

CONSUMER SOCIALIZATION: A COMPARISON BETWEEN INDONESIAN THIRD CULTURE KIDS (TCKs) AND NON-TCKs

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Abstract - An important determinant of a person's behavior is influence from others. Consumer socialization is the process by which consumers acquire skills, knowledge and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace. These skills, knowledge and attitudes are transmitted from various sources of influence, known as socialization agents—peers, parents, the mass media, and the Internet. Typically, these agents exert two types of influence on the consumer—normative influence and informative influence. An attempt is made in this study to present a comparison between emerging adult Indonesian third culture kids (TCKs) and Non-TCKs in terms of a) their consumer susceptibility to normative and informative influences of the four socialization agents, and b) cross-cultural orientation. The study also explores the correlation between cross-cultural orientation and consumer susceptibility to normative and informative influences. The result of this study indicates that compared to their non-TCK counterparts, Indonesian TCKs receive higher overall informative influence and have higher cross-cultural orientation in terms of both attitude and awareness. On top of that, results show that TCKs also receive higher parents informative and Internet informative influence.

Keywords: Consumer Socialization, Socialization Agents, Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence, Third Culture Kids

Introduction

According to a study done for the Indonesia Diaspora Network (Muhidin & Utomo, 2013) the number of overseas Indonesians has been estimated to range from 2 to 6 million, including labor workers. The range is wide as it's taken from various datasets. Regardless of the varying estimates, what needs to be remembered is that this number is continuously growing, whereby parents keep creating offspring and raising their children in an entirely different culture compared to the one they themselves had grown up in.

Here the author can see a social phenomenon called third culture kids—TCKs— increasing in significance due to the degree of cultural complexity many now face within their own families (Pollock & Van Reken, 2009) as a result of the interconnected world. The current definition of TCKs describes a third culture kid (TCK) as “a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside the parents’ culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any” (Pollock, 1988). The children’s parents’ culture would be their “first”, whereas the culture of the host country’s would be their “second” culture, hence, the origination of the label “third culture.” Measurement instruments such as the Cross-Cultural Orientation Inventory scale developed by Mittal (2012) can be used to quantify the significance of these TCKs’ cross-cultural lifestyle.

Although extensive writing has been done on the re-entry and lack of identity issues amongst TCKs, notably less research has been done on how they live and behave as consumers in the marketplace when in fact it is a topic worth exploring as TCKs would most definitely undergo a process of growing up in a completely different environment and culture from their non-TCK counterparts, and hence, develop a set of contrasting consumer behavior, attitudes and perceptions. As international mobility increases, it follows that new patterns of consumer behavior will emerge (Lichy & Pon, 2013). And because behavioral science believes that childhood experiences are of paramount importance in shaping patterns of cognition and behavior in later life (Ward, 1974), consumer researchers have since taken an interest in the field of socialization.

In the field of consumer research, the term "consumer socialization" has been introduced as "the processes by which people acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes relevant to their functioning as consumers in the marketplace" (Ward, 1974).

The sources of influence involved in this process are called consumer socialization agents, and to this date, the most common socialization agents are parents, peers (friends and siblings), the mass media, and the Internet (Singh et al., 2003). Evidently, not all sources of influence take place in the same period of time—for example, parents would be the most vital influence throughout the children's first few years, whereas peer groups would trigger new sociological needs such the obligation towards conformity or status throughout their pre-adulthood years. On the other hand, the mass media include those based on visual images, such as television, and those based on verbal communication, such as magazines and newspapers (Moschis, 1987). Consequently, John (1999) highlighted the need to address the Internet as a socialization agent as its adoption has grown exponentially over the past decade. Social media platforms have slowly replaced conventional advertising, and become an important communication tool that people use daily to connect to other people or even organizations (Sema, 2013). The interactivity of it all may influence consumer's decision-making.

Methodology

The conceptual framework for this research includes two main components:

1. A comparison test between the TCKs and Non-TCKs in terms of their susceptibility to normative and informative influences of consumer socialization agents and cross-cultural orientation
2. A correlation test between cross-cultural orientation (independent variable) and susceptibility to normative and informative influences of consumer socialization agents (dependent variable)

Sampling Method and Size

The two target population groups of this research are the 18 – 25 year-old (emerging adult) Indonesian TCKs and Non-TCKs. According to Pollock & Van Reken (2001), one of the most decisive characteristics of a TCK is that the individual must have spent a significant part of their developmental years outside their parents' culture, resulting in a few criteria to be followed by potential TCK respondents:

- They must be below 19 years of age when they first moved outside Indonesia for the actual development of a TCK mindset to take place
- The time they spent living outside Indonesia should not be less than 1 year per country for the country to be considered their second culture

By referring to Embassy of Indonesia in Doha's number of Indonesian families with children in Qatar (\pm 3000 households) multiplied by the average number of children per household (3

children) to limit the TCK population, the number 9000 for N was achieved. As for Non-TCK respondents, no particular criteria other than age were applied. At least 100 filled questionnaires must be obtained for both population groups (TCKs and Non-TCKs).

For the TCKs, Two sampling methods were used: judgmental sampling and snowball sampling. Judgmental sampling was employed to determine the initial sample which is based in Doha, Qatar—subsequent respondents were selected through referrals (snowball sampling). For the Non-TCKs, convenience sampling was conducted until the same number of valid surveys has been reached. Data was collected through an online survey.

Research Variables

The research depends heavily on past literature in finding the most relevant research variables and selecting the most appropriate scales to be used in the questionnaire. The author decided to split the initially single variable consumer susceptibility to consumer socialization agents to two different variables: susceptibility to normative influence of consumer socialization agents and susceptibility to informative influence of consumer socialization agents. This was done following the consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale first developed by Bearden et al. (1989), which states that susceptibility is multidimensional. The consumer socialization agents—peers, parents, the media and the Internet—became the dimensions for the two variables. On the other hand, the variable cross-cultural orientation (Mittal, 2012) has two dimensions: attitude and awareness.

Data Analysis

The author used a few statistical tools including Cronbach's alpha, nonparametric test, independent t-test, and Spearman's rank correlation coefficient. Cronbach's alpha was applied to test the validity and reliability of the questionnaire. Nonparametric test was used to test the normality of the distribution in order to determine which correlation test should be employed. Independent t-test was performed to compare study variables between the TCK group and the Non-TCK, whereas Spearman's rank correlation coefficient was used to find the correlation between the independent and dependent variables. Although not initially planned, two additional tests were employed to look at whether factors such as the number of years spent outside Indonesia or countries experienced by a TCK have a relationship with their consumer susceptibility to normative and informative influences and cross-cultural orientation.

Data Analysis

Comparison of Consumer Susceptibility to Consumer Socialization Agents between TCKs and Non-TCKs

H1a: TCKs receive higher overall informative influence than Non-TCKs, and H1b: Non-TCKs receive higher overall normative influence than TCKs

For starters, H1a is accepted with a level of significance of 0.012 while H1b is rejected with a level of significance of 0.535. The acceptance of H1a emphasizes TCKs' ability to not only obtain information, but also to know exactly where and who to go to in order to acquire such information. In contrast, H1b is rejected due to its insignificance. However, it can be seen that Non-TCKs scored slightly higher than TCKs in the overall normative influence type, which still supports the hypothesis to a certain extent. This hypothesis was developed in the first place because looking at the country's Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1993), Indonesians scored very low in terms of individualism, which suggests that Indonesians tend to conform to societal standards as a result of their collectiveness as a community. Even though these TCKs are Indonesians, it's been established that they grew up in a third culture, meaning that their birth country's cultural dimensions might not apply to them—and thus, H1b was developed with the assumption that the collectiveness of the Indonesian culture would be more intrinsic in Non-

TCKs.

H2: Non-TCKs receive higher normative and informative influence from peers than TCKs

This hypothesis is partially accepted as the level of significance for peers normative does indicate some significant difference, but the level of significance for peers informative does not. This hypothesis was built around the theory that Indonesia, as a country, has an incredibly low level of individualism, therefore the people in it would be very conforming towards one another as they're living a collectivist society. Although the TCKs in this study are also Indonesian, they must have not had the same collectivist experience that their non-TCK counterparts have faced—for instance, the friendship landscape at a TCK's international school would differ a lot from the friendships formed by a Non-TCK at his local school. Another reasoning would be that TCKs are very knowledgeable individuals—they know that by living as a TCK, there is never a "permanent home" for them, hence the rootlessness described by Pollock and Van Reken (2001). As a result, even when they do form strong bonds with other people, they know for a fact that they won't stay together for long—one day, they'll have to venture out to a whole new country. This might also be why TCKs don't bother much with having to comply with certain standards.

H3: TCKs receive higher normative and informative influence from parents than Non-TCKs

This hypothesis is partially accepted as the level of significance for parents normative is above 0.05, but the level of significance for parents informative indicates some significant difference. This implies TCKs' close relationship with their parents, up to the point where they go to their parents for help or further information regarding a product/brand. Although normal Indonesian families are usually also very close, families with TCKs have developed a greater sense of only having one another in good times and bad times, considering how they're living in a completely different culture outside of their own. Throughout their adaptation process, parents of TCKs must have guided them a lot in dealing with culture shocks, becoming reacquainted with their home culture, moving from school to school, and so on and so forth. Therefore, the bonds are, to some extent, much deeper

H4: Non-TCKs receive higher normative and informative influence from the media than TCKs

This hypothesis cannot be accepted at all as the level of significance for both media normative and media informative are below 0.05, meaning that there are no significant differences between the two groups. However, Non-TCKs actually receive slightly higher media normative influence while TCKs receive slightly higher media informative influence. Again, it can be seen how Non-TCKs are more vulnerable to the standards set by third-parties (the mass media), whereas the TCKs are more susceptible to the information they can derive from a certain influence. This is perhaps why mass media is still a very prominent channel of communication amongst Indonesian consumers.

H5: TCKs receive higher normative and informative influence from the Internet than Non-TCKs

The difference between the two population groups is that TCKs use the Internet as a platform where they can not only share their thoughts and feelings, but also their creative expression or creation. While Indonesians are busy tweeting about their crushes or updating their Facebook statuses to where they currently are, TCKs prefer to scroll through their Tumblr dashboard or blog about their multicultural friends. This is not a generalization—of course, a lot of TCKs do what their non-TCK counterparts do and vice versa, however there's a difference in the way they convey what they want to convey through social media platforms. For starters, TCKs would use a lot more English simply because they practically grew up with the language. TCKs are also usually more knowledgeable about the different websites they can go on to according to their interests. TCKs would also be more familiar with online shopping as it would be easier for them in terms of shipping compared to how it would be for those living in Indonesia. In short, TCKs maximize more of the Internet than Non-TCKs do.

The fact that TCKs receive higher informative influence from each of the four socialization agents compared to Non-TCKs implies that TCKs are more receptive of information gained from the sources of influence. This result suggests that TCKs are more inclined to take a particular piece of information into account for future decision-making, whereas Non-TCKs are more likely to disregard that piece of information. John (1999) has argued that information search is an acknowledged consumer skill as it greatly affects a consumer's decision-making. The three primary components of this skill are a) awareness and use of information sources, b) type of information sought, and c) adapting to search costs and benefits. The theory of informative influence can easily be linked back to this.

Comparison of Cross-Cultural Orientation between TCKs and Non-TCKs

H6: TCKs have a higher overall cross-cultural orientation than Non-TCKs

There is significant difference between the two population groups in terms of cross-cultural orientation, no matter from which dimension. Keeping in mind that a person's cross-cultural orientation indicates his readiness to interact with people from other cultures, strictly speaking, TCKs will have the upper hand as they have done more than just interact with cultures outside of their own—in fact, many of these TCKs deem those cultures their own, because despite knowing that they're not inherently part of it, growing up surrounded by that particular culture will still make them feel a sense of ownership towards it.

TCKs also scored higher both in the attitude and awareness dimensions, exhibiting their holistic development of cross-cultural skills that results in a behavior suited for cross-cultural environments. When calculated, the difference between both population groups is bigger in terms of awareness, demonstrating TCKs' extensive knowledge of other cultures. This is consistent with the fact that TCKs receive higher informative influence compared to Non-TCKs—building awareness has a lot to do with acquiring as much information as possible in order to prepare oneself for what's to come. Throughout their day-to-day interactions with and immersion in other cultures, TCKs have grown accustomed to unintentionally receiving information regarding those cultures' mannerisms, amongst many other things. Non-TCKs surely have not had as many opportunities to do so.

Correlation between Cross-Cultural Orientation and Consumer Susceptibility to Normative and Informative Influences

H7a: An individual's cross-cultural orientation has a positive correlation with his/her overall informative influence, and H7b: An individual's cross-cultural orientation has a negative correlation with his/her overall normative influence

Two conclusions can be derived from the results:

1. There is significant positive correlation between cross-cultural orientation and informative influence—H7a accepted
2. There is insignificant negative correlation between cross-cultural orientation and normative influence—H7b not accepted

The acceptance of H7a is supported by an argument that the author has proposed during the literature review process, which is that a high cross-cultural orientation depicts a person's readiness to interact with other cultures, suggesting that the individual is knowledgeable enough to respect diversity yet bold enough to stand by their own cultural principles. This level of knowledge and preparation must correspond with the individual's ability to not only absorb information from different sources, but also to know where to look as well as who to ask for the right information. Oftentimes it's not always about asking questions and approaching people—a person can acquire information simply by observing others and noticing the little things or habits that are ingrained in a particular surrounding. As Pollock and Van Reken (2001) has pointed out,

TCKs possess great observing skills from all the adapting and readapting they've had to do. This reinforces the above argument as TCKs also have a higher cross-cultural orientation as well as receive higher informative influence compared to their non-TCK counterparts.

On the other hand, even though H7b is not accepted due to its level of significance that is way above 0.05, it can be seen from its correlation coefficient value of -0.004 that the relationship between cross-cultural orientation and normative influence is a negative correlation, if any—in a way, H7b had been partially true.

Correlation between the Research Variables and the Number of Years Spent and Countries Experienced by a TCK

Although this research does not specifically aim to deduce differences amongst the same population group (in this case, the TCKs), the author decided to slightly extend the findings to look at whether there's a relationship between the research variables and the length of time spent outside Indonesia by a TCK. And thus, two additional methods of analysis were employed. To do this, the cross tabulation statistical method was used. After cross tabulation, came the Chi-square test to determine the contingency level of the relationship by looking at their level of significance.

The level of significance for each relationship was well above 0.05, which means that there is no significant correlation between the two variables. In short, the results show that the number of years spent outside the home country as well as the number of countries experienced by a TCK have no significant effect on their consumer susceptibility nor cross-cultural orientation. What this implies supports Pollock and Van Reken's (2001) argument that there is no definite length of time that a child needs to follow for him or her to be considered a TCK. For all we know, a TCK who has only spent three years outside Indonesia during their development years may have an equally high cross-cultural orientation as a TCK who has spent a longer time of more than six years.

Conclusion

In short, it can be concluded that:

1. Yes, emerging adult Indonesian TCKs differ from their non-TCK counterparts in terms of both consumer susceptibility to consumer socialization agents and cross-cultural orientation
2. There is positive, significant correlation between cross-cultural orientation and consumer susceptibility to informative influence
3. There is negative, insignificant correlation between cross-cultural orientation and consumer susceptibility to normative influence

The difference in terms of consumer susceptibility between the two population groups lies on three major findings:

1. TCKs receive higher overall informative influence than Non-TCKs

By receiving higher overall informative influence, this suggests that TCKs are the smarter, more thoughtful consumers out of the two. They're able to interpret information better through selecting parts of the information—which should they believe or not believe. This way, they won't give in too easily to advertising claims as they process and clarify the information first before succumbing to what is written/said about a product/brand. They're also very active at searching for the right type of information by themselves—they seem to be the type of consumers who listen to others' opinions for reference, but will not be convinced to make a purchase until they look up for more information about the products/brands itself.

2. TCKs receive higher parents informative and Internet informative influence than Non-TCKs

What this result implies is two things: TCKs' close relationship with their parents and their intense usage of the Internet. TCKs have shown to be incredibly trusting when it comes to their parents, as receiving higher parents informative influence indicates their zero hesitation to ask their parents for help or further info regarding a product/brand. This close relationship may result from the fact that TCKs live amongst cultures, and the only ones who probably understand them are their parents; therefore, TCKs develop an unbreakable trust in their parents. As for the Internet—it may have resulted simply due to the fact that the Internet availability and speed and availability are much tolerable in these TCKs' countries of residence than in Indonesia. Another possible reason for their prominent usage of the Internet is that these TCKs may have used it a way to connect with even more cultures, or even to connect with fellow TCKs who may not be living in the same place as them. These TCKs, after all, are "lonely"—they know that their experience is not something that everyone might understand, and thus they will be more than likely to share their stories and trying to reach out to fellow TCKs. This suggests that TCKs don't use the Internet solely for Facebook or text messaging—unlike the majority of home-grown Indonesians—they are also maximizing the culture of sharing that social media has created. Sharing platforms such as Blogger, Wordpress and Tumblr are often utilized in order to put their creation/content out there, perhaps more so than Non-TCKs.

3. Non-TCKs receive higher peers normative influence than TCKs

As expected, normal Indonesian teenagers are heavily influenced by their peer groups. This is supported by the low individualism score the country has on Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1993). Indonesians are more prone to making purchase decisions by observing what their friends are buying, what their friend are carrying to school/work, or what their friends are telling them to buy. There is a difference between the way a friend is providing information about a certain product/brand and the way a friend is creating a situation of conformity/standardization. By looking at this result alone, we can deduce that TCKs are the smarter consumers out of the two, as TCKs are not as easily swayed. The positive correlation between cross-cultural orientation and consumer susceptibility to informative influence suggests that having a high cross-cultural orientation will open up your mind—it will broaden your mindset, which is why you will start receiving more informative influence as you will be able to process information in a wider context. This corresponds with how the correlation between cross-cultural orientation and consumer susceptibility to normative influence is negative—this may be due to how normative influence is the tendency to conform to other people's standards, and when an individual has a high cross-cultural awareness and attitude, he or she would probably dismiss societal standards as they're alert to the fact that standards vary from culture to culture, hence it won't mean much for them to follow a particular set of guidelines only to have to change them again once they're in a completely different setting—which is the opposite of what normative influence makes you do.

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Managerial Implications

One of the ways in which this study can be utilized is to help businesses who are interested in tapping on the Indonesian TCKs—a niche market—in understanding them more as consumers in the marketplace and what may be important to them during their decision-making process. First, TCKs will expect a lot of information to be available on the Internet, therefore such businesses will have to make sure that their presence on digital platforms is not limited to only Facebook or Twitter. Second, TCKs respect the information they acquire from their parents, hence it might be a good idea to approach the parents as influencers who can encourage the target market—TCKs—to make a purchase. Third, TCKs possess a high level of cross-cultural orientation, meaning that they respect diversity and are aware of the importance to break down barriers between cultures—businesses may be able to keep this in mind as it can be utilized as an emotional hook that can be used while creating product/brand claims, for instance. TCKs can be a highly interesting market as there's an obvious emotional side of theirs that marketers can take an advantage of, which is that part of them that is rootless, "homeless", yet feels like they're part of something bigger.

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