Cultural Segmentation: An Updated Approach to the Attitude–Behavior Link

Consumer attitudes are an important topic of research among scholars and practitioners. Both groups of stakeholders' primary interest in attitudes hinges on their ability to predict behavior (i.e., the *attitude–behavior* link). Nielsen, like most market research firms, is in the business of regularly surveying consumer attitudes with the intent to predict consumer behavior. However, decades of cross-cultural research converge on the notion that **attitudes may be a stronger predictor of behavior among certain populations** (e.g., Riemer, Shavitt, Koo, & Markus, 2014). Our team's unique expertise in attitude and cultural research proposes to introduce the concept of **cultural segmentation** to enhance Nielsen's ability to identity market segments for whom attitudes are more likely to predict behavior.

AN CULTURALLY-SENSITIVE APPROACH TO THE ATTITUDE–BEHAVIOR LINK

Traditional attitude theorists and practitioners have adopted the **traditional approach** based on research conducted in North America that assumes that the attitude–behavior link is consistent across consumer groups. This is because attitudes have primarily been thought of as personal preferences that 1) reflect the stable internal states of individual attitude holders and 2) are impervious to contextual influence (e.g., Ajzen, 1988; Eagly, 1992). A **culturally-sensitive approach**, supported by a wave of recent cross-cultural research, suggests that for some individuals, **behavioral outcomes can be driven by social norms and contexts** as opposed to personal preferences. For example, compared to the U.S., personal preferences did not predict "green" purchase behavior in China. Instead, perceptions about what was appropriate were better predictors (Chan & Lau, 2001; Eom, Kim, Sherman, & Ishii, 2016). This is just one of several examples of evidence that question the basic assumption that attitudes work well to predict behavior in America, but not elsewhere.

CULTURAL SEGMENTATION OF AMERICAN CONSUMERS

We propose to use the insights gained from decades of cross-cultural research to **culturally segment Nielsen's American survey respondents** into groups for whom attitudes are likely, or not likely, to predict behavior. Perhaps the most frequently used and agreed upon cultural dichotomy in academic literature is the extent to which a culture is self- or other-focused (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Triandis, 1989). Drawing upon this previous research, **we predict that the attitude–behavior link is stronger among American consumer segments who are self-focused versus other-focused**. Whereas the bulk of earlier studies have used different countries to show differences between self- and other-focused cultures (e.g., Han & Shavitt, 1994), we intend to culturally segment in two ways. First, we plan to use Nielsen's unique survey data to identify American consumers who tend to be self- or other-focused as in prior work (Vandello & Cohen, 1999). Second, we plan to leverage our research team's extensive experience comparing attitude–behavior patterns across various ethnicities (e.g., Latino Americans). If the other-focused segment's behavior is more sensitive to subjective norms than personal attitudes, the attitude–behavior link should be weakest in domains where norms are especially strong or salient.

Using our proposed self- versus other-focus segmentation with Nielsen survey data also allows us to test the validity of other assumptions from the culturally-sensitive attitude–behavior approach. For instance, in contrast to the traditional approach, our culturally-sensitive attitude–behavior approach predicts that **attitudes may only be stable across time and domains in the self-focused segment**. Alternatively, we should expect to observe **lower *within-person* attitude consistency** in the other-focused consumer segment because their attitudes are more likely to be influenced by subjective norms. In addition, if the other-focused cultural segment is more sensitive to subjective norms, then might also expect to observe **greater *across-person* attitude consistency** in domains where norms are especially strong or salient.

The current research is the first to investigate and empirically test the marketing research implications of prior cross-cultural studies in the context of a single country. Supportive findings could help Nielsen **correct a potentially unforeseen bias in drawing inferences from consumer attitude patterns** across the United States. Our anticipated findings would also suggest that the practice of surveying consumer attitudes without considering cultural factors undermines a market researcher's efforts. Moreover, confirmation of our predictions would enhance the theoretical understanding of the attitude–behavior link.

DATA REQUESTED & FINANCIAL RESOURCES

To test these ideas, we request access to **individual-level data from Nielsen's syndicated surveys** including, but not limited to, the Scarborough Survey of the American Consumer ®. We are particularly interested in analyzing the correlation between items that reflect attitudes (e.g., "I am fascinated by new technology") and those that reflect corresponding behaviors (e.g., intentions to make technology or electronic purchases in the next 12 months). We have access to financial support from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign College of Business to support the purchase of the data requested.

OUR RESEARCH TEAM

The research team consists of Marketing Professor Sharon Shavitt, Psychology Professor Hazel Markus, and marketing doctoral student Aaron Barnes. Our team has over **80 years of combined experience** researching cross-cultural issues related to attitudes and consumer behavior.

Sharon Shavitt is the Walter H. Stellner Professor of Marketing at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She has published extensively on topics related to consumer information-processing, persuasion, and the cross-cultural factors affecting consumer persuasion, attitudinal and value judgments, and survey responding. She also conducts research on the impact of motivational and contextual factors on evaluative processes and on the determinants of public attitudes toward advertising.

Hazel Markus is the Davis-Brack Professor in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University. Her work is concerned with how gender, ethnicity, religion, social class, cohort, or region or country of national origin may influence thought and feeling, particularly self-relevant thought and feeling. She is a co-author of *Clash!: How to Thrive in a Multicultural World*, *Well-being, American Style*, along with *Engaging Cultural Differences: The Multicultural Challenge in*

Liberal Democracies, *Emotion and Culture: Empirical Studies of Mutual Influence*, and *Social Stigma: The Psychology of Marked Relationships*.

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