American Jews will be compared to Non-Jewish Americans.

The product chosen for this research is automobiles. Automobiles were chosen because they are a durable good, and a good that requires a great deal of involvement in the purchase decision. Additionally, automobiles are advertised heavily and are usually purchased with the intent of frequent, if not daily, use. Many factors of automobiles such as brand loyalty, sources of media used to obtain product information, and preference for specifically targeted media will be tested to determine whether consumer behaviors differ depending on the degree of consumer acculturation.

The list below illustrates the factors that have been used either individually or in combination to measure acculturation:

- acculturation factors;
- length of time in USA;
- reference groups;
- extent of Yiddish/Hebrew language maintenance;
- cultural affiliations;
- strength of emic ethnic identification; and
- Sabbath observance.

Language was not included as a factor in this study because there are virtually no automobile dealerships or automobile advertisements that utilize the Yiddish or Hebrew language. Religion was not included because of the uniformity of the basis of religious beliefs among the American Jewish people. (There are certainly varying degrees and sects of Judaism, with somewhat different beliefs and rituals, however, the main underlying factor that defines Jewish people throughout all of the different sects is the belief in one God and that the Messiah has not yet arrived.)

Acculturation and the Jewish experience in the USA post-1880

The traditional American Jewish family is generally egalitarian (Heinze, 1990, Joselit, 1990, 1994). While among Ultra-Orthodox and Hasidic Jews women are separated from men in synagogue, household responsibilities today, are generally shared. Although traditionally in American Jewish households, women were in charge of all household duties, including household purchase decisions. (Heinze, 1990; Joselit, 1990, 1994). In certain Jewish circles, the woman of the house, or the matriarch holds the most power in the family (Heinze, 1990; Joselit, 1990, 1994). In Jewish households, both the father and the mother are responsible for the raising of the children, and women are often encouraged to think independently and follow their own career paths (Joselit, 1994). Education is of paramount importance to the Jewish family and more value is placed on education than almost any other activity in daily life, hence the name “people of the book” (Blau, 1974; Joselit, 1990, 1994). Information seeking is a part of daily life for most Jews, and has been for generations (Blau, 1974; Donin, 1991; Heinze, 1990; Joselit, 1990, 1994).

There is a strong constellation of maternal traits among the role of the woman in the Jewish family. This is commonly referred to as the *Yiddishe Mameh* and is the modal maternal

pattern among Jews of Eastern European descent (Blau, 1974). *Naches fun die kinder* (joy from children) represents the highest form of self-fulfillment and achievement for a woman in Jewish society. With this in mind, it is the role of woman to ensure that all the best decisions are made for the entire family with regard to anything that deals with the home. It is the responsibility of the Jewish mother to select “the best” when shopping for any items for the home or anything that related to general health and well-being of the members of the family (Blau, 1974; Heinze, 1990). Additionally, identification with the mother is the cornerstone of the entire family socialization process (Blau, 1974). In traditional Jewish households, the transmission of learning and ritual, serving as a role model for sons in the home, and acting as a representative of the family in the religious community are the responsibilities of the father (Blau, 1974; Heinze, 1990; Joselit, 1990, 1994; Sklare and Greenblum, 1967).

Blau’s (1974) study of the Jewish family in America and the Jewish Mother showed many of the key reasons why Jews typically are high in information seeking. Blau’s (1974) interpretivist studies shows that Jewish children growing up in twentieth century America were often accompanied by a marginal status in society among gentiles. Having been barred from competing successfully in the social arena they were found to be more likely than non-Jewish youth to concentrate their energies on individual pursuits, such as schoolwork, study and personal-interest-related research (and generally activities of a more intellectual nature) “in which the dispensation of rewards were less subject to the intrusion of prejudices over which they could exercise no control. Competition in athletics and social leadership became the domain of gentile youth while that of Jews was typically in scholarship, journalism, debating” (Blau, 1974, p. 177) – all of which constituted good preparation for adult achievement and future decision making.

Additionally, according to Blau (1974) the hostility of gentiles and exclusion from mixed social activities led Jewish youth, as a matter of preference, to form social ties primarily with fellow Jews – in which they could feel at ease and share their thoughts and aspirations. This, in a sense, led to “clannishness” in which thoughts and preferences were shared among people of similar culture, background and experience (Blau, 1974; Sherman, 1965). Jews who discriminated against in social groups like fraternities and sororities were frequently forced to form their own groups and social circles – essentially forming a “new ghetto” in the USA (Sherman, 1965). This in itself, lead to a type of Jewish communal lifestyle where thoughts and attitudes were shared on a regular basis (Blau, 1974; Heinze, 1990; Joselit, 1990, 1994; Sherman, 1965; Sklare and Greenblum, 1967).

Word of mouth and consumption behavior in the Jewish community

Since the main wave of Jewish immigration to the USA began in 1880 (Heinze, 1990), Jewish women were inherited with the task of overseeing consumption behavior in the Jewish household (Heinze, 1990). This stems largely, from the fact that Jewish families were supposed to observe the Sabbath according to Jewish law, and in order to properly complete that task in the Jewish home, many household items were needed to be obtained of proper (and often luxurious) quality (Heinze, 1990). As the arbiter of household consumption, Jewish women frequently involved themselves in the domain

of commerce, “where they sharpened their familiarity with the quality of merchandise and the activity of bargaining” (Heinze, 1990, p. 107). As many Jews lived in large cities, which were rather sophisticated in terms of material offerings, Jews were able to familiarize themselves better with the different grades of merchandise (Heinze, 1990), in fact, Jewish women were frequently regarded as experts in understanding the various differences between consumer products (Heinze, 1990). Additionally, in these cities where large immigrant populations were found (such as New York), Jews found themselves able to afford more consumer goods than their fellow immigrants (Heinze, 1990), thus allowing an even further sharpening of purchasing skills. In the first major report on street marketing in New York City, published in 1925, the report noted that “The women of the Jewish race are rarely deceived when trading with the vendor” (United States Agricultural Economics Bureau, 1925). The fiscal skill and shopping prowess of Jews is a phenomena that circumvented Jewish social classes – Jews both wealthy and non-wealthy were regarded as superior shoppers (Joselit, 1994).

As Jewish women would frequently talk about the latest bargains that they found, they would rely on each other for information regarding the quality and price of the items purchased, thereby circumventing the extremely large amounts of advertising that inundated the predominately Jewish areas of the USA from 1880-1950 (Heinze, 1990; Joselit, 1990). While Jewish areas, such as the Lower East Side of New York City, were littered with advertising in its local papers and storefronts, Jews became wary of claims that were unsubstantiated by someone else’s personal experience with the advertised product or service (Heinze, 1990; Joselit, 1994).

Shopping in itself became something that Jews engaged in as a group activity, where a ritual was formed in which groups of Jews would shop together, then share a meal and discuss their purchases (or non-purchases) (Heinze, 1990). This ritual that began in the twentieth century continues among Jewish families today (Joselit, 1994). Shopping for Jews was, from early on, a pleasant experience (Heinze, 1990; Joselit, 1994) in which a great deal of socialization occurs. Hirschman (1981) found that these social rituals led to a situation in more recent times, where Jewish ethnicity is positively related to the transfer of consumption information. Additionally, Hirschman (1981) found that Jewish ethnicity is positively related to information seeking – specifically Jewish consumers expose themselves to a greater quality of information sources.

The term “maven” is one that is still widely used in the Jewish community. A maven is one who understands a particular area extremely well, and is comfortable with sharing that information with others (Joselit, 1994). Many firms in Jewish communities looked to target their marketing message, specifically, to mavens in the twentieth century (Joselit, 1994) as they understood the word of mouth power that these mavens enjoyed in the community. Jewish consumers, today, have still come to rely on mavens for knowledge about consumer purchases (Joselit, 1994).

Hypotheses

Given these findings with regard to the Jewish consumer experience in the USA, it is reasonable to examine related variables that implicate information seeking, knowledge

activation and innovation that has resulted from the long-standing “clannishness” that American Jews experience. Therefore the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1. American Jewish consumers are less brand loyal in terms of automobile purchasing than Non-Jewish consumers.

H1a. The higher the degree of acculturation, the less likely the Jewish consumer will be brand loyal.

The rationale here is that since Jews have been shown to be high seekers of information, it might be reasonable to assume that when making consumption decisions, Jews will look to gather as much information as possible regarding the upcoming purchase. This might indicate that Jews will be more likely to look at the costs and benefits of specific products, regardless of brand – essentially looking at key attributes of the product and not using brand name as a “shortcut” to make evaluative decisions.

Furthermore, as Hirschman (1981) found, American Jews adhere to norms favoring innovativeness and that the level of Jewish felt ethnicity moderates the relationship positively (Hirschman, 1981) in the consumption decision equation. It is therefore assumed that buying the same brand of automobile over and over again would not be considered an innovative activity. Additionally, since American Jews frequently discuss their purchases and the costs/benefits of each, it is assumed that these consumers would be unlikely to make snap decisions based on a simple cue, brand, without engaging in discussion with their peers. The fact that American Jews have shown a history, as shoppers, of discussing their purchases may lead some to believe that American Jews are less likely to merely rely on a simple cue, especially when their particular culture lends itself to the general skepticism towards advertising:

H2. American Jewish consumers rely more heavily on word of mouth information in terms of information gathering for automobile purchases than Non-Jewish consumers.

H2a. The higher the degree of acculturation, the less likely the Jewish consumer will rely on word of mouth.

The rationale here is that clannishness will result in a stronger use of oral history and experience when making decisions. Oral history and personal experience will likely have a larger effect on the product decision when compared to information received from sources outside the group. Additionally, as Hirschman (1981) found that Jewish ethnicity positively related to adult information seeking and transfer of consumption information, it will be interesting to see if these phenomena apply themselves to the arena of automotive purchases.

Furthermore, the role of the maven is significant is Jewish culture. The maven in the Jewish community does not advertise his/her selection and recommendations to those interested in listening, but rather discusses these recommendations in social settings, as has been the case since the turn of the twentieth century in the Jewish community.

Methodology

This study utilized survey administration. Multiple revisions of the survey resulted in the questionnaire included in the Appendix, Figure A1. The portion of the survey that

measured acculturation level was taken from Ogden (2002) (which uses a scale synthesized from Valencia (1985) and Hirschman (1981)). The scales used to measure use of word of mouth and brand loyalty were taken directly from the scales for these constructs found in the *Handbook of Marketing Scales* (Beardon *et al.*, 1993). Included in the survey are a number of questions related to automobile purchases, but not related directly to the research question. These questions were added to assist in masking the research question(s) from the respondents.

The final version of the questionnaire was pre-tested to determine acceptability. This pre-test included survey data from American Jewish consumers, Anglo-Americans and African Americans.

Universe and sampling frame

The universe of interest is American Jewish consumers currently residing in the USA. The sampling frame for American Jewish consumers was composed of names and addresses given by a number of various Jewish religious and cultural organizations. Cultural organizations were used in addition to religious organizations so that the population being studied would not tilt towards the "religious" end of the American Jewish population. The national Jewish organization, Hadassah provided 200 names and addresses of respondents in the states of New York and New Jersey. The Jewish Community Center of New York City and Alexandria, Virginia provided 50 names and addresses. Two orthodox religious organizations in New York City provided 50 names and addresses. One large reform/conservative religious and cultural organization in Upstate New York provided 200 names and addresses. Additionally, 50 surveys were sent out to random Russian immigrants of Jewish descent in New Jersey and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The last of the American Jewish sampling frame comprised 50 names and addresses obtained from a local reform congregation in Southern New Jersey that also had members residing in Pennsylvania. Surveys were mailed along with a self-addressed, stamped envelope and no personal information was required from the respondents. The goal was to obtain 250 usable surveys from American Jewish consumers. These cities and locales were used because of the large concentrations of Jews living in them.

Names and addresses for all non-Jewish American consumers were obtained through a local marketing firm, from the cities as the Jewish samples. The 300 names and addresses were comprised of not only Anglo-American consumers, but consumers of any ethnicity. Additionally, a local Philadelphia organization with a large number of African-American consumers was given 50 surveys for distribution. The goal was to obtain 250 usable surveys from non-Jewish American consumers.

Of 950 total surveys sent, 450 were returned and 436 were usable. This yielded a response rate of 47 percent.

Statistics

After survey administration and tabulation, cross-tabulation was performed as was extensive descriptive statistical tests (chi-squared analysis).

Chi-squared analysis and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were utilized to test the hypotheses. In addition, demographic information such as age, income, education level and marital status were collected and cross-tabulated (and controlled for

to determine whether demographic variables contribute to any of the results found.

Independent variables

Ethnicity

Ethnicity was measured using an emic approach. Using the emic approach, the respondent describes his/her own ethnicity. Research in this area has determined the emic approach to be the most appropriate (Ogden, 2002; Hirschman, 1981; Valencia, 1985) and will therefore lead to most accurate classification of study participants.

In this study, two questions were used to measure ethnicity. First, subjects were asked, "What is the ethnic/cultural group you most strongly identify with?" Second, subjects were asked how strong their identification was with the ethnic group they had selected. A scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 being very strong, and 5 equal to very weak was used to record responses. These are the same questions used for the same purpose by Ogden (2002).

Acculturation

To measure the degree of acculturation of American Jews, a combination of parts of indexes by Valencia (1985), Hirschman (1981) and Ogden (2002) were modified, added to, and used. The premise behind the tool is that some members of the American Jewish subculture are "more Jewish" than others. Valencia's scale can be found in the *Handbook of Marketing Scales* (Beardon *et al.*, 1993). The combined index was used to measure: length of time in the USA, strength of Sabbath observance, participation in Jewish cultural events, language spoken at home, place of birth, identification with cultural groups.

The scales were tested on a sample of residents from a New Jersey suburb obtained in person before the proper study was undertaken. The most significant issue found during the pre-test was that almost all respondents spoke English as their primary language. Language was then dropped for the full study.

After the data for the study were obtained, a principle components factor analysis was performed in order to attempt to simplify the original dimensions into a smaller number of components to see if there were any acculturation factors that could be reduced into smaller groups.

The result of this analysis is that two principle factors were found that explain close to seventy percent of the variance in the group. The two significant vectors are presented in Tables I-III with the analysis results.

These vectors, or new variables used to measure acculturation are listed in Table IV.

Factor 1 as a new variable has been named "Objective practicing Jewishness."

Factor 2 as a new variable has been named "Emic feelings of Jewishness."

Table I Factor analysis – descriptive statistics

	Mean	Standard deviation	<i>n</i>
Length of time in USA	2.63	1.123	227
Strength of Jewish affiliation	2.93	1.466	227
Sabbath observance	3.69	1.318	227
Participation in Jewish cultural events	2.91	1.292	227
Feel part of US culture	1.95	0.949	227

Table II Rotated component matrix

	Component	
	1	2
Length of time in USA	7.757E-03	0.710
Strength of Jewish affiliation	0.918	3.360E-04
Sabbath observance	0.848	5.268E-02
Participation in Jewish cultural events	0.929	4.937E-02
Feel part of US culture	-4.79E-02	-0.724

Notes: Extraction method: principle component analysis; Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization; Rotation converged in three iterations

Results

H1. American Jewish consumers are less brand loyal in terms of automobile purchasing than non-Jewish consumers – not supported

A chi-squared analysis and cross tabulations revealed no significant difference between American Jewish consumers and non-Jewish consumers in the area of brand loyalty in regard to automobile purchases. Brand loyalty was measured on multiple dimensions, and this lack of difference held true across all dimensions measured. The specific results are summarized in Table V.

H1a. The higher the degree of acculturation, the less likely the Jewish consumer will be brand loyal – somewhat supported

Regression analyses were run on each aspect of the measures for brand loyalty. Tables VI and VII detail which acculturation factors were found to be significant along the specific measured dimensions of brand loyalty, with Table VI representing acculturation factor 1 – practicing Judaism and Table VII representing acculturation factor 2 – emic feelings of Jewishness.

Regarding the ordinal variable, “Committed to brand,” which measured the degree of the consumer was committed their chosen brand, neither of acculturation factors were found to be significant (Factor 1 – $F = 1.052, 0.306$; Factor 2 – $F = 1.541, 0.215$).

H2. American Jewish consumers rely more heavily on word of mouth information in terms of information gathering for automobile purchases than non-Jewish consumers – not supported

A chi-squared analysis and cross tabulations revealed no significant difference between American Jewish consumers

Table IV Acculturation factors

Factor 1	Factor 2
Degree of affiliation with Jewish groups	Personal feeling as being a part of the Jewish culture
Observance of the Sabbath	
Participation in Jewish cultural events	

and non-Jewish consumers in the area of word of mouth with regard to automobile purchases. Word of mouth was measured on multiple dimensions, and this lack of difference held true across all dimensions. The specific results showing no significant differences are summarized Table VIII.

H2a. The higher the degree of acculturation, the less likely the Jewish consumer will rely on word of mouth – somewhat supported

Only some of dimensions of word of mouth were shown to be significant when analyzed with the two acculturation factors. As can be seen from the results, the means between acculturated Jews and non-acculturated Jews were very close for most dimensions. The results are detailed in Tables IX and X, where Table IX represents acculturation factor 1 – practicing Judaism and Table X represents acculturation factor 2 – emic feelings of Jewishness.

Conclusions and implications

Managerial implications

The findings of this study show that the American Jews and non-Jewish Americans may not differ significantly in selected areas of consumption behavior when the product is automobiles. A potential explanation for the lack of differences found in this study is that highly acculturated Jewish Americans may be similar in response to other Americans, which may make noticeable significant differences more difficult to uncover. There were, however, some significant findings in how Jewish consumers rely of word of mouth and brand loyalty with different degrees of acculturation. These results show that as American Jews acculturate, the more likely they are to take on the larger culture’s behaviors among these two constructs of consumer behavior. This finding would lend to credence to the idea of the “American melting pot” in the sense that as Jewish Americans become more ingrained in the culture of their new

Table III Total variance explained by factors

Component	Total	Initial eigenvalues		Rotation sum of squared loadings		
		% of variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of variance	Cumulative %
1	2.439	48.774	48.774	2.426	48.529	48.529
2	1.022	20.437	69.211	1.034	20.682	69.211
3	0.983	19.662	88.873			
4	0.385	7.7	96.573			
5	0.171	3.427	100			

Table V H1 Summary results

Factor	Chi-square statistic	DoF	Significance, $\alpha = 0.05$	<i>n</i>	
				Jewish Americans	Non-Jewish Americans
"I would rather stick with a brand than try others"	3.584	4	0.465	213	210
"If I like a brand, I rarely switch to try something new"	5.621	4	0.229	212	210
"I always introduce new brands to friends"	4.113	4	0.391	212	210
"I rarely take chances by buying unfamiliar brands"	1.312	4	0.859	212	209
"I buy the same brand of car even if I think it is only average value"	6.675	4	0.154	209	210
"I would wait for others to try a new make first"	5.702	4	0.223	210	210

Table VI H1a summary results for acculturation factor 1

Factor	<i>F</i> statistic	Significance, $\alpha = 0.05$
"I would rather stick with a brand than try others"	1.031	0.311
"If I like a brand, I rarely switch to try something new"	0.471	0.493
"I always introduce new brands to friends"	0.715	0.399
"I rarely take chances by buying unfamiliar brands"	0.249	0.618
"I buy the same brand of car even if I think it is only average value"	5.759	0.017*
"I would wait for others to try a new make first"	2.613	0.107
"I usually stick to well-known brands"	3.747	0.054*

Note: * Denotes significance

Table VII H1a summary results for acculturation factor 2

Factor	<i>F</i> statistic	Significance, $\alpha = 0.05$
"I would rather stick with a brand than try others"	0.596	0.552
"If I like a brand, I rarely switch to try something new"	4.636	0.011*
"I always introduce new brands to friends"	2.804	0.063 ^a
"I rarely take chances by buying unfamiliar brands"	1.042	0.354
"I buy the same brand of car even if I think it is only average value"	3.126	0.046*
"I would wait for others to try a new make first"	1.748	0.177
"I usually stick to well-known brands"	2.404	0.093

Notes: ^a Here there is a minor trend towards significance ($p = 0.06$) for this factor in the regression. The Beta is also significant (-0.15 , $t = -2.209$, $p = 0.028$) showing a negative relationship between acculturation and this aspect of brand loyalty; * Denotes significance

Table VIII H2 summary results

Factor	Chi-square statistic	DoF	Significance, $\alpha = 0.05$	<i>n</i>	
				Jewish Americans	Non-Jewish Americans
"I seek advice from family, friends and neighbors"	2.555	4	0.635	210	210
"I regard family and friends as good sources of information"	1.331	4	0.856	211	210
"I can think of at least two people who have told me about automobiles"	6.386	4	0.172	211	210
"If I have little experience with a product, I ask others"	8.452	4	0.076	212	210
"I trust the information I receive from family and friends"	7.210	4	0.126	213	210
"I frequently gather information from family and friends"	7.516	4	0.111	213	210

Table IX *H2a* Summary results for acculturation factor 1

Factor	F statistic	Significance, $\alpha = 0.05$
"I seek advice from family, friends and neighbors"	2.718	0.101
"I regard family and friends as good sources of information"	5.364	0.021 *
"I can think of at least two people who have told me about automobiles"	3.147	0.077
"If I have little experience with a product, I ask others"	1.491	0.223
"I trust the information I receive from family and friends"	0.179	0.673
"I frequently gather information from family and friends"	3.627	0.058 *

Note: * Denotes significance

Table X *H2a* summary results for acculturation factor 2

Factor	F statistic	Significance, $\alpha = 0.05$
"I seek advice from family, friends and neighbors"	1.718	0.182
"I regard family and friends as good sources of information"	3.736	0.025 *
"I can think of at least two people who have told me about automobiles"	2.056	0.130
"If I have little experience with a product, I ask others"	0.841	0.433
"I trust the information I receive from family and friends"	0.090	0.914
"I frequently gather information from family and friends"	2.363	0.096

Note: * Denotes significance

host country, the more they take on the characteristics of the new home culture.

For auto manufacturers, the findings suggest that if they are looking to better target newer immigrants (especially American Jews) they should attempt to find ways to increase their recognition and usage among word of mouth. Additionally, these automakers may want to attempt to make significant inroads in newer American Jewish communities in order to become the first brand that these immigrants will be exposed to, as the level of brand loyalty among this population is relatively high compared to both non-Jewish Americans and Jewish Americans who are more highly acculturated. Automakers may want to specifically use geographic segmentation and target areas like Brighton Beach, Brooklyn; Northeast Philadelphia; and Baltimore, Maryland where these new immigrants are relatively low in acculturation. If these automakers can penetrate these markets quickly and ensure that their customers have positive experiences with their products, they lend themselves to an increase in the extremely valuable commodity of positive word of mouth. At the present time, there has been no automaker who has taken advantage of this opportunity, therefore there is a high propensity for "first mover advantage" in these markets. So while Jewish ethnicity by itself is not a reason for segmentation strategies, the level of acculturation among Jewish consumers living in America, is.

Theoretical contributions

There has been little study of American Jewish consumers in the marketing literature. The last study published in a major journal was Hirschman (1981), which occurred over 20 years prior to the study undertaken here. This study used a larger sample size and looked at the role of acculturation in how it plays in consumer behavior. While the results of this study show no significant difference in brand loyalty and word of

mouth between all American Jews and American non-Jews, the study does show that one should be very careful about making generalizations about the Jewish population as a whole.

The results of this study show that there is a significant difference between highly acculturated American Jews and low-acculturated American Jews. While there are significantly more highly-acculturated Jews in America (and in this study), future researchers deciding to explore the difference between consumer behavior between different ethnic groups in the USA may wish to take the construct of acculturation into account. If this study was performed without the acculturation constructs, the results would easily have lent themselves to causing the implication that there is no difference between Jews and non-Jews on the dimensions tested. This would have only told part of the story.

Future research

The most important take-away from this study is not that there is no significant difference between Jews and non-Jews and two dimensions of their consumer decision-making practices, but rather that acculturation is potentially a significant moderating variable in ethnic studies in the USA. This is not only significant for scholars in marketing, but in all areas that study ethnicity. Additionally, future marketing scholars may want to revisit the ethnographic studies about different types of consumers and add acculturation moderators to see if this results in any difference from past results.

The results of study two are consistent with Ogden (2002) which showed no significant difference between Latinos and Anglo Americans in terms of acculturation and the use of word of mouth and degree of brand loyalty. If studies like these continue in the same direction, better explanations can be made about whether or not the USA is indeed becoming less of a "mosaic" and more of a "melting pot."

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Appendix

Figure A1 Purchase behavior study

1. What is your gender?

- Male (0)
- Female (1)

2. What is the ethnic/cultural group you most strongly identify with:

- Jewish American (1)
- Caucasian American (2)
- African American (3)
- Latino (4)
- Asian American (5)
- Other (6)

3. How strongly is your identification with the ethnic/cultural group you mentioned above?

Very Strong	Strong	In Between	Weak	Very Weak
1	2	3	4	5

4. How long has your family lived in the United States?

- I am an immigrant (1)
- One or more parents are immigrants (2)
- One or more grandparents are immigrants (3)
- One or more great-grandparents are immigrants (4)
- My family has lived in the United States for over three generations (5)

Answer the following questions only if you identify yourself as Jewish.

5. How strongly do you observe the Sabbath?

Very Strong	Strong	In Between	Weak	Very Weak
1	2	3	4	5

6. How strongly do you participate in Jewish cultural events?

Very Strong	Strong	In Between	Weak	Very Weak
1	2	3	4	5

7. Which language do you predominately speak when at home?

- English (1)
- Hebrew (2)
- Yiddish (3)
- Other _____ (4)

8. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being a Very Strong affiliation and 5 being a Very Weak affiliation, to what extent are you involved with Jewish organizations?

Very Strong	Strong	In Between	Weak	Very Weak
1	2	3	4	5

9. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being a Very Large Part and 5 being Not At All, to what extent do you feel a large part of the culture of the United States?

Very Large Part	Large Part	In Between	Weak	Not At All
1	2	3	4	5

(continued)

Figure A1

10. Where Were You Born?

United States (0)

Outside of United States (1)

11. I seek advice from my family, friends and neighbors when deciding to purchase an automobile.

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

12. I generally regard my family, friends and neighbors as a good source of advice about automobiles.

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

13. I can think of at least two people I know who have told me something about automobiles in the last six months.

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

14. If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my family, friends and neighbors about a product.

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

15. When it comes to automobiles, I trust the information I receive from my family, friends and neighbors more than I trust information from media sources (radio, television, magazines, etc.).

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

16. I frequently gather information from my family, friends and neighbors about a product before I buy it.

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

17. I would rather stick with a brand I usually buy than try something I am not very sure of.

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

18. If I like a brand, I rarely switch from it just to try something different.

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

(continued)

Figure A1

19. I always introduce new brands and products to my friends and family.

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

20. I rarely take chances by buying unfamiliar brands even if it means sacrificing variety.

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

21. I buy the same brand of automobile even if I think it is of only average value.

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

22. I would wait for others to try a new make of automobile than try it myself.

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

23. I would rather stick to well-known makes when deciding to purchase a car.

Strongly Agree	Agree	In Between	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1	2	3	4	5

24. On a scale of 1 to 5 with 1 being a Strongly Committed and 5 being Strongly Uncommitted, please state how committed you are to purchasing your preferred make of automobile.

Strongly Committed	Committed	In Between	Uncommitted	Strongly Uncommitted
1	2	3	4	5

25. Who in your household *most often* decides on purchasing the make (i.e. – Toyota, Ford, Honda, etc.) of automobiles?

- Self (1)
- Husband (2)
- Wife (3)
- Parent (4)
- Children (5)
- Joint Decision with _____ (6)
- Other _____ (7)

26. What is your age category?

- (1) 18-25
- (2) 26-30
- (3) 31-35
- (4) 36-40
- (5) 41-45
- (6) 46-50
- (7) 51-55
- (8) 56-60
- (9) 61-65
- (10) 66-70
- (11) 71-75

(continued)

Figure A1

- (12) 76-80
(13) 81 or older
27. What is your approximate annual household income?
- (1) Less than \$20,000
(2) \$20,001 - \$50,000
(3) \$50,001 - \$75,000
(4) \$75,001 - \$100,000
(5) \$100,001 - \$125,000
(6) \$125,001 - \$150,000
(7) \$150,001 and over
28. What is your marital status?
- (1) Single
(2) Married
(3) Other
29. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
- (1) High School Diploma
(2) Associate's Degree or Professional Certificate
(3) Bachelor's Degree
(4) Master's Degree or Equivalent
(5) Doctorate or Equivalent
(6) Other

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Executive summary and implications for managers and executives

This summary has been provided to allow managers and executives a rapid appreciation of the content of the article. Those with a particular interest in the topic covered may then read the article in toto to take advantage of the more comprehensive description of the research undertaken and its results to get the full benefit of the material present.

Ethnicity and consumer behavior

Evidence suggests that ethnicity can have a significant influence on consumer behavior, and that possessions can and do play a role in creating and sustaining ethnic identity. And with immigration in the USA continuing to rise, many analysts suggest that an impact on the consumer goods market is inevitable.

Despite the fact there are currently almost 7 million American Jews in the USA, Podoshen points out that study of this consumer group is limited. However, previous research into ethnic groups in the USA found Jewish ethnicity to be most influential on consumer behavior.

Jewish identity is said to be formed through both religion and culture, and American Jews are a well-educated group

found predominantly in the higher social classes. US Census Bureau figures reveal that the median income among American Jewish families is significantly higher than the average recorded for all US households.

Consequently, American Jews enjoy considerable purchasing power and the author suggests that this consumer subgroup may use this purchasing power to satisfy their cultural needs and beliefs. This is contrary to less affluent consumer groups, whose purchase decisions may be largely determined by price.

Word of mouth approval

Previous research has indicated that Jewish consumers seek more product information before making any purchase decisions. Some commentators believe that this thirst for knowledge is at least partly the consequence of Jews being marginalized and forced into individual pursuits, such as reading. Similarly, it is thought that marginalization served to strengthen Jewish loyalties and help create a cultural subgroup where thoughts and opinions are commonly shared.

This behavior is also evident within the shopping context. Jewish women are traditionally responsible for making purchases for their families and strongly evaluate different consumer goods because they aim to purchase only the best, especially when it concerns the health or well being of their family. As shopping is regarded as part of the socialization process, Jewish women routinely meet to exchange information about their purchases. Consequently, Jewish consumers place considerable faith in such word of mouth

approval, especially because they are also generally suspicious of advertising claims made by sources outside the group.

The significance of acculturation

Many analysts believe that the level of acculturation can modify the behavior of ethnic groups. Indeed, previous studies have revealed links between acculturation, ethnicity and the consumer purchase decision. Different definitions of acculturation are offered but each broadly agrees that the process relates to the how individuals and groups behave after they have adapted to the culture of the host nation. Acculturation is usually assessed through factors such as religion, language usage, ethnicity, marital relations and length of time in the host country.

Against this background, Podoshen carried out a survey of American Jews and other US consumers to analyze the effect of word of mouth on consumer purchase decisions. Because of the Jewish consumer's tendency to seek more product information, the author felt that this would influence the level of brand loyalty. Specifically, he speculated that American Jews would look at different attributes and consult peer groups instead of evaluating solely on brand name. Furthermore, previous research had indicated that American Jews were innovative and it was assumed that sticking with one brand would run contrary to this behavior. Examining the moderating effect of acculturation also formed a key part of the study.

A questionnaire was distributed to American Jews and other US consumers in different states including New York, New Jersey and Philadelphia. Questions to measure ethnicity and acculturation were included and the author receives 436 usable replies. Respondents were asked about purchasing automobiles and this product group was selected because automobiles are heavily advertised, frequently used and require a considerable amount of involvement in the purchase decision.

Study findings were somewhat contrary to expectation. For instance, the beliefs that American Jews were less brand loyal than other US consumers and would rely more on word of mouth in relation to automobile purchase were not

corroborated. There was, however, some evidence to support the hypothesis that higher levels of acculturation would decrease any dependence on word of mouth approval.

The investigation found American Jews to be similar to other American consumers in terms of word of mouth and brand loyalty but the author believes that this may be due to a high level of acculturation among American Jews surveyed. He concludes that acculturation is especially significant and notes that the differences between American Jews and other US consumers recede as American Jews become more acculturated. Specifically, the more acculturated they become, the more they adopt the norms of the host nation in terms of the factors (i.e. word of mouth and brand loyalty) analyzed.

Marketing recommendations

Podoshen proposes that marketers should specifically target American Jewish consumers before the acculturation process takes effect. He believes that companies adopting a high profile in such areas may gain opportunities to boost their reputation and increase the likelihood of gaining word of mouth approval. The survey also discovered a higher level of brand loyalty in American Jews than in other consumers or American Jews deemed highly acculturated. Podoshen points out that this provides scope for first mover advantage and notes areas where American Jewish groups are relatively low in acculturation. He believes that companies most able to create positive initial impressions on this consumer group will be best placed to gain word of mouth approval and capture this advantage.

The author concludes that the level of acculturation is the most important factor and suggests that future studies focus closely in this area. He also believes that incorporating this factor into previous studies of other consumer subgroups may be informative.

(A précis of the article "Word of mouth, brand loyalty, acculturation and the American Jewish consumer". Supplied by Marketing Consultants for Emerald.)