

Acculturation As a Conceptual Framework for Creating Culturally Relevant Advertisements: A Review with Special Focus on Hispanic Consumers

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly complex marketplace, creating culturally relevant advertising is not just beneficial, but it is essential for companies and marketers to succeed with multicultural consumers. This paper explores the conceptual and strategic use of acculturation theory as a foundational framework for creating effective, culturally relevant advertisements, with a particular emphasis on Hispanic consumers in the United States. The study establishes that Hispanic consumers represent a growing, highly engaged, and economically powerful market segment with different backgrounds, acculturation levels, and cultural preferences which must be considered when formulating advertising strategies and messages. By examining the Hispanic population's subgroup breakdown, consumption patterns, and purchasing behaviors, this paper argues that conventional approaches used for the general market are no longer sufficient. Despite heavily contributing to the American population growth and wielding sizable purchasing power, companies continue to underfund media expenditure to Hispanic consumers. Furthermore, advertisements often lack compelling linguistic or cultural nuances. This paper leverages studies conducted and instruments used with acculturated Hispanic consumers to show higher return on investment from advertisements that are in-language and in-culture, versus advertisements directly translated from English, to confirm the importance of culturally sensitive marketing.

To better understand Hispanic consumer attitudes toward culturally relevant advertisements, the paper analyzes key acculturation models focusing on the four-fold framework and its later adaptations. It also includes other acculturation measurements developed for specific Hispanic subgroups. These instruments help marketers interpret how cultural strategies like integration, biculturalism, assimilation, separation, and marginalization influence responses to culturally targeted media. The review also evaluates the limitations and criticisms of existing frameworks, especially their generalizability across heterogeneous Hispanic subgroups, such as Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, and Cuban Americans, and calls for more adaptable and multidimensional models to account for social, psychological, technological, and linguistic variables. Ultimately, the paper argues for the integration of acculturation theory into companies' marketing strategies to improve message relevance, audience connection, and brand equity. By aligning advertising efforts with Hispanic consumers' evolving cultural identities, marketers can create campaigns that are not only more authentic and persuasive, but also more effective in building long-term consumer relationships in an intensely competitive landscape.

INTRODUCTION

The population of the United States (U.S.) is a cosmopolitan mixture of nationalities, backgrounds, and cultures, which have simultaneously converged and diverged to shape the purchasing identities, desires, and values of American consumers. At a macro level, there are two racial-ethnic population segments, majority and minority. The former consists of non-Hispanic Whites; the latter comprises individuals from other races, origins, and ethnic groups including White Hispanics (Naiman et al., 2023). From an advertising standpoint, companies have traditionally designated the racial-ethnic majority segment as mainstream consumers or the general market. Conversely, the racial-ethnic minority segment has been regarded as subgroup consumers or the multicultural market. As the complexity of the U.S. population continues to increase at an accelerated pace, companies need to reevaluate the scope, framework, and budget of marketing initiatives to remain relevant and competitive, especially in a digital environment (Singh, et al., 2024).

In a 2019 study conducted by Alliance for Inclusive and Multicultural Marketing, results showed that 100% of the U.S. population growth came from multicultural consumer segments (ANA, 2019). Post COVID-19 pandemic, these consumers have continued to fuel the nation's growth based on US Census data (Evans, 2023). Moreover, multicultural consumers reached a combined total purchasing power of \$5.6 trillion dollars in 2024, an amount which is nearly 65% more than the purchasing power amount from a decade earlier (Poinski, 2024; Nielsen, 2015). These facts lend support to the reevaluation of marketing efforts through a culturally germane lens. To build multicultural customer engagement and maximize business returns, especially with Hispanic consumers, companies must create messages and advertisements which are mutually in-language and in-culture. Capturing insights about Hispanics' emotions and reactions to different advertising media modalities is also crucial to successfully develop multicultural advertising strategies and leverage communication channels effectively.

BACKGROUND

Advertising is a cornerstone component of the marketing communications mix which enables companies to convey a purposefully tailored message about brands, products, or services to a targeted audience either for promotional purposes or for building its reputation (Rabindranath & Singh, 2024). It is a non-personal presentation of an offering, and it can be executed through a variety of paid mass communication channels like television, radio, print, outdoor, digital, social media, and mobile. According to Moriarty et al. (2015), advertising is an effective marketing strategy because it is aimed at touching people's emotions, staying in their thoughts, and influencing them to desired actions or perceptions. Unlike other elements of the marketing communications mix, advertising allows companies to fully control the offering's message to enhance the relevancy, exposure, and responsiveness from consumers.

Besides driving revenue, advertising efforts also serve to build strong brand equity and customer perceptions. Brand equity is important because it is both a key

indicator of an offering's success in the market, as well as a predictor of future performance. Equity can also be tantamount to brand quality and consumer loyalty. As a result, businesses worldwide rely on advertising as a key strategy within the marketing plan to propel sales, bolster brand value, defend against competition, and broaden the scope of their market footprint. Given its success in connecting with audiences, optimizing costs, and boosting ecommerce, digital advertising has gained even more importance post the COVID-19 pandemic (Jivrajka, 2023).

Media Advertising Expenditure

In the U.S., the total annual media advertising expenditure has been consistently increasing for over two decades, from \$153.72 billion dollars in 2010 to a forecasted \$592.63 billion dollars in 2030 (Statista, 2025). The estimated incremental expenditure can be attributed to several tactical reasons such as companies' desires to strengthen sales, differentiate from competition, grow the business, boost reputation, or increase brand awareness. Digital advertising, which comprises internet and other technology platforms to target consumers based on specific characteristics, is expected to account for a sizable portion of the American total annual media expenditure according to Statista Research Department (Statista, 2025).

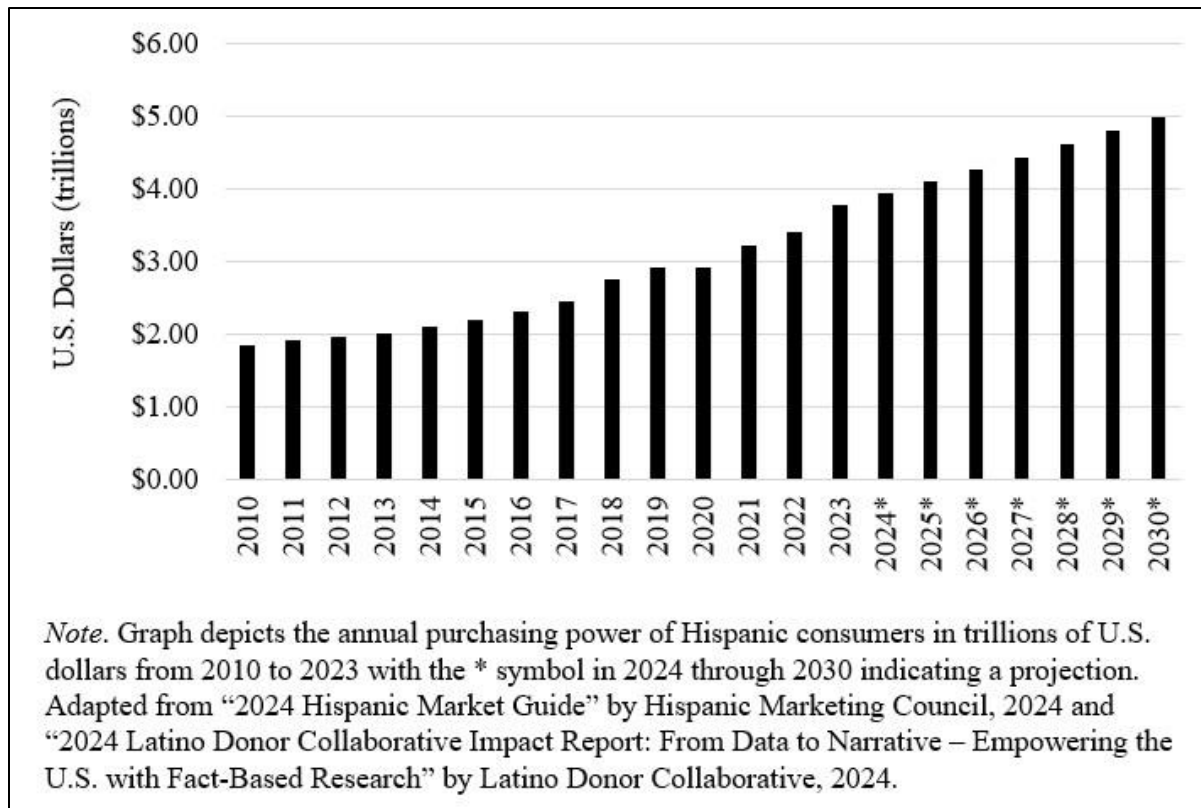
In addition to tactical reasons, market conditions can also influence companies' advertising expenditures. For example, favorable economic situations, encouraging market prognoses, or unexpected commercial opportunities can enable companies to increase advertising expenses. Another market contributor is based on the influence of multicultural groups. Between 2022 and 2025, the Hispanic population surpassed 68 million and accounted for almost 71% of the population growth in the U.S. with an estimated purchasing power of \$4.1 trillion dollars (Ramos, 2025; U.S. Census, 2024; Latino Donor Collaborative, 2025). Figure 1 shows the consistent increase of this group's buying power from 2010 to 2023 with a projection through 2030. Hispanics have also been dubbed as super consumers due to their strong media consumption patterns and high engagement with digital advertising channels such as websites, social media, video, and mobile (Nielsen, 2015).

The combination of population growth, spending power, and consumption trends makes Hispanic consumers an attractive and lucrative market segment. However, the advertising spend by companies for the Hispanic market has been severely underinvested for years, with multicultural advertisement expenditure in 2023 only accounting for 5.3% of the country's total annual media advertising corporate budget (Wheless, 2023). While multicultural advertising expenditure lags severely, it could also increase (due mainly to Hispanic consumers) with upcoming political campaigns, sporting events, and continued digital media consumption between 2025 and 2030. Conversely, multicultural advertisement expenditure growth in general could be stunted given the political, social, and economic climate in the U.S. following the 2024 presidential elections.

Hispanic Media Advertisement Insights

With multicultural advertisement expenditure predicted to remain a small portion of the total annual media spend in the U.S., to ensure effectiveness and expenditure return maximization, companies must understand the criteria and distinctions of multicultural advertising such as in-language and in-culture contexts. A study conducted in 2016 by global marketing research firm, Nielsen Holdings Company, proves this point. The Nielsen study showed that television advertisements in English delivered a return on investment (ROI) of \$1.10 dollars versus only \$0.80 cents for advertisements in Spanish (Mizrahi, 2017). A detailed analysis of the study revealed the ROI gap was due to a non-compliance of multicultural advertising contexts, meaning the Hispanic advertisements were direct translations from English without consideration of Spanish language aspects or culturally relevant situations.

Figure 1. Hispanic Purchasing Power in the U.S. from 2010 to 2023 with a Projection through 2030



The study also showed that advertisements in Spanish which applied in-language and in-culture structures experienced a four-time higher ROI than advertisements in English. Given the significant ROI difference, these findings could be interpreted as a roadmap, or as marketing insights, for companies to successfully advertise to Hispanic consumers with the intent of budget expenditure optimization. Upon further evaluation of the study, the advertisements translated in Spanish, which

lacked an application of multicultural factors such as in-language and in-culture elements because they were converted directly from English, only delivered a 73% return on investment compared to native- created English advertisements.

In contrast, when advertisements in Spanish incorporated original content tailored to Hispanics, coupled with cultural idiosyncrasies and authentic language dialogue, Spanish advertisements were substantially more effective with consumers across every recall and likeability performance metric compared to English-version counterparts (Loechner, 2017). Moreover, 54% of native-created Spanish advertising campaigns equaled, and more important, significantly outperformed the consumption index of English advertisements, thus strengthening the importance of understanding how to market to Hispanic consumers and how to employ multicultural contexts effectively in advertising (Gardner, 2017). Braca and Dondio (2023) suggest that to be persuasive and influential, advertising must be framed by social forces and by consumers' thoughts or sentiments about the advertisements seen. This is a key observation because opinions and feelings play a fundamental role in consumers' purchasing attitudes.

Given the size of the Hispanic population, there seems to be a disparity of attitudinal information in scholarly journals about Hispanic consumers' reactions and sensitivities when asked to compare English advertisements versus multicultural adapted Spanish advertisements, particularly in digital media platforms. While implementation of language and cultural contexts is crucial, as evidenced by the Nielsen study, how and to what degree these elements affect Hispanic consumers' thoughts and sentiments is scant in the body of work. This presents a problem for companies advertising in the multicultural market space, and it could have negative repercussions, especially for growing revenue, strengthening brand equity, and maximizing advertising ROI dollars.

Hispanics consumers represent a valuable business opportunity with a distinct linguistic, cultural, and attitudinal profile than the mainstream market. Despite sharing a common language and similar customs, Hispanic consumers should not be misconstrued as a homogeneous market. Conomos et al. (2016) assert that Hispanics are quite diverse as a result of different genetic ancestry, ethnic backgrounds, economic status, and environmental exposures due to geographically extensive nativity origins. Birthplace also plays a pivotal role in social identity and on the level of acculturation.

Guarnaccia and Hausmann-Stabile (2016) describe acculturation as a multidimensional process in which an individual's or a group's native cultural patterns change because of direct and constant contact with a different culture. The degree of acculturation can be gauged based on the extent of acceptance, or rejection, by the individual or group toward the process. According to Tsai and Li (2012):

Hispanic consumers often exhibit varying degrees of acculturation, which in turn influence[s] how these consumers respond to ethnic cultural cues in advertising. Marketing research on Hispanic consumers confirms that Hispanic acculturation patterns are associated with variances in media

use, response to direct marketing and digital advertising, as well as purchase behaviors. (p. 306)

The total media advertising expenditure in the U.S. for both mainstream and multicultural markets is expected to continue rising through 2030 (Statista, 2025; Wheless, 2023). The demographic, financial, and social impact of ethnic consumers such as Hispanics creates a strong argument for the integration of cross-cultural perspectives into conventional marketing efforts to ensure effectiveness. Tsai and Li (2012) caution that for Hispanic consumers, their level of acculturation plays a significant factor in responding to culturally oriented marketing messages. The challenge is there is a shortage of adequate literature explaining the relationship between acculturation and different advertising strategies. This is a valid concern because filling the knowledge gap can clarify Hispanic consumers' attitudes and potential purchasing intentions. This emphasizes further the notion that cultural relevance in advertisements is a combination of in-language and in-culture elements that are congruent with the consumers' background, experiences, expectations, and level of acculturation.

CONCEPTUAL RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

To maximize the reach and investment yield of advertisements directed at Hispanic buyers, the provenance of multicultural advertising strategies must be rooted in solid theories and models. As a result, the theoretical framework of this paper underpins the advances in acculturation theory. While advertising theory provides insights into the communication process and the persuasive nature of advertising for influencing decision-making and purchasing conduct, acculturation theory explains to what degree Hispanic consumers' attitudes, backgrounds, social identities, and acceptance level of mainstream's culture can impact their buying behavior intentions.

The understanding of these differences in consumers' attitudes, based on their level of acculturation, is essential to improve the reach and return of marketing efforts. Consequently, their magnitude is the genesis for endorsing the attitudinal study of consumers toward the application of multicultural contexts, especially when advertising to ethnic groups such as Hispanics. Acculturation theory is presented as the key theoretical orientation associated with Hispanic consumers' cognitive, affective, and behavioral intentions toward advertisements. Various processes and models related to acculturation are discussed to bolster the theoretical framework. An overview of acculturative approaches, dimensions, and instruments found in the body of literature is included to support the link between acculturation and Hispanic consumers' attitudes towards advertisements.

ACCULTURATION THEORY

Acculturation is the process of modifying a person's or a group's culture through exposure to another culture's individuals, literature, art, or media which leads to the adoption of the latter's values, traits, and practices. Acculturation, however, is not only about cultural changes; it can also contribute to adaptations or shifts in a person's or a community's social interactions. Acculturation is rooted in behavioral psychology and

cross-cultural psychology since these sciences “study [the] similarities and differences in behavior among individuals who have developed in different cultures. The search for relationships between cultural context and human behavior is” what provides a definition and a frame of reference for this dynamic process (Berry, 2017, p. 1). Kim (2017) also agrees with this provenance assertion and explains that in the 1930s the Social Science Research Council, a nonprofit organization founded to support social research worldwide, was responsible for formalizing acculturation as an investigative field within the main discipline of cross-cultural studies.

The first anthropologists to use the term acculturation in a research report were Robert Redfield, Ralph Linton, and Melville Herskovits in 1936. These three anthropologists crafted one of the most ubiquitous definitions of acculturation theory which is described as individuals from different cultures coming into first-hand contact continuously with another group and consequently causing changes to either the original group’s culture or to both of them. Though acculturation research increased in study and popularity after the publication of the three anthropologists’ report, the term had been coined over fifty years earlier. John Wesley Powell, an American geologist and ethnologist who rose to fame for exploring the Colorado Plateau region and studying North American Indians’ cultures and languages, is credited with coining it in 1880 to explain the psychological changes created by cross-cultural interactions (Khawaja, 2016; McNamee, 2019).

Anthropologists Redfield, Linton, and Herskovits expanded on Powell’s definition and identified three initial theoretical outcomes stemming from the acculturation process: acceptance, adaptation, and reaction. The first outcome, acceptance, is described by the anthropologists as the adoption of a host culture in great portion, or almost in its entirety, while a group’s native culture is lost or purposefully dismissed. Rumbaut (2015) believes acceptance is synonymous with assimilation, a strategy in which ethnic distinctions and social identities are blurred, and that assimilation cannot be possible if the dominant society does not accept and include the ethnic population into its fold. The second outcome, adaptation, occurs when both host and native cultures are harmoniously combined, and any differences of opinion or attitudes are accepted or seamlessly merged into quotidian life. Based on these descriptions, neither acceptance nor adaptation sound dissonant, pessimistic, argumentative, or antagonistic. Yet, the third outcome seems to evoke a different reaction.

For Redfield et al. (1936), the reaction outcome is tantamount to oppression, subversion, and rejection, thus leading to a contra-acculturative movement and a return to the native culture. While the other two outcomes seek understanding or cohesion with the new host culture, reaction obstructs its embrace and dissemination, favoring only the native culture. Due to the strong adherence to this divisive view, reaction was subsequently renamed and reclassified as a separation strategy within the outcomes of the acculturation process (Cole, 2018; Rudmin et al., 2017). In fact, the theory of acculturation has continued to evolve into diverse processes and models to accommodate the nuances, intricacies, and variations arising from the growth of multiethnic societies and multicultural markets.

The Process of Acculturation

Within the purview of psychological sciences, a process can be described as an individual's engagement in active changes, and in a consistent direction, which culminates in a chosen conduct (Snow, 2021). Therefore, the outcome of a process is due to the individual's capacity and capability to make decisions rather than caused by personality traits. From a broader perspective, a process is not a haphazard event or occurrence. Instead, it follows a series of related and transformational steps that have a specific value. A process can be mapped, explained, repeated, evaluated, and measured. The latter, its ability to be measured, is especially important from a social and behavioral standpoint because measurements can predict outcomes with a certain degree of confidence and credibility, as well as estimate the magnitude or intensity of a given effect in a population (Wasserstein & Lazar, 2016).

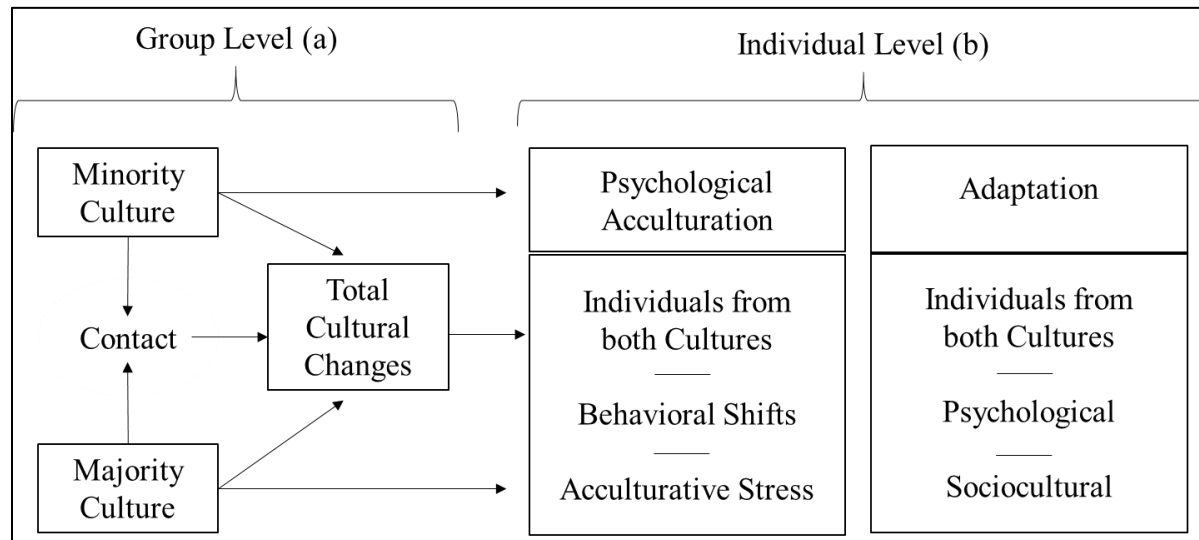
A single continuum process. According to Van de Vijver (2015), early descriptions of acculturation theory characterized it as a one-direction process. Under this modality, acculturation was believed to happen in a straightforward manner with successive adjustments and adaptations to a new host culture over time. Simultaneously, the native culture was voluntarily forsaken or forgotten. This designation as a unilinear continuum process emerged largely from the experiences of European immigrants to the U.S. at the turn of the 20th century. Many of these foreigners did not speak English. It is also highly unlikely these immigrants would have been familiar with the American culture beforehand or would have had the same level of formal schooling compared to American born countrymen. Despite retaining pride for their heritage, most immigrants wittingly adjusted to their new home and became Americanized. It could be argued that this type of acculturation led to an Americanization movement in the earlier part of the century which promoted the seeds of patriotism and the importance of U.S. history education among both citizens and naturalized foreigners.

A dual continuum process. Stathi and Roscini (2016) also agree that the acculturation theory was initially characterized as a one-directional process on the basis of immigration or the minority perspective. In other words, immigration-derived acculturation was considered unilinear with cultural and social context only flowing in one direction. While the experiences during the early 1900s may have supported this theoretical view, limiting acculturation as a single continuum process negates that communication is bidirectional, reciprocal, and bilayered. As a result of the latter, behavioral anthropologists like Theodore D. Graves argued that a single path was insufficient, and two distinctions had to be made within the acculturation process: group level and individual level.

Group level acculturation is a collective phenomenon centered on a cohort's historical, political, cultural, and economic views; individual level acculturation is a subjective reflection of psychological changes based on personal attitudes and experiences (Berry, 2005; Castro, 2017). Figure 2 depicts a cultural framework which helps connect and codify the process's two domains. For instance, at a group level (a), minority and majority factions constantly interact; both cultures are changed since communication is an active and mutual process with a feedback loop. The reciprocal

exchanges, in turn, affect the individual level (b), meaning they impact people's opinions, activities, and conduct. These are expressed in terms of shifts, stressors, and adaptations at psychological and sociocultural levels.

Figure 2. Illustrative Framework of Group Level Acculturation and Individual Level Acculturation



Note. Figure illustrating the framework of group level acculturation and individual level acculturation by Berry, 2015. Adapted from The Sage Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence, by J. M. Bennett, 2015. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc. Copyright 2015 by SAGE Publications, Inc.

Linking Acculturation Strategies and Consumer Behavior

Leveraging the idea of dual directionality, Samnani et al. (2013) identified the theoretical background of the acculturation process as being supported by two independent and separate psychological dimensions derived from personal attitudes. The first attitude-driven dimension deals with newcomers' desires to keep the original culture. There seems to be validity in this attitude because preserving certain aspects of a native culture such as language, traditions, and social values can be extremely advantageous. For example, bilingual individuals have demonstrated intellectual gains in processes linked to creativity, working memory, cognitive flexibility, conflict resolution, and spatial performance compared to individuals who only speak one language (Xia et al., 2022). Plus, with the advances in technology and globalization, bilingualism could also generate increased professional or personal opportunities. Lastly, upholding of cultural heritage and customs could serve to reinforce an individual's sense of identity and boost self-esteem as well.

The second attitude-driven dimension noted is newcomers' eagerness to fit in with society by adopting the values and standards of behavior of the dominant culture. Given the plethora of ascribed possibilities, it is difficult to ascertain in a simple manner this willingness to embrace the host culture, especially since the acculturation process

can be complex, delicate, and ambiguous. However, Simms (2018) offers a possible explanation by suggesting that people find value in uniting under a national banner or character with the singular goal of working together toward society's common good. It is precisely the juxtaposition of these two theoretical attitude-based dimensions which led to the transformation of acculturation from a concept to a four-fold strategy model.

Acculturation strategies. In 1980, cross-cultural psychologist John W. Berry recommended treating these two dimensions as the outcomes of social strategies in life's daily engagements rather than the result of personal attitudes (Emamzadeh, 2018). The recommendation was based on social representation theory, which advocates finding common understanding to develop social relationships, and on the extent to which both dimensions shape behavior. To clarify, attitudes are interchangeable with feelings and sentiments. Moreover, attitudes are emotional opinions, or mental state reflections, that can subjectively drive behavior. Since attitudes are deeply intertwined with emotions, orientations, and personal values, it may be difficult to change or influence an individual's conduct by perfunctory or superficial contact.

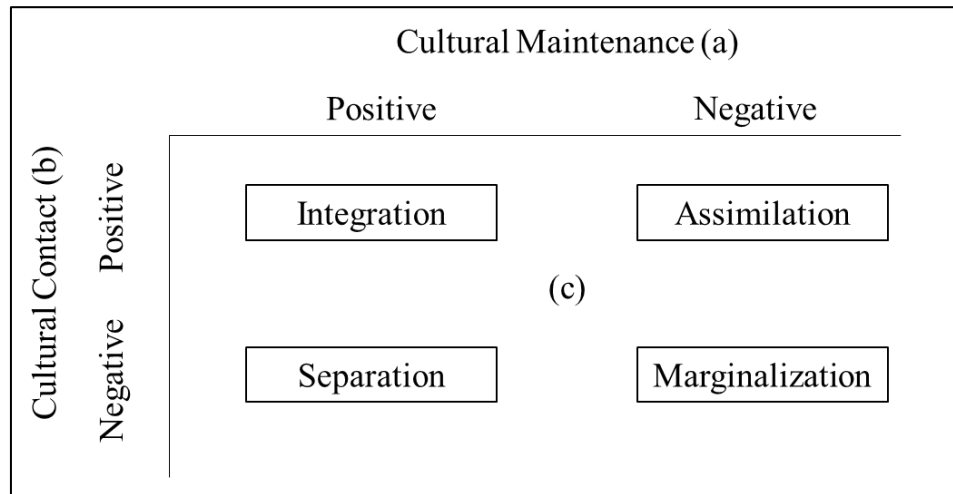
Like attitudes, social strategies can also impact behavior. Strategies are guided by a logical approach, or a valid assessment, that is typically associated with positive or negative choices. Ultimately, social strategies' positive and negative choices were translated into a dual context analytical framework based on the dimensions of cultural maintenance and cultural contact as shown on figure 3. Borrowing from these dimensions, the psychologist defined the extent to which an individual wants to conserve the native culture in quotidian life as the cultural maintenance (a), while the extent to which an individual wants to interact with other cultural groups in the community as the cultural contact (b). This cultural maintenance and cultural contact framework led the cross-cultural psychologist to develop the prominently recognized four-fold model (c) with its four acculturation strategies: integration, assimilation, separation, and marginalization.

Integration and assimilation strategies. Integration and assimilation are alike in that both strategies view engaging the dominant culture or other ethnic groups in society as an important component of acculturation. Integration, however, goes one step further in the process by also upholding the native heritage and cultural identity while adopting the host culture at the same time. Integration is driven by strong and positive sociocultural adjustments to both worlds, making the strategy synonymous with the term biculturalism (Ozer, 2017). Thus, an immigrant or foreigner from a minority group who chooses to integrate into a dominant culture can also be considered bicultural.

Integration is also identified in other models as biculturalism due to its positive responses to cultural contact and to cultural maintenance. The difference between integration and assimilation can be attributed to demographic or psychographic factors. In an age and gender study conducted by Nshom and Croucher (2018) among Finnish adolescents, support for cultural integration was shown to increase with age; conversely, assimilation endorsement decreased with age. The Finnish study also showed that females favored integration more than assimilation, unlike the study's male

participants. Though integration and assimilation strategies are personal choices, countries with highly political or religious governments may force minority groups to assimilate into the larger society.

Figure 3 . Four -fold Acculturation Model



Note. Illustration of the four-fold acculturation model. Adapted from The Oxford Handbook of Acculturation and Health, by S. Schwartz & J. Unger, 2017. New York, New York: Oxford University Press. Copyright 2017 by Oxford University Press.

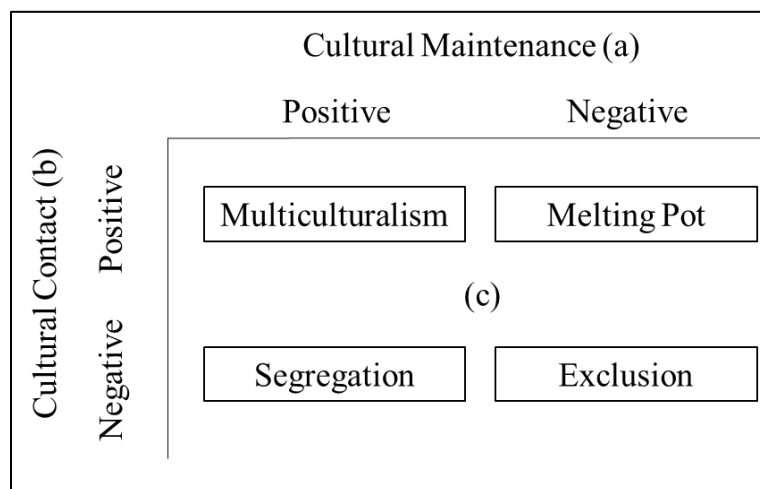
Separation and marginalization strategies. Separation and marginalization strategies both entail the devaluation or rejection of cultures. However, the negation may be caused by diverse reasons. For instance, to preserve a group's native culture, minorities may form closed ethnic enclaves or create segregated communities within a larger society. As a result, heritage is maintained while the host culture is shunned. For Nshom and Croucher (2018), separation can also turn into segregation if it is demanded or enforced by the dominant society. While unintended, such drastic actions could lead to marginalization.

Marginalization is a parallel rejection of both the original and the host cultures. Carter et al. (2023) describe it as a lack of belonging perpetuated by inequality and exclusion. An alternate view is that it is a strategy with the psychological spectrum that ranges from low engagement in social activities to a total withdrawal from all types of interactions. Given the isolationism and discordant characterization of these strategies, individuals who are culturally separated or marginalized could possibly experience negative outcomes in society. Some examples might include reduced workforce prospects, lower educational opportunities, weaker economic security, and decreased access to health resources. From an emotional perspective, marginalization in a society might also affect a person's mental health and well-being.

FROM THEORETICAL MODELS TO PRACTICAL INSTRUMENTS

Berry (2017), the creator of the four-fold acculturation model, admits the theory of acculturation has expanded to include remote contact, meaning not just direct or by firsthand interactions. Although the four-fold model is still considered one of the most influential tools for conceptualizing acculturation, further adjustments were needed to account for the changes brought on by technology and globalization. The advent of social networks, online communities, and digital platforms has ensured that cultural exposure is not limited or confined by a country's geographic borders. As the world's population is becoming more socially accessible and multifaceted, acculturation is turning into a global phenomenon capable of impacting most if not all societies. Consequently, Berry (2017) updated the four-fold acculturation model, as shown in figure 4, to reflect the four strategies as outcomes from a larger society perspective. The definitions of cultural maintenance (a) and cultural contact (b) remained the same. However, the strategies (c) changed.

Figure 4. Updated Four-fold Acculturation Model



Note. Illustration of Berry's updated Four-fold Acculturation Model. Adapted from *The Oxford Handbook of Acculturation and Health*, by S. Schwartz & J. Unger, 2017. New York, New York: Oxford University Press. Copyright 2017 by Oxford University Press.

Multiculturalism, melting pot, segregation, and exclusion are not just a renaming of the original acculturation strategies, but instead a reflection of acculturation expectations from all members of a society toward public practices, attitudes, and policies. In other words, these were updated to mirror the manifestations from the community at large. Despite the revisions, other models have emerged since individuals' and groups' behaviors may differ from the stated strategies of the four-fold acculturation model due to chosen or imposed constraints. For instance, two-dimensional approaches such as the four-fold acculturation model might not reflect the growth of global consumerism or the diffusion of polyculturalist ideas. Thus, more multidimensional models might be needed to include growing diverse views. Any new

models should also take into consideration psychological aspects like people's religions and food preferences, or social aspects like group inclusiveness and tolerance.

A different issue which can add yet another layer of complexity to the evolution of acculturation theory and the development of new models is subcultural diversity within an ethnic population. Hispanics are not a homogenous group. Pew Research Center estimates that 81% of the 65 million Hispanic people in the U.S. identified as foreign-born or U.S.-born Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Salvadorans, Cubans, and Dominicans (Moslimani & Noe-Bustamante, 2023). The remaining 19% of the Hispanic population derives from immigrant and U.S.-born individuals from Central and South America, and also Spain. Hispanics are not a race, but an ethnicity, and thus Hispanic consumers can identify racially as White, Black, Asian, or multiracial. Figure 5 shows a breakdown of the Hispanic population's subgroups in the U.S. based on percentage.

To be relevant and useful, especially for marketing advertisements, acculturation models and strategies should encompass global, technological, psychological, social, and ethnic dimensions along with attitudinal issues from a larger society perspective. Howarth et al. (2014) agree with this assertion and claim that acculturation theorists typically recognize that it is a complex process that involves social practices, psychological preferences, and political situations. However, theories must be put into practice because culture and identity can be shaped by many factors unaccounted for in theoretical models. Practical instruments can be used to reduce stereotyping, clarify implicit attitudes that may impact behavior, and create an inclusive feel for respondents regardless of cultural origin (Phelan et al., 2019).

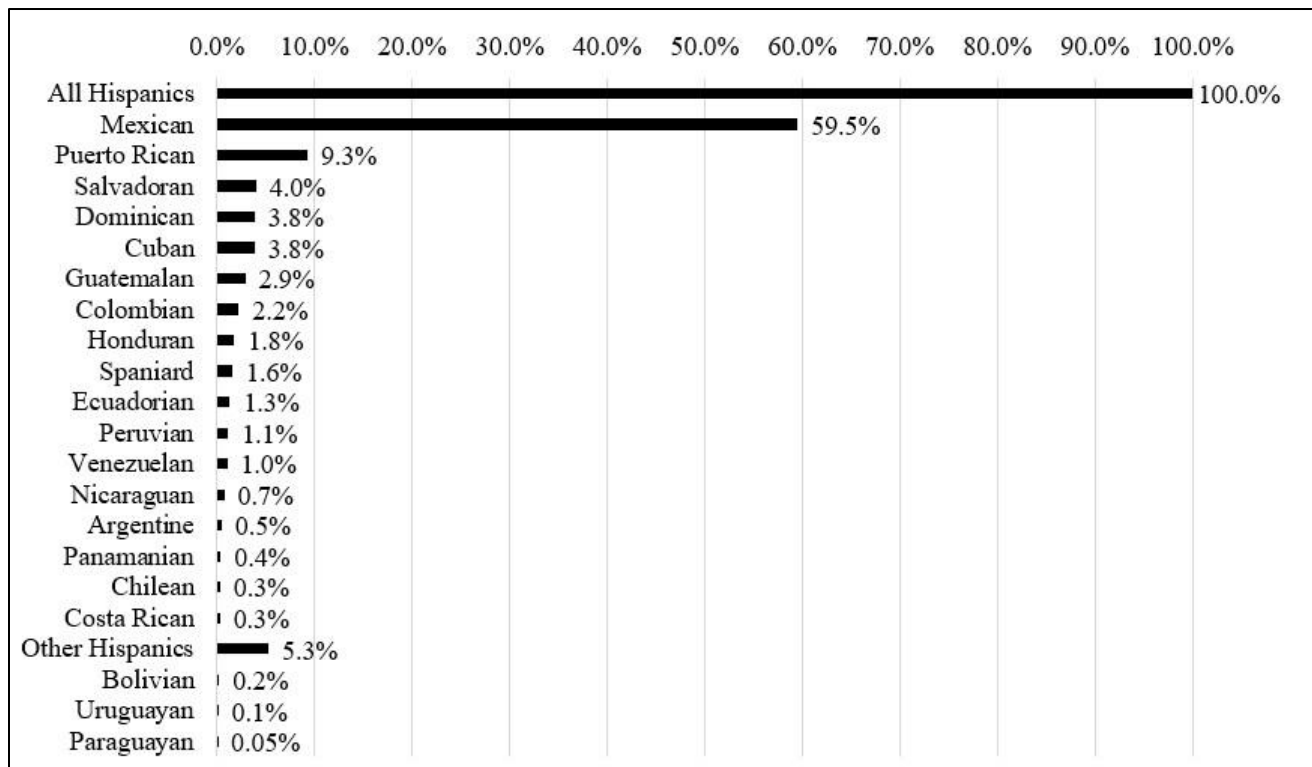
Practical Hispanic Acculturation Instruments

Leveraging the existing body of work through the late 1970s, Szapocznik, Kurtines, and Fernandez (1980) created the first Hispanic bilinear acculturation instrument that produced two independent scores based on adherence to cultural origin and to the host culture. The Behavioral Acculturation Scale (BAS) was inspired by the adaptation habits exhibited by Cuban Americans. The development of the BAS was an important step for the study of acculturation because the instrument focused specifically on the four-fold's integration strategy, thus amplifying and adding depth to the concept of biculturalism. This bilinear acculturation instrument simultaneously superimposed two separate dimensions: behaviors and values. Fan and Ashdown (2014) note the significance of this progression because acculturative behaviors and values impact people's actions differently. For example, a change in behavior may not automatically translate into a change in personal values. However, a change in values can result in different behaviors and actions, including purchasing decisions.

Shortly after the launch of the BAS, contemporary research psychologists Cuellar, Harris, and Jasso (1980) countered with the development of the Acculturation Rating Scale for Mexican Americans (ARSMA) to evaluate the effects of acculturation on patients with mental disorders. Rather than using the strategies from the four-fold acculturation model as outcomes as BAS did, the ARSMA test employed a 5-point Likert scale to determine the degree of acculturation based on responses to several

dimensions such ethnic interaction, heritage and pride, cultural identity, and language usage. The ARSMA test was administered in both English and Spanish to 222 individuals in Texas who were either Mexican immigrants or Mexican Americans. Respondents' answers were then given a numeric value, with cultural orientations ranging from 1 (very Mexican), 2 (Mexican-oriented), 3 (bicultural), 4 (Anglo-oriented), to 5 (very Anglicized). While the ARSMA instrument was developed specifically for a subethnic group within the Hispanic population, it contributed to the field by broadening the range of dimensions to study the acculturation phenomenon.

Figure 5. Breakdown of Hispanic Population's Subgroups in the U.S.



Note. Graph depicts the breakdown of the 62.5 million Hispanic population's subgroups in 2021. Total is 100.2% due to rounding errors or duplication in participants' responses to census survey. Adapted from "U.S. Population Detailed Tables" by Moslimani and Noe-Bustamante from Pew Research Center, 2023.

Given the predominance of Mexican individuals within the Hispanic population in the U.S., psychologist Manuel Ramirez created the Bicultural/Multicultural Experience Inventory (B/MEI) around the same time as the ARSMA's publication to assess the acculturation levels of this ethnic group (Romero & Branscome, 2014). However, unlike ARSMA, the B/MEI was considered an experiential instrument that gauged behavioral dimensions and cultural identity by analyzing demographic information, educational history, linguistic preferences, and socialization tendencies (Kim & Abreu, 2001). While limited, the B/MEI instrument is worth mentioning because it demonstrated clear

differences in psychological, attitudinal, and social dimensions between high acculturated and low acculturated Mexican Americans.

During the mid-1990s, the ARSMA test was revised into the ARSMA-II to provide a more robust, relevant, and multifactorial assessment of this Hispanic subgroup. The instrument was expanded from 20 questions to 48 questions. The revision also incorporated two scales based on the four-fold acculturation model. According to Burrow-Sánchez et al. (2015), the usage of the ARSMA-II to measure acculturation among Hispanics continues to be widespread because it has been found to be reliable and applicable with Mexican American research participants. In addition to acculturation instruments based on Cuban and Mexican Hispanic subethnicities, another important milestone in the 1990s was the introduction of the Bicultural Scale for Puerto Ricans (BSPR) by Cortés et al. (1994). Similar to the BAS, the BSPR consisted of a 20-question instrument anchored on a 4-point Likert scale for assessing bicultural domains of cultural involvement of Puerto Ricans living in the mainland. The instrument examined multiple dimensions, including language preference, values, cultural references, and other practices.

Kim and Abreu (2001) assert that in the span of 18 years, from 1978 to 1996, there were 23 different Hispanic acculturation instruments published based on various linear modalities and psychological dimensions. While most instruments were independently geared toward analyzing Cuban, Mexican, and Puerto Rican groups, a few of them such as the Brief Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (BASH) and the Bidimensional Short Acculturation Scale for Hispanics (BSASH) were developed with multiple Hispanic ethnicities in mind. According to Mills et al. (2014), the BASH instrument measures the acculturation levels among Mexicans and Puerto Ricans based on a language-driven questionnaire. A BASH study of 435 Hispanics in 2014 concluded that despite the instrument's simplicity and brevity, it demonstrates strong psychometric properties such as reliability and validity, thus bolstering the accuracy of the results. Similar to BASH, the BSASH instrument evaluates language and media use to measure the degree of acculturation. While short, BSASH adds a valuable assessment factor because it can be used with Hispanics of all subgroups (Lindsay et al., 2017). These acculturation instruments are useful because they simplify and generalize responses from Hispanic consumers while maintaining psychometric properties.

In the early 2010s, Maldonado (2011) further contributed to the acculturation body of work by doing an ARSMA-based study on the effectiveness of advertising among 331 consumers who identified as Mexican, Mexican American, and non-Hispanic. The study concluded that understanding a consumer's level of acculturation is crucial for measuring advertising effectiveness as it relates to cultural orientation. Among the findings, Mexican consumers did not have a more favorable opinion of advertisements with Mexican cultural elements, and likewise, non-Hispanic consumers did not have a more favorable opinion of culturally sensitive American advertisements. However, acculturated Mexican Americans with a higher Mexican orientation had a

more positive reaction to advertisements with Hispanic elements such as in-language and in-culture.

Cultural orientation was expected to drive advertising effectiveness. However, acculturated Mexican Americans with a higher American orientation did not respond as favorably to advertisements with American cultural elements. Instead, these consumers expressed a negative reaction, leading the researcher to postulate that acculturation level, consumer attitudes, and the use of cultural elements are important variables to achieve advertising effectiveness. A caveat of the study is its limitation to Mexicans and Mexican Americans, which could have affected the results and invalidated them for market generalization. Therefore, the recommendation for future research is to conduct studies with other Hispanics ethnicities besides Mexican such as Puerto Ricans, Salvadorans, Cubans, and other Hispanic consumers from Central and South America.

ACCULTURATION CRITIQUES SHAPING CULTURALLY RELEVANT ADVERTISEMENTS

The projected growth of the Hispanic population in the U.S. over the next two decades merits additional research evaluating how acculturation influences people's behaviors and actions in daily aspects of life like intrapersonal and interpersonal relationships, social and community engagements, lifestyle and health choices, social media usage, and purchasing decisions. While newer studies have been performed, they have had limitations or shortcomings due to the reliance on constrained models or instruments, population type or sample size restrictions, erroneous assumptions, wrong observations, and other unforeseen or uncontrollable circumstances (Bérard et al., 2016; Goltz & Dowdeswell, 2019). Each of these limitations should be scrutinized and reviewed to better understand how future research can improve the body of work or address any existing knowledge gaps. This, in turn, will further help with the creation of more effective and relevant advertisements for multicultural consumers like Hispanics.

Acculturation Model Critiques

Despite its acceptance, influence, and continuous usage worldwide, the four-fold acculturation model has been criticized mainly for two reasons: rigidity and strategy validity. Emamzadeh (2018) states that people's behaviors are not always logical or congruent with attitudes, values, or personal desires. In other words, there is a degree of behavior fluidity based on psychological and environmental situations. The four-fold acculturation model seems to lack the flexibility needed to account for this. Ozer (2017) claims that the four-fold acculturation model is also inflexible in terms of diversity and application to various groups. Other critiques of this model address the description narrowness of the integration and marginalization strategies. Given its widespread acceptance and usage in acculturation research, Guarnaccia and Hausmann-Stabile (2016) suggest dividing the model's criticisms into two discussion areas: how the model was conceptualized and how it is defined.

Model's conceptualization myopia. Conceptualization is the mental process of formulating abstract and intellectual ideas based on emotional, social, physical, linguistic, and cultural experiences (Langacker, 2014). Since the process is based on

personal knowledge, lessons, and insights, individuals may interpret concepts or contexts in unique and different manners. For this reason, Guarnaccia and Hausmann-Stabile (2016) suggest the goal of the acculturation model should be viewing cultural trait analysis as the process's starting point and integrating the results into a wider, more conceptualized, and new cultural perspective as the final objective. Research studies which focus only on the model's traits to stereotype people, instead of fully understanding the dynamics of the acculturation process, are therefore incomplete.

When created, the model's integration strategy was considered the acculturation practice with the highest chance of yielding meaningful social interactions in two cultures. This synonymity with biculturalism has given rise to its critique. Given the shrinking of social, commercial, and communication barriers worldwide, it seems myopic to associate cultural integration only with biculturalism because this curtails the feasibility of multiculturalism. Marginalization strategy has also been heavily criticized because like integration, its explanation seems restrictive. Marginalization is associated with vulnerability, which Wrigley and Dawson (2016) describe as a susceptibility to flawed thinking or a lack of capacity that stereotypes individuals, thus leading to invalid assessments. Incomplete or faulty information can be detrimental to the creation of culturally relevant messages.

Model's definition staticity. Acculturation is a social exchange process based on the fluidity and dynamism of interactions among individuals from majority and minority groups (Schinke et al., 2016). It is also dependent on the reach and frequency of different cultural encounters and social relationships among these groups. Besides being reproached by its lack of conceptual framing, the four-fold acculturation model is also criticized for its static definitions, which in turn, preclude explaining the differences among groups and individuals (Tahir et al., 2019). Analyzing participants' preferences and orientations, in addition to using set model definitions, could be a potential solution to address such criticism.

Haugen and Kunst (2017) indicate that the definition of acculturation as a bidirectional process between cultural groups is respected and well established. However, research leveraging the model's framework to understand the adaptation of majority cultures is scarce. This seems to be driven by the model's definition and dominant focus on minority groups in relation to the community's majority members. To ensure congruence between the term acculturation and its analytical approaches, the definition of frameworks such as the four-fold acculturation model should include the actions and interactions of all members of a society. In response to this critique, Guarnaccia and Hausmann-Stabile (2016) suggest that expanding the model's definition to be more diverse and inclusive of all people, not just minorities, could strengthen studies' results.

Population Differences' Critiques

While Hispanic acculturation instruments have been used since 1978 to investigate a gamut of subjects such as mental and physical health, cultural experiences, leadership and assertiveness characteristics, and consumers' purchasing

intentions, most of the instruments were developed for specific Hispanics subethnicities. Consequently, the studies' results cannot be generalized to all Hispanics since the population is heterogeneous. Moreover, some ethnicities seem to be more bicultural and bilingual than others as is the case with Puerto Ricans. Moslimani et al., (2023) indicate that 83% of Puerto Ricans are bilingual compared to 72% of other Hispanics. Because all Puerto Ricans are American citizens by birth, this group is unlike any other within the Hispanic ethnicity spectrum.

Since acculturation is a social process tightly bound by complexity, uncertainty, and fluidity, its effect on a given population should not be simplified or divided into set categories. The reason is because not all members of an ethnic group will acculturate the same way or to the same degree. In other words, not all Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Cuban Americans, or any other subethnicity within the Hispanic community will acculturate equally simply because they belong to the same heritage or country. According to Liu and Macdonald (2016), people are guided by multiple inner voices, or a dialogical self, which are the result of external and internal interactions with the world around them. This concept of dialogical self serves as a criticism of the four-fold acculturation model for not encompassing all the layers of psychological differences. Figgou and Baka (2018) summarize this critique about populations by implying the importance of individuality in a person's linguistic and cultural choices as being based on interactions and influences, not just on group denominations.

Erroneous and Misleading Assumptions' Critiques

Wrong assumptions can also be made not just among different populations of the same group, but also within individuals in the same subethnicity segments. For example, from a citizenship standpoint, all Puerto Ricans are considered equal whether born on the island or any of the 50 states. However, there are socioeconomic and language differences between Puerto Ricans who reside on the island and those who live in the mainland, thus establishing yet another subcategory within a subgroup (Rodríguez de Laguna, 2017). As a result, it could be misleading to assume that all Puerto Ricans may respond alike to acculturation instruments or to marketing advertisements.

Linguistic issues. Language proficiency, in particular, is yet another acculturation dimension which has been criticized not just among Puerto Ricans, but also among all Hispanic ethnicities in general. Birman and Simon (2014) suggest that language proficiency can vary greatly between immigrants and native-born Hispanics based on learning age, skill level, and educational support. Therefore, it cannot be used as proof of acculturation level. Li and Tsai (2015) state that a consistent answer to explain the question of what role does language proficiency plays in an individual's acculturation has not yet been provided by the existing literature. This presents a couple of repercussions. First, language proficiency should be carefully used as a variable in acculturation models and instruments to avoid misleading generalizations. Second, researchers must also be cognizant that individuals, regardless of acculturation level, may select one language over another solely based on circumstances. This reinforces the notion that studies performed on Hispanics must involve participants from various

subethnicities and language proficiency levels to provide a more holistic view of acculturation.

Acknowledgements to reduce pitfalls. Addressing all these criticisms will not preclude new research from other shortfalls or deficiencies. As such, that was not the purpose of this study. The intent was to enrich and broaden the body of literature by leveraging insights into acculturation theory and its models to better understand their impact for creating culturally relevant advertisements to multicultural consumers such as Hispanics to better understand purchasing attitudes and behaviors. Furthermore, rather than limiting the scope to one or two Hispanic ethnicities as several instruments do, this paper included a deeper view to augment the existing research work. As a recommendation, further development of acculturation instruments or additional multicultural research with participants should closely resemble the breakdown of the Hispanic population in the U.S. to minimize such pitfalls and increase the probability of creating culturally sound messages to reach this target market.

MARKETING IMPLICATIONS AND CALL TO ACTION

The insights and findings from the studies and acculturation frameworks presented provide key implications for companies seeking to reach Hispanic consumers in an increasingly competitive marketplace. One of the central concepts is that Hispanics are a multifaceted population, and therefore, should not be treated as a homogenous segment in terms of marketing efforts. For instance, even in the same household, Hispanic individuals may speak Spanish but may also have different countries of origin or levels of acculturation. Understanding the latter is of paramount importance in marketing because the Hispanic acculturation spectrum can significantly influence these consumers' preferences, media consumption, and responses to advertisements.

The implications to create effective, culturally relevant advertisements aimed at this multicultural group are twofold. First, companies should adopt segmentation strategies based on the acculturation outcomes of target consumers: integrated (bicultural), separated, or assimilated. According to data maps and census projections, 68% of Hispanics in the U.S. are considered biculturally acculturated, which translates into a market of over 46.2 million people who consume media and advertisements almost equally in English as in Spanish (Refuel Agency, 2026; Ramos, 2025). This is in comparison to about 14% of Hispanics who identify as less acculturated. Research from Refuel Agency (2016) shows that while less acculturated Hispanics consume advertisements in both languages, they also demonstrate a slight separation orientation by focusing their attention on advertisements exclusively in Spanish. Of the remaining 18% of the Hispanic population, almost nine out of 10 display an assimilation orientation by preferring advertisements in English only and dismissing companies' native-created Spanish ads first as a lack of identity understanding.

As discussed with linguistic issues, the presence (or absence) of language cannot be used as proof (or disproof) of acculturation. Therefore, the second implication is that companies should not rely solely on language as a proxy for cultural relevance or

to tag advertisements as multicultural marketing as demonstrated by the 2016 Nielsen study. While messaging in Spanish language can drive attention and effectiveness, advertisements should also include in-culture elements to increase resonance and authenticity. Translations alone are not sufficient to successfully appeal to Hispanic consumers due to the different outcomes of the acculturation arc. In-language and in-culture implementation could include elements that reflect popular jargon, lived experiences, similar norms and beliefs, social values, shared ideas, or common traditions. For example, a bicultural Hispanic consumer may respond better to a hybrid approach that blends language and cultural nuances instead of a simple translation of an ad. The cultural aspect could be heightened even further for less acculturated consumers to enhance relatability. In contrast, highly acculturated or assimilated Hispanic consumers may respond more favorably to advertisements that reflect broader market appeal while also incorporating subtle linguistic and cultural elements aligned with their acculturation stage.

The call to action for companies is to develop deeper cultural insights by leveraging data, analytics, and acculturation levels rather than just aggregating Hispanic consumers into a single demographic house. Elevated research should incorporate behavioral, psychographic, technological, and acculturation-based variables in addition to traditional demographic segmentation. Given the continuous population growth and increasing purchasing power of Hispanic consumers, formulating strategic decisions based on these implications and call to action could help boost brand relevance, build stronger long-term relationships with Hispanic consumers, and maximize companies' multicultural advertising expenditure. Regardless of acculturation level, Hispanics account for almost 20% of the U.S. population and about 22% of the country's total disposable personal income, so creating culturally relevant advertisements is paramount for companies to succeed in the American marketplace (Latino Donor Collaborative, 2025; YCharts, 2026).

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper examines acculturation theory as a conceptual framework for creating effective and culturally relevant advertisements aimed at Hispanic consumers. Its purpose is to bridge the gap between theoretical models and practical applications to advance the understanding of factors that influence consumers' consumption and purchasing decisions, especially in the multicultural market. A brief description of advertising, media expenditure, and the demographics of Hispanics in the U.S. served to anchor the context and importance of the study. The research showed the Hispanic market as a large, growing, and economically significant consumer segment, justifying its monetary appeal for companies. The underinvestment of multicultural advertising spending patterns highlighted the disconnect between market potential and current marketing practices, thus supporting the implementation of acculturation segments as a call to action to build better, more financially sound advertising strategies.

Several acculturation models and instruments, especially from the 1970s through the 2010s, were discussed to establish a foundation. The findings point to acculturation as being neither simple nor static, but instead as being a multidimensional and

measurable process that shapes consumers' identities, attitudes, and decisions. The implications of this paper contribute to the marketing field by connecting acculturation theory with advertising strategy. The research's direction for companies is to align advertisements' messages with acculturation levels, as well as properly balance linguistic and cultural elements, to gain a competitive advantage. This recommendation is a shift from viewing multicultural marketing as a tactical adjustment into a strategic imperative for market growth and advertising expenditure optimization.

Future research opportunities may include empirical studies testing the relationship between the different acculturation outcomes and advertisements presented in various media modalities. From a business perspective, testing digital and social platforms would be relevant for companies because consumers' consumption patterns and purchasing behaviors are expected to continue evolving rapidly driven by generational shifts, economic stressors, and technological advancements in artificial intelligence. Another possibility could be exploring how interactions between Hispanic subethnicities over time impact acculturation, and by extension, if these produce changes to consumers' responses to advertisements. Given the increasing purchasing power of Hispanics, future research could also explore how acculturation translates income into buying decisions across different product categories. In turn, this could lead to the prospective development of a multidimensional acculturation scale for marketers to match consumers' economic potential with behavioral reality based on segmentation.

While positioned as conceptual, this paper is highly valuable to businesses because it establishes that advertising strategies aimed at Hispanic consumers risk being incomplete or unprofitable without updated or deeper research. Combining acculturation theory with insights from linguistic and cultural elements reflects a forward-thinking approach because it provides the foundation for creating more culturally relevant messages. Ultimately, this integration between literary studies and practical marketing is vital to engage consumers in a more meaningful and authentic manner, whether in the general or the multicultural marketplace.

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