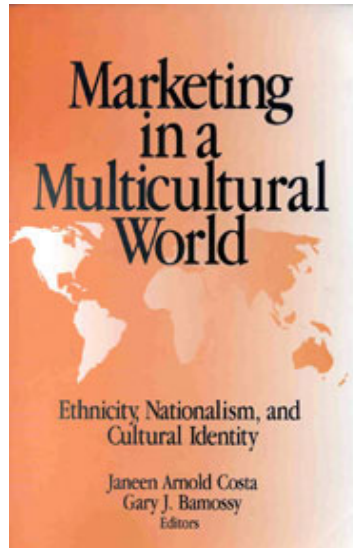


Ethnoconsumerism: A New Paradigm to Study Cultural and Cross-Cultural Consumer Behavior



Project NOAH

Alladi Venkatesh Ph.D.
Professor, Graduate School of Management and
Director, Project NOAH
Center for Research on Information Technology and Organizations (CRITO)
3200 Berkeley Place
University of California
Irvine CA 92697
Tel – 1-949-824-1134
avenkate@uci.edu
www.crito.uci.edu/noah

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ALLADI VENKATESH

In order to follow a baseball game one must understand what bat, hit, an inning, a left fielder, a squeeze play, a hanging curve, and a tightened infield are.
Clifford Geertz (1983, p. 69)

What happens to understanding when empathy disappears?
Clifford Geertz (1983, p. 56)

The story about the death of positivism is highly exaggerated.
Anonymous

In a seminal work, Geertz (1983) raised the important issue of the "native's point of view."¹ As he himself admitted, this is not a new but a recurrent theme; it has, however, assumed certain epistemological significance in the postmodern and poststructuralist era.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine a new paradigm in consumer behavior that I have labeled *ethnoconsumerism*, which is a conceptual framework to study consumer behavior using the theoretical categories originating within a given culture. The

motivation for this chapter is twofold. The primary reason is the ongoing argument in comparative cultural studies regarding the use of a single theoretical framework for studying different cultures. The second reason has its origin in certain insights or intuitions that I have gained during my own introspection about my role as a researcher (see the appendix in this chapter).

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The general tendency in the social sciences has been to use the same theoretical categories across cultural settings, with supposedly appropriate modifications to suit the conditions of the particular cultural group being studied. Ethnoconsumerism is the study of consumption from the point of the cultural order in question, using the categories of behavior and thought that are native to the culture-ethnos means nation or people, and *consumerism* is used here in the classical sense of consumption as a set of cultural practices, as discussed in the works of cultural theorists and social historians to represent the tendencies of consumer orientation (as an example, see Campbell, 1987). Consumerism in this chapter is not to be mistaken for concepts such as consumer activism, consumer rights, and so forth.

This chapter is at the intersection of three areas: consumer behavior as a cultural phenomenon, ethnic studies, and comparative and crosscultural research. I shall first give a brief introduction to ethnoconsumerism and follow this with a discussion of the three areas. The discussion will serve as a lead into a more elaborate development of ethnoconsumerism with illustrations in the second half of the chapter.

What Is Ethnoconsumerism?

Ethnoconsumerism is the study of consumption from the point of view of the social group or cultural group that is the subject of study. It examines behavior on the basis of the cultural realities of that group. Ethnoconsumerism follows the intellectual traditions of comparative methods and cross-cultural studies, but it differs from existing versions of comparative or cross-cultural studies in several ways. First, ethnoconsumerism is not a method, as the others tend to be, although crosscultural comparisons can and must be

made. Ethnoconsumerism begins with basic cultural categories of a given culture. It studies actions, practices, words, thoughts, language, institutions, and the interconnections between these categories. In general, cross-cultural comparisons are easier at the level of actions and become increasingly problematic at deeper levels of analysis. Seemingly similar practices across cultures may contain deep cultural meanings that differentiate crosscultural practices in fundamental ways. Hence, one must carefully analyze cultural underpinnings of various events and actions. An example of this can be found in the following quote describing Geertz's Balinese cockfight:

The intelligibility of any action requires reference to its larger context, a cultural world. So, to take a powerfully developed example, when Clifford Geertz describes the Balinese cockfight, a text analogue, he progressively incorporates other essential Balinese symbols, institutions, and practices that are necessary to an understanding of the seemingly localized cockfight. The Balinese cultural and social world is not incorporated into the cockfight, but must be brought into analysis in order to understand the event The aim is not to uncover universals or laws but rather to explicate context and world. (Rabinow & Sullivan, 1987, p. 14; italics added)

The idea of studying a culture from the point of view of the researched group is not new and generally is known as the emic perspective. There is a superficial resemblance between emic perspective and ethnoconsumerism, but they are not equivalent. *Emic* is a loose term that refers to the subject's point of view, is limited to strategies of data collection, and rarely leads into a discussion of any deeper interpretive issues. Ethnoconsumerism advocates not only the so-called native's point of view but goes deeper into the development of knowledge constructed from the culture's point of view. From a philosophy of science perspective, ethnoconsumerism is an example of an ethnoscience that views all social sciences as ethnosciences that lay no claim to the universality of social science. Before developing ethnoconsumerism in fuller detail, I will examine some related topics that provide the theoretical context to my later elaboration.

Consumerism as a Cultural Phenomenon

CONSUMERISM AS AN ETHNOCULTURAL PHENOMENON

After pursuing my cross-cultural fieldwork in different settings India, Denmark, and the United States-and reading varied forms of cultural and textual material, I am left with no choice but to consider all consumer behaviors as primarily sociocultural phenomena that must, therefore, be discussed in sociocultural terms.² There is a confusion in our field (consumer behavior or, more generally, marketing) that results from observing behavior at the individual level and subsequently regarding the phenomenon itself as individualistic. The argument is less than convincing, because we, as researchers, are the ones who have chosen to study consumer behavior at the individual level. The behavior is not primarily individualistic simply because we have chosen to study it that way for epistemological convenience. There is ample evidence to show that all individual identities are derived from interaction within a sociocultural environment (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; McCracken, 1988; Sahlins,1976). In fact, quite often,

²"Ethnoconsumerism: A New Paradigm to Study Cultural and Cross-cultural Consumer Behavior," J.A. Costa & G. Bamossy (eds.), *Marketing in a Multicultural World*, SAGE Publications, 1995, 26-67.

when we describe consumer behavior, we use the cultural group, explicitly or implicitly, as the level of analysis-Americans, Californians, Indians, Hispanics, and so forth. The reason we do it is because only at that level does consumer behavior seem to make intuitive sense. Seldom are we interested in what Mr. Smith as a single American or Mrs. Singh as a single Indian does. We are more interested in what Americans or Indians collectively do. Of course, we collect data from many individual Smiths and Singhs, but our ultimate aim is to say something meaningful about the collectivities to which they belong. Individuals are products of their culture and their social groupings; therefore, they are conditioned by their sociocultural environment to act in certain manners (Douglas & Isherwood, 1979; McCracken, 1988). Only derivatively can their behavior be called psychological. I am not denying that psychology has something to say about individual behavior, but before psychology come culture, family, and group norms. Psychological approaches to consumer behavior are a curious blend of reductionism, mentalism, and naive empiricism.

In this chapter, culture includes various aspects of social life—from religion to everyday practices, from mundane to profound, from institutions to ideologies, from ideas to activities, and from social formations to meaning systems (McCracken, 1988; Williams, 1981). In fact, many aspects of cultural life have developed historically, either through internal evolution or by external imposition. Dealing with such varied topics requires a rich framework that can be obtained only by a deeper examination of the cultures in question and their practices, value systems, and behavioral norms as they relate to consumption.

The ability to understand consumer behavior in its many-sidedness has been hampered by academic specializations and the division of labor into subdisciplines such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology. These specializations have caused researchers to put on blinders, with psychologists appropriating the study of the human mind, sociologists the social order, and anthropologists the culture.

For the typical researcher, these distinctions have become rather cumbersome because reality is not partitioned that way, even though university departments are (Goody, 1993). As mentioned earlier, several cultural theorists adopt the view that individuals are products of their cultures and that as their cultures change, so do they. Similarly, the social institutions and their organizational philosophies reflect the cultural values and norms of a given culture. Consequently, a reasonable position to take is that culture is what defines a human community, its individuals, and social organizations, along with other economic and political systems. Thus, the individual and the social are but part of their culture, and culture is the overall system within which other systems are organized. The modernist perspective regards culture and economy as two separate spheres of activity (as is usually the approach taken in the traditional discourse on capitalism and Marxism), but this position is not tenable if culture is to be viewed realistically, that is, as a more encompassing system. See Firat and Venkatesh (1994) for elaboration of this idea under modernism and postmodernism. Figure 2.1 contrasts the two views of culture, the modernist view and the proposed view.

The implications of global cultural diffusion are several. We need to understand the nature of the impact, the local resistances and adaptive strategies to external influences, and the modifications to externally imposed cultural phenomena by giving them a local coloring.

Ethnicity, Nature, and Scope

This book is about ethnicity and consumer behavior. Ethnicity is a catch-all collective term that has replaced several other identifiers— race, religion, language group, nationality, religion, and so forth— as a way to determine the social identity of groups, under the claim that although these different identifiers may be more precise and objective in their meaning, they may be inadequate in today's complex world. As a theoretical construct, ethnicity has acquired a central position in cultural studies in its ability to accord a separate status to people belonging to differentiated groups. It combines such elements as race, language group, and religion into schemes of identity formation. Accordingly, to cite Nash (1989), the "building blocks of ethnicity" (p. 5) are the body (a biological component expressed as blood and genes, commonly shared among group members), a language, a shared history and origins, religion, and nationality. Quite often, however, the term *ethnicity* is used euphemistically as a substitute for these identifiers. For example, it is not uncommon for a survey questionnaire to contain the question "What is your ethnic background?" and then to provide response categories that are simply a jumble of racial (White, Black) and religious (Jewish, Moslem) categories.

Barth (1969), in a systematic investigation of ethnicity, first suggested that ethnicity is not merely an agglomeration of other identifiers. To quote him, "the critical focus of investigation becomes the ethnic boundary and not the cultural stuff that it encloses" (p. 5). For Barth, the constitution of the ethnic boundary, the mechanics of boundary maintenance, and the mythohistorical rationale for the group formation are extremely important in ethnic identity and differentiation. Thus, some of the ethnic groups in the United States, for example, such as African Americans, Whites, Jews, and Hispanics, may each use different criteria for identity. The first two groups are racial in character, but Arabs and Iranians are not included among Whites, although racially they are closer to many Southern Europeans. The term *White* usually is applied to people of European ancestry and may connote that they follow the Christian religion. African Americans are identified by skin color as well as genes, no matter what their religion or nationality. As Eriksen (1993) pointed out:

In the United States any individual who has the slightest phenotypical trace of African origin is classified as "black." So when a famous American professor in black history came to Trinidad in 1989 to give a lecture . . . the Trinidadian audience was startled to discover that the man was nearly white. (p. 83)

Thus, when discussion occurs within the context of a country such as Trinidad, it is the lightness or darkness of the skin and not the imputed African gene that makes up the

ethnic category. Hispanics usually are identified on the basis of language (Spanish) and nationality (Mexicans and other Central and South Americans), unless they have European ancestry, in which case they are called Hispanic Whites. Jewish people sometimes are included among Whites, but they may be separated by their religion.

Such permutations make it more difficult to pin down the concept of ethnicity than in the case of the other terms, such as religion, nationality, and race. (I must hasten to add, however, that in this postmodern world, even such terms as race and nationality have become problematic. See Anderson, 1983/1991.) The question is, who defines ethnicity? According to Barth (1969) and many others (De Vos, 1975; Eriksen, 1993), the basis of ethnicity is self-identification of the members mediated by the perceptions of the others. There are two sets of principles that operate within ethnicity: the inclusionary-exclusionary principle and the difference-identity principle. By excluding, one establishes difference. By including, one establishes identity. Both are, therefore, closely related. The inclusionary-exclusionary principle states that a group tries to include only people who display preapproved characteristics and excludes the others. For example, to be called a White, the relevant characteristics are religion (Christian), skin color, and European extraction. The presumption here is that this group has a distinct value system and cultural patterns.

In recent years, the term *ethnicity* has evolved in prominence and significance over the other identifiers, which have yielded to ethnicity as a more powerful indicator of identity formation because it is both subjectively claimed and socially accorded. Globally, the ethnic phenomenon poses the most serious challenge to traditional views regarding nationalism, pluralism, and modernism. Ethnic boundaries have become contentious issues leading to political and power struggles. Ethnic groups that feel marginalized have become forces of resistance. For example, as Friedman (1990) pointed out, "Ethnic and cultural fragmentation and modernist homogenization are not two arguments, two opposing views of what is happening in the world today, but two constitutive trends of global reality" (p. 311). Tambiah (1989) took the question of ethnic boundaries one more step beyond Barth (1969) and suggested that ethnic boundaries have led to ethnic conflicts in many countries. Ethnicity seems to have the potential to generate a more comprehensive theoretical framework for the study of social distinction and social differentiation, although at the same time it unfortunately facilitates the division of the world, with insidious ease, into "us" versus "them."

Originally, ethnicity referred to as-yet unassimilated or unassimilable, relatively well-differentiated minority groups within a larger population. These groups were called *ethnics*, a noun form to describe the groups. The presumption was (and still is) that the term *ethnic* should not be applied to a group in its host cultural setting if such a setting does, indeed, exist. For example, Mexicans are considered an ethnic minority in the United States but by definition cannot be considered so in Mexico. Nevertheless, scrutinizing the language we use, we hear a different story. Many North Americans seem to view Mexicans ethnically (that is, as a subordinate cultural group), regardless of whether they are referring to Mexican immigrants in the United States or to citizens of Mexico. There is also the obverse and curious side to this logic: In no part of the

non-White world are the Whites considered an ethnic group, even though they may be in a minority. *Ethnic* thus has come to mean people of secondary status in the eyes of a dominant global group. The term *ethnic* clearly originated with North Americans, Anglo-Saxons, and West Europeans, mainly to describe people of other cultures, frequently in inferior terms. For the most part, *ethnic* has come to mean an ideologically fashioned term to describe groups who are culturally and/or physically outside the dominant cultures of the day. Out of curiosity, I looked for the meaning of *ethnic* in *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1986). The first entry is, "of or relating to Gentiles or to nations not converted to Christianity," and one must read the third entry to find "having or originating from racial or linguistic groups" (p. 781). For my study, I prefer the prefix *ethno-* to the word *ethnic* because it seems less confusing if not less hegemonic. The only entry in the dictionary for the term *ethnos* is "of nation, people, caste, tribe" (p. 781). The choice is clear.

ETHNICITY AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

The burgeoning interest in the topic of ethnicity among consumer researchers in the United States demonstrates just how important this area of research has become. The increase in consumer research interest is partly a result of the changing ethnic landscape of the United States, especially in the states of California, Texas, Florida, and New York,³ which have been affected by recent immigrants from Mexico, Latin America, and Asia. There is a heightened awareness that the recent im-. migrants are less likely to assimilate into the mainstream of American life to the extent most of their predecessors did; thus, these newcomers are more likely to retain their cultural identities. Consequently, the metaphor describing the American ethnic landscape as a melting pot is being supplanted by the "tossed salad" or "cultural mosaic" metaphors (Glazer & Moynihan, 1975; Hegeman, 1991). Ironically, just at the time when the ethnic tensions in the social sphere have become a cause for concern among mainstream political leaders, marketers-driven more by economic opportunities than by social realities-are eyeing ethnic populations as market segments. Thus, for the marketing practitioner, the consumption patterns of new immigrants are sufficiently different and their numbers are sufficiently large that they cannot be treated as marginal populations. Clearly, marketers are driven by profits and bottom lines, and their desire to understand the behaviors of ethnic groups certainly is not motivated by transcendental considerations. Consumer researchers, who play a critical role in the study of marketing dynamics, now are charged to show a genuine interest in understanding ethnic groups and their practices.

In the field of consumer behavior, ethnic research is not recent. The first wave of ethnic-oriented studies was reported in the literature in the mid-1960s to the late 1970s and focused primarily on Blacks. See Engel, Blackwell, and Kollat (1978) for a summary of these studies. The second wave of studies started appearing during the mid- to late 1980s, with the onset of increased growth in the Latin American and Asian immigrant populations in the United States and also as part of the general awareness of ethnic developments among consumer scholars. Coincidentally, fewer studies have been reported on Black consumers.

One of the first specific consumer-oriented studies involving ethnic populations was Hirschman's (1981) analysis of Jewish consumption patterns. Other examples include key studies on Hispanics by Penaloza (1994), Stayman and Deshpande (1989), and Zmud and Arce (1992). The latter two of these studies follow positivist approaches to consumer science by treating ethnicity as a social psychological-demographic construct. The aim of such studies is to establish a relationship between ethnicity as an independent variable and consumption as a dependent variable. Most discussion within these studies centers on the method of analysis, measurement of ethnicity as a construct, and its explanatory power as a concept. The problem of ethnicity as an existential condition and the problems of the ethnic groups and their coping strategies seldom are invoked because that is not the focus of these studies. The subject's point of view is not a major consideration in these and similar studies. The interpretive questions in these studies are necessarily limited because ethnicity is treated as a scientific construct leading to a reductionism of sorts, and ethnicity is regarded as just any other demographic variable, such as disposable income or household size.

Of course, there is merit to this type of research. For one thing, by making ethnicity an important variable, researchers emphasize that it has come of age. By making it a scientific, analytical unit, they say that it can be treated as a value-free construct. The problem with such treatment is that ethnicity becomes a faceless variable in research, and researchers make no attempt to provide an understanding of what it means to be a member of an ethnic group.

One of the few exceptions to a purely positivistic approach to the study of ethnicity in consumer research and one that broadens the mainstream ethnic research is the recent work of Penaloza (1994) on Hispanic immigrants. Penaloza's work, which began in the mid-1980s and is still continuing, is the result of more than 6 years of close observation and participation in Hispanic communities. She trained herself in the Spanish language and immersed herself in the culture of Hispanics—essentially a requirement if one wants to pursue studies of this type. Her understanding of the Hispanic culture allowed her to examine socialization and acculturation processes of this group, the trials and tribulations of this ethnic community, and the strategies of coping. Penaloza has demonstrated that ethnic reactions to mainstream culture are determined by strategies of both acceptance and resistance. Ethnic assimilation into the mainstream is both traumatic and cathartic, and the dynamics of this cannot be captured in a typical positivistic research mode.

It is my feeling that ethnic research will benefit when one goes beyond using standard positivistic research methods because the epistemological position of the researcher might become too rigid to capture the existential condition of the researched subjects in a meaningful way. The typical researcher tends to objectify consumption research data with the objective of scientific pursuit. This conflicts with the state of mind of the researched, who subjectivize consumption experiences. Clearly, these two positions can sometimes stand in opposition to each other to the detriment of appropriate research outcomes. If the researcher is truly interested in developing an understanding of

consumers, he or she should develop an epistemology that is grounded in the subjects' point of view.

Three other examples, which concern Asian Indian immigrants, are Jain and Costa (1991), Joy and Dholakia (1991), and Mehta and Belk (1991). The complexity of doing ethnic research is clearly illustrated in these studies, which reveal that it is not possible to deal with ethnicity merely as another variable. Ethnicity becomes a cultural condition with profound consequences to the nature of consumption experiences among different groups.

Although not explicit, ethnic consumer studies can be considered cross-cultural or comparative because the researcher, in describing the relationship between ethnicity and consumption, establishes the cultural significance of ethnic consumption. A major difference between ethnic and cross-cultural or comparative studies lies in the fact that one is mainly intracultural and the other is intercultural. Ethnic studies always have as their implicit or explicit focus the relationship between the ethnic group and the dominant group.

Comparative and Cross-Cultural Research

The issue of comparative versus cross-cultural research in the social sciences is quite old and dates to the period of Durkheim. The nature of the debate has changed over the decades and has, indeed, become more complex. The issue has several aspects. Some center on the positivist approach to research versus the subjectivist-interpretivist approach. Then there are the goals of research: description, comparison, and generalization⁴ (see Table 2.1). Description involves a detailed account of facts as observed and gathered by the researcher, along with his or her impressions of the people, settings, practices, and institutional arrangements. Under description, one may also include interpretation. Thus, Geertz's famous ethnographic work on the Balinese cockfight falls under description or, more specifically, under "thick description," as he labeled it (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). Comparison may be viewed as a logical extension of description in that two or more cultures are examined along one or more pertinent dimensions. Comparison in this sense means cross-cultural comparison. Researchers speak of generalizations when comparisons lead to valid generalizations across cultures on the basis of cross-cultural similarities. Table 2.1 lists the relative merits of the three levels of research. Of critical importance here is that in moving from description to generalization, researchers lose a lot of richness of data and begin to make unrealistic assumptions about the nature of reality. The positivist tradition aims to generate universal principles of behavior across different cultural settings. The following quotes highlight the principle of generalization in cross-cultural research:

Cross-cultural research provides an essential component of valid generalizations about human society. (Burton & White, 1987, p. 143)

The typical cross-cultural study is directed toward the analysis of a relatively small number of traits over a relatively large number of societies. (Udy, 1973, p. 253)

Cross-cultural analysis makes sense only in an intellectual context that stresses the fundamental general similarities among separate societies that are different in detail. (Udy, 1973, p. 254)

TABLE 2.1 A Comparative Analysis of Description, Comparison, and Generalization

Factors	Description	Comparison	Generalization
Status of data	Focused data	Comparative data	Limited data
Richness of data	Very rich	Very rich	Low quality
Data gathering	Inductive	Inductive/ Deductive	Deductive
Strategic use of research	Understanding	Differentiation	Universalization
Testable hypotheses	Minor importance	Major importance	Major importance
Positivism, interpretivism	Interpretivism, subjectivism	Interpretivism, subjectivism	Positivism, subjectivism
Nature of theory	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Realism	High	High	Low
Speculation	Low	Low	High
Data accuracy	High	High	Low
Credibility of analysis	High	High	Low

Positivism in the social sciences has taken two different positions, one pertaining to scientific generalization and the other arising out of structuralism-functionalism. Scientific generalization refers to the discovery of lawlike regularities across cultures relative to the observed phenomena. Structuralism-functionalism is a particular view of the world as an organized system consisting of various parts with different functional capabilities but with common systemic goals. Both positions are for the most part ahistorical and treat culture in synchronistic terms. On the other hand, in the subjectivist tradition (as opposed to the positivist tradition), emphasis is on differences between cultures and not on similarities, but there is a recognition that cultural differences can be explained by common theoretical categories appropriately modified for cross-cultural research. Here, the purpose of the theoretical categories is to make comparisons possible but not to make an assumption that generalizations are necessary or desirable.

An aspect of cultural studies that needs to be mentioned here is a lack of clear distinction between the terms comparative and cross-cultural. These two terms have different origins. I have seen researchers also use the term cross-cultural comparative methods. Comparative study is a disciplinary approach used in sociology and anthropology and goes back to the time of Durkheim (1912/ 1964) at the turn of the century. According to

him, comparative sociology is not a particular branch of sociology, but rather it is sociology itself, insofar as it ceases to be purely descriptive and aspires to be a positivist science. The basic difference appears to be that a cross-cultural study must include at least two different cultures as part of the same field study, although it is possible to conduct a comparative study using a single cultural setting but making comparisons with other cultures using textual information rather than field data.

The term cross-cultural is more recent and is much looser in its orientation.⁵ Cross-cultural comparison originated as a method of generating and testing hypotheses derived from the positivistic paradigms in the social sciences that tend to regard comparisons within a unified framework.

Cross-cultural research spans several basic social science disciplines. Most relevant here are the fields of anthropology, sociology, and psychology, which study, respectively, cultural, societal and social structural, and individual behaviors. Of course, there is a tremendous overlap among the three fields, so much so that Berry, Poortinga, Segall, and Dasen (1992) have argued for the necessity of doing multidisciplinary work. Each of these fields has its own orientation in terms of the subject matter and methods used. Traditionally, cross-cultural psychologists have tended to be very positivistic. Sociologists have tended to be slightly less so, whereas anthropologists have used interpretive methods. It must be recognized that in the Western (North American, to be more exact) academic world, both psychology and sociology, in contrast to anthropology, historically have operated inside a given culture 'and are, therefore, late entrants into the cross-cultural scene. On the other hand, anthropology's focus has always been on other cultures, and, only recently, in fact, have anthropologists turned their attention to the study of their own cultures. See the noted anthropologist Ortner's (1991) *Reading America* for a development of this theme. Because both cross-cultural psychology and comparative sociology appeared on the scene much after these two disciplines had established themselves intraculturally, they have tended to carry with them the epistemological and methodological baggage of their original disciplinary orientations. Typically, therefore, psychologists and sociologists rely on theories and frameworks that are basically unicultural (or, monocultural), and their main research efforts are directed toward the application of their unicultural theories to cross-cultural settings. This has led many researchers to assume that the fundamental properties of behavior must be the same in all cultures, with only situational differences. There have been, however, some recent exceptions to this type of thinking (Berry et al., 1992).

A discipline in its own right, cross-cultural psychology has developed into a major area of inquiry in the past 20 years or so. The founding ideas of the field may be traced to B.B. Whiting and J. W. Whiting (1975) and Triandis and Lambert (1980). For a comprehensive survey of the field, a very good reference seems to be Berry et al. (1992). Applications to the field of management can be found in the influential work of Hofstede (1980) and in the fairly exhaustive theoretical discussion of Erez and Earley (1993). At the risk of simplification, the basic tenets of cross-cultural psychology may be summarized as follows. As the term psychology suggests, the focus of attention is individual behavior or, more specifically, individual psychological behavior, which is

shaped by cultural factors. A major goal of cross-cultural psychology is to "test the generality of psychological laws" (Triandis & Lambert, 1980, p. 3). A similar statement can also be found in Berry et al. (1992), "In essence psychologists seek to transport their present hypotheses and findings to other cultural settings in order to test their applicability in other (and eventually in all) groups of human beings" (p. 3). A derivative goal is to explain whether psychological differences may possibly be due to cultural variations. In sum, cross-cultural psychology studies *individual* human behavior across cultures using psychological theories with the goal of exploring or establishing their universal applicability.

In the field of consumer behavior, cross-cultural researchers typically have followed the approaches of psychologists and, to a much lesser extent, of sociologists. They tend to test monocultural concepts in multicultural settings. Their bias in favor of psychology stems from the dominance of consumer psychology in American academe.

Another type of studies that cross-cultural consumer researchers undertake can more accurately be described as cross-national comparisons. Such studies are more common in economics and the policy sciences. Examples include standard economic studies involving different national economies, World Bank reports, and multinational investment reports in which the focus may be on such variables as gross national product (GNP), sales and turnover, disposable income, and so on—these variables presumably being objective measures that need no cross-cultural translation. Here, although the researchers deal with various macroissues that are local in nature (e.g., lack of education, poverty, health standards, etc.), the approach is structural and not cultural. Obviously, there are situations in which uniform methods and measures are appropriate. Unfortunately, many economically oriented consumer studies are conducted without regard to the intrinsic values of the questions studied. In such studies, categories are reduced to noncultural or quantitative idioms. Poverty is studied abstractly as a condition related to or in terms of lack of education, educational programs, infrastructure, adequate housing, subsistent wages, and so forth. In these studies, seldom does one find researchers studying poverty phenomenologically: The object of their study may be poverty, but it is never poor people. In particular, economists trained in the neoclassical tradition cannot deal with the whys and wherefores of their questions, either in historical or cultural terms, and they avoid, therefore, culture-theoretical explanations.

CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR

Until recently, very few serious research articles on cross-cultural research have appeared in consumer research journals and publications.⁶ Nevertheless, the recent surge in activity suggests an important beginning in this area.⁷ The work of Russell Belk must be acknowledged as among the most significant so far in cross-cultural consumer behavior. Other recent work on comparative consumerism has provided an exposure to various consumer trends in major parts of the world. Recent published research has focused on a variety of settings—affluent Asian cultures, such as Japan (Anderson & Wadkins, 1991; Sherry & Camargo, 1987), Korea (Ko & Gentry, 1991), and Hong Kong

(Tse, Bells, & Zhou, 1991); developing Asian cultures, such as India (Joy & Dholakia, 1991; Mehta & Belk, 1991; Venkatesh, 1994; Venkatesh & Swamy, 1994) and China (Tse et al., 1991); developing African cultures (Belk, 1988); and emerging Eastern European markets, such as Romania and Turkey (Ger, Belk, & Lascu, 1993) and Poland (Witkowski, 1993). There also has been frequent mention in the press during the past 2 years of marketing and consumerist-oriented developments in these societies. The general theme pursued in these articles and popular studies is one of how these different cultures are adopting Western-style consumeristic tendencies while trying to retain their traditional and indigenous value systems.

In analyzing the developments across these different regions, two approaches can be seen. The first approach points to the commonalities in these developments that warrant generalizations regarding global consumer trends. The other approach emphasizes the peculiarities of each region with a reminder that there are deep-seated differences in the way consumer trends are unfolding and, therefore, that superficial similarities may hide real cultural differences. I believe that there is some truth in both positions. It is in this context of both similarities and differences that the present analysis is carried out.

Typical cross-cultural research studies involve a comparison of two countries or regions (sometimes more), usually the United States (or Canada) and another country. The following are some examples of recent studies: Europe and Turkey and the United States (Ger & Belk, 1990); Romania and Turkey (Ger et al., 1993); Canada and Germany (Rudmin, 1990); and the United States and the Netherlands (Dawson & Bamossy, 1990). Rudmin (1990) used cross-cultural psychological methods to study German and Canadian data on motivations for ownership. The scales and constructs he used were developed in the North American context and then applied to the German data. Interpretations of the results were based on theories developed mostly by American social theorists, Dewey and Mead. One could argue that Canada and Germany are comparable because they share Eurocentric perspectives and, therefore, that it is not necessary to take into account differential cultural norms and behaviors. This is a matter for further investigation in cross-cultural work.

In Dawson and Bamossy's (1990) study, the issue of materialism is examined with reference to the Netherlands and the United States. This study is similar to Rudmin's in terms of the positivistic methods used. Nevertheless, there is a clear differentiation in the interpretation of results on the basis of the different historical and sociocultural forces prevailing in these countries.

Ger and Belk's study (1990) involves a comparison of samples from the United States, Europe, and Turkey on the construct of materialism. The scales were developed in the American context and then adjusted, as deemed appropriate, for use with other samples. In the first half of the study, Ger and Belk discussed the methodology and scale construction in a manner similar to the two studies cited above. Their work, however, does contain a very detailed discussion of the results from the cultural standpoint. They examined the results and accounted for the differences and similarities using cultural arguments.

If I were to rank these studies in terms of cultural absorption (the term as it is used here connotes neither positive nor negative value), Rudmin is the least culturally absorptive, and Ger and Belk, the most. The cultural arguments in Ger and Belk's study, however, are presented only to interpret the results, not to illuminate their study's design. Had Ger and Belk examined the notion of materialism in different cultural settings, perhaps the very character of their research would have been different. By that, I mean that materialism as has been handed down in the North American context has a certain history to it and is embedded in its own cultural processes. Unless one examines this sociocultural context, the term *materialism* may not represent the same meaning in another context. Although Ger and Belk's study is certainly very significant in terms of the cultural discussion provided, I wonder if their results would be the same if they had discussed the cultural origins of the categories they used for their comparisons.

Why Ethnoconsumerism?

Why ethnoconsumerism? And why now? As mentioned earlier, the study of ethnoconsumerism follows the intellectual tradition of the comparative research methods and cross-cultural studies. The debates and issues of comparative studies are numerous and will not be repeated here. Nevertheless, some important issues need to be elaborated. One of the early approaches to cross-cultural studies is due to Ralph Linton (1945), who dealt with the notion of *modal personality*. A modal personality is one that occurs in a society with a certain empirical regularity and mirrors, in general, patterns of social interactions and work. It is Linton's argument that the individual's identity is constituted by his or her culture. This is a much stronger argument than the one that holds that culture merely influences the individual's behavior. In terms of consumption practices, the stronger argument is reinforced in a sociocultural-historical analysis carried out by Norbert Elias (1982) through his work *The History of Manners*. His is a clear demonstration of how the European culture, although undergoing changes of its own over a period of 400 or 500 years, created its own cultural product, the modern European individual as we know him or her today. Essentially, Elias's work deals with the I-We balance of individual behavior, in which I refers to behavior that is individualistically derived, and We refers to behavior that is collectively and culturally derived. The sliding between I-We is at the heart of the issue in any cultural analysis. Durkheim (1915/1965) also raised the idea of collective consciousness to signify the notion that individuals survive in shared environments of experiences, events, and meanings.

Echoing the issues raised by some of these early cultural theorists, ethnoconsumerism forces researchers to look at the individual not just as an individual but as a cultural being, as a part of the culture, subculture, and other group affiliations. It is the study of the consumer (his or her personality, cognition, and mental constructs) and the values systems, symbolic belief systems, rituals, and everyday practices all interwoven into a holistic view of the consumer. More precisely, the ethnoconsumerist approach is multilayered:

1. The study of the cultural (symbolic and belief systems, norms, and ritualistic practices)

2. The study of the social (social organization, social institutions, etc.)
3. The study of the individual (personality, cognition, behavior, mental constructs, etc.)

THEORETICAL RATIONALE

It is generally recognized that those social sciences whose focus is the study of various cultures across the globe have developed from Western epistemology— or, more specifically, from American epistemology—and that the cultural realities of the subject culture do not contribute to the theoretical categories but only to the content of research. (Incidentally, this is generally true of the field of marketing and consumer behavior.) This has led to certain disenchantment within some circles. In recent years, it has developed into a major debate in the social sciences. One of the first major thinkers to join the critical side of the debate was Clifford Geertz (1983), who addressed this question in his seminal work "From the Native's Point of View." He has influenced not only his own field of anthropology but also the social sciences in general. The debate has gone on in anthropology for several years, with Marcus and Fischer (1986) evincing one of the more provocative dimensions to the debate. The field of anthropology has been most concerned with these issues, primarily because its whole focus is the study of other cultures.

It is in this context that McKim Marriott's (1990) notion of ethnosociology as a framework for the study of different cultures is very appropriate. In line with Marriott's proposal, I propose a framework that I *call ethnoconsumerism* to study consumer behavior in different cultures. The arguments presented by Marriott for developing the field he called *ethnosociology* are very instructive and are stated here. Because his work is on India, his reference point is India. But the arguments he raises are applicable to other contexts well.

1. The social sciences as practiced in India today have developed from thought about Western, rather than Indian, cultural realities, and therefore cannot be used effectively to frame questions for which the answers lie in Indian realities and institutions. Therefore, we need social sciences that deal with Indian realities.
2. All social sciences, Western or otherwise, are ethnosocial sciences. All are parochial in scope.
3. Because thought originating outside of Europe and America has not yet been recognized as social science, the world has had to manage thus far with ethnosocial sciences of only one limited type—Western.
4. The term *ethno-* must not be viewed as a backwater of the social sciences but as an existential or definitional condition.
5. As a result of the above, the application of Western categories, such as "individuals," "social structures," "kinship," "classes," "rules," "oppositions," "solidarities," "hierarchy," "authority," "values," "ideology," "sacred," and so forth, risk imposing an alien ontology and epistemology on those who attempt an analysis of a particular culture.
6. Similarly, many Western conceptual distinctions simply cannot be transported into the framework Indian thought. Example of these distinctions include Marx's "material base and superstructure," as well as Durkheim's "sacred and profane," Levi-Strauss's "nature and culture," Weber's "class and status," and so forth. This is because Indians have their own conceptions of the connections between matter, actions, thoughts, and words, and these are imbued with certain relational properties that are not commonplace in Western thought.

EXAMPLES OF ETHNOCONSUMERISM

Here, I will briefly discuss different studies that illustrate various points I have raised about ethnoconsumerism. This is meant to be not an exhaustive critique of the studies but a look at them exclusively from the point of view of ethnoconsumerism. The first study, by Yau (1988), is based on his doctoral dissertation. Yau provided a detailed historical analysis of Chinese values dating from the Confucian and Buddhist periods. Given the fundamental belief systems prevailing among the Chinese, he argued that the notion of consumer satisfaction, its expression, and the consequent action would be totally different from a typical situation in the West. Because of a particular value concept known as *yuarn* (karma), the Chinese are less likely to blame the product when it fails and are apt to attribute such product failures to their own fate. Although Yau engaged in a discussion of Chinese value systems, the theoretical or classificatory framework is the value-orientation model developed by Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961). This model is introduced not at the level of categories but at the level of the overall framework itself. Thus, the framework includes such fundamental orientations as man-nature, man-himself, relational, time, and personal activity. This framework is at a higher order and, hence, is more fundamental than Hofstede's (1980) categories (individualism and collectivism, etc.) that are already culturally derived and so do not permit easy translation into a cross-cultural setting.

In a series of studies, Belk and Pollay (1985; Pollay, 1986, 1988) jointly, and singly have discussed the cultural value systems as derived from advertising in the North American setting. Clearly, the cultural values extracted from an examination of hundreds of ads from a 60-plus-year period reveal that these values are fundamental to American cultural life and have found their way into the consumer culture. Belk and Pollay's work can be considered a good example of ethnoconsumerist research. Essentially, one can interpret their work to mean that American consumer culture has its own ethnological dimensions and that the mainstream American culture provides an example of an ethnically constituted culture that holds Protestant, Eurocentric values. Once we consider these cultural values as ethnoconsumeristic, by implication, we would be treading on shaky ground were we to apply the same set of values in cross-cultural contexts without regard to the substance of the cultures in question.

Consider, for example, a value that is very basic to American culture: materialism (the American version). Its historical roots are in a combination of evangelical idealism, individualism, exceptionalism, Protestantism, and the capitalist subversion of asceticism. In discussing materialism, one cannot ignore its origins and treat the concept purely synchronically. When Ger and Belk (1990) chose to study materialism in Turkey, one asks, out of necessity, what the roots of materialism are in the Turkish context. Is there anything analogous to American materialism? If not, would it make sense to use a cultural category so fundamental to American culture, in which materialism is regarded as its basic defining character? I do not think one can transport a cultural category without regard to its historical context. This is not to say, however, that Turkey is not materialistic or that it could not become materialistic. I am also fully cognizant of the fact that human history is full of examples of cultural categories that have been

transported cross culturally and taken root in their new settings. Buddhism in China and Christianity in Scandinavia are cases in point. Similarly, food habits have been transported across cultures: Tea drinking among the English did not become prevalent until much after British colonial contact. Nevertheless, a discussion of the historical, sociocultural roots is very essential in this type of research. The point I raise regarding Ger and Belk's work is to question not its overall insights and fruitful cultural analysis but an aspect of it that has relevance to my discussion of ethnoconsumerism.

Geertz's work on caste in Bali (as analyzed in Howe, 1987) has shown that there are some crucial differences between Bali and India in the study of caste systems, although both are Hindu societies. Although Balinese culture borrowed heavily from the Sanskritic culture of India, its social structure has no Indian influence and is similar to the Indonesian social system. Thus, an intercultural comparison of caste would not produce meaningful results, whereas a study of Hindu religious rites would. Another example is the sacred-profane dichotomy, which originally was developed by Durkheim and was adopted more recently by Belk, Wallendorf, and Sherry (1989) in their work. A comparison of India and the United States on the sacred and the profane dimension would present quite a few problems. In the American culture, the terms *sacred* and *profane* are used as semantically similar to *good* and *bad*. As Veena Das (1987) has noted, in the Indian context an argument has been made that "the dichotomy of sacred and profane which dominated the Durkheimian sociology of religion has very little relevance in the Hindu context, since these are not antithetical in Hindu belief and ritual" (p. 114). Alternatively, to the extent that sacred and profane represent a dichotomy, Das argued that *sacred* refers to life (or purity) and *profane* refers to death (or impurity).

Clearly, what I consider to be the best example of an ethnoconsumerist approach to consumer behavior is the recent work by Arnould (1989) on innovation diffusion and preference formation in the Nigerian culture. Arnould directly confronts the applicability of Gatignon and Robertson's (1985) framework, which has received a lot of attention in the consumer behavior literature. He began with a sociocultural and historical analysis of consumption in Zinder, dating from the precolonial era. From a historical analysis, he proceeded to give a contemporary structural perspective of Zinder society. Here, the focus is on the impact of market-mediated exchange on the consumption schemes of a traditional society. Using both macro (world systems) and micro (everyday transactions) theories of behavior, plus a descriptive analysis of the current economic order, Arnould is able to demonstrate the challenges inherent in applying Western (North American) theories of consumer behavior in a non-Western setting. Two of his conclusions are most instructive:

Analyses of Nigerian data demonstrate the need to reconstrue the constructs employed in diffusion of innovations research for non-Western cultural contexts Innateness and emulationist theories underlying the standard diffusion of innovation models are shown to be ethnocentric, thereby lacking explanatory power in alternate contexts. (p. 262)

By systematic study of particular macro-economic, social-structural, political, and cultural variables, the process of preference formation, innovation, and the diffusion of innovation can be elucidated. (p. 263)

A final study that is central to my own work here is de Pyssler's (1992) cultural analysis of the adoption of two-wheelers (motor scooters) in India. This is one of the most fascinating pieces of writing to, appear in a consumer research publication. The study is at the intersection of what de Pyssler called *political economy* and *cultural economy*. Perhaps because it appeared in conference proceedings, it does not go into the depth of analysis that Arnould's (1989) article displayed, but it provides substantial evidence of what an ethnoconsumerist study could be. De Pyssler has provided a clear-sighted, historical analysis of the technology itself, its design, and its cross-cultural semiotics. After a discussion of the transformation of the meaning of the motor scooter in different cultural settings (Italy, Britain, and India), the article provided a narrative analysis of what *scooter* means to various Indians. The first part of the study accomplishes exactly what a cultural analysis is supposed to do, that is, de Pyssler took the subject's point of view in regard to a technology that was basically alien to the Indian scene at the time of its introduction more than three decades ago. Then the focus shifts to how Indians have adapted themselves to this technology, giving it a meaning wholly different from that given it by the Italians or the British. What is an elegant feminine icon in Italy becomes a technology of the rebel (punk rock groups) in England but in India is viewed as a utilitarian family vehicle. Here one does not impose the cultural categories of meanings from outside but generates them from the cultural ambiance of the setting. From the point of view of ethnoconsumerist discussion, one problematic aspect of the study comes in the latter half when de Pyssler began to discuss his findings by imposing two frameworks whose origins are Western in nature, McCracken's (1988) and Hebdige's (1988). There is no question about the standing of these two cultural theorists, but one must question why their framework was used to discuss Indian experiences.

SOME GENERAL GUIDELINES TO FOLLOW IN DOING ETHNOCONSUMER RESEARCH

Increasingly, cultural studies are becoming more confusing and confused. On the one hand, fear is growing that the spread of new communication technologies and rampant consumerism introduced by the multinationals may make the world monocultural. According to Appadurai (1990), the global cultural scene is now witnessing two opposing, yet simultaneously occurring movements: the homogenization and heterogenization of cultures. Homogenization represents a submission to global culturalism; heterogenization offers resistance to it. In this melange of cultural juxtaposition, the cultural theorist does not risk elaborating theories of generalization but is quite content to provide comparative descriptions of intracultural themes. Operationally, it does not make sense to put different cultures on linearly measured scales under the assumption that in every culture the scale measures the same phenomenon. Even if it does, do the high and low points of the scale have the same significance in different cultures? The problem stems from the fact that when different cultures are compared, the variable does not have the same ontological property at all points in the scale. Suppose one wants to measure high modernization versus low modernization. One cannot use, say, a measure of the number of Coke cans consumed or television sets sold as the best way to measure modernization. Cross-culturally speaking, one cannot make an assumption that higher numbers and lower numbers of culturally

variant measures are symmetrically related. Thus, there is an acute problem in intercultural studies using similar measures or variables.

I have already discussed Geertz's analysis of the caste system in Bali and India and also the difficulty in applying Durkheim's sacred and profane distinction to the Indian situation. Neither warrants repetition except the point that one must be careful when pursuing cross-cultural or ethnoconsumerist analysis on the basis of measures developed in monocultural contexts.

Without meaning to suggest a full-fledged technique for conducting ethnoconsumerist research, in the following I suggest some guidelines for performing a cultural analysis. A cultural analysis is essential for developing an ethnoconsumeristic understanding of a given culture.

1. First, identify the cultural framework.
2. From the cultural framework, derive cultural categories.
3. Interpret and provide meanings for cultural categories.
4. Establish relationships between cultural categories.
5. Identify and investigate relevant cultural practices and pertinent socioeconomic trends.
6. Identify relevant cultural objects and establish meanings.
7. Describe the consumer environments of interest and describe specific' consumer behaviors. Interpret both the consumer environments and behaviors using the categories and *their meanings*.
8. Interpret findings in a way that the reader understands that, ultimately, the interpretation is based on the researcher's own perspective.

Here are some explanations to the terms used in the previous guidelines. A cultural framework represents a theoretical structure on the basis of cultural categories derived from two key elements: the *field view* and the *text view*. The field view is a descriptive account of current practices, subjective impressions and statements of people living within a cultural group, a record of relevant cultural symbols, and descriptions of relevant domains of experiences. The text view refers to historical-sociocultural themes of the culture embedded in texts, local histories value systems, and archival sources. Cultural categories are theoretical concepts that are specific to the culture under study. Cultural categories must be carefully articulated and focused. They should also have relevance to the consumer environments that are included in the study. All cultural categories have meanings associated with them, and these meanings are generated internally within the culture and cannot be imposed externally from outside.

A key point to remember is that researchers who want to pursue ethnoconsumerist research need to combine two basic requirements of research: (a) knowledge of cultural texts and material and (b) in situ fieldwork or some equivalent. Doing only fieldwork, as ethnographers do, is not sufficient because cultural practices have origins and histories that cannot be evaluated purely on the basis of current practices. Nor can a researcher hope that fieldwork can be meaningfully substituted by data-gathering efforts, administering questionnaires to crosscultural convenience samples. This practice has become so rampant as to raise important questions regarding the validity of such studies. Furthermore, although the "native's" point of view is clearly important in this type of

work, sometimes the natives may not have a good understanding of the historical origins of their practices. In these cases, the researcher has to rely on other material, such as cultural texts, archival information, commentaries, and other written documents. Studying cultures cannot be reduced to "naive empiricism." Cultural patterns may display universal attributes and/or idiosyncratic patterns relative to other cultures, but the researcher should not be looking for either of these situations but instead be accommodating both possibilities.

Ethnoconsumerism in the Indian Context

FOUR QUESTIONS ON CONSUMPTION IN INDIA

With apologies to Ramanujan (1990), I ask the following four questions:

- Is there an Indian approach to consumption?*
- Is there *an* Indian approach to consumption?
- Is there an *Indian* approach to consumption?
- Is there an Indian approach to *consumption*?

To the first question the answer is, there was an Indian approach to consumption, which has changed over the years because of a variety of influences. This question is a historical one. The question addresses the issue of how consumption patterns have varied or changed over time and of what the nature of consumption culture is now compared to in the past.

The second question requires an answer that there is more than one approach to consumption in India, depending on the region and cultural group one is studying. It is, however, possible to imagine an Indian approach to consumption.

The third question attempts to elicit the answer that there may be something uniquely Indian about consumption that will not be found in non-Indian settings. The answer to this question comes from a cultural analysis of everyday practices, symbolic systems, value orientations, and behaviors arising from them. This question is central to the spirit of ethnoconsumerist approach.

The last question raises the issue of whether something called *consumption* is itself a historical construct, a product of industrial revolution in much the same way production is. In other words, is it appropriate, in the context of consumption, to include cultures that have not been an essential part of modern industrial history? Can the production-consumption nexus as conceived in the capitalist ethos, critiqued by Marx, appropriated by 20th-century socialism, and theorized by Weber be applied legitimately to India? The answer to this question is not a simple yes or no, for although countries such as India did not directly participate in the early industrial history of the world, they were forced, as victims of colonial expansion, to play a role in the world industrial development.

With this background to the problematic of consumption, I shall now discuss a specific application of ethnoconsumerist approach to India. Interested readers may refer to some additional work of mine relating to India (Venkatesh, 1994; Venkatesh & Swamy, 1994).

AN ETHNOCONSUMERISTIC APPROACH TO HOUSEHOLD TECHNOLOGY

Adoption and Use

I shall give an illustrative account of the ethnoconsumerist approach to a study that I conducted recently in India. My research project was concerned with issues relating to the adoption of household technologies by Indian families. My earlier work dealt with similar issues in the American context (Venkatesh, 1985; Venkatesh & Vitalari, 1992). The site selected for my recent study was the city of Madras in southern India.

The aim of the study was to document and critically analyze the uses of modern household technologies by Indian families and their experiences with them. I addressed two main research questions in this study: How do people relate to everyday technologies of the household as cultural objects, and what are the social implications of the relationships that people develop with respect to those technologies? Thus, the approach taken here may be called a sociocultural analysis of technological adoption and use.

The focus of analysis was at the microlevel, or the level of the household. I was more interested in the role of technology in the daily lives of the people, or the relationship between people and technologies from a cultural perspective. Such a cultural understanding of technologies has not been the subject of systematic research, although in the past some contributions to this field had come from the works of Spicer (1952), Foster (1962, 1969), and a few others. More recently, Singhal and Rogers (1989) conducted important research on the diffusion of television and VCRs in India with implications for the popular cultural practices in Indian communities. A similar study was undertaken by Manuel (1993) to study the impact of cassette technology on popular music in North India.

To explore the research issues concerning household technology adoption in India, I have developed an ethnoconsumerist framework consisting of four major components: (a) the cultural context, (b) modernization in the Indian context, (c) the rising consumerism in India, and (d) the technological context. These I describe briefly in the following sections.

The Cultural Context

Anyone studying India cannot take it merely on its face value. No amount of fieldwork will yield important insights into India unless this is also accompanied by a cultural understanding that can be obtained only by a knowledge of the secondary sources. A society that has an uninterrupted history dating back to more than 3,000 years has strong cultural and historical roots that cannot be easily unraveled but must be understood

nevertheless. In this seamless web of complexity, one has to pick a few important threads as a way to gaining meaning into the cultural presence of India.

Indian Cultural Ethos. The basic cultural code of Indian life can be conceptualized in the following terms: (a) its social structure (caste hierarchy and extended family system), (b) the role of religion (both as a spiritual doctrine and as a way of life) and the cosmic role of the individual, and (c) pluralism in life patterns and experiences. From the Western point of view that emphasizes material order, Indian society might appear to be full of contradictions, juxtapositions, and irreconcilable internal differences. As Veena Das (1987) and Marriott (1990) have pointed out, much of what goes by the name *Indian* culture has strong religious roots. Any researcher who wishes to gain a true understanding of the cultural categories will benefit by becoming familiar with the essence of the sacred texts that, in the Indian context, are philosophical discourses that codify much individual and social behavior.

In the West, religion stands in opposition to science, to rationalist thought, and, in fact, to modernity, which is the defining philosophical and cultural position of the West in the last 400 years. Science and religion are understood in oppositional terms, science representing the materiality of life and religion representing its spiritual dimension. Such a distinction is totally absent in Hinduism and in Indian culture, in which spiritualism and materialism are not considered opposites. In fact, Indians believe that the material world and the spiritual world belong to the same realm of experience. Indians do believe in the notion that life can be both spiritual and materialistic at the same time without any implied antagonism. Similarly, the concept of secularism, another Western idea, is totally absent within the Indian cultural scheme except as a borrowed idea from the West. Indians either ignore secularism in their daily lives or wear it like a necessary garb in dealing with the West.

Indians believe that objects have symbolic meanings at three levels: aesthetic, functional, and spiritual. In contrast, the Western notion of the objective world extends to its aesthetic and functional dimensions only. Significant about the Indian experience is the spiritual coloring that is readily accorded to material objects. This is an important part of the Hindu cosmology and must be given serious consideration in the study of Indian consumer culture.

One of the first things to be learned from India's sociocultural history is the role of religion in the daily life of Indians. Hinduism, which is the primary religion of the country, is not an organized theological movement but represents a way of life that has evolved over many centuries. Hinduism represents a complex system of daily practices, rituals, beliefs, and symbolic patterns that overlap various aspects of social life. From cosmological doctrines that define how the physical and spiritual world is constituted to more mundane aspects of life, Hinduism provides the framework to understand all these matters.

Another aspect of Indian cultural life has to deal with time. Time is neither historical nor chronological. Time is essentially cyclical. Similarly, birth and death are not

considered two finite events but two stages in one's continuous existence. Thus, the time before birth and after death have concrete meanings for many Indians. Because of this, the individual experiences take on different meanings because the Indian is prone to establish associations with people dead and gone.

The implications of Indian cultural ethos to the adoption of new technologies needs to be investigated if one believes that technology should be viewed as part of the cultural system. Although I establish in a separate research monograph what bearing the socioreligious character of Indian culture has on the adoption of technologies, my intention in this chapter is to demonstrate that a cultural analysis of technology adoption necessarily implies that to derive appropriate cultural categories, one has to have a sound understanding of the cultural ethos of India.

Modernization in the Indian Context

Technology adoption is clearly linked with the issues of modernization. Modernization is generally viewed both as a process and as an end-state (Schnaiberg, 1970). Schnaiberg investigated the change process occurring through modernization, especially in the context of the family or the household. On the basis of some previous studies, he noted that there is a hypothesized shift from an extended family system to a nuclear family system, consonant with individual mobility (social and geographic). He further postulated changes in the structure of production and consumption functions at home, declining importance of primary groups, greater dependence on impersonal resources (e.g., media) for information, and decline in religious involvement. Schnaiberg conducted a study of 803 Turkish households in the city of Ankara and evaluated them on six dimensions: media usage, extended family ties, declining religiosity, nuclear family role structure, environmental orientation, and production/consumption orientation. Because the study was conducted in a "developing" country, the findings are broadly applicable to the Indian situation. Schnaiberg found that all these dimensions were correlated with modernism. At the theoretical level, it means that even in non-Western societies, the process of urbanization and modernization and the impact of new technologies will grossly parallel the developments in Western industrialized societies. One should not forget that there could be exceptions to this. For example, Iran's recent history indicates that modernization over the years had the opposite reaction of pulling the country toward religious formalism.

In the Indian context, the early work of Srinivas (1966) is very relevant to the present study. Srinivas discussed social change in terms of Westernization, industrialization, urbanization, and secularization. Westernization results in the introduction of new institutions (elections, newspapers, etc.) and modifications to old institutions. It introduces such things as Western technology, clothing, eating practices, and scientific and rationalistic viewpoints. Modernization is related to Westernization. It is a general term that includes Westernization, industrialization, and secularization. Countries may prefer the term *modernization* to Westernization because it does not have the negative connotation of having to give up what is good within the indigenous culture. Vajpeyi's (1982) research explored the attitudes, opinions, perceptions, and beliefs of the Indian

elites toward modernization. His findings showed that the Indian elites supported the idea of social change through modernized developments as long as the traditional value system was not negatively affected. In many non-Western societies, modernization has become a value-laden term because its main challenge lies in the discovery of relevant ideology. The urge for modernity is commingled with the urge for identity. In India, the dominant cultural values are hierarchy, holism, continuity, and transcendentalism. There is a fundamental socioreligious outlook in which religion and personal life are neither separate nor antagonistic. Singer (1972) has discussed vividly what happens when a traditional culture such as India modernizes.

Rising Consumerism in India

Consumerism is used here in the sense of the development of consumer-oriented tendencies, marked by the availability of a variety of manufactured consumer goods and active advertising of the products in various media. Part of the rising consumerism in India may be cast in the general context of global tendencies in consumerism. Recent work suggests that global diffusion of consumerism has been aided by the expansion of multinationalism, the diffusion of telecommunication and satellite technologies, the general dissatisfaction with socialist political regimes, and emerging economic successes in East Asian countries. Certainly, recent moves in India echo these developments.

What is happening in India may also be described in postmodern terms. Indian development does not follow standard chronological sequences observed in some Western societies. Models of social change do not follow any known patterns of change. Modernist methods found in the conventional social sciences have limited value when the objective is to capture change in non-Western cultures. This is because modernist thinking is regimented, very rationalistic, and (pseudo)scientifically oriented. Postmodernist thinking accommodates nonlinear thinking and is open-minded when it comes to alternate or nonorthodox patterns. For example, some new technologies in India are diffusing faster than some old technologies. So, one cannot use the historical progression of the West as a model to study India. The Indian consumer scene is replete with what might be misinterpreted by the modernist to be contradictions and the juxtaposition of opposites (and therefore, non-natural), but in reality they represent highly symbolic modes of behavior, much of which must be understood within the Indian cultural framework.

In sum, I have identified 13 different factors to describe India as an emerging consumer society. Although these factors are not to be considered exhaustive, they are representative of the movement of India toward a consumer-oriented society. The factors are:

- A burgeoning middle class, its changing values, and pent-up consumer demand
- Changing women's roles, women's labor participation, and the changing structure of the family (Liddle & Joshi, 1986; Sharma, 1986; Wadley, 1977)
- Rising consumer aspirations and expectations across many segments of the population

- increased consumer spending on luxury items aided by past savings and the introduction of the credit system
- New types of shopping environments and outlets
- Media proliferation, satellite and cable television, and the thriving film industry
- Media sophistication and familiarity with English language among media people and a wide segment of the population
- High degree of consumer awareness and sophistication across different segments
- The emergence of traveling Indian consumers-immigrants in the United States and England, overseas workers, tourists, and professionals-and their exposure to worldwide consumer products
- Strong domestic consumer goods manufacturing sector
- Resurfacing of hedonistic cultural elements after centuries of dormancy
- Entry of multinational corporations into India
- The emergence of the rural consumer sector

The rising consumerism as reflected in the above factors are hypothesized to have considerable impact on technology diffusion and adoption.

The Technological Context

Underlying Issues. Some of the very early work by anthropologists and archaeologists is concerned with the relationship between technology and material culture (Kroeber, 1923; Tylor, 1878; Wissler, 1929). Using an evolutionist interpretation, they tended to view technologies (such as fire making, cooking, and pottery) in the context of societies advancing from one stage of development to the next. A related perspective on technology has dealt with the issues of diffusion (Rogers, 1962). Diffusion is the process by which new ideas are transferred from one social unit to another within the same culture. Analytically, these approaches regard technologies as an external force acting on the system. Such cause and effect approaches are still used for studying technology and social change.

Televisual Culture. The televisual culture in India is marked by strong consumerism and commercialism. Singhal and Rogers (1989) have already established how influential the television has become as a cultural and entertainment medium. Television reaches the four corners of India as no other technology has done in the country's history. The next development within the context of television is consumer advertising. Consumer advertising is burgeoning with the arrival of satellite TV, or more specifically, Star TV. A mix of domestic and multinational brands are advertised on Star TV, for example, Bajaj scooters, Stayfree sanitary napkins, Pepsi's Hostess Chips, and McDowell Whiskey, to name just a few. The diffusion of consumerism is further accelerated by the sponsoring of sports, concerts, and other entertainment for the public. The participation of industries in the cultural production system is on the increase.

New Technologies. Indian economy is also changing with the advent of new technologies. Ironically, the traditional technologies have not had much impact on Indian consumer. For example, very few of the recent changes in India can be attributed to the telephone or the automobile, both of which have existed in India for a long time. These same technologies have had profound impact on Western industrial economies in the last five decades. The telephone system in India is highly underdeveloped and is run by the

government. It is indeed the object of many jokes and ridicule in India. In the case of automobiles, the impact has been minimal because very few Indians could afford the automobile.

On the other hand, there are some other technologies that have made a difference in Indian life, for example, the motor scooter, the television and the VCR, and other household appliances such as the refrigerator and the cooking stove. The motor scooter and the motorcycle have become ubiquitous because of their affordability and maneuverability. Many young families and individual professionals, both male and female, use motor scooters as personal transportation.

Consumer Technologies/Electronics. Many of the revolutionary changes in India can be attributed to the emergence of consumer technologies. The first effect of this is the access to electronic information and entertainment (Manuel, 1993). More specifically, the electronic media influences tastes in music and increases exposure to various entertainment forms from different cultures. This is also a prelude to what one might call the development of a mass culture society. Another consequence of this electronic technology is the development of the material culture.

India in the Global Technological Context. Four developments have begun to change the general nature of inquiry relative to technology. First, the rise of postindustrialism and information technologies has sensitized researchers to a radically different technological environment that is not amenable to standard modes of inquiry that were originally developed to investigate material technology. Second, the modern technologies have begun to interconnect the world in unprecedented ways, giving a new meaning to the world order. This interconnectedness seems to imply the emergence of a universal language of technology that could potentially bridge cultural differences. Third, the ascendance of Eastern countries such as Japan, Korea, and Taiwan as the producers of modern technologies and the accompanying rapid diffusion of modern technologies within those countries has prompted researchers to view technologies in a nondevelopmental, culture-specific framework. Thus, for the first time in several centuries, the sources of some new technologies are no longer located in the Western hemisphere. Finally, as Appadurai (1988) has pointed out in a different context, countries such as India that are experiencing new levels of material success have begun to view their cultural practices in a selfconscious, self-reflective fashion without using Western yardsticks of what is acceptable and not acceptable.

These developments stand in contrast to the notions of modernization and Westernization, which dominated earlier thinking on the subject (Srinivas, 1966). Previous research on India has dealt with issues of social change occurring because of modernization and Westernization. Although modernization was used as a broad concept dealing with urbanization, social mobility, and new media experiences, Westernization was identified with social and cultural patterns dealing with clothing, eating, language, and the like.

Recent work by Singhal and Rogers (1989) has focused on the cultural shifts occurring within the Indian entertainment scene as a result of the arrival of television and VCRs. The technological diffusion of both television and VCRs has been rather astonishing and cannot be completely explained by economic variables such as disposable income and standard of living. In fact, their diffusion pattern is unlike that of some other technologies such as the telephone, refrigerator, and the automobile. It seems more to do with the patterns of culture than mere economic processes.

One can, of course, venture an explanation to the Indians' adoption of modern household technologies in terms of class ideology and consumption styles, as Appadurai (1988) attempted to show with respect to certain aspects of food consumption. But this is not plausible because the historical role that food has played in Indian culture has no parallel in the adoption of technologies. Nevertheless, it is evident from Appadurai's work and the work of more recent authors that one has to look for a contemporary theme to better explain the various cultural shifts. For example, Singer (1989) has characterized the current Indian cultural scene in terms of "the coexistence of the past and the present" (p. 8). This is in direct contrast to some earlier views that tended to represent past and present in antagonistic and hierarchical terms. Thus; modernization and Westernization were regarded as both superior and antagonistic to traditionalism. This view is beginning to fade because the current research on India seems to suggest that the Indians are shaping their culture in ways different from those of an earlier generation.

With these various factors in the background, the following research questions were raised in the study:

- What role does technology play in the life of the household?
- How is technology viewed symbolically or materially? How does it fit into the rest of the symbolic and material system of the household, and how do technological objects relate to family values and other family possessions?
- How do families accumulate household technologies? In what order?
- What sociocultural significance can be attached to the process of acquiring technologies?
- What concepts of technology do members of the household have?
- How are the concepts formed, and how are they articulated?
- What cultural meanings are attached to technological products?
- How are the technologies used? By whom? With what frequency?
- How are members socialized into the use of technologies?
- How are decisions made regarding the acquisition of technologies?
- To what extent are social and gender roles reflected in the use of technologies?
- What impacts have these technologies had on the life of the household?

These research questions provided the basic structure for the empirical investigation (the field view of Indian consumer culture). The broader theoretical issues (the text view)⁸ emerged from the four major components of the ethnoconsumerist framework discussed previously. Together, these two elements (the field view and the text view)⁸ provided a valuable framework for the research undertaken here.

In conclusion, I have illustrated an application of the ethnoconsumerist approach to the study of technology adoption and diffusion in the Indian context. Four major

components of the ethnoconsumerist framework were identified. Although no attempt was made to establish possible theoretical and empirical connections among the components, some broad relationships were discussed as illustrative of the ethnoconsumerist approach. In due course, more rigorous arguments will be developed and presented. More to the point, however, is the idea that ethnoconsumerism is a new approach to studying consumer behavior both intraculturally and cross-culturally. It has several merits and has the potential for filling an intellectual void in cross-cultural research.

Appendix: A Personal Intellectual Note

This chapter reflects to some extent my own existential condition, being a product of two cultures (or, perhaps, of neither). Recently, I had a chance to do fieldwork in India, and, as must be obvious to some seasoned researchers, I found it difficult to apply to the Indian situation the principles of consumer behavior that I had learned so assiduously in the American academic scene. My general training in the United States has given me the perspective that consumer behavior must be regarded in universal terms—that is, the point of departure for research is the discovery of similarities between different consumer settings, although the differences can be explained in terms of some idiosyncratic variables. The general idea is to impose a universal theoretical framework on different cultural settings, with a proviso that researchers are entitled to expect behavioral differences at the level of practices. The framework is sacrosanct, and the rest is a matter of detail.

For some of the reasons detailed above, I am also guilty of not being familiar with consumer research studies published outside the United States. After being away for a year in India and Denmark, I have become painfully aware of my own intellectual limitations caused by the academic condition in American universities, which is influenced by institutional and structural factors—institutional and structural because the attitude of the American academic environment to external scholarship extends from benign neglect to indifference. Although consumer behavior is a global phenomenon and the impact of American consumer culture is truly global, it is hard to understand how insular (and patronizing) American consumer research scholarship is to scholarship from outside the United States (unless it is modeled after it). By "American scholarship," I do not mean, so much, scholarship produced by native-born Americans scholars but by scholars working within the American institutional environments regardless of their origins. Here I must add that there are many intellectual differences among native-born American scholars who themselves represent many different perspectives. In fact, my main argument in this chapter is inspired by the work of McKim Marriott, an American South Asianist from the University of Chicago. It is also true that many North American-trained scholars, after returning to their home turf, simply apply American approaches to their own research problems.

Finally, although it is not uncommon for scholars outside the United States to read major journals and texts published in the United States, there is very little that goes on in the

other direction. In the study of cross-cultural or comparative research, this shortcoming of U.S.-based researchers becomes an acute deficiency. One can understand, of course, that language could be a major hurdle, but this does not have much face validity because many non-U.S. publications are available in the English language. Parenthetically, one might add, marketing practitioners more than the academics seem to be better grounded and are waking up to the danger inherent in being insular from the social processes in the rest of the world. This does not mean that they do not have their own agendas that may run counter to local needs. .

Notes

1. Because the term native seems to have acquired a negative connotation (although this is not how Geertz used it), perhaps we should consider something more neutral, such as, "the culture's point of view."
2. For a detailed analysis of the notion of culture in marketing, see Costa (1993).
3. In this section, I address the issue of burgeoning interest in ethnic consumption patterns among consumer researchers. Although the topic of ethnicity and the sociopolitical issues are globally widespread and are discussed widely by social theorists in various countries, the specific issue of consumption patterns of ethnic communities as a subject of market economy is not discussed in such detail outside the United States. Perhaps it is only natural-the United States being a consumer society par excellence with a high degree of marketing activism and specialization and a long history of inventing new markets for goods and services-that the consumer angle has first appeared here. It is only a question of time, however, before this spreads to marketing constituencies in other parts of the world and legitimizes the intellectual inquiries of consumer scholars about the consumption patterns of their own ethnic groups. The question of ethnicity has become an important issue with the recent influx of Asian and Latin American immigrants in the United States. The immigrant issue is a recurrent theme in American history, but in the last hundred years, different groups have attracted similar attention.
4. The discussion on description, comparison, and generalization is based on Holy (1987).
5. The most problematic research in this area is by Hofstede (1980), who is one of the most influential researchers today. His work, despite its impact, is not as culturally sensitive as it is claimed to be by him and his supporters.
6. For important contributions to cross-cultural research in consumer behavior, see Tan and Sheth's (1985) edited volume based on the conference in Singapore. See also van Raaij and Bamossy (1993).
7. Emphasis on cross-cultural and comparative studies is also reflected in recent international conferences. Examples include the first Marketing and Development Conference held in Istanbul, Turkey (1987), followed by conferences in Zagreb, Yugoslavia (1989), New Delhi, India (1991), and San Jose, Costa Rica (1993). In 1985, the Association for Consumer Research held its first International Conference in Singapore. The year 1992 seems a key year in this sequence: the first European Conference of the Association for Consumer *Research in* Amsterdam (June 1992), the Conference on Culture and Marketing at University of Odense, Denmark (May 1992), and the First International Conference of *the* Macromarketing Group in Nijenrode, the Netherlands (May 1992).
8. The terms field view and text view are discussed in Veena Das (1987) and are directly adopted here.

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