"A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY OF INTERPERSONAL INFORMATION SEEKING AND GIVING BEHAVIOR"

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ABSTRACT

Research conducted primarily in the United States has shown that interpersonal influences are more important than most other factors in consumers' product adoption and brand choice decisions. Is the level of information giving and seeking behavior dependent on culture? In a study representing over 35 nationalities, we examine the importance of interpersonal influences across cultures. Consistent with arguments which favor the globalization of marketing efforts, our study indicates that individual factors (information search behavior, risk aversion, and category interest) better explain differences in interpersonal information seeking and giving than one's culture, or country of origin.

Introduction

Although managers increasingly are faced with the challenges of operating in global markets, academics have noted that "empirical studies in the area of international marketing are limited", especially those which focus on "gaining insights into the [marketing] standardization issue" (Jain 1989, p. 70). Farley and Lehmann (1992) describe as "myth" the widely accepted notion that international differences in market response are large, and they call for empirical work to determine whether international "laws" exist in marketing. Levitt (1983) similarly argues that multinational firms should seek to identify similar segments of consumers around the globe so as to avoid unnecessary costs of adapting marketing plans to local market conditions. As Levitt points out, the standardization versus adaptation debate has strong implications for marketing managers in terms of resource allocation and profitability. Its resolution depends, however, on empirical evidence about the extent to which consumer behavior is constant across cultures.

Information from personal sources is one of the most prominent influences on consumer behavior (Assael 1984, Brown and Reingen 1987, Price and Feick 1984). It thus is important to ask whether interpersonal influence varies across cultures. From a managerial perspective, the issue has implications for how communication efforts should be divided, for example, between messages which target opinion leaders and those which target product purchasers directly. Managers who assume that interpersonal influence behaviors are invariant across cultures would allocate similar budget proportions to each of these options in, say, Germany, the United States, and Japan; those who assume that interpersonal influence behaviors vary across cultures might find it worthwhile to tailor the allocation plan to each of the three countries individually. The latter decision would entail

additional expense and complexity in the marketing function. Despite numerous studies among consumers in the United States showing the importance of interpersonal influences over firm-originated marketing activities, the literature has not, to our knowledge, considered the use of interpersonal influence behaviors across cultures.

This paper examines whether information giving (opinion leadership) and seeking behavior is similar or varies across cultures. We begin our investigation by considering important methodological issues in cross-cultural research. Next, we briefly review theoretical and empirical research concerning consumer usage of interpersonal information and we consider the potential impact of culture on these influences. Multiple tests are then presented which measure differences among subjects from 38 nationalities in interpersonal information exchange when purchasing consumer electronic products. In addition to exploring the effects of culture on interpersonal influence behaviors, we consider the effects of individual-level variables previously noted in the literature (e.g., search orientation). By doing so, our study adds to the general understanding of information seeking and giving behavior at the individual level. The paper concludes with a discussion of our findings and suggestions for further research in this area.

Conceptual Background

Cross-Cultural Research

Whereas many marketing studies have looked for cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior (Hall 1959, Terpstra and David 1985), few have considered the extent to which basic consumer activities are similar across cultures (Farley and Lehmann 1992). Social scientists have recognized a number of behavioral "universals", including cooperative labor, feasting, games, gift giving, joking, and trade which tend to exist (albeit

in different forms) across all cultures (Murdock 1945). As universal behaviors tend to be those which either increase the potential for a species' survival, and/or increase its members' satisfaction with life, one can reasonably ask whether certain consumption-related activities are also universal. Interpersonal information exchange, for example, might be considered a time-efficient, risk-reducing behavior which allows individuals from every society to maximize the utility that is gained from purchases.

In order to investigate similarity across cultures, the researcher must first address two problems. The first is that of operationalizing the construct of "culture". Although the objective of most international studies is to determine the effects of culture on selected consumer or market behaviors, the data examined in pursuit of this goal often confound culture with economic and demographic variables. In some cases these variables will themselves have an effect on the dependent variable of interest and thus either mask the effect of culture, or alternatively, be mistaken for it (Farley and Lehmann 1992). for example, the typical cross-cultural study provides comparisons between two or three countries, using nationality as an index of culture. Despite the practicality of this approach, it is problematic in that nations are both too heterogeneous within and too homogeneous between to act as strict indicators of culture. The buying behavior of a doctor in London, for example, is more likely to resemble that of a doctor in San Francisco than that of a carpenter in Manchester. Socio-economic, rather than cultural factors might account for much of the observed variation in individual behavior. To overcome the problem of within-nation heterogeneity, matching of cross-national samples along selected demographic and economic dimensions seems warranted so as to disentangle the effects of culture from those of background factors.

To overcome the related problem of between-nation homogeneity (e.g. Honduras

and Guatemala), individuals from more than one nation can be grouped into a single culture cluster. In addition to recognizing cross-border similarities, this approach permits a wider extrapolation of conclusions than is possible with strictly national comparisons. Clark (1990), for example, has argued that nations can be characterized by behavioral or personality variables (such as a tendency toward introversion versus extroversion) which may yield more general conclusions about cultural tendencies than do national indicators. Grouping nations according to behavioral dispositions allows the researcher to attribute observed group differences to causal factors and thus extrapolate conclusions beyond the countries represented in the sample to similar populations in other countries which have a common psychological orientation.

Managers might also wish to group nations for comparison on the basis of geographical trade area or market development variables. Although this approach would blur some cultural distinctions that sociologists and anthropologists find meaningful, it emphasizes dimensions that are relevant in the realm of international marketing decision-making. It is not unusual, for example, to hear managers discuss differences between North American, Asian, and West European consumers. International marketing texts also discuss global segmentation strategies in terms of regional proximity and trade areas (see, for example, Keegan 1989). In accordance with this practice, it is useful to group nations for analysis along such business-related dimensions.

As described more fully later, our study attempts to overcome these problems by using a sample of individuals from 38 nations who are matched along demographic and economic dimensions. Culture-groups are then defined according to four different approaches which focus on either national boundaries, behavioral dispositions, or managerially relevant dimensions. By using multiple definitions of culture we seek to

increase our understanding of the extent to which interpersonal influences may be universal; true universals ought to be independent of culture, regardless of the selected definition. Unlike typical cross-cultural studies which compare individuals from two or three nations, our study seeks to offer more general conclusions about behavioral tendencies which may span national boundaries.

Given an operational definition of culture, the researcher must confront the second problem of cross-cultural research: that of testing for universality in behavior. The question is multi-faceted, as we not only want to know whether interpersonal influence behavior is observed in each cultural group, but also whether the importance of this behavior and the level at which it is observed is similar across cultures. As noted above, insight on these latter issues will enable the marketing manager to improve the quality of budget allocation decisions. The difficulty in conducting this type of analysis, however, is that classical hypothesis testing procedures are designed to test for differences across groups rather than for similarities. Evidence of universality in the use of interpersonal influence behaviors, therefore, will consist of a failure to reject the null hypothesis that interpersonal influence levels are the same across cultures (the kind of test often used in pooling data from different groups). While fully recognizing the conceptual problem that such a test represents, we are aware of no feasible alternatives for this situation. We test for universality in interpersonal influence behaviors, therefore, using classical statistical procedures while keeping this caveat in mind.

Interpersonal Communication

A number of studies have documented the relative importance of personal information sources over marketer-dominated information sources in influencing

consumers' purchase decisions (e.g., Brown and Reingen 1987, Kiel and Layton 1981). One reason for their predominance is that personal sources such as friends, relatives and experts are viewed by consumers as being relatively credible and impartial (Burnkrant and Cousineau 1975, Myers and Robertson 1972, Thomas 1982). Although early research on interpersonal influence hypothesized a one-way flow of information from impersonal sources through opinion leaders and on to opinion followers, later studies find evidence of a more complex information exchange. Reynolds and Darden (1971), for example, provide evidence that opinion leaders in a category obtain their information from a variety of impersonal *and* personal sources. These authors conceptualized a model of two-way information flow in which consumers are cross-classified according to their propensities to give and seek information from personal sources. Empirical evidence shows that "socially integrated" consumers who score high on both interpersonal information seeking and giving have greater exposure to both consumer magazines and personal sources. "Socially isolated" consumers, on the other hand, who score low on both interpersonal information giving and seeking, report lower exposure to both information types. Exposure levels among the two remaining categories -- "socially independent" consumers who are high on interpersonal giving but not seeking, and "socially dependent" consumers who are high on interpersonal seeking but not giving -- are intermediate to those of the first two categories. The result that opinion leaders tend also to be opinion seekers is replicated by Feick, Price and Higie (1986). The finding that impersonal sources complement personal sources among opinion leaders is replicated by Price and Feick (1984).

Differences in consumer propensities to exchange information about products have in the past been related to a number of individual-level factors, including expertise (Leonard-Barton 1985, Thomas 1982), product involvement, (Richins and Root-Shaffer

1988), age, need differences, familiarity, competence, confidence, and risk proneness (Park and Lessig 1977). To date, however, little has been done to generalize these findings beyond the cultural groups and geographical boundaries of the United States. As a number of studies have identified cross-cultural differences in individual-level factors which have been related to interpersonal information exchange, one might expect cross-cultural differences in this latter behavior as well.

Schneider (1989) and Schneider and De Meyer (1991) note differences in the way that individuals from different cultures search for, select, interpret and use the information in their environments. Osgood, May and Miron (1975) also argue that individuals in different cultures may process information differently. The reasons for this diversity in information use and processing are in part generated by each cultures' underlying approaches to uncertainty or risk. Hofstede (1980) finds wide variations in uncertainty avoidance across cultures. Hoover, Green and Seagert (1978) similarly find differences in risk perception between the United States and Mexico. Other factors which may lead to differences in interpersonal information exchange across cultures include (1) differences in the content and availability of certain forms of information (e.g. consumer magazines), (2) differences in marketing infrastructure (ability of marketers to disseminate product information), (3) differences in each culture's expertise in the product area (Parameswaran and Yaprak 1987), and (4) differences in levels of networking or individualism (Hofstede 1980). Finally, general cultural and socio-economic development might explain differences in consumer behavior, and interpersonal influence in particular. Consumers in non-marketing oriented countries (those with less developed marketing infrastructure) may rely on interpersonal information to a greater extent than consumers from marketing oriented countries. Consumers might also use marketer-supplied information differently

across countries because advertising takes on such varied forms across countries.

An equal number of arguments can be put forward to expect similarities of interpersonal influence across cultures. Marketing activities serve the same purpose in all cultures. Marketer-supplied information serves to inform, persuade and sell whereas information from interpersonal sources either substitutes or complements that information with what is generally perceived to be an impartial viewpoint. The search for information from impartial sources is most likely driven by the desire to obtain accurate information with minimal effort. Given that these risk reduction and cost minimizing functions of interpersonal information exchange are consistent with other cultural universals which serve to ensure the survival and well-being of a species (Murdock 1945), we might expect to see interpersonal information exchange occurring in all cultures, possibly with equal importance. Additionally, some have argued that, since consumer behavior is converging, especially among developed countries, existing cultural differences which might affect marketing are minimal (Elinder 1961, Fatt 1964, Levitt 1983, Ohmae 1985, Roostal 1963). This convergence is due to the high penetration of mass media advertising in all societies, increased competition among products and media, increased globalization of products, and the increased international mobility of consumers. Languages, educational institutions, customs and other culture-specific factors are said to have diminishing influence on basic consumer behavior. This view is not universal, however, and some authors have argued that convergence has not occurred, or that the differences are actually increasing (Boddewyn 1981, Fisher 1984). Given this diversity of opinion, and the relative dearth of empirical evidence on cross-cultural effects, the need for additional research is clear. The next section describes our empirical contribution to the study of interpersonal influence across cultures.

Data and Analysis

Sample and Questionnaire

A self-administered questionnaire assessing knowledge, intentions and behaviors toward consumer electronic products was completed by 829 MBA students representing 38 nationalities; 802 responses were complete and useable for analysis. As noted by Park and Lessig (1977), technologically complex products are likely to be the subject of informational interpersonal influence. The broad category of consumer electronic products thus was deemed appropriate for our study. MBA students were chosen for the study for several reasons. First, all respondents were fluent in English, which allowed us to avoid the potential problems of translation-based differences in the questionnaire. Second, this sample represents a key target market (young affluent households) for new products; it thus is likely to have a high percentage of opinion leaders for many products, while ownership, familiarity, and involvement with the electronics category are likely to vary. This variance in sample characteristics was confirmed in pretesting of the questionnaire.

Finally, as noted above, it is important when doing cross-cultural research to match samples so as to minimize the confounding of socio-economic and demographic background factors with that of culture. Respondents in our sample were pre-screened by the MBA admissions procedure with the result that age, education, professional aspiration, and academic potential were highly similar across respondents (the sample exhibited an average age of 28 years, with an average of 5 years working experience). Income levels, as indirectly measured by home/apartment ownership, car ownership, and ability to finance education also were highly similar across respondents. As argued by Lynch (1982), the use of homogeneous respondents within culture groups restricts our ability to generalize our results to economic and demographic groups other than those investigated here, but at

the same time it increases our confidence that our conclusions are not confounded with these additional background factors. Clearly, it will be desirable in future research to extend the generalizability of our conclusions by examining cross-cultural samples drawn from different matched socio-economic groups. This study offers initial insight, however, into the effects of culture on interpersonal influence behaviors for a single, relevant, socio-economic segment.

Although it might be argued that students in an international MBA program have lost a certain amount of their original culture, the idea that one can somehow shed one's culture is debated by anthropologists and sociologists (Hall 1966). Nevertheless, as a precaution against the possibility that the MBA program would have a homogenizing effect on respondents, the questionnaire was administered during the first weeks of the program. Additionally, dependent variable responses were compared among respondents who had lived in, or travelled to, multiple countries versus those who had not; no significant differences were observed.

The questionnaire collected information about respondents' cultures, interpersonal information exchange, and a number of individual-level variables previously examined in the interpersonal influence literature. Information giving and seeking behaviors were measured at the category level with 7-point scales which assessed the likelihood that subjects would "give (seek) advice to (from) others on their purchases of electronics products". Following Reynolds and Darden (1971), respondents were cross-classified into four information exchange categories by splitting the sample at the median on each of these two questions. Table 1 reports sample sizes for each of the categories, along with means and standard deviations for the two information flow questions.

Insert Table 1 about here

Following previous work on interpersonal communication, we measured a variety of additional individual-level variables that may be alternate or complementary explanations for interpersonal communication behaviors. These include information search patterns, category interest or knowledge, risk proneness and self-confidence, and selected demographic characteristics (Park and Lessig 1977, Price and Feick 1984, Reynolds and Darden 1971, Thomas 1982). Information search from other sources was assessed with a battery of dichotomous (yes/no) items which asked subjects whether they often relied on newspapers, personal friends, consumer magazines, tv commercials, radio commercials, and/or salespersons when purchasing home electronics. In addition, subjects rated the likelihood (on 7-point scales) that they would use signals (i.e., price, brand name, retailer reputation, and physical appearance) as indicators of quality in this category and the likelihood that they would do research before making a purchase. Finally, subjects indicated the number of magazines and newspapers they subscribed to and the number of shops they typically visited when making consumer electronics purchases.

Category interest was assessed by measuring respondents' purchase intentions (on a 10-point scale) and actual ownership of various consumer electronic products and appliances. A 7-point scale was used to collect self-assessments of product knowledge ("very little"/"a lot") for each of these items. Additionally, a group of psychographic profile questions asked subjects to compare themselves to the average person on 7-point scales ("a lot less"/"a lot more") in terms of their price sensitivity for consumer electronics, their venturesomeness, and their self-confidence. Risk-proneness and category innovativeness were measured on 7-point scales assessing the likelihood that subjects

would start a clothes fashion trend (social risk), gamble on horses or in casino games (financial risk), or purchase the latest electronic gadget (innovation/product adoption risk). Finally, subjects' demographic profiles were collected (age, nationality, measures of asset wealth, etc.) with a variety of direct measures.

Identification of Culture Groups

As mentioned in the introduction, individuals were grouped for analysis according to national, psychological, and business-related conceptualizations of culture. Table 2 shows sample sizes and country membership within each of the cultural groupings. As indicated in Table 2, 12 of the 38 nationalities represented in our sample had enough respondents (>15) to be analyzed separately as individual cultures. These 12 include countries from Asia, Europe, and North America which account for over 60 percent of the world's gross national product. Respondents originating in countries with too few observations were eliminated from cross-national comparisons. Although these individuals might have been included in an "other" category and included in the analysis, their diversity argued against this. For the national grouping, therefore, and for each of the groupings described below, respondents who did not fit into the prescribed categorizations were excluded from group comparison analyses (see Table 2).

Insert Table 2 about here

Our second grouping of individuals follows from Clark's (1990) reasoning that nations can be characterized by systematic patterns of behavioral or psychological dispositions. Consistent with this logic, Hofstede (1980) has identified a four-dimensional definition of culture based on answers from respondents in 66 countries to a series of

work-related questions. The four dimensions identified by Hofstede -- power distance (i.e., how far people perceive themselves to be from ultimate decision makers), individualism, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance, or relation to risk -- are highly similar to factors identified by other cross-cultural researchers as meaningful cultural discriminators (Clark 1990). Hofstede identified 11 cultural groups on the basis of these four factors; our sample contained sufficient numbers of respondents for four of these groups to allow meaningful comparisons. Table 3 shows sample characteristics for each of these groups, and highlights the matching on socio-economic variables.

Insert Table 3 about here

The next two grouping procedures are motivated by managerial criteria. The first is based on trading blocks, a procedure which reflects the tendency of managers, academics, and business journalists to classify consumers along broad geographical lines (such as European or Asian). Our sample held sufficient numbers of respondents to create three groupings based on trading blocks: (1) member countries of the European Economic Community (EEC), (2) European countries which are not EEC members, and (3) North American countries (U.S. and Canada).

The last approach groups individuals according to the level of marketing development exhibited by their countries. As an indicator of marketing development we used the percentage of the labor force engaged in the retail sector. Although limited in scope, this indicator reflects the level of consumer marketing activity within a country, and thus serves as a reasonable and easily available proxy for marketing development.[1] The FASTCLUS routine (SAS 1989) was used to cluster the countries in our sample into two marketing development groups (F-statistic for testing differences in cluster means is

significant at $p<.01$).

Analysis

Table 4, Panel A, reports mean responses to the interpersonal influence questions for three of the four culture clustering schemes. As seen in the table, subjects in all culture groups reported a reasonably strong propensity to exchange product information with interpersonal sources. Across the entire sample, information seeking was more likely (mean rating 5.6 on a 7-point scale) than information giving behavior (mean rating 4.3), which replicates previous research in the United States showing relatively high levels of information seeking in the consumer electronics category (Feick et al., 1986). The magnitude of reported information exchange indicates that, at least within this product category, both information seeking and giving behaviors satisfy the basic anthropological test of existence in each of the cultures represented in the sample. While this suggests that we might add interpersonal influence to Murdock's list of cultural universals, the mere existence of a behavior provides minimal information for making marketing decisions. A more relevant test examines the absolute levels and the distribution of interpersonal influences across countries.

Insert Table 4 about here

To test for differences in the mean reported levels of interpersonal information exchange across culture groups, eight analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted. Each ANOVA used either information seeking or giving as the dependent variable, and one of the four culture groupings as the independent variable. As seen in Table 4, none of the ANOVA's was significant at a p-level of .05. Despite this similarity among culture

groups in overall information exchange, it might be that the distribution of respondents across Reynolds and Darden's (1971) four information flow categories differs by cultural group. Table 4, Panel B shows the distribution of respondents for each cultural group, along with the results of a chi-squared test of distribution differences. As seen in the table, no significant differences were found, regardless of whether cultural groups were defined along national lines or along larger aggregate clusters (p-values>.40). The results of these tests clearly indicate that both the level and the distribution of reported information seeking and giving behavior of our sample was independent of respondents' countries and cultures of origin.

In addition to comparing the pattern of interpersonal information exchange across cultures, it is important to consider the importance each culture places on impersonal information sources relative to personal sources. Table 5 shows the percentage of respondents who indicated that they frequently relied on each of six information sources when deciding on the purchase of home electronics. The table also shows the results of multiple chi-squared tests for differences in the proportion of each group responding positively to each information source. Reinforcing the conclusion that interpersonal information exchange is strong in this category, personal friends were by far the most commonly accessed source of information, with over 90 percent of the sample responding positively to this question. This high proportion of respondents who rely on personal friends is notably constant across cultures, as evidenced by the high p-values associated with each test of differences. Even more notable is the strong similarity across cultural groups in their reported usage of the five additional information sources. Consistently across the cultural groupings, consumer magazines and salespersons follow personal sources in terms of their frequency of access, although the order of these two items

sometimes varies. Moreover, the fourth, fifth and sixth most commonly cited sources invariably are newspapers, tv commercials and radio commercials, in that order. Chi-squared tests on the overall distribution of responses within each culture table are non-significant in every case.

Insert Table 5 about here

Taken together, Tables 4 and 5 present an image of highly similar information access and exchange patterns across the cultural groups investigated. The rank order of information sources in terms of frequency of access was nearly identical in every case, with personal friends by far the most important source and consumer magazines and salespersons serving as common complements. Although individual chi-squares for the impersonal information sources suggest some differences across culture in absolute proportions of respondents who frequently use them (e.g., consumer magazines, newspapers), the high potential for type I error arising from repeated testing of the data argues for caution in accepting these results. Substantively, our results suggest that differences in interpersonal information exchange may not be large enough to justify systematic adaptation across cultures of communications plans which build on interpersonal effects. Media plans for impersonal information sources, however, are likely to need local adaptation.

Individual versus Cultural Differences

The results of our cross-cultural comparisons suggest that culture need not be a key consideration when developing marketing plans which build on interpersonal purchasing influences. As suggested by Levitt (1983), therefore, managers may be able to identify

similar segments of opinion leaders and followers across countries. Successful targeting of these segments will require an understanding of their members' characteristics. In this section we follow previous investigations which seek to relate information giving and seeking behaviors to individual consumer characteristics. Table 6 reports Pearson and Spearman correlations for the pooled cross-cultural sample between interpersonal information seeking and giving behaviors on one hand , and (1) information search preferences, (2) risk proneness or category innovativeness (Rogers 1983), (3) product interest and familiarity, and (4) demographic profiles (education, family status) on the other. These variables reflect segmentation schemes widely used in practice.

Insert Table 6 about here

Only correlations with p-values greater than .05 are reported in the table. Blank entries thus represent non-significant correlations. Table 6 clearly demonstrates that individual factors suggested in the literature better explain interpersonal influence variation in our sample than does cultural identification. With respect to information search, Table 6 suggests that high opinion givers are more likely to do research before buying than are low opinion givers. Research efforts are likely to take a variety of forms for opinion leaders, as signalled by the significant correlations with retail visits, number of general magazine subscriptions, and propensity to rely on newspapers and consumer magazines when making a purchase. High information seeking is also correlated with likelihood of doing research and visiting shops, but to a lesser extent than is information giving. Information seekers also are likely to rely on quality signals such as brand name and retailer reputation.

Among the various risk measures, only product innovativeness toward electronic

gadgets was significantly related to interpersonal influence behaviors. As seen in Table 6, innovativeness was highly correlated with opinion leadership. The table also shows that self-confidence was positively related to opinion giving behavior, but was unrelated to opinion seeking behavior. As might be expected, opinion leaders rated themselves as being knowledgeable about other electronic products, as well as having higher ownership levels and intentions to purchase electronic products. Advice seeking, on the other hand, was negatively correlated with category knowledge. Finally, certain demographic and economic factors explain advice seeking and giving about consumer electronics. Females reported a higher propensity to seek advice in this category and a lower propensity to give it. Information seeking was negatively correlated with car ownership, which can be viewed as an indicator of wealth, and positively correlated with price sensitivity.[2]

Discussion

On the basis of empirical evidence, we would agree with recent arguments that certain consumer behaviors may be more similar across cultures than previously has been recognized. Our study offers evidence that segments of opinion leaders exist in many cultures, and that their influence is uniformly strong within the category of consumer electronics. Though our sample is limited to well educated, reasonably affluent consumers, these individuals are highly representative of those whom one would target when seeking opinion leaders or launching new products in the electronics category. Our limitations in ability to generalize conclusions beyond this socio-economic segment thus are somewhat compensated by the managerial relevance of the segment. Our study further demonstrates that opinion leadership is not uniformly high for all members of this socio-economic group. Individuals differed in their propensity to give electronics purchasing

advice as a function of gender, asset wealth, risk proneness, self-confidence and category interest.

The observed pattern of results suggests that managers attempting to target opinion leaders with marketing campaigns would do better to focus on potential differences at the individual consumer level rather than at the broadly defined cultural level. One should not expect Americans, for example, to be more prone to give opinions nor to rely on the opinions of others than are the Japanese. Observed similarities in our sample might justify a balanced emphasis across cultures in communications efforts, as well as in other marketing efforts, though local adaptation may be required to optimally utilize impersonal communications options in various countries.

Study Limitations

Naturally, one must exercise caution in interpreting a null result as evidence of universality in consumer behavior. As judged by the strong similarity of responses reported in Tables 4 and 5, however, and by the very low significance levels of the hypothesis tests, it would appear that the use of interpersonal influences is "culture free" within the consumer electronics category and among young, affluent members of the cultures investigated here. Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that different results might be found for non-global products such as certain food items, or those products which are "culture bound" (Ohmae 1985). The potential difference across products raises an interesting question of which comes first, the global product or global consumer behavior? It would be interesting to determine the conditions under which the use of globally uniform strategies could elicit globally similar behavior from consumers. In any case, it would be worthwhile to replicate our investigations with additional product

categories.

Replication of our study with alternative socio-economic segments matched across cultures is also warranted. Although we have focussed on a relevant segment for the consumer electronics category, managers will need to know if the same patterns of results hold in other segments. As category sales are not limited to our chosen socio-economic segment, this replication within other segments may provide important insights.

Finally, we would encourage researchers to conduct additional empirical investigations of commonality in consumer behavior across cultures. Our findings can be interpreted to imply that culture or country boundaries may be less important criteria than individual factors in stipulating the necessary design and implementation details of a marketing plan based on interpersonal influence. As managers must make decisions about many additional elements of the overall marketing program, insights on cross-cultural commonalities would be highly useful. It is hoped that our study offers encouragement in this direction, as we provide initial evidence that managers would be unwise to unconditionally accept what Farley and Lehmann (1992, p. 1) call the "myth in international marketing that all things are different" when one crosses borders.

FOOTNOTES

1. A number of additional indicators of marketing development were tested in our analyses. These included urban density, income per capita, electricity penetration, radio penetration, television penetration, telephone penetration, literacy levels, and the percentage of workforce in agriculture and manufacturing. None were found statistically significant in explaining information seeking or giving behavior.

2. When culture and individual-level variables are considered simultaneously using multiple regression analyses, cultural variables are rejected in favor of individual variables in explaining information exchange behavior. This is true regardless of the cultural definition adopted.

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Table 1

Sample Sizes for Reynolds and Darden's (1970) Social Categories, and Mean Reported Levels of Interpersonal Information Seeking and Giving

	N	Information Seeking Mean	Information Giving Mean
Social Isolates	158	4.14 (1.07)	2.88 (1.03)
Social Independents	168	4.33 (1.06)	5.56 (0.68)
Social Dependents	204	6.41 (0.49)	2.74 (1.05)
Social Integrateds	272	6.45 (0.50)	5.73 (0.72)

Table 2
List of Nationalities and Sample Sizes by Cluster

Trade-area Clusters	Hofstede's Culture Clusters	Marketing Orientation	Nationalities N>15
1. North America (N=118)	1. Latin (N=256)	High (N=388)	
Canada	Argentina	Australia	Belgium (N=20)
United States	Belgium	Austria	Canada (N=25)
	Brazil	Belgium	Denmark (N=19)
2. EEC (N=524)	Italy	Canada	France (N=152)
Belgium	France	Hong Kong	Germany (N=55)
Denmark	Spain	Ireland	Israel (N=16)
France	Portugal	Italy	Italy (N=31)
Germany		Japan	Japan (N=25)
Greece	2. Germanic (N=101)	Luxembourg	Netherlands (N=33)
Ireland	Austria	Netherlands	Norway (N=21)
Italy	Germany	New Zealand	Spain (N=28)
Luxembourg	Israel	Norway	United Kingdom (N=157)
Netherlands	Switzerland	Singapore	United States (N=74)
Portugal		Spain	
Spain	3. Anglo (N=295)	Switzerland	
United Kingdom	Australia	UK	
	Canada	Venezuela	
3. Non-EEC-Europe (N=60)	Ireland		
Austria	New Zealand	Low (N=404)	
Czekoslovakia	United Kingdom	Argentina	
Finland	United States	Brazil	
Hungary		China	
Iceland	4. Nordic (N=80)	Denmark	
Norway	Denmark	Finland	
Poland	Finland	France	
Russia	Iceland	Germany	
Sweden	Netherlands	Greece	
Switzerland	Norway	Hungary	
Ukraine	Sweden	India	
		Israel	
4. Others	5. Others	Lebanon	
Argentina	Chile	Mexico	
Australia	China	Portugal	
Brazil	Greece	South Africa	
Chile	Hong Kong	Sweden	
China	Hungary	Syria	
Hong Kong	India	Zimbabwe	
India	Japan		
Japan	Lebanon		
Lebanon	Luxembourg		
Mexico	Mexico		
New Zealand	Singapore		
Singapore	South Africa		
South Africa	Syria		
Syria	Venezuela		
Venezuela	Zimbabwe		
Zimbabwe			

Table 3
Sample Characteristics Across Hofstede's Culture Clusters[a]

Characteristics	Latin (N=256)	Germanic (N=101)	Anglo (N=294)	Nordic (N=80)	Total (N=731)
Age	28.6 (2.6)	28.4 (2.4)	27.8 (2.3)	28.4 (2.5)	28.2 (2.4)
Years at University	6.4 (1.1)	6.0 (1.2)	5.2 (1.5)	6.4 (1.4)	5.9 (1.4)
% Male	90.6	89.1	72.9	87.5	82.9
% Married	37.8	33.0	19.2	21.6	32.2
% with Children	31.7	13.8	7.8	7.6	15.5
% owning house	33.4	32.6	44.8	32.5	39.9
% owning car	89.5	95.0	80.3	85.0	86.0

[a] Standard deviations are in parantheses.

Table 4

PANEL A

Means and Standard Deviations of Interpersonal Information Use by Clusters using Three Clustering Methods[a]

	Trade - Area				Hofstede's Culture Clusters					Retail Development		
	NAFTA	EEC	Non-EEC (Europe)	F	Latin	Germanic	Anglo	Nordic	F	Low	High	F
Likely to	(N=88)	(N=431)	(N=51)	P<	(N=202)	(N=85)	(N=238)	(N=62)	P<	(N=253)	(N=330)	P<
Seek	5.66	5.54	5.58	0.35	5.46	5.73	5.61	5.43	0.94	5.45	5.55	0.68
	(1.35)	(1.30)	(1.20)	.79	(.08)	(.13)	(.08)	(.15)	0.45	(1.41)	(1.26)	0.41
Give	4.34	4.26	4.41	1.05	4.26	4.55	4.28	4.26	0.67	4.41	4.25	1.32
	(1.83)	(1.67)	(1.78)	.37	(1.73)	(1.67)	(1.69)	(1.50)	0.61	(.16)	(.13)	0.25

PANEL B

Percentage of Respondents in each Interpersonal Information Classification by Cluster

	Trade - Area				Hofstede's Culture Clusters					Retail Development		
	NAFTA	EEC	Non-EEC (Europe)	Overall χ^2, p-value	Latin	Germanic	Anglo	Nordic	Overall χ^2, p-value	Low	High	Overall χ^2, p-value
	(N=88)	(N=431)	(N=51)		(N=202)	(N=85)	(N=238)	(N=62)		(N=253)	(N=330)	
Isolates	17.05	20.51	15.71		20.00	15.30	18.90	27.42		19.52	20.52	
Independents	17.05	20.75	17.65		23.00	20.00	17.65	19.35		24.30	18.79	
Dependents	30.68	28.21	19.61		27.50	21.18	28.99	29.03		24.70	26.67	
Integrateds	35.25	30.54	39.22	8.16, 0.52	28.10	43.53	34.45	24.19	11.99, 0.46	31.47	33.03	2.64, 0.45

[a] all values are means on "7" point scales. Numbers in parentheses are standard deviations.

Table 5

Interpersonal Influences and Alternative Information Sources: Percent Respondents Reporting Frequent Use, By Cluster

	Trade Area					Hofstede's Culture Cluster						Retail Development				Nationality	
	NAFTA (N=118)	EEC (N=52)	Non-EEC (N=60)	χ^2	P<	Latin (N=256)	Germanic (N=295)	Anglo N = 295	Nordic (N=80)	χ^2	P<	Low (N=404)	High (N=388)	χ^2	P<	χ^2 (N=656)	P<
Personal Friends	93.22	95.23	96.67	1.39	0.71	96.09	94.06	93.9	98.75	4.05	0.26	94.8	95.62	0.29	0.59	13.1	0.37
Consumer Magazines	76.27	68.32	65.00	5.2	0.16	65.23	65.35	77.63	56.25	18.74	0.001	66.34	74.74	6.72	0.02	31.35	0.01
Salespeople	72.03	64.31	61.67	7.31	0.07	59.38	66.34	68.81	72.50	7.5	0.06	61.14	67.78	3.82	0.06	15.4	0.22
Newspaper	60.17	41.79	53.33	14.79	0.01	41.41	58.42	44.07	55.00	11.45	0.02	48.51	43.81	1.76	0.19	47.1	0.001
TV Commercials	23.73	22.52	23.33	7.52	0.06	22.66	17.82	25.42	27.5	3.21	0.37	22.77	25.77	0.97	0.33	28.7	0.01
Radio Commercials	10.17	6.49	3.33	3.86	0.28	5.08	3.96	10.17	6.25	7.4	0.06	6.68	7.73	0.33	0.57	11.5	0.49
Overall χ^2 for Kruskall-Wallis Test				5.09	0.05					0.22	0.95			0.23	0.1		

Table 6

Correlations between Individual Level Factors and Interpersonal Influence

Individual Measures	Seek	Give
1. Information search behavior		
- Likely to do research before buying	0.29	0.41
- No. of shops visited	0.11	0.20
- Subscriptions to magazines		0.10
- Likely to use brand as signal of quality	0.21	.09
- Likely to use retailer reputation as signal of quality	0.11	
- Rely on newspapers[a]		0.11
- Rely on personal friends[a]	0.17	
- Rely on magazines[a]		0.13
- Rely on sales people[a]		-.08
- Likely to use physical appearance		
2. Risk proneness and self-confidence		
- Likely to buy latest electronic gadget		0.40
- Self-confidence		0.11
3. Category interest		
- Intention to purchase:		
Personal computer		0.18
Video camera		0.17
VCR		0.12
Satellite TV		.07
- Knowledge		
Personal computer	-.08	0.39
Video camera		0.31
VCR	-.10	0.27
Satellite TV	-.08	0.18
High-definition TV	-.06	0.14
- Ownership		
Personal computer		0.19
Video Camera		0.09
Microwave oven		
4. Other		
- Number of cars	-0.12	
- Gender (female = 1)[a]	0.13	-0.19
- Married[a]	-.08	
- Education= Engineering[a]	-.09	0.12
- Price sensitivity	0.16	

[a] Spearman correlations reported. Pearson correlations otherwise. Medium split created if necessary. Results are insensitive to the use of biserial, phi, Pearson or Spearman measures.