The Role of Demographics on the Susceptibility to Social Influence: A Pretest Study

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This study investigates the role of demographics, specifically gender, on susceptibility to three social influence types for certain products. Data were collected in two stages from business students at a large university. Analyses were performed at the construct and product levels. At the construct level, marital status and living situation were found to be the significant demographics for both informative and normative influences. At the product level, gender, ethnicity, marital status, and living situation were found to be influential demographics for both informative and normative influences. The hypotheses are supported for certain demographics and products. Limitations and suggestions are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics (i.e., age, income, education, ethnicity, religion, occupation, social class, culture, and lifestyle) appear to affect purchase decisions and brand preferences (Stafford, 1966; Ford and Elwood, 1980). However, demographic and socioeconomic background may not necessarily have a direct and/or one-to-one effect on a person's purchasing decisions or brand preferences. The combination of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics may compound the effect and increase a person's level of product knowledge. This, in turn, may also affect a person's level of involvement in use and purchase of certain products or brands. These two factors--level of product knowledge and level of involvement in product usage and purchase--may in turn affect the degree and types of susceptibility to social influence.

A person's susceptibility to social influences may depend on "the nature of the individual, the product, and specific social factors" (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004, p. 331). Therefore, the degree of a person's susceptibility to different types of social influence may be affected by not only their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics but by the environment in which the person resides or subsists at a given time. For example, individuals may make different purchasing decisions in different marketing environments based on their familiarity with the product and also with whom they are shopping.

As an important demographic variable, gender has been found to affect search behavior (Ibanez, et al., 2005), adoption and usage of technology in the workplace (Venkatesh and Morris, 2000), susceptibility to informational influence during purchase decisions (Khan and Khan, 2005), decision making processes (Bem and Allen, 1974), determinants of self-esteem (Tashakkori, 1993; Rose, et al. 1998), interpersonal influence in display aspects of clothing (Rose, et al., 1998), informational influence in advertising (Auty and Elliot, 1998), information processing strategies (Laroche, et al., 2000; Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran, 1991), parental influence (Feltham, 1998), friends, siblings, and media influence (Wilson and MacGillivray, 1998), and risk taking (Byrnes, et al., 1999; Eckel and Grossman, 208; Schubert, et al.,

1999). Although most of the prior research finds significant gender differences, some still reveal mixed results.

The objective of this study is to find out whether a person's demographic characteristics, specifically gender, significantly influences a person's susceptibility to different types of social influence (informational and normative (i.e., utilitarian, and value-expressiveness)) for certain products. This study was patterned after the study by Park and Lessig (1977) that examined the differences between students and housewives in terms of their susceptibility to reference group influence. While Park and Lessig analyzed the differences between students in-class, students at-home, and housewives, this study solely investigates differences in the susceptibility level among students in-class. Therefore, this study does not examine susceptibility to social influence in different environments. Furthermore, this study uses the term "social influence" (Burnkrat and Cousineau, 1975) rather than "reference group influence" (Park and Lessig, 1977; Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Childers and Rao, 1992) because no group situation was created and the subjects were not necessarily functioning as members of a group other than as members of their home and classroom environment.

Because of the support found in the literature, in this pretest study, specifically gender as the prominent demographic variable was predicted to influence differences in the susceptibility level among the student population. The gender differences were examined not based on the students' masculinity or femininity, but based on the possible differences in the level of product knowledge and the level of involvement in product or brand usage. The ten products used in the pretest instrument were relevant to a student population, which are soft drink, toothpaste, coffee, walkman, jeans, bicycle, wristwatch, health insurance, computer and camera. These products were selected as "neutral" products by a separate sample of students based on their perceptions that males and females would have equal knowledge about these products and would equally be involved in their use. In the next section, the theory and concepts from which this study has evolved are elaborated.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Deutsch and Gerard (1955) contend that individuals are susceptible to social influence because from birth on they learn to rely on others' perceptions and judgments as sources of evidence about reality. They define two types of social influences: (1) Informational social influence in which a person accepts information obtained from another as evidence of reality, and (2) Normative social influence that is the tendency to conform to the positive expectations of others.

Furthermore, normative social influence is separated into two different types of influence: utilitarian influence and value expressive influence. Utilitarian influence is reflected in individual's attempts to comply with the expectations of others to achieve rewards or avoid punishment (Bearden, Netemeyer, Teel, 1989). Starting from childhood, an individual develops positive attitudes toward the objects that satisfy his or her needs and negative attitudes toward objects that punish him or her (Katz, 1960). Value expressiveness is defined as "the individual's desire to enhance his or her self-image by association with a reference group" (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel, 1989, p. 474). Self-expression, self-development and self-realization are important concepts for those who are more susceptible to value-expressive social influence because an individual receives satisfaction from self-expression of his or her values (Katz, 1960). In general, consumer susceptibility to social influence can be defined as one's tendency to learn about products and services through either seeking information from others or observing others in terms of what they purchase or use (informational influence), the willingness to conform to others' expectations to realize rewards or avoid punishments (utilitarian influence), and the need to identify one's image with others through the acquisition and use of certain products or brands (Value-expressive influence) (Bearden, Netemeyer and Teel, 1989).

The main assumption for this pretest study is that demographic and socioeconomic characteristics play an important role in interpreting individuals' purchase behavior. Product knowledge as well as interest and importance of involvement in use and purchase of a product may vary among individuals based on differences in gender, financial situation, marital status, ethnicity, education, age, and where a person

lives and shops. Differences between female and male in message processing and retrospective judgments of consumption emotions support the assumption of this study that demographics contribute to individuals' purchase behavior. Meyers-Levy and Maheswaran (1991) state that gender differences exist in message processing strategies. Their finding is that females use a detailed-processing strategy while males use a schema-based strategy when the message contained low-incongruity cues. Dube and Morgan (1996) also suggest that men and women differ in their ability to retrieve negative and positive emotions at the time of retrospective judgments. For example, if females use a detailed-processing strategy in certain situations and their retrospective judgments of negative emotions are more sensitive than males', then different purchase behaviors based on gender and other demographic characteristics may be expected. Therefore, the following hypotheses were tested to find out whether there are significant differences in susceptibility to social influence based on the differences in demographic features.

HYPOTHESES

Even though neutral products were used in the pretest instrument of this study, some of the products may still be expected to generate differences between male and female students in terms of susceptibility to informational and normative influence (i.e., utilitarian and value-expressive). These differences in the susceptibility level for some of the products may result from the differences between male and female students in their level of product knowledge and level of involvement in product or brand usage. Therefore, differences for the three types of social influence are hypothesized to exist between male and female students for some of the neutral products used in this pretest study.

Park and Lessig (1977) support that differences between housewives and students based on their needs and motivations exist in terms of their response to reference group influence. They state that need differences between housewives and students may result from their age distributions, which may in turn lead to differences in the amount of learning, the degree of familiarity and product knowledge, purchase experience and ability to cope with uncertainty and risk. They also expect that the learning and experience difference will directly affect reference group influence. Although this pretest was administered to a student sample with similar age, education and income, other demographic differences such as gender or living situation may contribute to significant differences in their susceptibility to the three types of social influence among the student population. For example, in Khan and Khan (2005) study, while no significant differences were found between young Malaysian males and females in the level of their susceptibility to informational social influence from their parents, significant differences were found in frequencies of seeking information (informational influence) from their siblings and friends when they are to make purchase decisions of designer label apparel. Females sought information from friends and siblings more frequently than males. The prior studies imply that if individuals are susceptible to interpersonal influence (informative or normative), such susceptibility is derived from a combination of their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Therefore, the following three hypotheses were proposed for testing:

H1: Significant differences in terms of susceptibility to *informational* social influence exist due to demographic differences among the student population when making purchasing decisions for certain products. Specifically, the level of each gender's need to obtain product or brand information from others is not the same.

H2: Significant differences in terms of susceptibility to *utilitarian* social influence exist due to demographic differences among the student population when making purchasing decisions for certain products. Specifically, female and male students will not conform to others' expectations in a similar way.

H3: Significant differences in terms of their susceptibility to *value-expressive* social influence exist due to demographic differences among the student population when making purchasing decisions for certain

products. Specifically, each gender's desire to enhance his or her self-image for certain products will not be the same.

METHODOLOGY

Pretest Data and Sample Characteristics

The survey was administered for pretest purposes to a convenience sample of 127 undergraduate and 26 graduate business students at a major Southeastern United States university. A total of 100 surveys were completed satisfactorily. Fifty-three were discarded for being rendered incomplete. The non-response rate was 35 percent. Seventy-six surveys were satisfactorily completed by undergraduate students and 24 surveys by graduate students. Out of the 76 surveys, four were completed by students at their homes. Because the four surveys did not seem to deviate from the rest of the surveys, they were not treated differently in the data analysis. An overall completion rate of 65 percent was achieved.

The sample was comprised of 44 percent male students and 56 percent female students. Fifty-one percent of the sample was Caucasian, 18.4 percent Hispanics, 10.2 percent Blacks/African Americans, and 20.4 percent included minority ethnic groups such as Asians, Native Americans, and Islanders. Sixty-five percent was single and 35 percent was married. Forty-six percent was between 18 and 25 years old, 42 percent was between 26 and 35 years old, 10 percent was between 36 to 50 years old, and 2 percent was over 50 years old. Thirty-five percent lived with their parents, 45 percent lived with significant other, 8 percent lived with a roommate, and 12 percent lived alone. Because the sample included both graduate and undergraduate students, sample characteristics were consistent with expectations.

Pretest Instruments

Product Classification

The 10 products used in the Social Influence Questionnaire (second stage) were selected based on the results of a Product Classification Questionnaire (see Appendix, Exhibit 1), which was administered to 30 undergraduate business students. The students were asked to classify a total of 24 products as masculine, neutral, or feminine based on which gender they think would have more knowledge about each product and would be more involved in its use. A neutral product was defined as being used by both genders equally and each gender would have equal knowledge about the product. The students classified 16 products as neutral. The 10 products out of the 16 that had the highest frequency in rank were selected for use in the Social Influence Questionnaire. By using neutral products to measure the differences between male and female students in their response to social influence, this study rules out the differences that may result from different needs of male and female subjects.

Social Influence

The second stage survey instrument used in this study is similar to the one used by Park and Lessig with the exception of an approach that eliminates researcher's bias in the selection of the products (first stage). The Social Influence Questionnaire was developed using 13 statements with the 10 products listed to assess informational, utilitarian, and value expressive influence (see Appendix, Exhibit 2).

The statements from 1 to 4 measured informational influence, from 5 to 8 utilitarian influence, and from 9 to 13 value-expressive influence. The thirteen statements used were adapted from Park and Lessig (1977). A 4-point scale was used for each statement-product combination: highly relevant (H), medium relevance (M), low relevance (L), and not relevant (NR). Individual responses are coded within the following distribution: 4 for H, 3 for M, 2 for L and 1 for NR.

Pretest Measurements

A Principle Component Analysis using the aggregate scores for each statement was performed to determine whether the items measured three dimensions. The results revealed two dimensions with Eigenvalues greater than 1, which were 7.292 and 1.510, with 67.71% cumulative variance explained. The first three statements loaded high on one component called Informative and low on another

component called Normative. The Rotated Component Matrix results were obtained through the Varimax rotation technique in SPSS and indicated that the fourth statement was not loading high (.573). The fourth informational influence statement was considered to be very similar to the first statement of informational influence. In addition, the corrected item-total correlation indicated .4298 (less than .5). Therefore, the fourth statement was eliminated. The utilitarian and value-expressive statements loaded high (ranged between .717 and .864) on the Normative component with the exception of the third statement of the utilitarian influence (.411) that was supposed to measure the influence from family members in purchase decisions. The third utilitarian statement cross-loaded higher (.530), but not satisfactorily high on the Informative component. Although the corrected total-item correlation was .5395 and the Cronbach's alpha did not increase much (from .9403 to .9408) by the exclusion of the third utilitarian statement, the third utilitarian statement was eliminated for not measuring what it was supposed to measure.

The elimination of the fourth informational statement increased the reliability coefficient alpha from .78 to .83 for the Informative component. After the elimination of the third utilitarian statement, the reliability for the Normative component did not change significantly (from .9403 to .9464). After a series of parsimonious validity and reliability tests, eleven statements were recommended to be included in the final instrument: three measuring the Informative and eight measuring the Normative component. The high loadings of the items on the underlying components support the discriminant and convergent validity (Table 1).

TABLE 1.
FACTOR LOADINGS

Items	Informative	Normative
Informative 1	.777	
Informative 2	.808	
Informative 3	.813	
Utilitarian 1		.728
Utilitarian 2		.717
Utilitarian 4		.785
Value-expressive 1		.864
Value-expressive 2		.856
Value-expressive 3		.844
Value-expressive 4		.765
Value-expressive 5		.860

Analyses and Results

Construct level

After the purification process, two components (Informative and Normative) of social influence were obtained instead of three (informational, utilitarian and value-expressive) opposed to what was hypothesized at the beginning of the pretest study. Therefore, the analysis involved one-way ANOVA and t-test to find out whether there are significant differences in the mean scores of two components (Informative and Normative comprised of total of eleven statements) for each of the demographic variables of the students: gender, ethnicity, marital status, age, and living situation. For more than two groups, Fisher's least significant differences (LSD) procedure is used to determine where the differences among the means occur.

At the construct level, the one-way ANOVA results indicated no significant differences in susceptibility to informative and normative social influence with regard to gender, age, and ethnicity of the students (not shown in a table). However, singles were found to be more susceptible to informative (significant at $p < .10$ level) and normative influence (significant at $p \leq .05$ level) than married couples.

Besides the marital status, living situation of the respondents significantly differed in their susceptibility to informational influence ($F_{(3, 92)}$=3.01, p=.031). Respondents living with roommates (at p< .05 level) and parents (at p< .10 level) were significantly more susceptible to informational influence than living alone or with a significant other. Similarly, respondents who live with their parents were significantly more susceptible to normative influence than living with a significant other at p< .05 level (Table 2). This finding supports the two hypotheses at the construct level for marital status and living situation but not for gender, ethnicity, or age. In addition, gender and living situation had no interaction effect on the susceptibility to informational or normative influence.

TABLE 2.
ANOVA RESULTS FOR INFORMATIONAL INFLUENCE

Demographics	Sample size	Mean	Construct		Sign.
Marital Status	S=64; Md=35	S=77.4; Md=71.4	Informative	(S>Md)	t=1.75; (.08)*
	S=64; Md=35	S=149; Md=127	Normative	(S>Md)	t=1.99; (.05)**
Living Situation	R=8; A=11	R=86.5; A=68.7	Informative	(R>A)	(.02)**
	R=8; SO=43	R=86.5; SO=72		(R>SO)	(.02)**
	P=34; A=11	P=79.2; A=68.7		(P>A)	(.07)*
	P=34; SO=43	P=79.2; SO=72		(P>SO)	(.06)*
	P=34; SO=43	P=157; SO=128	Normative	(P>SO)	(.03)**

** p <.10; ** p <.05*
S: Single; Md: Married; P: Parent; SO: Significant Other; A: Alone; R: Roommate

Product level

First, a factor analysis for the total scores of each product, compounded from the eleven statements, was performed to find out whether the statement (item) scores for each product loaded onto the two components, Informative and Normative. Second, a one-way ANOVA was used to find out whether there are significant differences in the mean scores for each product within each component (i.e. Informative total scores for soft drink, Normative total scores for soft drink) for each of the demographic variables of the students: gender, ethnicity, marital status, age and living situation.

If certain demographics are found to contribute to significant differences in the mean scores of certain products, Fisher's least significant differences (LSD) procedure is used to determine where the differences among the means occur for the demographic features that have more than two groups. Because gender has less than three groups (male and female), mean differences for male and female are tested by using t-statistics.

The results of the Rotated Component Matrices correspondingly supported discriminant and convergent validity at the product level. The ten product (soft drink, toothpaste, coffee, walkman, jeans, bicycle, wristwatch, health insurance, computer and camera) scores for the first three statements loaded high on the Informative component and low on the Normative component. The ten product scores for the rest of the eight statements loaded high on the Normative component and low on the Informative component as expected. Loadings at the product level were consistent with those at the construct level.

The one-way ANOVA results presented in Table 3 and 4 indicate that demographics contributed to significant differences in terms of students' susceptibility to informative and normative influences at the product level. In terms of informative influence, *gender* of the respondents made a significant difference for computer at the p <.05 significance level. Female students tended to seek information about computers from people, whom they believe credible, significantly more than the male students when making a purchasing decision (Table 3). On the other hand, male students were significantly more susceptible to normative influence for computers than female students at the p< .10 significance level (Table 4). Males were more susceptible to normative influence than female counterparts for a soft drink at p≤ .05 level,

and for a toothpaste, bicycle, and wristwatch at p≤ .10 level (Table 4). No significant gender differences were found in informational and normative influence for coffee, camera, walkman, health insurance, and jeans.

Ethnicity indicated significant differences in informative influence for bicycle at p< .10 level and normative influences for toothpaste and health insurance at p≤ .05 level. Blacks/African -Americans need significantly more information on bicycles than other minority ethnic groups (Table 3). Hispanics were significantly more susceptible to normative influence for toothpaste and health insurance than Caucasians (Table 4). For ethnicity, no significant differences were found in informative or normative influence for a soft drink, coffee, walkman, blue jean, wristwatch, computer, and camera.

For *Marital status*, the results revealed that singles are significantly more susceptible than married couples to informational influence for a soft drink and toothpaste at p< .05 level, and for a walkman and jeans at p< .10 level (Table 3). Singles were also significantly more susceptible than married couples to normative influence for a computer at p< .01 level, for a walkman at p< .05 level, and coffee, jeans, and camera at p< .10 level (Table 4). *Age* did not show any significant differences in susceptibility to informational or normative influence.

TABLE 3.
INFORMATIVE INFLUENCES FOR PRODUCTS

Demographics	**N**	**Mean**	**Product**		**t value (p-sign)**
Gender	M=42; F=52	M=9.8; F=10.9	Computer	(F>M)	t=2.4; (.02)**
Ethnicity	B=9 ; O=19	B=8.4; O=6.8	Bicycle	(B>O)	(.098)*
Marital status	S=64; Md=35	S=6.0; Md=4.9	Soft drink	(S>Md)	t=2.2; (.03)**
	S=63; Md=34	S=7.9; Md=6.6	Toothpaste	(S>Md)	t=2.09; (.04)**
	S=59; Md=32	S=7.1; Md=6.1	Walkman	(S>Md)	t=1.7; (.09)*
	S=62; Md=33	S=6.6; Md=5.6	Jean	(S>Md)	t=1.76; (.08)*
Living situation	P=34; SO=43	P=6.3; SO=5.0	Soft drink	(P>SO)	(.03)**
	P=34; SO=42	P=8.4; SO=6.9	Toothpaste	(P>SO)	(.02)**
	P=34; A=10	P=8.4; A=6.6		(P>A)	(.09)*
	R=8; SO=41	R=8.3; SO=6.3	Walkman	(R>SO)	(.04)**
	P=34; A=11	P=7.3; A=5.5	Jeans	(P>A)	(.04)**
	P=34; SO=41	P=7.3; SO=5.5		(P>SO)	(.002)***
	R=8; SO=42	R=9.13; SO=7.2	Bicycle	(R>SO)	(.04)**
	R=8; A=9	R=11.6; A=9.5	Health ins.	(R>A)	(.05)**
	R=8; SO=43	R=11.6; SO=10.1		(R>SO)	(.06)*
	P=30; A=11	P=10.8; A=9.3	Computer	(P>A)	(.03)**
	R=8; A=11	R=11.8; A=9.3		(R>A)	(.00)***
	R=8; SO=42	R=11.8; SO=10.2		(R>SO)	(.04)**
	R=8; A=11	R=10.6; A=7.8	Camera	(R>A)	(.02)**
	R=8; SO=43	R=10.6; SO=8.5		(R>SO)	(.03)**

** p <.10; **p <.05*
F: Female; M: Male; C: Caucasian; H: Hispanic; B: Black/African-American; S: Single; Md: Married; P: Parent; SO: Significant Other; A: Alone; R: Roommate

Similarly, *living situation* of the respondents made a significant difference in susceptibility to informative influence for a soft drink, toothpaste, walkman, jeans, bicycle, health insurance, computer, and camera at p≤ .05 level, and at p< .01 level jeans and computer, and p< .10 level for toothpaste and health insurance (Table 3). Students who lived with parents or roommates were consistently more susceptible to informational influence than those who lived alone or with a significant other. However,

living situation made no significant differences in informational influence for a wristwatch or coffee. Similarly, living situation made a significant difference in respondents' susceptibility to normative influence for toothpaste, coffee, walkman, jeans, health insurance at p< .05 level, computer at p< .01 level, and soft drink, computer and camera at p< .10 level (Table 4). Living with parents consistently showed significantly more susceptibility to normative influences than living with roommates or significant others. The results at the product level support the hypotheses for gender, ethnicity, marital status, and living situation but not for age.

TABLE 4.
NORMATIVE INFLUENCES FOR PRODUCTS

Demographics	N	Mean	Product		t value (p-sign)
Gender	M=42; F=55	M=14.3; F=11.8	Soft drink	(M>F)	t=1.97; (.05)**
	M=42; F=55	M=18.1; F=15.5	Computer	(M>F)	t=1.7; (.09)*
	M=40; F=54	M=14.1; F=11.8	Toothpaste	(M>F)	t=1.7; (.09)*
	M=39; F=51	M=14.6; F=12.5	Bicycle	(M>F)	t=1.7; (.09)*
	M=40; F=52	M=17.4; F=14.8	Wristwatch	(M>F)	t=1.89; (.06)*
Ethnicity	C=46; H=18	C=11.5; H=15.1	Toothpaste	(H>C)	(.05)**
	C=41; H=17	C=12.5; H=16.1	Health ins.	(H>C)	(.05)**
Marital status	S=63; Md=34	S=17.9; Md=14.2	Computer	(S>Md)	t=2.6; (.01)***
	S=61; Md=32	S=13.4; Md=10.9	Walkman	(S>Md)	t=2.15; (.035)**
	S=57; Md=32	S=12.8; Md=10.8	Coffee	(S>Md)	t=1.9; (.06)*
	S=61; Md=34	S=16.4; Md=13.9	Jeans	(S>Md)	t=1.77; (.08)*
	S=55; Md=31	S=14.7; Md=12.3	Health ins.	(S>Md)	t=1.8; (.07)*
	S=62; Md=33	S=15.5; Md=13.3	Camera	(S>Md)	t=1.8; (.08)*
Living situation	P=31; SO=42	P=14.5; SO=11.5	Toothpaste	(P>SO)	(.04)**
	P=31; SO=42	P=13.6; SO=10.8	Coffee	(P>SO)	(.03)**
	P=32; SO=43	P=14.2; SO=11.5	Soft drink	(P>SO)	(.06)*
	P=28; SO=41	P=14.1; SO=11.3	Walkman	(P>SO)	(.04)**
	P=32; SO=42	P=17.3; SO=14	Jeans	(P>SO)	(.05)**
	P=30; SO=38	P=16.3; SO=12.3	Health ins.	(P>SO)	(.02)**
	P=33; SO=42	P=19; SO=14.7	Computer	(P>SO)	(.01)***
	P=33; R=8	P=19; R=14		(P>R)	(.08)*
	P=32; SO=41	P=16.4; SO=13.5	Camera	(P>SO)	(.07)*

** p <.10; **p <.05*
F: Female; M: Male; C: Caucasian; H: Hispanic; B: Black/African-American; S: Single; Md: Married; P: Parent; SO: Significant Other; A: Alone; R: Roommate

DISCUSSION

Construct Level

Although the results showed no significant differences in susceptibility to informative or normative influence for gender, ethnicity, and age at the construct level, marital status and living situation generated statistically significant differences in susceptibility to both informative and normative influence among the student participants. The significant results at the construct level also indicated that students were most susceptible to informative influence when they lived with their roommates and parents, and normative influence when they lived with their parents. Because the students living with roommates compared to living with parents did not significantly differ in susceptibility to informative influence,

parents might be inferred to be influential about the choice of products or brands as almost the same as the roommates were. Living with a significant other indicated the next influential living situation. Finally, students were least susceptible to informative influence when they lived alone. These findings support the hypotheses that significant differences in terms of susceptibility to informational and normative social influence exist due to demographic differences among the student population when making purchasing decisions. However, the findings did not support the differentiating effect of gender on students' needs to obtain product or brand information from others at the construct level (Table 2).

Product Level

The usage of neutral products in the pretest could naturally have led to a result of no significant differences among the students in their susceptibility to social influence. However, the results that indicated significant differences in susceptibility to both informative and normative influence for products support the hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 (Tables 3 and 4). Because three dimensions had been expected, three hypotheses were proposed at the beginning of the study. However, two dimensions were obtained instead of three after an exploratory factor analysis. Therefore, the combination of hypotheses 2 and 3 is supported by the pretest results for certain products.

Females indicated that they would seek information from others (e.g., professionals, experts, friends, neighbors, relatives, peers) about computers more than did males (Table 3). This may result from the stereotype that males do not like to show that they are in need for information or need help from others. Prior studies consistently confirm that men seek professional help significantly less frequently than do women (Good et al., 1995; Robertson and Fitzgerald, 1992; Addis and Mahalik, 2003), and men do not stop to ask for directions (Venkatesh and Morris, 2000). Courtenay (2000) explains this with the notion that men internalize the idea that men should be tough, competitive, and emotionally inexpressive. On the other hand, males indicated higher susceptibility to normative influence for a soft drink, computer, toothpaste, bicycle, and wristwatch (Table 4). This may be for similar reasons that males have a higher need to express their masculinity; therefore, their choices of these products are influenced by others' expectations and/or preferences. Also, it might be assumed that frequency of product usage would typically increase one's knowledge about the product over time. Similarly, increased product knowledge might have an increasing effect on involvement in product usage. Therefore, female students' need to seek information about a computer may result from their unfamiliarity with computers and infrequency in their use, or low usage as suggested by Venkatesh and Morris (2000).

In addition, singles indicated that they would seek information from others about soft drinks, toothpaste, walkman, and jeans more than would married couples (Table 3), and singles would be more influenced by others' expectations and preferences than would the married counterparts for a computer, walkman, coffee, jeans, health insurance, and camera (Table 4). These results are consistent with those of Park and Lessig (1977) that significant differences exist in susceptibility to reference group influence (informative and normative) exist based on marital status. Furthermore, respondents who lived with parents and roommates had the most tendencies to seek information about a soft drink, toothpaste, walkman, jeans, bicycle, health insurance, computer, and camera (Table 3). Living with parents is found to exert the most normative influence for a toothpaste, coffee, soft drink, walkman, jeans, health insurance, computer, and camera (Table 4). These findings are consistent with those of prior studies aforementioned (Stafford, 1966; Ford and Elwood, 1980; Khan and Khan, 2005), and offer invaluable insights to marketing professionals and academics with regard to how demographics, specifically gender, influence person's need for information and knowledge, and desire to conform to others' expectations. As suggested in Schiffman and Kanuk (2004), the findings of this pretest study support that a person's susceptibility to social influences may depend on "the nature of the individual, the product, and specific social factors" (p. 331).

LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

The four utilitarian statements that were originally supposed to measure the level of conformance to others' expectations might have failed to successfully measure the utilitarian construct. The result of the pretest indicated that utilitarian and value-expressive statements loaded high on one construct called Normative. Therefore, the normative social influence refers more to value-expressive influence than utilitarian influence in this study.

This could have been because no group situation was created before or during the time of the administration of the survey instrument. A further consideration should also be given to the efficacy of the utilitarian statements as they relate to current day populations. Another limitation was that the sample was limited to the undergraduate and graduate students in Business Administration at a large university in the southeastern part of the United States. Samples obtained from various universities would provide more representativeness for the student population. In addition, a future study may present the findings at the item level for each product tested rather than construct or product level. Finally, a future study could test the hypotheses with some of the most current technology products that consumers are using (e.g., netbook computers, GPS, iPods, HDTV).

CONCLUSION

The present study contributes to the understanding of the students' susceptibility to social influence when making purchase decisions for certain products. The findings support that differences in demographics among students affect their need for seeking information from others, identifying their image with others through the acquisition and use of certain products or brands, and their willingness to conform to others' expectations.

This pretest study constructs a foundation for further investigation of the potential factors that may affect the susceptibility of students to informative and normative influence. Students' knowledge of products and their involvement in use and purchase of products are determined by their demographic background such as age, gender, marital status, living situation, income, and whether they receive financial help or not. Although other factors may exist, effects of product knowledge and involvement on susceptibility to social influence would be a good place to start.

Future research should expand on this study by increasing the sample size, exploring the nuances of living situations more thoroughly, and further investigating the soft drink and computer products as they relate to gender issues of social influence. Understanding the influential factors to susceptibility to social influence would give marketing professionals insights about who the users, purchasers and influencers are, and in which situations susceptibility occurs. This research would be helpful to better understand the buyer behavior process and aid in the development of promotional strategies to effectively target users of these product categories.

By surveying students to develop neutral products for this pretest study, the study contributes to the research arena through its use of an unbiased methodology (not yet developed or used based on an extensive review of literature). It also provides a reference for marketing professionals and academia to understand the behavior of the student population in purchasing decisions. Marketing professionals in different industries, especially the ones being referred to in this study (beverage, electronics, cosmetics, detergent, textile, bicycle and computer) may find the insights helpful uncovered in this study. These insights may aid in the formulation of advertising and promotional strategies to increase brand preferences and/or involvement in product usage among young adult consumers.

APPENDIX

Exhibit 1. Product Classification Questionnaire

Please classify the products listed below as either masculine, neutral or feminine.

Base your answer on which gender would have more knowledge about each product and would be more involved in its use.

A neutral product would be used equally by both genders and each gender would have equal knowledge about the product.

Indicate your choice by circling one choice for each product below.

	Masculine	Neutral	Feminine
Soft Drink	M	N	F
Toothpaste	M	N	F
Headache Remedy	M	N	F
Color Television	M	N	F
Walkman	M	N	F
Laundry Detergent	M	N	F
Automobile	M	N	F
Health Insurance	M	N	F
Computer	M	N	F
Camera	M	N	F
Beer	M	N	F
Facial Soap	M	N	F
Cigarettes	M	N	F
Coffee	M	N	F
Microwave Oven	M	N	F
Furniture	M	N	F
Bicycle	M	N	F
Wristwatch	M	N	F
Canned peaches	M	N	F
Alarm Clock	M	N	F
MP3 player	M	N	F
Backpack	M	N	F
Jeans	M	N	F
Tennis shoes	M	N	F
What is your gender?	M	F	

Exhibit 2. Social Influence Questionnaire Items

Informational Influence

1. I would seek information about various brands of the products listed below from an association of professionals or independent group of experts.
2. I would seek information from professionals (ex. Pharmacist, Doctor, Teacher) who work with the product.
3. I would seek brand-related knowledge and experience with the following products (such as how brand A's performance compares to brand B's) from those friends, neighbors, relatives, or work associates who I think have reliable information about the brands.
4. The brand I select is influenced by observing a seal of approval of an independent testing agency (such as Good Housekeeping).

Utilitarian Influence

5. To satisfy the expectations of fellow work associates/class mates, my decision to purchase a particular brand is influenced by their preferences.
6. My decision to purchase a particular brand is influenced by the preferences of people with whom I have social interaction.
7. My decision to purchase a particular brand of the following products is influenced by the preferences of my family members.
8. The desire to satisfy the expectations, which others have of me, has an impact on my brand choice.

Value-Expressive

9. I feel that the purchase or use of a particular brand will enhance the image which others have of me.
10. I feel that those people who purchase or use a particular brand (ex. Coca-Cola, Crest, Starbucks coffee, etc.) of the following products possess the characteristics that I would like to have.
11. I sometimes feel that it would be nice to be like the type of person which advertisements show using a particular brand (Tiger Woods wearing Nike golf clothes or Liz Taylor using White Diamonds perfume).
12. I feel that the people who purchase a particular brand of the following products are admired or respected by others.
13. I feel that the purchase of a particular brand of the following products helps me show others what I am, or would like to be (such as an athlete, successful business professional, good looking).

Scale: highly relevant (H), medium relevance (M), low relevance (L), and not relevant (NR)

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