

GENDER ISSUES IN BUYING BEHAVIOR: A CROSS-COUNTRY ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the potential differences in consumer behavior of two Asian countries: Singapore and Thailand. Of particular interest, the deviations between men and women on the amount of social influence that occurs in purchasing decisions and their orientation toward locus of control (e.g., one's belief about one's own behavior and the consequences of that behavior) are examined and reported. ANOVA is employed to test for the significance of differences between the subjects from these two countries. The results confirm significant differences between Thai men as compared to Singaporean men, as well as Thai women and Singaporean women. These findings suggest that some widely-held ideas about differences between men and women may, in fact, not apply the same way in Asia as they do in the West.

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INTRODUCTION

The implicit assumption that products and consumers' tastes, habits and preferences are similar across Asian countries is a strong one (Schutte 1998). Such a controversial suggestion that 'Asians are like' is probably due to the natural tendency to consider Asian cultures as a unitary, collectivistic group of people who view the world through the same set of eyes. Additionally, there is a tendency for cross-cultural research to separate the Eastern world from that of the Western. The fallacy of assuming the similarity of people within the same region may have grave effects in business endeavors as well as in understanding the true nature of people across cultures.

The purpose of this study is to formally examine a cross-national Asian setting: Singapore and Thailand. These two nations are located close together in Southeast Asia, and have both been categorized as highly collectivist countries and are expected to have collectivistic orientations as described by social science researchers (i.e. Triandis 1995; and Hofstede 1991). Men and women, regardless of their nationalities, are first investigated by using ANOVA to confirm the gender differences on purchasing behavior and level of social influence.

Once the differences between the two genders are formally established, the relative importance of locus of control as a source of influence in consumer purchasing decision was examined among the men and women of the two countries. Using ANOVA, the results confirms that Singaporean men are relatively more internally oriented than the Thai men. Moreover, the Singaporean women are reported to have greater internal orientation than the Thai women.

In addition to the above findings, the study reports the differences in level of social influence in consumer purchasing decisions. Significant differences between the men and women of both nations are reported as they appeared to be congruent with the hypotheses. Both Singaporean men and women are described to have lower level of social influences than their Thai counterpart.

The results of this study provide both marketing practitioners and academics more insightful understanding of the determinants of consumer behavior and the impact of

social influences in purchasing decisions. Moreover, the study disproves the erroneous beliefs that ‘Asians are alike’ by providing empirical findings on the differences between the people of this region. Not only will this insightful knowledge aid in the fundamental tasks of market segmentation, consumer target, and product promotion, but it will also facilitate the development of more effective strategies for cross-cultural marketing endeavors.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Sex Differences. The fashionable paradigm of the differences between men and women are passively accepted by marketing practitioners around the world. Obvious sex differences exist not just because of genetic reasons, but are quite often due to cultural variations (Teather 1995). Unfortunately, many practitioners have failed to recognize the complexity of the social and cultural variables that shape the behavior of these two species of human beings. Problems with stereotyped descriptions of males and females have plagued the financial service industry’s female-specific direct marketing campaigns (Cleaver 1998). In addition, Ogilvy and Mather Direct has recently concluded that income, age, lifestyle and family status are more important segmentation variables than gender alone (Cleaver 1998).

Despite the recognition of differences between men and women, not all practitioners agree on its importance to marketing strategy. Sex, however, is often differentiated from gender in terms of its biological determinism. While some (sexual) differences between men and women appear to be biologically inevitable, others (gendered) are obviously social constructions that have been knitted together to serve various purposes at various periods in time. However, by disentangling aspects of psychological and cultural differences from the classic biological factors, researchers would be able to contribute more to understanding gender differences, particularly in the field of marketing.

Earlier pieces of research on gender differences began to appear in 1960, with the work predominantly proposing that males and females differ in the extent to which they develop self-concepts that are separated from or connected with others (Markus and

Kitayama 1991). The earlier studies found that the male agentic role was characterized by concern for the self, while the female communal role typically embraced concern for both the self and others. In the same line of this research, Meyers-Levy (1988) determined that because of their attention to both self and others, females are expected to respond favorably to both agentic and communal advertising appeals. Men, on the other hand, due to their agentic role, do not incorporate communal concerns.

More social researchers, however, have recently recognized the importance that cultural traditions assign to dominance and assertiveness by males, and submission and passivity by females, may significantly contribute to observed sex differences. As an example, self-concept research moved from investigation of gender schematicity toward a concept of self as either 'separate' from or 'connected' with others (e.g., Cross and Markus 1993; Josephs, Markus and Tatarodi 1992). The relationship between sex and self-concept also appears to vary with social class, religion and ethnicity (e.g., Collins 1997; Crawford 1997).

To further support the above research, social and economic changes have accentuated the importance that the female segment plays in formation of marketing strategies. According to the IRS in 1997, 40% of Americans with assets over \$500,000 were women (Del Prete 1997). Furthermore, by 1998, Capital Publishing reported that women controlled 60% of U.S. wealth and that 85% of women would have sole responsibility for their finances at some point in their lives (Kerwin 1998).

Although behavioral differences between men and women are widely accepted in cross-cultural studies, marketers also have noted important changes in male purchasing behavior and domestic responsibilities. According to research firm GFK, men are starting to behave more like female shoppers (Teather 1995). They are doing more grocery shopping than ever before and have become as brand-conscious as women. Men also are doing more household chores and spending more time with children (Teather 1995). As a result, gender-related expectations that once were distinct have become blurred.

Locus of Control. Locus of control has long been recognized as a factor capable of explaining important dimensions of consumer decision making. This construct has also been postulated to reflect the amount of social influence that consumers experience in the buying decision process. The initial development of the locus of control (LOC) construct is attributed to Rotter (1966). He described the concept of “internal or external reinforcement control”, in which external control exists when a reinforcement is perceived as following some action of one’s own but not being entirely contingent upon one’s action. It is typically perceived as the result of luck, chance, fate, as under the control of powerful others, or as unpredictable events and outcomes because of the great complexity of the forces surrounding him/her. Conversely, internal control reflects the perception that the event is contingent upon one’s own behavior or one’s relatively permanent characteristics.

A compelling series of studies conducted by Morris and Peng (1994) provided strong empirical support for the hypothesis that members of independent cultures are more likely to perceive the individual as the causal agent from which behavior stems while members of interdependent cultures exhibit a greater tendency to perceive behavior as situationally determined and, at times, even being directed by groups. In their study, when subjects were shown the same descriptions of events, such as mass murders, and asked to determine the cause, Americans predominantly focused on the presumed mental instability and negative dispositions of the murderers, while Chinese made more references to societal and institutional factors which may have effected the murderers (such as emphasizing corruption by bad example or disruption instigated by social changes).

The above analysis further suggests that members of independent and interdependent cultures differ in their processing of information and their controlling of life events. Individuals with an interdependent self (i.e., East Asians) tend to cognize their environment holistically (Peng and Nisbett 1999), make more judgment on the behavior of others based on situational factors (Morris and Peng 1994), and attribute power to the collective (Menon et. al. 1999). On the other hand, people with an independent self (i.e., Westerners) tend to cognize their surroundings in regard to their components (Peng and Nisbett 1999), focus on individual dispositions to the exclusion of the other components in an environment (Morris and Peng 1994), and attribute power and authority to the

individual (Menon et al. 1999). In other words, East Asians tend to perceive group collectives as the determinants of their behavior, whereas Westerners tend to perceive individuals as causal agents of their behavior.

In marketing, most LOC research has been concerned with predicting external/internal behavioral differences in buying-related situations. LOC studies have been conducted on the relationships between general psychological constructs and environmental ('green') behavior (Berger and Corbin 1992; Biswas et al. 2000), and with pinpointing the antecedents of postpurchase/postconsumption behavior (Alwitt and Pitts 1996; Shrum, McCarty, and Lowrey 1995). Consistent with general LOC findings, externals exhibit a reluctance to make objective decisions after exposure to environmental events.

In the area of consumer credit, Tokunga (1993) found that internals are more likely to use consumer credit successfully than externals. Lunt and Livingston (1991) reported that internals are more regular savers and have fewer problems with personal debts. Moreover, Dessart and Kuylen (1986) has described internals as those who are less likely to experience financial difficulties and to act impulsively, were more likely to plan ahead, to act according to a plan and to be well informed.

Despite the widespread use of LOC as an explanatory tool, the construct and its measures have raised certain concerns among researchers. LOC has been found most useful when tailored to predict behavior in specific settings (Rotter 1990; Furnham & Steele 1993; and Marshall 1991). Specific context measures of LOC have been used successfully to predict behaviors pertinent to health (Lau & Ware 1981), work (Spector 1961, 1988), management (Hodgkinson 1992), and consumer behavior (Brusseri, Lefcourt, & Kerton 1998). These studies have supported the idea that the predictive powers of LOC measures are enhanced when the assessments of expectancies are tailored to particular social arenas. The present study therefore employs a consumer behavior-focused measure of LOC developed by Busseri and Kerton (1997).

Social Influences. According to the Fishbein behavioral intentions model (1969, 1975), a person forms intentions to behave or not behave in a certain way, and these intentions are based on the person's attitude toward the behavior as well as his or her perception of the opinions of significant others. Congruent with this notion, Lee and Green (1991) argue that although the basic framework of the Fishbein behavioral intentions model has been generally accepted for Americans, there are questions concerning the validity of the independence of attitudinal components and social influence components among people in Asian cultures. Americans' individualist nature is clearly manifested by their resentment of conformity (Hui and Triandis 1986). Most Koreans, on the other hand, feel strong social pressure to comply with group norms regardless of their own private view (Yau 1994; Lee and Green 1991).

In terms of differences between men and women regarding social norms and social influences, Bem (1981) argues that women and men encode and process information using different socially-constructed cognition structures that, in turn, help determine and direct an individual's perceptions. As a result, both men and women tend to make decisions that reflect biases inherent in their perception and actions (Nisbett 1998). This means that gender schemas can be considered as normative guides that cause actions or behaviors displayed by both sexes.

LOC and Social Influence. While social influence in the buying decision is widely recognized to vary across cultures (Redding 1982; Fisher and Ackerman 1998), most LOC research has focused on behavioral attributions and predictions relating to individuals' perceptions of their control over the environment in which they operate. The relationship between LOC and susceptibility to social influence has received less empirical attention, but has been addressed conceptually in the literature. Lefcourt (1982) stated that in regards to purchasing decisions, internals are more resistant to social influences while externals are more attentive and yielding to social cues. These observations are consistent with findings that indicate internals pay more attention to information pertinent to purchasing outcomes, exhibit more purposive decision-making, and have more confidence in their ability to succeed at important tasks (Lefcourt and Davidson-Katz 1991). In the marketing literature, Busseri and Kerton (1997), have also asserted (but not formally

tested) that externals may allow other sources (television ads or salespeople) to influence their decisions.

HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

Sex Differences. Since cultural traditions often play the role of assigning dominance and assertiveness to males, and submission and passivity to females, one can readily see the differences between the two sexes across cultures. Gilligan (1982) has proposed that masculinity is defined through separation but femininity is defined through attachment. Hence, this concept leads to the stereotyping that women, “we”, define their identities in the context of a relationship with others while the male, “I”, is defined in separation.

More recent evidence in support of the sex differences framework concerns the investigation of separated and connected appeals in a cross-cultural context (e.g., Wang et al. 2000). In these studies, individuals with low scores on a Separateness-Connectedness scale preferred the relationship-oriented theme while those with high scores preferred the separated theme. This approach is congruent with West and Zimmerman’s (1987) findings that once a person is labeled a member of a sex category, s/he is morally accountable for behavior consistent with the behavior that characterizes such an assigned category.

Relating locus of control to sex differences, currently there seems to be no research that compares the men and women in terms of their LOC orientation. However, since women are more likely to portray interdependent selves than men, they are predicted to be more external in their orientations than men. Complementary to this expectation of the effects of gender locus of control, “masculinity” may be associated with an internal locus of control, whereas “femininity” may be related to an external locus of control (Halvari 1996).

Although locus of control has proven itself to be useful in distinguishing the passive (*external*) / active (*internal*) orientation of individuals in relation to their environment, social influences will affect individuals’ actions toward an event. Studies have found that females are likely to favor social support and be more emotion-focused relative to males (Stein and Nyamathi 1999). Even as an increasing number of women in

Asian cultures become more career oriented, pressure to adhere to social norms and group conformity will continue to be relatively high among these contemporary women. Thus, H1 and H2 are associated with the differences between Asian men and Asian women with regard to the basis of locus of control and social influence.

H1: Asian men are more internally oriented than Asian women.

H2: Asian men are less subject to social influences than Asian women.

Locus of Control Construct. Academic research in this area has tended to be specific to the disciplines of the researchers. For instance, marketing academics have been focusing on consumer locus of control (Busseri and Kerton 1997; and Busseri, Lefcourt, and Kerton 1998), whereas organizational researchers have been on the work locus of control (Orpen 1992; and Blau 1993).

Although both Singaporeans and Thais are Asians, not all aspects of the two nation-citizens are the same. By being Asians, both Singaporeans and Thais are characterized as collectivists (Triandis, 1995; Hofstede 1991). In addition, by being collectivists both nation-citizens are predicted to be interdependent (Triandis 1995). According to Hofstede (1983), independent self-construal in an individual lends to the self being viewed as comprising a unique set of internal attributes including motivation, traits, and values.

Over time, however, nations and cultures change (Hoyer and MacInnis 2000), and some changes may be associated with changes in behavioral patterns and value orientations. Since the 1970's (when Hofstede's study was conducted), Singapore has enjoyed rapid economic growth and is now ranked among the world's most developed countries. According the World Economic Outlook (2002), per capita gross domestic product for Singapore has grown impressively relative to Thailand (Table 1). According to Hofstede (1983) and Triandis (1995), as a country becomes more economically developed, its culture also becomes more individualistic—more independent. This study hypothesizes that Singaporeans are relatively more internally oriented than the Thais. Thus, H3 and H4 are as follows:

- H3:** Singaporean men are more internally oriented than Thai men.
- H4:** Singaporean women are more internally oriented than Thai women.

Table 1: Per Capita Gross Domestic Product between 1970 and 2000
@ Current Price: U.S. Dollars per person

Year	Thailand GDP (\$)	Singapore GDP (\$)
1970	183.2	896.3
1975	349.2	2,608.7
1980	695.8	4,854.4
1985	752.7	6,466.1
1990	1,521.1	12,156.7
1995	2,816.0	23,962.3
2000	1,953.3	23,084.0

Social Influences. In predicting the behavior, more interdependent individuals are influenced by social norms rather than attitudes, and this relationship can be used to forecast the behavioral intentions of the individual (Lee and Green, 1991; Bontempo et. al, 1990). According to Markus and Kitayama (1991), interdependent-selves reinforce the value of following norms essential for group cohesion, whereas independent-selves lead to striving for self-determination. In other words, those with interdependent-selves display stronger identification with the group while those with independent-selves tend to be self-motivated. Since Singaporeans are predicted to be relatively more independent than Thais, they are expected be less subject to social influence than are the Thais. Thus, H5 and H6 are stated as follows:

- H5:** Singaporean men are less subject to social influences than Thai men.
- H6:** Singaporean women are less subject to social influences than Thai women.

METHODOLOGY

Selection of the Countries. Since there have not been prior studies that classify national cultures as being characterized by internal or external LOC, the current study employed a surrogate indicator derived from the literature. Hofstede (1980) classified countries according to the levels of individualism/collectivism exhibited by their people. As noted above, individualism/collectivism has been associated with LOC by several authors: individualists tend to have an internal LOC, collectivists an external LOC. Based on

Hofstede's (1980) findings, two collectivist countries (Thailand and Singapore) were selected for the study. These countries occupied extreme positions on Hofstede's individualist/collectivist scale, with Thailand and Singapore among the most collectivist nations.

Research Instrument and Sample. The instrument comprised a 14 item LOC scale (Busseri and Kerton 1997), a buying scenario (*"You need to buy some new sneakers. You are considering two models, one that you like, and another that is liked by the person who is with you. How likely would you be to purchase the sneakers that the other person likes if that person is": mother/father, close friend, boy/girlfriend, salesperson*), and classification questions. The LOC measure fits the requirements of the research in two major respects. First, it focused specifically on consumer-related LOC issues. Secondly, the scale items addressed several dimensions of LOC, one of which was social influence, the focus of the present study. After reading the purchase situation scenario, respondents were asked the likelihood (7-point Likert scale from: 1 = very unlikely to 7 = very likely) that they would be influenced by the other person's opinion.

Questionnaires were pretested in each of the countries. English was employed in the Singaporean questionnaires, since that is the official language of this nation. The Thai questionnaire was translated and back-translated using two Thais proficient in English. To test the psychometric equivalence of these measures, the reliability statistics were compared between the countries and the variance checked for floor or ceiling effects (Van de Vijver and Leung 1997). Questionnaires were administered in classroom settings. The study employed samples of university students from the two countries, thus controlling for age, occupational and social class factors. After elimination of respondents for whom there was missing data, the sample consisted of 367 respondents: 243 Thais and 124 Singaporeans.

ANALYSES AND FINDINGS

The data were first subjects to principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation to determine validity and to potentially isolate the social influence component of LOC. Three clean factors emerged from the analysis of the LOC scale accounting for 62.5% of the total variance. Cronbach's alpha ranged from 0.59 to 0.70, meeting (or very

close to) the 0.60 reliability test for exploratory/human behavior research (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994; Robinson et. al 1991). Of particular interest to the present study is that one of the factors contained items that are related to the level of social influence the person is susceptible to in the buying decision. This factor, labeled Susceptibility, also explained the greatest amount of variance. Given the study's concentration on social influence and LOC, the focus of the subsequent analysis is on results associated with the LOC scale as a whole (LOC total), and the results of the Susceptibility factor.

To examine whether there were any significant Gender x Culture interactions, a 2 (gender) x 2 (cultures) ANOVA was performed on each LOC factors. A significant means would indicate that the effect of gender on a particular LOC factor depends on culture. The Gender x Culture interaction was found to be significant (at the $p < .01$ level) for the LOC scale as a whole (LOC Total), $F(1, 359) = 8.43, p = .004$. Table 2 shows the means for the Susceptibility (to social influence) dimension of LOC and for the LOC Total. The overall finding is consistent with hypothesis 1: Asian men have means that are significantly lower than those of Asian women, indicating that Asian men are more internally oriented than Asian women. The findings, however, indicate that there are no significant differences between Asian men and women in regard to the 'susceptibility' factor.

**Table 2: Locus of Control Orientation—
Comparison between Asian Men and Women**

LOC	Men		Women	
	Means	Std. Deviations	Means	Std. Deviations
Susceptibility	3.20	0.62	3.21	0.52
LOC Total	2.66*	0.38	2.79*	0.47

** indicates significant differences between men and women*

The same procedure as above is implemented to examine whether there are any significant Gender x Culture interactions in regard to social influences. Contrary to the prediction with hypothesis 2, however, the results of this analysis (Table 3) indicate that Asian men are more subject to social influences than Asian women. In particular, the means for male subjects reflect that overall, men are more susceptible (than women) to the

influences of a close friend, salesperson, and a combination of social influences selected for this study. The results do not indicate any significant influences associated with parents and boy/girlfriend. Nevertheless, the overall objective of this hypothesis is satisfied in that the results show significantly different levels of influence between males and females.

**Table 3: Social Influences on Buying Decisions—
Comparison between Asian Men and Women**

Sources of Influences	Men		Women	
	Means	Std. Deviations	Means	Std. Deviations
Parents	4.34	1.76	4.32	1.60
Close Friends	5.01*	1.24	4.67*	1.32
Boy/Girlfriend	5.14	1.50	4.91	1.42
Salesperson	3.75*	1.57	3.32*	1.44
Social Influence Total	4.56*	1.10	4.31*	1.06

* indicates significant differences between men and women

To examine whether Singaporean men are more internally oriented than Thai men (hypothesis 3), ANOVA was also performed on the ‘susceptibility’ factor and the LOC factor as a whole (LOC Total). Again, a significant means would indicate that the effect of gender on locus of control orientation depends on culture. In this study, the results (Table 4) are found to be significant (at the $p < .01$ level) for the LOC Total, $F(1, 180) = 7.09$, $p = .008$.

**Table 4: Locus of Control Orientation—
Comparison between Singaporean Men and Thai Men**

LOC	Singaporean Men		Thai Men	
	Means	Std. Deviations	Means	Std. Deviations
Susceptibility	3.13	.63	3.24	.60
LOC Total	2.71*	.40	2.55*	.31

* indicates significant differences between Singaporean men and Thai men

To test for hypothesis 4, whether Singaporean women are more internally oriented than Thai women, ANOVA was replicated with the focus on the women solely. The

results are found to be significant ($p < .05$) for the ‘susceptibility’ factor, $F(1, 177) = 4.28$, $p = .040$; and marginally significant ($p = .07$) for the LOC total, $F(1, 177) = 3.32$, $p = .069$. Table 5 shows the results of the comparison between women of the two nations.

Table 5: Locus of Control Orientation—

Comparison between Singaporean Women and Thai Women

LOC	Singaporean Women		Thai women	
	Means	Std. Deviations	Means	Std. Deviations
Susceptibility	3.11*	.49	3.27*	.54
LOC Total	2.70*	.44	2.83*	.51

** indicates significant differences between Singaporean women and Thai women*

To examine whether there were any significant Gender x Culture interactions in regard to social influences, each of the social influence variables, in particular, parental, close friend, boy/girlfriend, salesperson and the entire set of influences (Social Influence Total), was tested by ANOVA to investigate the differences between the males and females of both cultures. A significant means would indicate that the effect of gender on a particular social influence depends on culture to which one belongs. For hypothesis 5, the differences between Singaporean and Thai men are found to be significance (Table 6) on every influence except for the boy/girlfriend influence: parental influence, $F(1, 180) = 24.75$, $p = .000$; close friend influence, $F(1, 180) = 3.59$, $p = .060$; salesperson influence, $F(1, 180) = 7.93$, $p = .005$; and social influence total, $F(1, 180) = 10.62$, $p = .001$. Singaporean men have means that are significantly less than those of Thai men, indicating that the former are less socially influenced than the latter.

**Table 6: Social Influences on Buying Decisions—
Comparison between Singaporean Men and Thai Men**

Sources of Influences	Singaporean Men		Thai Men	
	Means	Std. Deviations	Means	Std. Deviations
Parents	3.45*	1.58	4.76*	1.69
Close Friends	4.76*	1.13	5.13*	1.27
Boy/Girlfriend	5.09	1.38	5.14	1.55
Salesperson	3.28*	1.45	3.97*	1.59
Social Influence Total	4.18*	0.94	4.74*	1.12

* indicates significant differences between Singaporean and Thai men

To test for hypothesis 6, whether Singaporean women are less subject to social influences than Thai women, the process above was implemented with a focus on women in both countries. A significant difference is found with only parental influence, $F(1, 179) = 6.56$, $p = .011$. As predicted, the result indicates that Thai women are more influenced by their parents than the Singaporean women. Table 7 below shows the comparison between Singaporean and Thai women in regards to social influences. Thus, H6 was only partially supported.

**Table 7: Social Influences on Buying Decisions—
Comparison between Singaporean Women and Thai Women**

Sources of Influences	Singaporean Women		Thai Women	
	Means	Std. Deviations	Means	Std. Deviations
Parents	3.92*	1.87	4.55*	1.38
Close Friends	4.53	1.55	4.76	1.17
Boy/Girlfriend	4.85	1.63	5.00	1.29
Salesperson	3.24	1.38	3.37	1.48
Social Influence Total	4.17	1.28	4.38	0.91

* indicates significant differences between Singaporean and Thai women

DISCUSSION

The findings provide evidence that largely confirms the hypotheses, as well as raising questions that invite further research. In particular to this study, the LOC means of Asian men are tested against those of Asian women. The results provide the confirmation that they have different orientations toward locus of control. Asian men, therefore, are generally more internally oriented than Asian women. In addition, the findings clearly support the hypothesis that respondents from more developed nations (Singapore) are relatively more internally oriented, and those from the less developed nations (Thailand) are relatively more externally oriented.

In terms of differences in social influence across these nations, however, the findings are rather nuanced. Asian men, contrary to the prediction, have greater susceptibility to social influence than do the Asian women. An explanation of this discrepancy may be related to the origin of the previous research, which concluded that men are generally more independent than women (Josephs, A., Hazel M., and Tafarodi, R. 1992). The data that lead to the hypothesis are generally compiled from Western subjects, hence, may not be generalizable to the Asian part of the world.

Furthermore, one variable, boy/girlfriend influence consistently showed no differences across the two nations. This finding could be explained by the likelihood that many sample members do not have a boy/girlfriend, given their age level of 19 – 23 years. Respondents were thus responding to a hypothetical situation with regards to a person with whom they had a hypothetical relationship.

With respect to the other sources of social influence, Singapore and Thailand follow the expected patterns. The Thai respondents, regardless of gender, are more subject to social influences in their purchasing decisions than the Singaporean respondents. This outcome is even more substantial when the genders are examined separately. Consistently, the Thai men and women exhibit greater levels of social influence than the Singaporean men and women. This phenomenon clearly demonstrates the fallacy of generalizing behavior across Asian cultures.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions to Marketing Theory. This research has provided theoretical contributions that are either in areas that have not been subject to prior empirical research in marketing or they provide a reconfirmation of findings established several decades ago about cultural variations leading to behavioral differences. Based on this research finding, several contributions have been made to marketing theory:

1. The study has established that men are different than women, not purely because of biological factors -- many differences are due to variations in cultural factors.
2. People with an external locus of control are more subject to social influence in their buying decisions than those with an internal locus of control.
3. People in less developed nations (e.g., Thailand) tend to exhibit more of an external locus of control in their buying decisions than do people in more developed nations (e.g., Singapore).

Contribution to Marketing Practice. Beside the implications for marketing theory discussed above, this research has provided marketing insights for both firms that engage in international marketing and for firms that operate domestically. Internationally, the findings show that significant differences exist between Asian people in regard to locus of control orientation (with respect to their purchasing endeavors). Domestically, the findings also demonstrate varying levels of susceptibility in social influences and behavioral differences between men and women.

In developing, positioning, and promoting a brand, marketers would have to devise their strategies with regards to the behavioral differences between the two genders. Moreover, since this research has established empirical evidence that *Asians are not alike*, marketers would also have to develop their strategies and tactics, keeping cultural variations in mind. The level of social influence in purchasing decisions may be different for men and women within and across nations. Prudent practitioners, therefore, are advised to further investigate the effects of other social variables that may have significant consequences on consumer behavior differences across Asian cultures.

CONCLUSIONS

The social influence findings indicate that LOC may have some limitations when applied in an international setting especially in the event of trying to predict the levels of social influence to which consumers are subjected in their buying decisions. Other factors may intervene to counter the effects that LOC orientation has on social influence in consumer decision making. One possibility may relate to level of economic development. Singapore and Thailand are quite different in terms per capita GDP, suggesting that consumers in the two countries have unequal purchasing power, which could impact their perceived 'independence' in making buying decisions. This explanation, as presented here, is strictly correlational and cannot be taken as definitive. It appears, though, that the relationship between LOC and social influence is a complex one in a cross-national context, and should be the subject of further research.

LIMITATIONS

Although conducting research across countries is indispensable, it is usually done with a number of problems. One limitation of this study is that the samples for both cultures were convenience samples, each with an unknown degree of representation of its larger culture. Another limitation, also a sampling issue, is that the data were collected exclusively from university and classroom settings. Hence, the findings may not be generalizable to other segments of the population. The predominantly middle and upper-class college sample provides limited ability to compare locus of control orientation and social influences across social classes because the subjects in this study may not be truly representative of every class in the culture. A third limitation is that this study (as well as many cross cultural studies) uses measures that were developed by researchers belonging to Western cultures; hence, measures may have built-in cultural biases. Finally, data are gathered from only two Asian countries, which limit the ability to generalize across all Asian countries.

These limitations were projected before undertaking this study, and procedures were employed to minimize their impact on the research findings. They must nonetheless be considered when interpreting the results.



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