

# Study reveals how bicultural consumers respond to marketing cues

October 4 2012

---

Consider a Japanese-American woman strolling through a mall. If she passes by a UNIQLO store, is she more likely to opt for sushi than a hamburger when she reaches the food court? Would this cue of Japanese culture draw out her Japanese side? The answer, according to new research from Columbia Business School's Michael Morris, the Chavkin-Chang Professor of Leadership, and Aurelia Mok, Assistant Professor, City University of Hong Kong (she received her Ph.D. from Columbia Business School in 2010), depends on the degree to which she has integrated her cultural identities.

Prior research found that bicultural individuals switch between their two sets of cultural habits in response to cues in their current setting. Morris and Mok show that these responses differ between two kinds of bicultural individuals: "integrated-self" individuals exhibit chameleon-like behavior, expressing Asian tastes after exposure to Asian symbols, while "divided-self" individuals behave like cultural contrarians, expressing American tastes after exposure to Asian symbols. This holds true even when cues are presented subliminally, suggesting that unconscious motives are at work.

Unconscious, automatic responses can be hard to measure scientifically. The researchers devised a subliminal priming technique in which participants were repeatedly flashed with the word "Asian" or "American" while reading other words in an initial [word recognition](#) test. These cue words appeared long enough to register subconsciously but not long enough to be consciously seen. Cultural tastes were

subsequently measured with a consumer task: [Internet ads](#) that participants could click to get more information about a product. The product appealed to either collectivistic ideals (representing Asian cultural norms) or individualistic ideals (representing American cultural norms). Through individual assessments, the researchers also evaluated the participants' degree of bicultural integration. The results showed that individual differences in self-concepts or identity configurations determined how participants' ad choices responded to "Asian" or "American" priming.

Further research by the authors showed that the key mechanism at play is one of self-defense: a fear of losing or neglecting part of oneself. This threat is felt to a greater degree by "divided-self" individuals, who perceive situations that call upon one of their cultures as excluding the other culture. "Integrated-self" [individuals](#), who feel that their Asian and American sides do not conflict, do not have this perception and the associated defensive response.

With globalization, more and more consumers identify with multiple cultures. This new research shows that persuading bicultural consumers through identity-based marketing is not a straightforward, one-size-fits-all process.

Provided by Columbia Business School

Citation: Study reveals how bicultural consumers respond to marketing cues (2012, October 4) retrieved 19 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2012-10-reveals-bicultural-consumers-cues.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.