The Role of Media in Consumer Acculturation and Identity Negotiation: The Case of Malay Sojourners in the United States of America

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the Scripps College of Communication of Ohio University

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This dissertation titled
The Role of Media in Consumer Acculturation and Identity Negotiation: The Case of Malay Sojourners in the United States of America

by

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ABSTRACT

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The Role of Media in Consumer Acculturation and Identity Negotiation: The Case of Malay Sojourners in the United States of America

Director of Dissertation: Drew McDaniel

This dissertation described the role of media in Malay sojourners’ consumer acculturation and identity negotiation in the United States of America. This was achieved by examining the Malay sojourners’ 1) reactions to the American market, 2) pre-purchase information searches, 3) perception of American advertising and 4) symbolic consumption. To achieve these objectives, the Malay sojourner’s overall acculturation consisting of the pre-immigration phase, the immigration phase and the possible outcomes were studied.

The study employed an exploratory qualitative method by examining the sojourners’ experiences through self-reports. This involved 15 in-depth interviews and 3 focus group discussions conducted with Malay sojourners in Washington, D.C.; Athens, Ohio; Columbus, Ohio and Kalamazoo, Illinois. The sojourners consisted of students, expatriates, Malaysian Embassy staff and spouses of the first three groups.

The result showed that media did not play a big role either before or during the acculturation process. There was some level of distress in adaptation reported by the sojourners. In the sociocultural aspect, the Malay sojourners tended to be quite separated from the dominant culture group. Pre-immigration influences were found to be very important in Malay sojourner’s consumer acculturation and identity negotiation. Television advertising did not play an important role in Malay sojourner’s information
search. However, the Malay sojourners effectively maneuvered the American market by utilizing other marketing strategies employed by the host culture. This competence was guided by existing knowledge of marketing strategies, media and international brands.

The sojourners also had to adjust their purchasing behavior due to a lack of Islamic compliant products in the American market. The ethnic group’s collectivistic nature played an enormous part in their pre-purchase information search. The Malay sojourners used symbolic consumption to strengthen their existing identity built on faith and culture. These findings were discussed and associated with the Malaysian political forces and local market, the Malay culture and Islamic practices.

Keywords: consumer acculturation, identity, Malay sojourners.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, whose blessings, prayers and faiths gave me wings to fly.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is an exploratory qualitative study to understand Malay sojourners’ consumer acculturation and identity negotiation through symbolic consumption in the United States of America. Sojourners are defined by Swagler and Jome (2005) as people who “no longer reside in [their] native country, but whose stay in another country is temporary, voluntary, at least six months long, and related to a specific task” (p. 527). According to Maldonado and Tansuhaj (2010), symbolic consumption occurs when products or items are used to build an individual’s sense of self. The attempt to understand the Malay sojourners’ identity in a host culture is framed by examining their consumption behavior in the American market. In order to achieve that, we have to understand factors that influence the sojourners’ adaptation period. This chapter will discuss the background of the study, a brief history of Malaysia, my journey that led to this study, the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the definition of important concepts and the dissertation structure.

Background of the Study

The 21st century marks a notable growth in cultural migration. In 2009, the United Nations Population Division reported that the number of international migrants had reached 213 million. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2012), Malaysian migrants to OECD countries increased from 214,300 in 2000 to 245,000 in 2005/06. Of this total, the United States had the second-highest number of migrants after Australia. However, the numbers declined in 2010, making the United States the fourth-ranked nation after Great Britain, Australia, and
Japan. According to the International Organization of Migration (2005, p.14), sojourning of professional individuals and then their return to their homeland has become an important element of migration.

Previously, numerous studies were conducted on the acculturation process for immigrants. However, few studies have examined sojourners, and fewer still examined sojourner’s identity negotiation. Most of the studies conducted have discussed the sojourner’s perception of their environmental changes resulting in pressures and challenges they had to endure. Less commonly discussed are the implemented strategies used by sojourners to maintain their mental and social stability during the acculturation process (Swami et al., 2010).

Significant psychological, societal, physical, and economic transformations are likely to occur during major changes in a person’s life. According to Swami et al. (2010), migrating is a challenging process that involves finding and implementing various coping strategies. These drastic changes require one to make significant alterations in one’s daily life. In such a change, maintaining one’s identity is problematic, requiring intervention through various means (Mueller, 2007 and Williams, Lee & Haugtvedt, 2005). According to Belk (1987), material possessions could symbolize identity as objects are used to express self-concepts. More often than not, individuals rely on the social image associated with products to assert self-identity and satisfy role performance (Wallendourf & Arnould, 1988). Therefore, it is possible to surmise that acculturating individuals would show greater reliance on material symbols to create and maintain their sense of self.
Media have always been recognized as an important intermediary of acculturation as it is an important and convenient information source for immigrants. Lan (2010) argued that media provide cultural information for migrants in terms of the historical elements, values, and current issues without exposing them to the stress involved in actual interpersonal communication with locals. He claimed that this lack of anxiety and frustration makes new immigrants or sojourners prefer to socialize themselves using the media rather than actually going out and experiencing the adopted culture.

Lee (1993) postulated that advertising is a unique source of information for immigrants. Despite their goal to market goods, advertisements rarely provide specific information concerning buying decisions. Rather, they demonstrate the culture of the locals by presenting the way of life that is deemed appropriate and desirable, mainly one that is consumption based. Advertisements often tune in to the nuances of culture, revealing elements of a culture and desired lifestyle within a nation (de Mooij, 2010; Lee, 1993). According to Frith and Mueller (2010), some of the dimensions of culture are “time, context, power, and distance; and individualism vs. collectivism; masculinity vs. femininity; uncertainty avoidance, and long term orientation” (p.38). According to Hager (2007), advertisements could be used as a tool to introduce and teach culture to foreign students. Therefore, it is possible that immigrants and sojourners refer to advertisements as a cultural reference during acculturation (Lee, 1993).

The sojourning process in the United States could be especially difficult for Malaysians considering the small proportion of the sojourner population they constitute compared to other nationalities. According to Garoogian (2005), based on the 2000
Census in the US, Malaysia represented the smallest numbers of populations from all Asian countries. Apart from having the smallest immigrant population in the US, difficulties might emerge from cultural distance during the transition process. According to Berry (2006), cultural distance means the dissimilarity between two cultures in contact and the cultural distance between Malaysia and the US is high (Mulok and Ainuddin, 2010).

This study’s purpose is to examine the transition state experienced by sojourners and immigrants, especially those with few support mechanisms and with a high cultural distance. This study provides insights to the strategies a minority group used while adjusting to new surroundings. In particular, the study assesses the extent to which the media work as an agent for sojourners’ acculturation. This study also describes how sojourners negotiate meanings of consumer goods and how consumption of specific goods symbolically represents their identity.

A Brief History of Malaysia

Malaysia is situated in Southeast Asia; it borders Singapore, Thailand, Indonesia, and Brunei (see Figure 1). It consists of 11 states in Peninsular Malaysia, two states on the island of Borneo, and three federal territories. The capital city is Kuala Lumpur; however, the federal government center is in Putrajaya (Nordin, 2003). According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2014), the estimated population of Malaysia was 30.26 million by the second quarter of 2014. Malaysia is a multiethnic country consisting of Malays (50.1%), Chinese (22.6%), indigenous ethnic groups (11.8%) and Indians (6.7%). Most of the Malaysian population resides in Peninsular Malaysia.
According to the Department of Statistics Malaysia (2014), at the second quarter of 2014, the Malays, Chinese and Indians made up the main ethnic groups in Malaysia (see Table 1.1). The three major ethnicities in Malaysia are associated with different religions. According to Brown (2010), the Malays are exclusively Muslim; the Chinese are mainly Buddhist or Confucian, with a small Christian minority; and the Indians are predominantly Hindu, with Christian and Muslim minorities. According to Article 3 of Malaysia’s Federal Constitution, Islam is the official religion of the Federation. However,
all religions may be freely practiced, and discrimination against any religion is prohibited (Hooker, 2003).

Table 1.1

*Malaysia's Population Estimates by Second Quarter of 2014*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Population ('000)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Malaysian Citizens</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malay</td>
<td>15,231.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>6,584.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bumiputera (Indigenous groups)</td>
<td>3,572.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>1,972.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>263.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Non-Malaysian Citizens</strong></td>
<td>2,637.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>30,261.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia (2014).*

Malaysia achieved its independence on August 31, 1957. Located strategically in Southeast Asia, the country has attracted traders for centuries. Due to its rich soil and thriving trading industry, empires were drawn to the area, and they colonized and commercially exploited the region. Portuguese, Dutch, and British builders settled and colonized the country until the British ousted the others and achieved dominance of the country (Bunge, 1999). According to Hirschman (1986), in the late 18th century, Britain
gained influence over the peninsula; they first colonized Penang and Singapore and then took hold of Melaka and Johor from the Dutch. By the end of the 19th century, the British had colonized all of the states in Malaysia (then called *Tanah Melayu* or, the Malay Land), including Singapore.

According to Furlow (2009), during its settlement, the British imported Chinese and Indian workers as laborers in the agriculture and mining industries. The Chinese, primarily from Fujian and Guangdong, settled in Tanah Melayu to work as traders and mine laborers. The Indians, on the other hand, were from Southern India and worked mainly on rubber plantations. The Malays mostly engaged in agricultural work and administration. The British had implemented a system of “divide and rule” in which the population was separated into manageable sections; this made it impossible to fight the authority. The three main ethnic groups lived in different parts of the country: Chinese in the cities, Indians in the plantations, and Malays in the villages. British colonial policies played a large role in constructing the dynamics of multiculturalism in Malaysia. Their system segregated the ethnic groups geographically, socially, and economically (Furlow, 2009; Hirschman, 1986).

Regular trading activities in the earlier centuries brought religious influences to the people of Tanah Melayu. In the first century, Hindu and Buddhist elements of Indian culture dominated the region, influencing the native language, literature, and social customs. Islam was introduced in the region in the 13th century, brought by Indian and Arab traders. After 1400, Islam became a major faith in Tanah Melayu with the
conversion of the Melaka rulers. Islam then spread to other parts of Southeast Asia, such as the Peninsula, Sumatra, and the Indonesian archipelago (Bunge, 2009).

It is important to note that the Malay ethnicity is not exclusive to Malaysia. According to Andaya (2001), based on archeological and linguistic evidence, traces of the Malay ethnic group can be found in the Philippines, Borneo, the Indonesian archipelago, and Vietnam. Members of the Malay ethnic group can also be found in South Africa due to migration from Indonesia in the 16th century (The Cape Malay, 2014). However, for this study, the following references to Malay shall mean Malaysian Malay.

My Journey

I arrived in the United States as a graduate student to study at Ohio University on September 1, 2010. The initial few months were somewhat bittersweet for me as I had been a non-traveler who had never set foot outside my homeland of Malaysia. I found it a little amazing that the first time I was travelling abroad on my own was for a trip halfway across the world to a country that had 12 hours’ time difference. During the first few months I had to make incredible adjustments. Being a Muslim Malay, with a small community in Athens, Ohio was comforting and painful at the same time. The community was very supportive in every way, but it was very limited in terms of numbers. There were fewer than 30 Malaysians there at the time with only eight of them being Ohio University students.

Looking at the small Malay community around me, I started to wonder what factors had enabled their adaptation process. They seemed to be at home here, and over
time, had developed strategies to make them feel more at ease. I was also struggling with my desire to express my individuality, but at the same time wishing for integration with the locals. Drawing from my own experience, I was intrigued by those strategies and decided to investigate how Malay sojourners like myself adjust to their life in a foreign land.

Statement of the Problem

According to Swami et al. (2010), Malay Malaysian sojourning students in the UK reported significantly poorer socio-cultural adjustment compared to Chinese Malaysian sojourning students. The Malays were also reported to have more negative responses to a range of predictors. It was found that less contact with host and co-nationals, language incompetence, higher perceived cultural differences, and more perceived discrimination led to difficulties in the adjustment period by the Malays (Swami et al., 2010).

Immigrants and sojourners may find initial difficult adjustments in foreign lands due to: limited means to communicate one’s self-concept, insubstantial identity, and lack of traditional means to convey status (Maldonado & Tansuhaj, 1999). Van Gennep (1999) stated that when a person is going through a transitional period such as immigrating or sojourning, the individual goes through three phases – separation, liminal, and incorporation; I am most interested in the second phase. According to Van Gennep (1999), within the liminal period, the individual goes through role destabilization, resulting in feelings of obscurity, insecurity, and an ambiguous identity.
Noble and Walker (1997) said that individuals who are in the liminal stage will feel ambiguous and resort to “identity play” in order to find a personality they are comfortable with. One of the methods used for identity stabilization would be symbolic consumption, in which individuals would resort to alterations in their buying and consumption habits. In their minds, these alterations would be deemed necessary in order to ‘fit in’ during the liminal stage.

Kwak and Sojka (2010) said that a way for immigrants to adjust themselves in a new culture is by purchasing and consuming branded merchandise. Prestigious brands are surrogates to status, and this reliance on merchandise is especially relevant to immigrants as they are in a state that is unstable. According to Lee (1993), consumers tend to rely on the social image associated with products to assert self-identity and satisfy role performance. Therefore it is possible that acculturating individuals rely on material purchases to create a belonging feeling.

Advertising is one of the most effective brand promotion tools. However, rather than specific information on purchasing decisions, advertising usually provides images and values for various types of consumption activities. The goal of advertising is to portray for the audience a desirable way of life that is mainly consumption-based. Lee (1993) conducted a study on acculturating Taiwanese students in the US, and found that the Taiwanese had a favorable attitude towards advertising compared to other marketing media such as samples or word of mouth, suggesting their inclination to use advertising as a product reference. The sojourners were more concerned with the quality of products than the price, resulting in a preference to buy well-known brands rather than generic
ones. Kwak and Sojka (2010) suggested that immigrants tend to purchase high-end branded products during sale promotions so that they would be able to consume the goods even though they might not have ample monetary resources. This behavior suggests that symbolic consumption plays a big role in the acculturation process.

Being sojourning Malays in the US would presumably cause identity clashes for the sojourners since Malaysians, as citizens of a developing country, have a different culture compared to Americans, as citizens of a developed nation (Burns and Brady, 1996). According to Kamarudin, Mokhlis and Othman (2002), generally, as an ethnic group, the Malays were found to be less open to foreign culture, more conservative-minded, and to have highly fatalistic attitudes. They were also more ethnocentric in their consumption behaviors.

Adams (2011) found that Muslims, in particular, have spiritual underpinnings that encourage them to preserve traditions such as dress, diet, and leisure choices, causing assimilation to be slower. Wong (2007) and Fischer (2009) said that Islamic based materialism is growing to be a major identification of the new ethnic Malay identities, provoked by the intensification of Islamic practices in Malaysia. According to Fischer (2009), the nationalization of Islam by the Malaysian government has deepened and widened concerns for Islamic consumption and commodities among Malaysian Muslims. As new consumer practices emerge, new debates on the meaning of Islam and its proper practices are brought forth.

However, according to Kamaruddin and Kamaruddin (2009), religion alone is not sufficient to affect the Malays’ product’s decision-making style. This is supported by
Mochis and Fon’s (2011) study, which found that religious values of three main ethnic
groups in Malaysia do not influence brand selection and store preferences.

Purpose of the Study

In its largest scope, the objective of this research was to investigate sojourners’
adaptation and identity negotiation in another land. I studied how different factors come
into play in building a sojourners’ identity away from their original nation. Specifically, I
conducted a qualitative research project to uncover the acculturation process of a clearly
defined group, the Malays from Malaysia, and their perception of their consumerism and
socio-cultural adaptations in the United States. This observation was built on discussions
pertaining to the globalized market, media, culture, and political forces that naturally and
fundamentally influence individuals. I discuss these forces and their influences in detail
in Chapter 5.

Definition of Concepts

*Acculturation*

According to Sam (2006) and Organista, Marin and Chun (2010), there is a
growing attention to acculturation studies and discussion, particularly relating to
immigrants and refugees. However, the true understanding and operationalization of the
term in social science remains obscure due to the naturally elusive concept and limited
scientific development. Early social scientists in the beginning of 20\textsuperscript{th} century defined
acculturation as “a process of change that occurs when individuals from different cultures
interact and share a common geographical space following migration, political conquest,
or forced relocation” (Organista, Marin and Chun, 2010, p. 101). Other scholars proposed
the definition of acculturation as “all the changes that arise following ‘contact’ between individuals and groups of different cultural backgrounds” (Sam, 2006, p.11) while Gordon (1964, p. 71) defines acculturation as “change of cultural patterns to those of host society”. O’Guinn, Lee and Faber (1986, p.579) defined it as “the immigrants’ adoption of the dominant society’s attitudes, values and behaviors”. It is also important to note that since this area is quite conceptually indefinite, some scholars use the term ‘acculturation’ and ‘adaptation’ interchangeably and quite ineptly. For example, Kim (1989) mentioned adaptation, acculturation, assimilation and integration could be used interchangeably.

Some of these scholars, and many more, construct a rather limited conceptualization of acculturation that one group changes to become like another. This idea reveals a unidirectional flow in which the two cultures presumably are mutually exclusive and one has to move towards another. This inevitably leads to assumptions that the newcomer’s original cultural identity and practices would be weaker than those of the dominant group, and they will essentially absorb the dominant culture (Sam, 2006; Organista, Marin and Chun, 2010).

Some scholars such as Berry (1989) and Organista, Marin and Chun (2010) have rejected the idea of a cumulative progressive acculturation. They prefer to think that acculturation is at least two-dimensional where the newcomer would retain some aspects of their culture while adopting new ones. However, the level of adapting and retaining will vary for each individual. Kim (1989) has suggested that scholars need to conduct more investigation into the influences of the newcomer’s disposition which results from interactions of environmental and pre-immigration conditions.
For the purpose of this research, I prefer to employ Organista, Marin and Chun’s (2010) definition of acculturation as it serves my purpose best while including all the elements which have been discussed. They define acculturation as:

A dynamic and multidimensional process of adaptation that occurs when distinct cultures come into sustained contact. It involves different degrees and instances of culture learning and maintenance that are contingent upon individual, group, and environmental factors. Acculturation is dynamic because it is a continuous and fluctuating process and it is multidimensional because it transpires across numerous indices of psychosocial functioning and can result in multiple adaptation outcomes (Organista, Marin and Chun, 2010, p.105).

Sojourners

Similar to immigrants, sojourners are individuals who leave their country to live abroad. However, sojourners are unlike immigrants who settle down in a foreign country for long periods or permanently. According to Bochner (2006, p. 181) sojourners refers to “individuals who travel abroad to attain a particular goal within a specific period of time.” The length of time varies according to certain scholars, for example, as noted earlier, Swagler and Jome (2005) define sojourners as temporary non-resident aliens who stay in a country not their own for at least six months voluntarily for a specific task while Bochner (2006) indicated that it could be from a few days to several years.

Sojourners could be students, government personnel, volunteers, an army or missionaries (Swagler and Jome, 2005). However, according to Bochner (2006), the three main sojourner groups are tourists, students, and expatriates. Each of these sojourning
groups would experience different cultural contacts and cultural learning in the host country.

The impression that the sojourners will return to their original country after completing the traveling purpose will, in a way, affect their acculturation process. Unlike immigrants who would be more involved in fitting in with the dominant cultural group, sojourners may be reluctant to do so due to their temporary residence in the culture (Bochner, 2006).

**Consumer Acculturation**

Consumer acculturation is a distinct perspective of consumer behavior studies in the sense that it combines the viewpoints of anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies. “The term ‘consumer acculturation’ is defined as the general process of movement and adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country” (Penaloza, 1994, p.33). O’Guinn, Lee and Faber (1986, p.579) mentioned that consumer acculturation is derived from the understanding of acculturation as it could be explained as a subclass of acculturation. They explained that the process of consumer acculturation involves acculturation into the host’s consumer culture. This means that the newcomers would adopt the dominant host culture’s attitudes, values, and behaviors towards their consumerism. This change in consumer behavior is what we term as “consumer acculturation.”

Maldonado and Tansuhaj (1999) proposed a pattern called Consumer Acculturation Model that divides the process of consumer acculturation in three stages: pre-immigration, transition, and outcome. This model takes into consideration that the
process of consumer acculturation is affected by the newcomer’s background and the exposure to the dominant culture in the original nation. A fuller explanation of the model can be found in Chapter 2.

Identity Negotiation

During a major change in one’s life, a period of instability will occur in which the individual will go through a transition from one role to another. These changes will produce a period of uncertainty, as Van Gennep (1960, p. 18) explained, “Whoever passes from one [zone] to the other finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a length of time: he wavers between two worlds.” This period is termed as liminality (Van Gennep, 1960). Liminality could be triggered by symbolic role changes such as getting married or having a baby, or spatial transitions such as migrating or sojourning, resulting in role destabilization.

According to Noble and Walker (1997) during the liminal transition, a person’s personal identity is suspended and that might result in psychological consequences if not handled correctly. Therefore, people tend to conduct identity negotiation when they are in the liminal phase. Swann (2005, pg. 69) defined identity negotiation as the course through which individuals and the community “come to agreement” about individuals’ identities through the negotiation process. In other words, liminal transition is the process that changes one role into another, and identity negotiations may happen when individuals alter their self-concept associated with this transition in order to find a stable role.
According to Noble and Walker (1997), symbolic consumption may be used to assist the role transition process during liminality. Symbolic consumption works when the individuals use products, items or images in order to build a sense of self. These items could either be products found in the new location, or items brought from home. Belk (1988) found that possessions are related to components of self-identity and have different functions throughout our lives. Symbolic consumption does not have to be only about goods. It could also be through body image involving physical alterations such as tattoos and piercings (Schouten, 1991).

**Dissertation Structure**

This dissertation is composed of five chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the background of the study, history of Malaysia, my personal journey, the purpose of the study and the definitions of key concepts in the study.

Chapter 2 outlines a selected literature review of migration and acculturation in a globalized context. I also present the importance of identity negotiation generally and to sojourners specifically. In this chapter, I examine the consumer culture and symbolic consumption to demonstrate the social and psychological meaning of consumption. The role of media in shaping immigrants and sojourners’ identity is also discussed. It is also important to understand the Malaysian market and the Malay identity as a whole, which is shown by the end of this chapter.

Chapter 3 presents the methodological viewpoints on qualitative study. This study is an exploratory enquiry that involves traditional qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. I also discuss how the informants were selected.
based on their profiles. Apart from that, it also includes the procedures involved to collect
and analyze the information gathered through fieldwork.

Chapter 4 discusses the findings from the in-depth interviews and focus group
discussions conducted with the Malay sojourners. This includes the sojourners’ media
consumption before and after the move to the US, and how that is translated to their
acculturation as consumers in the new market. The religious aspect and its impact on
consumption are also examined closely as that is a theme that arises frequently in the
interviews. The Malay’s identity negotiation through symbolic consumption is also
examined.

Chapter 5 presents the discussion and conclusions based on the findings. This
chapter also discusses the implications from the findings.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discussed the overall background of the study. It explained the
theoretical gap of Malay sojourners’ consumer acculturation strategies and my experience
that led to this research. It also described the theoretical implications from conducting
this study. Next, it clarified the important terms that are used throughout this dissertation.
Lastly, it explained the structure of the following chapters.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides the theoretical framework of this dissertation based on the literature on the subject of sojourners. The first section introduces the development of migration and acculturation in a globalized context. The second section deliberates on the importance of identity negotiation in immigrants and sojourners. Next, the chapter examines symbolic consumption to demonstrate the social and psychological meaning of consumption. A close examination of the role of media in shaping immigrant and sojourner identity is also conducted. In addition, this chapter reviews the Malaysian consumer market and the Malay identity. The last section proposes four research questions based on the literature.

Migration and Acculturation

The 21st century shows a notable growth in migration. In 2009, the United Nations Population Division reported that international migrants had reached 213 million people worldwide (Gaston & Rajaguru, 2013). Developed countries have received about three out of four international migrants in the past two decades. This is expected, as “on average, people migrate from regions with low levels of human capital and labor productivity to regions with labor markets with higher average levels of human capital and labor productivity” (Gaston & Rajaguru, 2013, p.272). This means that most people migrate due to economic and social factors.

According to the International Organization of Migration (2005, p.14), the sojournning of professional individuals and their subsequent return to their homeland has become an important aspect of migration in previous years. According to Callahan
(2011), this intense global relocation has changed the course of intercultural interaction and communications. In the past, migrating might mean a linear adaptation system in which migrants travel alone and feel compelled to adapt to the host culture in one way or another. Nowadays, many migrants do not migrate permanently and instead return to their countries after a specific period of time spent in another. These sojourning activities could be for work or study and tremendously impact the sojourner’s home and host countries.

There are a few factors contributing to this development. Travelling is facilitated with advancement in the modern era of transportation. With the available and affordable transport choices, human mobility is facilitated enormously. The attitude and legal regulations of home and host countries also play their roles. Many countries import labor workers to work in jobs the locals are unwilling or unqualified to perform. Apart from that, certain receiving countries regard international students as a major source of revenue and a part of the export industry (Bochner, 2006). Therefore, imported workers and international students are welcomed in the receiving countries as they are beneficial to their development.

Another factor that separates the traditional migrators from the current ones is the availability of “cultural support groups” (Callahan, 2011, p.316). These groups could either be physical or online via social media and the Internet. These groups facilitate the process of migration by anchoring the travelers to their home culture. With news available in real-time, migrators feel a sense of connection with the people and issues in
their home culture (Callahan, 2011). This progress encourages more travelers to explore unfamiliar lands, as they know connection to their homeland is easy.

The United States is known as a nation of independence, development, and freedom. The idea of living the “American Dream,” where anything and everything is possible attracts people from all over the world. The US is seen as a place with opportunities for a better life. This is the reason why many immigrants are drawn to the US, resulting in a mixture of global cultures. The immigrant population in the US has increased substantially over the previous three decades, now making up nearly 30% of the population. This trend is expected to grow to nearly 50% in 2051 (Schmidley, 2001). Although there are mixed population consisting of various races and ethnicities from all over the world in the US, the immigrants strive to retain parts of their original culture. This results in the US being described as a “salad bowl”, holding different cultures within a nation (Mooij, 2010).

Scholars have been focusing on acculturation studies concerning immigrants or sojourners. Acculturation happens when a person goes through cultural modification following a transition into another culture (Berry, 2006). New and different surroundings and conditions affect the newcomers in ways that require negotiations of their cultural identity. A number of studies (Wallendorf & Reilly 1983; Joy & Dholakia 1991; Firat 1995; Lindridge et al. 2004) found that acculturating individuals do possess a desire to feel accepted by assimilating with the local community’s accepted norms.

According to Rosev (2009), the decisions sojourners make to maintain their culture or adapt to the new one are usually affected by cultural interactions. If the
interactions are positive, the sojourners will be more open to participating with the dominant culture groups’ activities. If the interactions are negative, the newcomers are more likely to distance themselves from the dominant culture.

Berry (2006) proposed the concept of acculturative stress in relation to the negative responses newcomers have while undergoing intercultural contact. The acculturative stress concept suggested that individuals having negative experience manage through coping strategies. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) discussed two major ways to cope: *problem-focused coping*, in which the newcomers attempt to address the problem; and *emotion-focused coping*, in which the newcomers attempt to address their emotions associated with the problems. Endler and Parker (1990) have acknowledged another important tactic to cope: *avoidance-oriented coping*, in which the newcomers avoid the problem altogether. Most newcomers manage their acculturative stress using one or more of these coping strategies.

Berry (1997) proposed a conceptual framework suggesting other possible acculturation strategies. These strategies were related to two issues: *cultural maintenance*, where the migrants selectively strive to maintain certain aspects of their identity, or *contact and participation*, where the migrants get involved with the dominant cultural groups. Figure 2.1 shows the conceptual framework with four possible outcomes: *assimilation, separation, integration* and *marginalization*. In the *assimilation* outcome, the newcomers would have maximum behavioral change since they would not have a high desire to maintain their cultural identity. In this state, the newcomers seek daily interactions with the locals and would have strong relationships with them. The
Separation outcome, on the other hand, results in the individuals having minimal behavioral changes since they would avoid interaction with the local community and seek to maintain their culture and identity. The integration outcome occurs when the newcomers desire to maintain their original culture while at the same time absorbing the local culture and having a strong relationship with the locals. Marginalization is the most undesirable outcome, as this is when the individual becomes suspended between two cultures, not wanting to maintain the original culture (usually because of enforced cultural loss), but also having little to no interest in absorbing the local culture or communicating with the local people.

*Figure 2.1. Acculturation strategies in ethnocultural groups (Berry, 1997).*
Identity Negotiation

According to Church (1982) and Ward et al. (2001), identity instability, insecurity, and ambiguity could happen during migration if acculturative stress is not handled properly. During migration, major psychological, societal, physical, and economic changes could occur to the travelers. They would have to cope with vast differences in culture, values, and interpersonal communication, apart from probably standing out because of their appearance (Anderson, 1994). Identity instability, if not addressed accordingly, can be a challenge to the newcomer’s identity in a negative way. Prolonged frustration, caused by difficulty coping with the psychological and sociocultural demands of this huge change, may result in adverse reactions such as depression, anxiety, withdrawal, and enervation (Swagler & Jome, 2005). Usually, the newcomer will engage in trials and experiments with their self-concept to resolve the discrepancy.

Sources of Identity

According to Mooij (2010, p. 98), identity is defined as “the idea one has about oneself, one’s characteristic properties, one’s own body, and the values one considers important.” As identity mainly originates from the individual’s own perception about him/herself, it is quite elusive to describe. Some people might consider roles to be their main identity, such as their family role or professional role. However, according to Sirgy (1982), although this source of identity is important, it usually fluctuates over time and ceases to be sufficiently representational. Roles are not permanent, and therefore are not sufficient to be the main source of identity.
On the other hand, Baumeister (1987) highlighted two issues associated with the understanding of identity and selfhood. First, identity should be understood on a personal level, according to the way the individual actively and creatively defines him/herself. Secondly, identity needs to be examined based on its relationship to both the individual and society. Dittmar (1993) also proposes that identity does not rely solely on the individual’s perception of him/herself; instead, it is located within the individual-society dynamic. Therefore, a person’s identity is formed on the personal and social level.

There are numerous variables which a person might reference as his/her source of identity. Influences of culture, community, biology, location, and demography could all contribute to a person’s self-identity. Table 2.1 describes some of the sources of identity as suggested by Sirgy (1982).
Table 2.1

Sources of Identity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of identity</th>
<th>Basis of Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age cohorts</td>
<td>Shared experiments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Biologically and culturally defined roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geography</td>
<td>Physical proximity and regional differences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race/physical features</td>
<td>Physical similarities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity/religion</td>
<td>Shared cultural values and/or history</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lifestyle choices/sexual orientation</td>
<td>Shared attitudes, interest and opinions and/or behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability</td>
<td>Special needs or behaviors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Sirgy, 1982

According to Tharp (2001), identity is reinforced by the actions people take, the products they buy, the media content they consume, and the services they use. These are all consumed to symbolically express who they are or who they aspire to be. There is a popular notion in contemporary consumer research that assumes each product comes with a symbolic meaning (Zaltman & Wallendorf, 1979; Hirschman, 1981). Product consumption is supposedly able to bring forth an idea and reflects a persona onto the user. Therefore, the act of purchasing and using a particular product could be evaluated and linked to its symbolic meaning (Elliot & Wattanasuwan, 1998). The associated symbolic meaning may affect its consumption by consumers, in that it is purchased and
used based on the image it projects more than its usability. This is especially true if the product implies a particular status and social position in society (Zaltman & Wallendorf, 1979; Hirschman, 1981). Consequently, the idea that identity is formed between individual and social perception could be linked to consumption, as consumption is socially constructed (Dittmar, 1993; McCracken, 1986; Baumeister, 1987).

_Culture and Consumerism in Identity Negotiation_

Beginning in 1966, Geert Hofstede has been developing a model that explains basic value differences in national culture. He suggested that the values could be measured by five dimensions: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, uncertainty avoidance, and long/short term orientation. This model has been widely used in cross-cultural studies, including cross-cultural advertisement (Hofstede, 2001). Lee (2005), Bulmer and Buchanan-Oliver (2006), Javalgi et al. (1995), Ketelaar et al. (2010), and Mooij (2009) have all conducted studies in advertisements using Hofstede’s theory, either directly in the research or as a reference. All of the researchers agreed that the theory is very applicable in looking for the connection between culture and the advertisements, either in the forming of the message or during the consumption process by the audience.

For Malaysians in the United States, the power distance dimension might be a good basis for understanding the conflict they might feel as newcomers. Malaysia is a country with very high power distance, while the US has low power distance. According to Hofstede (2001, p. 98) power distance means “the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power
is distributed unequally.” Further explanation about the societal norm between a high power distance nation and a low power distance nation is presented in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2

*Power Distance*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Low PDI</th>
<th>High PDI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All should be interdependent.</td>
<td>A few should be independent; most should be dependent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inequality in society should be minimized.</td>
<td>There should be an order of inequality in this world in which everyone has his or her rightful place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy means an inequality of roles, established for convenience.</td>
<td>Hierarchy means existential inequality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Superiors are people like me.</td>
<td>Superiors consider subordinates as being of a different kind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinates are people like me.</td>
<td>Subordinates consider superiors as being of a different kind.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The use of power should be legitimate and is subject to the judgment between good and evil.</td>
<td>Power is a basic fact of society that antedates good or evil; its legitimacy is irrelevant.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All should have equal rights.</td>
<td>Power holders are entitled to privileges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Powerful people should try to look less powerful than they are.</td>
<td>Powerful people should try to look as powerful as possible.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress on reward, legitimate and expert power.</td>
<td>Stress on coercive and referent power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The system is to blame.</td>
<td>The underdog is to blame.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The way to change a social system is by redistributing power.</td>
<td>The way to change a social system is by dethroning those in power.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latent harmony between the powerful and the powerless.</td>
<td>Latent conflict between the powerful and the powerless.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older people neither respected nor feared.</td>
<td>Older people respected and feared.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Hofstede (2001, p. 98)
In Hofstede’s (2010) study, Malaysia was ranked as the country with highest power distance compared to 53 other countries. Being a country with a high power distance means that Malaysians tend to be more comfortable with authoritarianism compared to Americans. Malaysians are more susceptible to inequality and tend to perceive a bigger gap between superiors and subordinates. According to Sweetman (2012), this high respect towards power could be traced back to the Malay feudal system and the influence of the British. Malay culture tends to admire class and status, granting much power to those of a higher ranking in an organization. In relation to consumer culture, this would mean that Malaysians have a tendency to depend a lot on symbolic consumption as a method to display social hierarchy. To date, there has not been a study conducted to connect this projection. However, Mooij (2010) did mention that citizens of high power distance nations would be more concerned with their attires.

Symbolic Consumption

During acculturation, consumption patterns play a fundamental role in the socialization process by forming and shaping identity (Sekhon & Szmigin, 2009, p. 757). Consumer behavior research has focused extensively on the role of product consumption and how it could symbolically communicate the user’s self-concept. It is an accepted notion that consumer goods are more often rated based on their symbolic social meanings rather than on their utilitarian role.

Hirschman (1981) brought forth three issues involving symbolic consumption. First, he thought that the appropriate systemic level of symbolic consumption should be on the sociological perspective instead of psychological. According to Zaltman and
Wallendorf (1979), symbols represent a social construction of reality. Therefore, in order for a symbol to fulfill its personification, it must be studied from an observer’s perception. However, for a symbol to achieve a particular representation, it must have a social symbolic meaning that is collectively agreed upon by a specific social group. This social phenomenon indicates that the observer’s view towards the symbol plays a bigger role than the user’s view.

The second concept involves the working aspect of the material. Hirschman (1981) believed that two major processes were involved in symbols: production and consumption. Symbols do not appear from a vacuum, instead they are the result of cumulative efforts by various units. A product, for example, would encompass inputs from the designer, distributor, marketing department, advertising agencies, and retail sales personnel. These groups of people would not only produce the tangible result of the product, but also intangible output in the form of the social meaning or symbol. “It is through advertising, retail store display, television shows, and magazines that a consumer learns what products currently symbolize” (Hirschman, 1981, p. 5). Therefore, in order to understand the symbolic consumption by consumers, it is vital to examine the symbolic production process that ascribes meaning to products.

However, although the initial process of affixing symbolic meaning to a product plays an important role, the consumer does not adopt a passive role in the adoption of the symbols. This idea brought forth the third issue debated by Hirshman (1981). Consumers are able to actively influence the symbolic meaning of products and have control over the meaning. This results in the symbols being dynamic, flexible, and moldable according to
the consumers and users. For example, how consumers redefine a particular item, such as thick-rimmed glasses, which used to be regarded as nerdy and unattractive, but shifted to be considered fashionable and hip.

Hogg and Michell (1997) proposed a model explaining how product purchase and consumption builds layers of meaning. The interesting interpretation by Hogg and Michell was on constellations and anti-constellations; indicating individuals’ positive choice of consuming or negative choices of not consuming certain brands, products, or goods. The act (or not) of consumption builds up the symbolic parts of their self that they are portraying to others. Anti-constellations are comprised of two aspects of consumers’ negative choices: non-choice and anti-choice. Non-choice means that the consumers are unable to purchase the brands, products, or services they would like to, as these brands, products and services are unavailable in the customer’s market. Meanwhile, anti-choice means the goods or services are deliberately not chosen, as they are considered as unsuitable for the consumers’ choice and preference. Hogg and Michell (1997) also said that the process of search, acquisition, possession, and disposal, when considered over a period of time, could suggest patterns in consumption. These patterns, along with the positive and negative choices, could uncover a system of meaning by the consumers, leading to creation, maintenance, and enhancement of identity.

Apart from the choices made on purchasing, newcomers in a foreign land often use prestigious brands to establish and communicate their personal identity (Kwak and Sojka, 2010). Brands are often used as a surrogate of status, serving as a symbol to indicate how the society should perceive the consumer. The brand acts as an extended
self, a representation of who a person is through visual and material aspects. This medium of self-expression is especially important to newcomers who have not established their identity in a foreign society. These newcomers arrive to new surroundings without any of their former means to communicate their self-concept, such as “job title, income, social status, or reference group” (Kwak & Sojka, 2010, p. 373).

Noble and Walker (1997) proposed a framework to explain symbolic activities and the psychological state that happens during a major transition throughout an individual’s life. They suggested psychological benefits could be obtained, using various methods, when one reduces the discrepancy between one’s internal self-view and the external role played during a profound change in one’s life. The researchers conducted a study on students who were identified as being in the pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal stages while going through the transition from high school to university life. 126 pre-liminal stage students, 164 liminal stage students, and 169 students who were in the post-liminal stage were surveyed. The findings of the survey indicated that the respondents in the post-liminal group were more psychologically stable compared to the other two groups. Liminal transitions also increase the need for possessions symbolizing past identity, resulting in the liminal and post-liminal group purchasing more products compared to the pre-liminal group.

Consumer Acculturation

“The term “consumer acculturation” is defined as the general process of movement and adaptation to the consumer cultural environment in one country by persons from another country” (Penaloza, 1994, p.33). According to McCracken (1986),
there is a distinctive characteristic of American culture called “consumer culture.” Generally, consumer culture is a form of capitalism based on consumerism and its economy, encouraged by acquisition of goods and services by consumers. This particular concept talks about how Americans build a culture based on material belongings and ultimately obtain happiness through their possessions. Many immigrants are attracted to this idea of a materialistically fulfilled life. Generally, capitalism and media guide the direction of consumer culture, causing practices, identity, and meanings to be interconnected and used by groups who would produce a collective reality (Appadurai, 1990; Slater, 1997; Wilk, 1995).

A consumer acculturation model designed by Maldonado and Tansuhaj (1999), based on several studies on acculturation, is particularly suitable for reference in this study. The model, as shown in Figure 2.2 (see p. 35), is explained in three phases: pre-immigration, transition, and outcome.

**Pre-immigration**

The pre-immigration phase takes into consideration aspects that could build up an individual’s personality, such as individual, psychological, social, and cultural characteristics. The model also touches on an aspect of ‘cultural interpenetration,’ based on Andreason (1990), considering the newcomer’s initial exposure to the new culture before the actual immigration. Andreason (1990) explained:

By cultural interpenetration, I mean the exposure of members of one culture (or subculture) to another through direct experience and/or indirectly through the media or the experiences of others. This, of course, is not a new phenomenon.
Over many centuries, a major impact of wars, conquests of new continents, political alliances, religious crusades, and many and diverse trade developments has been to provide opportunities for particular populations to be exposed to - sometimes in extremely unpleasant ways - the influences of other peoples and cultures. (p. 847)

It is important to examine this concept, as it allows researchers to understand the culture penetration extent of the host country in the newcomer’s country. This socialization could stem from various means, such as media, exported products, brand names, ideology, etc. The exposure of the culture from the host country will have an impact on the acculturation process of sojourners and immigrants (Maldonado & Tansuhaj, 1999).

Transition

Maldonado and Tansuhaj (1999) explained further that the second phase, transition, follows the actual immigration. In this stage, newcomers have to adjust and change to fit into the new environment. This phase is also called the liminal phase (Noble & Walker, 1997). During this phase, the newcomers would leave the roles previously established in their countries of origin. This ambiguity would result in role destabilization, which could cause the newcomers to resolve to experiment with new self-concepts that would suit them better in the new environment.

The newcomers would face crisis and conflict during this phase, from both this ambiguity and from a bombardment of new information which they would have to evaluate, filter, and use in order to build up a new self-concept. They will also come
across a lot of new marketplace encounters, such as advertising and other promotional activities. The encounters will bring forth an adaptation or rejection towards the newcomer’s product consumptions resulting in symbolic consumptions.

**Outcome**

The last phase is the outcome phase, in which the person disengages from his/her previous roles and moves into one of the four possible outcomes: marginalization, separation, assimilation or integration (Berry, 1997).

![Figure 2.2. Consumer acculturation model (Maldonado & Tansuhaj, 1999)]

**Studies on Sojourners**

Bochner (2006) proposed that sojourners are a group of people who travel outside their country for a specific purpose within a certain timeframe, which ranges from several days to a number of years. The three main groups of sojourners are tourists, international students, and expatriates. However, according to Swagler and Jome (2005), sojourners are a type of temporary, non-resident alien who stays in a country apart from their own
for at least six months voluntarily for a specific task. Thus, sojourners include groups of students, government personnel, volunteers, members of the armed forces or missionaries. Tourists are not considered sojourners according to Swagler and Jome’s (2005) definition.

The initial move to another country could be a difficult time for the sojourners; they have to cope with vast differences in culture, values, and interpersonal communication (Anderson, 1994). The knowledge that they will not stay in the new environment brings forth more complications for them. There might be a need to adapt and to establish relationships with the locals, but at the same time there will be hesitation because of the knowledge that they are going to leave anyway (Bochner, 2006). This change, if not addressed accordingly, can be a challenge to the newcomer’s identity in a negative way. Prolonged frustration caused by difficulty coping with the psychological and sociocultural demands of this huge transformation may result in adverse reactions such as depression, anxiety, withdrawal, and enervation (Church, 1982; Ward et al., 2001; Swagler & Jome, 2005).

In extreme cases, some host nations with a large number of sojourners do report an increase in “hate crimes,” offences performed by members of the host society towards the sojourners in the form of bullying, physical assaults, verbal and racial slander, and discrimination (Levin & McDevitt, 1993; Bochner, 2006). Such incidences further increase both the stress and the motivation of sojourners to blend into the crowd as much as possible.
According to a model proposed by Searle and Ward (1990), sojourners’ adjustments could be comprehended within the dimensions of psychological and sociocultural adjustments. Although related, these dimensions were developed within different theoretical frameworks. Searle and Ward (1990, p. 450) defined psychological adjustments as “feelings of well-being and satisfaction,” while sociological adjustments were defined as “the ability to fit in and to negotiate interactive aspects of the new culture” (Searle & Ward, 1990, p. 450). The frameworks also examined different predictors of adjustments. In the psychological aspect, the predictors examined were personality factors, amount of social support, contact with fellow nationals and hosts, life changes, and attitudes towards the hosts. On the other hand, in regards to the sociocultural aspect, cross-cultural contact, cultural distance, cross-cultural training, previous cross-cultural experiences, and length of residence in the new culture were considered.

Although it has been established that cross-cultural transitions are not easy, transitions for student sojourners are more complex (Dodge, 1990). The difficulties emerge due to the absence of a familiar support system and the altering of the current lifestyle to suit the new environment. The adjustment period is said to be high in the beginning, and then stabilizes over time. Unfortunately, some of these adjustments have negative effects, such as lowered academic performance and decreased psychological wellbeing (Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001). According to Ward and Kennedy (1993), students who are more involved with their host culture tend to achieve higher grades in
their studies, are more satisfied with their sojourning life, have higher self-esteem, and are less anxious.

Many studies (Oberg, 1960; Bochner, 2006) discussed the ‘U-curve of adjustment,’ a situation when immigrants are said to first go through a phase of elation and optimistic feelings, only to later be replaced by despair and anxiety in the second phase as they gradually adjust to reality. In the final phase, the immigrant would feel confident again, regaining peace and hopefulness after they learn how to cope in the foreign land. However, according to Bochner (2006), there is also a possibility that this U-curve does not happen to international students. A linear, as opposed to a U-shaped, learning curve of adjustments happens when students experience ‘culture shock’ but gradually adjust. The adjustment difficulties are actually intensified by the factor of distance from the home country, whereby students sojourning from a more dissimilar culture would experience more stress.

Ting-Toomey (1999) has made an observation that research on acculturation has pointedly neglected returning sojourners’ experience and the effect on them. The process of repetitive re-acculturation might have a severe impact on sojourners’ identity negotiations. It is logical to say that regular sojourners are less affected by sociocultural adjustments as they possess more experience and are more willing to expose themselves to such conditions. However, he also reasoned that although the sociocultural and practical adjustments might be easier, the psychological process might be quite heavy for recurrent sojourners. The impact of continuous identity negotiations throughout their journey is deemed to be more involved compared to a first time traveler.
Media and Its Role in Constructing Reality

Upon arrival, newcomers must learn to adapt to the host nation’s culture. They must also learn to identify numerous symbolic meanings in the host society through various means. Studies have found that immigrants are able to learn about culture, language, politics, and values through media such as radio, television, newspapers, cinema, theatre, etc. According to previous research (Adoni & Mane, 1984; Berger & Luckmann, 1987; Lee, 1989), mass media has been the most prominent medium of socialization to the host’s way of life prior to the migrants’ physical move from a remote area. The newcomers may have an initial view of what they should expect out of the host society based on what they were exposed to prior to the move. However, this interaction might result in differing perceptions and expectations, according to the newcomers’ usage of media (Lee, 1989).

Research has indicated that immigrants’ exposure to media in the host society could predict their level of acculturation. Language is also one of the pressing points of acculturating instructions that are helpful to the immigrants. Picking up the language is much easier through media than intercultural interaction with the host society (Kim, 1977; Stilling, 1997; Moon & Park 2007; Dalisay, 2012). Research has presented a clear picture that media could help in the process of fitting in using various ways. For example, Maghrebin immigrants in France watch an abundance of local television programs, as they associate it with a strategy of integration. The radio is most often regarded as an accompaniment and source of information for them (Hmida et al., 2009). This study shows that immigrants do resort to media for reference in daily lives. As television is
their main form of media consumption, they are bound to watch advertisements and compare the content to their own understanding of the values, products, and brands advertised. Immigrants are better able to acquire the dominant culture by examining the lifestyles depicted in the local programs and advertisements.

According to Cheng (1997), advertisements could be considered a channel that embeds cultural values. It is a privileged method of disseminating cultural values, since advertisements are believed to be powerful in endorsing values. Many studies have been conducted showing that the cultures presented in advertisements produced by various countries are significantly different from one another. Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) compared cultural values depicted in Chinese and American television commercials. They found that, overall, Chinese commercials tended to use more symbolic cultural values, while U.S. television commercials contain both symbolic and utilitarian values. Cheng and Schweitzer (1996) made a postulation that the symbolic appeal in the Chinese advertisements is due to its high context culture. Another study compared cultural values in Singapore and Malaysia’s advertisements and found that these two neighboring countries had different values depicted in their advertisements. Singapore shows individualism, work, and sex, which are less emphasized on in Malaysian advertisements. On the other hand, the value of leisure occurred in Malaysian advertisements often, which was lacking in Singapore’s advertisements (Lee, 2005). Therefore, it is important to note that advertising does depict a nation’s culture. Kalliny (2010) conducted a study theorizing that a better understanding of culture and religion could be gained through the study of advertising content. More importantly, according to O’Guinn et al. (1986),
immigrants learn to use certain products so that they feel they belong in the dominant culture by appearing as a part of the host society.

The Malay Sojourners’ Consumer Acculturation and Identity Negotiation

Malaysia is a multiethnic nation. What is special in Malaysia is the freedom given to each race to practice their traditions, beliefs, languages, vernacular education systems, and religions. However, while advocating for multiracial freedom, the Malaysian government is especially concerned with catering to the needs of Muslims. According to Hooker (2003), the nationalization of Islam in the Malaysian government started in the 1970s with the implementation of National Cultural Policy (NCP). This program was developed to cultivate a “. . . “national soul” for Malaysia based in the formation of a National Culture, in which Islam was an important component.” This Islamization process was continued when Tun Dr Mahathir Mohamad became Malaysia’s Prime Minister in 1981. Following this principle, various Islamic facilities were developed, such as an Islamic Bank, an International Islamic University, and an Islamic insurance company. Malaysia also became a major distributor of halal food, and is on its way to become the world’s halal hub (Khalid, 2014). Although these developments were welcomed by Malaysian society, many are also aware that these developments are actually a political strategy (Brown, 2010 and Fischer, 2009). According to Fischer (2005, p.282), “This nationalization has meant the increased centrality of Islam as a national and ethnic signifier in Malaysia; its logic is to see Islam equated with Malayness, viewing the latter as the naturalized core of the Malaysian nation.”
As a result, Islam has become the main element in Malay ethnic identity and therefore constitutes a dominant role in the Malay culture and lifestyle and in how Malays perceive themselves. A survey conducted in 2006 with 300 Malaysians found that 93.3% of Malaysian Malays regard Islam as one of their three main identity aspects. No other ethnic group comes near having a correlation this strong to any identity variables discussed (Brown, 2010).

The trend of Malaysia’s Islamic market and environment gives a glimpse into how Malaysian Malays, in general, would have trouble once they leave the known market, or “brandscape,” and move into another where the values and philosophy behind the production of the goods are in conflict with their own. The shift from a highly Islamic market in Malaysia towards a more secular market could be a problematic condition for Malay Muslims. Furthermore, due to intense social, political, and religious disputation, Malaysian Malays have a rather complex identity and are subject to a ‘discursive tradition’ (Fischer, 2008, p. 8).

Kamaruddin, Mokhlis and Othman (2002), in their study comparing Malay and Chinese consumers in Malaysia, concluded that Malay consumers tend to be more ethnocentric in their consumption behaviors. As an ethnic group, they were found to be less open to foreign culture, more conservative, and have highly fatalistic attitudes. Wong (nd) said that halal materialism is becoming a major identification of the new ethnic Malay identities, incited by the intensification of Islamic practices in Malaysia. However, according to Kamaruddin and Kamaruddin (2009), religion alone is not sufficient to affect the Malays’ products’ decision-making style. This idea is supported by
Mochis and Fon’s (2011) study, which found that religious values of the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia do not influence brand selection and store preferences. This difference between Kamaruddin, Mokhlis and Othman (2002) and the other two studies (Kamaruddin & Kamaruddin, 2009; Mochis & Fon’s, 2011) allowed me to study the Malay sojourner’s consumer acculturation in the United States, in particular their initial response once they were in a foreign market with values unfamiliar to them.

The literature review leads us to four empirical research questions in our attempt to understand the Malay sojourner’s consumer acculturation and identity negotiation within the American market. RQ1 investigates the sojourning Malays’ initial reaction towards the United States’ brandscape. This research question was asked due to the differences in the commercial and philosophical aspects of the two markets. Malaysia’s market is very Islamized, yet at the same time, they do have a lot of international brands. Would they feel uneasy within a new, secular market?

**RQ1) What is the initial reaction of sojourning Malays to the American market?**

Pre-purchase information seeking is an important act for the consumers, as they are actively engaging in a problem solving activity by looking for relevant information prior to purchasing. D’rozario and Choudhury (2003) and D’Rozario and Douglas’s (1999) studies elucidated that specific ethnic groups in a foreign environment would strategize pre-purchase product information in different ways. According to Kamaruddin and Kamaruddin (2009), Malay consumers appear to have problems in product decision-making. Many of them would display difficulty in organizing excessive product information, resulting in incompetence in decision-making. However, according to
Newman and Sahak (2012), Malaysian consumers should be able to adjust well in a foreign market, as the country is currently exposed to market globalizations in the form of mass media and the Internet, as well as global products and brands through the establishment of international retailers in the domestic market. On the other hand, the reinforced ‘Islamization’ of the Malaysian market may put Malaysian Malays in a rather awkward position in determining which products would suit their needs. Ambali (2013) asserted that committed religious groups’ decisions to eat, drink, purchase, or use any products are influenced by their identity, orientation, knowledge, and belief, based on their spiritual scope. This juxtaposition brought me to the second research question. RQ2 is about Malay sojourners’ strategy during pre-purchase information searches. This question relates to the acculturation and preservation of the Malay identity among the sojourners.

RQ2) How do sojourning Malays strategize pre-purchase information search in the American market?

For immigrants, watching advertisements could be an indirect way for acculturation (O’Guinn et al., 1986). Apart from good exposure to the local market and products, immigrants would also be able to acquire the dominant culture by examining the lifestyles depicted in local programs. As television is immigrants’ main medium (Dalisay, 2012), they are bound to watch advertisements and compare the content to their own understanding. Advertisements could be considered as a channel that embeds cultural and religious values in addition to giving information on the products and brands (Cheng, 1997; Kalliny, 2010).
According to Bayraktar (2012), Muslim consumers may develop negative attitudes toward advertisements that include sexuality. Furthermore, they will have negative impressions of brands in the advertisements and the firms that own these brands. They would even take precautions to prevent their family and themselves from exposure to these advertisements. Therefore, it is essential to see how Malay sojourners, as an ethnic group closely related with Islam, read American advertising, which is based on an open, secular environment. According to Fischer (2008), although the Malays are highly connected with Islam, their identity and media consumption patterns are very complex and arbitrary. Although Malaysia is a country that values Islamic traditions, it also strives for globalization, development, and modernity, thus subjecting the citizens to worldwide cultures through media exposure. This conflicting practice of consumption serves as a basis for further understanding of Malay sojourners’ perception of US based advertisements. RQ3 examines the Malay sojourners’ adaptation to an aspect of US consumer culture, which is advertising. How do culture and religion play a role in Malay sojourners’ perception of US based advertising?

**RQ3) How do Malay sojourners perceive American advertisements?**

Identity discrepancy happens when certain parts of the self contradict each other in situations where individuals struggle with personal or environmental challenges. Scholars have studied identity discrepancy in relation to variables such as acculturation, perceived discrimination, depression, or educational satisfaction (Jung, Hect & Wadsworth, 2007; Wadsworth et al., 2008; Valenta, 2009). Maldonado and Tansuhaj (1999) said that individuals who are adjusting in a foreign land would resort to “identity
play” in order to find a personality with which they are comfortable. They proposed that psychological benefits could be obtained when one reduces the discrepancy between one’s internal self-view and the external role during a profound change in one’s life. Urban and Orbe (2010) examined immigrants from various cultural backgrounds in their transition stage in the United States and found that the immigrants negotiate multiple dimensions of their identities, expressing their need to adapt while preserving portions of their cultural identity at the same time.

There are various consumer culture studies using consumer culture theory deliberating on ways consumers use consumption to build a sense of self, especially those who travel away from their homeland and are adjusting to a foreign land. These individuals resort to “identity play” in order to find a personality they are comfortable with (Maldonajo & Tansuhaj, 1999). One of the methods used for identity stabilization is symbolic consumption, whereby the individuals would resort to alterations in their buying and consumption habits. The idea is that the market is a mythic and symbolic resource enabling individuals to construct narratives of identity (Belk, 1988; McCracken 1986). In many ways, consumers rely on this social image associated with products to assert self-identity and satisfy role performance.

Being a sojourning Malay in the US would presumably cause an identity disparity since Malaysians, as citizens of a developing country, have a significantly different culture compared to Americans (Burns and Brady, 1996). According to Swami et al. (2010), sojourning Malay students in the UK reported significantly poorer sociocultural adjustment compared to Chinese Malaysians. There are a variety of reasons why this
could be so, religion being one of the possibilities. Adams (2011) found that assimilation among ethno-religious groups is slower compared to ethnic groups defined by country of origin. Muslims, in particular, have certain spiritual underpinnings that encourage them to preserve traditions such as dress, diet, and leisure styles. According to Fischer (2009), modern Malay Muslim identity in Malaysia is incomprehensible without taking into consideration the understanding and practices of Islamic consumptions. Therefore it is a possibility that sojourning Malays, as acculturating individuals, would rely on material purchases to create a feeling of belonging as mentioned by Lee (1993), Belk (1988), and McCracken (1986). Consequently, it would be essential to examine Malay sojourners’ perceived identity discrepancy and symbolic consumption as a way to negotiate their identity. RQ4 addresses the meaning of consumption by the Malay sojourners and how that was translated into portions of their identity. Considering that they were newcomers in the United States, their identities have supposedly destabilized. Therefore, do they resort to consumption in order to negotiate their identity? What does their consumption symbolize?

RQ4) How do Malay sojourners use symbolic consumption to negotiate their identity?

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the theoretical framework of this dissertation. The first section explained about migration and acculturation in a globalized context. The second section reflected on the importance of identity negotiation in immigrants and sojourners. And then, I explained about symbolic consumption in order to demonstrate the social and
psychological meaning of consumption. A close examination of the role of media in shaping immigrant and sojourner identity was also conducted. The last section focused on the Malay sojourner’s consumer acculturation and identity negotiation, which derived and proposed four research questions based on the literature.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This study examines consumer acculturation of Malay sojourners in the United States. In addition, it also examines the ways in which the sojourners used consumption to negotiate their identity in a new environment. This chapter describes the fieldwork involved and the analysis that follows. Initially, the purpose, design, and method rationale of the study are explained. Subsequently, the procedures involved, research instruments, respondents’ selection, data collections, and data analyses methods are explained for each of the methods employed.

The Position of the Researcher

Acknowledging that I am an insider to the population I am studying is the first step in conducting this research. "Reflexivity is an awareness of the self in the situation of action and of the role of the self in constructing that situation," (Bloor & Wood, 2006, p. 145). Reflexivity requires the researcher to understand oneself in terms of his or her values, understanding, and perspective on a matter. I am highly involved with the population as I am also a Malay Muslim. The interrelatedness between my language, experiences, and perspectives with the informants might produce a rather empathetic outlook. It might allow me to connect emotionally, theoretically, linguistically, and culturally with the participants’ experience in a way that non-Malays cannot. However, this empathy also creates a conflict. Because I am part of the world they were describing, some informants were quite reluctant to elaborate about events and topics they assumed I was already aware of. In order to rectify this, I had to probe more deeply, or assume an unknowing position about the information they were discussing. For example, I had to
encourage them to talk more about their halal consumptions. Many of them did not want to elaborate much because they assumed I was aware of the issue.

Greenfield (2000) has argued that it is quite impossible to escape from having an insider’s view on subjects that are culturally linked to the researcher. This condition, also known as a type of bias, could be viewed as problematic by some scholars. Taking an outsider role might be beneficial as the researcher will be able to “identify interesting and important cultural meanings,” (Greenfield, 2000, p.233). Greenfield suggested that the best position to take is a combination of insider and outsider roles, what he terms, “the culturally marginal person; these are people who have had important socializing experiences in more than one culture,” (p. 233). In this case, I am considering myself as such a marginal person. As a Malaysian born, Malay speaking Muslim sojourner, I fill the role as insider. Since I am conducting my research from the American based system of knowledge, I am also an outsider.

According to Reason (1994), a highly involved researcher requires the study to be conducted in two ways, one into the topic, and the other, into oneself. In doing so, the researcher has to continuously question his stance on research interactions with his subjects and continue to document all communications in both ways. One of the hardest challenges for a researcher in a qualitative study is to skillfully self-reflect. Recording the researcher’s reflections in field logs is particularly important in order to create awareness of self in the situation created by the researcher and his subjects (Glesne, 2011; Duncan & Fellow, 2004). The steps I have taken to methodologically document my reflections in my field log during the data collection phase have helped in this area.
Study Design

Past research has examined the Malay sojourners’ adaptation in the United Kingdom (Fischer, 2005; Swami, 2009), but there has been no previous study conducted in the United States. Fischer (2009) reported on a study on the Malays’ consumption patterns in his book entitled “Proper Islamic Consumption: Shopping among the Malays in Modern Malaysia.” Swami et al. (2010), who have studied Malaysian Chinese and Malay students in the United Kingdom, reported that Malaysian Malay students adjusted significantly worse socio-culturally when compared to Malaysian Chinese students. However, there is no known study on Malays’ consumer acculturation in the United States. Therefore, this study was an exploratory investigation which purpose was to examine a subject that is relatively new and to find variables that are important to the issue (Babbie, 2010). Babbie also said that exploratory studies are often conducted: “(1) to satisfy the researcher’s curiosity and desire for better understanding, (2) to test the feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study and (3) to develop methods to be employed in a subsequent study” (Babbie, 2010, p. 92).

Qualitative methods were used in this study. Merriam (2009, p. 13) explained qualitative research as, “… understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world.” There were two reasons I chose to conduct this research through qualitative means. First, the topic was unexplored and needed an initial examination to find the corresponding variables. Secondly, I wanted a method that could uncover opinions, perceptions, and attitudes. Many human attitudes are constructed by situational restrictions and
motivations. This socially constructed nature of reality could be explained by the “intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied,” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8). I believed that a qualitative study would be able to explain the thoughts and actions of the Malay sojourners.

The initial methodological approach planned for this study was in-depth interviews conducted with Malay sojourners. However, after the first few interviews I conducted, I decided to alter the original methodological plan. I was concerned about the scope of information I gathered from the in-depth interviews. One of the research questions was aimed at studying Malay sojourners’ perceptions of American advertising. However, I found that the informants were quite uninformed about American advertising, causing difficulty in articulating their thoughts. Some of the participants were able to remember some advertisements; however, they could not recall the content in detail. Consequently, they were unable to critically contrast the advertising industry in Malaysia and the US.

Many of the informants did not spend a lot of time watching television due to time constraint. Others admitted watching television programs through on-demand streaming websites such as Netflix, Hulu Plus, and YouTube. They were able to avoid advertisements by installing blocker software or by manually closing the advertisements. Therefore, the informants’ exposure to advertisements was minimal. In order to rectify this problem, I decided to conduct additional focus group discussions in order to answer the research question pertaining Malay sojourners’ perspective on U.S. advertisements. As a result, a triangulated technique was used to combine information and generate
analysis from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Triangulation is a technique, which combines a few methods of data collection to achieve a common objective (Babbie, 2010). It is a useful research strategy because each kind of data collection has its own strengths and weaknesses, and the use of multiple methods can enhance the reliability of findings.

**In-depth Interview**

The main method employed for this research question was in-depth interviews. It is by far the best qualitative method, as it can be used to learn about the perspectives of individuals and can be useful to prompt informants to reveal their personal feelings, opinions, and experiences. It was an opportunity for me to gain insight into how people interpret and order their world. According to Seidman (1998), in-depth interviews allow researchers to collect opinions from the perspective of the person who is experiencing the matter. At the same time, the method also allows researchers to derive meaning from their narratives. It was a beneficial tool to learn how they negotiated their identity through consumer culture.

I accomplished this by being attentive to the explanations the informants provided about what they had experienced and believed, guided by an interview protocol I developed. Active probing was used to uncover the connections and relationships they saw between particular events, phenomena, and beliefs. Interviews are also especially appropriate for addressing sensitive topics that people might be reluctant to discuss in a group setting (Webber & Byrd, 2010). As identity is a rather sensitive issue, it was best to ask these questions on a more personal level.
**Focus Group Discussion**

Utilizing a focus group discussion environment opened up many possibilities to examine the sojourners and the way they perceive American advertisements. The participants were asked to comment on and discuss selected advertisements to reveal their reactions towards the advertisements. The in-depth interview sessions conducted explored a variety of topics, but this method was not be sufficient to explore the respondents’ thoughts on certain advertisements since they might not be able to recall specific details about each advertisement.

There are many benefits to using focus groups as part of a methodology. According to Lindlof and Taylor (2011), the participants could bounce ideas off each other and link points to each other’s opinions, enabling an active generation of ideas. Conflicts can make the discussion lively, and participants will try to hold on to their ideas by giving examples and elaborating on their points. Making these connections is an effect that cannot be found using in-depth interviews alone. However, using focus groups can also result in some individuals being reluctant to express their opinions in a group setting, especially if they feel their ideas are dissimilar to the opinions of the group members (Goldman, 1962).

**Research Instruments**

This section discusses the research tools used to guide the information gathering process during the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions.
**In-depth Interview**

I developed an in-depth interview protocol that guided the administration and implementation of the interviews according to suggestions given by Lindloft and Taylor (2011), Lofland and Lofland (1995) and Boyce and Neale (2006). These instructions were followed in each interview to ensure consistency and increase the reliability of the findings. Please refer to Appendix A for the full protocol. The protocol consisted of the following:

**Facesheet**

The purpose of a facesheet was to identify and keep track of informant’s particulars. The facesheet was the first page of the guide, but the particulars could be asked before or after the interview, according to the situation.

**Interview guide**

The interview guide gave structure to each interview by reminding me of key components, such as thanking the respondent, stating the purpose of the interview, reviewing confidentiality protocols, stating the duration of the interview and consent process. In addition, it also listed the interview questions. According to Boyce and Neale (2006), an interview guide should contain no more than 15 open-ended questions. Therefore, my guide contained 15 open-ended questions with additional probes, which encourage the respondents to elaborate their answers.

**Post-interview comment sheet**

The comment sheet was merely an empty space for me to write useful fieldnotes after the interview. Some of the things that I took note of were time of the interview,
description of the setting and informant, emotional tone of the interview, difficulties encountered, my personal feeling at the time of the interview, perceptions, and my personal reflections. These comments were beneficial during the analysis of the interviews.

Focus Group Discussion

I developed a focus group interview protocol according to suggestions given by Lindloft and Taylor (2011). Please refer to Appendix B for the full protocol. The discussions started with some general icebreaker questions. According to Lindloft and Taylor (2011), it is important for focus group participants to feel comfortable enough to interact freely with one another. Next, six advertisements were played for the participants. Following the screening of each individual advertisement, the participants were asked a standard set of questions to stimulate the conversation.

Materials

Six American television advertisements were chosen as the subject of the focus group discussion. The main criterion for each of the advertisements chosen was the differences in comparison to common advertisements in Malaysia. The dissimilarity could be in terms of cultural differences, or in the production aspect of the advertisements. The summary of the chosen advertisements is as follows:

Beyonce’s Heat. This advertisement is an advertisement by Beyonce, a popular American singer who is promoting her own fragrance line called Heat. It was chosen as one of the materials as it portrayed prominent sexual elements that could not be shown on Malaysian television. In the advertisement, Beyonce appeared as a gorgeous and sexy
woman. The advertisement contained partial nudity and overtly seductive gestures, such as Beyoncé caressing her neck down to her exposed chest area. The United Kingdom banned this advertisement from daytime television following the Advertising Standards Authority receiving 14 complaints from viewers due to its racy content (Poulter, 2010).

*Dannon Oikos Yogurt.* This advertisement features the three adult male stars of the popular 1980s sitcom *Full House.* John Stamos, who was flirting with a date in his kitchen, spilled yogurt on his lip, which his date then kisses off. He then spills some yogurt onto his pants, followed by his date responding with a suggestive smile. Bob Saget and Dave Coulier break the sexy scene by cleaning up everything, including the pants. Although this advertisement cannot be described as particularly raunchy, it certainly contains many sexual innuendos that would not be shown in Malaysia.

*Lunesta Sleeping Pill.* This sleeping pill advertisement is considered common in the United States. It basically shows a man and a woman in different settings going to sleep in very serene and relaxed environments, complete with butterflies and soft background music. As with all medication advertisements in the United States, this advertisement includes all the side effects that may result after taking Lunesta. This is very contrary to Malaysia, where people rarely see advertisements containing the side effects of medicine.

*Call of Duty: Black Ops.* This advertisement promotes a video game featuring the tagline: “There is a soldier in all of us.” The advertisement is set in a war zone. However, its soldiers are common people dressed in everyday clothes, signifying how any regular person could be called upon to engage in the brutality of the game. Although Malaysian
movies are well known for their viciousness, the media industry does not normally use violence in television and advertising.

*Old Spice: Mom Song.* This advertisement tells the story of a mother who is sad that her son is growing up and becoming a man. She sings a sad song while spying on her son’s date in a most unusual and comedic manner. Her escapades are followed by other mothers who spy on their dating sons in questionable methods, such as hanging on the back of a moving car, posing as a cleaner in a school, or being swept in by a tide on a beach near her dating son. This advertisement presents a cultural conflict with the Malay culture, since they are very respectful towards the elderly, especially their mothers.

*Pepsi Vs Coca Cola Superbowl 2012.* This advertisement compares two American drinks, Pepsi Max and Coke Zero. A Coke Zero delivery man buys a Pepsi Max and ends up winning Pepsi Max for life. This sort of competitive advertising, which seems usual in the United States, is actually prohibited in Malaysia. According to Advertising Standards Authority Malaysia (2008, p. 12), “Advertisements should not attack or discredit other products, advertisers or advertisements directly or by implication.” The common practice in Malaysian advertisements is to replace the compared brand with a symbol, for example, “X” brand.

**Respondent Selection**

**Recruitment of Respondents**

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the number of Malaysians in the United States is very low compared to other Asian ethnic groups. As of the year 2000, there were only 10,711 Malaysians in the US (Gregorian, 2005). This number represents all of the
different races in Malaysia (Malay, Chinese, Indians, indigenous groups and others). It would be hard to estimate the percentage of Malay sojourners from this number. It is possible that there are more Malay sojourners compared to other races. This is due to more opportunities in working at the embassy and getting study scholarships for Malays. However, there might be more Chinese emigrants compared to Malays or Indians emigrants, as Malaysian Chinese are more proactive to find opportunities in settling outside of Malaysia (Pak, 2011).

For this study, the networking technique proved very valuable in locating potential informants. According to Lofland and Lofland (1995, p. 37), “There is a great deal of wisdom in the old saying, ‘It’s who you know that counts.’ Gaining entry to a setting or getting permission to do an interview is greatly expedited if you have ‘connections.’” The recruitment process had generated a few important contacts, which later led to more contacts. This method is known as snowball sampling, which is effective for “locating rich key informants,” (Patton, 2002, p. 262). This method is especially important to communicate with the harder to reach sojourners.

Initial contact with the respondents was made during a gathering of the Malaysian community in the United States. The event was the Malaysian Midwest Games, an annual sporting event held by the Malaysian Student Association under the Malaysian Ministry of Higher Education. The Malaysian Students Association at Western Michigan University hosted the event on May 24-26, 2013. This event gathered more than 1,000 Malaysian students and outsiders, proving that it would be a good venue to seek access to a large number of possible informants. During the event, I gathered the contact
information of several possible respondents from various backgrounds. Considering the setting of the gathering, it was problematic to conduct interviews during the busy and crowded event. While I only managed to conduct one interview with an expatriate’s wife during the event, I managed to gain the contact information for many potential informants. In addition, I also successfully gained contacts from the embassy staff in Washington, D.C., who helpfully gathered a few respondents from within the Embassy. On top of the contacts I gained from the Midwest Malaysian Games, I also used a contact from Ohio State University to gain access to more Malay students. My contact there introduced me to her connections, enabling me to form two groups for the focus group discussions. I also utilized my contacts in Athens, Ohio, from which I interviewed five students, two expatriates and three spouses. Four members of the community also participated in the last focus group.

Profiling Respondents

For a study that puts weight on certain aspects of the sample population, it is important to select the sample purposely, focusing on the group the researcher theoretically wants to study. A researcher should choose participants for the specific qualities that they bring to the study. This is often called purposive strategy; intentionally sampling research participants for the particular perspectives they offer. A carefully chosen sample allows researchers to explore different experiences among various individuals or groups (Esterberg, 2002; Webber and Byrd, 2010).

Sam and Berry (2006) have identified the main sojourner groups as tourists, international students, expatriate workers, international civil servants, and military
personnel. Among the five categories, I succeeded in interviewing representatives from three groups; students, expatriate workers, and civil servants. I had also added another category which I deemed an important group of sojourners to study, the spouses of the international students, expatriate workers, and international civil servants, who made up an important group of people sojourning in support of their partner.

**In-depth Interview Informants**

The following section describes the background of the informants. Pseudonyms were used to label the informants in order to protect their identity. The in-depth interviews involved five students, four embassy officers, three expatriates, and three spouses.

*Students*

Borhan, 32, was a graduate student in an engineering course. At the time the interview was conducted, Borhan had stayed in Athens, Ohio, a small university town for two and a half years. He was married and has a child. He was staying in the U.S. with his small family. Borhan, who did not have a lot of traveling experience, had never been to the United States prior to his move.

Lily was a 35-year-old graduate student in the engineering field at Ohio University. At the time of the interview, she had been living in the United States with her husband and three children for two and a half years. She has previously traveled to the United States as a teenager. Lily is an enthusiastic online shopper; she shops for most things online as she finds it very convenient.
Azura was a 32-year-old doctoral student in childhood education at Ohio State University who has lived in the U.S. for two years. She has traveled extensively, but mainly in Asia.

Anuar was a 25-year-old graduate student who was studying music at Ohio University. Anuar had only been living in Ohio for six months when this interview was conducted. Before coming to the States, he was a part-time, freelancing musician in Malaysia. He did not travel a lot outside Malaysia, but was widely exposed through the media.

Elfira was a 21-year-old undergraduate student in Athens, Ohio. She had been in the United States for two years at the time the interview was conducted. Elfira was a very dedicated shopper, who knows much about high-end brands in the global market. She had been exposed to various brands through the media and her surroundings. However, she had never traveled outside the Malaysia prior to her studies.

Embassy

Leha, 48, was a civil servant at the Malaysian Embassy in Washington, D.C. She had three children, and two of them were living with her in the States.

Mizi, 32, was an attaché under the Public Service Department in the Malaysian Embassy. He has been in the U.S. for 19 months. He has traveled before, but not extensively. He was born in the United Kingdom and grew up there until he was four years old.

Hussein, 38, was a senior officer in the Malaysian Embassy in Washington, D.C. He has been staying in the United States for two years when this interview was
conducted. While he has worked at consulates in many countries before coming to the U.S., this assignment was his first trip to the country. He has traveled to many countries in the Middle East, Europe, and Asia, doing a lot of substantive work on political relations, logistics, and economic relations.

Asmidar had been in the U.S. for two and a half years when this interview was conducted. This was her first trip to the country. She has travelled before, but only in Asia.

Expatriates

Rokiah was selected by the Ministry of Higher Education in Malaysia to be an outreach officer at Ohio University. When this interview was conducted, she had lived in the US for two years, but had previously lived in the United States while earning two graduate degrees. She was married to an American and visited the US frequently. Rokiah and her husband had two children.

Ahmad was a visiting researcher from Petronas. He had been assigned by his company to monitor a project at Ohio University. During the interview, Ahmad has lived in the U.S. for 6 months with his wife and three children.

Osman was an officer from a university in Malaysia. During the interview, Osman was in the U.S. for a work visit to the local higher education institutes in Ohio.

Spouses

Aniza was a spouse to an expatriate. Her husband was working in Chicago as a surgeon, and they were going to live in the States for a year. At the time of the interview, they had been in the US for six months. They had four children, ranging from 2 to 10
years old. In Malaysia, Aniza was an English secondary school teacher. She has stayed in the US previously while completing her undergraduate studies. She also conducted an online business during her spare time in the United States.

Najiha was a spouse to a graduate student in Athens, Ohio. She and her husband had one child. In Malaysia, she worked as an agricultural researcher, but during the interview she was a stay-at-home mother.

Liza was a spouse to an expatriate. During the interview, she had been in the United States for six months. In Malaysia, she was a staff member in the Malaysian government’s Department of Defense. In the United States, she was a stay-at-home mother.

Focus Group Discussion Participants

There were a total of 19 participants in three focus group discussions. There were six participants for the first group, nine for the second and four for the third. The first and second groups were conducted with Ohio State University undergraduate Malay students in Columbus, Ohio. The third group was conducted in Athens, Ohio, consisting of graduate Malay students of Ohio University and one of their spouses. The demographics of the focus groups are as in Table 3.1.
Table 3.1

*The Demographics of Focus Group Informants*

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Procedures

Data Collection

The data collection process for this study started in May 2013 and ended in August 2014. I started the process by conducting in-depth interviews in Kalamazoo, Michigan; Washington, D.C.; Athens, Ohio, and Columbus, Ohio. After initial analysis of the interviews, I decided to conduct focus group discussions to enrich the information. The focus group discussions were conducted in Athens, Ohio and Columbus, Ohio.

In-depth Interviews

Fifteen semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with the informants in an informal way in order to gain insight into their acculturation. All of the interviews were conducted face to face. This element is important, as it allowed me to observe any significant body and/or facial movements that could indicate emotions. It also gave me an opportunity to seek any necessary clarifications of their explanations. Each session lasted between 60 to 90 minutes. An interview guide was followed to ensure reliability throughout the interviews (see Appendix A).

Before starting the interviews, I provided the informants with the consent form (see Appendix C). All of them read through the form and gave their permission to be interviewed. I also asked for permission to audio-record the sessions and all of them agreed. During each interview, I wrote down important points brought forth by the informants. After each session, I would write anecdotes in my interview journal, detailing important occurrences for that session. According to Lofland and Lofland (1995), field notes are needed to remind the researcher of important information that might be
forgotten. At first, I did not regard this as a very important portion of the data collection phase. I only realized how important this was after some time had passed, and my notes really explained the setting and context of the interviews. As an example, this was what I noted on one of the earlier interviews I conducted:

The appointment was set up earlier, and we decided to conduct the interview in the library. I booked a study room so that I could get a good and quiet location to interview him. I picked him up at his house and drove him to the library. I also bought him some refreshments as a token of appreciation. Anuar seemed a little jittery and nervous, asking beforehand for the questions that I will be posing to him. I assured him that it’s not going to be hard, just his opinion on how he is adapting his life here. He asked me again, what if he answered them wrongly. I guaranteed him that nothing he said would be wrong. I was only looking for his opinion.

I asked him whether it would be alright to conduct the interview in English, and he said yes. In the beginning of the interview, he seemed to be very nervous, not elaborating a lot on the topics. I made some jokes, paying a lot of attention and nodding to the things he said, encouraging him to talk more. After the initial 10 minutes, he started to loosen up and elaborated extensively on his experiences, especially when we started to talk about his passion, music.

The problem with this interview was that it was conducted out of the informant’s comfort zone. He was unfamiliar with the setting, as he rarely goes to the library and it was his first time in the study room. The atmosphere was kind of
intimidating and foreign, as he was asked to speak in English with another Malay about a topic he is not very familiar with in an unfamiliar setting.

This reflection made me realize that getting the informants and myself comfortable was a very important aspect in building a good rapport with the informants. However, comparatively, I believe that it is more important for the informants to be more at ease than myself in order for them to reiterate their experiences. In a way, it could be helpful to switch the power role to them and make them feel that they are in control of the situation. Therefore, I decided to conduct the interviews in the most comfortable setting for the informants. This resulted in most of the interviews being conducted in the informants’ house, their workplace, or in my house.

*Focus Group Discussion*

For this study, three focus group discussions were conducted with 19 participants, with each group consisting of a minimum of four people. The setup of these groups did not only allow for open discussions, interaction, and information exchange, but also ensured that the participants were comfortable enough to express themselves. The number of the groups and characteristics of each was decided based on the research objective and discussion topics, which helped to provide a framework for understanding how Malay people understand and interpret advertisements with a cultural context outside of what they are familiar with. One focus group was conducted in Athens, Ohio, while two others were conducted at Ohio State University.

A majority of researchers endorse homogeneity of participants within a focus group, so that none of the respondents feel patronized by higher status members in the
Therefore, I decided to form three groups according to certain social characteristics. Two focus groups were conducted with undergraduate students at Ohio State University. I decided to form different focus groups for each gender, as most young Malays are quite withdrawn with the opposite gender. This issue could have posed a major impediment to open discussion in the focus groups. This is particularly important, since some of the advertisements shown would be considered improper by an average Malay’s standard.

*Focus group 1.* The first group consisted of six male undergraduate students. To encourage homogeneity, I chose a male moderator from Ohio University to moderate the male group. I had trained the moderator in an earlier training session. The objectives of the study, the research questions and the interview guide were reviewed in the training. I also discussed ways to ask questions, listen, and probe with the male moderator.

By request, the discussion was conducted at one of the participants’ homes. The environment was conducive as the living room where the discussion was held was large and spacious enough to seat all of them. The participants were also very relaxed, since they were very familiar with the setting. Before starting the discussion, I had distributed the consent form (see Appendix D). Each of the participants read the consent form before signing it. The materials for the discussion were shown on a 50-inch LCD television. To assist my data analysis stage, I had requested for a video and audio recording to be conducted, and the participants complied. Lunch was provided as a sign of gratitude for the participants’ time.
Focus group 2. The second group was comprised of nine female participants. For this group, I acted as the moderator. The discussion was held at the home of one of the participants. The materials were shown to the group using a projector owned by the homeowner. However, in this group, I did not use a video recording, since some of the female participants were uncomfortable with being recorded. For analysis purposes, I recorded the audio of the discussion. Consent forms were distributed, read and signed before the discussion started (see Appendix D). Lunch was also provided.

Focus group 3. The last group consisted of graduate students and their spouses at Ohio University. I decided that this group of four people would contain male and female participants, since they were more mature and older than the previous participants. Furthermore, they were already familiar and friendly with each other, enabling interactions to be free and unrestricted. I also moderated this discussion. The dialogue was conducted in a discussion room at the library at Ohio University. Audio recording was conducted during the discussion, and the materials were shown to the participants using the library’s projector. Although the setting was conducive, it was quite problematic as the participants had to bring along their children, causing the discussion to be quite disrupted at some points. Consent forms were distributed, read and signed before the discussion started (see Appendix D). Lunch was provided afterwards.

Data Analysis

Babbie (2010) and Lofland and Lofland (1995) surmised that the data analysis process of qualitative methodology is very abstract and cannot be summarized in a mechanical and rigid way. Glesne (2011, p. 184) said that it involves “organizing what
you have seen, heard and read so that you can figure out what you have learned and make sense of what you have experienced.” The methods, however, are also quite different and distinct from one researcher to another. Qualitative research is in its entirety open-ended and as much an art as a science. However, there are steps and guidelines that could be implemented to ensure legitimacy, and a researcher should know which steps to adopt in order to make his/her research work (Lofland & Lofland, 1995).

For my research, I referred to Lofland and Lofland (1995), Babbie (2010), Ellis (2004) and Dutta-Bergman and Pal (2005). The main concern of the analysis is to link the overall theoretical frame, research questions, and the data collected. I chose to conduct thematic analysis to frame and organize the information I obtained from the interviews. According to Glesne (2011), thematic analysis uses analytical techniques in organizing and segmenting the information by separating them into themes and subjects. “Thematic analysis refers to treating stories as data and using analysis arrive at themes that illuminate the content and hold within or across stories. The emphasis is then is on the abstract analysis rather than the stories themselves” (Ellis, 2004, p.196).

The data analysis steps I adopted were as follows, referring to methods described by Babbie (2010) and Dutta-Bergman and Pal (2005):

Transcribing

All of the interviews were transcribed verbatim to enable the analysis process to be conducted. Given that there were many interviews to be transcribed, I commissioned some help for a few of the interviews. However, since my transcriber was not in the setting and was not so familiar with the topic, there were instances when the transcription
was done incorrectly. There were also problems when she could not transcribe certain portions of the interview due to muffled voices, overlapping discussions or external noises. I made sure to review and correct all of the transcribed manuscripts to ensure correct data transferal.

Out of the 15 in-depth interviews, six were conducted in Malay language by request of the informants. In order to analyze and report the data, I translated the interviews with the assistance of an English- and Malay-speaking friend. The method we used to ensure consistency was back-translation, where she would translate the scripts back to Malay. We would then compare the translated scripts to the original scripts to ensure that the translation was done correctly, or at least, was similar to the context of the situation.

**Coding**

The data was then labeled into sets of codes that could classify specific items. The concept is the organizing principle of this stage. Coding is an acceptable method to test an assumption that has been generated by prior theory. In this research, two types of coding were used: open coding and axial coding, as explained by Babbie (2010).

*Open coding.* First, I conducted open coding, in which every piece of information was broken down, examined, and compared to each other in order to look for connections. Subsequently, the discrete ideas that were related to the same phenomenon were categorized into the same concepts, termed ‘categories’. For example, the codes of ‘punctual’, ‘manage’, ‘concerned’ and ‘polite’ were placed under the ‘positive
experience’ category, while ‘worry’, ‘nervous’ and ‘weird’ were placed under ‘negative expectation’.

Axial coding. Then, axial coding was conducted, in which the core concepts of the study were formed. This stage involved regrouping the concepts made during the open coding stage. Formulations of relationships among and between the categories were conducted. For example, when I reanalyze the categories of ‘positive experience’ and ‘negative expectation’, I derived the relationship of ‘paradigm shift’, where the informants’ expectation did not result in a negative experience but a positive experience.

Memoing

As data was being coded, I wrote memos and notes in order to organize the data. Code labels and their meanings are particularly important, as they will give a clear explanation of the coding. Theoretical memos are also important as they explain the relationships between concepts and theoretical prepositions. Not all relationships were easily derived and straightforward. Therefore, a lot of notes were needed to explain and develop links between categories.

Chapter Summary

This chapter described the methods I employed to gather information. I used in-depth interviews with 15 informants and focus group discussions with three groups. I used snowball sampling to gather potential informants, and purposive strategy to choose suitable informants. To analyze the materials I gathered, I used thematic analysis, utilizing open coding, axial coding and memoing to find the themes.
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

This chapter examines the outcome of interviews and discussions conducted with Malay sojourners in the United States. The main objectives of this research were to understand the consumer acculturation and identity negotiation process of Malay sojourners in the US. Taking into consideration that Malaysian Malays have a highly complex identity resulting from social, political, and religious factors, this research aims to narrate informants’ experience as newfound consumers in a secular surrounding. Specific emphasis was placed on sojourners’ media consumption prior and during the shift from Malaysia to the United States, and how that consumption affected their acculturation as consumers in the new market. In addition to an emphasis on media consumption, each of the narrations were examined from the perspective that Malaysian Malays are Muslims by law and tradition, bound by specific consumption practices. By the end, this research synthesized the conflict of the Malay identity in a material based nation and how they represent their identity through symbolic consumption. To determine this, 15 in-depth interviews and 3 focus group discussions were conducted with Malay sojourners in the United States. The informants varied from groups of students, expatriates, embassy officers, and spouses of the people in those three categories.

This chapter reports the findings from these interviews and focus group discussions in four main sections. First, I examined the sojourner’s sociocultural adaptation in the United States. Then, I looked at their initial reaction to American market. Next, I discussed their media exposure prior to and during the shift in the US, as it was highly relevant to their consumer acculturation process. Naturally, the sojourner’s
interpretation of and response to the American marketing strategies was examined to understand Malay sojourners’ tactics when interacting with the local market. Lastly, I examined the sojourner’s experience with the American consumer culture in the context of consumer behavior. To illustrate the findings, I reiterated portions of the informants’ interviews. Because some of the interviews were conducted in Malay language at the request of the informants, they were translated into English for this dissertation. Although the informants mentioned many different things during the in-depth interviews, only the most relevant expressions were selected and reported in this chapter.

Malay Sojourner’s Adaptation in the US

This section discusses the main issues on the Malay sojourners’ initial socio-cultural adaptation in the United States. The recurring themes extracted from the conversations were language issues, changed view of dominant culture group, appreciation for the local culture, but unable to integrate with that group, and Malay collectivistic nature.

Language Barrier

Generally, educated Malaysians have a fair command of the English Language. The Malaysian education system enables its citizens to converse and write in that language effectively. However, some of the informants, especially students, did mention that language was a problem in their initial adaptation in the US. The main problem was because Malaysians use British English in their education system. The different terms, pronunciation, and spelling between British English and American English contributed to Malays’ difficulties in effectively communicating.
One of the informants who experienced a language barrier was Aniza, an English language teacher in Malaysia. During the interview, she revealed that she traveled to the United States to accompany her husband who was on a work trip for one year. That was her second trip to the US, with her first trip being for her first degree in Rochester, New York. She explained her problem during her first degree as follows:

Difficulty I faced when I first came here was the language, of course, even though you know English; your English is like British English, not American English. When you speak with Americans, sometimes you wouldn’t understand them, because sometimes they would be speaking in a slang, like dialects. Like us, we have different parts in Malaysia; even though everybody’s speaking in Bahasa Malaysia [Malay language] but different types of slang can make you pronounce differently and you can’t understand what they are saying (personal communication, May 24, 2013).

This problem was one of the difficulties she had when she was studying, as she could not really understand what the instructor was saying. Language became one of her main problems during her initial adjustment in the US.

For you to adapt in class, when the lecturer is talking and you want to take notes at the same time, is kind of difficult. At first. But after a while, you get used to it, you socialize with your friends, which are from here (personal communication, May 24, 2013).

Borhan, a student in engineering, also had problems in class and in his daily life during his transition period in the US. He said that he was able to adapt and ask for help
from other students to exchange notes and do group work. However, before familiarizing himself with the ways here, he was struggling to understand and acclimatize to the language.

There’s some culture shock going on because we are accustomed with the British system, British slang. Like when we went to Pizza Hut, I was trying to explain that I want to have the pizza at home, ‘take away’ the pizza. But they couldn’t understand the term ‘take away’. “Take away? What? Oh, to go!” So I was like, “Yes, to go”! Different terms like ‘cart’ and ‘trolley’, ‘napkins’ and ‘tissues’, ‘restrooms’ and ‘toilets’. We mention these things and people will go, “What?” And also the slang, sometimes we would ask for water and still they wouldn’t understand because of the pronunciation. I feel like twisting my tongue every time I have to pronounce ‘water’ like the locals here! [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

Both Aniza and Borhan mentioned that they watched a lot of Hollywood movies and television series before they came to the US. However, the lifestyle and language culture depicted in the media did not really register in their minds. Watching American life on television and actually living in it are two very different things. When Borhan was asked how the confusion made him feel, he said it embarrassed him. Both Aniza and he said that it took some time to adjust and learn all the terms.

Azura (personal communication, August 31st 2014) reported that language became a setback in her studies. As a graduate student, she was required to convey ideas and participate in academic discussions in class. However, that was difficult because
language became a barrier in her communication. She said that her American classmates did not acknowledge her ideas and were not open to discussions with her because of her inability to be very articulate. This would happen often during group discussions and would result in her feeling “frustrated by the frequent silencing” (personal communication, August 31st 2014).

Elfira, an undergraduate student, also noted that her American classmates would only talk among themselves during group discussions (personal communication, May 6th 2014). She remarked that she had to initiate and make extra effort to join the discussion. This required her to be more assertive in demonstrating her capabilities in academics. She also said that she felt better in communicating with Americans who had a basic knowledge of her culture such as her classmates in their Indonesian language class. Although they still conversed in English, she found it easier to communicate with them.

Azura (personal communication, August 31st 2014) said that although her American friends acknowledge the struggles of communicating and studying in a second-language, not many of them were interested in building informal relationships with non-native English speaking students. She said that foreign students were much more empathetic and they would make more effort to understand her, thus enabling them to build friendships. She admitted that her group of friends consisted mostly of international students.

Paradigm Shift

A pattern that I noticed from my informants was that they changed their perception about the United States after moving here. Most of the informants would be
really wary about coming to the States and dealing with Americans. Initially, they were anxious about the locals’ perception of them, being foreigners and Muslims. Islamophobia sentiment was brought up a lot in the conversations.

When asked about his initial impression about the States, Borhan said that he was so nervous that he actually took a step to change his image before coming here. In his words:

I didn’t know much about the US before coming here. All I know was what I watch in the television. I was nervous primarily because of the whole Islamophobia thing. Those things made me nervous, to an extent that I shaved off my beard. I had quite a long beard when I was in Malaysia, but I shaved everything off. Clean. I did it just because I was scared. Because Malaysian media described US as hard to penetrate, so I was scared that at the airport they might mistake me for a militant…But then I still got in trouble. I was took into a room, interviewed, and had to fill out some forms. I am not sure if it was a random check but that made my family and I miss our connecting flights. So yes, first experience here was traumatic for me. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

Borhan went on to describe that he struggled in the first 2 years to adjust to life here, mentioning language barriers, cultural conflicts, and religious belief clashes. However, he found his life stabilizing in his third year:

It’s actually nice living here. Nice as it’s so peaceful, perhaps it’s this town, if it’s a bigger city than that might not be the case. Even the driving culture is better
here, so relaxed and unaggressive, unlike in Malaysia. The people here are so nice and friendly. I admit when I first came here I was so scared to let my wife to in public alone as she is wearing the headscarf [hijab]. But now that’s not a problem, it is okay. The people here are more polite and nice compared to Malaysians. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

Leha, 48, a civil servant at the Malaysian Embassy, Washington DC, mentioned the same observation. She recalled being initially guarded towards Americans’ perception of her, as she is a Muslim and wears the hijab. She was concerned for the safety of her children and always advised her children to be careful. However, her concerns proved to be incorrect:

My perception changed after I arrived here. The community here is nice and friendly. I guess, coincidently, this is a nice neighborhood. It is peaceful here. Americans are friendly, even the Arab Americans are not having any problems here. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, July 6, 2013).

Lily, 35, a graduate student, mentioned an experience that also resonates with a paradigm shift. Her account was more about her observation of people’s perception of her:

Hmm. At first I didn’t like it because I think I feel that some people think that I am weird because I wear hijab. I think! I don’t know if it’s right, but I feel like because when I sit down somewhere, I feel like people don’t want to sit next to
me. Like they try to sit some other place. I was like, why? Yeah I have a feeling that people were staring at me. I don’t know, if it’s just, maybe it’s in my mind, but that’s what I feel. Especially when I go to places like West Virginia. There the feeling is more obvious, like they have never seen such people before (personal communication, June 19, 2013).

When asked whether she still feels isolated, she was very resolute that she was not. She said that she feels very comfortable in her own skin here, even more so than in Malaysia. She attributes having that sentiment due to the fact that America is so multi-cultural and the community is very open towards any distinctive member of society. She explained it as the follows:

Now I don’t give a damn. Because America is a nation of immigrants. There’s so many immigrants. So like, they don’t care actually. I could do whatever I want and they don’t disturb me. That’s one thing that’s good about this country. Because in Malaysia if I do something different, people will think that I am crazy. Here I am free to do whatever I want and people don’t talk behind my back (personal communication, June 19, 2013).

Positive Outlook on Local Culture

Most of the informants mentioned that they were pleasantly surprised with the dominant culture groups’ positive attitudes and hospitality towards them. The main themes mentioned were the Americans’ friendliness and openness towards international members of the society:
Ahmad: I praise their attitude. Their attitude is friendly. Friendly. They will greet us even if we are foreigners. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 2, 2013).

Najiha: I like their style, I like to learn. It gives a lot of positive things to us. How they deal with kids, I learn a lot in that aspect. They don’t scold a lot, like us. I like the way they treat children. I like it that we could learn good things from them. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

Elfira: The people here are nice. Very helpful, compared to Malaysia…. For example, they hold the door open for us. I like that. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, May 6 2014).

The informants also said that many of the positive practices in the US are worthwhile to take home and implement. Generally, the Malay sojourners respect the Americans’ way of living, as they consider it to be full of good values. Some were referring to the local’s attitude in terms of hospitality to foreigners, and some were talking about their work ethic and cleanliness:

Anuar: They are very punctual. In Malaysia we know that they are very stressful in works because everything they do must be fast but when I came here…they’re very steady…and open (personal communication, April 6 2013).

Mizi: Basically the American are very good in managing, so we want to see they deal, how they manage things, stuff like that. And furthermore for me, as a civil servant, is also on looking how public service works. Because they have county
level, district level, so, a lot of layers but still they can do things very efficiently, not like back home even though we do not have that many layers, but still things are pending here and there (personal communication, July 5, 2013).

Asmidar: They are really concerned about their environment, their social work, they greet people very polite, so that’s one thing we should take home (personal communication, July 7, 2013).

Borhan: There’s a lot that we could exemplify actually. In terms of their values. Human capital. There’s a lot of human capital. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 9, 2013)

Ahmad: People do not litter here. In Walmart, people return the carts once they are done with them. It’s not like this is Malaysia. We’ll just leave them near our car. The workers will take them later. I don’t know if there’s any fine if you don’t return, I don’t think so… In restaurants, we have to clean up after we are done eating. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 2, 2013).

Disassociation from the Dominant Culture Group

Despite the majority of informants saying that they really think positively of the local’s culture, most of them admitted that they do not really socialize with the dominant culture group. Many of them disclosed that despite being friendly with Americans, they do not really mingle much with them. The extent of their relationships with the locals is respectful, yet quite insubstantial. The following are some of the comments by informants when asked about their relationship with the dominant culture group:
Ahmad: Us, us. Them, them [meaning that the two groups do not mix]. Just say hi, hello like that. Above my house is an old man. So I just say hi to him. Sometimes if his children come, I would also just say hi and talk a little bit. But to have a meal together, no. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 2, 2013).

Leha: Not really because the scope of my work is more individual work. Meetings will only be joined by the director. So not so much interaction for me. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, July 6, 2013).

Mizi: We mingle now and then but maybe does not go through a very informative discussion I guess. So it’s more of a “hello, hi, good bye, how are you” kind of things. It’s much more [like] acquaintance in nature (personal communication, July 5, 2013).

Lily: Yea yea. I interact with the locals. Like, with the neighbors. And then at my workplace. That’s all. I don’t really hangout with them (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

Elfira: Not a lot, if I have to, like in class. We don’t usually like, talking to each other. But we, when there is a group work, then we’ll try to get to know each other. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, May 6 2014).

The main reasons the informants mentioned as the cause of this separation from the dominant culture group would be the restrictions in terms of religion. Apart from that, time constraints and cultural differences were also mentioned.
Religiously, the activities performed during a gathering might pose as a restriction for the Malays. Even though they were not required to act and consume as their friends, some of them were uncomfortable to be in the environment. Borhan mentioned some stories that relates to the religious issue:

My non-Muslim friends would sometimes invite me to go to the bars after office hours. I would say, no thanks. They know that I do not drink [alcohol] and would suggest that I just hang out and drink Coke. There are also some naughty ones who would suggest that I just try it [drinking alcohol] once. Or just a little bit, to release stress. I said no again. A lot of times they would ask me, to go to the bar, play some darts, snooker or something. I never went. There were also gatherings or parties that they held. I didn’t go either because I saw in their pictures there were alcoholic beverages. If we join those events, we are considered involved with a syubhah environment [unclear whether it is Halal or non-Halal]. So, there are a lot of restrictions. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher]

(personal communication, June 9 2013).

However, Borhan realized that his actions might cause a rift between himself and his colleagues, and therefore tried to lessen the gap he created. He would try to find balance and adjust his mingling pattern with his coworkers, specifically related to an annual party held by one of them:

I didn’t go [when invited], but up until the third time, I felt guilty because I kept saying no. Every single year I didn’t go to the party. I didn’t want to be labeled as kera sumbang [anti-social]. So I decided to go just to have some food, say hello
and then leave…. I just went to avoid being called a snob and to maintain good relationships with colleagues. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (Personal communication, June 9, 2013).

I prodded him more on the issue, asking whether his actions ever caused any debates among his colleagues. He highly agreed, narrating more stories:

There were a lot of debates, even about eating chicken meat from Walmart. At my office, there’re a lot of potlucks going on. Everybody would bring their own dish. So I would just eat lightly, and choose dishes that I could eat. Then they’d ask why aren’t you eating? I’d say I can’t eat those. Why not? Are you vegetarian? I’d say no, I just couldn’t eat it. I have to eat slaughtered chicken. They’d ask where do you get that meat? I’d say Columbus. So far. I think they’ll say that Islam is so hard to practice. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (Personal communication, June 9, 2013).

Hearing this, I asked further whether they actually mentioned that Islam is a burdensome religion, or was it only his assumption of their thoughts:

I think. Because when I explain that this religion prohibits its believer from drinking alcohol and eating pork, they would say, what a sad religion. It’s too strict, what a sad religion. I didn’t say anything because the person who mentioned that is actually my superior in the office. I didn’t feel that it’s worth it because he would only see it from his point of view anyway. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (Personal communication, June 9, 2013).
Ahmad also mentioned that to spend time and have meals with non-Muslim friends might pose some difficulty for him:

If it involves food, that would be a little hard, whether it is halal or not. But if a Muslim friend invites me for food, okay then. Like if Pak Dani [an Indonesian] invites [me and my Muslim friends], for sure we’ll go. If a non-Muslim invites us, it would be harder in terms of the food. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 2, 2013).

Several of the informants, especially those working in the embassy in Washington, D.C. informed me that the main restriction preventing them from mixing with the locals is time.

Mizi: We are much more tight to the Malaysian communities than the local people. Neighbors, not so much. Maybe it comes back to us being a part of embassy; we are much tied with the embassy in terms of the programs and stuff. Even in some cases where we have a local program, in this county, and at the same time we have programs in the embassy. Most probably we couldn’t make it to the program because we have to go to the embassy program. So it limits, somehow it limits us to join certain programs we want in the county, because it’s part of the job description I guess for us to be with the embassy most of the time (personal communication, July 5, 2013).

Leha: Interaction with the neighbors? It’s okay, I talk with the people opposite of my house. I know the people around the neighborhood but they are busy, I am
busy too. We are all busy, so there’s no time to mix around. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, July 6, 2013).

Anuar, a music student, also attributes his lack of communication with the locals to time limitations:

Actually, in terms of hang out, I’m not that kind of, like, hang out that kind of way, because mostly all the music students busy doing, busy to practice, and so on, so on, so we don’t have much time to maybe grab some lunch together or then hang out or go to some other place. So we just kind of can, I can meet them doing extra practice or maybe in classes, before the class start. So I can have a little chat with them, so that’s all. But I don’t have the time to maybe like, invite them to go some other places, to hang out and then maybe to chat more (personal communication, April 6, 2013).

Leha and Elfira have also mentioned cultural reasons on why they do not really mix well with the locals. When asked whether she visits her local friends at their house, Leha replied, “Not really. It’s not in their culture… We don’t really chat like when we go beraya [celebrate Eid]” (personal communication, July 6, 2013).

Elfira mentioned that while the locals are nice to her, they are also more inclined to talk more to each other than with her. This usually happened when she was required to do group work in her studies. However, she also understands that this condition is normal, comparing the situation here to Malaysia, “In Malaysia, when we are with Malays, and there are Indians, maybe we would talk more with the Malays” (personal communication, May 6, 2014).
Collectivism

Throughout the interviews, the informants would often mention doing things, hanging out, or going somewhere with other fellow Malaysians. Several different settings would arise in the conversations, and yet the informants would say that they would be doing it with another Malaysian instead of friends of different nationalities.

Anuar: It depends actually, mostly I love to hang out with Malaysian because most of the time I’m in the faculty, so from 10 am till 8 pm I have to practice in my faculty so I have to meet a lot of people there, and when it’s night, I have to hang out with my Malaysian friends (personal communication, April 6, 2013).

When Elfira was asked whether her adaptation time in the first few months was hard, she said:

Not really. Because there were already Malaysians when I first came here. I wasn’t expecting there would be any Malaysians. Although there were not many, I feel as if I have known them for a long time. Even if you’ve only met them, you could talk with them for a long time… I was neither sad nor homesick at all (personal communication, May 6, 2014).

Initial Reaction to American Market

The shift from a highly Islamic market in Malaysia towards a more secular market could be problematic for Malay sojourners. There are some specific requirements for a Muslims’ lifestyle that could be hard to adjust to within a secular setting such as in American culture. Apart from that, Malay sojourners need a strategy to maneuver through
the vastness of the American market in terms of product types and brands. This next section examines Malay sojourners’ initial reaction to the American market.

Transferal from Generic to Brand-name Products

Most of the informants mentioned that they tend to change from using generic to high-ended brand products. This was especially so in terms of buying clothes, handbags, and shoes. Aniza explained that her consumption shift was more because of the quality that comes with specific brands.

Aniza: It wasn’t before. Because one thing with Kelantanese, we are very close to Thailand. So Thailand, they have a lot of imitations. Like Adidas, becomes Adibas…So I [was] not the type of person who [would] go for brand. I’m more of, how [would] you say, cost efficient. I preferred to buy a handbag, which is like about 50 Ringgit, compared to 8 or 7 hundred Ringgit Malaysia handbag. Because the function is the same. But once I am here, once you get the hang on all these branded goods, you will never go back. Because the quality is so much different. Yes, function-wise it is the same, but quality is not the same, no it’s not, it’s more satisfaction and it lasts longer. I don’t think I am able to buy cheap goods anymore (personal communication, May 24, 2013).

Lily: Yes! Because the opportunity to get cheaper clothes here. Although they are called branded here, but they are actually normal priced in Walmart. Like some stuff they only sell in boutiques in Malaysia, but here it’s sold in Walmart. So of course I buy. Like babywear, like Carter’s. And then like… for kitchen tools. Like basic stuff, like spatula and sudip [cooking utensil]. I just buy those with brands
because as a hobby, I like to collect them because Malaysia doesn’t have them so I take the opportunity to buy them (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

When Lily was asked why does she opt for branded goods and clothes instead of the generic ones, she answered:

Because they just look nicer. They have a nice shape. They last longer, more quality. Higher quality, so I buy them. It’s not just because… yea when I first got here I just buy the cheap ones because I have limited money so I just go to Dollar Store and buy stuff there because everything is cheap. But then after sometime, they don’t last long, they melt, or patah, kemek or senget [broken] whatever. So I decided time to throw them away and buy new ones. So buy the more quality ones because I earned more money then and then I can see that they are better quality (personal communication, June 19, 2013).

Rokiah: I am quite a brand conscious person, I must say, I mean, I’ll be lying if I said I’m not a brand conscious. When you graduate, as you grow older, as you earn more, you graduate, from say from buying a plastic handbag or a fake leather handbag to a nicer handbag. To a more branded one like Gucci, Burberry, Chanel. I have gone through life when I was poor and cannot afford good things because I don’t have the money. And then when I had the money when, say, in my 30s, in my 40s… because I also subscribe to the philosophy that you get what you pay for. Because if you buy cheap thing, it won’t last, it will fall apart very soon (personal communication, June 13, 2013).
Borhan: We would only purchase if we know the brand comes along with quality. Like Carter’s, OshKosh, we know that it has quality even though it is more expensive compared to other clothes, like from Walmart for example. Because of the quality we would buy it. But frankly speaking it is also because of the brand. Looking at my children wearing branded items. It’s one of the reasons. It’s a satisfaction. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

**Halal Consumption**

One of my questions was posed on getting the informants to talk about getting products which were essential to them, but unfortunately were not so readily available in the US. The topic that always popped up was getting halal items for consumption. All of the informants admitted that it is harder to get halal food in the US compared to Malaysia. However, the level of difficulty varied from a big city to a smaller town. It was easier to gain access to halal products in a bigger city.

For example, Anuar, 25, a Masters student in Athens, Ohio mentioned that he needed to travel for one and a half hours in order to get to the nearest zabihah (slaughtered in Islamic way) butcher when he needed meat. In Islam, in order for meat to be halal, it has to be slaughtered in a certain way. According to Anuar, he only consumes halal meat that he purchases in Muslim stores, even though that would take substantial time to get. He mentioned that his main source of information would be from the existing Malaysian community in Athens:
I know about the halal stores from friends, there are Malaysian friends who have been living here for so long so, they introduce me to store so if we want to go there we will go there together, we will have a convoy some sort like that so, we will have a lot of pit stops, and we are going to CAM; Columbus Asian Market, that’s the first pit stop. And then we will go to the Popeye, because they sell halal chicken, and we will have lunch there, and then we will go to the third pit stop which is, Yasmin, and there we will buy a lot of chicken and then meat, and then put it in the cooler box. We will prepare the cooler box, and then put it in the cooler box, and we will buy some ice cube and we will put it to make it maintain longer and then after that we’ll go to the mosque and pray after that we’ll go home (personal communication, April 6 2013).

When asked about his strategies to purchase everyday food that does not involve meat, he said that he would buy them at the local Walmart. However, he was still very cautious with the ingredients in the products. He will constantly check the ingredients if they have ingredients such as gelatin or whey that may originate from pork or non-zabihah animals. He also mentioned that he looks for the Jewish logo, the kosher logo of “K” or “D”, and proceeds to purchasing those products. According to the Kof-K Kosher Supervision (2014), kosher means “fit” or “proper” in Hebrew. Accordingly, the term is also used to label food products that are permissible by the Jewish law. A lot of Muslims refer to this labeling because a portion of the Jewish consumption law is similar to the Muslims’.
I proceeded to ask him about his motivation to immerse himself in this way of consumption, as it seems that it takes a lot of effort and time in order to get the right information and access to the right products. His answer was:

Back in Malaysia, we don’t have to be afraid of anything because we have in mind that all is *halal*. All the chicken sells in the market are all *halal*, even though we didn’t know what happen back there but we all assume that it’s all *halal*. So when I came here, I have to be very precise, I have to be very careful in order choose the right food or the right groceries, even though in Malaysia also if I am going to buy like snacks or something, I just go and grab it and eat it, but when I am here I have to look at the ingredient and says, “oh, they have this kind of ingredient in this snack” so cannot take it, have to choose another one or something like that. Yes, I can say that I am more particular now because with all the stuffs that I have gone through in order to not to fall from the Islamic way, so I have to be more particular in order to find the correct food or the correct groceries (personal communication, April 6 2013).

*View on Local Products*

Elfira, 21, an undergraduate student, is a highly involved shopper. She was exposed to most of the high-end brands in fashion before coming to the US. Her acquaintance to the brands mainly came from her surrounding and media back in Malaysia. Unsurprisingly, she prefers the market in the US compared to Malaysia due to the variety of choices and lower cost comparatively. However, interestingly, the question of Islam still enters the conversation:
I prefer shopping here than in Malaysia, because the branded stuff here are cheaper than Malaysia. However, for me the clothes here are weird. For example, Charlotte Russe, I would find a top that I like, but it turns out to have a huge hole at the back! Damn! I really like the shirt but then the hole looks weird. Sometimes they have weird styles right? I think maybe it’s because we need to be covered (hijab). It’s not a problem for them. Another thing, the material they use is sometimes problematic. They use see-through materials. Shirts that are see-through. I dislike wearing the inner. I mean they should use thicker material, right? [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, May 6 2014).

Rokiah mentioned that she is a well-traveled person. In comparison with a lot of countries, she ranked the United States to be the best place to shop.

I have been to many countries, England, Australia, Germany, Russia. US is still the best place for shopping. The best, the most choice, the cheapest, and the easiest to get, extremely easy to get. FedEx, if it’s online, FedEx, UPS, within 2 days, 3 days, 4 days. Athens is a kampung [small town]. We don’t have shopping here, there is no JC Penney, there is no, even Target pun tak ada kan [none], no K-Mart, the best still WalMart and Elder-Beerman. So, like me, I like sometimes I like Nordstrum, I like Macy’s, so, I Google, buy online (personal communication, June 13, 2013).
Media Consumption

This section explains the sojourners’ media consumption and their perceptions of American media in general. There are also descriptions of the sojourners’ perspective on the American advertising industry.

American Media Exposure

All of the informants said that they were exposed to American media before they came here. Even if they did not watch American media content regularly, they were certainly aware of them. Many mentioned that they got a substantial amount of exposure to American culture through their media usage. Several informants were exposed to American movies, series, sitcoms, and literature. The following excerpts were the informants’ answers when they were asked about their American media exposure:

Leha: Rarely, but sometimes, yes (personal communication, July 6, 2013).


Rokiah: My Bachelors Degree was in English Literature so I read American Literature, I read Filipino Literature, I read British Literature, English Literature so I’m very, very familiar with the western world. You know when I was growing up I watched Mission Impossible, I watched Peyton Place, I watched Dallas, Flamingo Road. North Landings, Dynasty, you know, so I was really very much aware of the western culture (personal communication, June 13, 2013).

However, there were conflicting answers when they were asked whether these exposures prepared them to adapt well here. Borhan mentioned that although he did
watch Hollywood movies, that exposure did not prepare him in adapting with the culture and language here. He said that “they just did not register” (personal communication, June 9, 2013) before he was actually in the environment. Mizi also mentioned that the depiction of the American culture through the media was inaccurate and was not representational. When asked about his exposure to American culture prior to coming here, this was his answer,

   Basically the media. Movies, news, even paper. Basically. But those are not reflecting the true norms of the society. So you can only catch a glimpse of it. But when you are here it’s kind of different. I always thought that British would be much more polite. But when you come here I see that Americans are much more polite. It’s kind of nice (personal communication, July 5, 2013).

Anuar, on the other hand, mentioned that he learned a lot about the American culture through the media. Media consumption helped him to prepare before coming to the United States, as he explained:

   Yes, indeed, because you can learn some kind of, what do we call that, lifestyles, the manners, and how do they talk to each other, treating each other, so I learn a lot from the movies actually (personal communication, April 6 2013).

Rokiah mentioned that since she was studying English Literature during her Bachelor Degree and she was an ardent American series follower, she learned a lot about western culture through her studies and media exposure. “So adaptation here was a lot easier for me than it’s for people who know nothing about your country. For example, now, if I were to go to Russia I would have a problem because I don’t know the language.
I don’t quite know the culture although in recent years I’ve read some Russian Literature but that is the comparison. America, the west, England, Australia; very familiar” (personal communication, June 13, 2013).

Perception of Sexually Explicit Media

During the focus group discussions, the participants were quite vocal about the overtly sexual content in some of American media generally, and advertisements specifically. In Malaysia, sexual topics are still considered a taboo in daily life and in the media. Basically this arises from the religious beliefs in Malaysia apart from the accepted social norm or adat. Furthermore, it is illegal to display or discuss any sexually unsuitable materials in Malaysia. It was stated under Section 211 of the Communication and Media Act, that any sexually explicit materials that are considered improper and lewd are prohibited in media content (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Content Code, 2014).

A number of the participants acknowledged that the culture in the US was very open towards sexuality. However, they also expressed that they have fairly adapted to the culture there and were more tolerant towards the openness of the subject. They mentioned that they were foreigners; therefore it was not in their power to say anything about the locals’ way of living. Nevertheless, they said that they tend to look away when there were such scenes on the television or if they came across such views in their daily lives.

Amira: Culture is a factor, religion is another. We might have adapted to the culture here, it is okay because it is so normal, but we will still walk away. We are accustomed with the Islamic way. [Islam teaches its believers to] lower your
gaze… lower your gaze. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, March 29, 2014).

Lia: I think it’s the same because, for me, it’s not so much of a cultural issue, but it’s a religious issue. So, even if we are in the US, we are still Muslims (personal communication, March 29, 2014).

The participants also displayed an ability to read advertisements and media content in view of the local’s understanding while at the same time, acknowledging that their own perceptions of the material were different, as they were based on different contexts. The participants gave interesting comments when I showed them a sensual advertisement by Beyonce on Heat, her fragrance product.

Azimah: That’s the problem with Americans; they make women looks like symbol of sex (personal communication, March 29, 2014)

Imani: Interestingly, the thing is, you might say that it is a symbol of sex, but for me, the way I see it, Beyonce believes in sexiness as women empowerment. They have different views than us. So we couldn’t just give opinions on our side without looking at their rationale. They do sexy things because they believe sexiness is confidence and that confidence reflects on women’s power. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, March 29, 2014).

I asked them to elaborate on their perception of sexiness, and they gave the following answer:
Laila: Sexiness is being conserved. Like the more you conserve, the more that you shut yourself, close yourself, the sexier you are (personal communication, March 29, 2014).

Zafreen: I get what she’s saying. Sexy doesn’t means like you have to reveal that amount of skin, that much. Sexy can comes in many ways, how you think, how you present yourself, that can be sexy (personal communication, March 29, 2014).

In another discussion, when they were asked about the perception of people in Malaysia compared to their own about the Heat advertisement, they said that the perception should be the same as theirs, as the cultural and faith aspect plays a big role:

Fikri: In my opinion it must be the same, because we come from the same culture. So, our opinion, our perspective must be the same since we have grown up in the same...

Taufiq: I think it’s the same because, for me, it’s not so much of a cultural issue, but it’s a religious issue. So, even if we are in the US, we are still Muslims. I think even some Muslims in the US are offended by this advertisement. Because it doesn’t fit the religion.

*Competitive Advertising*

A prominent element that the informants liked to bring up was how the American advertising industry has been so open and competitive compared to Malaysia’s. A majority of informants preferred the edginess of the American advertising. In their opinion, this edginess could cultivate a healthy competition between companies. This edginess is also more informative for the audience as they could really compare the...
strength and weaknesses of rival products or brands. The following are some of the opinions mentioned during the focus group discussions:

Izham: In US, it is more freedom to ban [point out weakness of] other companies… in Malaysia they might get offended easily. This is the big difference in US and Malaysia.

Taufiq: I like the way that the American advertisement can compare their product to the other without having to urm.. using, X brand… like for example, Kindle Fire, when they compare their products with Apple, Ipad. Things like that. I don’t think that really happens in Malaysia, like for softener advertisement, it’s like, Softlan, and product X. They don’t really compare Softlan and whatever product it is.

Fikri: One advertisement that I remember the most is, aaa I think, maybe the Mercedes Benz advertisement, or no, maybe that Audi advertisement where they compare their brand with Mercedes, and Volkswagen or other German cars and they like, they don’t really like, bash the other company but it’s like they are showing their company are better than other company. It’s the Christmas advertisement, I think.

Asrul: So, they compete each other and that competition makes it really fun. So the audience can see how the competition is fun. But instead in Malaysia, they don’t really have that, it’s really plain and normal.
Salleh: I think the advertisement, in comparison here is more humorous compared to the ones in Malaysia where they will be very serious when some other company try to bash another company.

Although the in-depth interviews covered a bigger scope than the focus groups, some of the informants also mentioned the advertising industry and its openness in executing the advertisements. The following were thoughts from Leha and Borhan:

Leha: The advertisements here, if you notice, are really blunt in condemning other products. For us, we do not want to do that because we are scared of being sued. Not here. That’s a really big difference. America is really cool. But the ones being condemned don’t take any action. Malaysians would not let that happen but here they are open about it. That’s a big difference that I see. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, July 6, 2013).

Borhan: Watching the advertisements here could give us a culture shock at first because they compare products really openly. Like, product X and product Y, with real brands. Coke and Pepsi for example. They are really honest and open. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

The majority of the informants and the focus group members agreed that Malaysia should start being more competitive in its advertising industry. For them, the liveliness and openness of such an environment will enable more ideas to be cultivated, and thus, develop a better market for Malaysians.
Infomercials Attraction

According to Bogle (2014), infomercials or ‘direct response television’ (DRTV) industry in the US could be worth up to USD300 billion. This huge industry results in heavier airtime for infomercials compared to what Malaysia currently has. For this reason, the informants said that they are especially engrossed in infomercials.

Lily: There’s a lot of those… infomercial. Those make you really want to buy. Because sometimes they have reviews, testimonial. “Oh, this is good. Oh, it makes my hair soft. So you always feel like, is it true? Is it true?” (personal communication, June 19 2013).

However, Lily did not actually purchase the items she saw being advertised in the infomercial as she did extra research on the products. She went on to look for comments by other users of the product and found that it had unsatisfactory reviews. Borhan also related an experience pertaining to infomercials. He said that he was never convinced to purchase anything through infomercials; however, his mom did:

Borhan: For example, my mom. [She came over to visit him in the US.] She watched an infomercial selling Meaningful Beauty. The product is expensive in Malaysia… Now she subscribes to the product and we have to mail them back to her in Malaysia. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 9 2013).

On the other hand, Elfira told me a story of how she always got attracted to infomercials. It came to a point where she actually purchased the products, but the decision also came with encouragement from friends:
Elfira: They have those advertisements where you have to call 1-800 and so on. The other day they had this promotion that got me interested and they were only selling a vacuum cleaner! It looks so exciting. Then there was a foot lotion for dry skin. There was a promotion, buy two and get another two, or something. I am really, really convinced with goods with testimonies where they prove the effectiveness of the product… sometimes the advertisement could make me fantasize that I would be pretty if I use it. Like Proactive Solution that I am using right now. I got attracted at first because of the infomercial, and then a friend recommended it to me, so I tried it. And it’s actually good. So actually I got attracted because of the convincing infomercial. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, May 6 2014).

Kids and Advertisements

Most of the informants said that although the advertisements in the US were appealing to them, they rarely made any actual purchases because of the advertising. However, informants with children under the age of 12 often mentioned that the advertisements did play a role in the kids’ consumption demands. Ahmad mentioned that he had to make the first purchase for the kids because of the advertising during the first week he and his family arrived in the United States:

When we first came here it was in the winter and we were in the hotel, the kids saw an advertisement on blankets and cartoon slippers. They were captivated and kept asking for them. We don’t have those in Malaysia. So I bought them, the same one. The advertisement mentioned that it is available in Walmart, so we
went there to look for it. The blanket is with Dora character, like Snuggy. But I just get the blanket and not the slippers. The slippers were too expensive. I got it because they ask for it and they were fascinated by it. As a father, I try to deliver their requests. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 2, 2013).

Lily has three daughters, and she mentioned that sometimes while watching television, the girls would watch advertisements for beauty products and they would get interested in it:

Yes. Sometimes. Normally some beauty products, or like for nail, or hair stuff. Like “ooh can I have that, so I can have beautiful hair?” “Ooh can I have that, so I can have beautiful nails”…or whatever. They want it because it looks so good on TV. It’s just because of the advertisement (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

Mizi agrees that his children were also affected by the advertisements they watched on television:

Aha yes, even more if you’re talking about toys, yes. They are very tempted lah. Demanding, for sure. So it’s up to how the parents curb it lah. Their urges, we’ll try to curb it. It was basically how the media strategize in terms of putting the advertisement for toys and stuff, in between cartoons, so the effectiveness of them putting those kinds of advertisements during the kids’ peak hour of watching television is really effective. So the kids will definitely be tempted to ask for the stuff. Furthermore if they are novelty items, stuff we have never seen before, and
it’s kind of new. So they will definitely want it (personal communication, July 5, 2013).

He explained further how he tried to curb the children’s requests. There were times when he was able to control their demands, but there were also situations when he could not deny their wishes:

For us, sometimes we try to buy because most of the times what they advertise in the television we need to buy it through phone or online. So if we don’t see the items in the supermarket it’s not a problem for us, we could always avoid it. But if we are at the supermarket and they see it, then they’ll say, hey this is the same one as the advertisement, so definitely they will go and pick it up and ask us to buy. So in that case we cannot evade. But if it’s novelty item where you have to buy through phone or through online then we can always avoid that kind of pressure of buying. But the kids definitely, they always tempted (personal communication, July 5, 2013).

Borhan mentioned that his child was especially attracted to game applications for hand held devices advertised on the television:

If there were new Apple Aps advertisement on the television, my daughter would go, “I want this game, I want this game”. They have those ads in Disney Channel or the kids’ channel. There’s some influence there, so we are the ones who have to buy for them. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 9, 2013).
Pre-purchase Information Search

Many of the informants told me that they do not rely heavily on traditional media channels such as television and radio to get information on the consumer culture in the US. Their main methods of doing information search activities were by interpersonal communication and through the Internet. This was especially so for the unmarried informants as their main source of information and communication was through the Internet.

Community Influence

Many of the informants mentioned that their Malaysian community where they were residing played a huge role in their consumption behavior. They would be the main source of information about good brands and places to buy things. The Malay community also played a major role in getting information about products to consume or to avoid for abiding to Shari’ah law. Mizi explained his strategy in finding product information:

Normally, people in the embassy, close friends who would suggest the things that you should buy, the brands that meets the needs of the household. And then comes the media. Basically when you go through television and stuff. But I think the biggest weightage in terms of us in buying stuff would be from our friends. Because when you watch the TV you know they are selling things so they most probably are talking about the positive side of it (personal communication, July 5, 2013).
Lily: From friends who are, I mean Malaysian friends who already are in Athens. So they’ll tell me about where to find and all (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

Anuar: I know about the halal stores from friends, there are Malaysian friends who have been living here for so long. So, they introduce me to store so if we want to go there we will go there together (personal communication, April 6, 2013).

Internet Power

Most of my informants mentioned trying to save money while buying stuff; therefore they would try to find ways to gain access to sales and discounts. Consequently, many said that they became members of companies and brands that they like. In return, the companies would send them emails about their offers and promotions. Sometimes, the registered members would also get special discounts and selected promotions.

Elfira mentioned that she subscribed to a lot of different brands. She would always get sales or promotions notifications through emails. She would be very influenced to purchase when she reads the promotions offered by the companies, even when she does not need the goods:

I subscribe to H&M, Forever 21, Charlotte Russe, JustFab. They would send emails every time there is a promotion. Sometimes there are promotions of 2 handbags for $50. This would attract me to open up the email. And I would end up buying even though I don’t need them. Even free shipping promotions would
attract me. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, May 6 2014).

Rokiah is an expatriate on a work visa in the US, therefore, her economic status is more stable compared to students. Consequently, she did not use the Internet as a way to save money while searching for items. However, she has numerous friends and family back home who like to ask for her help in purchasing goods in the US. Therefore, she utilizes the Internet to help them:

I received emails from them [advertisers] everyday. All these David Yurman, John Hardy, all these designer apparels. Sometimes I don’t even open, if I see them in my Blackberry, I would just delete. I only open them sometimes. For example if I receive orders from Malaysia, wanting Coach bags, so when I got sale alerts, I will forward it to them (personal communication, June 13, 2013).

Other informants mentioned that they exploit the Internet while searching for information when they need particular goods that are not so commonly found or to find items at a lower price than offered in the supermarkets. Aniza would search for information on electrical goods through the Internet:

The other day, I wanted to buy a present for my husband. I bought a 27-inch Axus monitor, the biggest monitor there is. Because he spend a lot of time in the Internet. That’s the best present for him. So I know based on my experience married to him, he’s very particular about how much does it cost… So I have to be cost efficient. So what I did is I have to browse in the Internet. I don’t have the
time to go from one shop to another shop (personal communication, May 24, 2013).

Hussein, an embassy officer, also mentioned that he uses the Internet a lot to gain product information, “We have the internet for everything, we have Amazon, we have ebay, everything we have” (personal communication, July 5, 2013).

Lily is a graduate student who is also taking care of her 3 children. Her husband’s work requires him to travel around a lot. Therefore, Lily has to manage her studies and her family at the same time. To lessen the burden on fulfilling her role as a studying-mom, she often buys her daily essentials online, as she explained:


Normally I must know what I want to buy. Like, I think the kids need a dress. So I search dress. And then look for a good website (personal communication, June 19, 2013).

Strategic Maneuver

Many of the informants were highly strategic while conducting the information searches in the purchasing process. Contrary to Kamaruddin & Kamaruddin’s (2010) findings, Malaysian sojourners were not helpless when they were bombarded with an abundance of product information. According to the informants, they would get attracted to a variety of marketing channels when exposed to them, but would then investigate further to get more details prior to purchase. The main way of being more effective is through reading reviews from other consumers on the Internet, price comparison with other retailers and utilizing coupons in order to get more discounts. Lily mentioned this,
You just go to any website and just search coupon. Like for example I go to GAP website, and then I want to buy this, this, this and this but they are not on sale. And even of they are on sale. And then I just search another.. just Google coupon for GAP. And then I can find many coupon for GAP from people. They have coupons and they put it online. So it’ll be like, just use this code. I use the code and I get extra discount (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

One of the informants, Elfira said that she relied a lot on social media promotions in her shopping strategies. However, when the promotions caught her attention, she would still try to get more information in order to get the best and the most worthy deals, as she explained below:

FB sometimes has these ‘recommended brands’ links, so I would click those. They would have like, USD60 of Michael Kors handbags. At first I would get excited, but after that I would read the reviews underneath. Some people complains that they didn’t get the product, some would complain that the tracking number were lost. And they just lose their money just like that. Then after seeing that I backed off. I don’t want to turn out like them (personal communication, May 6 2014).

Many also mentioned various strategies so that they could gain the most deals from their purchases. One of the main strategies mentioned was to be loyal to a company. Companies in the US would usually offer redeemable points for every purchase. Some also mentioned that being a member of a company would entitle them to automatic additional discounts. A couple also mentioned that companies would usually offer
coupon booklets for members. This would entitle them to more discounts. Aniza explains these methods well, as mentioned by some of the other informants too,

You have to take advantage of all the benefits they have here. For example, every shop or every company, they have benefits. For example, Walmart, Dominics, all the shops, Macy’s, Cole, K-mart. You have to become a member. Being a member, you will get a lot of benefits, either you get discounts, or you get points. For Toys“R”Us for example. And being a member they will give you all the brochures. That’s another media too. The brochures. So this will lure you to the shops. So you’ll see, ohh there’s 50% off, before this, it was like expensive. But before you get the brochures you have to become a member first. Then they will send it over to your house. And not just that, they’ll send it through emails too. So you get 2 notifications (personal communication, May 24, 2013).

Lily mentioned that she likes to buy goods with companies that offer free shipping. However, sometimes there are companies that require customers to purchase a specific amount of goods before they could obtain the free shipping. Lily said that she would buy the specific amount of goods and keep the extra ones for future use or to be used as gifts in the future.

Consumption Behavior

This section discusses the main themes about the Malaysian sojourners’ consumption behavior in the US. The interviews opened up some interesting consumption habits about the Malay sojourners, as discussed below.
Sojourners as Malaysian Consumer’s Intermediary

In many of the interviews, informants mentioned that they usually become a middleman in supplying American products for people in Malaysia. Some would help friends and family who want particular things that the sojourners have to go shop for. Others would start a small business by being a dealer.

Rokiah: My cousins, my nieces, yes diorang selalu minta tolong belikan [they always ask me to help them buy things]. My nephew [wants] jeans, Levi’s jeans. Because they are so much cheaper here . . . I never buy things full price except for thing that never go on sale. Things that never got on sale are Louis Vuitton and Chanel. They never go on sale. So if you like it, you have to pay full price. But Kate Spade, Michael Kors, Coach ke [or] whatever baju [clothes] they are always go on sale. So I only buy, most of my stuff, I only buy sale price. I never buy full price. So for example Levi’s dekat [at the] outlet, a pair of Levi’s I beli [bought] for my nephew, 49 dollars. Make it 50. 50 times 3 is 150. In Malaysia, it’s 300. Dia tunggu 3 bulan, 4 bulan pun tak apa [He is fine with waiting for 3 months or 4 months]. It’s okay. (personal communication, June 13, 2013).

Aniza: I am doing nothing [here], so what I did was I am selling Coach handbags online. Yes, if you see my Facebook, I posted all pictures of Coach handbags. I became a member of Coach online and I sell all these handbags at cheap price because my motto when I started this business I want everybody in Malaysia, at least all the woman in Malaysia who can’t afford to buy Coach handbags before
this, they can buy. And they can even buy, like, *bayar ansuran*, in installments. That’s what I did (personal communication, May 24, 2013).

Lily: And then sometimes the shipping is expensive, but let’s say they say, “If you purchase $50 and above, you’ll get shipping free. So that means, I will end up buying more. Because I want to get the free shipping. But then, since I have to buy more, I will just buy extra and give it to… save it as a gift for my friends or families, because I only want one, but I have to buy 4 to get the free shipping. But they are all on sale. So ok fine, I will buy whatever until I get the free shipping rate and then I’ll keep the other things as a gift for friends. For future use (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

*Cost-effective Strategy*

A particular pattern that seems to permeate the Malays’ shopping strategy is the peculiar relationship between cost and public-private/necessity-luxury consumption. Some informants mentioned that they would be looking for the cheapest products they could find. Interestingly, this only applied towards products that are privately consumed, such as household groceries. However, many of these informants are also students, who understandably are on a tight budget.

According to Anuar, when buying private necessities such as groceries, he will scan for the cheapest among all the brands in the store. Then other factors will be taken into consideration, such as the *halal* status of the product. If both factors satisfy him, he would purchase the products. Borhan also mentioned that the cost would come first in their daily consumption for non-ingestion products. The second factor would be the
effectiveness of the products. If the products were ineffective and cause adverse reactions, then he would try another brand that might be a little more expensive but also more effective.

Some of the expatriates and embassy officers mentioned some other factors affecting their decision to purchase necessities such as quality and originality of the products. For example, Rokiah mentioned that she is attracted to green products that are not harmful to the users and environment. Mizi mentioned that he might prefer some brands that he is used to, or products possessing higher quality. However, in the end, cost would still play a role, although not as great a factor as for the students.

For the public products consumption, cost does not really come into the discussion. The informants seemed to give the branding factor more weight when considering a public product. For example luxury items such as designer handbags would get mentioned a lot, as they are status-indicating items. Mizi explains this situation well when he was asked whether brand is important for him,

Depends. If you’re talking about household items like groceries items, it’s not an issue because basically you just want that to serve your purpose. But if talking about electrical items, maybe like women’s apparel, maybe brand plays a major role. Even though you can get similar kind of handbag with a cheaper price, still we opt for (personal communication, July 5, 2013).

The Coach Factor

Essentially, in all of the interviews, the informants would drop some brand names to emphasis what they were talking about. However, in most of the interviews, the Coach
brand would eventually be mentioned as an example. Coach is a high-quality American lifestyle accessories company that offers products such as leather handbags, shoes, watches, wallets, and belts.

For the informants who mentioned this brand, Coach symbolizes prestige. Consumers who use Coach products are considered possessing higher status, but at a level that is recognizable to the people back home in Malaysia. Mizi explains,

Basically, because here most of the branded items are not on TV. Because you just see people talking.. because we don’t see Coach having advertisement or Louis Vuitton on TV kan [right]? So basically what you get is a combination of our colleagues, the people who have been here for a long time, and the same time you get the preference based on the price comparison. Urm how much it is sold in Malaysia. For example 150 worth of handbag here. You can see back home. You know for a fact that that is an expensive item. You know that there’s some kind of prestige behind it. So to say that media has a role in identifying a brand, here, it’s kind of minimal tapi [but] makes what us to say that that is a prestigious brand or not, we always compare it to how the product is selling back home. So if it’s expensive than you’ll know that it’s something worthwhile to buy because most probably it has a second hand value (personal communication, July 5, 2013).

One of the informants, Aniza is conducting a part-time online business in which she supplies American products to friends and family back home. According to her, she started off the business by selling Coach bags. In her words,
I sell all these handbags at cheap price because my motto when I started this business, I want everybody in Malaysia, at least all the woman in Malaysia who can’t afford to buy Coach handbags before this, they can buy (personal communication, May 24, 2013).

Borhan was also referring to Coach as an example of a brand that has quality and prestige among people in Malaysia.

Borhan: Like Coach, for example. The brand in Malaysia is expansive; over here it’s cheaper. So we have an impression that the item is branded, people would use it. Like Nike and Osh’Kosh, we know they are branded. Because we know the brand, they have quality. We would only purchase if we know the brand comes along with quality. [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, June 9, 2013).

Self-representation through Consumption

Before coming to the United States, Azura lived her life as a modern woman. She was not covered, and quite rebellious in terms of her image. However, after spending time in the United States, she felt a need to “highlight” herself as a Malaysian and a Muslim. I was intrigued, and asked, why highlight when she could blend in? She replied that’s what she wanted to do to feel close to home. Being away from home gave her an opportunity to reflect on herself and the purpose of her existence, which brought her back to Islam. She started to attend Islamic classes, and became more open to the teachings of Islam. Somehow being away from home made her desire to return to her roots and represent herself as a Malay Muslim. She felt that she needed something solid to base
herself on and symbolize who she was in the public eyes. She said, “at least I have something to hold on to” in reference to her identity and her faith, as she genuinely could not fit in with the American culture. She ended the topic by saying, “Perhaps, the sense of wanting to belong to a specific group is stronger in a world full of strangers” (personal communication, August 31st 2014).

Elfira mentioned some stories that caught my attention. Her consumption behavior is not directly linked to the Malay identity, but more to her effort to be accepted and admired. Interestingly, she cares about her image projected to the people back home in Malaysia as much, if not more than, the people in the US. I started off the conversation with a question about her criteria when choosing products when she shops:

Ok, firstly, honestly is the brand. Secondly, is the quality. But then if it is branded but with no quality it’s not good too. I’d say both then. I don’t really mind the clothes, but I do mind the handbags. Because people notice handbags, you see. And shoes too . . . I am more particular about brands in Malaysia, but not so much here because everything is after all based in the US. As long as it’s US brand, and hard to get in Malaysia. I love shopping for winter because I like having a jacket collection. I like to have options you see, and I don’t want to appear the same in pictures. I like a variety of colors and not just wear the same black jacket in all the pictures. Especially when I am travelling, I don’t want to look the same right from Chicago to DC! [Translated from Malay language by the researcher] (personal communication, May 6 2014).
She went on to explain that she liked to document her travels in social media, especially using Instagram. Most of her friends and acquaintances in Malaysia were in her list of Instagram and Facebook contacts. That’s why she needed to have a variety of clothes on when she uploaded pictures.

Even when I am dressing up, I would choose clothes that have not appeared in my Instagram for a while. I mean, that’s when I actually want to upload pictures. Honestly I don’t care at all when I am in the campus area, I’ll just wear whatever I am comfortable with [Translated from Malay language by the researcher.]

Considering this statement, I asked her whom does she care to impress actually? Is it the people around her or the people in her social media network? She replied that it’s more towards her list of friends in her social media. But then she continued by saying this,

I don’t wear branded things to let people know that I am rich or something. It’s like for your own satisfaction. And you feel more confident. For example, if we enter a high end boutique, Gucci or Chanel, the salesperson will consider what you wear and treat you based on it. I hate that! That’s why I want to look ‘expensive’ even though I am not actually going to buy anything. And some people dress up to impress certain people, or in certain places. For me, I do it all the time because I need to feel like myself. I want to feel confident and beautiful in my own skin at all times [Translated from Malay language by the researcher.]
Chapter Summary

From the interviews, it became clear that Malay sojourners did not have a deep connection and relationship with the dominant culture group. They respected the American culture and way of life; however, they did not feel a need to immerse themselves in the local culture. The Malay sojourners did not feel deeply disconnected with the commercial environment. Many of the informants were familiar with a lot of the international brands due to the media and global market penetration. Even if they were not familiar with some of the locally distributed brands, they did not have major problems in placing the unfamiliar brands in the new brandscape. The strategy to do this came from information seeking.

However, philosophically, the sojourners did have concerns about the production aspect of some of the products. Being Muslims, they had to abide by certain requirements in their lifestyle. Food products and clothing were some of the main concerns that required adjustments from the sojourners’ side. According to the interviews, the informants were ready to make substantial sacrifices in order to continue with their Islamic lifestyle within a very secular surrounding.

Conventional media played a small role in pre-purchase information searches for the Malay sojourners. The sojourners had to be proactive in finding channels that were able to provide them with the specific information they were concerned with, especially products that abide by the Islamic law. Two of the main methods mentioned were getting information through the Internet and also through the existing local Malay communities. Advertisements did attract the informants up to a point, but were quite ineffective in
terms of giving needed information on the new brandscape. Furthermore, advertising played a small role when a sojourner needed to find information on certain items. For example, no informants mentioned getting any information about *halal* items from advertisements.

This study was also designed to seek the Malay sojourners’ perceptions of US advertising from a commercial and cultural standpoint. The informants were vocal about the excessive sexual appeal in some of the American advertisements, a condition quite contrary to the Malaysian culture. Basically, this perception was caused by religious beliefs in Malaysia, apart from the accepted norm or *adat*. On the other hand, the informants claimed that they had adapted to the social environment to an extent. They displayed an ability to read the advertisement in view of the local’s understanding while at the same time, acknowledging that their own conceptualization is different. Although they did not have objections to the advertisement, they also did not agree to them.

However, the informants favored the competitive environment in the American advertising industry. They thought that the edginess in the industry could cultivate a healthy competition between companies. In particular, comparative advertising helped them in determining the strengths and weaknesses of rival brands.

I also strived to uncover the Malay sojourners’ consumption behavior in the United States. A substantial change in the informants’ consumption behavior was in the usage of high-end brands. Many said that they were more familiar and acquainted with brand names in the US. Although they might be familiar with the brands back in Malaysia, they were not able to purchase them back home due to the high cost. Many of
them took the opportunity to use high-end brand names in the US. They said that the quality that comes with the brands convinced them to start using them. There were also a few that mentioned that the brand itself is an attraction, meaning that the items convey the status and prestige that comes with the brand.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The main scope of this research was to understand the consumer acculturation process for Malay sojourners in the United States. Various factors, either pre or post-sojourning were found to be influential in shaping Malay sojourners’ acculturation processes. One of the focuses was on the sojourner’s acculturation in the American market as there is a large difference between Malaysia’s highly Islamic market and America’s more secular setting. In order to do this, (1) the Malay sojourners’ opinion of the American market, (2) the strategies the Malay sojourners used to find information and maneuver through the market, as well as (3) their perception on American advertisements were investigated.

Another objective of this research was to explore the Malay sojourner’s identity negotiation through consumer culture and symbolic consumption. The modern Malay identity is a complex matter and needs careful examination from various standpoints. This chapter discusses Malay sojourner’s identity in relation to their consumption behavior with considerations to factors such as media, politics, social, culture, and religion.

This research started off in one direction and traversed into another. In the beginning, I was interested in examining Malay sojourners’ perspective on American based advertising and how that relates to the Malay sojourner’s consumption patterns. This consumer behavior would then be linked to the Malay sojourner’s identity negotiations. My initial interest in advertisements was sparked by readings on previous
research and not by any observation on my part. I think this was the main reason why my original plans did not work out.

My idea was challenged when I first started the fieldwork. The original plan was to conduct in-depth interviews with Malay sojourners consisting of students, expatriates, and government civil servants. I started my interviews enthusiastically, trying to get the informants to communicate to me their perspectives on their acculturation process generally, and their consumer behavior in particular. The sessions were pretty productive until it was time to talk about the advertisements. To my dismay, the first few interviews revealed that my informants did not watch enough advertisements to reiterate much about them. They told me that they hardly watch television to get a lot of exposure to advertisements. Some informants, who were students, said that they did not have cable at their house to watch television channels. The only contact some of them had with advertisements was when they accidentally watched them on the Internet. Even then, they mentioned that they skipped them manually or used advertisement blocker software. Informants who were parents confided that the television set at home was usually turned on to children’s’ channels as their children were the ones who usually had time to watch.

To rectify this problem, I proposed adding another data collection method into the operational plan. Three focus group discussions were added to support the data collection process. The discussions revolved around six advertisements, which were chosen by the researcher and shown to the focus groups’ participants. Although this method answered the question on the sojourner’s perception of American’s advertising, it did not change the fact that they did not have a lot of contact with it.
Triggered by this unexpected turn, I wondered what were the sojourner’s main sources of pre-purchase information sources. Therefore, during the in-depth interview sessions, I explored the ways the sojourners find information in order to conduct product purchasing. This opened up more interesting issues in my research and brought it to the current questions that I was investigating.

Answering the Research Questions

Chapter 4 has unveiled plenty of themes derived from thematic analysis conducted on the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with the Malay sojourners. Each of the themes derived might answer one or more of the research questions posed. Therefore, this section gathers applicable themes for each of the research questions.

RQ 1) What is the initial reaction of sojourning Malays in the American market?

From the information given by the informants, Malay sojourners do not feel deeply at odds with the commercial environment in the United States. Most of the informants were familiar with many of the international brands due to their media presence and global market penetration. Therefore they were able to continue with their existing consumption behavior with similar products and brands. Even if they were not acquainted with some of the locally distributed brands in the US, they did not have major problems in buying and using unfamiliar brands. The confidence to do this came from vigorously conducting pre-purchase information search.

However, sojourners did have concerns on certain aspects of products sold in the American market. Being Muslims, there were certain requirements that had to be met to
suit their preferred lifestyle. Consumption of food products and clothing especially required adjustments by sojourners. According to the interviews, the informants were ready to make substantial sacrifices and accept inconveniences in order to maintain their Islamic lifestyle within the secular surroundings in the US. They would consistently find ways to only purchase products compliant with Islamic teachings.

Another pattern emerged when many of the informants mentioned shifting from generic to brand name products. They said branded products usually have more quality compared to generic products. Quality products would last longer, and thus have more value. They also said that branded products in the American market were priced lower compared to the Malaysian market. Many said that they had the desire to purchase such products while they were still in Malaysia, but were unable to do so due to the high price. Therefore, they took the opportunity to shop branded products while they were in the United States.

Many of the informants also expressed keenness to shop in the American market. They found that the American market offered more choices at a higher quality in a reasonable price range. The informants mentioned that the shopping environment was very convenient, as retailers always made sure that customers could get the products they desired easily. Products could be purchased easily, either in the stores or online through various websites. The stores in the United States offered plenty of promotions that were very beneficial for the consumers. The consumers could save money and gain a lot of additional benefits if they really took advantage of the promotions. Therefore, most of the informants preferred shopping in the United States compared to Malaysia.
RQ2) How do sojourning Malays strategize pre-purchase information search in the American market?

Pre-purchase information seeking was very important for the Malay sojourners. Being Muslims, the sojourners had particular needs that had to be fulfilled when they purchased goods. They had to be aware and follow certain guidelines for every aspect of life. Therefore, they had to be very careful while buying goods, especially foodstuffs and clothes, so that those items fall within the permissible consumption in Islam. Apart from that, the Malay sojourners were also very cost-conscious. They wanted to save money as much as possible, while still getting the products they desired. Therefore, they opted to conduct pre-purchase information searches and strategized their shopping behavior to achieve this.

Informants indicated that advertisements through conventional media such as television, radio, and newspapers played a small role in their pre-purchase information search. The informants said that they were hardly exposed to television advertising, as they did not watch plenty of television. The sojourners had to be proactive to identify products that catered to their needs. Two of the main methods mentioned were getting information through the Internet and through word of mouth, especially from fellow Malaysians.

RQ3) How do Malay sojourners perceive American advertisements?

The Malay sojourners’ primary exposure to advertising was through online media. To some extent, advertising did attract the attention of informants, but was thought to be ineffective in giving information they needed in the new brandscape. Furthermore,
advertising could not provide key information on products of their particular interest, such as halal items.

On the other hand, the informants were vocal about what they perceived as excessive sexual content in some American commercials, a condition quite at odds with Malaysian culture. Basically this arose from both Malaysian religious beliefs and from Malaysian tradition and accepted norms or adat. In Malaysia, such blatant sexual content in the media is prohibited by law. However, informants claimed to have become accustomed to the environment to some degree. They displayed an ability to read the sexualized advertising messages with a local’s understanding while at the same time acknowledging that their Malaysian conceptualization was a contrasting one.

Informants favored the competitive environment of the US’ advertising scene compared to Malaysia’s. They thought that the edginess in the industry could cultivate a healthy competition between companies. In particular, they liked comparative advertisements where there were comparisons between brands in a single commercial. According to them, these comparisons could help them in determining the strengths and weaknesses of rival brands.

**RQ4) How do Malay sojourners use symbolic consumption to negotiate their perceived identity?**

A recurring theme throughout the interviews was about the Malay sojourners’ Islamic identity. Interestingly, being in a secular country did not seem to affect their Malay Muslim identity much. If anything, it made them reflect on their life and values causing them to reassert their Malay Muslim identity more strongly.
As mentioned earlier, the informants purchased more branded products in the US compared to in Malaysia. They took advantage of the chance to acquire high-end branded products while in the US, justifying their purchasing choices on the quality that came with those brands. However, many also mentioned the brand itself was an attraction, meaning that they appreciated that such items conveyed high reputation and prestige. The informants mentioned that they wanted to possess such branded products as using these products would place them in a higher hierarchy socially.

The Big Shift

Malaysia is literally on the other side of the world from America, 9374.86 miles away. The travelling time from one country to the other usually takes more than one full day of several flights, as a direct flight between the two countries would be almost impossible considering the distance. Apart from the distance differences, the two countries are unalike in many ways. One is a highly developed, western, and commercialized country, while the other is a developing, eastern, and relatively less commercialized nation. America is well known to be a secular nation, while Malaysia has an official federal religion: Islam. Taking all of these differences into consideration, it is fitting to say that the move from one country to the other is a stressful experience in a person’s life.

The first few weeks following the shift is a highly strained moment for a sojourner: therefore a lot of support is needed for a good transition (Tansuhaj and Maldonado, 1999). From my observation from being in the United States for 4 years, Malaysians are highly involved during a fellow Malaysian’s initial adaption. I have
witnessed various occasions where a newcomer would be welcomed to stay in a fellow Malaysian’s house for a few days, regardless of race or religion. Elfira (personal communication, May 6, 2014) mentioned that when she arrived in the United States, a fellow Malaysian picked her up from the airport in Columbus, Ohio for the one and a half hour trip to Athens, Ohio, where she would be residing. Upon arrival, another Malaysian family welcomed her into their house to stay for a few days during her orientation period. Azura, an Ohio State University student, told a similar story as she also stayed for a few days at a Malaysian student’s house in Columbus, Ohio (personal communication, August 31, 2014). Many of the hosts would go to great lengths to make sure that their guests were comfortable, and help as much as they could while the newcomers settled in even though they were not acquainted beforehand.

According to Hofstede (2001), the citizens of Malaysia are collectivistic compared to other countries such as the United States. Fundamentally, being collectivistic means that the society is interdependent on each other. Therefore, it is not surprising that Malaysians resort to each other’s company and help, especially in an alien setting. This initial contact could be very important in setting the tone of the newcomer’s stay in the US later on. Being welcomed and absorbed into the existing Malay community in the host country affects the sojourner’s other relationships with the society. The newcomers would naturally seek the people they were initially acquainted with for companionship and assistance during the adjustment period, and further on.
Malay Sojourners’ Liminal Conditions

Being a sojourning Malay in the US could impose a liminal condition on the Malay sojourners since Malaysians as citizens of a developing country have a significantly different culture compared to America as a developed nation (Burns and Brady, 1996). Furthermore, the vastly different climate, education system, communication styles, and other structures add to the confusion. These differences could result in a state called role destabilization, whereby the individuals would feel insecure and ambiguous about almost everything, including their role and identity. Maldonado and Tansuhaj (1999, p. 134) mentioned that immigration could cause “a sense of instability, ambiguity, uncertainty and an unanchored identity until the role destabilization is resolved”. Van Gennep (1960, p. 18) explained that a person who passes from one ‘zone’ to another “finds himself physically and magico-religiously in a special situation for a certain length of time: he wavers between two worlds.”

According to the in-depth interviews conducted with the informants, a few of them did report not having any problems in adjusting during the first few months. This was especially so for those who had a lot of initial exposure to western-based literature and media content, for example Rokiah. However, she had also studied English literature during her undergraduate studies, and therefore had plenty of exposure to American language and culture. She was also married to an American, and often visited her in-laws (personal communication, June 13, 2013). At the time of the interview, she was in the US for work and had to stay for two years. Therefore, her ease in adjusting could be expected due to her repetitive exposure to the culture. On the other hand, there were many others
who reported being unclear or confused about certain things and experiencing ‘culture shock’.

Malaysia has been greatly influenced by the United Kingdom due to its colonization from 1824 until independence in 1957 (Lopez, 2001). As a result, Malaysians are quite acclimated to British ways, and this includes their educational system. All universities in Malaysia use the semester system, and have other similarities to universities in the United Kingdom. Some student informants reported feeling stressed when they first learned that US institutions sometimes use the quarter system rather than the semester system. They had to adjust to working within 10 weeks per academic terms instead of the usual 16 weeks per semester.

Being under the British influence also meant that most Malaysians use British English. This required adjustments for the Malay sojourners when they newly arrived in the US. Miscommunications would sometimes happen, as some terminologies in British English are different than American English. Informants also mentioned that their speech accents were more like British, causing occasional problems when communicating with Americans, causing their confidence to spiral downwards. Some even developed insecurities in communicating, because they felt Americans might perceive them as incompetent. This in a way caused a feeling of discomfort until they became better adapted to US communication styles and habits.

Some informants also told me stories about how they were sometimes surprised by the way that some matters were handled in the US. For example, Elfira mentioned that she was taken aback when she was placed in a coed residency hall upon arrival at her
university (personal communication, May 6th 2014). Segregation between genders is common in Malaysia and she felt ill at ease living in such close proximity to males. In the end she requested a change to an all-female residence hall. The segregation of gender is encouraged in Malaysia, mainly due to the teachings of Islam, which prohibit close proximity between different genders.

The need for private space is also highly important for Malaysians, in contrast to the Americans. From my own observation, even the public restrooms could be an issue for newcomers. They would be questioning the half-inch gap between the restroom stalls’ door that deprives people of complete privacy. They just could not understand the need for the crack and not making the walls flush against the edges. Malay sojourners reported discomfort as they were used to total privacy while using a restroom.

Some informants also mentioned that the Americans are more disciplined and structured compared to Malaysians. It is an accepted norm in the US to clean up after dining in fast food restaurants whereas in Malaysia these establishments always have staff available to do the job. One informant mentioned that he was not aware of this expectation, and left his mess in restaurants. Upon learning about this custom, he became embarrassed by his mistakes.

Coming from a tropical country where the temperature ranges from 70 to 95 degrees Fahrenheit, winter requires great adjustments for the Malay sojourners. Some of the informants would be astonished by the amount of clothing needed during winter, and the massive temperature plummet, especially for those in Ohio. From my daily conversations with my fellow Malay community members, they have to learn about the
basic winter survival skills the dominant culture group would regard as second nature. I remember in my first year, a Malay friend told me to lather lotion on my skin throughout winter because she did not, and as a result, had bloody cracks all over her hand. Another friend confided that she suffered from winter blues, and it affected her so much that her grades in her studies dropped. I am also reminded of my own liminal period, when I was so clueless while shopping for winter apparel that I accidentally bought a pair of winter indoor boots and wore them outside.

Religion could also be a source of liminality when Malays move to a non-Muslim environment. As I had mentioned before, Malaysia’s main religion is Islam, and therefore many aspects of life in Malaysia revolve around Islam. The informants usually mentioned consumption practices especially the problem of getting halal food. I will discuss this topic in detail in a later section.

Muslims are also required to perform daily prayers (solat). Although none of my informants mentioned this, I do know that many of them struggle to keep up with the solat in the US as there are not many prayer rooms or buildings prepared for the public. If they could not find a prayer room in a building, they would resort to praying in any secluded corner in a building; in the library, near the fire escape, unused hallway, or even in the parks. Over time this ritual becomes easier to perform; however, at first it would usually seem a little hard as the Malays are so used to having an available space everywhere in Malaysia to conduct this obligation.

The analysis from the interviews showed that the Malay sojourners did experience the liminal condition with a certain degree of difficulty. Although none of these problems
were major, it does show that within a certain timeframe, the Malay sojourners did experience some moments of ambiguity and confusion. While most of the informants had a substantial exposure to American lifestyles and English language through media and education, many reported that it did not help much during their initial adaption in the United States. Problems concerning communication and lifestyle were especially prominent in the dialogues, showing that media, to a certain extent, were not very helpful in preparing for the sojourners’ initial adjustment. The implications of media usage for Malay sojourners will be discussed in a later section.

Malay Sojourners’ Relationships with Others

Many of my informants admire and respect the American citizen’s attitude and way of life. They mentioned positive American values such as punctuality, cleanliness, and friendliness as worth being exemplified and implemented back home in Malaysia. A couple also mentioned that the American’s superb management capability is something really worthwhile to be imitated and learned. A few also mentioned that the culture of being polite and helpful really made them feel at ease while residing in the States, especially when they were initially exposed to the culture and required a lot of help to settle down.

However, despite good impressions about American citizens, few of my informants had any notable personal relationships with them. The extent of their connections would be respectful, yet quite insubstantial. The informants mentioned the language barrier, lifestyle differences, time constraints, and limited work scope to be some of the factors producing this lack of association. Nevertheless, an analysis of the
interviews showed culture and religious differences as the core factors that separated them. It was quite hard to find a meeting point strong enough between the two distinct worlds to build a bond.

The respondents confided in me that their consumption and social behavior might be one of the most prominent factors that separated them from non-Malays in America. Some of my informants mentioned that there were occasions when the dominant culture group would invite them to go to parties, or hang out at their house or bar. My informants told me that most of the time they would decline the offer. Usually the parties held would involve consuming alcohol, smoking and mixing of different genders. There are religious boundaries in the way Muslims consume food and mingle, where they usually do not eat non-halal food, drink alcohol or get too close to persons of the opposite gender. Many informants, being devoted Muslims, felt uncomfortable when asked to socialize in such an environment.

My informants told me that although they were not expected to behave and consume in the way that American did, they tended to feel detached from others since they could not socialize with them. As a culture group that functions in a collectivistic way (Hofstede, 2001), Malays tend to feel the most at ease when they can feel a sense of belonging to a group, and they would feel awkward being in a situation where they could not blend in. Their tendency to be intensely concerned about other people’s perceptions (Swift, 1965) also plays a role here. If they are unable to “act” according to the situation, they prefer not to be in the setting altogether, so that sojourners simply avoided being in such a social gathering.
However, the responsibility for a lack of substantial relationships between Malay sojourners and Americans seems to have been shared. Some of the informants reported feeling marginalized when being in a group of US citizens. They felt that it was hard for them to communicate with Americans. According to a study by Young & Faux (2012), the usage of jargon, regional accents, idioms, insensitive questions, and rude nonverbal responses by native speakers resulted in out-grouping non-native speakers. Non-native speakers tended to blame themselves when miscommunication occurred with native speakers. According to them this condition leads non-native speakers to accept out-grouping and then to not strategize to overcome it.

Such issues can be viewed in terms of intercultural communication. Malay speakers have distinctive communication styles and habits. According to Awang et al. (2012), Malays have strong ties to their cultural values, and these values appear in their communicative behaviors. That study showed that a common behavior among many Malays is conflict avoidance, leading to indirect, self-effacing, accommodative, and polite communication style. In contrast, Americans are mostly known for being “direct, open and assertive” (Tharp, 2001, p.48) in their communication style. The conflicting styles might be a key reason for ineffective communication between Americans and Malays.

A few of my informants confided that they felt more at ease building relationships with international students and immigrants than with Americans, even though spending time with the international students might still pose the same problems of clashing cultures and different interpersonal communication styles. This could probably be
attributed to the shared experience of being a foreigner in the United States. Student informants in particular mentioned that they feel more comfortable building friendships with other foreign students.

Figure 5.1 shows the acculturation strategies of ethnocultural groups as proposed by Berry (1997). It was also used to signify the outcome level of immigrants after going through the transition or liminal period when they have to adjust in the new environment (Maldonado and Tansuhaj, 1999). Looking at the informants’ responses, Malay sojourners seemed to be very passionate to maintain their heritage, culturally and religiously. They also did not have substantial relationships with the dominant cultural group in the United States. However, it is not really correct to say that they do not want to build connections with the dominant local groups and would rather live separately from the dominant culture group. Instead, many of the informants are quite acquainted with people outside of their own culture, especially with groups of other foreigners.
Interpretation of Halal and Haram Consumption

For the purpose of this dissertation, it is important to understand the meaning of *halal* and *haram* Islamic concepts. Although the understanding is complicated due to varying interpretations, the main idea is universally agreed upon. According to Kamali (2003), *halal*, when used in an English language context, usually refers to food that is edible by Islamic law. However, in Arabic, it means anything permissible in Islam, which can extend to every aspect of life including consumption, relationships, business, finance, and lifestyles. In consumption, it is used strictly to describe the permissible edibility and usage of, “... food products, meat products, cosmetics, personal care products, food ingredients, beverages and food contact materials” (Hanzaee and Ramezani, 2011, p.3). If these products were tainted with ingredients considered *haram*, then they should not be consumed by Muslims. Generally, Muslims are expected to be cautious of what they are
consuming, and avoid taking *haram* products. In fact, they are encouraged to avoid items that are not certain to be *halal*.

There are two main religious reference materials in Islam, *Al-Quran*; the holy book of Islam and the *hadith*; statements or actions conducted by Prophet Muhammad (praises upon him) (Al-Qardawi, 2001). Many different verses in the Quran stated the ways of impermissible consumption by the *sharia*. One of them is; “You who believe, eat the good things We have provided for you and be grateful to God, if it is Him that you worship. He has only forbidden you carrion, blood, pig’s meat, and animals over which any name other than God’s has been invoked. But if anyone is forced to eat such things by hunger, rather than desire or excess, he commits no sin: God is Most Merciful and Forgiving.” (2:172-173).

This quote states that Muslims are not allowed to eat meat that is not slaughtered in the Islamic way, blood, and pig’s meat. However, in adverse conditions, Muslims are allowed to consume this food provided they only take them to relieve hunger and thirst. The same condition applies to alcohol as it as allowable to be consumed in adverse situations. However, the interpretation of the level of adversity required for this exception to be enacted is quite different from one Muslim community to another, resulting in different practices but remaining within the same boundaries.

In Islam, there are four different doctrines or *mathabs*, which were named after four great religious leaders (*imams*), Imam Abu Haneefah, Imam Maalik, Imam al-Shaafa’I and Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal. According to Yusuf (2014), *mathab* in Islam means “different ways of interpreting. Each school acknowledges the other schools’
validity in differing with them because they are based in sound methodological principles.”

All *mathabs* stress the importance of halal consumption. However, there are certain *mathabs* that are more lenient compared to others. This is why some Muslims believe that they may consume non-*halal* foods when *halal* food is hard to find. This condition is known as *darurah*, a state of emergency whereby followers are allowed to break Islamic rules if it inflicts danger on the physical and intellectual well-being of the person. Many of my Muslim friends from other countries follow this understanding of consumption and consider that living in a nation that doesn’t commonly sell *halal* products as a state of *darurah* thus enabling them to consume non-*halal* food.

Most Malaysians do not agree to this. Malaysia follows the Shafi’ite *mathab*, the doctrine that is known to be stricter and more exacting when it comes to acts of worship. Malaysians tend to be much more sensitive about the food they consume than Muslims from some other countries. Based upon the interviews I conducted and also from my own experience, the Shafi’ite *mathab’s* interpretation of *darurah* is different from other doctrines. Most Malaysian community members do not consider the condition of living in the US an emergency as there are plenty of sources of food to eat even if they could not consume meat. In addition, there are a few sources of halal foods within driving distance and most are able to travel to them to purchase the needed food supplies.

Self-representation through Islam

One of the main themes that permeate most of the conversations I had with the respondents was on the difficulty of maintaining an Islamic way of life in a secular
environment such as the United States. Being Muslims, they have to abide certain requirements in their lifestyle. According to the interviews, the sojourning Malays were ready to make substantial sacrifices in order to continue with their Islamic lifestyle, as Islam is an all-encompassing guideline in life. This guideline includes consumption, worship, and identity, as the informants had informed me. Some adjustments had to be made in order to continue with their Islamic lifestyle.

**Halal Consumption**

The consumer environment in the US is significantly different than Malaysia. This is also a source of liminality in the sojourning Malays as their way of life is altered quite drastically. Therefore it is possible that sojourning Malays, as acculturating individuals, would rely on material purchases to create a feeling of belonging as mentioned by Lee, 1993; Belk, 1988 and McCracken, 1986. Various consumer culture studies considered ways individuals use symbolic consumption to build identity. The idea is that the market holds a symbolic resource enabling individuals to construct narratives of identity through specifically selected types of consumption. This happens as consumers associate products with certain social image and, therefore, assert self-identity and satisfy role performance (Belk, 1988; McCracken 1986).

**Food**

Food products and clothing are some of the main concerns that require some adjustments from the sojourners. The sojourners do have concerns about the production of some of the goods in the American market. Most of the respondents said that the main problem for them was in getting halal meat and food, as they are not commonly sold in
every city. Many of them have to travel long distances in order to get the meat supply. Borhan, Ahmad, Anuar, Elfira and Lily were residing in Athens, Ohio and they all traveled for one and a half hours in order to reach the nearest halal butcher. Figure 5.2 shows one of the stores in Columbus, Ohio that sells halal meat.

![Image of a halal butcher shop](image)

*Figure 5.2. One of the halal butchers in Columbus, Ohio that is frequented by the sojourning Malays.*

During most of the interviews conducted with the Malay sojourners, the informants told me that they are very cautious with their grocery shopping. They would ensure that the food items they buy are free from non-halal sources. This includes approaches such as scanning the ingredients for elements such as gelatin or whey that might originate from pork or non-zabihah animals.
Clothes

Generally, Islam asks its followers to dress modestly and offers certain guidelines which Muslim men and women should follow. However, these guidelines vary for each gender, and are based upon situations in which persons find themselves. For example, men should always be covered from navel to knee when around anyone, even other men. Women are also required to cover themselves from navel to knee among other women. However, in the presence of non-related men, women are required to cover themselves in loose garments from head to toe, except for the face and hands. This act of covering is a sign of submission to God, and is commonly called hijab. The modest way of dressing represents a principle to be used out of respect for their bodies and not as a means of attracting unnecessary attention or lust.

In Malaysia, it is common to see Muslim females to cover themselves and wear headscarves in public. However, the degree of the hijab depends on each individual. Some would cover themselves rigorously. Others would resort to covering their hair, but not their feet or forearms. Interestingly, it is also quite common to see women dressing in tight clothes while wearing the headscarf and totally missing the point of hijab.

All except one of my informants wore headscarves and abided by the rule of hijab. Most of them were basically covering themselves thoroughly, with the exception of a few who exposed their forearms and feet. Some of them mentioned having difficulties in finding clothes in the US that were compliant with Islamic law. This problem is especially pronounced during summer months when clothes on sale would be shorter with designs that would show skin. Some of the materials would also be less opaque. My
informants said that they would wear an additional inner layer to avoid showing their body shape, or just avoid buying and wearing the revealing clothes altogether.

Acts of Worship

As I mentioned before, Muslims are required to conduct solat (prayer) for five times a day. These prayers require about five minutes each time, depending on individuals. My informants told me that they try to perform solat as required, although it is harder as it is not as convenient as Malaysia where the facilities for the worship are abundant. Therefore, they tend to seek a quiet and discreet place to conduct it. However, if it were required, they would not mind if the public sees them doing it. In my own experience, while travelling, Malay Muslims do not mind performing prayers in the rest areas. They usually find a good, clean, and unobtrusive place such as in the park, a secluded part of a building or a picnic shelter to conduct it.

For one month every year, Muslims are required to fast from sunrise to sunset in Ramadan, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar. When in the Gregorian calendar, the month falls in summer, the total fasting hours could rise to 16 hours per day. During this month, the Muslims’ consumption habits change substantially. They are not allowed to eat or drink for most of the day, and only ingest after sunset. Although this sounds harsh, most Muslims find it therapeutic and enjoyable. However, this act of worship imposes some impediments to normal daily activities, as some people would prefer not to be too active during fasting hours.
All except one of the Malay women that I talked to for this study wore the hijab. A few of them did voice out that they had a concern of being stereotyped due to the hijab before they came here. However only one of them related a bad experience because of the way she looked. One of the focus group participants mentioned that she could easily uncover herself here as she is away from people who knew her before. Nonetheless she did not, because she said she is covering herself for God, and not for people around her.

Most of the female informants were keen to identify themselves as a Muslim woman from their way of dressing. There were even a couple of cases in which the informants got more religious and more determined to present themselves in a Muslim identity through hijab in the United States compared to when they were in Malaysia. According to Azura (personal communication, August 31st 2014), she started covering herself one year after she moved here. Her story is interesting to me because she decided to cover up and limit her choice of clothing items after spending time in the United States, a land that is known to be tolerant and secular. Something must have moved her to make this unexpected choice.

These findings that Malays often represent themselves as Muslims more than anything else is very parallel to a previous study by Brown (2010) which found that 93.3% of the Malaysian Malay regards Islam as one of their three main identity aspects. In regard to consumption, Malay consumers were found to be more ethnocentric compared to other races in Malaysia in their consumption behavior (Kamaruddin, Mokhlis and Othman, 2002). Halal materialism is growing to be a major identification of
the new Malay identity (Wong, nd). On the other hand, Kamaruddin and Kamaruddin (2009) found that religion alone is not sufficient to affect Malaysian decision-making styles on products, while Mochis and Fon (2011) found that religious values of the three main ethnic groups in Malaysia do not influence brand selection and store preferences. However, these studies were conducted in Malaysia, therefore it is irrelevant to base the analysis in a condition whereby the Malays already have access to products which are compliant with their religious obligations. This religious based consumption practice could be largely due to the intensification of Islamic practices in Malaysia, which I will discuss in the next section.

Islamization of the Malaysian Market

Before coming to study in the United States, I had spent all of my 29 years of life in Malaysia. Suffice it to say, I was very accustomed to and comfortable with the market culture there, up to the point that I was oblivious of how Islamic the Malaysian market is. There are signs of Islam everywhere, from tiny packaging of snacks labeled with the halal logo to big and modern boutiques selling Islamic compliant dresses for Muslim women (refer to Figure 5.3). The Malaysian market offers an ample choice of services and goods compliant with the Islamic law (sharia) and has been declared as one of the main sources for halal rhetoric, production, trade, and consumption (Fischer, 2009).
In Malaysia, almost all of the commercial food products have a JAKIM logo, indicating that they are *halal*. JAKIM is the acronym for Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia). It was first developed in 1968 under a different department in order to help monitor Islamic affairs in Malaysia. After several name and scope changes, in 1997, the Department of Islamic Development Malaysia (JAKIM) was established. The overall role of the department is as the main agency in planning and managing Islamic affairs and development of *ummah* (community) (http://www.islam.gov.my). JAKIM is very involved in ensuring the *halal* standard is met in Malaysian market, particularly for food products.

Figure 5.4 shows the *halal* logo that is on most of Malaysian produced or repackaged products. Figure 5.5 shows some of food products produced in Malaysia with the *halal* logo.
Figure 5.4. The halal logo approved by JAKIM.

Figure 5.5. Examples of Malaysian food products with halal logo

Fischer (2009) and Brown (2010) mentioned that Malaysia’s political state might have contributed to the development of the halal market. From the 1970s onwards, the Malaysian government began to “nationalize” Islam in Malaysia by increasing the
discourse and implementation of the Islamic way of life, in response to condemnations on religion issues from Parti Islam SeMalaysia (PAS), the Islamic opposition party.

Currently, Malaysia is well on its way to be the world’s halal hub (Khalid, nd). In fact, recently Malaysia has been named as the world’s most Muslim-friendly tourist destination ahead of Egypt, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Indonesia (Rakyat Post, 2014). According to a survey by New Horizon, Malaysia is the only country that has been given an “excellent” rating for government support in the financial services industry (New Straights Times, 1995).

According to some scholars, this development in Malaysia’s Islamization has socialized the Malaysian Muslims to be especially concerned over halal commodities in the market, more so compared to Muslims from other countries (Brown, 2010; Liow, 2003; Fischer, 2008).

Hypersensitivity about Islamic Issues

As mentioned before, some scholars claim that Muslims from Malaysia tend to be very sensitive when it comes to issues relating to halal consumption (Brown, 2010; Liow, 2003; Fischer, 2008). This point is very interesting as it resonates with my own experience. Since my first year in the United States, I have been living with Muslim Middle Eastern roommates. Undoubtedly, living with them has enriched me in ways no other experience could, as I observed many aspects of their culture in our daily encounters. My roommates have opened my eyes to how Muslims from many other parts of the world are not as particular in Islamic consumption as Muslims from Malaysia. I was quite taken aback at first because I have never had any exposure to Muslims from
other cultures and was not expecting a big difference in consumption practices. Many Muslims from other cultures are not as strict as Malaysian Muslims in ensuring that the food they are going to consume is *halal*. For example, many Muslims in Athens, Ohio would purchase their meat from the local supermarkets, regardless of the *halal* status.

Undeniably, Muslims in Malaysia do have a higher level of sensitivity in matters concerning their faith. In May 2014, a fiasco rose in Malaysia when information was leaked through social media that the leading brand for chocolate, Cadbury, had the DNA of porcine. This issue led to some unreasonable reaction from some Muslims in Malaysia. This feedback was amplified by some Malay-Muslim organizations in Malaysia, who demanded that somebody must take responsibility for this blunder. During a press conference, more than 20 Malay-Muslim groups had gathered and called for a ‘holy-war’ against Cadbury by boycotting all of its products, even those that were not tainted. These groups, including Muslim Consumers Association of Malaysia (PPIM), Perkasa, Pertubuhan Kebajikan Darul Islah Malaysia (Perkid), Ikatan Muslimin Malaysia (Isma), and the Halal Muslim Entrepreneurs’ Association (Puhm), said that Cadbury had insulted the Muslims by violating their trust. Abu Bakar Yahya, chief of Perkasa, a non-governmental Malay supremacy organization in Selangor state, said that Cadbury has a hidden agenda by putting *haram* (impermissible) agents in the Muslims’ food. According to him, consumption of *haram* food was the reason why the Malays are so divided (Kamal, 2014). There were other examples of hysterical responses, such as by Sabariah Abdullah, a council member of Allied Coordinating Committee of Islamic NGOs.
(ACCIN) who demanded Cadbury bear the cost of “blood cleansing” procedures for her and her family in order to remove the porcine stains in the their blood (Shuman, 2014).

Most practicing Muslims in Malaysia did have an adverse reaction to this issue, as most regard this matter as seriously unfavorable. However, not all share the over-dramatized sentiments put forth by the said organizations. In fact, the president of Malaysian Islamic Youth Movement (ABIM), Amidi Abdul Manan said that these reactions are irrational, emotional and embarrassing (Shuman, 2014).

Former Perlis Mufti Datuk Dr Mohd Asri Zainul Abidin commented on this issue as following, “Suing Cadbury is a welcomed move as it involved the rights of consumers. However, calling for measures like samak mulut (gargling of water mixed with sand) and blood transfusion are extreme. Islam is fair and does not call for such troubling measures. Whoever had consumed something deemed ‘haram’ by mistake is not considered a sinner and Allah will not punish a person for doing something which is beyond his knowledge or control” (Shuman, 2014, para. 14).

American Media Content and Marketing from the Malays’ Eyes

Although Malaysia is a country that values Islamic traditions, it also strives for globalization, development, and modernity, thus subjecting the citizens to worldwide cultures through media exposure. Upon arrival, newcomers must learn to adapt to the host nation’s culture. They must also learn to identify the various symbolic meaning in the host society through various means. Studies have found that immigrants are able to learn about culture, language, politics, and values through media such as radio, television, newspapers, cinema, theatre etc. According to previous research, the mass media has
been the most prominent medium of socialization to the American’s way of life prior to the physical move from a remote area. The newcomers may have an initial view of what they should expect out of the host society based on what they were exposed to prior to the move. However, this interaction might result in differing perceptions and expectations according to the newcomer’s usage of media (Lee, 1989).

All informants said that they were exposed to American media before they came to the US. Many mentioned that they got a substantial exposure to US culture through American movies, series, sitcoms and literature. Although some did not watch or read American media regularly, they were certainly aware of their content. However, there were conflicting answers when they were asked whether these exposures prepared them to adapt here. While they did learn about the American lifestyle and language through the media, they also found that they had formed misconceptions about the nation and its people. In particular, exposure to Hollywood-based movies and series presented a distorted image of Americans. A few mentioned being surprised about how multicultural the United States actually was, because American media content exported to Malaysia usually focused on white Americans.

Additionally, many informants mentioned being worried before coming to the US about “Islamophobia” that was portrayed in the media. Although they did not specify the media source of this idea, many admitted feeling anxious about possible bigotry in the US. One informant went as far as changing his physical appearance by shaving his Muslim beard to avoid getting harassed. However, upon arrival, most informants reported having no troubles of prejudice from local residents as a result of their Islamic identity.
Advertising

This study was also designed to seek the Malay sojourners’ perception of American advertising from a commercial and cultural standpoint. It is important to understand the Malays’ perception of advertising, as advertising is one of the main marketing channels. As mentioned earlier, informants reported having minimal experience with American advertising. There were a few reasons for this. My student informants mentioned lack of time as the main reason. Juggling schoolwork, and for some part-time work, did not leave them with much time to spare. Others said that they did not have cable service to watch television. Consequently, many resorted to selectively watch programs through on-demand streaming websites such as Netflix, Hulu Plus, and YouTube. They also mentioned that they attempted to avoid commercials as much as they could by manually skipping them, or installing software on their computers that could block pop-up advertisements.

Informants with children under 12 years of age reported watching more television than single informants. However, the parents revealed that usually the television set in their home would be tuned to children’s channels. They also mentioned that advertisements did affect their children a great deal. The children would develop a desire for the toys and other merchandise advertised, and asked their parents to purchase them. My informants said that they sometimes complied, and other times tried to curb their children’s demands. However, they also mentioned that when the children saw the actual product advertised on television in a shopping complex, their requests would be more insistent.
Although my informants mentioned that they do not watch television much, and thus were not heavily exposed to advertisements, there were some aspects of American advertising they were aware of. This was especially obvious during the focus group discussions when actual commercials were shown. The main themes extracted from the discussions were sexual appeals in American advertising, strength of comparative advertising, and cultural elements in advertising.

One prominent issue that the informants mentioned was the excessive sexual appeal in some of the American advertisements, a condition quite contrary to the Malaysian culture. In Malaysia, sexual topics are still considered a taboo in daily life and in the media. Basically this is caused by the religious belief in Malaysia apart from the accepted social norm or adat. Some of the informants did mention not being comfortable with purchasing products that have advertisements with sexual innuendos in them, for example, the Danone advertisement. According to Bayraktar (2012), Muslim consumers may develop negative attitudes towards advertisements that include sexuality. Furthermore, they will have negative impressions to brands in the advertisements, and the firms that own these brands. He also said that they would even take precautions to prevent their family and themselves from exposure to these advertisements. In Malaysia, it is illegal to display or discuss any sexually unsuitable materials. It was stated under Section 211 of the Communication and Media Act, that any sexually explicit materials that are considered improper and lewd are prohibited in the media content (Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Content Code, 2014).
Informants had many comments on the competitive environment of the US’ advertising industry. They seemed to have given this issue much thought beforehand, and many agreed that Malaysia’s advertising industry should be more competitive too. Comparative advertising would make companies more competitive and would provide more information to consumers. For them, the liveliness and openness of such an environment would enable more ideas to be cultivated, thus developing a better market in Malaysia.

Another issue that was frequently mentioned in discussions was the prominence of cultural elements in advertising. Participants noted that advertising in the US does display the society’s cultural values. The presentation of humor, sex, and competition in American advertising were all based on American interpretation of social values. The participants displayed an ability to read the advertisements from the perspective of the dominant cultural group’s understanding, while at the same time acknowledging their different point of view. For example, the portrayal of mothers in the Old Spice commercial was really different compared to Malay culture. In the advertisement, the mothers were shown stalking their sons in a humorous and comical way. They would pop-up from under a sofa, be washed up by a wave on a beach, or drop from the sky just to follow their sons on a date. In Malaysia, mothers are usually portrayed to be loving and respectful individuals. However, the informants understand that such humor appeal works in the American setting. Moreover, informants also recognized that the display of sexiness in Beyonce’s “Heat” advertisement was meant as power and enchantment over
the opposite sex. Although they personally were not comfortable with the idea, they acknowledged that sex appeal works for American viewers.

*Product's Information Search Activities*

Conventional media played a small role in pre-purchase information searches for the Malay sojourners. The sojourners had to be proactive in finding channels that were able to provide them with the specific information they were concerned with. The main elements the sojourners focused on were cost, quality, and brand for products while *halal* for foodstuff. Although advertisements did attract the informants up to a point, but the advertisements were quite ineffective in a new brandscape as there were too many options which the sojourners were not familiar with. Two of the main methods mentioned were getting information through the Internet and through the existing local Malay communities.

*The Internet*

Many of the informants extensively utilized the Internet for pre-purchase product information searches. Among the most mentioned were promotional e-mails for members, surfing brands’ websites, and searching for coupons online. According to Vijayashanker (2014), email is the most effective channel of marketing. Fear of missing out drives receivers to at least scan through emails. The informants also mentioned that online advertisements sometimes caught their attention too. However, many said that the final step before purchasing was to read online reviews written by other users.
Word of Mouth

The informants also relied on other Malays in their locality for information. This was especially so for anything related to Islam. Therefore, they learned about halal product sources from people around them.

Branded Merchandise as a Symbol of Status

Many of the sojourners mentioned that most of the high branded products they saw in the US were familiar to them since the products were in Malaysia. Many of the sojourners were acquainted with many international brands due to the media and global market penetration. Even if the sojourners were not familiar with some of the locally distributed brands, they did not have major problems in placing the unfamiliar brands in the new brandscape. The strategy to do this came from information seeking.

The informants mentioned a substantial difference in their branded products consumption behavior in Malaysia and the US. Although they might be familiar with the brands back in Malaysia, they were not able to purchase them back home due to their high cost. Therefore, many of them took the chance to use high-end brand names here. They emphasized that the quality that comes with the brands convinced them to start using them. There are also a few that mentioned that the brand itself is an attraction, meaning that the items convey a status and prestige that comes with the brand.

According to Kwak & Sojka (2010), newcomers in a foreign land often use prestigious brands to establish and communicate their personal identity. Brands are often used as a surrogate of status, serving as a symbol to indicate how the society should perceive the consumer. The brand acts as an extended self, a representation of who a
person is through visual and material aspects. This medium of self-expression is especially important to newcomers who have not established their identity in a foreign society. These newcomers arrive to new surroundings without any of their former means to communicate their self-concept, such as “job title, income, social status or reference group” (p. 373). However, this point of view does not represent all of the sojourners. The expatriates and embassy officers established identities as a consequence of their position at work. Their income would be stabilized, and they would have established a higher social status. Most likely students would be the most unstable group of all the sojourners.

The media also played a role in introducing and depicting international and high-end brands as a “must-have” in Malaysia. As a result, most Malaysians are keen to possess and use branded items, as proven by many of the informants’ iteration. Many would prefer to use branded items compared to generic ones and some would even play a role as a goods mediator to people home in Malaysia. They would either help people shop, or become an agent to sell American-based items to people back home.

This identification with expensive branded products is common in Malaysia, as noted by the Federation of Malaysian Consumer Associations (FOMCA) Chief Executive Officer, Datuk Paul Selvaraj. In a newspaper article dated September 26, 2011, he mentioned that despite the rising cost of living, Malaysian consumers preferred to purchase expensive branded products compared to in-house brands. He said that Malaysians had become obsessed with brands by placing unrealistic importance on appearance instead of utility. This habit could be traced to the Malaysian value system and could lead to extravagance (Rahim, 2011).
This socio-cultural observation could be linked with one of Hofstede’s (2001) dimensions of culture, in which he stated that Malaysia is a country with high power distance, which means that Malaysian citizens value authority stemming from unequal power within the society. What a person possesses and how a person lives represents the power that a person has, and that power is something that is strived for in the society. This results in luxurious public consumption. Kwak & Sojka (2010), Zaltman and Wallendorf (1979) and Hirschman (1981) also mentioned that product consumption could imply symbolic meanings based on the images it projects, especially for items that imply particular status and social position in society.

This symbolic meaning also relates to why the Malay community in Malaysia is so obsessed with high branded materials, especially Coach handbags. It is interesting to note that Coach got numerous mentions in the interviews compared to other brands although there are many other high-end brands here in the US. I believe Coach is the benchmark among Malaysians in portraying high status as it is known to be very expensive while having good quality.

This observation and theory could also be connected to Malays’ tendency to be highly concerned with others’ material condition and status. Being a collectivistic country, Malaysians tend to be very close-knit as a community. Nevertheless Malays also tend to be impressed with high status and power. This conflict results in a community that is competitive in appearing powerful.

Malays also tend to be hypersensitive of others’ perception of themselves. This tendency to appear high-status and respected directs the Malays to be extra cautious of
the way they dress and present themselves to the world. Mastor (2000) in his study of the Malay culture and personality found that Malays score higher in the “Self-consciousness” aspect. This finding relates to a conventional study by Swift (1965), who conducted an ethnographic study and found a cultural concept that is fundamental in the Malay trait; they are very concerned about other people’s judgment about them. This trait, if studied reflectively, also means that the community tends to judge and analyze others in terms of what is ‘correct’ and ‘proper’.

Limitations of the Study

Most operational plans do have some weaknesses, and it is a good research practice to acknowledge the flaws of a methodology. I had employed the snowball sampling while selecting informants. This method, although appropriate for this study, tends to make the types of sojourners similar among one another. This is why most of my in-depth respondents and focus groups participants tend to be more Islamic than not. I am sure there are non-practicing Malay sojourners who do not consider Islam to be their main concern while consuming food products or while buying apparels, labeled as ‘pragmatic Muslims’ by Fischer (2009). Nevertheless I did not get a chance to get in contact with this group of Malays. This also means that this study was employed within specific locations especially in Athens, Ohio where I reside. Other locations were Columbus Ohio, Kalamazoo Michigan and Washington, D.C.

I also did not have any contacts with sojourners who stayed in the United States for more than three years continuously. In fact, everybody who I talked to was newer to the country than I was. This limited my ability to contrast experiences and opinions based
on the length of time of the sojourners. However, there were two informants who came to study in the US several years before. This groups them as recurrent sojourners. Therefore, some comparisons could be made between first time sojourners and recurrent sojourners.

Research Contributions

There are plenty of existing studies conducted on the acculturation process for immigrants. However, significantly fewer studies have examined sojourners. Most of the studies conducted discussed the sojourner’s perception on the environmental changes resulting in threats and challenges they had to go through in the process of moving abroad. Less commonly discussed are the implemented strategies by the sojourners in order to maintain a mental and social stability during the acculturation process (Swami et al, 2010). This study examines the overall acculturation process including pre-immigration phase, immigration phase, and the possible outcomes, with a specific examination of how the Malay sojourners strive to merge their culture and identity into life in the United States. Fundamentally, I also expose how capitalism, the globalized market and the mediascape builds the foundation of consumerism and how the local market, political forces, culture, and faith play an integral part in building an identity and eventually, effecting the adaptations of Malay newcomers in an alien setting.

Suggestions for Future Research

We have discovered from this research that there are many factors that contribute to Malay sojourners’ consumer acculturation and identity negotiation. However, it became clear that this is an area available for further exploration as more questions arose from the findings. Future scholars might want to pursue research in the following areas.
First, studies of a similar nature with a deductive reasoning approach might be good to further clarify the findings in this study. According to the study, Malay sojourners rely on the community and the Internet for pre-purchase product information search. The discussion indicated that the ethnic group’s collectivistic nature and difficulty in social interaction with the host culture might be the reason why they opted for these sources. A survey will be able to determine which medium does Malay sojourners use the most and the reason behind this choice.

In this study, it was found that Malay sojourners were determined to identify themselves as a Malay Muslim community, and that came across through their consumer behavior. Symbolic consumption was employed to represent the Malay Muslim identity through gastronomy and attire consumption. There were also cases of Malay sojourners being more resolute to identify themselves as Malay Muslims based on attire changes made during their stay in the host culture. It would be noteworthy to see whether these were unique cases, or do Malays generally want to emphasize their “Malayness” in a host country. Studies on self-image perception before and after sojourning could be employed in order to demonstrate identity negotiations in sojourners or immigrants.

This study involved sojourners who stayed abroad for a short span of time. Therefore, future research could also consider length of time as a base to study identity negotiations. This would enable the researcher to contrast experiences and opinions based on the length of time of the sojourners. It would also be interesting to compare identity negotiations between sojourners and immigrants. The findings from this study will help
us in understanding and forecasting certain aspects of the acculturation process for migrants.

This research gave insights into strategies Malay sojourners use while adjusting to new surroundings. Sojourners have different coping mechanisms compared to immigrants, as their visit to the host country is temporary. This fact has an impact on the sojourners’ socio-cultural adjustments, as sojourners tend to cling to the lifestyle they had in their home country. However, due to different living conditions abroad, there are bound to be some changes in the behavioral aspect. As discussed earlier, Malay sojourners’ acculturation strategies are exclusive to the ethnic group, as there are cultural, political, and religious aspects that build the character of Malays. These sojourners will eventually return to Malaysia and contribute substantially in various ways to their country. Therefore, it is interesting to explore what returning Malay sojourners’ coping mechanisms are.

Chapter Summary

This study examined the consumer culture of sojourning Malays from the perspective of one, with aid from dialogues involving fellow Malay sojourners. By no means do I claim that it is exhaustive or representative. Nevertheless, it allows a glimpse into a world that has not been explained before.

From the discussion, we could see that the Malay identity is complex, bounded by tradition and religion, yet modern and progressive at the same time. Malay sojourners would have been exposed to western culture and artifacts through the media and market prior to their shift to America. Therefore, they would have had some mental preparation
about what awaits them in the United States. Many were prepared for the worst, especially following the ‘Islamophobic’ sentiment that the media always hype about. They were pleasantly surprised with the lack of oppression they experienced after the sojourn.

One of the main transformations for Malays moving from Malaysia to the United States would be the change from an Islamic surrounding to a secular one. This change requires substantial adjustments in terms of consumptions, but it was found that the sojourners would still adhere to the rules of Islam. This devotion towards a certain way of life has been cultivated throughout Malaysia by the ruling government. It is true that halal consumption is requested by the religion, but the stringent background has been contributed by the implementation of halal economy, rhetoric, and lifestyle by the government. From the interviews, it was evident that Islam is the main identity of the Malay sojourners. Despite much negative press on Islam, Malay sojourners seemed to be quite firm in representing themselves as Muslims, whether with their identity publicly or with their consumptions taken in private.

This identity, although quite significant for the Malays sojourner’s self-value, could be a factor that separates them from the local Americans. Many of the informants confided that they do not have substantive relationships with the locals here. Some cited time factor, others cited work environment, but many implied that the different culture and consumption practices based on religious belief are the main factors that separate them. They do not feel accepted within the American circle as they are not able to consume or socialize the same way as the Americans do. Furthermore, they are just more
comfortable being within walls they build for themselves and their fellow countrymen, considering the fact that they are sojourners who will eventually, return to their land.

The Malay sojourners proved to be quite savvy in maneuvering within a foreign market. Many of my informants mentioned that they gather plenty of information before attempting to purchase in the market. They also maneuver their shopping behavior through various methods, taking full advantage of many marketing strategies offered by American companies. Interestingly, advertising plays a minimal role in the sojourner’s information seeking. Many of the informants with a family, however, mentioned that advertising does attract the attention of their children quite substantially.

According to Maldonado and Tansuhaj (1999) in their proposed Consumer Acculturation Model, prior to the actual immigration, newcomers would have gone through the pre-immigration phase, whereby the newcomers would have exposure to the new culture through various factors. The move to another country could bring forth a difficult time for the sojourners. They have to cope in vast differences in culture, values, and interpersonal communication, apart from standing out because of their appearance (Anderson, 1998). The knowledge that they will not stay in the new environment brings forth more complications for them. There might be a need to adapt and to establish relationships with the locals, but at the same time, there will be hesitation because of the knowledge that they are going to leave eventually (Bochner, 2006). According to Berry (1996), acculturation in a new culture would require a substantial amount of changes and adjustments in the newcomer’s life. These adjustments would require several phases and the last phase, the outcome phase, is where the person disengages from his/her previous
roles and moves into one of four possible outcomes: marginalization, separation, assimilation, and integration.

The Malay sojourners demonstrated that during the pre-immigration phase, they were exposed to the new culture through the media. However, many still observed that the media content was misleading in representing the American culture. Therefore, many still reported having feelings of ambiguity and displacement during their initial move here. On the other hand, in the consumerism aspect, many of the informants reported that they were aware of various major American brands. This was a result of global marketing by the companies.

After the actual migration, the sojourners were in the transitional state, also known as the liminal state. Within this state, newcomers usually report feeling of disparity as many would encounter conflicts. In the aspect of consumerism, the Malay sojourners in America apparently had to face a new social structure in a more secular market, which led them to identity disparity. This consumption condition leads to a gap in the sojourner’s relation with the locals, which affects their overall outcome from the liminal stage. Since this study is an exploratory one, it would be assumptive to label the outcome of the observations. However, it is safe to say that Malay sojourners do strive to maintain their heritage culture and identity, to a point where it hindered them from having substantial relationships with the locals.

Personally, the journey of writing this dissertation has been life changing. Prior to starting this project, I expected that this research would be similar to the ones I have conducted before; educational, but not phenomenal. Being a sojourner myself has given
me a lot of insight into my informants’ experience. I thought understanding them, and understanding their situation and behavior would be easy. However, as I delved deeper into the study, I found that I had to take my views away from the norms in order to have a deeper level of understanding. Being a sojourner also played a role in this; I was taken out of familiar surroundings, and therefore was forced to view my findings in a new light. This has made me question the accepted norms in Malaysia and unearth the related causes to those norms which otherwise, would never be apparent in my eyes.
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doi:10.1080/10253860701566440


APPENDIX A: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW GUIDE

Number of interview:

Informant’s name:

Date:

Place:

Sex:

Age:

Education:

Place of residence:

Place of birth:

Reason for sojourning:

Occupation or other position:
Interview guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction Key Components:</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Thank you</td>
<td>I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Your name</td>
<td>today. My name is Nadiah Mukhia from Ohio University. I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Purpose</td>
<td>would like to talk to you about your experience in the US and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confidentiality</td>
<td>your adaptation to the life here compared to Malaysia. The</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Duration</td>
<td>questions will ask you about your life generally. This</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How interview will be conducted</td>
<td>interview should take about one hour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Opportunity for questions</td>
<td>For your information, I will need to record the session as I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Signature of consent</td>
<td>cannot write fast enough to get all of your comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>However, I will also take some important notes as you speak.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As I will be recording this conversation, please speak up so</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>that I would not miss any of your comments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All responses will be kept confidential. This means that your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>interview responses will only be shared with my committee</td>
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<td></td>
<td>members. Do take note that you do not have to talk about</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anything you do not want to and you may end the interview at</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>any time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there any questions about what I have just explained?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are you willing to participate in this interview?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>If you are, I will need your signature in a consent form.</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions</td>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ask factual before opinion</td>
<td>• How long have you been in the US?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use probes as needed</td>
<td>• What is your reason for coming here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Is this your first time here?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Acculturation**

- How are the first few months for you? Probes:
  Expectation before coming here, first impression, struggles, culture shock.
- Did you watch/read/listen to a lot of American media content before coming here? Probes: movies, television series, books, magazines, songs

**Media in the US**

- In the US, what source do you refer to in order to get information on products? Probes: seasonal clothes or things you are not familiar with.
- Do you pay attention to US advertisements? Probe: television, radio, social media, email.
- How are they similar/different from advertisements in Malaysia?
- What do you focus on while watching a US based advertisement?
- Have you ever bought a product because of advertisements?

**Product consumption**

- What was your first impression while shopping here? Probe: groceries, food, clothes
- Do you have any difficulty in getting products you use in Malaysia? Probe: groceries, food, clothes
- Do you substitute the products?
- How do you choose the products you purchase here? Probe: price, quality, brand, color, comfort, trend)
- What meaning does the product have for you?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Probe: beauty, status, comfort, faith.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Did you use American brand before you came to the US? Probes: apparels, electronics</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Outcome

- What relationships do you have with the locals? Probe: Do you interact with them? What is their perception on you? What is your perception on them?
- Do you participate in the local activities and celebrations? Probes: Halloween, events by the University, department gatherings.
- Compare your preference between before and after coming here. Probes: Language, food, perception on US, shopping etc.
- Have you changed in anyway?

### Closing Key Components:

- Additional comments
- Next steps
- Thank the informants

Is there anything more you would like to add?

I will be analysing your response to be included in my research within the next month. If you like, I could send you a draft of our analysis.

Thank you for your time.
Post interview comment sheet

(Fieldnote such as time of the interview, description of setting/informant, emotional tone of the interview, difficulties encountered, personal feeling at the time, perceptions, reflections and others)

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APPENDIX B: FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW GUIDE

Logistics

Date: 

Location:  

Name of participants:  1)  
2)  
3)  
4)  
5)  
6)  
7)  
8)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction Key</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Components:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Thank you</td>
<td>Thank you for joining our focus group discussion. My name is ______________ and I will be facilitating our discussion today. You were all invited here today because I would like to listen to your opinion about US’ advertisements. I will show you several advertisements and we will talk about your ideas, comments and suggestions on them. This interview should take less than two hours.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Your name</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Purpose</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Confidentiality</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Duration</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How interview will be conducted</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For your information, we will need to record the session
- Signature of consent

as we could not write fast enough to get all of your comments. I will also take some important notes as you speak. As we will be recording this conversation, please speak up so that we would not miss any of your comments.

Your interview responses will only be shared with research team members. Do take note that there are no right or wrong answers, we just want to hear your personal perspective. I would like to hear from everyone, so don’t be shy; on the other hand be considerate of others if you notice that you are talking too much and others are contributing less. One person should talk at a time, but there is no need to raise your hand to contribute. You don’t have to talk about anything you don’t want to and you may end the interview at any time.

A consent form is now being distributed to you. Once you have read the form and agree to its content, please sign by the end of the form, indicating your agreement to participate in this study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>1) Do you notice any difference in advertisements in the US and in Malaysia?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• No more than 15 open-ended questions</td>
<td>2) What qualities do you think should be in an advertisement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ask factual before opinion</td>
<td>3) Putting aside the commercial aspect, what values do you think should be present in an advertisement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Use probes as needed</td>
<td>4) Are there any particular Malaysian advertisements that you remember and like? Why?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5) Are there any particular American advertisements that you remember and like? Why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Play each (6) advertisement separately and discuss:*

1) What do you think about this advertisement?

2) What do you think is the main message of the advertisement?

3) How do you think your friends or family back in Malaysia would interpret the advertisement?

4) Do you think their understanding of it is different or the same as yours?

5) Since you have been here, have your attitude on
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6) Would you purchase this product? Why?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Closing Key</th>
<th>Components:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is there anything more you would like to add?</td>
<td>We will be analysing your response to be included in our research within the next month. If you like, we could send you a draft of our analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional comments</td>
<td>Thank you for your time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next steps</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank the informants</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX C: IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: Malaysians Adaptation in the US

Researcher: Sharifah Nadiah Syed Mukhiar, Ohio University, Doctoral student

You are being asked to participate in this research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks by participating in this interview. This process will also explain how your personal information will be used and protected. I will read this form to you and answer your questions about the study if you have any. By the end of this process, if you agree to participate and answer the questions in the interview, you are implying consent for me to use the information.

Explanation of Study

This study is being done to examine Malaysians in the United States. The objective of this study is to learn about the different ways Malaysians use the media in the US and how that helps them adjust here.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer a few questions. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this research. Your participation in the study will last for 45 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no risks or discomforts for being interviewed. All responses will be confidential and you will not be referred to by name in any report. Individual responses will be audio recorded and used in papers or reports for the study. The recordings will not be seen by people outside the research team, consisting of the researcher, advisor, and transcribers.

Benefits

This study is important to science and society because this study will contribute to the field of intercultural communication, specifically on the understanding of Malaysian as newcomers abroad.

Individually, you may benefit, as you will have a chance to share your thoughts and contribute your perspective in this study.

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Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by the researcher. Your interview does not include any personal information to identify you. The responses will only be available to the researcher and will be destroyed by May 2014.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Compensation

You will not receive any compensation for doing the survey. However, you may request a report on the results by informing me of your email address.

Contact Information

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact: Sharifah Nadiah Syed Mukhiar (740-818-8234; ss127509@ohio.edu). Dr Drew McDaniel (740-593-4855; mcdanied@ohio.edu) is the faculty advisor for this project.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By participating, you are agreeing that:

- you have been read this consent form and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
- you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Version Date: 05/15/13
APPENDIX D: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION CONSENT FORM

Ohio University Consent Form

Title of Research: Advertising and Malaysian Audiences.

Researchers: Sharifah Nadiah Syed Mukhiar, Ohio University, Doctoral student

You are being asked to participate in this research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in this study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

EXPLANATION OF STUDY

This study is being done to examine Malaysian audience’s perception on American advertisements. The objective of this study is to learn about the different ways the Malay audience interpret advertisements outside of their own culture.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to watch a few advertisements and participate on a discussion about your impression on those advertisements. You must be at least 18 years old to participate in this research. Your participation in the study will last for 90 minutes.

Risks and Discomforts

There are no risks or discomforts for being interviewed by our researchers. All responses will be confidential and you will not be referred to by name in any report. Individual responses will be audio recorded and used in papers or reports for the study. The recordings will not be seen by people outside the research team, consisting of the researchers, advisor, and transcribers.

Benefits

This study is important to science and society because this study will contribute to the field of cross-cultural advertising, specifically on the interpretation of advertisements from the perspective of newcomers. Individually, you may benefit, as you will have a chance to share your thoughts about your culture with other members of the group. You could also have the opportunity to learn about others impression on specific issues.
Confidentiality and Records

Your study information will be kept confidential by the researchers. Your interview does not include any personal information to identify you. The responses will only be available to the researchers and will be destroyed by May 2015.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

* Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
* Representatives of Ohio University (OU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at OU;

Compensation

You will not receive any compensation for doing the survey. However, you may request a report on the results by informing me of your email address.

Contact Information

For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact: Sharifah Nadiah Syed Mukhiar (740-818-8234; ss127509@ohio.edu). Dr. Drew McDaniel (740-593-4855; mcdanied@ohio.edu) is the faculty advisor for this project.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, please contact Jo Ellen Sherow, Director of Research Compliance, Ohio University, (740)593-0664.

By signing below, you are agreeing that:

• you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
• you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction.
• you understand Ohio University has no funds set aside for any injuries you might receive as a result of participating in this study
• you are 18 years of age or older
• your participation in this research is completely voluntary
• you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.