

**Hip-Hop Heard 'Round the World: Consumer Implications of Urban  
Identification in the U.S. and Hong Kong**

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## **Hip-Hop Heard ‘Round the World: Consumer Implications of Urban Identification in the U.S. and Hong Kong**

Identification with a particular subculture can mitigate feelings of animosity toward a country and its brands, making steps toward a truly global marketplace. The current research introduces a scale measure of "urban" identification and tests the urban construct cross-culturally on U.S. and Hong Kong populations, examining the effects of urban identification on sources of consumer information and influence and attitudes toward the U.S. and American products.

**Keywords:** youth segments, global consumer behavior, hip-hop, urban segment

## 1. Introduction

The globalization of markets continues to present many challenges to marketing researchers and practitioners alike, as U.S. marketers struggle to make their brands and brand messages globally relevant and researchers attempt to understand how cultural differences affect acceptance of these products and messages. Current high levels of anti-U.S. sentiment around the world make for an even more challenging task of establishing U.S. brands abroad. Research in consumer behavior has shown that individuals' feelings of animosity towards a country reduce their likelihood of purchasing products from that country, even if the product is rated higher in quality than competing products (Klein, Ettenson & Morris 1998). To the extent that identification with a particular subculture may mitigate these feelings of animosity toward a country or the country's brands, steps can be made toward the convergence of tastes described by Theodore Levitt in his classic (1983) Harvard Business Review piece "The Globalization of Markets."

One market segment that is breaking down cultural and global boundaries in an unprecedented fashion is the urban segment. U.S. marketers have traditionally defined the urban segment quite narrowly as African-American and Latino or inner city consumers. In reality, the urban segment is a unique blend of ethnicities that is heavily influenced in tastes, attitudes and lifestyle by inner-city American youth, hip-hop culture and the voice of hip-hop culture – rap music. The Urban segment in the U.S. is estimated at 59% Caucasian, 19% African-American, 17% Latino, 4% Asian and 1% "other" approximately 16 to 34 years old whose purchasing decisions are either directly or indirectly influenced by inner city trends and hip-hop culture. Illustrative of this diversity is the fact that over 80% of rap CDs are reportedly purchased by white youth (Stavraka 2001). Thanks to the vast reach of media vehicles such as MTV, the Internet and the Hollywood film industry, urban subculture, long discounted as a passing fad by many, has become one of America's most notable exports (Morris 2004). To the extent that individuals around the world identify with this pervasive subculture that crosses ethnic, gender, age and geographic boundaries, it could quite possibly override individuals' animosity toward the United States, at least in terms of willingness to purchase U.S. brands.

The power of mass media has been credited (or blamed, depending on one's point of view) with facilitating the emergence of global consumption symbols, particularly with young adults who are more likely to be in touch with modern media and contemporary consumer trends

(Durvasula et al. 2001). These younger consumers, in particular, are an important segment for marketers as they are likely to be a less dogmatic, more impressionable audience. As such, a more thorough understanding of how this particular aspect of western society may appeal to consumers and work to affect consumption is called for.

It is hypothesized here that higher levels of urban identification may mitigate the effects of animosity towards the United States in terms of consumption intentions and reported purchase behavior. Thus, the present research has four major goals: 1) to introduce and test a scale measure of Urban identification (hereafter referred to as Urban ID) within a U.S. population; 2) to test the Urban ID scale on a non-U.S. population (the current study examines Chinese consumers in Hong Kong) and compare underlying construct dimensions between these two cultures; 3) to test for similar patterns of effects on consumer sources of information and influence; 4) to test for differences, within a Hong Kong population, between urban identifiers and non-Urban identifiers in animosity toward the U.S. and willingness to purchase U.S. brands.

### **The Urban Market**

*“At first, US corporations flirted uneasily with the styles, music and attitudes of the inner city. But as black urban culture took root as the universal youth emblem, they overcame their squeamishness and went for a taste of what the streets call ‘flavor’. They saw the young, white kid from Kansas cocking his head and splaying his fingers downward, middle fingers tucked back in imitation of a street gesture. You can’t ignore that...street certification in a rap song is a marketer’s dream come true...”*

*(Levine, 1997)*

Consumer behavior researchers have developed numerous theories and identified many criteria by which to segment consumers in an attempt to explain and predict their behavior (Zaichowsky 1985; Bettman 1979). As marketers, we tend to view the marketplace in terms of demographics while consumers tend to identify themselves in lifestyle terms. Research has focused on segmentation based upon ethnicity to understand and predict consumer behavior including a focus on degree of ethnic identification, examining subcultures such as blacks (Whittler 1991), Hispanics (Webster 1994) and Jews (Hirschman 1981). In more recent years, marketers and researchers alike have begun the shift from the use of demographic data as the primary basis for understanding and categorizing consumers to segmentation variables with more

explanatory power such as lifestyle. This is particularly appropriate amongst the hard-to-reach teen and young adult segments who take multiculturalism for granted and see things less in terms of black and white than cool or un-cool, making demographic and ethnicity-based segmentation less insightful for newer generations of consumers.

Despite its growing recognition by practitioners, very little research exists as to the distinct characteristics, behaviors and attitudes of the urban segment that shape its unique patterns of consumer behavior and its influence on broader segments of consumers in the U.S. and abroad. The pervasiveness of this segment along with over \$890 billion per year in buying power in the U.S. alone (Stavraka 2001) makes it a highly sought-after one for marketers, with brands from Coca Cola to Louis Vuitton to Hennessey using celebrities in the urban market to promote their products to broad audiences. Members of the urban subculture are heavily influenced by rap music, a cornerstone component of hip-hop and urban culture. Brand names, particularly luxury brands, are a key element of many rap songs, which speak of survival, defiance and materialism (James 2004). Urban consumers are highly brand focused, with a particular taste for luxury brands, and demonstrate a selective “trading up” to higher levels of quality while showing less brand loyalty than traditional luxury consumers (Economist 2002). One goal of the following study is to propose and empirically test predicted dimensions of urban identification both in the U.S. and abroad to contribute to a more systematic understanding of a very important consumer segment.

Given the prevalence of the hip-hop lifestyle and broader urban culture around the world and its similarity in form and expression, it is predicted that these dimensions will replicate cross-culturally and will have implications for global consumer attitudes toward U.S. brands. More specifically, it is hypothesized that to the extent that consumers in other countries identify with urban subculture, they will be more likely to have positive attitudes toward U.S. brands. The following section first seeks to define the construct of Urban ID, identifying its underlying dimensions and examining its effects on consumer characteristics such as sources of information and influence and materialism. In order to accomplish these goals, a scale measure of Urban ID is developed and tested. This is followed by an examination of the effects of Urban ID on Chinese consumers’ attitudes toward the U.S. and the purchase of American brands.

## **STUDY 1 – SCALE DEVELOPMENT**

A general scale measure of urban identification would allow researchers to use the same measure across various research studies. In fact, the proposed scale, which incorporates behavioral and lifestyle variables as well as social, style and attitude variables may provide insights into other aspects of consumer behavior and response to marketing communications as well as social and behavioral areas of study.

Different types of scales were pre-tested before selecting a measurement approach that seemed to be a generalizable and comprehensive representation of urban ID. First, five “expert” subjects were asked to describe a series of prototypical urban identifiers. Responses varied widely in levels of specificity and were heavily skewed toward portrayals of male prototypes. A semantic differential scale was attempted (Zaichowsky 1985) but many of the factors that were generated did not have bipolar endpoints to allow for meaningful pairings of words or concepts. Furthermore, given that the construct of Urban ID is still somewhat ambiguous in terms of its dimensions; researcher-generated concepts would have been largely subject to the researchers’ own interpretations.

It was determined that the best measure of Urban ID would loosely follow the steps used by Zaichowsky (1985) in development of the widely cited Personal Involvement Inventory (PII) scale and related PII scale reduction techniques (Zaichowsky 1994), beginning with the use of a panel of experts to generate construct components. Thus, the steps taken to develop the measure are as follows:

1. Define the construct to be measured
2. Solicit expert generation of items that pertain to the construct
3. Judge the content validity of generated items; determine the internal reliability of items judged to have content validity (factor analysis; item reduction)
4. Test convergent reliability of the scale by assessing correlation of scale measure of urban ID with self-report measure.
5. Test the construct validity or theoretical value of the scale by gathering data to test whether the scale discriminates on self-reported attitudes/behavior.

### **Defining the Construct**

With roots firmly entrenched in hip-hop culture, the urban market is anchored by a cultural triangle of *fashion*, *music* and *sports*. As reflected in the expert-generated items which contribute to the scale measure, Urban ID is also characterized by several distinct behavioral and

attitudinal factors such as “hip style” and “edgy, contrarian attitudes” (Marigny Research Group 2000). Guy Primus, executive director and senior analyst at UrbanIQ, a division of Vanguard Media, reported that the urban segment is a racially diverse group of consumers made up of approximately 59% whites, 19% blacks, 17% Latinos, 4% Asians and 1% “other” between the ages of 16 and 34 whose purchasing decisions are either directly or indirectly influenced by inner city trends or hip-hop culture (UrbanIQ, 2000). This definition of Urban is used for the purposes of scale development in the current study and is also used as a subjective self-report measure.

### **Item Generation and Content Validity**

A scale was developed based on the above definition of urban. In line with Peter (1981) and Mittal’s (1995) specifications of construct validity, for a measure to be construct valid two conditions must be met: (1) each of the measurement items must relate to the characteristics of the construct, and (2) each item must be free from contamination by elements of the other constructs. To address the first of these conditions, expert input was sought to generate representative measurement items. Five experts<sup>1</sup> were given the definition and asked to generate a list of words describing Urban. This process yielded 165 words. Duplicates were removed from the list leaving 85 unique items. A set of 5 new experts<sup>2</sup> rated the 85 remaining variables on the following scale: 1 = clearly representative of Urban; 2 = somewhat representative of Urban; 3 = Not representative of Urban. Items that received a rating of 1 (clearly representative of Urban) from at least 3 of the 5 experts were included in the scale. From this process 30 unique variables remained (see Appendix A for the 30-item Urban ID scale).

Early theorizing on the construct of Urban ID, including the above definition, would lead one to believe that the sole component of the construct is one’s identification with hip-hop culture. However, in line with the authors’ intuition, many of the items listed in the 30-item scale suggest that more meaningful individual characteristics also exist. Followers of urban culture cite the fact that hip-hop itself is more than rap music; it is a *lifestyle* and an *attitude*. Thus, it would seem that these make up two key components of Urban ID; in fact, many of the 30 items fall under one of these three major categories which represent hip-hop lifestyle, personal style, and personality.

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<sup>1</sup> The first panel of experts consisted of 3 undergraduate students/hip-hop dancer/choreographers; one co-owner of a music video production company; one South Bronx, NY junior high school teacher.

<sup>2</sup> The 5 experts used in the second stage of scale development consisted of a Washington, DC nightclub owner; BET music video producer; Creative Director, DDB Advertising Agency; President, Blackstarr Entertainment (an event marketing company); an independent filmmaker.

The next step of the analysis consisted of administering the 30-item scale to a student sample. Two hundred and fifty-six undergraduate marketing students from three private universities in Washington DC and Los Angeles completed the survey. Subjects were asked to report the extent to which they identified with each item on a scale of 1 (Not at All) to 7 (Very Much). Subjects were also asked the single-item subjective self-report measure (order of this item and the scale measure was counterbalanced so that half of the subjects saw the single item question first, while the other half saw the 30-item scale first, each separated by unrelated filler items; no significant order effect was found).

Factor analysis was performed to identify underlying dimensions of Urban ID and to satisfy the second requirement for content validity – unidimensionality. It was predicted, based on researcher intuition, that three primary factors would emerge from this analysis – one representing a hip-hop affiliation/affinity; a second representing a style element; and a third representing a personality component. Factor analysis, using principal component analysis with a varimax rotation, showed that the 30 items hang together quite reliably with a Cronbach alpha equal to .93 and resulted in a 7-factor solution, with the first 3 of these factors explaining nearly half of the total variance (48.65%). The unique explanatory power of the 3 factors, conceptualized as (1) Hip-Hop Headz, (2) Fashion Forward, and (3) Free Spirit, is graphically depicted in the scree plot in Exhibit 1. The first 3 factors have Cronbach alphas of .90, .85 and .79 respectively, indicating that they statistically as well as intuitively hang together well (See Table 1). The two categories which reflect style and attitude components appear to represent characteristics attributed to the Urban market in existing definitions cited earlier such as “hip style” (Fashion Forward) and “edgy, contrarian attitudes” (Free Spirit) (Marigny Research Group 2000).

By using only the first three factors, eighteen variables remained, with nine of those falling under the first factor “Hip-Hop Headz.” An analysis of the variables within this factor showed some redundancy among the items, indicating that the scale would likely gain in efficiency from further reduction, thus item-to-total correlations and inter-item correlations were examined. Item-to-total correlations within each of the three factors, which ranged from .47 to .87, were examined first and items with an item-to-total correlation below .75 were dropped. When inter-item correlations are high, it is likely that a particular item is measuring close to the same thing as another item and may be redundant (Zaichowsky 1994). Three items within the



first factor (Hip-Hop Headz) had an inter-item correlation above .75 and also intuitively overlapped with other variables and were thus eliminated (Zaichowsky 1994). Examples of overlapping measures were “purchase rap music” with “listen to rap music” and “familiar with hip-hop slang.” These processes left a total of 10 Urban ID scale items (see Table 1 for factors and items). The 10-item reduced scale is significantly correlated with the full 30-item measure (Pearson’s correlation = .97,  $p < .0001$ ) indicating that the 10-item measure adequately captures the construct of Urban ID.

### **Convergent Validity**

An additional test of scale validity, convergent validity, ensures that alternative measures of the same construct correlate significantly. Researchers have called for subjective as well as objective measures to define constructs such as ethnicity and subcultural affiliation as well as degree of identification with a subgroup. In Hirschman’s (1981) study of American Jewish ethnic identification, subjective self-report labeling is noted as the only valid measure of ethnicity, since it represents the internal beliefs of the individual and hence reflects the salience and reality of the ethnic affiliation he/she experiences. Early researchers of ethnic identification, a domain of study that similarly measures identification with a subgroup, used researcher-generated subjective measures of identifying/categorizing subjects such as surname identification (Gillet and Scott 1974), interviewer observation (Pruden et al. 1974), and area of residence (Wallendorf and Reilly 1983) in addition to self-identification (Saegert, Hoover and Hilger 1985).

Deshpande, Hoyer and Donthu (1985) emphasize the importance of measuring *degree* or intensity of affiliation with particular subgroups. Similarly, identification with a lifestyle segment, while not as central a construct as ethnicity, may also be somewhat subjective in nature and one’s degree of identification may determine the level of commitment he/she experiences regarding the norms of the group and the group’s influence on actions and attitudes (Hirschman 1981). In line with this call for both objective and subjective measurement in addition to a measure of degree of identification, the current study includes a single item self-report measure of urban identification in addition to the scale measure. Respondents are given the definition of Urban as “a racially diverse group of U.S. consumers – 50% Caucasians, 19% African-Americans, 17% Latinos, 4% Asians, 1% other – approximately 16 – 34 years old whose purchasing decisions are either directly or indirectly influenced by American inner city trends and hip-hop culture” and asked to indicate the degree to which they would classify themselves as

part of the Urban segment on a 7-point Likert scale from 1 (Not at All) to 7 (Very Much). The presence of a mid-point, 4, allows for those who feel indifferent, neutral or unsure to indicate as such; therefore the exclusion of subjects self-reporting a 4 or below leaves only “high” identifiers (as opposed to low, moderate or neutral/unsure) for inclusion and study in the Urban population. Thus, the scale was divided such that scores of 5 or higher were categorized as “Urban” while scores of 4 or below were categorized as non-Urban.

The 10-item scale measure is significantly correlated with the single-item self-report measure (Pearson’s correlation = .44,  $p < .0001$ ) which allows the use of this categorization (Urban vs. non-Urban) for the purposes of testing the study hypotheses using ANOVA.

### **Construct Validity**

The Urban segment is predicted to differ significantly from non-Urban populations in terms of attitudes and behaviors, leading to differences in consumption behaviors, information search and use, and decision making. For example, pre-tests show that subjects self-categorizing as Urban identifiers are significantly more likely than non-Urban subjects to watch BET (Black Entertainment Television) and MTV (Music Television) and listen to rap and R&B (rhythm & blues) styles of music and are less likely to listen to rock and alternative styles of music. It is predicted in the current research that individuals’ identification with urban subculture will also lead to tangible differences in attitudes and behaviors as consumers.

#### *Non-Traditional Sources of Information and Influence*

Given the heavy influence of rap music and hip-hop culture in Urban subculture and the prevalence of product placement in music videos and rap lyrics, it is predicted that Urban consumers are more likely to gain information and influence from non-traditional sources, particularly entertainment vehicles which often feature Urban style leaders (e.g. product placement, celebrity endorsement, branded entertainment and events and other entertainment-related vehicles). As such, urban style leaders, particularly more visible celebrity style leaders who introduce and proliferate the latest urban adoptions, serve as an important source of information and influence and as a motivating force behind widespread adoption of particular products, brands and ideas.

While a fair amount of research has been conducted on product placement (Russell 2002), this work has focused solely on placement in the traditional medium of network television. As uncovered in pre-tests, urban identifiers are more likely than non-Urban

identifiers to watch music videos and to listen to certain types of music. Hence the effects of product placement in these particular entertainment vehicles are examined separately from traditional film and television placements.

**H1:** Urban identifiers will be more likely than non-Urban consumers to get information from non-traditional/entertainment sources.

A large body of research has shown that group membership influences consumer purchasing decisions and contributes to predictions regarding urban identifier influences. Specifically, people tend to behave in accordance with a frame of reference produced by the groups to which they belong (Bearden & Etzel 1982). Reference group influence is also related to product conspicuousness. Publicly consumed luxury goods, in particular, are characterized by a great deal of brand influence within reference groups since there is a degree of exclusivity and the products are publicly noticeable and identifiable to consumers (Bearden and Etzel 1982). Veblen (1899) and later Mason (1981) find that there are exceptional forms of consumer behavior in which the buyer's assessment of third-party opinion and others' reactions to the proposed purchase becomes the major factor in the decision to buy (Mason 1981). These normative influences often cause the individual to do what a referent group or individual prescribes because it is instrumental in achieving a social objective, thus superceding actual product utility or attributes in influencing preferences.

In the purchase of socially symbolic products (such as those that signal inclusion and status within the Urban segment) Midgely (1983) finds that subjects relied more on interpersonal information sources than on retailer controlled information or the advice of store personnel. Entertainment media/vehicles such as music television, the internet, and the relatively new format of reality television programming allow for urban celebrities as well as non-celebrity urban style leaders to be closely followed by members of the urban subculture. This facilitated proliferation of urban lifestyle leadership represents not only a blurring of the line between advertising and entertainment (Shrum 2003), but also serves to broaden the scope and definition of "informal information source" to include individuals that are outside of personal friendship circles or geographic location, yet inside of the subcultural circle, and often distinct from celebrity endorsers. Given the findings regarding motivation and group influences as well as the importance of non-traditional/entertainment venues as sources of information, it is predicted that

the urban segment will be more influenced by these non-traditional sources than non-Urban consumers.

**H2:** Urban consumers will be more influenced by non-traditional/entertainment sources than non-Urban consumers.

### *Materialism*

Materialism is a major component of the hip-hop lifestyle and rap music as is evident in rap songs which often incorporate brand names - particularly luxury brands - into the lyrics and themes of the music (James 2004). For example, songs such as “Pass the Courvoisier” (a high-end brand of cognac) and “Air Force Ones” (a line of Nike sneaker) feature the brand as the subject and title of the song and in accompanying music videos. The emphasis on conspicuous material acquisition as a means of signaling success and status is a key element of rap music and the hip-hop lifestyle, thus reinforcing the extent to which materialism and possession of certain products/brands are key elements of the lifestyle and membership in the subculture. According to Belk, (1985), possessions help define our selves and often through materialistic acquisition consumers measure their success. Richins and Dawson (1992) find that strong material values centralize the importance of acquiring and owning possessions. This is important because, as Richins states, the objects that someone values are a window into that person’s inner self. In line with research by Belk (1985) the value of possessions stems not only from their ability to confer status, but also from their ability to project a desired self-imagined perfect life.

One predicted distinction between urban and non-urban consumers are each group’s values surrounding materialism. The emphasis on material acquisitions as a means of signaling success and status is clearly a key element of rap music and the hip-hop lifestyle that serves as the guiding voice of the urban segment. This leads to the first set of hypotheses regarding differences in materialism and its impact on purchase intentions:

**H3:** Urban identifiers will report higher levels of materialism than non-urban identifiers.

Given a higher level of materialism on the part of the urban consumer, it would follow that the aspects that define the construct – use of material possessions to measure success, membership in particular consumer societies or brand communities, and projection of a desired self image – will be more predictive of product/brand purchases by urban consumers.

**H4:** The Urban segment of consumers will be more likely than traditional consumers to identify materialistic reasons behind intended purchase of brands.

## **Study 1 Results**

In support of Hypothesis 1, urban identifiers were significantly more likely to get information about new products from non-traditional/entertainment related sources. Specifically, urban identifiers were significantly more likely to get information from movies, television, music, music videos, athletes and celebrities (see Table 2).

### **Insert Table 2 Here**

There was no significant difference between the groups in their use of more traditional sources such as magazines, news, books, friends, parents, or ads as sources of information. Similarly, in support of Hypothesis 2, urban identifiers were more influenced than non-Urban identifiers by non-traditional/entertainment sources including movies, television, music, music videos, athletes and celebrities as well as books and, at a marginally significant level, magazines. There was no significant difference in the influence of news, friends, parents or ads (see Table 3).

### **Insert Table 3 Here**

Hypothesis 3 predicts that urban identifiers will report higher levels of materialism than non-Urban identifiers. Using the materialism measure developed by Richins and Dawson (1992), subjects were queried on the 18 items which make up the 3 dimensions of materialism – defining success, acquisition centrality and pursuit of happiness. In accordance with previous findings (Richins and Dawson 1992), the three dimensions are significantly correlated with each other. In support of Hypothesis 3, the 10-item reduced Urban ID measure is significantly correlated with the overall materialism measure as well as each of the three dimensions. A closer look at the relationship between Urban ID and materialism shows that certain dimensions of each construct are significantly correlated. Table 4 shows these relationships.

### **Insert Table 4 Here**

In partial support of Hypothesis 4 which predicts that urban identifiers will be more likely to identify materialistic motivations behind purchases, when asked “How much does each of the following influence which brand of a particular product you buy?” Urban identifiers were significantly more likely to indicate that they buy a particular brand because it “represents my status” ( $F = 5.63, p < .02; X_{urb} = 4.91, X_{nonurb} = 4.46$ ). No significant differences were found for the influences of quality, prestige, “represents who I am,” “my parents use it,” “my friends use it,” or advertisements.

## **Cross Cultural Validation of the Urban ID Scale**

It is predicted that many of the same relationships found between Urban ID and the constructs of information and influence source and materialism will be found across cultures. It has long been noted that globalization is spreading the materialistic ideology of the West throughout the world, particularly in developing countries (Durvasula et al 2001), resulting in shared sets of consumption-related symbols that carry over into product categories, brands and consumption activities (Terpstra and David 1991). This West-inspired materialism, much like in the U.S., is not directly related to affluence (Ger and Belk 1996), thus broadening the appeal to individuals in first- to third-world countries.

In particular, new markets such as China are becoming increasingly important for advertisers and marketers of U.S. brands. Studies have shown that in Asia, there is a younger audience which welcomes the opportunity to get closer to the Western world (Economist 2004). The lyrics and images of hip-hop, the most visible manifestation of Urban ID, are often the opposite of mainstream society and thereby challenge societal norms reflecting and promoting a “defy the status quo mentality” that is representative of youth culture around the world. A report on the prevalence of hip-hop in China, particularly the children of China’s growing economic elite, asserts that Western fashion and music offer young Chinese ready-made ways to assert individualism in a society that still emphasizes public displays of conformity. Chinese youth report being particularly fascinated with black America because of its enormous influence on world music (Fackler 2002).

As such, the first set of hypotheses represents predictions regarding Hong Kong Chinese consumers’ fit with U.S. Urban ID findings. Specifically, as with American subjects, it is predicted that within a Hong Kong Chinese population:

- H5:** Underlying dimensions of Urban ID will be the same as those in the U.S. scale
- H6:** Urban identifiers will be more likely than non-Urban identifiers to become aware of brands through non-traditional (informal) sources
- H7:** Urban identifiers will be more influenced by non-traditional (informal) sources than non-Urban identifiers

## **Overcoming Animosity**

The animosity model of foreign product purchase (Klein et al. 1998) finds that consumer animosity toward a particular country over current or past military, political or economic disputes or disagreement affects consumers' willingness to buy products produced in or by firms from that country, often despite individuals' positive ratings of the products' attributes. This work goes on to show that a product's origin will affect consumers' buying decisions directly and independently of product judgments and stresses the importance to managers of understanding what effect country-of-origin or brand-related associations are likely to have on consumers who evaluate and select foreign goods. It is proposed in the current research that higher levels of urban identification may work to override feelings of animosity toward the U.S. with regard to product purchase. Again recalling the observation of young Chinese consumers and their affiliation with hip-hop culture by Fackler (2001), he finds that "Hip-hop's growing following underscores the popularity of American culture in China, despite the two nations' often rocky political ties and the misgivings many Chinese feel toward U.S. military power." Thus, while this Urban affiliation may make individuals more open to cultural imports from the U.S., it is not expected to soften or change opinions regarding views of U.S. political or military behavior, but simply to work *in spite of* existing feelings of animosity to affect willingness to buy U.S. products. In fact, according to Fackler (2001), experts warn that the same young Chinese who consume American brands and music are no less likely to march on the U.S. embassy if they believe that their national dignity is at stake – as they did amid tensions over the U.S. spy plane's downing in 2000. These findings should be of particular interest to U.S. marketers abroad given ongoing tensions between the U.S. and several nations surrounding past military action in Iraq and ongoing political involvement in other regions and, as such, lead to the following hypotheses regarding urban identifiers.

**H8:** Subjects high in animosity will report less willingness to purchase U.S. products than those low in animosity

**H9:** Urban identifiers will be more likely to report willingness to purchase U.S. products than non-Urban identifiers

**H10:** Urban identifiers will report a lower level of cultural animosity than non-Urban identifiers

## **Methodology**

In line with previous animosity research conducted within a Chinese population, and given the often-tenuous relationship between the U.S. and China, the current study measures urban identification and its effects on attitudes toward the U.S. and its brands within a Chinese undergraduate population in Hong Kong. University students were selected because they serve as an appropriate age group for the urban segment, falling within its 16-35 age range, and are generally technology- and media-savvy, with high rates of Internet and cable access. One hundred and ten students at a private university in Hong Kong were surveyed using the same pen and paper instrument consisting of the 30-item Urban identification scale and a set of related questions regarding sources of information and influence, as well as an additional set of survey questions adapted from previous animosity and ethnocentrism scales (Klein et al. 1998). The order in which subjects were given each of these sets of questions was counterbalanced.

Urban identification scale items, all measured on a 7-point scale, were analyzed using factor analysis to identify the major components of the Urban identification construct and to compare the current findings to recently collected U.S. scale development results. The dichotomous Urban/Non-Urban measure was used to assess behavioral differences between the two groups. A list of sources of information and influence were given, including formal/traditional sources of product information (advertisements), informal/non-traditional sources of interest (television, music, music videos, athletes, celebrities) and others (books, parents, friends, magazine articles, news).

In line with Klein and colleagues' study of animosity (1998), respondents were asked to indicate their agreement on a 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree) scale with statements regarding four general constructs: (1) U.S. product quality, (2) willingness to buy U.S. products, (3) consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp and Sharma 1987), and (4) animosity toward U.S. generally and war, economic and cultural animosity in particular. The survey was conducted in English, as instruction at the university takes place in English.

## **Results**

*Urban Identification Scale.* Like the Urban identification scale results for the U.S. student population, the Hong Kong scale results showed three underlying dimensions that comprise the construct of urban identification – “Hip Hop Headz,” “Fashion Forward” and “Free Spirit,” the most influential of which was identification with or adoption of a hip-hop lifestyle (“Hip Hop Headz”). Thus Hypothesis 5 was supported. Results of the 5-item Hong Kong Urban



identification scale are seen in Table 5, with the shaded column representing the results of the U.S. sample for comparison.

**Insert Table 5 Here**

*Sources of Information.* As a test of Hypothesis 6, subjects were asked to report the extent to which each of a number of items were sources of information about new trends. Unlike U.S. Urban subjects who were significantly more likely than their non-Urban counterparts to get such information from all entertainment related sources (movies, TV, music videos, music, athletes and celebrities), Hong Kong Urban identifiers showed more of a tendency to get information from broader forms of media (news) and informal sources (friends) as well as entertainment venues. Like American Urban identifiers, they were significantly more likely to get information on new trends from movies, music, music videos and celebrities and, at a marginally significant level, television and their parents (see Table 6 for results on this factor). There were no significant differences between urban identifiers and non-Urban identifiers in either population in the use of books, advertisements or magazine content. Thus in support of Hypothesis 6, urban identifiers were more likely than their non-Urban counterparts to get information from non-traditional/informal sources.

**Insert Table 6 Here**

*Sources of Influence.* In support of Hypothesis 7, Hong Kong Urban identifiers, like their American Urban counterparts, are also significantly more likely than non-Urban identifiers to be influenced in their purchasing by informal/non-traditional entertainment sources such as music, music videos, athletes, movies, television and celebrities as well as by friends. Urban identifiers are also more likely than non-Urban identifiers to be influenced by traditional advertisements and, at a marginally significant level, by magazine content (see Table 7 for results on this factor).

**Insert Table 7 Here**

*Animosity toward the U.S. and its brands.* The predicted relationship between animosity toward the U.S., Urban ID, and willingness to purchase U.S. products, was tested using latent variable structural equation modeling (Jöreskog and Sörbom 1993). While the animosity and willingness to purchase constructs have been defined in previous research (Klein et al 1998) each construct in the model was analyzed separately to establish its components and their scale reliability (see Table 5 for Urban ID constructs and Table 8 for Animosity and Willingness to Purchase).

*Animosity.* In line with Klein et al. (1998) the animosity construct was made up of three components – war animosity, economic animosity and cultural animosity. In the present study, however, war animosity (which was specific to a Chinese/Japanese war that instigated the specific animosity addressed in the Klein et al. research) was replaced with a more general political animosity which included reference to the U.S. invasion of Iraq. As in the referenced work by Klein et al., cultural animosity is represented by a single item measure that captures the sentiment (“I believe the U.S. has too much cultural influence on China”). These three components have a Cronbach’s alpha score of .65.

*Willingness to Buy.* In line with Klein et al. (1998), five of the original six measures of willingness to buy were used. These five items hung together well with a Cronbach’s alpha score of .78.

*Ethnocentrism.* Klein et al.’s (1998) 6-item measure of ethnocentrism was taken although no specific hypotheses address this construct. While the items hung together well (alpha = .80) and it was a significant predictor of willingness to purchase U.S. products, it was not significantly correlated with animosity or with Urban ID. Thus, for the sake of efficiency it was left out of the model.

*Urban American.* Early theorizing on the concept of urban identification made the assumption that it was widely perceived to have origins in and be strongly affiliated with the U.S. As anecdotal evidence and exploratory work has since shown, this is not necessarily the case. Two questions were included to assess 1) the extent to which subjects believe that the urban subculture is inherently, or originally, of the U.S. and, 2) if it is a global culture with no particular nationality. The two questions are not highly correlated, as is shown in the low Cronbach’s alpha score ( $\alpha = .29$ ) because it is possible to agree with both (i.e. Urban started in the U.S. but has *become* global). However, the construct’s presence in the model improves the overall fit and brings the path between Urban ID and (un)willingness to buy closer to significance thus it may have a tangible effect on the potential relationship. Further study of the measurement and role of this construct may shed some theoretical light on the effects of Urban ID on willingness to purchase U.S. goods.

*The structural model* I am not sure this figure is necessary. It is not clear what we see there. . The results of the structural equation analysis are shown in Exhibit 3. The model achieved a good level of fit:  $\chi^2(220) = 305.33$ ,  $p < .001$ , RMSEA = .06, NFI = .78, IFI = .93, TLI = .91 and CFI = .92. Overall, the items in the model accounted for 24% of the variance in willingness to

buy. As predicted in H8, the path from animosity to (un)willingness to buy U.S. products was significant and negative. No significant main effect of Urban ID was found on (un)willingness to buy, thus failing to provide support for H9. Though not significant, the effect of Urban ID on this factor was negative and approached significance, lending directional support to the theory that it may be related to increased willingness to purchase U.S. products.

Hypothesis 10 provides more insight into the potential relationship between Urban ID and (un)willingness to purchase, given the role of animosity. As predicted in H10, the path from Urban ID to animosity was significant and negative, showing that Urban identifiers are less likely to report animosity toward the U.S. Given that animosity is a significant predictor of (un)willingness to purchase U.S. products, it would follow that Urban ID indirectly affects willingness to purchase through its effects on animosity. The following additional analysis examines the role of Urban ID in (un)willingness to buy more closely.

#### Sub-Group Analysis

An additional analysis was conducted to examine differences in (un)willingness to buy between high- and low-Urban identifiers. A univariate analysis of variance was run to test between-subject effects of Urban ID on (un)willingness to buy with ethnocentrism as a covariate. As is shown in Table 9, Urban ID is a significant predictor of (un)willingness to buy with ethnocentrism as a highly significant covariate.

### **Discussion**

The results of this initial study support each of the research hypotheses and provide empirical support for the effects of urban identification on animosity toward the U.S. and its products and, to some extent, on willingness to purchase U.S. products. These results are encouraging in that they indicate the existence of a subcultural group that goes beyond ethnic and geographic boundaries to align and appeal to young-minded consumers around the world. As marketing researchers continue to explore and identify criteria by which to segment and appeal to consumers and to predict behavior, the current research takes steps toward understanding a pervasive and rapidly growing lifestyle segment. While marketing practitioners have been attempting to appeal to this segment for some time and are increasingly recognizing its value as a viable consumer segment and influencer of broader consumer behavior, an understanding of the dimensions that exist and their effects on global brand attitudes is crucial to effective strategy development that attempts to position brands around the world. Especially at a time when animosity exists at various levels between countries and regions ranging from ongoing tension to outright anger, an understanding of what variables might not only bypass, but

mitigate animosity to affect foreign product purchase is important for marketing practitioners with global aspirations.

Several limitations exist to the current study, including the small sample size consisting of university students in only two countries. While university students do present an age-appropriate and representatively technology- and media-savvy segment, future studies would benefit from a larger, more diverse sample to allow for more generalizable findings. In addition, samples from a number of different countries would also test the generalizability of the Urban identification scale globally and how it affects attitudes toward U.S. products. It is possible that individuals from nations with more or less contentious present and past dealings with the United States could be differentially influenced by Urban identification. Additionally, the fact that the current population was drawn exclusively from Hong Kong prevents the study's generalizability to the Chinese population at large, as there may be tangible difference between Hong Kong and mainland Chinese populations.

The question was raised as to whether individuals in non-U.S. countries actually do view Urban culture as a phenomenon of American origin. It was suggested that this interpretation of the origins of Urban culture may affect responses to U.S. brands as a result of identification with the subculture. Two questions were included in the present study to measure this belief. In response to the question "To what extent do you view Urban culture as a phenomenon of American origin?" there was no difference between Urban and non-Urban identifiers in their responses (Urban = 4.04; non-Urban = 4.37; n.s.), which were both just over the mid-point on a 7-point scale. When asked, "To what extent do you believe that Urban culture has become a general global youth culture with no particular national affiliation?" subjects differed between Urban and non, with Urban subjects more likely to agree with the statement ( $x = 5.25$ ) than non-Urban ( $x = 4.71$ ). This may go along with or possibly provide explanation for non-Urban respondents' more closed views toward the U.S. and its brands although the nature of that relationship is unclear – it is possible that non-Urban identifiers identify less with the subculture because they see it as representative of or derived from the U.S. It is also possible that Urban identifiers help to justify their affiliation by defining it as a world culture with less affiliation to the U.S. in particular. However, this second explanation would not account for their less negative responses toward the U.S. Further research into Urban identification may help shed

more light on this question as well as further implications for global marketing, branding and promotion strategy.

Several areas within and related to this particular lifestyle domain are ripe areas for further research including diffusion of styles and innovations, effects of materialism, response to particular forms of ad messages and content, and differences in attitudes and behaviors involving the use and influence of technology. Further collaborative study by marketing researchers and practitioners will undoubtedly lead to valuable consumer and social insights into a powerful lifestyle segment.

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## Appendix

To what extent does each of the following characteristics describe YOU? (Urban ID Scale)

	<b>Not At All</b>		<b>Somewhat</b>			<b>Very Much</b>	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Multicultural	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Have “attitude”	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Listen to rap music	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Purchase rap music	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Familiar with hip-hop slang	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Familiar with hip-hop fashion	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Influenced by hip-hop styles/culture	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Spend money (versus saving)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Adventurous	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Not happy with the status quo	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Expressive	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Individualist	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Sexy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Cool	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Appreciate hip-hop	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Up-to-date / trendy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Had experience with life in a large city	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Comfortable / familiar with African-American culture	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Flashy	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Rhythmic	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Young-hearted	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Use/ understand slang	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Read “Source” / “Honey” / “Vibe” / “Savoy” magazines	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Dance	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Resourceful (Can always make do)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Animated	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Like flashy clothing	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Like flashy car rims	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Fashion leader	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Trend setter	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

**Table 1**  
**Factor Analysis of the Urban ID Scale**  
**(U.S.)**

Factors	Cronbach Alpha	% Variance	Cumulative% Variance	Eigenvalue
<b>“Hip-Hop Headz”</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Listen to rap music</li> <li>▪ Appreciate hip-hop</li> <li>▪ Influenced by hip-hop</li> <li>▪ Familiar w/hip-hop slang</li> </ul>	$\alpha = .90$	31.11	31.11	10.53
<b>“Fashion Forward”</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Fashion leader</li> <li>▪ Flashy</li> <li>▪ Trendy</li> </ul>	$\alpha = .85$	10.68	41.78	3.13
<b>“Free Spirit”</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Individualist</li> <li>▪ Expressive</li> <li>▪ Resourceful</li> </ul>	$\alpha = .79$	6.87	48.65	2.15

**Table 2**  
**Sources of Information**  
**(U.S.)**

Factor	Urban mean	Non-Urban mean	F	Significance
Movies	4.44	4.08	4.08	p < .05
Television	4.62	4.24	3.76	p < .05
Music	5.39	4.74	11.29	p < .001
Music videos	5.43	4.53	19.50	p < .001
Athletes	3.99	3.26	11.98	p < .001
Celebrities	5.41	4.98	5.0	p < .05
Magazines				n.s.
News				n.s.
Books				n.s.
Friends				n.s.
Parents				n.s.
Ads				n.s.

**Table 3**  
**Sources of Influence**  
**(U.S.)**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Urban mean</b>	<b>Non-Urban mean</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Movies	3.59	2.82	15.12	p < .001
Television	3.75	2.94	17.22	p < .001
Music	4.18	3.32	16.09	p < .001
Music videos	4.25	2.95	39.18	p < .001
Athletes	3.22	2.44	12.54	p < .001
Celebrities	4.48	3.68	12.81	p < .001
Books	2.50	1.97	10.41	p < .001
Magazines	5.00	4.63	3.16	p < .10
News				n.s.
Friends				n.s.
Parents				n.s.
Ads				n.s.

**Table 4**  
**Urban ID and Materialism**  
**(U.S.)**

	<b>Overall Materialism</b>	<b>Defining Success</b>	<b>Acquisition Centrality</b>	<b>Pursuit of Happiness</b>
<b>10-item Urban ID Measure</b>	.21 p < .001	.15 p < .05	.21 p < .001	.13 p < .05
<b>“Hip Hop Headz”</b>	.13 p < .05			.17 p < .005
<b>“Fashion Forward”</b>	.36 p < .0001	.30 p < .0001	.48 p < .0001	
<b>“Free Spirit”</b>			.13 p < .05	-.12 p < .10

**Table 5**  
**Urban Identification Scale**  
**(Hong Kong)**

Hong Kong Factors	<i>U.S. Factors</i>	Cronbach Alpha	% Variance (US score)	Cumulative % Variance	Eigenvalue
<b>“Hip-Hop Headz”</b> •Fam hip-hop slang •Influenced by hip-hop •Familiar w/hip-hop fashion	<b>“Hip-Hop Headz”</b> •Listen to rap music •Appreciate hip-hop •Influenced by hip-hop •Familiar w/hip-hop slang	$\alpha = .93$	34.34 (31.11)	34.34	10.30
<b>“Fashion Forward”</b> •Fashion leader •Trend setter •Trendy	<b>“Fashion Forward”</b> •Fashion leader •Flashy •Trendy	$\alpha = .88$	8.37 (10.68)	42.70	2.51
<b>“Free Spirit”</b> •Resourceful •Animated •Have Rhythm	<b>“Free Spirit”</b> •Individualist •Expressive •Resourceful	$\alpha = .79$	6.09 (6.87)	48.79	1.83

**Table 6**  
**Sources of Information**  
**(Hong Kong)**

Factor	Urban mean	Non-Urban mean	F	Significance
Movies	4.84	4.02	13.65	p < .001
Friends	6.00	5.19	12.78	p < .001
Celebrities	5.31	4.46	11.54	p < .001
Music	5.33	4.59	9.84	p < .01
News	5.33	4.81	4.51	p < .05
Music videos	4.94	4.42	4.06	p < .05
Television	4.69	4.19	3.52	p < .10
Parents	3.65	3.10	2.95	p < .10
Magazines				n.s.
Athletes				n.s.
Books				n.s.
Advertisements				n.s.

**Table 7**  
**Sources of Influence**  
**(Hong Kong)**

<b>Factor</b>	<b>Urban mean</b>	<b>Non-Urban mean</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Music videos	4.00	3.29	7.64	p < .01
Movies	3.90	3.15	6.91	p < .01
Ads	5.86	5.32	6.83	p < .01
Music	4.27	3.54	6.44	p < .05
Friends	6.06	5.53	6.01	p < .05
Athletes	3.27	2.71	3.96	p < .05
Television	4.06	3.42	4.15	p < .05
Celebrities	4.33	3.76	3.77	p < .06
Magazines	5.29	4.76	3.05	p < .10
<i>News</i>				<i>n.s.</i>
<i>Books</i>				<i>n.s.</i>
<i>Parents</i>				<i>n.s.</i>

**Table 8**  
**Structural Equation Model**  
**Construct Reliability Tests**

Construct	Components	Variables	Cronbach Alpha
<b>Animosity</b> ( $\alpha = .65$ )	Political Animosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Angry at the US</li> <li>• Don't like US policies</li> <li>• Angry about Iraq</li> </ul>	$\alpha = .77$
	Economic Animosity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Too much econ power</li> <li>• US takes advantage</li> <li>• Too much econ infl</li> </ul>	$\alpha = .73$
	Cultural Animosity	Too much cult infl	n/a
<b>(Un)Willingness to Purchase US Products</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guilty buying US prod</li> <li>• Never buy US car</li> <li>• Avoid US products</li> <li>• Idea of owning</li> <li>• Pay more for Canada</li> </ul>	$\alpha = .78$
<b>Urban American</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Urban is American</li> <li>• Urban is global, not of one country</li> </ul>	$\alpha = .29$

\* Components and variables adapted from Klein, Ettenson & Morris 1998

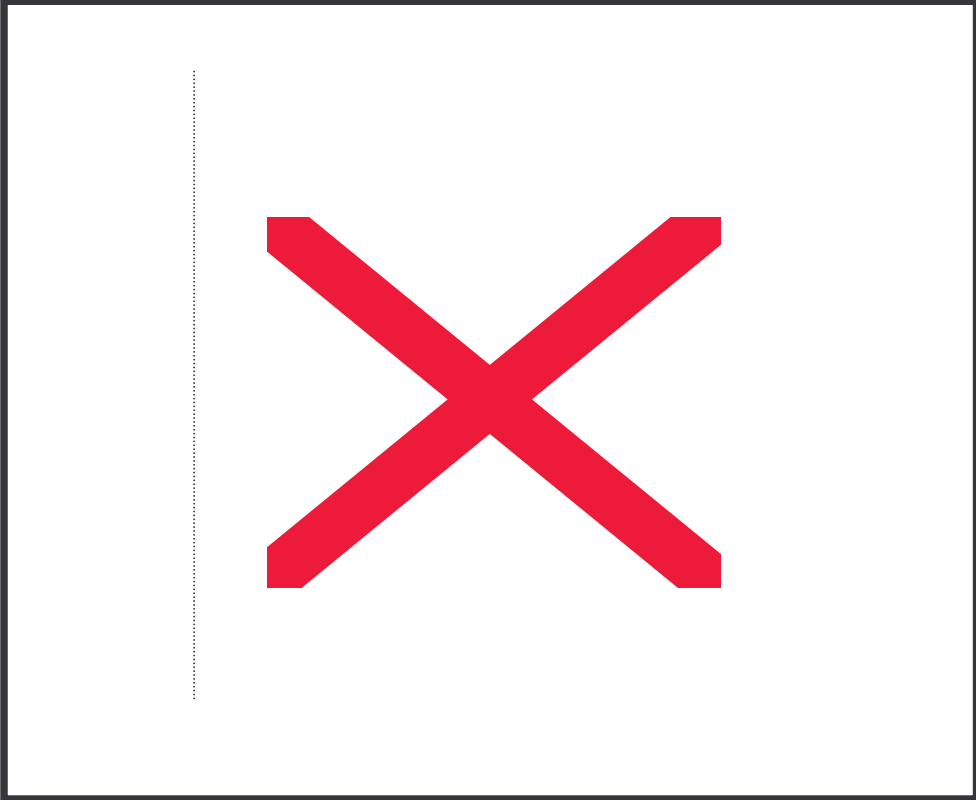
**Table 9**  
**Tests of Between-Subjects Effects**

Dependent Variable: willing

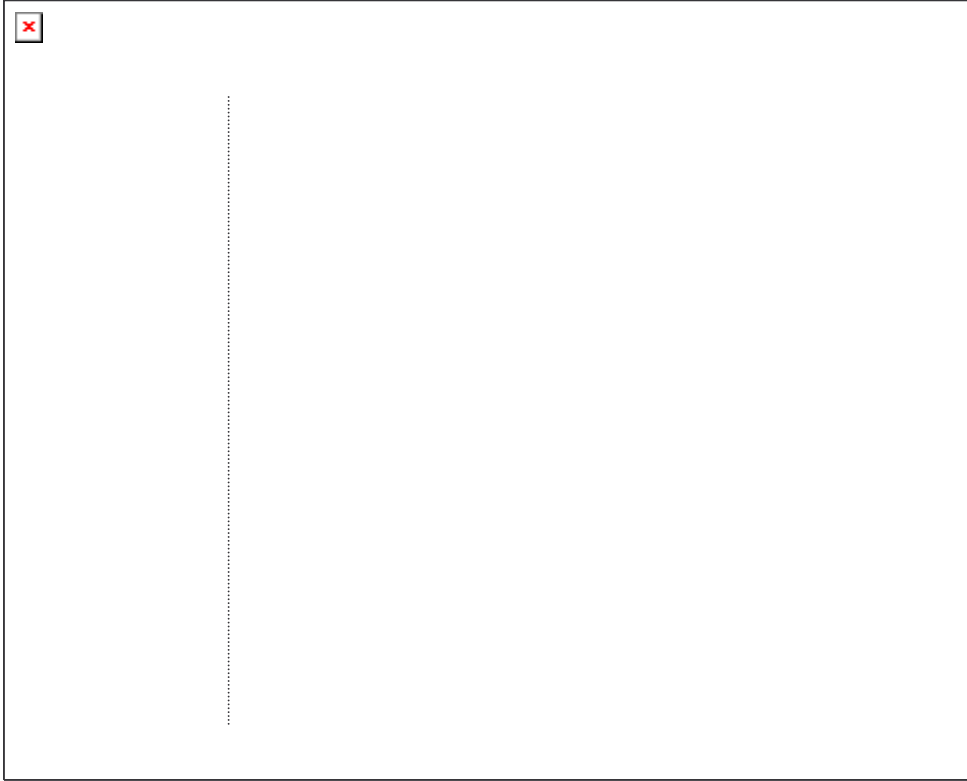
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	41.222(a)	7	5.889	13.473	.000
Intercept	7.045	1	7.045	16.118	.000
ethnoc	36.917	1	36.917	84.459	.000
urbratin	9.520	6	1.587	3.630	.003
Error	43.710	100	.437		
Total	578.160	108			
Corrected Total	84.932	107			

a R Squared = .485 (Adjusted R Squared = .449)

**Exhibit 1**

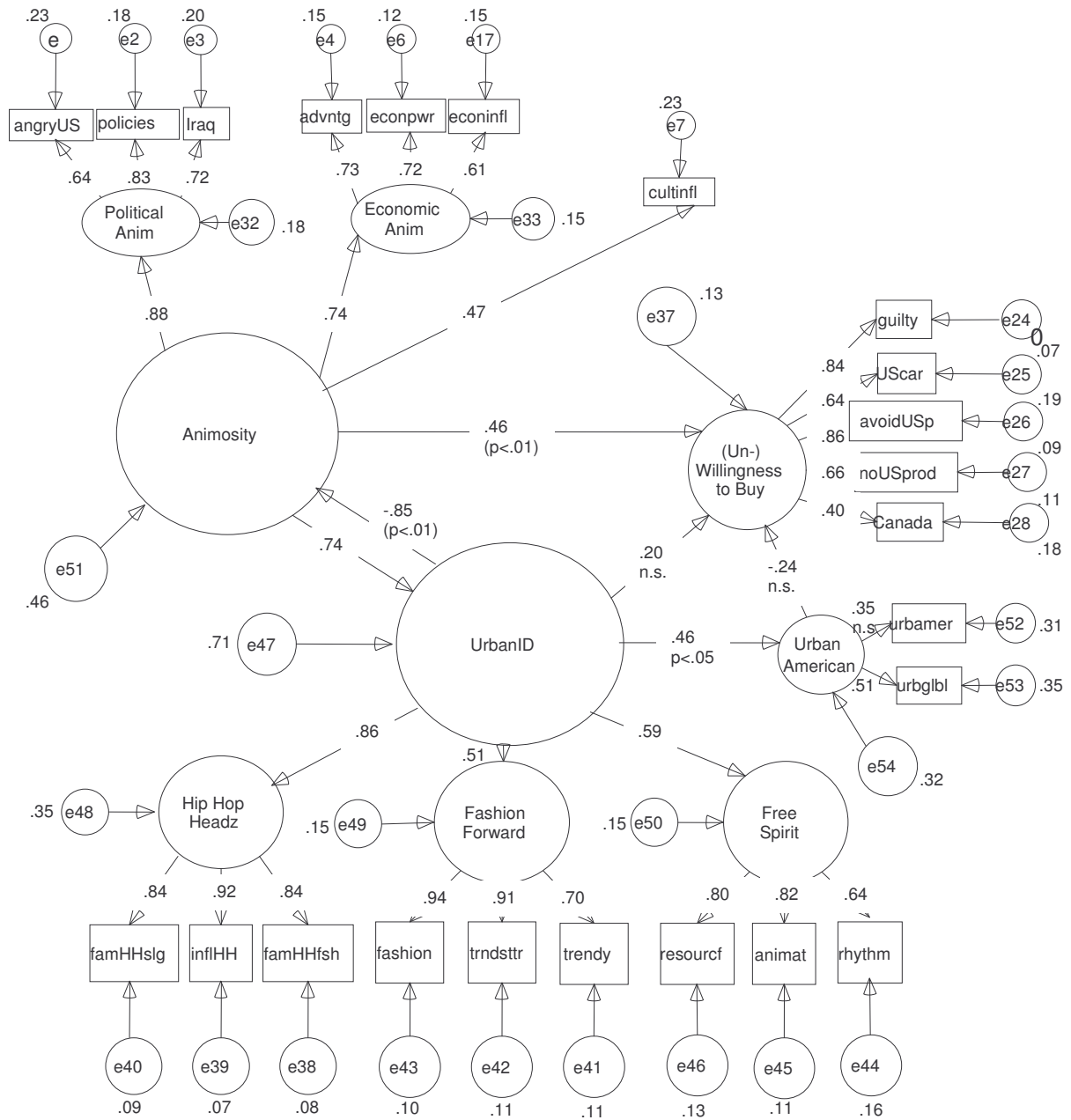


## Exhibit 2





### Exhibit Structural Equation Model



- \*residual values are unstandardized
- All path coefficients are significant at .001 unless otherwise specified