Situational ethnicity and identity negotiation: 'Indifference' as an identity negotiation mechanism

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Abstract

Purpose: While literature on migration highlights the reshaping of host and immigrant population in countries, there is a paucity of research in marketing investigating the evolving dynamics for acculturation. The purpose of this study is to further our understanding of the emerging phenomenon of acculturation and identity negotiation.

Methodology: Three experiments examined situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation in home and host culture work and social settings. Study 1 and Study 2 were conducted in the United Kingdom, where the host country is the majority population. Study 3 was conducted in United Arab Emirates where the host country is the minority population. Study 4 utilized qualitative interviews in both countries.

Findings: Results from all four studies show that ethnic consumers deploy 'indifference' as an identity negotiation mechanism when the host society is the majority population (UK) and when the host society is the minority population (UAE).

Originality: We offer new insights on identity negotiation by ethnic consumers when the host society is the majority population as well as the minority population. 'Indifference', i.e., preferring to neither fit in nor stand out as an identity negotiation mechanism, is deployed in work and social settings of home and host societies. We also advance existing literature on acculturation by examining whether independent and interdependent self-construal influence identity negotiation.

Keywords Situational ethnicity, identity negotiation, majority and minority population, mixed methods research

Paper type Research paper

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The interplay of ethnicity, identity, and social contexts continues to garner interest amongst marketing scholars (Cleveland and Xu, 2019; Dey et al., 2019). The question of how immigrants construct, present and preserve their identity in different cultural and situational settings requires continuous examination as migration grows globally. In the marketing literature, situational ethnicity has been acknowledged as an important boundary condition for understanding identity negotiation and consumer behavior. "Situational ethnicity is premised on the observation that particular contexts may determine which of a person's communal identities or loyalties are appropriate at a point in time" (Paden 1970: 268, cited in Okamura 1981) and is differentiated from self-designated ethnicity and felt ethnicity. Self-designated ethnicity is defined as "the ethnic group an individual belongs to" and felt ethnicity as "how strongly the individual identifies with that group" (Stayman and Deshpande, 1989: 362). Situational ethnicity is identified as a better predictor of a person's behavior and consumption choices for identity formation and negotiation (Kakkar and Lutz, 1981).

International migration continues to grow globally with an estimated 258 million migrants, representing 3.4 percent of the world population (Connor and Krogstad, 2018). This growth has created new and stratified consumer segments across different geographic markets and an increase in multicultural marketing initiatives to make brands meaningful to ethnic and race subgroups of target markets. Examples range from Procter and Gamble's 'the talk' advertising campaign, 'calling all creatives' campaign of diverse celebrities by Adidas, Nike's swim hijab and collaboration between LVMH and Rihanna for the Fenty collection. Such migration, international marketing and consumption trends highlight a continuous examination of the evolving social contexts, situation ethnicity and identity negotiation.

Extant literature on consumer ethnicity has evolved from the early acculturation model (Berry et al., 1989) to plural and contingent identities adopted by immigrants (Demangeot et al., 2015; Sekhon and Szmigin, 2011), consumer ethnocentrism and cosmopolitanism (Cleveland and Balakrishnan, 2019; Zolfagharian et al., 2017). More recent research has examined the multi-directional acculturation strategies adopted by immigrant consumers in multicultural societies (Dey et al., 2019; Kizgin et al., 2018) and the rise of territorial identities in a multiethnic society (Stöttinger and Penz, 2019). These studies indicate that ethnic identity formation and negotiation is a dynamic process. Although marketing literature investigating ethnicity, identity and acculturation continues to evolve and enrich, it does so on a set trajectory. Across these studies, the research setting remains firmly one where the host country is the majority population. Literature on migration and inter-cultural studies acknowledges the reshaping of majority-minority population structures (Crul, 2016) resulting in conditions where the host society is sometimes the minority population and immigrants are the majority population. However, there is an absence of research in marketing that examines identity negotiation and consumption when the host society is the minority population.

The role of situational ethnicity in the acculturation process of immigrants in host societies has been well documented by Dey et al. (2019), Sekhon and Smizigin (2005), Xu et al. (2004). This body of research identifies fitting in and standing out identity negotiation mechanisms adopted by

immigrants in the host society. However, in non-marketing literature, indifference is uncovered as a professional identity negotiation mechanism (Lemmergaard and Muhr, 2012) and consumer segments indifferent to food choices (Onwezen and van der Weele, 2016). In these studies, indifference is defined as "adopt a neutral attitude" (Lemmergaard and Muhr, 2012:192) and "do not find the issue important and do not have clashing moral principles or thoughts" (Onwezen and van der Weele, 2016: 98). Therefore, in addition to fitting in and standing out, does indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism exist for consumption and acculturation? If it does, then how and why do immigrant consumers deploy such an identity negotiation mechanism in relation to situational ethnicity?

Extant literature on consumer ethnicity also shows that the formal nature of work environment influences identity formation and negotiation differently to identity formation and negotiation in a social setting (Ramarajan, 2014; Ramarajan and Reid, 2013). While extant research offers substantial insights on identity negotiation in either social setting or in work setting, such identity negotiation is largely examined in isolation. Thus, a need for simultaneous examination of identity negotiation in work and non-work (i.e. social) setting is warranted (Stöttinger and Penz, 2019).

The research presented herein furthers our understanding of consumer ethnicity in evolving societal situations. To that end, our study is guided by the research objective to examine the relationship between situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation, a) when the host population is the nation's majority, and b) when the host population is the nation's minority population. Our research, comprising of three experiments and qualitative in-depth interviews is conducted across two countries. The first research setting is in United Kingdom (UK), where immigrants make up 14 percent of the population (Office of National Statistics, UK, 2017) and hence the host society is the majority population. The second research setting is the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where immigrants constitute 88.5 percent of the population (Global Media Insight, 2020) and therefore the host society is the minority population. We use a mixed methods research approach to enable a rich understanding of situational ethnicity and identity negotiation and luxury brand consumption as the context. Prior research on situational ethnicity and acculturation has relied heavily on food as a context, since it is ethnically cued (Dey *et al.*, 2019; Xu *et al.,* 2004). By examining luxury brands as a context, we further affirm the role of conspicuous consumption for prestige-seeking behavior by immigrants (Mo and Wong, 2019; Charles *et al.*, 2009).

Our study provides important contributions to the acculturation literature. *First*, we identify indifference i.e., preferring to neither fit in nor stand out as an identity negotiation mechanism deployed by ethnic consumers, given the uncertainty around adoption or rejection in the host society. The finding appears consistently across both scenarios of host country as majority and minority population respectively. Such a finding is a distinctive departure from prior studies that have found identity mechanisms geared towards either fitting in or standing out in the host societies as acculturation strategies. *Second*, we find that indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism is deployed in social as well as work settings of home and host societies. Such a finding reinforces the stability of indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism. *Third*, our study is also the first to examine identity negotiation in a host country with minority population. In doing so, our study makes an important contribution to understanding acculturation in evolving societies. Collectively, the research findings not only uncover a new identity negotiation mechanism but also provide a nuanced understanding of situational ethnicity and identity

negotiation in contemporary societies.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses development

2.1 Fitting in, standing out and indifference as identity negotiation mechanisms

Self-categorization theory (Turner *et al.,* 1987) argues that people define themselves at individual and group levels. The salience of a particular group identity is based on how accessible a categorization is to an individual, and how well it fits the social context (e.g., bearing in mind what the individual wants to achieve with their behavior, or what they did the last time they were in that situation). Tajfel and Turner (1979) argue that when category distinctions are salient, people perceptually enhance similarities within the group ('we're all much the same') and enhance differences among the group ('we're different from them'). The phenomenon of fitting in is studied in the literature not only in broad societal terms but also in terms of acculturation and organizational fit (Goldberg *et al.*, 2016). Masgoret and Ward (2016:59) define fitting in as sociocultural adaptation "…to negotiate interactive aspects of life in a new sociocultural milieu."

In contrast, individuals may seek to differentiate either as need for uniqueness (Tian *et al.,* 2001) or to distance themselves from undesirable identities (Berger and Heath, 2007). Oakes *et al.* (1991) suggest that self-categorization occurs based on the reflection of the individual influenced by the group norms (Hornsey and Jetten, 2004; Postmes and Jetten, 2006). People cognitively represent their social groups in terms of prototypes and modify their salient self-category depending on the comparative context. Such a change reflects identity negotiation not only at the group level (social identity) but also describes the attitudes, emotions and behaviors based on a particular context (personal identity).

The binary model of identity negotiation in terms of fitting in or standing out has been a central tenet in the literature. However, a third form of identity negotiation mechanism, i.e., the stance of indifference has been discussed in a very small number of studies in psychology, management and food choices. Given the limited discussion of the phenomenon in the management literature and absence in marketing and international marketing literature, we first delve into the origins of the phenomenon before discussing the empirical studies on indifference.

The term 'principle of indifference' was coined by Keynes ([1921] 1979) to codify the notion long established in probability theory. Williamson (2018) offers three versions of the principle of indifference in increasing order of strength, i.e., loss, expected loss and worst case expected loss, and the justifying role of the principle of indifference in minimizing and avoiding the three versions of loss. Scott (2007:70) argues indifference as a dimension of life that "sets the mind apart from its own beliefs [but does not] eliminate them …not one of disbelief, but of impartial non-belief". Other philosophers argue that, if we have no grounds for preferring one outcome over any other, then indifference is a perfectly valid stance (Norton 2008; Novack 2010).

The philosophical debate aside, indifference has been studied in law (Stevenson and Friedman, 1994), sociology (Stichweh, 1997), theology (Taylor, 1999) and psychology (Ortega *et al.,*2013). Management scholars have also uncovered indifference as a professional identity negotiation mechanism. In a study of prison correctional officers, Lemmergaard and Muhr (2012) discuss how

these individuals use professional indifference as an identity mechanism in the stigmatized work environment of a correctional facility. Lemmergaard and Muhr (2012:192) define professional indifference as "adopt a neutral attitude to their work without losing their personal involvement". Elaborating on the concept, the authors state that the research respondents were "not being indifferent to their own indifference…being acutely aware of it and using it purposefully" (p.192). In consumer research on food choice, Onwezen and van der Weele (2016) identify two sub-sets of indifferent consumers as those who don't care and therefore ignore the issue and those who care but strategically choose to ignore the issue.

The limited research on indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism warrants a deeper examination of the phenomenon. The two positions of fitting in and standing out and their respective choice can have implications on how an individual may choose to position themselves in other settings (Goldberg *et al.,* 2016). However, with the existence of a third identity negotiation mechanism, i.e. indifference, it is not known how it may juxtapose with the fitting in and standing out identity negotiation mechanisms. Furthermore, the implications for situational ethnicity and acculturation are largely unknown in relation to indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism.

Grounded in a systematic review of existing literature on situational ethnicity and identity negotiation, Table 1 provides a summary of key themes and supporting studies guiding our study and positions our research contribution. Our search was conducted with three major electronic databases: Scopus, Web of Science and EBSCO. The database searches covered a period from 1980 to 2020. Table 1 shows that studies examining situational ethnicity and identity negotiation have largely focused on relationships between ethnicity and consumption in social settings and in host countries where the host country population is the majority. This body of research focuses on the effects of social context on the consumption behaviors of immigrant consumers. Studies of consumer acculturation in workplace settings, however, remain scant. Table 1 also highlights a focus on fitting in and standing out as identity negotiation mechanisms deployed by immigrant consumers and reveals that no research has been undertaken on situational ethnicity and identity negotiation in both social and workplace settings where the host country is the minority population.

Insert Table 1 about here

2.2 Situational ethnicity and identity negotiation when the host country is the majority population

Research on identity and consumption reveals the dynamic and evolving nature of identity formation and identity conflicts (Ruvio and Belk, 2018). The cultural conflicts immigrant consumers experience between their home and host country is one example of identity conflict (Askegaard *et al*., 2005; Mehta and Belk, 1991). Immigrants balance their commitment, affinity, and/or self-identification with the culture, norms, and society of origin, i.e., the home culture and society as well as commitment to or self-identification with the host culture and society (Cleveland and Balakrishnan, 2019).

Ethnic identity characterizes an individual's sense of self within an ethnic group, and the attitudes and behaviors associated with that sense (Crul, 2016; Xu *et al*., 2004). Unsurprisingly, ethnic identity is an integral part of the individual's social identity and a vital component of his/her self-

concept (Dey *et al.*, 2019). The construction and preservation of one's ethnic identity through possessions is a feature among immigrants (Cleveland and Bartsch, 2019; Stöttinger and Penz, 2019), as they constantly negotiate their identity between and within their home and host culture groups as an acculturation approach. Known as biculturalism, this model of acculturation argues that an immigrant can adopt values and behaviors of the host culture while simultaneously holding the values and behaviors of the culture of origin (Cleveland and Bartsch, 2019).

Different concepts have been used to describe ethnic consumers' identities. For example, Dey *et al.* (2017) use the term 'contextual acculturation' to describe how socio-economic, institutional and spatial contexts influence acculturation. An individual's interaction with family, religion, society and various institutions leads to their strategy for acculturation and determines to what extent home cultural traits are retained and/or the host country's culture is adopted. Jafari and Süerdem (2012) use the concept 'authorized selection' to suggest that individuals, with reference to religion, authorize themselves to justify their lifestyles choices and everyday life practices.

Furthermore, situational ethnicity focuses on the impact of situational contexts on the relationship between ethnicity and consumption choices (Sekhon and Szmigin, 2011). Stayman and Deshpande (1989:361) state "ethnicity is not just who one is but how one feels in and about a particular situation." Different social situations produce different effects on the strength of one's felt ethnicity, and therefore, consumer behavior.

Belk (1975) examined the influence of situational ethnicity on consumption and identified five objective dimensions of situations that drive identity negotiation: physical surroundings, social surroundings, temporal perspective, task definition, and antecedent states immediately preceding choice. Stayman and Deshpande (1989) argued that of the five situation dimensions, antecedent states and social situations are most relevant for examining situational ethnicity. Although research on migration/acculturation branched into newer territories, such as consumer ethnocentrism and cosmopolitanism (Cleveland and Balakrishnan, 2019), hyphenated ethnicity (Luna *et al.,* 2008), and transnational ethnicity (Askegaard and Özçaglar-Toulouse, 2011), there is little advancement of our understanding of whether situational ethnicity still influences identity negotiation. The demographic and social contexts that were the backdrop to studies on situational ethnicity in the 70s and 80s have undergone vast changes. For instance, the percentages of people who are foreign-born across countries have changed significantly. Therefore, there is a need to consistently revisit the identity negotiation phenomenon.

Further, research on situational ethnicity (Xu *et al.,* 2004) focused on ethnic consumers' acculturation in the social environment and studied the phenomenon for food choice behavior in the presence of family, friends and business associates from the host society. Recent research by Dey *et al.* (2019) with ethnic consumers in the multi-cultural environment of London, United Kingdom, presents a spectrum of results on acculturation, ranging from fitting in behavior such as supporting an English premier league football team and watching a football match in the pub (host society cultural setting) to adjustment strategy such as neutral food choices in the company of other nationalities to rebellion against one's own culture such as drinking alcohol and not eating one's own ethnic cuisine.

If situational ethnicity and identity negotiation is influenced by the presence of friends and business associates belonging to the host society in a social setting, whether a similar situation

plays out in a work setting is an unanswered question. As illustrated in Table 1, research on situational ethnicity and identity negotiation in work settings is scant. Following Walsh and Gordon (2008) in the organizational psychology literature, we define work setting as the collection of meanings attached to the self by the individual and others in a work domain that separates itself from other social settings. Research on identity negotiation and formation has alluded to differential identity negotiation in the work and social context and called for further scrutiny (Ramarajan, 2014). Work setting is comparatively more formal involving identity negotiation through the aspects of employee role, tasks performed by the individual and the team members and organizational rituals among others (see a review by Miscenko and Day, 2015) that may differ substantially from a more informal social setting. For instance, Stöttinger and Penz (2019) in their research on territorial identities, uncover ethnic consumers' referring to an affinity to the host culture in the work environment.

In this study, it is proposed that ethnic consumers will demonstrate fitting in behavior when in a social setting with home culture friends and family. This is likely since an ethnic consumer possesses strong emotional and psychological bonds with the home culture (Dey *et al.*, 2019). However, in the work setting, where the host culture participants dominate, an ethnic consumer is likely to act differently based on the normative pressures (Ramarajan and Reid, 2013). To become a part of the mainstream culture, ethnic consumers are likely to adjust their identity in their work setting by standing out from the home culture and fitting in with the host culture (Stöttinger and Penz, 2019). Similarly, when in a social setting with other host culture consumers, ethnic consumers will show fitting in behavior to conform to the majority group (Mo and Wong, 2019). Thus, when interacting with host culture consumers in social and work settings, ethnic consumers will reflect on the felt ethnicity and adjust their social identity by moving away from the home culture. Hence, the following hypotheses are proposed to examine situational ethnicity and identity negotiation:

H1: When the host population is the nation's majority, ethnic consumers will (a) fit in with social setting that reflects the home culture and (b) stand out from work setting that reflects the home culture.

H2: When the host population is the nation's majority, ethnic consumers will (a) fit in with social setting that reflects the host culture and (b) fit in with work setting that reflects the host culture.

2.3 Situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation when the host country is the majority population

Cultural theorists observe that individuals vary along certain value dimensions within and across cultures (Schwartz, 1994). In this regard, an important construct to understand situational ethnicity and identity negotiation is self-construal. Self-construal is defined as a constellation of thoughts, feelings, and actions concerning the relation of the self to others and the self as distinct from others (Singelis, 1994). Self-construal is modeled as a two-dimensional construct that describes distinct aspects within one individual (Markus and Kitayama, 1991) namely, (a) interdependent self-construal and (b) independent self-construal.

Interdependent self-construal emphasizes the self as inseparable from others and social contexts. Such individuals are relatively more interested in fitting-in with others and emphasize harmony

and commonality to a greater degree (Escalas and Bettman, 2005). In contrast, independent self-construal emphasizes individual uniqueness and self-expression (Markus and Kitayama, 1991). For independent self-construal consumers, the inner self is the most significant driver regulating their behavior.

It is important to highlight that these two aspects of the self can co-exist within the individual and get reflected as per the context (Singelis, 1994). Markus and Kitayama (1991) observe that the self-construal can vary across cultures. For example, the motivation for behavior in many Western cultures tends to be individual or independent in nature. On the other hand, motivation for behavior in collectivist cultures tends to depend on the social context and is interdependent. Depending on the extent of cultural contact and the desire to adjust to cultural contexts and groups, individuals would portray distinctive self-construal patterns (Singelis, 1994). Although the effects of self-construal may highlight interesting behavioral similarities and differences, it is unclear as to how an individual with a specific self-construal will negotiate their identity in the work and social setting in home versus host culture.

Based on extant research, predictions can be made regarding how consumer with different self-construal will react. Individuals with independent self-construal who have a higher need to differentiate (Markus and Kitayama, 1991) will not necessarily stand out from the home culture social setting and host culture work setting. Instead, such individuals are likely to maintain a stance of indifference, in order to avoid rejection (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017) from the respective groups in the specific setting. Hence, indifference can be a plausible response, when it will not be a wise strategy to alienate oneself completely (Onwezen and van der Weele, 2016) in a largely unknown host culture. For consumers with interdependent self-construal, the prime motive is harmony and commonality (Singelis, 1994). Hence, they will attempt to fit in with the home culture in social setting and host culture in work setting. Therefore, in order to examine situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation, the following hypotheses are proposed and tested:

H3: When the host population is the nation's majority, ethnic consumers with independent self-construal will be indifferent to: (a) work setting and (b) social setting that reflects the home culture, (c) work setting and (d) social setting that reflects the host culture.

H4: When the host population is the nation's majority, ethnic consumers with interdependent self-construal will fit in with: (a) work setting and (b) social setting that reflects the home culture, (c) work setting and (d) social setting that reflects the host culture.

2.4 Situational ethnicity, self-construal, and identity negotiation when the host country is the minority population

In the acculturation model developed on the study of immigrants in Canada, Berry *et al.* (1989) presented four possible acculturation attitudes adopted by immigrants: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalization. This seminal work shaped the literature on immigrant identity, premised on the host country population as the majority and immigrant population as the minority group. Subsequent empirical research setting for studies on ethnicity, identity and consumption have all followed this pattern, i.e. the host society population is the majority in the research setting.

As evident in Table 1, there has been no study of situational ethnicity and identity negation in social and work settings where the host country is the minority population. There are countries with minority native population and majority of immigrant population. For example, in the Middle East, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have smaller percentages of native population with 30% in Kuwait, 15% in Qatar and 11.5% in the UAE (Worldpopulationreview, 2020). These forms of demographic composition challenge the long held conventional theories on assimilation. Navas *et al.* (2005) identify the influence of both groups (host and immigrant) on each other and the impact of psychosocial and socio-demographic variables. In research of pluralistic social environments, Cleveland and Xu (2019) uncover the use of multi-layered acculturation by immigrants to the host majority culture, immigrant minority culture and global consumer culture. However, there is a paucity of research examining acculturation, consumption and identity when host population is the minority.

Furthermore, in the current study, we hypothesize that where the host culture is the minority, ethnic consumers with independent self-construal will stand out from the host culture in the work and social setting, as the need to fit in will not be acute and it may well be the case for asserting one's self-designated and felt ethnicity (Onwezen and van der Weele, 2016). Whereas in the work and social setting of home culture, they may attempt to fit in since the ethnic consumers are the majority group. On the other hand, ethnic consumers with interdependent self-construal could be indifferent to the host culture in the work and social setting as there is no perceived sense of threat (Grubenmann and Meckel, 2017) given the host population being the minority. Similar to the ethnic consumers with independent self-construal, those with interdependent self-construal will attempt to fit in with their home culture in a work and social setting. Therefore:

H5: When the host population is the nation's minority, ethnic consumers with independent self-construal will fit in with: (a) work setting and (b) social setting that reflects the home culture and stand out from (c) work setting and (d) social setting that reflects the host culture.

H6: When the host population is the nation's minority, ethnic consumers with interdependent self-construal will fit in with: (a) work setting and (b) social setting that reflects the home culture and will be indifferent to: (c) work setting and (d) social setting that reflects the host culture.

3. Research Method

3.1 Overview of studies

We test our predictions across four studies. In study 1, we validate the hypothesis about identity negotiation by immigrants in home and host culture work and social setting. In doing so, we examine the interaction between situational ethnicity and identity negotiation. Study 2 further expands on study 1 by examining the moderating role of consumer self-construal. We test the variations in identity negotiation by immigrant consumers in host and home culture, social and work setting depending on consumers' chronic self-construal. Study 2 provides further robustness check for the findings in Study 1. While studies 1 and 2 are conducted in a country where the host country is the majority population (UK), study 3 examines identity negotiation and the role of self-construal when the host country is the minority population (UAE). In study 4, we offer a more

nuanced perspective on identity negotiation and indifference through in-depth interviews with immigrants in the UK and UAE.

3.2 Study 1: Situational ethnicity and identity negotiation when the host country is the majority population

Method

More than 400 ethnic consumers in Greater London and the Southeast of United Kingdom were contacted over a period of four weeks. This part of the country has the greatest population of immigrants from diverse countries (Office of National Statistics, 2017) and provided a suitable setting for study 1. Overall, 203 responses were received, and 34 responses had to be eliminated from the data set due to incomplete or improper responses, leaving a total of 169 participants (Md_{Age} = 29.80 years; Female = 63%) with an overall response rate of 42.25%.

Prior research has often used food consumption as a research context when researching identity negotiation (Dey *et al.,* 2019; Xu *et al.*, 2004). In this study, the consumption of status goods was used as the context for the field experiments. Many consumers engage in status consumption not just to satisfy material needs but also with a motive to fulfill social needs such as signaling one's identity and group belongingness (Berger and Heath, 2008). Charles *et al.* (2009) found empirical support for the use of luxury brands as visible consumption to signal income within and across races. More recently, Mo and Wong (2019) find evidence supporting the consumption of luxury goods by immigrant Chinese in the USA for acculturation.

Once a participant agreed to join the study, they were given a booklet with an introduction. Thereafter, the participants were asked to list names of luxury brand goods they had purchased for themselves in the past six months. The instrument listed a wide range of luxury product categories for participants to mention the category and the brand purchased within that category. The product categories were identified from a pre-study search in luxury focused magazines and newspapers such as Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, and Financial Times Wealth Magazine.

Next, the participants were given four group choices in the questionnaire (i.e. home culture friends from the social network; host culture friends from the social network; home culture colleagues from the work network; host culture colleagues from the work network). This question aimed to determine the in-group versus out-group association. The participants were asked to identify which group they felt they belonged to, by using a seven-point scale with "not at all" to "very strongly" as anchors. After that the participants completed a series of scale questions indicating the degree to which they felt their fit with each group.

Following Escalas and Bettman (2005), to determine group and brand congruity, the participants were asked to list one brand that was consistent with the group ("In the box below, we would like you to name a brand that is consistent with the home/host, social/work groups that you belong to. This can be a brand that members of the group actually use or it can be a brand that shares the same image as the group"). Thus, each participant entered four brand names, which they identified with each of the four groups mentioned above.

Participants then completed an unrelated filler task designed to reduce potential demand effects.

Afterwards, they were asked to rate the degree to which they had self-brand connections with the four brands they associated with each of the groups (i.e. home culture friends from the social network, host culture friends from the social network, home culture colleagues from the work network, and host culture colleagues from the work network). A seven-point scale was used to measure the responses with "not at all" to "very strongly" as anchors. Scale points 1-3 were used to capture the standing out behavior and scale points 5-7 to capture fitting in behavior. The participants were then asked as to which of the four group choices they had been given earlier, they would generally follow for their purchase of brands. The order of tasks involving group choices, brand consistency with group, self-brand connection was randomized. The participants were debriefed after completing the questionnaire and were thanked for their participation. The entire procedure took approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

The groups and brands were idiosyncratic to each participant and were not of interest for the analysis. The study had a 2 x 2 design, with cultural group belongingness (home vs. host culture) and environment (work vs. social) as within-subjects variables. The participants' fitting in and standing out behaviors were measured using three items anchored on a five-point scale by "strongly disagree" and "strongly agree". The items included: "I belong to this group", "I fit in with this group of people" and "I consider myself to be this type of person" ($\alpha = 0.823$). These items were chosen based on them having the highest item-to-total correlations with the corresponding twelve-item Singelis (1994) scale, as used in previous research (Escalas and Bettman, 2005).

In the latter part of the procedure, the participants were asked as to which of the four groups they would follow for the purchase of specific brands. This procedure served as a manipulation check. Participants rated each item on a seven-point scale with 1="not at all" to 7="very strongly" as anchors. Participants who identified themselves strongly as belonging to home culture social network ($F_{(1,166)} = 22.59$; $p < 0.001$) or home culture work network ($F_{(1,159)} = 11.61$; $p<0.005$), were more likely to purchase brands associated with the specific social group or work group compared to those who did not identify themselves with the above groups. Similarly, participants who identified strongly with the host culture social network ($F_{(1,166)} = 4.64$; $p <0.05$) or host culture work network ($F_{(1,159)} = 9.66$; $p<0.005$), were more likely to purchase brands belonging to host culture social group and work group than other groups.

Results

The model used for analysis was a repeated-measures ANOVA with culture type and environment as independent variables and fitting in/standing out as dependent variables. Both hypotheses 1 and 2 predicted a two-way interaction between culture and environment. A significant main effect of culture ($F_{(1,159)} = 21.48$, $p<0.001$) and environment ($F_{(1,159)} = 18.06$, $p<0.001$) was observed on participants' fitting in and standing out behavior. Additionally, there was a significant interaction effect of culture and environment on fitting in or standing out behavior ($F_{(1,159)} = 7.36$, $p<0.01$). As shown in Figure 1, there is support for hypothesis H1a as ethnic consumers negotiate their identity by fitting in with the home culture social setting. However, they remain indifferent to their home culture in the work setting, therefore H1b is rejected. With regards to H2, it was predicted that ethnic consumers would fit in with their host culture in the work and social settings. H2a and H2b were not supported, as the ethnic consumers were found to be indifferent to the host culture in both work and social setting.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Discussion of results from study 1

The ethnic consumers' need to fit in with their home culture social setting is consistent with prior literature regarding the importance of situational ethnicity. However, the finding about being indifferent to the home culture in a work setting is counterintuitive but unsurprising. Prior research by Charles *et al.* (2009) has shown that ethnic consumers would attempt to favorably distinguish themselves from members of their own communities. Additionally, the finding about being indifferent to the host culture work and social setting is contrarian. The projected attitude of being indifferent is quite a remarkable strategy as fitting in may create issues of social identity threat (Khalifa and Shukla, 2021) that may manifest itself as either acceptance or rejection by the host culture. Such a situation is likely since ethnic consumers cannot be certain about which outcome is possible. On the other hand, standing out from the host culture is likely to cause alienation from the majority (i.e. the host culture), which is also not desirable for the ethnic consumer. Hence, being indifferent (Norton 2008; Novack, 2010) seems to be the optimal strategy for identity negotiation in a host culture dominated setting. These findings offer significant empirical insights relating to situational ethnicity and identity negotiation by extending the work of Stayman and Deshpande (1989).

3.3 Study 2: Situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation when the host country is the majority population

Method

A sample of 500 ethnic consumers was contacted in London, Greater London and the Southeast of United Kingdom. The data collection was over a period of four weeks. A total of 328 responses to the self-administered questionnaire were received. After data cleaning, a final usable sample of 304 (Md_{Age} = 26.14 years; Female = 57.90%) responses was available for data analysis. The survey took approximately 35 minutes to complete.

To check the difference in the degree of self-construal, this study measured consumers' independent versus interdependent self-construal. The participants completed two of the Singelis (1994) interdependent scale items ("I often have the feeling that my relationships with others are more important than my own accomplishments" and "It is important for me to respect decisions made by the group," p.58) and two of the independent scale items ("I'd rather say 'No' directly than risk being misunderstood" and "I enjoy being unique and different from others in many respects," p.44). To differentiate the consumers based on self-construal, first the scores were averaged for both interdependent and independent self-construal items. Then the mean was calculated for both items and each consumer's response on the interdependent and independent self-construal were compared. Those consumers who demonstrated consistency (for example, a consumer showing higher than mean score on interdependent self-construal should have a lower than mean score on independent self-construal) were chosen for the analysis. Participants who were high on both or low on both self-construal scales were eliminated from the dataset. A dummy variable was created identifying these consumers as either having chronic independent or

interdependent self-construal. This exercise reduced the overall usable sample to 228 responses, which included 101 consumers with chronic interdependent and 127 consumers with chronic independent self-construal.

The manipulation check showed that participants who identified themselves strongly as belonging to home culture social network ($F_{(1,299)} = 40.84$; $p < 0.001$) or home culture work network ($F_{(1,299)} = 23.72$; $p < 0.001$), were more likely to purchase brands associated with the specific social group or work group compared to those who did not identify themselves with the above groups. Similarly, participants who identified strongly with the host culture social network ($F_{(1,299)} = 7.80$; $p < 0.01$) or host culture work network ($F_{(1,299)} = 15.27$; $p < 0.001$) and were more likely to purchase brands belonging to host culture social group and work group than other groups.

Results

The model used in the analyses to predict fitting in or standing out behavior was a general linear model that measured self-construal (independent vs. interdependent) as a between-subjects factor, culture type (home vs. host) and environment (social vs. work) as within-subject factors. All the two-way and three-way interactions of self-construal, culture type and environment type were included in the model.

A significant main effect of culture ($F_{(1,227)} = 28.23$, $p < 0.001$) and environment ($F_{(1,227)} = 32.96$, $p < 0.001$) was found on participants' fitting in and standing out behavior and a significant interaction of culture and environment ($F_{(1,227)} = 5.79$, $p < 0.05$). As shown in Figure 2, ethnic consumers negotiate their identity in home culture social setting by fitting in, thus supporting hypothesis 1a. However, hypothesis 1b was not supported, as they are indifferent to their home culture in the work setting. With regards to hypothesis 2a and 2b, ethnic consumers were found to be indifferent to host culture in both work and social setting (see Figure 2) and were therefore rejected.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Hypothesis 3 and 4 implied a three-way interaction of self-construal, culture type and environment. A significant interaction effect of self-construal and environment ($F_{(1,284)} = 4.16$, $p < 0.05$) and self-construal and culture ($F_{(1,284)} = 6.09$, $p < 0.05$) was found. However, the three-way interaction between self-construal, environment and culture was non-significant. Hypothesis 3 was fully supported, wherein, consumers with chronic independent self-construal were indifferent to both work setting and social setting reflecting the home culture (hypotheses 3a and 3b) and work and social setting reflecting the host culture (hypotheses 3c and 3d) (see Figure 3).

As shown in Figure 4, ethnic consumers with chronic interdependent self-construal demonstrated fitting in with the home culture social setting, thus supporting H4a. However, they remained indifferent to home culture in the work setting, thus H4b was rejected. Contrary to the predictions of hypothesis 4c and 4d, ethnic consumers with chronic interdependent self-construal demonstrated indifference to both host culture work setting and host culture social setting.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Insert Figure 4 about here

Discussion of results from study 2

Study 2 reaffirmed the findings observed in study 1 that ethnic consumers negotiate their identity based on the environment and culture setting. The role of situational ethnicity was again seen to be important in the home culture social setting and the strategy of being indifferent was observed to be an important response where the threat of acceptance and rejection was unclear.

As predicted, ethnic consumers with independent self-construal demonstrated being indifferent to both home and host culture in social and work settings. This demonstrates the identity struggle these consumers face as they find themselves unsure of either to fit in or to stand out. While they may want to avoid self-designated ethnicity to demonstrate their independent self-construal, these consumers also want to avoid rejection from home culture peers and hence adopt the strategy of being indifferent. Similarly, to avoid backlash from the dominant group in the host culture, they adopt the strategy of being indifferent.

Study findings also indicate that the need for social identity and sense of belonging through self-designated ethnicity appears to be strong for consumers with interdependent self-construal as they try to be seen as 'one' with the home culture social setting. However, the surprising result was that they tend to remain indifferent to the home culture in the work setting and host culture work and social setting. It appears that in order to avoid rejection within the dominant host culture and to yet maintain harmony consistent with the characteristics of inter-dependent self-construal, these consumers adopt the strategy of being indifferent and maintain a status quo.

3.4 Study 3: Situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation when the host country is the minority population

Method

Study 3 was conducted in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), home to one of the highest immigrant populations globally, where the host country is the minority population. Of the total 10 million population, immigrants constitute 88.5% against the local Emirati population of 11.5% (Global Media Insight, 2020). UAE is a multicultural society with diverse groups of immigrants from Asia, Middle East, Europe and the Americas. A sample of 420 ethnic consumers representing the expatriate population of Asian, Arab, and Western Expats were contacted over a period of eight weeks in Dubai and Sharjah, two of the largest cities in the UAE (and two of the seven emirates). A total of 286 responses to a self-administered questionnaire were received ($Md_{Age} = 26.50$ years; Female $= 56.40\%$; Asian expats $= 25.5\%$; Arab expats $= 37.7\%$; Western expats $= 36.8\%$). Following the same procedure in study 2, ethnic consumers who demonstrated consistency in self-construal scores were chosen for the analysis. Ethnic consumers who were high on both or low on both self-construal scales were eliminated from the dataset. After data cleaning, a final usable sample of 123 ethnic consumer responses was available for data analysis, which included 53 consumers with chronic interdependent and 70 consumers with chronic independent self-construal.

This experiment was identical to study 2 but with additional demographic questions. These included "Were you born in the UAE" in order to determine whether the respondent was a first generation or second-generation immigrant. A second question was added "how long have you been living in the UAE" and the response was captured with the following measures: "less than one year", "one year to three years", "three years, one month to five years", "five years and above". This question provided an understanding of the temporal dimension of change in behavior. The final questionnaire was administered in English and took approximately 40 minutes to complete.

The manipulation check showed that participants who identified themselves strongly as belonging to home culture social network (F $(1,251) = 45.62$; p <0.001) or home culture work network (F $(1,251) = 21.53$; p<0.001), were more likely to purchase brands associated with the specific social group or work group compared to those who did not identify themselves with the above groups. Similarly, participants who identified strongly with the host culture social network (F $(1,251) = 22.10$; p <0.001) or host culture work network (F $(1,251) = 31.70$; p<0.001), were more likely to purchase brands belonging to host culture social group and work group than other groups.

Results

A mixed ANOVA model was used, with self-construal (independent vs. interdependent) as a between-subject factor and culture type and environment as within-subject factors. The dependent variable was fitting in/standing out behavior.

A significant three-way interaction effect was observed (F $(1,121 = 4.16$, p<0.05) and a significant relationship between culture and self-construal (F $(1,121) = 11.07$, p<0.05) was found. Figures 5 and 6 illustrate the results. For H5a and H5b, when the host culture is the minority population, ethnic consumers with chronic independent self-construal fit in with the home culture work setting and social setting. For H5c and H5d, ethnic consumers with independent self-construal stand out from the host culture work setting and social setting. With regards to hypothesis 6, we find partial support. It was observed that ethnic consumers with chronic interdependent self-construal remain indifferent to home culture work setting, thus rejecting H6a. However, H6b was supported as ethnic consumers with chronic interdependent self-construal fit in with the home culture social setting. Further, they remain indifferent to the host culture work setting and social setting, thus supporting H6c and H6d.

Insert Figure 5 about here

Insert Figure 6 about here

Discussion of results from study 3

Responding to research calls for examining identity-based consumer behavior when the host country is the minority population, study 3 examined whether self-construal differs in a cultural context when ethnic consumers are the majority. Results demonstrate that ethnic consumers with chronic independent self-construal stand out from the host culture work setting and social setting and fit in with the home culture work setting and social setting. Results also show that ethnic consumers with a chronic interdependent self-construal are indifferent to the host culture work setting and social setting and fit in with the home culture social setting. Taken together, these

findings suggest that despite the host country population being the minority, ethnic consumers negotiate their identity based on the environment and cultural setting.

3.5 Study 4: Qualitative research

Method

Across the three experiments conducted in two country settings with opposing conditions of host country as the majority and minority population (UK and UAE respectively), indifference emerged as a novel identity negotiation mechanism for acculturation. Bryman (2008) suggests qualitative research can provide explanations for quantitative findings. Hence, a fourth study, qualitative in nature, was undertaken to further examine indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism in social and work settings used by immigrant consumers. We used the principles of explanatory sequential design as a mixed methods research approach (Creswell and Clark, 2018; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009) to examine specific quantitative results. Six in-depth interviews were conducted with immigrant consumers in the UK and UAE, accessed through key informants. Table 2 provides the respondents' profile.

Insert Table 2 about here

A semi-structured interview guide was developed with themes from the quantitative experiments' study, i.e., self-designated and felt ethnicity, situational ethnicity, fitting in, standing out and indifference as identity negotiation mechanisms. The themes were explored for social and work settings across both country contexts to tease out similarities and differences and respondents' underlying reasoning. The interviews were approximately 45 minutes in duration and conducted via Zoom due to the ongoing pandemic. All interviews were video recorded with prior consent of the respondents. The data privacy and security protocols recommended by Lobe *et al.* (2020) were followed. These included setting up the Zoom meetings with passwords provided only to the respondents and video recordings stored on the researcher's computer and not on cloud. The interviews were conducted in English and transcribed by one member of the research team. The initial data coding utilized a set of core codes based on the interview guide topics and the interview data was coded manually under the core codes. Next, a repeated reading of the data under core codes to identify the emergent open codes (based on Strauss and Corbin, 1990). Within and cross-case thematic analysis (Miles and Huberman, 1994) was undertaken for all interviews. Other members of the research team reviewed the cross-case data analysis tables to ensure analysis consistency.

Results

Across both country settings, while the respondents' ethnic background, i.e. self-designated ethnicity forms the foundation of their identity, the strength or weakness of identifying with their ethnic group, i.e. felt ethnicity, varied. Two of the respondents from different ethnic backgrounds provided contrasting views, as below:

> "*I have been an expat for a long time. I still see myself as a Canadian though. I am married to a Brit, who I met here in Dubai.*" [KC, Female, 30s, UAE]

"I have lots of overlaps of identities and it is very difficult to be defined by only the ethnic background. Actually, I have stayed in Western countries way longer than I have stayed in China. So, I connect more to expats from Europe, other parts of Asia and China." [SPU, Female, 40s, UK]

The influence of situational ethnicity on consumption and identity negotiation in social settings appeared to be strong. However, the importance of situational ethnicity was underplayed for work settings in both country contexts.

"The weird thing is that we eat Bulgarian food when I am in a group of international people…because they are fascinated by the different dishes and breads. Bread is a massive thing in my culture. Baking bread in Bulgaria is a ritual…So, I love introducing the culture and the food to my non-Bulgarian friends." [PS, Female, 30s, UK]

"I consider myself a very social person and have a number of different social groups. So like I have a Egyptian-British group, we share the same cultural identity…I do have some British friends…With colleagues in London, they were very diverse, mixed European, couple of British ones, but they were much older. So, it wasn't about culture, it was age. But my friends were German, Polish, from Pakistan." [DK, Female 30s, UK]

"I don't think anyone has ever attached nationality labels to me at work. A lot of people assume that I am not from Pakistan. They assume I am either Turkish or Syrian. It doesn't bother me." [RA, Female, 20s, UAE]

The experiments' results found support for fitting in with one's home culture in a social setting where the host country population is the majority, thereby highlighting the pivotal role of culture. However, with regards to the role of self-construal in influencing identity negotiation, ethnic consumers with independent self-construal did not always demonstrate fitting in behavior. We found consistent data in the qualitative interviews. In the interviews, we first asked questions around respondents' inter-group behavior to determine independent or inter-dependent self-construal, such as, "do you always agree with others or take a stand against something?" We then probed for respondents to share incidents that would be indicative of the self-construal type.

After establishing the respondents' self-construal, we then probed to determine the identity negotiation mechanism deployed in different settings. Our experiments data suggested that indifference is the chosen identity negotiation mechanism by ethnic consumers with independent self-construal in work and social settings of both home and host cultures, when the host nation is the majority population. One of the UK respondents talked about the usage of luxury brands for identity negotiation in a work setting that overlapped with social setting of the host culture. She described how she moved from fitting in towards indifference, as she got older, and moved across professional settings and geographies:

"Business world was flamboyant, flashy. In my 20s and 30s, I was in Washington DC and stayed in a very flashy circle of private jets and yachts. Like, we used to go to breakfast every week and took turns to get the bill, but every bill is a couple of thousand dollars for the group with champagne. There was such an emphasis on brands, not

quality, just name-dropping. I am detached from that circle and find it unnecessary and superficial." [SPU, Female 40s, UK]

The experiments also presented counter-intuitive findings for ethnic consumers with inter-dependent self-construal. They were predicted to demonstrate fitting in with the work and social settings of the host culture when it is the majority population. However, the findings indicated indifference as the chosen identity negotiation mechanism for both work and social settings of the host culture. We found similar evidence in our qualitative research. As a UK respondent with inter-dependent self-construal articulated:

> *"With friends I would care and would either want to fit in or stand out. It is very important for me. Last year I started working as a Lecturer at a college affiliated with the University. I don't know what it is but there I don't care whether I stand out or fit in."* [PS, Female 30s, UK]

Upon probing, the respondent elaborated:

> *"You are not trying to be "British" (double inverted commas by hand gesture). We get it. We like it. But we are not trying to be like "them". If that makes sense."* [PS, Female 30s, UK]

The qualitative findings shed further light on identity negotiation when the host culture is the minority. In the UAE, the Emirati host population is the minority, and the workforce is highly multinational. This implies a three-way interaction, where immigrants negotiate their identity at work with members of the host culture and other immigrant colleagues from their own country and culture as well as colleagues from other countries and cultures. As explained by one respondent, there appears to be a form of national stereotyping at play, which creates an unusual standing out phenomenon:

> *"Because they see you on video call and you look fairer than most people from your community, they assume either Lebanese or Turkish or Syrian. In finance and accounting, because it is numbers they assume everyone to be Indian ...or in admin, they assume the person is from Philippines.. I used to initially think that brands don't matter but when you start going to work and start socializing with new people, you realize that it does matter. You don't have to have the highest of brands but like you can't be earning lot and not spending at all. That gives off a very bad image. And the negative can happen that if someone is not that well dressed, then not as many people begin a conversation with them."* [RA, Female, 20s, UAE]

These findings suggest that the standing out identity negotiation is less about the need for uniqueness and more to do with distancing oneself from an undesirable identity in relation to other relevant social actors.

The two female respondents in the UAE highlighted the twin barriers of culture and language, which limit engagement and interaction with the host country population at work and in social settings. Such limited engagement leads to a sense of indifference in terms of identity negotiation as there is little need or desire for any adjustment on the part of the immigrant consumer:

"The socializing in the workplace is much more professional. The UAE locals are open and friendly to share their culture with you but family is separate. In that sense it is different here. Whereas in Oman I found the locals interacted quite naturally with expats. Maybe it is the size of the population or maybe in Oman the locals are a lot more integrated into the different business sectors whereas, here they are more in the public sector." [KC, Female, 30s, UAE]

"With the majority of locals, I would say that language can sometimes be a barrier. They are very strong with their Arabic language. I cannot speak Arabic like that. They prefer hanging out with people who can speak their language. I am not able to fluently interact with them. So, language becomes a barrier…." [RA, Female 20s, UAE]

When our respondents were probed on how they would describe the culture and language barriers, they were not very concerned and used gestures of nonchalance such as shrugging their shoulders with a smile during the interviews. At that point in the interview, we offered the phrases fitting in, standing out and indifference and asked which one describes best what they narrated. When they chose indifference, we then asked what indifference meant to them:

"Indifference to me means that you don't care. You might think about it or ponder over it but you don't care enough to make an action or a reaction towards it." [RA, Female 20s, UAE]

In contrast, our male respondent speaks the local language Arabic fluently and has greater engagement with the local population and indicated fitting in behavior.

"I am Pakistani, born in Saudi, lived there until 5, then family moved to UAE. I am a Dubai and England kid. Always get asked so many questions… why I look a certain way (I have Irish ancestry), my accent (which is Newcastle accent), why I haven't changed my passport…I can speak Arabic and have Emirati friends. Yes, we have similar interests on how we want to carry ourselves, dress. It is about liking something, the brands and the spending power and this also connects us. We are comfortable in the group. I sometimes even wear the Kandora [the long male robe]" [RR, Male 20s, UAE]

In contrast, the same individual highlighted a different facet of indifference, towards his own home culture.

"My parents are Pakistani. I speak the language, but I cannot connect with the culture. I feel like an outsider. At Uni (in the UAE), with Pakistani students, didn't find myself connected to that vibe or the culture. It's not negative." [RR, Male 20s, UAE]

Discussion of results from study 4

The narrative above details how the qualitative findings reinforce the experiments' results. The qualitative findings not only establish the underlying explanation for indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism but also a nuanced explanation on facets of indifference. We now have concrete evidence on indifference as a phenomenon within marketing literature.

4. Discussion

4.1 Theoretical Contributions

Acknowledging changing demographic and socio-cultural milieu, our research examines situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation among immigrant consumers in two opposing settings of host country as the majority population and minority population. The results from three experiments and qualitative in-depth interviews make several substantive contributions to the migration/acculturation literature.

First, we respond to research calls for simultaneously examining identity negotiation in social and work settings (Ramarajan, 2014; Stöttinger and Penz, 2019). Results from the experiments and qualitative research show that ethnic consumers need to fit in with their home culture social setting but are indifferent to their home culture work setting, host culture work setting and host culture social setting. We demonstrate that identity negotiation of ethnic consumers is influenced by both culture and environmental settings.

Second, we uncover indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism against the rigidity of the binary model of identity negotiation. Prior research has suggested that in societies where the host country has majority population, ethnic consumers try to either fit in or stand out (Berry et al., 1989), create plural and contingent identities to balance their identity and cultural needs in home and host culture settings (Sekhon and Smizigin, 2011; Askegaard et al., 2005) and use a combination of territorial identities at the national, regional and home country levels (Stöttinger and Penz, 2019). Our study makes an important contribution to understanding acculturation by identifying indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism, where ethnic consumers neither reject nor accept acculturation. When there is uncertainty about acceptance or rejection by the host society, i.e. social identity threat (Khalifa and Shukla, 2021), indifference is a better coping mechanism than standing out, as the latter would lead to alienation. Indifference may be deployed as an identity negotiation mechanism if the ethnic consumer is unsure of continuing to reside in the host country, perhaps in a state of acculturation liminality (Mitra and Evansluong, 2019). Some of these ethnic consumers may also be in a situation akin to sojourning, which is not a long-lasting life stage in the host country, and therefore indifference is a choice. The robustness of our findings regarding indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism is confirmed in both situations, i.e. when the host country is the majority population (UK) or minority population (UAE).

Third, by acknowledging that situational ethnicity and identity negotiation are contextual phenomenon, we examine the effect of independent and interdependent self-construal on fitting in and stand out behavior. A unique insight emerging from this study relates to ethnic consumers with independent self-construal. When the host society population is the majority, these consumers remain indifferent to home and host culture work and social settings due to their independent self-construal. However, when the host country population is the minority, there is a desire to assimilate with the home culture social setting, thereby, reinforcing the role of culture in identity negotiation, in line with prior research (Dey et al., 2019; Cleveland et al., 2011).

Finally, we offer novel insights on identity negotiation by ethnic consumers when the host society is the majority population as well as the minority population. Researchers have argued that the binary oppositions of home/host can undermine theoretical robustness (Askegaard *et al.*, 2005). Our research disagrees with this stance in the extant literature. Prior research on acculturation has been premised on the home/host binary opposition where the host country population is the majority. To the best of our knowledge, our study is a first examining acculturation when the host country population is the minority. Indifference as an identity negotiation mechanism emerges as a consistent finding across the three experiments and qualitative research in both settings of host country population as majority and minority. Thus, we reinforce the importance of social and cultural context in framing consumer responses.

4.2 Managerial Implications

From a managerial perspective, our findings underscore the importance of situational ethnicity and identity negotiation when targeting immigrant populations. This is particularly relevant for retailers and advertisers. For instance, in luxury retail, sales advisors regularly ask how the customer is planning to wear/use the product to offer relevant guidance. In such situations, strategies targeting immigrants should extol the virtues of ethnic consumers and be adjusted depending on the culture (home/host) and environment (work/social). Within the advertising context, when the host country has the majority population, rather than showing fitting in every time, communicating indifference could be an interesting approach to create salience among ethnic consumers. On the other hand, in countries where ethnic consumers are the majority, different retailing and advertising strategies for identity negotiation may be warranted. For example, to achieve assimilation into the home culture social setting, managers should communicate fitting in behavior for consumers with an independent and interdependent self-construal. In contrast, to achieve assimilation into the host culture work settings, communicating standing out behavior using the luxury brand could be effective for consumers with an independent self-construal. Such strategies allow retailers and advertisers to go beyond the standard segmentations and employ an integrative socio-demographic (i.e., ethnicity, social/work setting) and socio-psychographic (i.e., self-construal) segmentation, highly representative of their customer groups.

The role of luxury brands in identity negotiation by ethnic consumers in social and work settings was prominent in our qualitative interviews. Luxury brand managers can draw upon these insights in several ways. For instance, luxury brands increasingly have celebrity brand ambassadors from ethnic backgrounds. Lupita Nyong'o endorsing Lancôme and Miu Miu, Salma Hayek for Pomellato-Kering, Pharell Williams for Chanel, Aishwarya Rai endorsing Longines in India and Jackson Yee endorsing Tiffany in China are a few examples. Celebrities from ethnic backgrounds endorsing luxury brands enable the brands to reach consumers in particular geographic markets such as China and India and specific ethnic communities such as African Americans and Hispanics.

However, there is a notable absence of models from ethnic backgrounds in the digital and retail promotions strategies of luxury brands in countries of high immigration where the host population is the majority, such as UK. Using models or influencers from ethnic community backgrounds would enable luxury brands to make a deeper connection with the ethnic consumers in these markets. In multicultural markets with minority host country population, such as the UAE, it

would be worthwhile for luxury brands to engage with a combination of celebrities, famous personalities and influencers in order to reach diverse consumer segments. Some interesting current examples include high-end Indian jewelry brands having brand endorsements by Bollywood personalities targeting the South Asian diaspora and UAE's Etihad Airways using Nicole Kidman as a brand endorser targeting the Caucasian origin expatriate population. Additionally, the luxury brands' storytelling can depict different work and social settings to demonstrate the brand's potential for consumers' self-brand connection and thereby, facilitating in-group connection. Doing so would also enable luxury brands to overcome some of the cultural hurdles in these markets by building integrative identity positions that align with the immigrant cultural mindset. Such strategies may also increase the use of these luxury brands for identity signaling and for other expressive purposes.

5. Limitations and future research directions

This study is not without limitations and viable prospects for further research remain. The findings were derived from the study of expatriate consumers belonging to different nationalities and aggregated at the overall level. Future research should aim to construct bigger datasets of ethnic consumers of different nationalities in a country and examine cross-cultural differences between these sub-groups. Doing so would deepen our understanding of the impact of culture and self-construal on situational ethnicity and identity negotiation, when ethnic consumers are the majority in a multicultural host society. Navas et al. (2005) posit that in a changing landscape where host societies are the minority population, both host and immigrant groups are likely to influence the acculturation process. An engaging future research direction would be to examine perceived social identity threat for the host country population when they are the minority group. Such a study will generate insights about the macro- and meso- level forces shaping ethnicity and wellbeing proposed by Visconti et al. (2014). Dey et al. (2019) demonstrate novel adoption behaviors employed by ethnic consumers including rarefaction and refrainment. Future studies should further examine these behaviors in comparison to indifference.

As societies become increasingly heterogeneous, the need for refreshing our understanding of situational ethnicity and identity negotiation deepens, in order to reassess acculturation mechanisms. This study casts new light on the phenomenon and uncovers indifference as an alternative acculturation mechanism being deployed by present day ethnic consumers, in settings where the host population is the majority and when the host population is the minority group. In doing so, this study has taken a vital step in revitalizing research on situational ethnicity and identity negotiation. The findings of this study set out an agenda for further examination of the phenomenon in a changing migration landscape.

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Table 1. Summary of research on situational ethnicity and identity negotiation

Study	Authors	Research Approach
Laboratory study of consumption choices of Chinese American and Mexican American consumers in the US	Stayman and Deshpande (1989)	Quantitative: Survey IV: Self-designated ethnicity and antecedent state MED: Felt ethnicity DV: Food consumption behavior MOD: Product type and social surroundings
Field study of the consumption experiences of Mexican immigrants in the US	Penaloza (1994)	Qualitative: Ethnographic study using interviews, photographs and artefacts.
Field study of the consumption experiences of first-generation Haitians in the US	Oswald (1999)	Qualitative: Ethnographic study using participant observation, interviews, field trips, written questionnaires and group interviews.
Field study of Asian American young adults in the US	Xu et al. (2004	Quantitative: Survey IV: parental acculturation level, parental cultural identification, ethnic friendship orientation MED: Ethnic identity DV: Cultural-specific consumption behavior MOD: Situational influence
Field study of first- and second-generation Korean Canadians	Cleveland and Chang (2009)	Quantitative: Survey IV: Ethnic identity media consumption, values, interpersonal relationships and language DV: Materialism and Religiosity
Field study of mainland Chinese, American and Chinese-American consumers	Mo and Wong (2019)	Qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (survey) IV: American culture-orientated values, Chinese culture-orientated values, self-improvement values DV: Luxury value perceptions MOD: Consumers' level of cultural adaptation, level of consumer interaction, level of cultural maintenance

Field study of British Black Caribbean graduate employees	Kenny and Briner (2013)	Qualitative: Interviews
Field study of British South Asian adults	Dey et al. (2017)	Qualitative: Interviews
Field study of first- and second-generation immigrants in London	Dey et al. (2019)	Qualitative: Interviews, observations and photographs
Field study of Turkish ethnic consumers in Austria	Stöttinger and Penz (2019)	Qualitative: Interviews
Field study of immigrants in the UK (host country majority population) and the UAE (host country minority population)	**This Study** *Extends literature by identifying 'indifference' as an identity negotiation deployed by ethnic consumers in situations when the host country is the majority population and minority population*	Experiments Qualitative: Interviews

Figure 1. Study 1: Situational ethnicity and identity negotiation when the host country is majority population (Hypotheses 1 and 2).
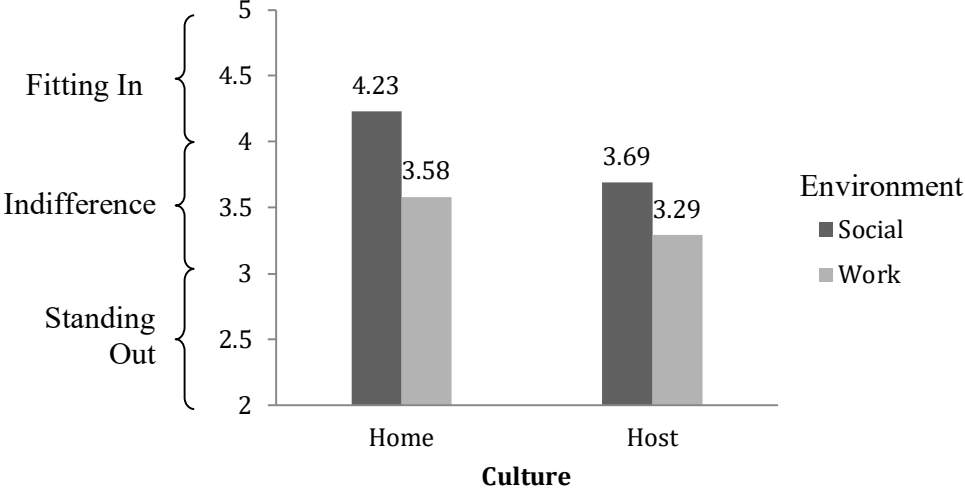
Figure 2. Study 2: Situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation when the host country is majority population (Hypotheses 1 and 2).
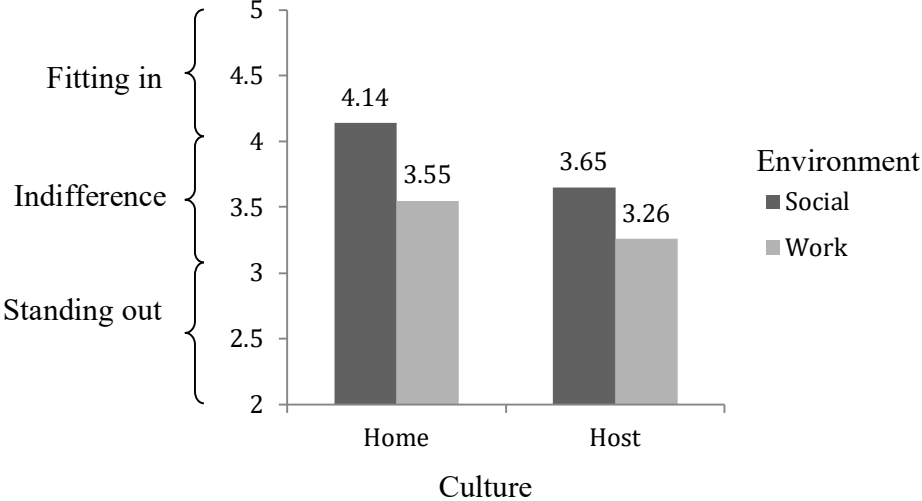
Figure 3. Study 2: Situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation when the host country is the majority population (social setting)
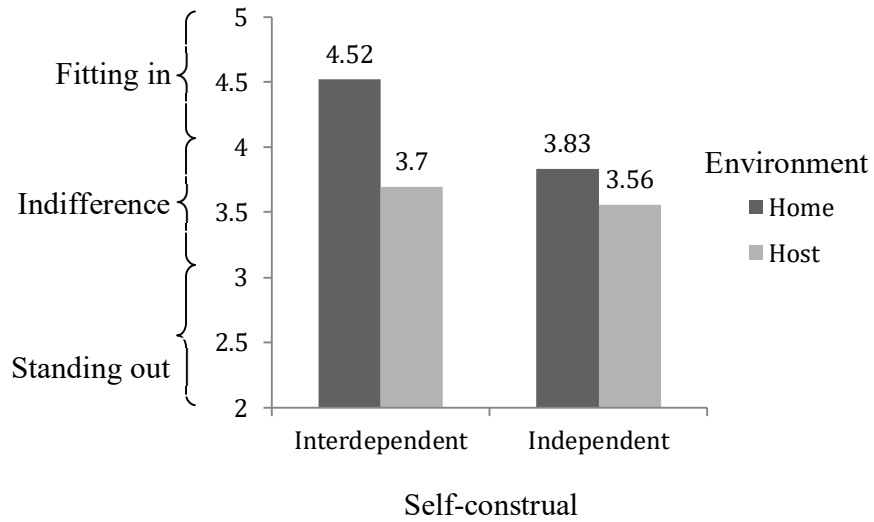
Figure 4. Study 2: Situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation when the host country is the majority population (work setting)
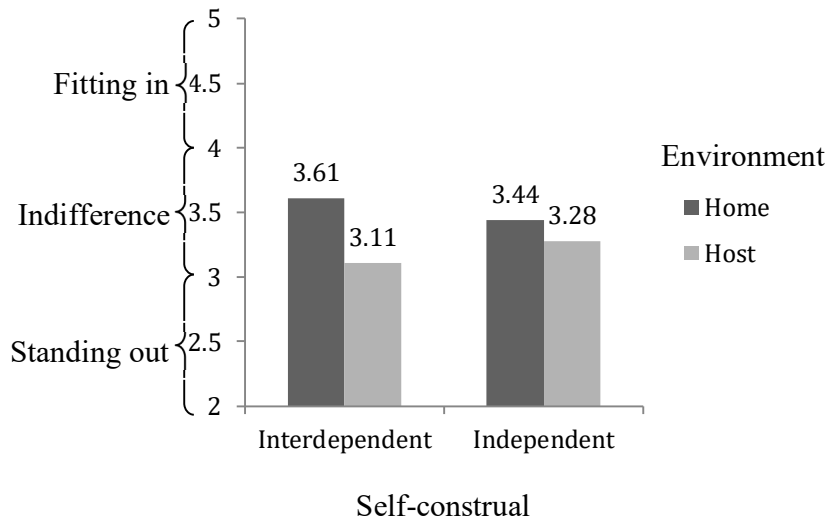
Figure 5. Study 3: Situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation when the host country is the minority population (social setting)
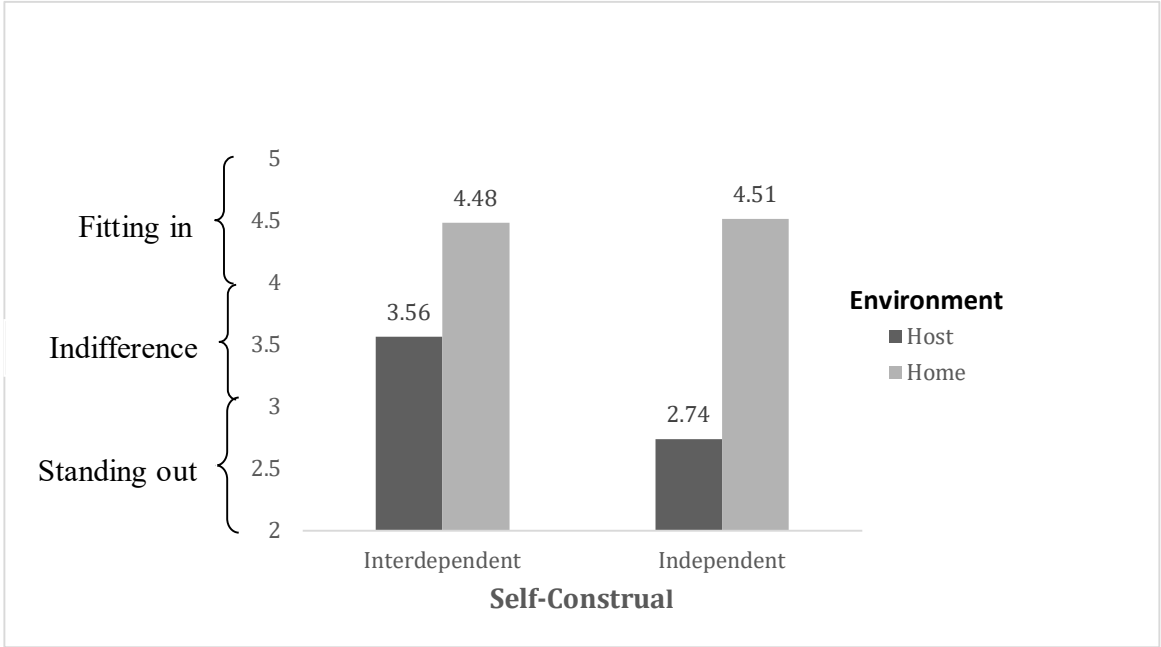
Figure 6. Study 3: Situational ethnicity, self-construal and identity negotiation when the host country is the minority population (work setting)
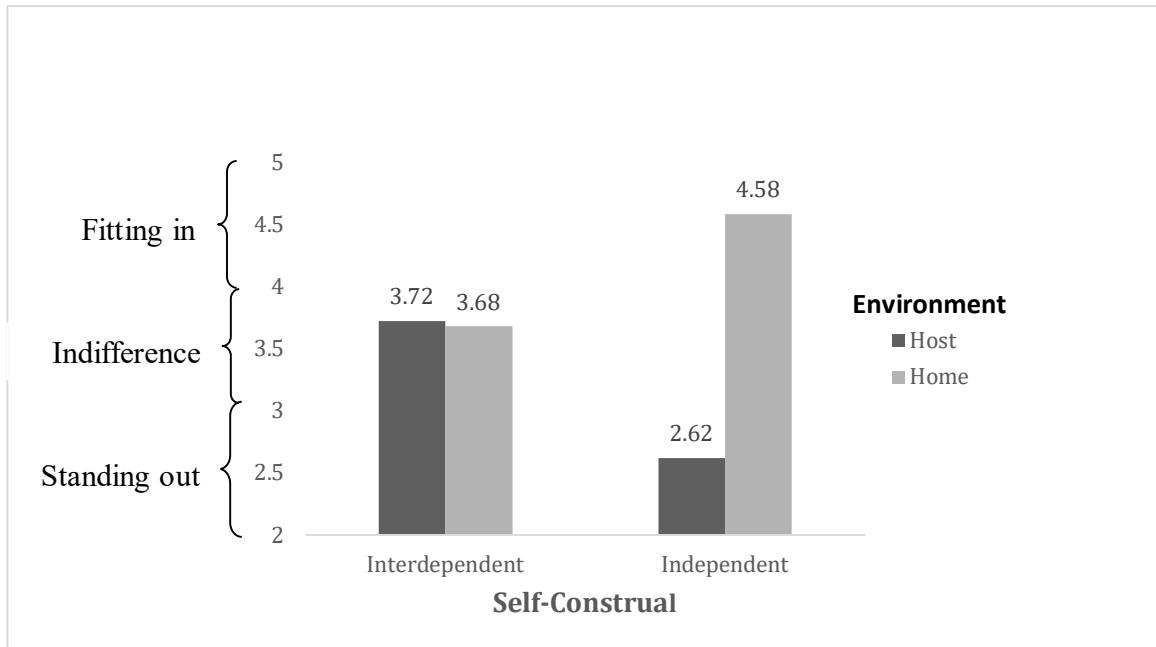
Table 2. Study 4: Qualitative research respondent profile

Interview and country setting	Respondent	Gender	Age range	Number of years residing in the current country	Country of Birth	Occupation	Highest education level
1 UAE	KC	Female	30s	15	Canada	HR Professional	Masters
2 UAE	RA	Female	20s	21	Pakistan	Marketing Executive	Masters
3 UK	PS	Female	30s	09	Bulgaria	University Faculty	Ph.D.
4 UK	SPU	Female	40s	08	China	International Business Development Officer	Masters
5 UK	DK	Female	30s	08	Egypt	Social Sciences Researcher	Ph.D.
6 UAE	RR	Male	20s	20	Saudi Arabia (Pakistani parents)	Marketing Executive	Undergraduate