

The Many Faces of One Ethnicity: Food Consumption Across Segments

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While ethnicity segments have been explored independently (assimilation, biculturalism, and monocultural ethnicity), few studies have explored consumption differences across segments within one ethnic group. This study disaggregates ethnicity and explores food consumption across four segments within one ethnicity, finding variations across ethnic, marginalizer, assimilator, and bicultural segments. Of particular interest, findings show that the bicultural segment is the only group to exhibit patterns of both host and ethnic food consumption.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary culture in developed nations is increasingly multiethnic and complex with overlapping boundaries and loyalties (Cohen, 1978; Padilla, 2006). Ethnic groups in developed nations continue to grow, with 80% of persons claiming ancestry from one of 136 ethnicities housed in the United States alone (Census, 2000). Culture connects people at multiple levels (material, ideological, and normative), reflects a group's worldview, and impacts attitudes and behavior (McCracken, 1989). As cultures continue to change, overlap, and divide, there are numerous implications for consumption and marketing targeting strategies. Consumer behavior literature has acknowledged that culture, both dominant and ethnic subculture, is an important influence impacting consumption (Penaloza & Gilly, 1999).

Ethnicity has been shown to positively impact the rate of adoption of new products, level of information seeking, consumption information transfer, situational ethnic consumption, ethnic advertising effectiveness, ethnic food consumption, and ethnic entertainment (Hirschman, 1981; Laroche, Kim, & Tomiuk, 1998; Stayman & Deshpande, 1989; Xu, Shim, Lotz, & Almeida, 2004). Ethnicity has primarily been independently explored in terms of assimilation, biculturalism, and monocultural ethnicity, however few studies have considered all together (for within group ethnic comparisons, see: Lau-Gesk, 2003; Zhang, 2009). Marketers are currently faced with the hurdle of reaching ethnic groups, often composed of very different segments: those identifying with 1) the ethnic culture (ethnic), 2) the host culture (assimilated), 3) both cultures (bicultural), and 4) neither culture (marginalizers). Understanding the varying ways persons of ethnic descent identify with ethnic and host cultures gives marketers insight into the different consumption patterns of multiple segments within one ethnicity, shedding light on potential targeting strategies.

This study contributes to ethnicity literature by exploring the many faces of one ethnic group through an emic (self-ascribed) multi-dimensional measurement of ethnic identity (see Berry, Phinney, Sam, & Vedder, 2006). In disaggregating the ethnicity construct into four segments (assimilated, ethnic, bicultural, and marginalizers), this study explores variation across segments within one sample and examines differing impacts on consumption.

FACES OF ETHNICITY

The terms ethnicity, ethnic, and ethnic identity have been used somewhat interchangeably in literature to describe a global construct of ethnic group identification that reflects both an external (etic) group characteristic (Saegert, Hoover, & Hilger, 1985; Wallendorf & Reilly, 1983) and an internal (emic) assessment of strength of identification (Hirschman, 1981; Stayman & Deshpande, 1989). These external and internal elements are identifiers used to determine inclusion in a distinctive group, allowing for both self identification and identification by others (Hui & Kim, 1997). Ethnicity, then, encompasses not only a membership group (Bourne, 1956), but also a person's feelings about his/her heritage (Deshpande, Hoyer, & Donthu, 1986).

Traditionally viewed as a uni-dimensional model, the acculturation process assumed mutual exclusivity of ethnic and host cultures. In this "linear bipolar model," individuals lose features of their ethnicity as they take on features of the host culture, eventually assimilating into the dominant culture (Gans, 1979; Gordon, 1964). However, as early as 1924 it was postulated that although immigrants would become "Americanized" over time, they would also retain much of their distinctive cultural heritage (Kallen, 1924), specifically in multicultural or multiethnic dominant cultures (Szapocznik & Kurtines, 1980).

Since acculturation is a process with multiple, independent dimensions (Berry, et al., 2006, pg. 305; Phinney, 1992), assimilation to the host culture and retention of the ethnic culture happen simultaneously. However, strength of identification with either culture varies among individuals such that segments within an ethnic sample may include assimilators, separatists, marginalizers, and integrators (Berry, et al., 2006). Assimilators adopt the host culture and abandon the ethnic culture, separatists do the opposite by maintaining the ethnic culture and shunning the host, marginalizers identify with and maintain neither of the two cultures, and integrators maintain and blend both cultures. In understanding that ethnic groups are not homogenous, marketers can gain a better understanding of differences in consumption patterns and preferences across groups.

H1: Members of one ethnic group will show varying levels of identification with both the ethnic and host cultures.

Defined as "an individual's sense of self within an ethnic group, and the attitudes and behaviors associated with that sense" (Xu, et al., 2004, pg. 94), ethnic identity consists of two parts: a sense of self (identity) and an outcome (attitude and/or behavior). Thus, an individual's ethnic identity impacts or is reflected in his/her consumption. Research in ethnic consumption has shown ethnicity as a factor in favorable evaluations of ethnic advertising (Forehand & Deshpande, 2001), increased willingness to adopt new products and provide consumption information to others (Hirschman, 1981), a shift in ethnic- and host-oriented consumption based on situations (Stayman & Deshpande, 1989), and a shifting between cultural norms when language is "cued" (Briley, Morris, & Simonson, 2005).

Recent studies have begun to distinguish not only host and ethnic behavior differences, but also differences among segments within an ethnic group. Loraine G. Lau-Gesk (2003) explores responses to persuasion appeals among two types of biculturals (integrators and alternators). Integrators blend the two cultures and respond favorably to dual-focused persuasion appeals, while alternators compartmentalize the cultures and more readily shift between two single-focused appeals. While focusing solely on differentiating the bicultural segment through comparison with the two primary monocultural groups (ethnics in country of origin and host nationals in host country), Lau-Gesk is one of few to examine differences across ethnic subsegments. While overall ethnicity is an important factor impacting attitudes and consumption (Hirschman, 1981; Stayman & Deshpande, 1989), consumption differences across segments within an ethnic group are expected based on self-ascribed ethnic identification. Thus, variation in consumption is expected across the ethnic identity segments.

H2a: Participants with high ethnic and low host identification will exhibit ethnic food consumption patterns.

H2b: Participants with low ethnic and high host identification will exhibit host food consumption patterns.

Specific differences in consumption can be expected with respect to biculturals, those who identify with two cultures simultaneously (Gomez & Fassinger, 1994). Biculturals adapt to and are comfortable with two cultural frames (Briley, et al., 2005), thus they are most likely to exhibit consumption in line with both cultures.

H2c: Participants with high ethnic and high host identification will exhibit both ethnic and host food consumption patterns.

METHODOLOGY

The current study collected a real world sample of 175 Romanians living in the United States through an online survey placed on cultural and religious websites as well as phone interviews conducted by two persons of Romanian origin. Since language choice is an indicator of a person's ethnic identity (Laroche, Kim, Tomiuk, & Belisle, 2005), the survey was offered in both English and Romanian. One Romanian national translated the survey from English to Romanian, while another cross-examined both surveys to ensure comparability.

The Romanian population in the United States is unique in that it is a geographically dispersed ethnic group held together by ethnic organizations (cultural and religious). This structure differs from the large ethnic groups (Asian, Hispanic, etc), which are found in geographic communities, but is representative of the majority of ethnic groups (Hungarian, Finish, etc) found in the United States. As such, the Romanian ethnic group gives insight into the varying segments of ethnicity by identifying persons who choose to maintain differing levels of ethnic identity by choice rather than geographic necessity.

Procedure

A link was posted on Romanian cultural and religious sites. Participants were introduced to the survey topic and, after indicating language preference, were directed to the language-appropriate survey instrument. The ethnic identity construct used and adapted measures from Valencia's (1985) Hispanicness scale and Singh's (1998) ethnic association scale. Phinney's (1992) multigroup ethnic identity measure was not used as this study measured identity on two parallel measures: identification with ethnicity and identification with host culture. Thus, an eight-item scale ($r = .78$) measured Romanian Identity (RI) and a similar eight-item scale ($r = .77$) measured American Identity (AI). Four consumption items ($r = .72$) were created to explore differences in food consumption (eating out, use of prepared foods, eating at home, food from scratch). All items (See Table 1) were measured on 7-point scales, where 1 = strongly disagree and 7 = strongly agree.

Demographics

Of the 175 total survey hits, 126 completed the entire survey (71%) and were used to analyze final results. Participant age ranged from 14 to 84 years of age, 57.5% of which were age 26 and older. Twenty participants took the survey in Romanian, while the remainder chose to take the survey in English. A majority (71%) of participants were born in Romania, 24% were born in the United States, and 5% were born in other countries. Of the 104 participants who chose to respond to the demographic questions, 68% percent have lived in the United States at least fifteen years, 64% were female, 58% have completed college or graduate school, and 75% are affiliated with other Romanians through religious organizations.

TABLE 1
SCALE ITEMS

Scale	Scale Item	Cronbach's Alpha
Romanian Identity (RI)	I primarily speak Romanian at home.	r = .78
	Given the chance to speak with someone just as well in Romanian or English, I would choose Romanian.	
	I was primarily raised and/or educated in Romania.	
	I highly identify myself as a Romanian.	
	It is very important to me to hold onto my Romanian background.	
	It is very important to me that I marry a Romanian.	
	When I talk about Romanians, I usually say “we” rather than “they.”	
American Identity (AI)	I primarily speak English at home.	r = .77
	Given the chance to speak with someone just as well in English or Romanian, I would choose English.	
	I was primarily raised and/or educated in the United States.	
	I highly identify myself as an American.	
	It is very important to me that I “fit in” and adapt well to the American culture.	
	It is very important to me that I marry an American.	
	When I talk about Americans, I usually say “we” rather than “they.”	
Food Consumption	I tend to order or eat out.	r = .72
	I tend to eat homemade food at home.*	
	I tend to eat frozen entrees/canned/prepared food.	
	I tend to eat food from fresh ingredients/scratch.*	

*Items were reverse scored to create an aggregate consumption variable with all items in the same direction

RESULTS

The first hypothesis predicted variation of ethnic identification across segments within one ethnic group. Literature suggests the presence of four segments within an ethnic group (Berry, et al., 2006). To explore the first hypothesis, ethnic identity was measured on two 10-item scales representing the two cultural dimensions: Romanian Identity (RI) and American Identity (AI). The scales were split at 4 (neutral) such that scores 1 to 3 = low identity and 5 to 7 = high identity. According to Priester and Petty (1996), a “neutral” score (4) could be considered “indifferent” or “ambivalent/conflicted”. As such, neutrality was assumed when the other cultural identity was low (marginalizer categorization), while ambivalence was assumed when the other cultural identity was high (bicultural categorization).

Segments were determined based on the literature's definitions of each category. Thus, participants with a low association with one culture (scores 1 through 3) and a low or neutral association with the other culture (scores 1 through 4) were categorized as Marginalizers, persons maintaining neither culture. Participants with a high association with one culture (scores 5 through 7) and a high or neutral association with the other culture (scores 4 through 7) were categorized as Biculturals, persons maintaining both cultures to some degree. Participants with high RI (scores 5 through 7) and low AI (scores 1 through 3) were categorized as Ethnics, persons maintaining only the ethnic culture and separating from the host culture. Finally, participants with high AI (scores 5 through 7) and low RI (scores 1 through 3) were categorized as Assimilators, persons maintaining only the host culture and abandoning the ethnic culture. By using the literature as a gauge, four self-ascribed segments emerged: ethnics (n = 32), assimilators (n = 13), marginalizers (n = 14), and biculturals (n = 67). Variation in cultural identification was indeed found within one ethnic group, supporting H1.

Hypothesis two explored variation in consumption across ethnic identity segments. An ANOVA revealed overall differences across segments ($F(3, 50) = 6.7, p < .01$), while post hoc analysis revealed that the primary points of difference were between a) ethnics and all other identity segments and b) marginalizers and biculturals (See Table 2). Further analysis explored differences at the item level, finding differences across three of the four items: "I tend to eat or order out" ($F(3, 50) = 7.18, p < .001$), "I do not eat homemade food at home" ($F(3, 50) = 6.40, p < .01$), and "I do not eat food made from scratch/fresh ingredients" ($F(3, 49) = 3.18, p < .05$).

Specifically, assimilators exhibited host culture consumption patterns (eating out) and ethnics exhibited ethnic culture consumption patterns (eating homemade food and eating food made from scratch). Thus, there is variation in food consumption across segments, supporting H2a and H2b.

Perhaps the most interesting finding is that biculturals are most similar to assimilators with regard to eating out, but most similar to ethnics with regard to eating homemade food at home (See Table 2), exhibiting both ethnic and host consumption patterns. This supports H2c and echoes past literature suggesting the dual-culture identity of biculturals and their ability to operate comfortably in two cultural frames.

TABLE 2
ANOVA RESULTS FOR FOOD CONSUMPTION

	Marginalizers (1)	Ethnics (2)	Assimilators (3)	Biculturals (4)	F-statistic	Sig.	Post Hoc**
Overall Food Consumption*	4.02	1.60	3.19	2.51	6.71	0.001	(1,2) (1,4) (2,3) (2,4)
Item 1: Eat/Order Out	5.25	1.73	4.25	3.75	7.18	0.000	(1,2) (2,3) (2,4)
Item 2: Eat Homemade Food	4.25	6.80	4.75	5.96	6.40	0.001	(1,2) (1,4) (2,3)
Item 3: Frozen/ Prepared Food	3.50	2.13	2.50	2.50	.67	0.57	--
Item 4: Eat Food from Scratch	5.33	6.67	5.25	6.25	3.18	0.03	(2,3)***

* Items 2 and 4 were reverse scored to create an aggregate food consumption variable with all items in the same direction

** Tukey post hoc analyses, significant at .05

*** Trend toward significance found

DISCUSSION

This study sought to disaggregate ethnicity and conduct an initial exploration of the variations in food consumption among ethnic segments. Findings support acculturation along two separate dimensions (Berry, et al., 2006), discovering variations in ethnic identity that result in four segments (ethnics, assimilators, marginalizers, and biculturals) that vary in food consumption. Ethnics differ from other segments to a greater extent, supporting literature stating that separatists refuse to adopt the host culture and create a pocket of ethnicity within which they operate. Marketers should consider that within an ethnic group, ethnics/separatists may not be reached by the same means as the other segments. Of greatest interest, biculturals show evidence of adaptation to both cultures. This group consumes both in the host country pattern (eating out) and the ethnic culture pattern (homemade food at home), supporting a dual-culture identity viewpoint. Marketers may wish to explore this group's ability to act as a "liaison" connecting mainstream marketing to ethnic culture pockets.

Further research should explore the possibility of reaching ethnics through biculturals. Additionally, future research should consider distinguishing between different types of biculturals by using the theory of ambivalence or internal conflict (Priester & Petty, 1996). Are alternators (Lau-Gesk, 2003) more ambivalent than integrators?

This study was limited in that it considered only one ethnic group, explored only a sector of food consumption, and could not ensure that participants answered all questions (allowing for some missing data). Future research into the differences between ethnic segments, even across ethnicities, will prove valuable to marketers creating multi-ethnic targeting strategies.

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