Minority marketing students' perceptions of international groups: implications for international marketing efforts

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ABSTRACT

With the expansion into international markets, U.S. businesses that are genuinely committed to diversifying their workforce incur challenges when identifying globally prepared minorities. Cultural barriers, such as the belief that they will be discriminated against, have impacted minority students' willingness to participate in experiences, such as study abroad, that will prepare them globally for careers. Given these cultural barriers, do significant levels of social distance by minority business students, particularly exist toward international groups? From a social distance context, this study examines how minority students perceive international groups. By knowing and understanding the target audience, value-added strategies can be developed that will successfully reach the target audience. The researchers provide a unique contribution to business education by assessing where these minority students are culturally and how business educators can help to target those students who may need more knowledge and instruction regarding the benefits of cultural awareness and global preparedness for culturally diverse business environments.

Keywords: International Marketing, Global, Social Distance, Minorities, Culture

INTRODUCTION

More than half of the revenue for U.S. corporations such as Apple and Google comes from international markets (Kelly, 2015). Yet, multinational companies face challenges in finding adequately prepared workers (Slaughter & Tyson, 2012). This issue is further heightened when U.S. corporations that are committed to diversifying their workforce, incur difficulty in identifying globally prepared minorities (McGiffert, 2014a).   Accrediting agencies, such as the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB International), the top accrediting body for collegiate business schools worldwide have also made note of this growth by emphasizing globalization and multiculturalism assessment in the business curriculum (AACSB, 2014). Despite the infusion of globalization and multiculturalism in business education, challenges may exist in reaching minority marketing majors. A primary example is study abroad participation. Study abroad for minority students attribute to them learning a second language, being more accepting of other cultures, and being more comfortable with new and challenging experiences (Gasman, 2010). But minority students lag in the participation of study aboard experiences. In 2002/03, only 5.1% of Latino students participated in a study abroad experience. In 2012/13, 7.6% of Latino students participated in a study abroad experience, a growth of 2.5% across a 10-year period. For African American students, 3.4% participated in a study abroad experience in 2002/03. In 2012/13, 5.3% of African American students participated in a study abroad experience, a growth of only 1.9% in a 10-year period. In 2012/13, 76.3% of Caucasian students participated in a study abroad experience (Institute of International Education, 2014b).

So why is there such a gap in the participation of African Americans and Latinos in global experiences such as study abroad? The primary reason is financial barriers (Hembroff & Rusz, 1993; McGiffert, 2014a; 2014b). To address this barrier, financial resources have been funneled into various international opportunities. But there are also cultural reasons, such as the lack of travel experiences and apprehension of overseas travel, fear of discrimination, and that international travel and study has not traditionally been a part of minority students' culture, which thereby impact minority students' willingness to participate in global experiences (Brown, 2002; Hembroff & Rusz, 1993; McGiffert, 2014a; 2014b). If minority students are in fact willing to participate in global experiences such as study abroad, they typically select regions where they have a cultural affinity. For African American students, such regions include Africa or countries such as Brazil due to their large Afro-Brazilian population (McGiffert, 2014a; Penn & Tanner, 2008). Latino students prefer to study in Spain or countries in Latin America (McGiffert 2014a).

Given the cultural barriers that hinder minority students' willingness to participate in global experiences such as study aboard and the industry need for more globally prepared business graduates, the researchers wanted to examine the cultural profile of minority marketing majors and their level of social distance toward international groups. Their level of social distance is examined across the following domains: previous contact, social willingness, knowledge, and affect. With the continued global growth in international marketing, it is imperative that marketing programs know their students from a global context. By knowing their audience, marketing educators can reevaluate

their global initiatives while working to promote greater student participation and global preparation, particularly among minority marketing majors.

Social Distance and its Link to Marketing Education

Social distance encompasses the tendency to withdraw from an ethnic group in social relationships (Schaefer, 2011). From the context of minority marketing students and global experiences, the researchers believe that when minority business students are engaged with multicultural and global experiences, the more positive their feelings and perceptions toward international groups become. Hence, their cultural awareness and global preparedness increases. Therefore, the theoretical foundation for this study is grounded in the Social Distance Theory, which postulates, "that individuals are susceptible to particular attributes of others, and this susceptibility influences interaction patterns among individuals" (Young & Fox, 2002, p. 537). By accessing key domains – previous contact, social willingness, knowledge, and affect, business educators can ascertain where minority students are culturally and work to build their cultural and global preparedness for culturally diverse business environments. Based on the findings across domains, marketing educators can also target key areas such as greater emphasis on content knowledge and more engagement in multicultural activities.

Business Education and Perceptions of International Experiences

The review of the literature finds a number of studies that examine business students' international experiences, particularly in study abroad programs. Some of these studies include Alber-Miller, Prenshaw, and Straughan (1999), which revealed that few students had taken steps toward participating in a study abroad experience and less than half were aware of their university's study abroad opportunities. Black and Duhon (2006) found that international experiences such as study abroad impact business students' cultural tolerance and empathy. Participation in a short-term, first-year study abroad resulted in business students being more willing to continue in language programs and take advantage of additional study abroad programs as revealed in a study conducted by Olson and Lalley (2012). Positive impact in global preparedness and success in multicultural environments was found in a study conducted by Wright & Clarke III (2010). Payan, Svensson, & Hogevold (2012) examined deterrents and the role of risk aversion in American and Norwegian marketing students' willingness to participate in global experiences such as study abroad.

The review of literature affirms that international experiences and exposure, such as the kind that a study abroad experience would yield, typically have a positive impact on business students from both a global and cultural context. However, students may be unwilling to gain international exposure or take advantage of an international experience due to a lack of knowledge as found in the study conducted by Albers-Miller, Prenshaw, & Straughan (1999) and risk aversion as found among Norwegian students in the study conducted by Payan, Svensson, & Hogevold (2012). The review of literature finds that the perceptions and perspectives of minority business students regarding international experiences and exposure are limited. Therefore, this research seeks to diversify and build on the breadth of the existing literature.

Methodology

The research was conducted at a medium four-year, state supported, Minority Serving Institution (MSI) located in the southeast region of the United States. The Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) – International accredits the College of Business at this particular MSI. Given the global growth and international marketing efforts that accompany this expansion, the researchers disseminated an online questionnaire and collected data from marketing majors and students who indicated that marketing was their minor. Aside from examining the descriptive statistics, the researchers employed a Mann-Whtiney U to examine group differences.

Survey Instrument

A questionnaire that consisted of statements from all four domains (previous contact, social willingness, knowledge, and affect) was utilized for data collection. General and specific demographic data was initially collected to ascertain a profile of the respondents. Respondents then provided Likert-type responses on a 1 to 4 scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questionnaire statements referenced individuals from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia due to the growth of these students studying in colleges and universities in the United States (Almanac of Higher Education; Newman, 2014). Moreover, the majority of these countries or regions are places in which the respondents have minimum cultural affinity.

Sample

The sample of useable online surveys for this study was 64. The respondents were comprised of 64 minority, marketing majors and minors. The demographic questions indicated that the respondents were African American (98.4 percent) and Latino (1.6 percent). Gender wise, the respondents were majority female (56.3 percent). Only 37.5 percent of the respondents indicated that they had traveled outside of the United States.

Results

An examination of the descriptive statistics revealed that social distance does exist among minority marketing students regarding their perceptions of international groups, particularly in the knowledge domain. The findings in this study aligns with literature from Brown (2002), Hembroff & Rusz, (1993), and McGiffert (2014a; 2014b). Table 1 highlights notable findings by domain.

Descriptive Statistics
Table 1
Notable Findings by Domain

Previous Contact Domain		
Statement	**Percent Agreed**	**Percent Disagreed**
I have spoken to a person from a country such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia during the last month.	54.7	45.3
I was scared by a person from a country such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia when they approached me.	50.0	50.0
I have had an unpleasant experience with people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia; for example, being yelled at or feeling mistreated during the past year.	48.4	51.6
When I have seen a person from a country such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia needing help, I did what I could to help.	39.0	61.0
I have been warned to stay away from people that come from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia because they do weird things.	59.3	40.7
When I was a child, I saw my parents spend time with people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia.	53.1	46.9
When the subject comes up, I have heard people say bad things about people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia.	81.2	18.8
I have helped people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia during the last month.	32.8	67.2
Social Willingness Domain		
Statement	**Percent Agreed**	**Percent Disagreed**
I would talk to people from China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia while waiting in line or in a social setting.	42.2	57.8
I think that people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia should join my social groups.	43.7	56.3
I would go to a movie with a person from a country such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia.	43.7	56.3
I would sit next to a person from a country such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia in a social situation.	46.9	53.1
I would eat lunch with someone from a country such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia.	43.7	56.3
I would invite a person from a country such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia to spend the weekend with my family.	64.0	36.0

I would be friends with a person from a country such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia.	64.0	36.0
I would take a person from China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia out with me on a Friday or Saturday night if I was doing something with a group of friends.	48.4	51.6

Knowledge Domain		
Statement	Percent Agreed	Percent Disagreed
I think that people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia come to the United States and take jobs from American citizens.	78.1	21.9
People from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia are more likely to be terrorists.	51.6	48.4
People from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia often try to cheat Americans out of their money.	59.3	40.7
People from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia are typically poor.	62.5	37.5
There are entirely too many people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia immigrating to the United States.	53.1	46.9

Affect Domain		
Statement	Percent Agreed	Percent Disagreed
I just feel sorry for people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia.	40.6	59.4
When watching telethons about people from China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia, I have felt like giving money.	60.9	39.1

Group Differences

To gain a more in-depth understanding of minority marketing students, the researchers examined group differences based upon the demographic information that was collected. Key areas that were examined included generational differences, employment status differences, differences across gender, and differences regarding whether the respondents have traveled or have not traveled outside of the United States. Generational differences and employment status differences yielded no significant differences. Tables 2 and 3 highlight significant group differences by gender and whether the respondents have traveled or have not traveled outside of the United States.

Table 2
Group Differences Based on Gender

Null Hypothesis	Sig.	Decision
Knowledge Domain		
The distribution of "I think that people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia come to the United States and take jobs from American citizens" is the same across categories of gender.	.011	Reject the null hypothesis.
Social Willingness Domain		
The distribution of "I have helped people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia during the last month" is the same across categories of gender.	.008	Reject the null hypothesis.
The distribution of "I would invite a person from a country such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia to my house" is the same across categories of gender.	.011	Reject the null hypothesis.

Table 3
Group Differences Based on International Travel Status

Null Hypothesis	Sig.	Decision
Previous Contact Domain		
The distribution of "I avoid looking at or walking by people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia when I see them on the street" is the same across categories of international travel.	.043	Reject the null hypothesis.
The distribution of "I have had an unpleasant experience with people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia; for example, being yelled at or feeling mistreated during the past year" is the same across categories of international travel.	.046	Reject the null hypothesis.
Knowledge Domain		
The distribution of "People from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia are more likely to be terrorists" is the same across of categories of international travel.	.017	Reject the null hypothesis.
Affect Domain		
The distribution of "I just feel sorry for people from countries such as China, South Korea, India, or Saudi Arabia" is the same across of categories of international travel.	.044	Reject the null hypothesis.

Discussion and Implications

Group differences based on gender indicated higher levels of social distance among females in both the knowledge and social willingness domain. Higher levels of social distance were present among students who indicated that they had traveled outside of the United States. These levels were found within the knowledge domain and the

previous contact domain (e.g., avoidance of looking at or walking by people from countries such as China.).

Group differences and descriptive findings within the knowledge and social willingness domain indicate that greater information, experiences, and global content should be introduced to broaden minority marketing students' perspective, knowledge base, and willingness to engage with international groups. This should also be applied to students who have already traveled as their pre-existing international experiences may need to be accompanied with more knowledge-based content and insight. Minority students mirror "clients" in that they must see the true value of content and ideas and how this content can be applied to their professional goals before they are willing to buy in. Building this knowledge can take place outside of the classroom. Engaging them in developmental advising sessions is one alternative. Introducing them to speakers who are global practitioners is another option.

Contributions and Future Research

There is limited research on minority marketing students and their perceptions regarding international groups. Given the diversity and globalization of business, this study is one of the few that seeks to explore this area. The primary participants in this group were African American marketing majors. Future research should seek to expand on this topic and examine other minority groups such as Latinos. This stream of research provides important insights for any marketing program that receives minority students or may be looking to brand their marketing programs from a global or diverse context. This study contends that marketing programs may be unaware of the cultural profile of their minority students thereby incurring challenges on how to successfully reach this group. Therefore, this study seeks to shed some light on this group so marketing programs can culturally capture them as they continue to move forward.

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