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Self-Construals, Types of Social Media Usage, and Consumer Decision-Making Styles—A study of young Asian Americans

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Globalization has generated more international business and overseas education between Western and Eastern countries. Although young Asian Americans may have been born in the United States, they are influenced by their family members in Asia and by Asian international students on campus. This influence has become stronger with the growing number of international students from Asia, especially China. The Department of Homeland Security data indicate that 1.13 million foreign college students are in the United States, which is an increase of about 50 percent since 2010 (Jordan, 2015). Asian students account for 75.56 percent of all international students (Jordan, 2015). A common belief is that people from the Eastern world are more interdependent whereas people from the Western world are more independent (Hahn & Kean, 2005). However, it is hard to determine what the self-construals of young Asian Americans are these days.

According to EMarketer (2015), social media is the first place retailers target when they want to reach college students. By 2012, 88.6 percent of Asian Americans lived in a household with an Internet connection—the highest rate among all race and ethnic groups (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2015). However, little published research has examined the relationship between social media behavior and people's decision-making style in purchasing apparel. Asian Americans have the highest average annual household income and education level and are the fastest-growing consumer segment in the United States (Pew Research, 2012). With young Asian Americans being the mainstream purchasers among all Asian Americans, their decision-making style in purchasing apparel would be critical to evaluate.

Scholars have used several types of research to examine the relationship between self-construals and decision-making styles as well as relationships between self-construals and social media behavior. However, few studies have included social media behavior as a variable in shaping the consumer's decision-making styles in a contemporary setting or self-construals as an individual characteristic that might influence specific social media platform behavior. Therefore, the purposes of this study are to investigate (1) self-construals of young Asian Americans in a contemporary context, (2) the relationship between self-construals and different types of social media usage of young Asian Americans in shaping their purchasing apparel behavior, (3) the relationship between different types of social media usage and young Asian Americans' decision-making styles in purchasing apparel, and (4) the relationship between self-construals and decision-making styles in purchasing apparel among young Asian Americans.

A survey was sent out through the online platform Qualtrics to 18- to 25-year-old female Asian Americans born in the United States. Three instruments were used in this research to measure participants' self-construals (Singelis, 1994), social media usage (Kang, Johnson, &

Wu, 2014), and decision-making styles (Sproles & Kendall, 1986). Ultimately, 210 full responses were collected.

The results showed that a statistically significant association did not exist between young females' interdependent self-construal ( $M = 3.66$  on a 5-point Likert-type scale) and independent self-construal ( $M = 3.55$ ). The majority of young Asian Americans held both high interdependent and independent self-construal. Interdependent self-construal showed no significant relationship with social media usage. However, independent self-construal had a statistically significant positive relationship with the frequency of updating social media, especially for YouTube ( $r = 0.26, p < 0.05$ ). A similar pattern applied to Facebook ( $r = 0.20, p < 0.1$ ), which was different from Kim, Kim and Nam's (2010) research finding that interdependent but not independent self-construal was correlated with Facebook usage. The strongest relationship between social media usage and decision-making styles was between opinion seeking on YouTube and perfectionistic decision-making style ( $r = 0.48, p < 0.01$ ), followed by the relationship between opinion seeking on Facebook and novelty-fashion conscious consumer decision-making style ( $r = 0.47, p < 0.01$ ). We found that opinion seeking on Instagram had a positive association with brand-loyal consumer decision-making ( $r = 0.25, p < 0.05$ ). Finally, independent self-construal had more associations than interdependent self-construal with different types of decision-making styles regarding purchasing apparel.

This study is especially useful for apparel companies seeking to market their products to young Asian American consumers. When a company wants to promote its latest product, it should produce marketing messages on all three social media platforms, emphasizing Facebook in particular.

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