A Comparative Study of Consumer Information Seeking: Singapore Versus U.S.

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INTRODUCTION

In a competitive place, product information to influence consumer brand choices is abundant. In fact, a successful marketer is often the one most effective in communicating product information to the target audience. There are many vehicles available to a marketer to transmit information to the consumers. An optimal utilization of all the alternatives involves an understanding of where consumers seek information and how they rate information sources to be useful.

In general, the most direct information sources are the various mass media. Alternatively, a marketer can use consumers themselves as transmitters of information. In fact, it has been documented that communications from the various mass media do not reach the mass audience directly, they reach a small group of opinion leaders first who in turn transmit them to the general audience (Katz and Lazarsfeld, 1955). In the literature, such a thesis is known as the two step flow of communication and it is widely believed and practiced in marketing.

The reliance on personal communication to transmit product information is not new. For instance, gimmicks like unusual product features and catchy advertising lines have long been used by marketers to stimu-
late product related conversations among friends, neighbors and family members. People around us are all regular providers of product information.

In international marketing, due to the diversity of foreign countries, comparative studies of markets and consumers are often needed before marketing strategies are transferred abroad. The much written issue of standardization versus localization of international marketing strategies obviously depends on the extent the foreign market is similar to or different from the U.S. Cross-cultural comparison of countries is therefore a very important aspect of international marketing.

**RESEARCH PROBLEM DEFINED**

In the tradition of cross-cultural consumer research, this study investigates consumer information seeking behavior in two countries. The question is how consumers from a totally different social/cultural environment differ from the U.S. consumers in their usage of personal, market and independent sources of information. The question is important because when a marketer goes overseas, he cannot conveniently assume that the foreign market is like home, and that the same information sources proven to be effective at home can be adopted there as well. Very likely, the foreign market may not have as many mass media outlets as the U.S., or the reach of media is less extensive, or the social environment may be so different that personal communication and henceforth word-of-mouth advertisings can be either more or less pronounced than that of the U.S. All these are queries that a comparative study can attempt to answer.

Present research compares consumer information seeking behavior in the U.S. and Singapore. Singapore provides an interesting comparison because of several unique characteristics of the country.

1. It has a multi-racial population which is pre-dominantly Chinese (75%). The life style is a mixture of East and West while the culture is strongly influenced by the Chinese. Among the people, traditional values such as strong family ties and close social relationships are still dominant in the society. The social environment is therefore distinctly different from the U.S.

2. In Asia, Singapore is the second wealthiest country only after Japan. It has a per-capita income high enough to be