Individualistic orientation and consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence

Mehdi Mourali
Concordia University, Montreal, Canada

Michel Laroche
Concordia University, Montreal, Canada, and

Frank Pons
University of San Diego, San Diego, California, USA

Abstract

Purpose – Interpersonal influences play a major role in shaping consumer choice decisions. This is particularly evident in the case of services, where intangibility and variability add to the decision difficulty. While all consumers are susceptible to interpersonal influence, people differ in the extent of their susceptibility to interpersonal influence, with some individuals being chronically more susceptible to social influence than others. Seeks to speculate in this paper that, in addition to individual differences, susceptibility to interpersonal influence also varies systematically across cultures with varying degrees of individualism-collectivism.

Design/methodolog/approach – Hypothesis is tested by investigating and comparing the structure, properties, and mean levels of the susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale across samples of French and English Canadian consumers.

Findings – It is found that: French Canadians are significantly more susceptible to normative influence than English Canadians; French Canadians score significantly lower than English Canadians on measures of individualism; and individualism has a significant negative effect on consumer susceptibility to normative influence.

Originality/value – By showing that French Canadians were indeed less individualistic than English Canadians, and that individualistic orientation had a significant negative effect on both the utilitarian and the value-expressive dimensions of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence, hopefully it has been demonstrated that differences in susceptibility to normative influence between French and English Canadians are partly driven by cultural differences in individualistic orientation.

Keywords Consumer behaviour, Interpersonal relations, Individual behaviour, Influence

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Most consumer behavior models recognize social influence as an important component of the decision-making process. Others have been shown to affect consumer decision processes, whether they were known or unknown to the target, present during the choice task or simply imagined (Dahl *et al.*, 2001, McGrath and Otnes, 1995, Ratner and Khan, 2002). Moreover, social influences are particularly salient in a service context, because of the intangibility and variability inherent in services (e.g. Keaveney, 1995). Acknowledging the ubiquitous influence of others, some authors have, nonetheless, suggested that people differ in their responses to social influence (McGuire, 1968). The underlying concept of susceptibility to interpersonal influence has since been proposed as a general trait that varies across individuals (Bearden *et al.*, 1989, 1990). The degree of others' influence on a person's beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors is assumed to be a function of his/her willingness to accept the mandates of the group (Kelman, 1961).

The way individuals relate to the group, however, is not only affected by individual-level differences, it is also systematically influenced by cultural and societal values and norms (Hofstede, 2001, Markus and Kitayama, 1991, Triandis, 1989). At this regard, Hofstede (2001) describes the relationship between the individual and the collectivity as a fundamental dimension on which societies differ. Along the same line of thinking, we speculate in this paper that while all humans show some willingness to accept the mandates of the group, different cultural groups show willingness to different degrees. We illustrate our hypothesis by investigating and comparing the structure, properties, and mean levels of the susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale (Bearden *et al.* 1989) across samples of French and English Canadian consumers. French and English Canadians were chosen because they form two culturally distinct groups, shown to differ in their levels of individualism (Hofstede, 2001), which is posited here to be the cultural dimension directly impinging on the extent of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence

Consumers expect others to evaluate their choice decisions, which might lead them to make choices different from the

The Emerald Research Register for this journal is available at
www.emeraldinsight.com/researchregister

The current issue and full text archive of this journal is available at
www.emeraldinsight.com/0887-6045.htm

Journal of Services Marketing
19/3 (2005) 164–173

[DOI 10.1108/08876040510596849]

Journal of Services Marketing
Volume 19 · Number 3 · 2005 · 164–173

ones they would have made in the absence of public scrutiny (Ariely and Levav, 2000; Belk, 1988; Ratner and Khan, 2002). Ratner and Khan (2002), for instance, found that consumers incorporate more variety seeking in their public versus private decisions. The authors suggested that increased variety seeking emanates from a desire to make a favorable impression on others. Ariely and Levav (2000) also found that consumers tend to incorporate more variety in the context of public consumption. Their study, which focused on sequential choice decisions in a group, concluded that in the presence of others, a consumer has to balance his or her individual goals with the group goals, which may lead to different (more variety seeking) choice decisions and less personal satisfaction. In yet another study, Dahl *et al.* (2001) found that the presence of others (real and imagined) leads to more embarrassment when purchasing an embarrassing product (a condom). The rationale was that embarrassment is driven by the concern of what others are thinking about us.

While these studies highlight the existence of manifest interpersonal influence on individual decision processes, they do not deal directly with the various types of interpersonal influence likely to take place in a given situation. In the last fifty years or so, the issue of dimensionality of interpersonal influence has received substantial interest from consumer and social psychology researchers (e.g. Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Bearden *et al.*, 1989, 1990; Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975; Deutch and Gerard, 1955; Kelman, 1958, 1961; Park and Lessig, 1977). Generally, these authors concur that interpersonal influence could be manifested in three different forms: utilitarian, value-expressive, and informational, though utilitarian influence and value-expressive influence have frequently been grouped under the broader category of normative influence (Bearden *et al.*, 1989; 1990).

Utilitarian influence is reflected in individuals' attempts to comply with the expectations of others in order to obtain approval or avoid disapproval (Bearden *et al.*, 1989). Utilitarian influence operates through the process of compliance (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975; Park and Lessig, 1977). According to Kelman (1958), compliance occurs when people adopt attitudes and behaviors in order to obtain specific rewards or to avoid specific punishments. The person, therefore, adopts group norms, values, and behaviors not out of genuine conviction of their worth, but because they are instrumental in producing a desired social outcome. Utilitarian influence is most likely to take place when the person's behavior is visible to the influencer.

Value-expressive influence, on the other hand, happens when individuals use others' norms, values, and behaviors as a model for their own attitudes and behaviors. Value-expressiveness operates through the process of identification (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975, Park and Lessig, 1977). Identification occurs when people adopt attitudes and behaviors in order to be associated with a satisfying, self-defining relationship with another person or group (Kelman 1958). Identification differs from compliance in that the individual actually believes in the attitudes and behaviors adopted. Therefore, value-expressive influence is likely to occur whether the person's behaviors are public or private.

The third form of interpersonal influence, informational influence, refers to people's tendency to accept information from others as credible evidence about reality (Bearden *et al.*, 1989, Deutch and Gerard, 1955). People may directly request information from knowledgeable others or may acquire it indirectly by observing the behaviors of others. Informational influence is said to operate through the process of internalization (Bearden *et al.*, 1989; Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975), which occurs when people adopt attitudes and behaviors because their content is congruent with the individuals' value systems (Kelman, 1958).

Bearden *et al.* (1989) developed a scale to measure all three facets of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Their analyses, however, indicated that their measures did not discriminate between the utilitarian and value-expressive dimensions. This led to a two-dimensional scale reflecting consumers' susceptibility to normative influence, including the utilitarian and value-expressive components, and their susceptibility to informational influence. Bearden *et al.*'s (1989) scale was further validated in several marketing studies (e.g. Bearden *et al.*, 1990; D'Rozario, 2001; Kropp *et al.* 1999).

Cultural influence

The Canadian context is characterized by the coexistence of two major cultural groups, namely French Canadians and English Canadians. Numerous studies have compared consumption patterns and life-style differences between these two groups (e.g. Hui *et al.*, 1993; Mallen, 1977; Schaninger *et al.*, 1985; Tigert, 1973). Hui *et al.* (1993), for example, reported that, compared to French Canadians, English Canadians were less likely to be opinion leaders, were more price conscious, and were less fashion conscious. Moreover, according to Mallen (1977), French Canadian consumers can be characterized as more sensate and more conservative than their English counterparts. The sensate trait is translated in a greater hedonistic attitude toward consumption on the part of French Canadians, whereas conservatism is seen in French Canadians' greater household and family orientation and their greater brand loyalty (Hui *et al.*, 1993).

Several attempts have been made to explain the consumption differences between French and English Canadian consumers. Earlier work by Lefrançois and Chatel (1967) proposed that such differences could be explained by differences in the socio-economic status of the two groups. The authors noted that French Canadians were generally less educated and had lower income than English Canadians. They concluded that this difference in social class must account for the consumption differences. However, several studies have since rejected this view (e.g. Chebat *et al.*, 1988; Palda, 1967; Schaninger *et al.*, 1985; Thomas, 1975). The most widely accepted view offers culture as the main determinant of the observed differences in consumption. Mallen (1977), for instance, discusses six cultural dimensions describing the French Canadians: the rural root, the minority root, the North American root, the Catholic root, the Latin root, and the French root. He argues that these cultural roots act as determinants of the sensate and conservative traits characterizing French Canadian consumers.

Most importantly, French and English Canadians are also distinguishable on the cultural dimension of individualism. In fact, Hofstede (2001) has recently shown that French people were less individualistic and more collectivistic than British people. Given the French roots of French Canadians and the British roots of English Canadians, one could expect a similar

Journal of Services Marketing
Volume 19 · Number 3 · 2005 · 164–173

difference in individualism between French and English Canadians.

French Canadians' lower individualistic orientation, in addition to their higher fashion consciousness and greater concern with external impressions (Hui *et al.* 1993), suggests that relative to English Canadians, they would be more susceptible to normative influence. That is, French Canadians are expected to have a higher need to identify or enhance their image with significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, and to be more willing to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions than English Canadians.

H1. The mean level of consumer susceptibility to normative influence is higher for French Canadians than for English Canadians.

H1a. The mean level of the utilitarian dimension of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence is higher for French Canadians than for English Canadians.

H1b. The mean level of the value-expressive dimension of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence is higher for French Canadians than for English Canadians.

In a recent study comparing French and English Canadians' information search behavior, Laroche *et al.* (2002) found that the two groups did not vary in their susceptibility to informational influence. Similarly, we propose:

H2. The mean level of the informational dimension of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence is invariant for French and English Canadians.

In building our first hypothesis, we claimed that differences in susceptibility to normative influence are, in part, due to differences in individualistic orientation. A similar argument was suggested by D'Rozario (2001) in his comparison of susceptibility to interpersonal influence between two immigrant groups in the USA. Such an assertion, however, merits further conceptual and empirical validation. To begin with, we formally test the posited difference in individualism between French and English Canadians, based on an extension of Hofstede's (2001) findings.

H3. French Canadian consumers will have a lower individualistic orientation than English Canadian consumers.

Individualism-collectivism has been investigated extensively in cross-cultural research (Grimm *et al.*, 1999), with some studies having successfully related self-described personality traits and individualism-collectivism. For example, samples in individualistic cultures have averaged higher on needs for aggression, change, exhibition, independence, and uniqueness, whereas samples of collectivistic cultures have averaged higher on affiliative tendencies, interdependence, sensitivity to rejection, and needs for abasement, deference, and order (Grimm *et al.*, 1999).

Moreover, Triandis (1995) described four central elements of the individualism-collectivism distinction:

1 a sense of self as an autonomous, independent person versus a sense of self as more connected to in-groups;
2 a priority of personal goals versus subordination of personal goals to group goal;
3 an emphasis on personal attributes versus roles and norms in guiding behavior, and
4 the maintenance of relationships for personal benefits rather than for a sense of connection and obligation.

Based on these theoretical differences, one should expect some discrepancies in the way people from individualistic and collectivistic cultures respond to normative interpersonal influence. If this is the case, then consumers' individualistic orientation should have a direct negative impact on their susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

H4. Consumers' individualistic orientation will have a negative impact on their susceptibility to normative influence.

H4a. Consumers' individualistic orientation will have a negative impact on their susceptibility to utilitarian influence.

H4b. Consumers' individualistic orientation will have a negative impact on their susceptibility to value-expressive influence.

Contrastingly, susceptibility to informational influence, which reflects people's tendency to seek and accept information from interpersonal sources, is not necessarily related to individualistic orientation. Indeed, interpersonal sources have been shown to be extensively used by most consumers in their acquisition of product related information (Arndt, 1967; Brown and Reingen, 1987; Price and Feick, 1984). Seeking product-related information from a friend or accepting an advice from a parent can help reduce the costs of information search, without compromising a person's autonomy and independence from the group, and hence does not interfere with individualistic goals. In fact, a study by Dawar *et al.* (1996) found that Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions of uncertainty avoidance and power distance were more likely to have an effect on the use of interpersonal sources than individualism-collectivism.

H5. There is no relationship between consumers' individualistic orientation and their susceptibility to informational influence.

Methodology

Sample

Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires in the Greater Montreal area. Seventeen census tracts were selected and streets were randomly chosen within each of these census areas to proceed with a door-to-door distribution of the questionnaires. A total of 500 English questionnaires and 500 French questionnaires were distributed and 419 (221 French and 198 English) usable questionnaires were mailed back. The response rate of 41.9 percent (44.2 percent for French and 39.6 percent for English) was judged satisfactory. A detailed description of the sample is provided in Table I.

Measures

Bearden *et al.*'s (1989) scale was used to assess consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. The original scale had 12 items: four for each of the three dimensions (utilitarian, value-expressive, and informational). As mentioned earlier, however, Bearden *et al.* (1989) grouped the eight items reflecting susceptibility to utilitarian and value-expressive influences to form one normative dimension. Ethnic identification was measured by one item: I consider myself English Canadian/French Canadian/or other. All those

Table I Descriptive statistics

Variable	Range	English (%)	French (%)	Pearson χ^2	Sig level
Gender	Male	47.1	55.7	2.657	0.103
	Female	52.9	44.3		
Status	Single	21.2	25.7	9.596	0.022
	Married	68.2	63.8		
	Separated	6.0	10.0		
	Widowed	4.6	0.5		
Age	Under 20	3.9	3.3	6.457	0.264
	20 to 29	15.8	15.7		
	30 to 39	17.1	19.5		
	40 to 49	26.3	29.0		
	50 to 59	21.1	24.8		
	60 and older	15.8	7.6		
Income	< $30,000	10.0	11.4	4.753	0.690
	$30,000 to $49,999	17.2	11.9		
	$50,000 to $69,999	21.4	20.3		
	$70,000 and more	51.4	46.4		
Education	Elementary	0.7	1.0	4.695	0.320
	Secondary	9.3	8.6		
	College	32.7	24.8		
	University	41.3	41.9		
	Graduate	16.0	23.8		

who responded "other" were not considered for further analysis. The final sample included 153 English Canadians and 211 French Canadians. Finally, individualistic orientation was measured by four items, adapted from the scale of Yamaguchi (1994).

Initially, the questionnaire was developed in English. It was translated to French by a bilingual individual whose mother tongue was French. Then, it was back-translated to English by a bilingual person whose mother tongue was English. The process went on until all discrepancies disappeared. All items are shown in the Appendix, which also includes measures of reliability, convergent validity, and discriminant validity.

Analysis

Factorial structure of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence

First, using the entire sample, Bearden *et al.*'s (1989) 12-item scale was submitted to an exploratory factor analysis. This preliminary step indicated the presence of three factors with eigen values equal to 5.3, 2.1, and 1.1 respectively. The three factors accounted for 70.8 percent of the total variance explained and reflected all three facets (utilitarian, value-expressive, and informational) of susceptibility to interpersonal influence. The varimax-rotated solution (see Table II) revealed two problematic items. INFL4 and INFL9 loaded substantively on more than one factor. These items were deleted for further analyses.

Next, confirmatory factor analyses were conducted to confirm the factorial structure of the construct. More specifically, we compared a three-factor structure, as suggested by the EFA results to a two-factor structure, as suggested by past research (Bearden *et al.*, 1989, 1990; D'Rozario, 2001).

Table II EFA results: rotated component matrix

	Component		
	1	2	3
INFL8	0.822	0.234	−1.616E-02
INFL6	0.808	0.351	−7.657E-03
INFL7	0.786	0.218	5.884E-03
INFL5	0.674	0.365	7.516E-02
INFL9	0.654	6.836E-02	0.477
INFL3	0.336	0.821	0.119
INFL1	0.109	0.816	8.842E-02
INFL2	0.367	0.793	0.114
INFL4	0.522	0.652	6.681E-02
INFL11	0.115	0.146	0.878
INFL10	1.339E-02	1.252E-02	0.848
INFL12	5.939E-02	0.115	0.842

Notes: Extraction method: principal component analysis. Rotation method: varimax with Kaiser normalization

Fit of the CFA model is assessed using the traditional chi-square χ^2 statistic and its p-value, the ratio χ^2/df, the normed fit index (NFI), the non normed fit index (NNFI), and the comparative fit index (CFI). Ideally the χ^2 value should be small and its associated probability value should be greater than the selected significance level. However, as this statistic is extremely sensitive to sample size and statistical power, it would reject almost every reasonable model in a great statistical power condition (Raykov *et al.*, 1991). Alternatively, acceptable model fits are indicated by χ^2/df values smaller than 5 (Taylor and Todd, 1995). As for the practical fit indices (NFI, NNFI, and CFI), they range from 0 to 1 and are derived from a comparison of the hypothesized model with the null model. Values greater than 0.90 are considered to indicate acceptable fit to the data (Bentler, 1992).

The three-factor model displayed the following fit results: $\chi^2 = 85.5$ with 32 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.01$), χ^2/df = 2.67, NFI = 0.96, NNFI = 0.97, and CFI = 0.98. The two-factor model, on the other hand, displayed poorer fit statistics: $\chi^2 = 364.9$ with 35 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.01$), χ^2/df = 2.28, NFI = 0.83, NNFI = 0.80, and CFI = 0.85. A chi square difference test confirms that the three-factor structure fits the data significantly better than a two-factor structure (χ^2 difference = 279.4, df = 3, $p < 0.01$).

Convergent and discriminant validity

In assessing the validity of the measures, Bollen (1989) suggests a scrutiny of the factor loadings as well as the squared multiple correlations between the items and the constructs. Bagozzi and Yi (1988) suggest that factor loadings of 0.60 and more are indicative of convergent validity. Regarding the squared multiple correlations, values greater than 0.40 are suggestive of substantial shared variance with the underlying theoretical constructs (Taylor and Todd, 1995).

The results, shown in the Appendix, indicate that, for both samples, all ten items of susceptibility to interpersonal influence have acceptable loadings and squared multiple correlations, thus suggesting good convergent validity (Table AI).

As evidence of discriminant validity, Lagrange multiplier tests revealed that no item loaded significantly on a factor for which it was not intended. A more stringent statistical test of discriminant validity, however, consists of performing a chi-square difference

test between two models: one in which the correlation between two constructs is freely estimated, and one where the correlation is fixed to unity (Salisbury *et al.*, 1996). A chi-square difference greater than 3.84 ($\alpha = 0.05$) would suggest that the two constructs are statistically different. The results provide strong evidence of discriminant validity of constructs for every possible pairing (see Appendix, Table AII).

Measurement equivalence

Equivalence across the French and English Canadian samples was assessed following the procedure outlined by Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998). The first test is for configural invariance. No constraints are imposed across the groups. This test assesses whether the same simple structure of factor loadings holds across the two groups. The second test examines metric invariance. Here the factor loadings are constrained equal. A third test assesses invariance of the factor covariances and of the factor variances. Finally, a fourth test evaluates scalar invariance before latent means can be compared.

By examining various combinations of constrained and unconstrained models, we can determine the source of any differences in the way the constructs are composed and interpreted in the different cultures. Specifically, by examining the Lagrange Multiplier (LM) statistics, we can judge which individual items, if any, are problematic in using the constructs (Bollen, 1989; Byrne, 1994).

Results

The test of configural invariance produced a $\chi^2 = 128.6$ with 64 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.01$), yielding a ratio $\chi^2/df = 2.01$, suggesting a good fit to the data. The practical fit indices confirmed the model's good fit: NFI = 0 .94, NNFI = 0.95, and a CFI = 0.97. Thus, both cultural groups exhibit the same simple factor structure.

The second test examined whether the factor loadings were equal for the two groups. The test produced $\chi^2 = 161.8$ with 71 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.01$), $\chi^2/df = 02.28$, NFI = 0.92, NNFI = 0.94, and CFI = 0.95. Although the fit indices overall indicate a good fitting model, they also show a significant decrease in fit. The chi-square difference between the simple structure model and the equal loadings model was 33.2 with 7 degrees of freedom. This is significant at $p < 0.05$, and suggests a slight violation of metric invariance. A close look at the LM statistics revealed that one of the equality constraints did not hold. The loading of INFL8 on the value-expressive factor differed between the Anglo and Franco Canadian samples. Thus, only partial metric invariance of the scale of susceptibility to interpersonal influence was established (nine factor loadings out of ten). Byrne *et al.* (1989) argue that full metric invariance is not necessary for further tests of invariance and substantive analyses, such as comparison of factor means, to be meaningful, provided that at least one item other than the one fixed at unity (to define the scale of each latent construct) was metrically invariant. In further testing, the non-invariant parameters should be specified as unconstrained across groups. The model of metric invariance was reassessed after deleting the problematic constraint. The analysis yielded the following results: $\chi^2 = 148.0$ with 70 degrees of freedom ($p < 0.01$), $\chi^2/df = 2.11$, NFI = 0.93, NNFI = 0.95, and CFI = 0.96, which represents a significant improvement in model fit compared to the full metric invariance model: χ^2 difference = 13.8 with 1 degree of freedom, $p < 0.05$.

When equality constraints of the factor covariances and the factor variances were added to the partially metric invariant model, the analysis yielded the following model fit results: $\chi^2 = 163.1$ with 76 degrees of freedom and $p < 0.01$, $\chi^2/df = 2.15$, NFI = 0.92, NNFI = 0.95, and CFI = 0.96. Here again, the significant drop in chi-square (15.1 with 6 degrees of freedom) compared to the previous model indicates possible misspecification of at least one of the new constraints. An examination of the LM statistics revealed three misspecified constraints. First, the variance of the first factor (utilitarian influence) was statistically different across the French and English Canadian samples. Furthermore, the covariances between the utilitarian dimension and the value-expressive dimension, and between the utilitarian dimension and the informational dimension were also different across the two groups. The presence of non-invariant factor variance and covariance implies that the correlations between the latent constructs differ for the two groups (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). Indeed, a reassessment of the model after deleting the misspecified constraints not only resulted in an improved fit of the model to the data, but also revealed significant differences between the two groups in two out of three correlations between the latent constructs.

The reanalysis yielded $\chi^2 = 152.3$ with 73 degrees of freedom, $p < 0.01$, $\chi^2/df = 2.09$, NFI = 0.93, NNFI = 0.95, and CFI = 0.96. The correlation between the utilitarian and the value-expressive factors for English Canadians was equal to 0.67, while it equaled 0.63 in the French Canadian sample. Similarly, the correlation between the utilitarian and the informational factors was 0.25 for the English Canadian Sample and 0.41 for the French Canadian sample. Correlation between the value-expressive and the informational factors, on the other hand, was invariant across the two groups and was equal to 0.19. Interestingly, these results show a stronger association between the normative and the value-expressive dimensions of interpersonal influence than between any one of these dimensions and the informational dimension. This is consistent with previous findings suggesting two dimensions for susceptibility to interpersonal influence (e.g. Bearden *et al.*, 1989, 1990), though our data, as shown earlier, was better represented by a three-dimensional structure.

The last test was concerned with assessing scalar invariance. A two-group latent means model of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence was tested.

The goodness-of-fit statistics show the model to be a good fit to the multi-group data, as indicated by $\chi^2 = 162.3$ with 80 degrees of freedom, $p < 0.01$, $\chi^2/df = 2.03$, NFI = 0.92, NNFI = 0.95, and CFI = 0.96. The LM statistics, however, indicated that two equality constraints were misspecified (intercepts of INFL2 and INFL11). The model was subsequently re-estimated with these intercepts freed. Removal of these constraints yielded a significant improvement in goodness-of-fit: $\chi^2 = 153.7$ with 78 degrees of freedom, $p < 0.01$, $\chi^2/df = 1.97$, NFI = 0.93, NNFI = 0.96, and CFI = 0.96. Again the difference in chi-square (8.6 with 2 degrees of freedom) is statistically significant at $p < 0.05$.

We have been successful in establishing partial metric and scalar invariance. Now we can confidently turn to hypothesis testing by interpreting the factor intercepts, which represent the differences in latent mean values. The English Canadian group was designated the reference group, and as such, had

all factor intercepts fixed to zero. Table III shows the factor intercepts for the French Canadian group along with their associated error terms and test statistics.

In support of *H1* (both *H1a* and *H1b*), Table III shows that French Canadian consumers are more susceptible to utilitarian and value-expressive influences than their English Canadian counterparts. These results were expected based on previous findings indicating higher fashion consciousness and greater concern with external impressions for French Canadian consumers as opposed to English Canadian consumers (Hui *et al.*, 1993), and on a speculated difference in individualistic orientation. In support of *H2*, Table III also shows that both groups have a statistically equivalent level of susceptibility to informational influence.

Differences in susceptibility to normative influence between French and English Canadians were thought to arise, mainly, from differences in individualistic orientation between the two cultural groups. The reasoning was that English Canadians were more individualistic than French Canadians, which made them less susceptible to normative influence. To test this theory, two conditions have to hold. First, we must show that English Canadians are indeed more individualistic than French Canadians (*H3*). Next, we must show that individualism has a direct negative impact on consumer susceptibility to normative influence and no effect on consumer susceptibility to informational influence (*H4* and *H5*).

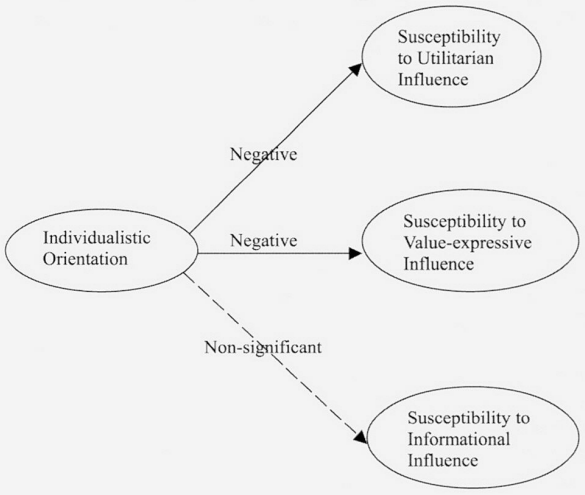
H3, *H4*, and *H5* were tested simultaneously by fitting a structural model, depicting direct relationships between individualistic orientation and the three dimensions of susceptibility to interpersonal influence (see Figure 1), to both groups.

The Steenkamp and Baumgartner (1998) procedure for assessing model equivalence, described earlier, was applied to the entire structural model. The results confirmed the partial invariance of susceptibility to interpersonal influence and indicated full invariance of individualistic orientation across the two groups. The fit statistics of the final invariance model (including constraints relative to metric, structural, and scalar invariance) are: $\chi^2 = 242.1$ with 138 degrees of freedom, $p < 0.01$, $\chi^2/df = 1.75$, NFI = 0.90, NNFI = 0.94, CFI = 0.95.

Metric and scalar invariance having been established, factor intercepts can be interpreted confidently. Again, using the English Canadian group as the reference group, the factor intercept for the French Canadian group indicates whether a significant difference in the latent mean of individualistic orientation exists. Consistent with *H3*, the results (factor intercept = −0.57, standard error = 0.17, test statistic = −3.27) show that French Canadians are significantly less individualistic than English Canadians.

Furthermore, the Lagrange Multiplier test for releasing constraints indicated that all structural paths linking individualistic orientation to each dimension of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence were invariant for the two groups. These paths, along with their associated errors and test statistics provide a strong test of *H4* and *H5*.

Figure 1 Impact of individualistic orientation on consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence



Individualistic orientation had a significant negative effect on consumer susceptibility to utilitarian influence (path coefficient = −0.32, standard error = 0.09, test statistic = −3.41). This result provides full support for *H4a*. Further, in support, of *H4b*, individualistic orientation had a significant negative effect on susceptibility to value-expressive influence (path coefficient = −0.33, standard error = 0.11, test statistic = −2.90). Finally, supporting *H5*, individual orientation had no significant effect on susceptibility to informational influence (path coefficient = 0.11, standard error = 0.10, test statistic = 1.06).

Discussion

Consumer decision processes are often influenced by other people. Bearden *et al.* (1989) developed a scale to measure individual differences in consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Though their scale has been widely validated with American samples, its application to non-American samples has been very limited (D'Rozario, 2001). In the present study, we tested the properties, structure, and mean levels of the susceptibility to interpersonal influence construct across samples of French and English Canadian consumers. Interestingly, our analyses revealed that a three-factor representation, comprising the utilitarian, value-expressive, and informational facets of susceptibility to interpersonal influence, provides an excellent description of the data.

While, Bearden *et al.*'s (1989) initial exploratory factor analysis also revealed a three factor solution, further analyses

Table III Latent means comparison between English Canadians and French Canadians

Factor intercept	Estimated value	Standard error	Test statistic	Conclusion
Utilitarian	0.37	0.14	2.73	Higher for French Canadians
Value-expressive	0.36	0.15	2.34	Higher for French Canadians
Informational	−0.16	0.17	−0.91	Invariant

Journal of Services Marketing
Volume 19 · Number 3 · 2005 · 164–173

of their data revealed that the utilitarian and the value-expressive dimensions were highly correlated and could not be treated as distinct factors. In our study, evidence of discriminant validity among the three constituting dimensions was readily found. Moreover, a chi-square difference test comparing a three-factor model and a two-factor model confirmed the superiority of the three-factor model.

Beyond the empirical superiority of the three-factor representation, the distinction between susceptibility to utilitarian and to value-expressive influences is theoretically useful as it recognizes that both influences operate through different processes. Utilitarian influence, for instance, operates through the process of compliance, which occurs when people adopt attitudes and behaviors in order to obtain specific rewards or avoid specific punishments (Kelman, 1958). Value-expressiveness, on the other hand, operates through the process of identification, which happens when people adopt attitudes and behaviors in order to be associated with a satisfying, self-defining relationship with another person or group (Kelman, 1958). Identification, therefore, is indicative of a higher degree of influence than compliance since the individual actually believes in the attitudes and behaviors adopted.

We have also argued that the extent of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence depends on cultural and societal values and norms. Based on previous findings highlighting consumption and lifestyle differences between French and English Canadians, we predicted and found that French Canadians were on average more susceptible to normative (utilitarian and value-expressive) influence than English Canadians. We further speculated that these differences were in part due to differences in individualistic orientation between the two groups. Though previous research has hinted on the potential role of individualism (e.g. D'Rozario 2001), this paper denotes the first attempt to empirically model its influence on the various dimensions of susceptibility to interpersonal influence. By showing that French Canadians were indeed less individualistic than English Canadians, and that individualistic orientation had a significant negative effect on both the utilitarian and the value-expressive dimensions of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence, we hope to have demonstrated that differences in susceptibility to normative influence between French and English Canadians are partly driven by cultural differences in individualistic orientation.

Methodologically, this study has been carefully designed to ensure a high degree of validity in the conclusions drawn. Traditionally, cross-cultural consumer research has often suffered a lack of methodological rigor. In particular, critics have denounced the lack of evidence of measurement equivalence in cross-cultural studies (Mullen, 1995; Sin *et al.*, 1999). Lack of evidence of measurement invariance casts doubts on the conclusions of a study and on the theory underlying them. In this paper we used multiple group confirmatory factor analyses, which represent the most powerful and most versatile approach to testing for cross-group measurement invariance (Steenkamp and Baumgartner, 1998). We were able to demonstrate full configural invariance as well as acceptable partial metric and scalar invariance of the scale of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence before moving to a confident interpretation of latent mean differences between the two groups under study.

Our study also offers a number of practical implications. First, the absence of significant differences in susceptibility to informational influence between French and English Canadian consumers suggests that word-of-mouth communications and the use of interpersonal sources of information are equally important across the two groups. Consequently, when planning their promotional activities and budgets, Canadian marketers as well as international firms present in the Canadian market need not vary the proportions of interpersonal versus impersonal communication activities and budgets across the two groups, though the content of these activities may differ significantly.

Next, French Canadians' higher susceptibility to normative influence suggests that certain products, by attaining the status of norm, could be adopted on a larger scale and would gain larger market shares in the French Canadian market than in the English Canadian market. A related issue pertains to the diffusion of innovations. French Canadians' higher susceptibility to normative influence is at the source of their greater brand loyalty, especially toward the leading brands (Kindra *et al.* 1994). As a result, new brands are likely to encounter greater difficulties in penetrating the French Canadian market than the English Canadian market. However, as the product moves through the later stages of its lifecycle and gains further acceptance among opinion leaders, its adoption could increase at an even faster rate than it would in the English Canadian market.

Interestingly, most of the practical implications mentioned above could be extended beyond the Canadian market to firms marketing their products and services in countries on the opposite poles of the individualism-collectivism dimensions. For instance a new brand of soft drinks may have a harder time penetrating the Chinese market than the American market, but once accepted by opinion leaders, it may reach higher market performances in China than in the USA, especially if it succeeds in attaining the norm status.

Limitations and future research

Although the main objectives of the study were generally met, some weaknesses still exist. For instance, regarding the use of multi-group analyses, it should be noted that procedures for assessing construct equivalence are implemented after data collection. Therefore, this technique still does not offer a remedy to the problem of cross-cultural measurement equivalence, even though it is an extremely reliable diagnostic tool. To date, only care in the data gathering process is offered as a preventive measure for dealing with this problem (Sekaran, 1983). In the present case, extreme care has been taken in the data gathering process, as the original English instrument was translated to French and back-translated to English until all discrepancies disappeared. Another limitation to the use of multi-group structural equation modeling is the large sample size requirement (Bollen, 1989). In this study, sample size was not a limitation because a sufficient number of observations was available given the number of parameters in the model.

This study, however, can be criticized for the way culture was operationalized. Ethnic identification was measured by a single subjective indicator. Kim *et al.* (1990) argued that such classification scheme ignores the varying degrees of

acculturation individuals may have experienced towards either end of French-English ethnicity. Future research should investigate the role acculturation might play in influencing the structure and level of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Future research could also validate the susceptibility model in other cultural settings and explore the potential effects of other cultural dimensions such as those identified by Hofstede (1980).

References

Ariely, D. and Levav, J. (2000), "Sequential choice in group settings: taking the road less traveled and less enjoyed", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 27, December, pp. 279-90.

Arndt, J. (1967), "Word of mouth advertising and informal communication", in Cox, D.F. (Ed.), *Risk Taking and Information Handling in Consumer Behavior*, Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University, Boston, MA, pp. 188-239.

Bagozzi, R.P. and Yi, Y. (1988), "On the evaluation of structural equation models", *Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science*, Vol. 16, pp. 74-94.

Bearden, W.O. and Etzel, M.J. (1982), "refefence group influence on product and brand purchase decisions", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 9, September, pp. 183-94.

Bearden, W.O., Netemeyer, R. and Teel, J.E. (1989), "Measurement of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 15, March, pp. 473-81.

Bearden, W.O., Netemeyer, R. and Teel, J.E. (1990), "Further validation of the consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale", *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 17, ACR, Provo, UT, pp. 770-6.

Belk, R. (1988), "Possessions and the extended self", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 2, September, pp. 139-68.

Bentler, P. (1992), *EQS: Structural Equations Program Manual*, BMDP Statistical Software, Los Angeles, CA.

Bollen, K.A. (1989), *Structural Equations with Latent Variables*, John Wiley & Sons, New York, NY.

Brown, J.J. and Reingen, P.H. (1987), "Social ties and word-of-mouth referral behavior", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 14, December, pp. 350-62.

Burnkrant, R.E. and Cousineau, A. (1975), "Informational and normative social influence in buyer behavior", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 2, December, pp. 206-15.

Byrne, B.M. (1994), *Structural Equation Modeling with EQS and EQS/Windows: Basic Concepts, Applications, and Programming*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Byrne, B.M., Shavelson, R.J. and Muthén, B. (1989), "Testing for equivalence of factor covariance and mean structures: the issue of partial measurement invariance", *Psychological Bulletin*, Vol. 105, pp. 456-66.

Chebat, J.-C., Laroche, M. and Malette, H. (1988), "A cross-cultural comparison of attitudes towards and usage of credit cards", *International Journal of Bank Marketing*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 42-54.

D'Rozario, D. (2001), "The structure and properties of the consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence scale in two immigrant populations in the USA", *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 13 No. 2, pp. 77-101.

Dahl, D.W., Manchanda, R.V. and Argo, J.J. (2001), "Embarrassment in consumer purchase: the roles of social presence and purchase familiarity", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 28, December, pp. 473-81.

Dawar, N., Parker, P.M. and Price, L.J. (1996), "A cross-cultural study of interpersonal information exchange", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 27 No. 3, pp. 497-516.

Deutsch, M. and Gerard, H.B. (1955), "A study of normative and informational influence upon individual judgment", *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, Vol. 51, November, pp. 629-36.

Grimm, S.D., Church, A.T., Katigbak, M.S. and Reyes, J.A.S. (1999), "Self-described traits, values, and moods associated with individualism and collectivism", *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, Vol. 30, July, pp. 466-500.

Hofstede, G.H. (1980), *Culture's Consequences: International Differences in Work-Related Values*, Sage Publications, Beverly Hills, CA.

Hofstede, G. (2001), *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Hui, M., Joy, A., Kim, C. and Laroche, M. (1993), "Equivalence of lifestyle dimensions across four major subcultures in Canada", *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 15-35.

Keaveney, S. (1995), "Customer switching behavior in service industries: an exploratory study", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 59, April, pp. 71-82.

Kelman, H.C. (1958), "Compliance, identification, and internalization: three processes of attitude change", *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 51-60.

Kelman, H. (1961), "Processing of opinion change", *The Public Opinion Quarterly*, Vol. 25, Spring, pp. 57-78.

Kim, C., Laroche, M. and Joy, A. (1990), "An empirical study of the effects of ethnicity on consumption patterns in a bi-cultural environment", in Goldberg, M.E., Gorn, G.J. and Pollay, R. (Eds), *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. XVII, Association for Consumer Research, Provo, UT, pp. 839-46.

Kindra, G.S., Laroche, M. and Muller, T.E. (1994), *Consumer Behavior: A Canadian Perspective*, 2nd ed., Nelson Canada, Scarborough.

Kropp, F., Lavack, A.M. and Holden, S.J.S. (1999), "Smokers and beer drinkers: values and consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence", *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 16 No. 6, pp. 536-57.

Laroche, M., Mourali, M. and Pons, F. (2002), "Cultural differences in interpersonal information search: the case of French and English Canadians", in Bigné, E., Johar, V. and Hassan, S. (Eds), *Proceeding of the 2002 AMS Multicultural Marketing Conference, Vol. IV, Academy of Marketing Science, Miami, FL.*

Lefrançois, P.C. and Chatel, G. (1967), "The French Canadian consumer: fact and fancy", *The Canadian Marketer*, Vol. 2, pp. 4-7.

McGrath, M. and Otnes, C. (1995), "Unacquainted influencers: when strangers interact in the retail setting", *Journal of Business Research*, Vol. 32 No. 3, pp. 261-72.

McGuire, W. (1968), "Personality and susceptibility to social influence", in Borgatta, E.F. and Lambert, W.W. (Eds), *Handbook of Personality Theory and Research*, Rand McNally, Chicago, IL, pp. 1130-87.

Mallen, B. (1977), *French Canadian Consumer Behavior: Comparative Lessons from the Published Literature and Private*

Corporate Marketing Studies, The Advertising Executive Club of Montreal, Montreal, p. 1.

Markus, H.R. and Kitayama, S. (1991), "Culture and the self: implications for cognition, emotion, and motivation", *Psychological Review*, Vol. 98 No. 2, pp. 224-53.

Mullen, M. (1995), "Diagnosing measurement equivalence in cross-national research", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 26 No. 3, pp. 573-96.

Palda, K.S. (1967), "A comparison of consumers' expenditures in Quebec and Ontario", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, Vol. 33, p. 26.

Park, C.W. and Lessig, P.V. (1977), "Students and housewives: differences in susceptibility to reference group influence", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 4, September, pp. 102-10.

Price, L.L. and Feick, L.F. (1984), "The role of interpersonal sources in external search: an informational perspective", in Kinnear, T.C. (Ed.), *Advances in Consumer Research*, Vol. 11, Association for Consumer research, Provo, UT, pp. 250-5.

Ratner, R. and Khan, B.E. (2002), "The impact of private versus public consumption on variety seeking behavior", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 29, September, pp. 246-57.

Raykov, T., Tomer, A. and Nesselroade, J.R. (1991), "Reporting structural equation modeling results in psychology and aging: some proposed guidelines", *Psychology and Aging*, Vol. 6 No. 4, pp. 499-503.

Salisbury, W.D., Gopal, A. and Chin, W.W. (1996), "Are we all working from the same script? Developing an instrument to measure consensus on the appropriation of an electronic meeting system", in Nunamaker, J.F. Jr and Sprague, R.H. Jr (Eds), *Proceedings of the 29th Annual Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences, Maui, HI, 3-6 January*, IEEE, Los Alamitos, CA, pp. 13-23.

Schaninger, C.M., Bourgeois, J.C. and Buss, W.C. (1985), "French-English Canadian subcultural differences", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 49, Spring, pp. 82-92.

Sekaran, U. (1983), "Methodological and theoretical issues and advancements in cross-cultural research", *Journal of International Business Studies*, Vol. 14 No. 2, pp. 61-73.

Sin, L.Y.M., Cheung, G.M.H. and Lee, R. (1999), "Methodology in cross-cultural consumer research: a review and critical assessment", *Journal of International Consumer Marketing*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 75-96.

Steenkamp, J.-B.E.M. and Baumgartner, H. (1998), "Assessing measurement invariance in cross-national consumer research", *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 25, June, pp. 87-90.

Taylor, S. and Todd, P.A. (1995), "Understanding information technology usage: a test of competing models", *Information Systems Research*, Vol. 6, June, pp. 144-76.

Thomas, D.R. (1975), "Culture and consumption behavior in English and French Canada", in Stidsen, B. (Ed.), *Marketing in the 1970s and beyond*, Administrative Sciences Association of Canada, Montreal.

Tigert, D.J. (1973), "Can a separate marketing strategy for French Canada be justified? Profiling English-French markets through lifestyle analysis", in Thompson, D.N. and Leighton, D.S. (Eds), *Canadian Marketing: Problems and Prospects*, Wiley of Canada Ltd, Toronto, pp. 119-31.

Triandis, H.C. (1989), "The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts", *Psychological Review*, Vol. 96 No. 3, pp. 506-20.

Triandis, H.C. (1995), *Individualism and Collectivism*, Westview, Boulder, CO.

Yamaguchi, S. (1994), "Collectivism among the Japanese: a perspective from the self", in Kim, U., Hui, H.C., Kagitcibasi, C., Choi, S. and Yoon, G. (Eds), *Individualism and Collectivism: Theory, Method and Applications*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Further reading

Hui, M., Laroche, M. and Kim, C. (1998), "A typology of consumption based on ethnic origin and media usage", *European Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 32 Nos. 9/10, pp. 868-83.

Table AI Appendix

Item description	Multiple Sqrd Corr		Std Loading		Std error		t-value		Alpha	
	FC	EC	FC	EC	FC	EC	FC	EC	FC	EC
Utilitarian Influence									0.89	0.79
I rarely purchase the latest fashion until I am sure my friends approve of them **(INFL1)**	0.53	0.39	0.76	0.68	-	-	-	-		
It's important that others like the products and brands I buy **(INFL2)**	0.67	0.72	0.90	0.88	0.08	0.57	13.66	4.16		
When buying products, I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve of **(INFL3)**	0.70	0.72	0.89	0.95	0.09	0.52	13.54	4.15		
Value-expressive Influence									0.85	0.81
I like to know what brands and products make good impressions on others **(INFL5)**	0.42	0.46	0.69	0.69	-	-	-	-		
I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brands that others purchase **(INFL6)**	0.64	0.69	0.87	0.90	0.09	0.09	11.25	9.59		
If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy **(INFL7)**	0.51	0.65	0.74	0.82	0.08	0.08	9.73	9.10		
I often identify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands they purchase **(INFL8)**	0.68	0.37	0.87	0.60	0.08	0.07	11.20	6.55		
Informational Influence									0.80	0.88
If I have little experience with a product, I often ask my friends about the product **(INFL10)**	0.40	0.53	0.66	0.77	-	-	-	-		
I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product category **(INFL11)**	0.51	0.66	0.91	0.91	0.17	0.12	8.87	11.08		
I frequently gather information from friends and family before I buy **(INFL12)**	0.42	0.61	0.64	0.85	0.13	0.11	8.68	10.79		
Individualistic Orientation									0.69	0.77
I don't think it necessary to act as fellow group members would prefer	0.38	0.46	0.67	0.69	-	-	-	-		
I don't change my opinions in conformity with those of the majority	0.46	0.53	0.76	0.78	0.22	0.13	6.95	8.42		
I don't support my group when they are wrong	0.41	0.49	0.69	0.77	0.17	0.09	4.07	8.73		

Evidence of Discriminant Validity

Factor correlations constrained = 1	χ^2	Diff in χ^2 (comparison with freely estimated correlations)	Conclusion
None (Freely estimated correlations)	85.5	-	-
Utilitarian and Value-expressive	95.8	10.3	The utilitarian and the value-expressive dimensions are statistically distinct
Utilitarian and Informational	95.6	10.1	The utilitarian and the informational dimensions are statistically distinct
Value-expressive and Informational	102.3	16.8	The value-expressive and informational dimensions are statistically distinct

Differences in $\chi^2 > 3.84$ indicate that the constructs are statistically different