Exploring Relationships among Ethnic Identification, Acculturation and Religiosity: A Study Involving British Muslim

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationships among ethnic identification, acculturation and religiosity among British Muslim in the United Kingdom. Quantitative research was undertaken by means of a web based survey questionnaire. The usable questionnaire consisted of 222 respondents. Results show that religiosity is negatively related to acculturation but not with ethnic identification. The findings also show that acculturation is negatively related to ethnic identification. Limitations and direction for future research are discussed towards the end of this paper.

Keywords: Ethnic identification, Acculturation, Religiosity, British Muslim

1.   Introduction

British Muslim have been recognised as one of the fastest growing ethnic minorities and the second largest population in the United Kingdom (UK) after Christian (Burton, 2002; UK National Statistics, 2001). According to the UK National Statistics (2001), three quarter of Muslims (74%) were from an Asian ethnic background, predominantly Pakistani (43%), Bangladeshi (16%), Indian (8%) and other Asian (6%). It has been reported that around 81% of Muslims think of themselves as Muslim first. Muslims living in Muslim-majority countries also tend to think of themselves as Muslim first rather than identifying with nationalism (for example 87% of Pakistanis identify themselves as Muslim first rather than Pakistani) (The Pew Global Project Attitudes, 2006). However around 83% of Muslims are proud to be a British citizen, compared to 79% of the general public, 77% of Muslims strongly identify with Britain while only 50% of the wider population do, 86.4% of Muslims feel they belong in Britain, slightly more than the 85.9% of Christians, 82% of Muslims want to live in diverse and mixed neighbourhoods compared to 63% of non-Muslim Britons (Moosavi, 2012).

Religion is an important defining characteristic of people's identity (Office for National Statistics, 2012). Religion also poses an important consideration to the market segmentation of ethnic groups (Emslie, Bent, & Seaman, 2007). As noted by Burton (2002), the relationship between religion, ethnicity, and consumer behaviour has not been adequately addressed in marketing research. Given the issue of identity among British Muslim, the importance of ethnic identification and acculturation among Muslims should be explored in studying ethnic minority consumers (Hui, Laroche, & Kim, 1998; Lindridge, 2010).

1.1   Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to investigate the relationships among ethnic identification, acculturation and religiosity among British Muslim in the UK. This paper begins by providing related literature review on ethnic identification, acculturation, and religiosity and hypotheses development. Then, methodology used in this study is presented and followed by discussion of results and finding. A final section provides the conclusion, limitations and recommendations for future research.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

2.1 Ethnic Identification and Religiosity

Ethnic identification has been defined as the extent to which a person feels tied to his/her culture of origin (Donthu & Cherian, 1992). Strong ethnic identifiers are those whose sense of self is very strongly formed by the culture of origin, therefore, the basic values and attitudes of the culture of origin will be predictive of their actions. In contrast, weak ethnic identifiers are those whose self-image is only slightly formed by the culture of origin, therefore, the

weak ethnic identifiers will not necessarily be predictable by the culture of origin or values or attitudes (Donthu & Cherian, 1994).

Religious commitment, on the other hand, often termed as religiosity is defined as 'belief in God accompanied by a commitment to follow principles believed to be set forth by God' (McDaniel & Burnett, 1990). In other words, highly religious individuals tend to abide by the rules and codes of conduct set by their religious doctrines, for example, attending regularly worship services and being strictly committed to the religious practices and membership of the group. If their belief in religious tenet is weak, they might feel free to behave in other ways. Hence, how strongly consumers committed with their religion should be considered in understanding the nature of consumer behaviour (Mokhlis, 2006b).

Few studies have investigated relationships between personal characteristics and level of ethnic identification. Brouard and Tiberj (2005) cited in Saroglou and Mathijsen (2007) examined the relationships between religiosity and level of ethnic identification. Findings of the study indicate that people with high degree of religiosity tend to have strong attachment to the origin country. As such, strong attachment to the origin country reflects strong ethnic identifiers (Donthu & Cherian, 1994). The same finding is also supported in Saroglou and Mathijsen's (2007) study. Using Belgian Muslim immigrants as a sample, the study shows that high religiosity or spirituality was related to low attachment to the Belgian and European identities and high attachment to the origin identity. In contrast, high doubting in religion was followed by endorsement of the European and Belgian identities and by attachment to the Belgian culture or integration. This finding is another study which shows that intensity of faith and religious practice was negatively related to host country culture.

Moreover, Saroglou and Mathijsen (2007) found that highly religious immigrants were not only found to have strong attachment to the origin country, as opposed to those of low religiosity, but also hold a more traditional conception of the status of women and have traditional matrimonial practices typical of their origin countries. This finding perhaps relates to the tendency of highly religious individuals to be more conservative (Delener, 1990, 1994), high dogmatism (Schiffman, Dillon, & Ngumah, 1981) and more traditional (Delener, 1990, 1994) than are the non-religious subjects. Following this line of reasoning and results from the previous studies, it can therefore be anticipated that highly religious individuals will hold more traditional views, and more attached to their culture of origin. In accordance with the discussion on ethnic identification and religiosity, it is therefore possible to make the following hypothesis:

> **H1:　An individual's ethnic identification will be positively related with his/her religiosity levels.**

2.1 Acculturation and Religiosity

Majority of Muslims in the UK were immigrants from Asian countries such as Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh (UK National Statistics, 2001). According to previous research, people migrating to other countries go through acculturation which refer to the process of learning and adopting cultural traits different from the ones with which the person was originally reared (Ownbey & Horridge, 1997). It has also been recognised that more acculturated immigrants are more readily adopting the values, attitudes and behaviour of the dominant host culture while less acculturate immigrants retain a great many of their own culture's attitudes, values, and behaviours. The changes in the values, attitudes and behaviour are likely to be reflected in their buying behaviour as well (e.g. Podoshen, 2006; Rajagopalan & Heitmeyer, 2005).

As acculturation also deals with changes in attitudes, values, and/or behaviours of members of one cultural group toward the standard of the other cultural group (Lee, 1993), individual's personality traits seem to differentiate individual responses to change or acculturate. Change management literature showed that attitude toward change is positively associated with openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness and negatively associated with neuroticism (Vakola, Tsaousis, & Nikolaou, 2004). In a study involving consumer acculturation, Schiffman et al. (1981) found that high scores on dogmatic scale inhibited consumer acculturation while low scores on dogmatic scale facilitated consumer acculturation.

Researchers have also established that a religious person tend to be close minded and dogmatism (Delener, 1994; Schiffman, et al., 1981). They also tend to be conservative, traditional (Delener, 1990, 1994) and also less prone toward novelty seeking activities (Hirschman, 1982) than the non-religious subjects. Individuals with these types of personality have been negatively associated with attitude toward change according to the change management literature (Vakola, et al., 2004).

In a study examining the relationships between religiosity and acculturation, Saroglou and Mathijsen (2007) found that intensity of faith and religious practice was negatively related to acculturation within the Belgian culture. Low certainty in faith or low faith corresponded to high Belgian identity, sense of belonging and acculturation to the Belgian culture and low attachment to the origin identity and culture. The same findings were also evidenced among the Asian Americans and African Americans whereby religiousness was negatively related to acculturation (Ghorpade, Lackritz, & Singh, 2006). As such, highly religious individuals should therefore less acculturate because they tend to be highly dogmatism and conservative (Delener, 1990, 1994). In contrast, individuals who are less religious will acculturate better. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

> **H2:** **An individual's level of acculturation will be negatively related with his/her religiosity levels.**

2.3 Ethnic Identification and Acculturation

Ethnic identity is a psychological construct that reflects a person identification with, and membership, in an ethnic group (Cuellar, Nyberg, & Maldonado, 1997). Numerous studies that have investigated the impact of ethnic identity on consumer behaviour have operationally defined ethnic identity as an individual's strength of ethnic identification (e.g. Chattaram & Lennon, 2008; Kim & Arthur, 2003). According to Deshpande et al. (1986), an individual's strength of ethnic identification signifies the individuals' base level of affiliation with an ethnic group. This construct differs from the related construct of acculturation in that strength of ethnic identification focuses on the maintenance of aspects related to the culture of origin, whereas, acculturation focuses on the acquisition. Therefore, it is expected that ethnic identification and acculturation will be negatively related. The following hypothesis is proposed:

> **H3:** **An individual's level of ethnic identification will be negatively related with his/her acculturation levels.**

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Data Collection

The data collection process for quantitative research was conducted over a period of six weeks. For the purpose of this study, web based questionnaires was used as the main data collection method. Respondents were selected using a non-probability sampling; a combination of self-selection and snowballing. These individuals were approached in social network (Facebook) either through personal invitation or group invitation. It must be noted that sampling frames were collected from members of group of interest located in the online social networking (Facebook). The decision to construct a sampling frame from social networking was made because young people in the UK is actively involved in using the internet (UK National Statistics, 2007). Furthermore, social networking has become a mainstream online activity among all age groups in the UK and the penetration was highest amongst 25 to 34 year olds (89%) and 15 to 24 year olds (86%) (comScore, 2009).

3.2 Survey Instrument

A review of the literature on religiosity indicates that there is no accepted definition on religiosity however, most researchers have conceptualised religiosity using multiple items (e.g. Essoo & Dibb, 2004; McDaniel & Burnett, 1990; Mokhlis, 2006a). Consistent with the previous studies, this study operationalises religiosity using nine items. Two items were adapted from Siguaw and Simpson (1997) and seven items were newly developed for the purpose of this study. Strength of ethnic identification has been measured using five items used in the previous studies (Donthu & Cherian, 1992, 1994). Respondents were first asked to identify the ethnic group that they belong to and then report how strongly they identified with that ethnic group. Acculturation was measured by eight questions that frequently used in previous studies (Lee, 1993; Lee & Um, 1992). Respondents were asked to report their preference for language at different situations, language use most often for several media, and social interactions. All items were measured on a seven point Likert scale ranging from '1' (strongly disagree) to '7' (strongly agree) and respondents were asked to state the degree of agreement for each statement given.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1   Descriptive Analysis

The net number of usable survey questionnaire was 222. As illustrated in Table 1, 82.6% of the respondents were female while 17.4% were male. The information on marital status of respondents demonstrated that more than half (78.2%) were single, followed by married/living with partner (19.9%) and divorced (1.9%). With regards

educational background, majority of respondents obtained undergraduate degree (53.4%). Regarding the respondents occupation, the largest group comprised of student (62.3%), followed by professional/senior management (14.5%), unemployed (5.8%), housewife/husband (5.8%), clerical staff (3.9%), self-employed (2.9%), technical staff (2.4%), and others (2.4%). With regards educational background, majority of respondents obtained undergraduate degree (53.4%). While others attended at least high school and obtained qualifications to GCSEs/O Level (5.4%), A Levels (17.6%), professional qualification/diploma (10.3%), and postgraduate degree (13.2%).

Regarding the respondents occupation, the largest group comprised of student (62.3%), followed by professional/senior management (14.5%), unemployed (5.8%), housewife/husband (5.8%), clerical staff (3.9%), self employed (2.9%), technical staff (2.4%), and others (2.4%). In terms of respondents' length of stay in the UK, 67.3% have stayed in the UK since they were born, 14.5% between 1 and 10 years, 12.7% between 11 and 20 years and 5.5% for more than 20 years. Based on this number, 32.7% of the respondents can be categorised as first generation while the others (72.8%) belong to second or later generation (Jamal & Chapman, 2000; Sekhon & Szmingin, 2005).

When the respondents were asked to indicate their ethnic group, the largest group regarded themselves as British Pakistani (31.3%), 10.6% of respondents saw themselves as British Bangladeshi and 8.7% would classified themselves as British Indian. The remaining considered themselves as Pakistani (8.7%), British (7.2%), British Arab (6.7%), Arab (6.3%), Bangladeshi (3.4%), Indian (3.4%), British African (2.4%), African (1.0) and other (10.6%).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variables	Category	Sample (N=222)	
		Frequency	(%)
Gender	Male	36	17.4
	Female	171	82.6
Marital Status	Single	161	78.2
	Married/Living with partner	41	19.9
	Divorced	4	1.9
Occupation	Student	129	62.3
	Housewife/husband	12	5.8
	Professional/senior management	30	14.5
	Clerical staff	8	3.9
	Technical staff	5	2.4
	Self employed	6	2.9
	Unemployed	12	5.8
	Other	5	2.4
Education	GCSEs/ O Level	11	5.4
	A Levels	36	17.6
	Professional Qualification/Diploma	21	10.3
	Undergraduate degree	109	53.4
	Postgraduate degree	27	13.2
Length of Stay in the UK	Since birth	148	67.3
	1 to 10 years	32	14.5
	11 to 20 years	28	12.7
	More than 20 years	12	5.5
Ethnic Group	British	15	7.2
	Pakistani	18	8.7
	British Pakistani	65	31.3
	Bangladeshi	7	3.4
	British Bangladeshi	22	10.6
	Indian	7	3.4
	British Indian	18	8.7
	African (i.e., Somali, Algerian, Libyan)	2	1.0
	British African (i.e., Somali, Algerian, Libyan)	5	2.4
	Arab (i.e., Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian)	13	6.3
	British Arab (i.e., Iraqi, Yemeni, Egyptian)	14	6.7
	Other (i.e., Asian, American)	22	10.6

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Table 2 shows results of correlation analysis. The results show that there was no relationship between ethnic identification and religiosity. Hence, H1 is not supported. The finding of H2 is in line with expectation. The results show that there was a negative relationship between acculturation and religiosity (r = -0.16, p≤ .05) which lead us to support H2. Finally, the result of H3 is in line with expectation whereby there was a negative correlation between acculturation and ethnic identification (*r* = -0.329, *p* = ≤ .01) and thus support H3. This implies that more acculturated individuals tend to have a weaker extend to its culture of origin. This finding is in line with Penaloza (1994) who suggested that ethnic identification is negatively related to consumer acculturation. The more a person affiliates with his or her ethnic community, the less his or her chance to adapt and adopt mainstream values and behaviour.

Table 2: Correlations Analysis Results

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		Acculturation	Ethnic Identification	Religiosity
Acculturation	Pearson Correlation	1.000	-.329[**]	-.160[*]
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.026
	N	199	193	194
Ethnic Identification	Pearson Correlation	-.329[**]	1.000	.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.691
	N	193	199	194
Religiosity	Pearson Correlation	-.160[*]	.029	1.000
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.026	.691	
	N	194	194	202
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).				
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).				

5. Conclusion

This paper aims to investigate the relationships among ethnic identification, acculturation and religiosity among British Muslim in the UK. Results show that individual level of ethnic identification is negatively related to acculturation but not with religiosity. The findings also show that acculturation is negatively related to ethnic identification. The results obtained from this empirical work must be interpreted in the light of the study's limitations. For the purpose of this study, snowball sampling method was used to recruit respondents. This sampling method requires the existing respondents to recruit future respondents from among their families and friends. If the respondents distributed the survey to friends or families with similar values, this may have caused a potential bias. This study's focus has been on relatively young British Muslims, mainly the second or later generations, neglecting the older population of British Muslims living in the UK. The issue of generational effects also needs to be recognized since first and later generations may develop different behaviours and attitudes (Burton, 2000). Consequently, further research to recognise different behavior and attitudes among different generations should be examined.

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