

## **The Effect of Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence on the Pre-purchase External Information-Search Tendencies of Chinese-Americans**

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*Key psychometric properties of "Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII)" scale (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel 1989) are re-assessed in a sample chosen from the Chinese-American micro-culture in the U.S.. The scale is modified in light of differences found between this group and that of the original study. Cultural differences between these two groups are highlighted. The effects of CSII on Chinese-American consumers' pre-purchase external information-search tendencies in four separate product purchase scenarios are assessed. It is found that for those consumers who are more susceptible to informational influence, they consult a lot more sources of information, both personal and impersonal, internal and external, than those who are more susceptible to normative influence. Furthermore, in-store display is a very important source of information for luxury or public products, regardless of types of CSII. The implications of the findings and limitations of the research are discussed.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Despite the recent economic recession, racial minority buying power is expected to grow rapidly over the next few years from \$1.6 trillion in 2010 to \$2.1 trillion in 2015, accounting for 15% of the nation's total buying power (Selig Center Report). The African-American market, for example, is estimated to rise from 957 billion to 1.2 trillion, an increase of 25%. The Asian buying power is expected to grow 42%, from 544 billion in 2010 to 775 billion in 2015. The Hispanic market is expected to grow 50% from 1 trillion in 2010 to 1.5 trillion in 2015 in purchasing power.

The minority markets will continue to grow much faster than the majority market (Pires, Stanton, & Stanton, 2011). Even so, these markets have long been overlooked by both practitioners and academics, given the size and erstwhile growth rates of the micro-culture market. Practitioners are now however devoting more attention to them, given that by some projections (Schlossberg 1991), "America's population will increase fifty percent over the next fifty years, with almost ninety percent of that increase in the minority community (Mineta, 2000).

Thus for example, marketers are developing separate product lines (Miller 1993a) and mail-order catalogs (Edwards 1994), and online shopping venues among others, for specific micro-culture markets. Attention from academics, however, is in need of redress.

Most of the marketing literature on micro-cultures has dealt with Hispanic- and African-Americans (e.g., Wallendorf and Reilly 1983; Wilkes and Valencia 1985), and while much progress has been made in understanding these two groups, not much is known about some of the smaller, but no less affluent groups (Kotkin 1987), such as Asian-Americans. The little that is known, has come from studies of hedonic consumption (Hirschman 1982) and cognitive structure in Chinese-Americans (Hirschman 1983), product-set selections in Chinese- and Japanese-Americans (Wong, Yokum and Saegert 1989), situational ethnicity in Chinese-Americans (Stayman and Deshpande 1989), ethnic-identity in Indian-Americans (Mehta and Belk 1991; Gupta, 2011; Khare, Mishra, Parveen, & Srivastava, 2011) and product attribute-evaluations by Korean-Americans (Lee and Um 1992), and Turkey (Ehren, 2009)

Most of these studies indicate that though there are similarities between Asian- and Anglo-Americans, there are also differences. Hirschman (1983) for example, showed that though there were similarities between the Chinese- and English-, Greek-, Irish- and Italian-Americans on a variety of consumption motives, there were also differences, such as in their consumer information-transfer patterns. More importantly, in the case of differences, some were found to be more enduring than others, as these groups assimilated into the macro-culture. Thus for example among Indian-Americans, Mehta and Belk (1991) found three types of changes. In the first type were the complete adoptions of key macro-culture values, such as achievement-orientation tendencies. In the second, were the establishment of compromise patterns between those of this group and that of Anglo-Americans, such as in food consumption. In the last type were those of maintenance and/or reaffirmation of key micro-culture values, such as ethnic identification.

The key, from the point of view of marketers catering to these groups is to: (a) distinguish between enduring and transient micro-culture traits and (b) among the transient ones, to ascertain the extent of their change at any point in time, so that appropriate modifications can be made to marketing mixes targeted at these groups, such as use of ethnic spokespersons and language in advertising.

A common influence across American micro-cultures of East-Asian origin is that of Confucianism, with its emphasis, among others, on "obedience to superiors", "acceptance of authority", "filial piety" and "appreciation of ritual" (de Bary 1966). The effect of this influence on the consumer behavior of such individuals in their cultures of origin has been documented (e.g., Childers & Rao 1992; Tan & McCullough 1985; Wang & Lin, 2009). However, its effect on them after they move to a new, non-Confucian culture and begin to assimilate has rarely been investigated (Chow 2011). This is surprising, given the growing presence of East-Asian-Americans in the U.S. (Edmondson 1991) and the fact that segments within them are differentially assimilating (Tong 1994).

As a result, our objectives for this study are as follows. First, we will recalibrate the "CSII" scale, originally developed using Anglo-Americans (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel 1989), in a Chinese-American sample. The Chinese, being less individualistic in orientation, are expected to be especially susceptible to the *normative* type of interpersonal influence (Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005; Orth & Kahle, 2008). Second, we will examine how the key psychometric properties of this scale are similar between this group and that of the original study (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel 1989). Finally, the effect of CSII, as measured by the Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel

(1989) scale, on a Chinese-American consumer's pre-purchase external information-search tendencies in four separate product purchase scenarios are assessed. The implications of the findings from each of these four product purchase scenarios are discussed.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Susceptibility to interpersonal influence has long been recognized as a relatively stable trait that varies across individuals and is believed to be an aspect of McGuire's (1968) general construct of influenceability (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel 1989). Based on the early work of Deutsch & Gerard (1955) and later that of Kelman (1958), three broad subtypes of this trait have been widely recognized. Though the nomenclature used to describe these influence types varies slightly from study to study, the following is perhaps the most widely used (Lascu & Zinkhan, 1999; Schroeder, 1996).

The first, *utilitarian*-influence, operates when an individual complies with the expectations of another to gain a reward or avoid a punishment. In this type of influence situation, the individual adopts a certain behavior not because it is: (a) congruent with his own belief system nor (b) that of another individual or group of individuals with whom he identifies, but because it is "prescribed" for him by some external agent.

The second, *value-expressive*-influence, operates when an individual accepts influence from another agent with whom he identifies. In this type of influence situation, the individual adopts a certain behavior not because it is: (a) "imposed" on him externally nor (b) because it is congruent with his own belief system, but because doing so allows him to act as if he actually were the agent that he identifies with or as if he were in a reciprocal role relationship with it (Wooten & Reed II, 2004).

The third and final type, *informational*-influence, operates when an individual accepts influence from another who is perceived to mediate reality for him. This mediation may take place actively, whereby the individual solicits information from this other, or passively, whereby he obtains it by the mere observation of this other. In this type of influence situation, the individual adopts a certain behavior not because it is: (a) "imposed" on him externally nor (b) because it is congruent with the value system of another with whom he identifies, but because doing so allows him to react to this mediated reality, as dictated by his own beliefs. In other words, he believes in what he does.

Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel (1989) rigorously developed a four- and eight-item measure of informational- and normative- (a combination of utilitarian and value expressive) influence respectively. Their scale was shown to be a reliable and valid measure of its underlying construct. Of interest to this study however is the fact that it was developed on macro-culture individuals. While this rigorously-developed scale is indeed a contribution to this literature, its properties in most micro-culture populations are thus not well understood (Holt et al., 2010).

There is reason to believe however, that the properties of this scale may be different in less-individualistic, non-Anglo-American samples, as will be discussed shortly (Singh, Kwon, & Pereira, 2003). As Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel (1989) themselves state, "additional tests of the scale are needed to establish its validity and final form" (Holt et al., 2010; Martin, Wentzel, & Tomczak, 2008). The "additional test" of this scale to be performed in this study is its cross-cultural assessment in a micro-culture (namely, Chinese-American) population known to be less individualistic in orientation (Lai 1980) and whose members therefore are expected to be especially susceptible to the normative (utilitarian and value expressive) type of interpersonal

influence. In addition, we assess the effect of Bearden et al's (1989) scale, on a Chinese-American consumer's pre-purchase external information-search tendencies across four separate product purchase scenarios (Kim & Kang, 2001).

## HYPOTHESES

Two types of hypotheses are proposed below. The first deals with the effect of susceptibility to *informational* interpersonal influence on a Chinese-American consumer's pre-purchase external information-search tendencies across four separate product purchase scenarios. The second deals with the effect of susceptibility to *normative* interpersonal influence on the Chinese-American consumer's pre-purchase external information-search tendencies across the same four product purchase scenarios.

Because of the influence of Confucianism, with its emphasis among others, on the subordination of individual aspirations to that of the group (de Bary 1966), the Chinese will be more "collectivistic" (Hofstede 1984) in orientation and thus be even *more susceptible to normative* types of influence, in comparison with individuals from American macro-cultures, which stress "individualism" (Hofstede 1984).

For validation in a consumption context, pre-purchase external information-search tendencies was chosen, given that Hirschman (1983) found that Chinese-Americans differed in their information transfer patterns, among others, from the four European-American groups she studied. The products chosen were: (a) video-camera, because it is a "public luxury" (Bearden and Etzel 1982), to which much symbolic meaning is attached (Midgley 1983), thereby making its purchasers especially *susceptible to both influence types* (Kulviwat, Bruner II, & Al-Shuridah, 2009), (b) dandruff-shampoo, because it is a "public-necessity" good (Bearden and Etzel 1982), to which much symbolic meaning is attached (Midgley 1983), thereby making its purchasers *more susceptible to normative than informational* influence, (c) personal-computer, because it is a "private-luxury" (Bearden and Etzel 1982), thereby making its purchasers *more susceptible to informational than normative* influence, and, (d) color television, because it is a "private-necessity" (Bearden and Etzel 1982), thereby making its purchasers *less susceptible to both* types of interpersonal influence.

### Video-Camera Purchase Scenario

Because of the two main effects that operate in the case of a video-camera purchase, namely, a 'luxury' effect and a 'public' consumption effect, we expect that a person's susceptibility to *informational* influence would be heightened, *regardless of ethnicity* and so such a person could be expected to solicit information from a wide variety of sources. Further, as per Childers & Rao (1992) and Park & Lessig (1977), those most susceptible to informational-influence could be expected to both: (a) *overtly* seek information from personal sources (such as family, friends, and coworkers) and/or (b) *passively* seek information from observational sources (such as what cameras other people use), whereas those least susceptible could be expected to rely on themselves. Thus,

**H1:** Individuals most susceptible to *informational-influence* would be most likely to seek information from,

**A:** Family,

**B:** Friends,

**C:** Co-workers,

**D:** Salespersons,  
**E:** The mere observation of what other people use,  
**F:** In-store Displays,  
**G:** Advertisements, and,  
**H:** Neutral sources of information (such as Consumer Reports),  
 whereas, those least susceptible to this influence-type would be most likely to,  
**I:** Rely on themselves.

Because of the cultural dissimilarity of Chinese- and Anglo-Americans, we expect Chinese-Americans who are more susceptible to *normative* influence to seek information about video camera primarily from sources *outside* their family, with peer influence being more pronounced (Childers & Rao 1992). Further, Moschis and Churchill (1978) showed that for the learning of "value-expressive behavior", adolescents are socialized primarily by the mass-media. Thus, in this study, those most susceptible to normative influence were expected to seek information from advertisements in the mass-media, whereas those least susceptible were expected to rely on themselves. Thus,

**H2:** Individuals most susceptible to normative-influence would be most likely to seek information from,  
**B:** Friends,  
**C:** Co-workers,  
**D:** Salespeople,  
**E:** The mere observation of what other people use,  
**F:** In-store displays, and,  
**G:** Advertisements in the mass-media,  
 whereas those least susceptible to this influence-type would be most likely to,  
**I:** Rely on themselves.

### **Dandruff-Shampoo Purchase Scenario**

Because of the 'public' consumption main effect that operates in the case of dandruff-shampoo purchase (i.e., if the shampoo is effective, there will be no visible traces of dandruff evident to the observer), we expect that the a person's susceptibility to informational influence would be heightened, regardless of ethnicity and so such a person could be expected to solicit information from a wide variety of sources, with the possible exception of observation (because it is not possible for an observer to know the kind of shampoo a person is using, merely by looking at him/her). Again, as per Park and Lessig (1977), those most susceptible to informational influence could be expected to both: (a) *overtly* seek information from personal sources (such as family members) and/or (b) *passively* seek information from observational sources (such as in-store displays), whereas those least susceptible could be expected to rely on themselves. Thus,

**H3:** Individuals most susceptible to informational-influence would be most likely to seek information from,  
**A:** Family,  
**D:** In-store Pharmacist/Salesperson,  
**F:** In-store Displays,  
**G:** Advertisements, and,  
**H:** Neutral sources of information (such as Personal-care Guides),  
 whereas, those least susceptible to this influence-type would be most likely to,

**I:** Rely on themselves.

Again, because of the cultural dissimilarity of Chinese- and Anglo-Americans, we expect Chinese-Americans who are more susceptible to normative influence to seek information about this product primarily from sources outside their family. However, because of the socially-embarrassing nature of the condition (i.e., dandruff) that this product treats, we expect that those who are most susceptible to normative-influence could be expected to favor sources where *passive* observation (such as in-store displays) could provide the information needed rather than sources that require overt interaction. Here again, as Moschis and Churchill (1978) showed for the learning of "value-expressive behavior", we expect the mass-media to play a role in socializing those more susceptible to normative influence. Thus, in this study, those most susceptible to normative-influence could be expected to seek information from advertisements in the mass-media. However, those least susceptible to normative influence could be expected to rely on themselves. Thus,

**H4:** Individuals most susceptible to normative-influence would be most likely to seek information from,  
**E:** The mere observation of what other people buy,  
**F:** In-store displays, and,  
**G:** Advertisements in the mass-media,  
whereas those least susceptible to this influence-type would be most likely to,  
**I:** Rely on themselves.

### **Personal-Computer Purchase Scenario**

At the time of this study, the 'luxury' main effect operates in the case of a personal computer purchase. We expect that the a person's susceptibility to informational influence would be heightened, regardless of ethnicity and so such a person could be expected to solicit information from a wide variety of sources. Again, as per Park and Lessig (1977), those most susceptible to informational-influence could be expected to both: (a) *overtly* seek information from personal sources (such as friends and coworkers) and/or (b) *passively* seek information from observational sources (such as in-store displays), whereas those least susceptible could be expected to rely on themselves. Thus,

**H5:** Individuals most susceptible to informational-influence would be most likely to seek information from,  
**A:** Family,  
**B:** Friends,  
**C:** Co-workers,  
**D:** Salespersons,  
**E:** Observation of what other people use,  
**F:** In-store Displays,  
**G:** Advertisements, and,  
**H:** Neutral sources of information (such as Consumer Reports),  
whereas, those least susceptible to this influence-type would be most likely to,  
**I:** Rely on themselves.

Again, because of the cultural dissimilarity of Chinese- and Anglo-Americans, we expect Chinese-Americans who are more susceptible to normative influence to seek information about this product primarily from sources **outside** their family. However, because this product, for most people is consumed privately (i.e., in their home): (a) we do not expect much learning of

"value-expressive behavior" to take place, and, (b) for the little learning of this behavior that does take place, we expect it to take place through non-verbal interaction (e.g., by observing what other people use). However, again, those least susceptible to normative influence could be expected to rely on themselves. Thus,

- H6:** Individuals most susceptible to normative-influence would be most likely to seek information from,
  - E:** The mere observation of what other people buy,
  - F:** In-store displays, and,
- whereas those least susceptible to this influence-type would be most likely to,
  - I:** Rely on themselves.

### **Color Television Purchase Scenario:**

Because neither the 'luxury' main effect nor the 'public' consumption main effect operate in the case of a color television purchase, we expect that the a person's susceptibility to informational influence would be dampened, regardless of ethnicity and so such a person could be expected to solicit information from a more restricted variety of sources. However, again as per Park and Lessig (1977), those most susceptible to informational-influence could be expected to both: (a) *overtly* seek information from personal sources (such as friends and coworkers) and/or (b) *passively* seek information from observational sources (such as in-store displays), whereas those least susceptible could be expected to rely on themselves. Thus,

- H7:** Individuals most susceptible to informational-influence would be most likely to seek information from,
  - A:** Family,
  - B:** Friends,
  - E:** Observation of what they see in other people's houses,
  - F:** In-store Displays,
  - G:** Advertisements, and,
  - H:** Neutral sources of information (such as Consumer Reports),
- whereas, those least susceptible to this influence-type would be most likely to,
  - I:** Rely on themselves.

Again, because of the cultural dissimilarity of Chinese- and Anglo-Americans, we expect Chinese-Americans who are more susceptible to normative influence to seek information about this product primarily from sources **outside** their family. However, because this product, for most people is consumed privately (i.e., in their home): (a) we do not expect much learning of "value-expressive behavior" to take place, and, (b) for the little learning of this behavior that does take place, we expect it to take place through non-verbal interaction (e.g., by observing what other people use). However, again, those least susceptible to normative influence could be expected to rely on themselves. Thus,

- H8:** Individuals most susceptible to normative-influence would be most likely to seek information from,
  - E:** The mere observation of what they see in other people's houses,
- whereas those least susceptible to this influence-type would be most likely to,
  - I:** Rely on themselves.

## **METHOD**

### **Instrument**

This study was part of a larger survey of the Chinese- and Armenian-American micro-cultures in the U.S.. Towards this end, the "CSII" scale (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel 1989) was included, along with a number of other lifestyle, demographic and consumption-related questions, in the original survey instrument. Some of these other questions will be referred to in subsequent sections, where some are used to revalidate the "CSII" scale and others to assess the demographic statuses of the various sub-samples chosen in the two micro-cultures of this study.

Of the many consumption-related questions asked, the following was specifically chosen, to test for consistency with the findings of Hirschman (1983), discussed earlier.

Imagine that you were going to buy a video-camera for your own personal use. Please rate the following sources, in terms of how likely you would be to use each of them for information in deciding what kind of video camera to purchase.

The potential sources listed (Newman 1977; Beatty and Smith (1987) included: family, friends, advertisements, salespeople in stores, in-store displays, observation of what other people use, consumer magazines (e.g., 'Consumer Reports'), co-workers, self and other. For each source, respondents were asked to indicate if they would: (a) "definitely" or, (b) be "highly unlikely", or (c) be "somewhat likely", or (d) be "highly likely" to consult it, prior to the purchase in question.

### **Translation**

The questionnaire, first generated in English, was translated, using the back-translation technique of Brislin (1970). First, a professional Chinese translator rendered the English version in Chinese. Second, two bilingual Chinese students translated it back into English. Discrepancies between the two back-translated versions were resolved on consultation with this author and the original question reworded only after all three raters (the two students and this author) had agreed on its unambiguous restatement. The questionnaire was then tested on a sample of 30 Chinese-American students studying at a major northeastern university. Feedback from this group revealed no misunderstandings.

### **Sample**

In the Spring of 1990, an independent sub-sample was drawn from each of three geographic-clusters of this micro-culture. For the first sub-sample, two groups of Chinese-American students distributed questionnaires at six pre-assigned locations in Chinatown in New York City. The Chinese who live in Chinatown, are known to be of a much lower socioeconomic status (Wong 1985) than their counterparts elsewhere in New York City. A thousand questionnaires were handed out, of which, 364 were returned, for a response rate of 36.4%.

For the second sub-sample, also in the Spring of 1990, two questionnaires were mailed out to each of 301 members of a Chinese-American association who lived in affluent, non-ethnic neighborhoods all over Long Island, NY. Ninety-nine questionnaires were returned, for a response rate of 16.44%.

For the third sub-sample, again in the Spring of 1990, sets of two questionnaires were mailed out to each of 300 households with distinctly Chinese last names, chosen at random from telephone books of 2 boroughs of New York City (Queens and Manhattan (non-Chinatown)), known to have a large (but not exclusively) Chinese-American population. This selection was

done by a Chinese-American student who was familiar with the wide range of possibilities for Chinese last names. 43 questionnaires were returned in all, for a response rate of 7.16%.

In all three sub-samples, respondents were told that the questionnaires were being gathered strictly for research purposes and respondent confidentiality was guaranteed. In fact, respondent identity wasn't even solicited on the survey instrument.

The differences between the three sub-samples on duration of stay in the U.S., education, occupation and income were all significant and in the direction expected. That is, the Chinatown sub-sample had arrived in the U.S. more recently and was of lower socioeconomic status than the Manhattan (non-Chinatown) and Queens sub-sample, which in turn had arrived in the U.S. more recently and was of lower socioeconomic status than the Long-Island, NY sub-sample.

**TABLE 1**  
**AGGREGATE MICRO-CULTURE-SAMPLE STATISTICS**

Microculture (Construct)	No. of items	Range	Mean	SD	Reliability			Variance Extracte d
					Alpha	Construc t	Retes t	
Chinese Sample								
(Informational)	3	3-21	12.95	4.33	0.73	0.73	0.50	0.48
(Normative)	8	8-56	22.78	10.32	0.89	0.89	0.46	0.50

## RESULTS

### Validity

#### *Cross-Validity*

To check for cross-validity (Jacoby 1978), the sub-samples were compared on their scores for both sub-scales. As expected, on both informational- and normative-influence, the Long-Island sub-sample was less susceptible than the Manhattan (non-Chinatown) and Queens sub-sample, which in turn was less susceptible than the Chinatown sub-sample. However, the differences were significant ( $p < .01$ ) only in the case of the Long-Island versus Chinatown comparisons.

#### *Construct-Validity*

To check for convergent validity, a confirmatory factor analysis was performed on the eleven items retained from the earlier exploratory factor analysis. For a two-factor correlated structure, the GFI and AGFI were 0.93 and 0.89 respectively. The signs on all the  $\Lambda_x$  parameters were in the direction expected and all the indicator  $t$ -values were highly significant ( $p < .01$ ).

To check for discriminant validity, first, the assumption of the underlying two-factor structure was checked, by testing an alternate one-factor model. It however produced a worse fit to the data, with a GFI and AGFI of 0.87 and 0.80 respectively. Second, the 0.01 confidence interval for the correlation between the informational- and normative-influence factors (i.e.,  $\phi_{21}$ ) did not include the value 1, indicating that the two factors though correlated are nonetheless distinct. Finally, as per Fornell and Larcker (1981), the average variance-extracted estimate for the normative- and informational-influence construct-pair of 0.49, was greater than the variance

shared by this construct-pair, of 0.36. Thus, it can be said that the two constructs, though related, are nonetheless distinct from one another, a result consistent with the findings of Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel (1989). Additionally, estimates of construct reliability for the informational- and normative-influence factors were 73% and 89% respectively.

### *Predictive-Validity*

To test the information-search hypotheses, for each product purchase scenario, simple Pearson correlations between the respondent ratings of their likelihood to use each of the ten information sources on the one hand and scale scores for each of the two interpersonal influence types on the other hand were obtained (see tables 2 through 5). In the discussion of results that follow, we shall concentrate only on those correlations that were significant (at least at the  $p < 0.10$  level).

For the video-camera purchase scenario, as expected, those most susceptible to informational influence were most likely to consult their friends (0.46,  $p < .01$ ), followed by family (0.35,  $p < .01$ ), neutral sources (0.35,  $p < .01$ ), advertisements (0.27,  $p < .01$ ), observation of what other people use (0.25,  $p < .01$ ), co-workers (0.22,  $p < .01$ ), in-store displays (0.15,  $p < .05$ ) and salesperson in the store (0.14,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, hypotheses **H1A** through **H1H** were supported. However, contrary to expectations, those most susceptible to informational influence were also found to be more likely to consult their own prior knowledge base, for information prior to making this purchase (0.24,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, hypothesis **H1I** was not supported. See Table 2.

With respect to normative-influence, for this product purchase scenario, none of the proposed hypotheses were supported, except for one, **H2F**. That is, those who were most susceptible to normative influence, appeared to consult in-store displays, as expected. However, two surprising, counter-intuitive results found were as follows, those who were least susceptible to normative influence appeared: (a) more likely to consult friends (-0.27,  $p < .01$ ), which is the exact opposite of **H2B**, and (b) more likely to consult neutral sources of information (-0.21,  $p < .01$ ), which was completely unexpected. See Table 2.

For the dandruff-shampoo purchase scenario, as expected, those most susceptible to informational influence were most likely to consult their family (0.25,  $p < .01$ ), followed by in-store pharmacist (0.16,  $p < .01$ ), personal-care guides/books (0.14,  $p < .01$ ), advertisements (0.11,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, hypotheses **H3A**, **H3D**, **H3F**, **H3G** and **H3H** were supported. However, contrary to expectations, those most susceptible to informational influence were also found to be more likely to consult their own prior knowledge base for information prior to making this purchase (0.24,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, hypothesis **H3I** was not supported. Also unexpectedly, those most susceptible to informational influence were found to be more likely to: (a) consult their friends (0.30,  $p < .01$ ) and (b) co-workers (0.12,  $p < .05$ ). See Table 3.

**TABLE 2**  
**VIDEO-CAMERA PURCHASE SCENARIO**

Information-Search Sources	Type of Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence	
	Informational	Normative
Consult family (and relatives)	<b>H1A: 0.35<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.10
Consult friends	<b>H1B: 0.46<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>H2B: -0.27<sup>a</sup></b>
Consult business associates/coworkers	<b>H1C: 0.22<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>H2C: -0.07</b>
Consult Salesperson (in-store)	<b>H1D: 0.14<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>H2D: 0.04</b>
Observation of (what) other people (use)	<b>H1E: 0.25<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>H2E: 0.07</b>
In-store Displays	<b>H1F: 0.15<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>H2F: 0.17<sup>b</sup></b>
Advertisements	<b>H1G: 0.27<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>H2G: -0.05</b>
Neutral Sources (e.g., Consumer Reports)	<b>H1H: 0.35<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.21 <sup>a</sup>
Other (e.g., Telephone, Internet, etc.)	0.33	0.66 <sup>b</sup>
Rely on self	<b>H1I: 0.24<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.04

The  $\beta$  coefficient in each cell was obtained after controlling for respondent age, income and education. Significance of coefficients are indicated in accompanying superscripts, as follows: a -  $p < .01$ , b -  $p < .05$ . For ease of reading, in each row, shaded cells indicate  $\beta$  coefficients that are significant at least at the .05 level, this applies to tables 2-5.

With respect to normative-influence, for this product purchase scenario, two of the four proposed hypotheses were supported, namely **H4E** and **H4F**. That is, those who were most susceptible to normative influence, appeared to: (a) observe what other people use (0.21,  $p < .01$ ) and (b) consult in-store displays (0.16,  $p < .01$ ), as expected. However, **H4G** and **H4I** were not supported. See Table 3.

For the personal computer purchase scenario, as expected, those most susceptible to informational influence were most likely to consult their friends (0.42,  $p < .01$ ), followed by coworkers (0.35,  $p < .01$ ), neutral sources (0.30,  $p < .01$ ), family (0.29,  $p < .01$ ), advertisements (0.23,  $p < .01$ ) and the mere observation of what other people use (0.19,  $p < .01$ ). Thus, hypotheses **H5A**, **H5B**, **H5C**, **H5E**, **H5G** and **H5H** were supported.

**TABLE 3**  
**DANDRUFF-CONTROL SHAMPOO PURCHASE SCENARIO**

Information-Search Sources	Type of Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence	
	Informational	Normative
Consult family (and relatives)	<b>H3A: 0.25<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.03
Consult friends	<b>H3B: 0.30<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.04
Consult business associates/coworkers	<b>H3C: 0.12<sup>b</sup></b>	0.01
Consult Pharmacist (in-store)	<b>H3D: 0.16<sup>a</sup></b>	0.01
Observation of (what) other people (buy)	0.08	<b>H4E: 0.21<sup>a</sup></b>
In-store Displays	<b>H3F: 0.10</b>	<b>H4F: 0.16<sup>a</sup></b>
Advertisements	<b>H3G: 0.11<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>H4G: 0.04</b>
Neutral Sources (e.g., Personal-Care Guides/Books)	<b>H3H: 0.14<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.04
Other (e.g., Telephone, Internet, etc.)	0.00	0.00
Rely on self	<b>H3I: 0.10</b>	<b>H4I: -0.07</b>

However, contrary to expectations, those most susceptible to informational influence were also found to be more likely to consult their own prior knowledge base for information prior to making this purchase (0.17,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, hypothesis **H5I** was not supported. See Table 4.

With respect to normative-influence, for this product purchase scenario, two of the three proposed hypotheses were supported, namely **H6E** and **H6F**. That is, those who were most susceptible to normative influence, appeared to: (a) consult in-store displays (0.26,  $p < .01$ ), and, (b) observe what other people use (0.15,  $p < .05$ ), as expected. However, **H6I** was not supported. Four surprising, counter-intuitive results were found as follows. Those who were least susceptible to normative influence appeared most likely to consult: (a) friends (-0.25,  $p < .01$ ), (b) co-workers (-0.20,  $p < .01$ ), (c) neutral sources of information (-0.19,  $p < .01$ ), and (d) family (-0.15,  $p < .05$ ), which was completely unexpected. See Table 4.

**TABLE 4**  
**PERSONAL COMPUTER PURCHASE SCENARIO**

Information-Search Sources	Type of Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence	
	Informational	Normative
Consult family (and relatives)	<b>H5A: 0.29<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.15 <sup>b</sup>
Consult friends	<b>H5B: 0.42<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.25 <sup>a</sup>
Consult business associates/coworkers	<b>H5C: 0.35<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.20 <sup>a</sup>
Consult Salesperson (in-store)	<b>H5D: 0.10</b>	0.06
Observation of (what) other people (use)	<b>H5E: 0.19<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>H6E: 0.15<sup>b</sup></b>
In-store Displays	<b>H5F: 0.07</b>	<b>H6F: 0.26<sup>a</sup></b>
Advertisements	<b>H5G: 0.23<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.01
Neutral Sources (e.g., Consumer Reports)	<b>H5H: 0.30<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.19 <sup>a</sup>
Other (e.g., Telephone, Internet, etc.)	0.00	0.41
Rely on self	<b>H5I: 0.17<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>H6I: 0.00</b>

For the color television purchase scenario, as expected, those most susceptible to informational influence were most likely to consult their friends (0.30,  $p < .01$ ), followed by family (0.29,  $p < .01$ ), observation of what other people use (0.17,  $p < .01$ ), advertisements (0.16,  $p < .01$ ), neutral sources of information (0.12,  $p < .05$ ). Thus, hypotheses **H7A**, **H7B**, **H7E**, **H7G** and **H7H** were supported. However, **H7I** was not supported. See Table 5.

With respect to normative-influence, none of the proposed hypotheses were supported. However, four surprising, counter-intuitive results were found as follows. Those who were least susceptible to normative influence appeared most likely to consult: (a) neutral sources of information (-0.25,  $p < .01$ ), (b) friends (-0.14,  $p < .01$ ), (c) advertisements (-0.12,  $p < .05$ ).

**TABLE 5**  
**COLOR-TELEVISION PURCHASE SCENARIO**

Information-Search Sources	Type of Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence	
	Informational	Normative
Consult family (and relatives)	<b>H7A: 0.29<sup>a</sup></b>	-0.08
Consult friends	<b>H7B: 0.30<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>-0.14<sup>a</sup></b>
Consult business associates/coworkers	0.08	-0.08
Consult Salesperson (in-store)	0.07	0.01
Observation of (what) other people (use)	<b>H7E: 0.17<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>H8E: 0.01</b>
In-store Displays	<b>H7F: 0.09</b>	0.01
Advertisements	<b>H7G: 0.16<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>-0.12<sup>b</sup></b>
Neutral Sources (e.g., Consumer Reports)	<b>H7H: 0.12<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>-0.25<sup>a</sup></b>
Other (e.g., Telephone, Internet, etc.)	0.05	-0.04
Rely on Self	<b>H7I: 0.00</b>	<b>H8I: -0.09</b>

## DISCUSSION

First, in this Chinese group, each type of susceptibility to interpersonal influence affected external information-search differently. Second, the more susceptible consulted a greater variety of information sources in the Chinese group. Third, in the Chinese group the more susceptible consulted a mix of sources, both inside and outside the family. Finally, in the Chinese group, the more susceptible consulted a mix of both personal and impersonal sources, with friends and family being in the former category and the observation of other people and advertisements in the media being in the latter category.

Thus, depending on micro-culture, individuals search very differently for information prior to the purchase of products, or at least for products laden with symbolism and visible to others, such as video camera. Those from the Chinese-American micro-culture, search for information: (a) from among more source-types, (b) by using a mix of sources both within and outside the family, (c) by combining verbal interaction with passive observation, and (d) from among source-types that are different, depending on the type of influence in question. One of these sources was advertisements, illustrating the influence of the commercial, mass-media in the socialization of these individuals.

A very important finding from the current study is that consumers who are susceptible to informational influence consult a lot more sources of information, both personal and impersonal, internal and external, than those who are more susceptible to normative influence. Another finding that is consistent across 3 product categories is the importance of “in store display”. Visual signal/stimulation is very important before purchase even for convenience product such as “dandruff shampoo”. Specifically, with respect to the CSII scale, Chinese consumers consult “in store display” more on the more expensive products (except color TV). For video camera, in store display is very important for those susceptible to either kind (informational or normative) of influences, indicating a main effect of this particular luxury-public product. For personal computer, which is luxury-private, only those most susceptible to normative influence consult in store displays. At the time of this study, the personal computer was still very expensive, yet there were still enough number of choices/brands to drive the status conscious customers into the store.

It seems that for expensive luxury product, most people need to see and touch the product first before purchase. This shows that the power of in store display, as it greatly lower the financial, social, and psychological risk of purchasing these kinds of products.

### **Implications**

This research shows that theoretically, the CSII construct directly influences the pre-purchase external information search tendencies of Chinese-American consumers. This greatly extends the nomological model of CSII by linking a consequence to the central construct. In the meantime, it also extends the literature on consumer information search, by linking a new antecedent to the central construct of “sources of information search”. Thus the current article contributes to both bodies of literature. Previous literature (Chaoying, Jian, & Ille 2011) also found that emotional appeals to be more efficient than rational appeals for the Chinese consumers in the telecommunications services category. The current study shows consistent results that those more susceptible to normative (more like emotional) influences can be influenced with fewer sources of information than those who are more susceptible to informational (more rational) influences.

This research also shows the following practical implications. First, the CSII scale may now be used to segment the Chinese-American market in the U.S.. For example, those more susceptible to normative influence in this population were found to rely almost exclusively on the media for information, and emotional (normative) appeals seem to work well for them (Chao et al. 2011). Thus, for the marketing of symbolic products, it could be used to locate and target this segment with differential communication strategies, using various combinations of mass- and specialized-media sources. Pending its re-validation, it may be similarly used with comparable segments in other micro-cultures (e.g., Hispanic-Americans).

In store display is important for expensive electronic products, either public or private. The online retailers initially had a disadvantage, until people realize that they could first see the product at a brick and mortar store, and purchase online later, at a much lower price. Thus, the “show-rooming” effect of expensive electronic products, when Best Buy becomes Amazon’s showroom. Apple set up its own retail stores to let people see, touch and experience its mostly expensive products before purchasing. To drive traffic into the store, Apple could identify those who are most susceptible to normative influences from social networking sites. It could then use mass media to reach those customers and bring them into the store.

Finally, the results may now also be used by policy-makers and social-workers to locate and educate the “more susceptible” and hence “more vulnerable” segments of micro-culture

consumer populations. But for now, a gap in the literature was demonstrated and now plugged by the re-calibration of the "CSII" scale in a micro-culture.

### **Limitations**

The first limitation was the use of non-probability samples, which while consistent with the *intervention falsification* (i.e., scale re-validation) goals of this study, nonetheless remains a threat to the external validity (Calder, Phillips and Tybout 1982) of the re-validated scale. The re-testing of this scale with representative samples of the two micro-cultures of this study, as well as others, thus remains an avenue of future investigation.

A second limitation was the use of a cross-sectional, rather than longitudinal design to study how susceptibility to interpersonal influence declined with assimilation. While beyond the scope of this study, the use of a longitudinal design to examine this process thus remains an avenue of future investigation.

A third limitation was the use of self-administered questionnaires only. Other methods of administering this scale, such as the personal interview, were thus not tested. The extent of methods-bias was thus not ascertained in this study. Neither was it in that of the original scale developer's (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel 1989). While beyond the scope of this study, the use of multiple methods to measure this scale thus also remains an avenue of future investigation.

A final limitation was the use of self-reports, rather than observational measures of information-search, as suggested by Newman and Lockeman (1975). However, this is not a problem for the following reason. We did not use a recall measure of a past purchase, which was criticized by Newman and Lockeman (1975). Rather, we used a hypothetical purchase scenario, to ascertain search *tendencies*, for which self-report measures may not be inappropriate (Newman 1977). Future research could retest these scales using other measures of information-search or entirely different consumer-behavior constructs.

### **Future Research**

Theoretically, this research shows that the relationship between CSII and cultural values such as individualism may not be as simple as a linear relationship (Mourali, Laroche, & Pons, 2005). For example, the research shows, unexpectedly, that those least susceptible to normative influence turns out to be more likely to consult their close social network, such as family friends, in the both the video camera and the personal computer purchase situations. These two products were considered luxury products at the time of study, except that one is public and the other is private. There may be two alternative explanations for this unexpected finding. First, it seems that for luxury (big ticket) items, consumers consult a variety of sources regardless of their level of CSII. This shows that whenever the risk effect becomes salient, it overshadows the CSII, which is considered a situation-specific trait. Results from this research shows that CSII belongs to a larger theoretical framework with financial, social, and psychological risk as one of the antecedents (Hoffmann & Broekhuizen, 2009). Second, the Chinese may have different purpose of the normative influence on the purchase of big ticket items, those who resists the mass media communication, may try to find out what their friends are buying, so as to avoid buying the exact same product. Another unexpected result is that consumers' prior knowledge base is important regardless of level of CSII. More research needed to clarify the relationship between these two constructs.

The internet has become an integral part of consumers' life in both consumption and socialization. Research in this nascent area is still in a preliminary stage. It is very important that

more research is conducted to understand consumer's susceptibility to interpersonal influence in the virtual environment, especially through social media. The current research sheds light on the direction of the future research, in both testing the CSII scale in the online environment, and testing with the generation who grow up with the internet. (Park & Feinberg, 2010; Pentina, Prybutok, & Zhang, 2008)

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