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## Artrepreneurship and Learning in Ethnic Markets

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### **Abstract**

Many scholarly studies point to the growing cultural diversity in the marketplace and subsequent cultural learning mechanisms adapted by marketers and consumers. This research advances the theoretical and instrumental understanding of cultural learning mechanisms adopted by a specific form of entrepreneurs called ethnic artrepreneurs. Using interview data with 16 ethnic artrepreneurs, the study finds that ethnic artrepreneurs' learning is cyclical in nature consisting of interconnecting stages. Following, Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory, the study labels and discusses emerging themes as per four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. The study represents an attempt to identify artrepreneurship as a strategic resource for marketing in ethnic markets.

## **1. Introduction**

Consumer and marketer acculturation are important issues for marketers who have to deal with a growing marketplace cultural diversity (Penaloza & Gilly, 1999). Acculturation requires the interaction of at least two cultures and is a process by which a person learns and adopts the norms and values of a different culture (Rudmin, 2003). Consumer acculturation studies focus on progressive learning of a new culture, making sense and adjusting to the culture changes that occur subsequent to cultural contact (Laroche & Jamal, 2015). A related stream of research focuses on ethnic entrepreneurship revealing the extent to which ethnic entrepreneurs take an active interest in identity based relations facilitating consumer acculturation processes (Jamal, 2003; 2005) including culture swapping (Oswald, 1999) and frame switching (Luna, Ringberg & Peracchio, 2008). Ethnic entrepreneurs actively engage in progressive learning, translating cultural customs and developing adaptation strategies while coping with multiple acculturation agents (Jamal 2005; Penaloza & Gilly, 1999).

This study aims to investigate the learning mechanisms adopted by ethnic minority artists, henceforth, referred to as ethnic entrepreneurs. Like consumers, ethnic entrepreneurs also face a clash of cultures with the need to navigate in between heritage and host cultures. They may act as ‘bicultural mediators’ (Penaloza & Gilly, 1999) promoting marketplace diversity and transcultural consumption (Elliot, Cherian & Casakin, 2015) by utilizing contrasting elements from diverse cultural representations (Jamal, 2005). However, ethnic marketing literature largely ignores the extent to which ethnic entrepreneurs’ engagement in art facilitates diversity in the marketplace. The production of a work of art relies crucially on a hidden collaborative network of artisans, suppliers and distributors (Besich & Kittredge, 2008) facilitating interaction among

cultural diversity, creativity and innovation enhancing competitiveness of local economies (Smallbone, Berotti & Ekanem, 2005).

In this context, this study investigates how and in what sense ethnic artrepreneurs progressively learn and translate cultural customs via artistic engagement (Besich & Kittredge, 2008). How do they exploit cultural consumption markets, appropriate and commodify their own cultural talent, creativity and originality while working in a low capital, low knowledge but highly competitive and multicultural environment? Our motivation is to contribute towards a better understanding of ethnic entrepreneurship in specific contexts such as art and to discuss implications for acculturation and ethnic marketing. The present study differs from earlier efforts by its consideration of specific learning processes that ethnic artrepreneurs undergo as they acculturate into and propagate marketplace diversity.

We organize our work as follows: We begin our discussion of artrepreneurship in ethnic markets by situating it in relation to the ethnic marketing tradition in marketing and consumer research and identify the research need. Next, we outline literature characterizing learning mechanism within artrepreneurship in ethnic markets. We then move on to present our data collection and data analyses procedures in our methodology section and offer an integrative perspective of artrepreneurship in ethnic markets in our findings section. Finally, we conclude with a discussion of the contributions and limitations of our work and directions for promising future research.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. 1 Artrepreneurship**

Artrepreneurs, being a subcategory, share similar traits with the category of entrepreneurs — creativity, proactiveness, alertness, and opportunistic behavior. With a specific focus on

culture and art, artrepreneurship brings together individuals from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds and unites them by a common goal (Benjamin, Cerere, Granier & Tang, 2006). Artepreneurs represent a creative class that makes good use of market information for refining ideas, identifying problems, and finding relevant solutions (Ayse, Dees & Anderson, 2002; Bird, 1989). Their use of imagination is crucial for developing social consciousness and new forms of civic association and collaboration (Greene, 1995). They learn and educate themselves and others in ways that imaginatively empower and promote respect for diversity, build communities and engage other artists in a participatory democratic manner (Garber, 2001). Their motivational disposition acts as a motor for developing personal visions (Ayse et al., 2002). Most of them have a personal agenda of achieving progress and of changing socio-economic realities, and specific cultural contexts impact this agenda (Mair & Marti, 2006). Artrepreneurs survive and grow despite lack of finance, formal business training and education and, therefore, their learning and creativity become central to success. Because their learning is not formal, it is interesting and useful to understand exactly how they learn their craft and subsequently impact acculturation experiences in the marketplace through artistic engagement.

### **2.1.2. Ethnic Artrepreneurship**

The literature on ethnic entrepreneurship, the marketing/entrepreneurship interface and consumer acculturation provides a conceptual basis to understand the cultural underpinnings of ethnic artrepreneurship. Ethnic entrepreneurship refers to “a set of connections and regular patterns of interaction among people sharing common national background or migration experiences” (Waldinger, Ward, Aldrich & Stanfield, 1990: p. 3). Networks of ethnic minority enterprises act as distinct marketing systems within the mainstream economy (Iyer & Shapiro 1999; Jamal 2005). Specific ethnic entrepreneurs take active interest in identity based relations

facilitating consumer acculturation processes (Jamal, 2005). Accordingly, ethnic entrepreneurs compete with other entrepreneurs very much in the same way as ethnic entrepreneurs compete with mainstream businesses with a special interest in ethnic and cultural identity projections via their artistic work. This is mainly because ethnic identity pervades much of the social and business fabric of the ethnic minority communities in the US (e.g. Iyer & Shapiro, 1999).

As a collective entity, ethnic entrepreneurs act as culturally adaptive communities that either embrace diversity to capitalize on cultural assets or utilize arts and culture as an economic development tool with the ultimate goal of achieving improvements for the community and its inhabitants (Benjamin et al., 2006; Smallbone et al., 2005). At the very heart of this competency is the notion of experiential learning that involves experience and knowledge of doing business (Carson & Gilmore, 2000) and of creating and recreating art in a culturally authentic manner, as well as communicating this to all stakeholders of different cultural backgrounds. Despite the potential role of ethnic entrepreneurship, little research has investigated their experiential learning occasioned by their acculturation experiences. Such a perspective is useful as it helps in understanding how various elements of culture generate and impact creativity within a business domain (Peterson & Anand, 2004).

## **2.2. Experiential Learning and Acculturation**

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory (ELT) is a theory of how individuals learn from experience (See Figure 1). Kolb argued that experiential learning encompasses the entirety of the human learning process, where experience forms the foundation for four modes of learning: feeling, reflecting, thinking, and acting. Experiential Learning is a continuous process whereby learning emerges from the interplay between expectation and experience. The process begins with concrete experience (CE), where one is involved in a new experience. CE serves as

the basis for observation and reflection (RO), a process of objective analysis, in which the experience is subsequently assimilated into abstract conceptualization (AC), which involves reviewing conceptual understanding. From AC, the experience is then formed into active experimentation (AE) within the milieu. AE both completes the cycle of learning and ensures that it begins afresh by assisting the creation of new experiences. CE emphasizes the ability to employ feeling, intuitive understanding in the present reality, and sensitivity towards other people's emotions and values. AC involves the use of logic, ideas, and concepts. RO capabilities require understanding the meaning of thoughts and situations by carefully watching and listening. RO emphasizes using reflective understanding to uncover how and why things happen and imagining the meaning of situations and ideas, seeing things from different perspectives, and appreciating different opinions. The AE process focuses on practical applications, experimenting to find solutions and a pragmatic focus on what works.

Kolb defines several characteristics of the experiential learning theory: learning is best conceived of as a process with ideas formed and reformed through experience; learning involves transactions between the person and the world (transaction being distinct from the limited concept of interaction). Finally, learning requires the resolution of conflicts between dialectically opposed models of adaptation to the world. The acculturation process can be categorized as a learning process with similar characteristics of experiential learning. As a process likely to occur outside any formal educational system, cross-cultural learning within ethnic entrepreneurship fits naturally under the general category of experiential learning (see for example Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001). An extensive review of acculturation (Laroche & Jamal, 2015) and experiential learning (Kolb, 1984; Kolb, Boyatzis & Mainemelis, 2001) literature suggests that both acculturation and experiential learning interlink with each other and yet we find no



research investigating the dynamics involved when ethnic entrepreneurs learn and acculturate. This research aims to fill this gap in the literature. In this study, we integrate experiential learning theory with research on acculturation by explicating findings from our study that illustrates this interplay.

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Insert Figure 1 about here  
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### **3. METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1. Research Context**

The study selected the Pilsen neighborhood, situated in the West side of Chicago as a research site due to its strong cultural identity, its importance to ethnic entrepreneurship in general, and to ethnic entrepreneurship in particular. The Pilsen neighborhood has a large Mexican population and includes other ethnic groups such as Slovaks, Slovenes, Croats, and Austrians, as well as immigrants of Polish and Lithuanian heritage. Pilsen continues to serve as port of entry for immigrants, both legal and undocumented (Orta, 2010). Pilsen's rich Neo-Bohemian Baroque architectural heritage provides an ideal setting for the ethnic entrepreneurs who want to promote commercial tourism with the neighborhood setting as a business corridor, whilst addressing community problems such as urban blight, immigrant rights, labor rights, social justice, religious activism and transnational development. Pilsen is also famous for its murals and the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum where the Pilsen ethnic entrepreneurs exhibit their works. This context with adorning building facades and design artifacts associated with the Mexican culture tells the story about the acculturation experience of the ethnic entrepreneurs.

#### **3.2. Research Design**

To explore the research questions, we adopt a grounded theory approach that incorporates interviews and observations into an interpretive analysis (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). The study uses the ethnographic method of phenomenological interviews using open-ended questions that allow probing about cultural environment and creative design activities (See Appendix 1). Ethnography is considered the ideal research approach for our multi-ethnic study because it gives an account of differences between the world of the group being studied and that of the audience that is grounded in culture (e.g. Risjord, 2007). Phenomenology is the study of a given phenomenon as experienced by the appearances of things or things as they appear in an individual's experience, and of how that individual assigns meaning to that experience (e.g. Angelides, 2001).

### **3.3. Data Collection**

We choose two different ethnic groups (Mexican-Americans and African-Americans) due to their history of entrepreneurial activities within the Pilsen and South Chicago neighborhoods. The sample size consists of 16 entrepreneurs (10 Mexican-Americans and 6 African-Americans) selected through purposive sampling. The interviewees were selected from a listing at the National Museum of Mexican art where the ethnic entrepreneurs living in the Pilsen neighborhood exhibit their works, private design offices within the neighborhood and some referrals from these offices. The sample size is sufficient given the nature and objectives of this qualitative inquiry (McCracken, 1988). Details of participants are shown in Table 1. Interviews were conducted over an eight-month period and each interview lasted for an average of one hour. All interviewees are entrepreneurs who make a living out of their artworks. The ethnic entrepreneurs living in the Pilsen community are profoundly shaped by their heritage and culture, as well as by environmental issues and practices back home. Most ethnic

artrepreneurs in the Pilsen artistic enclave involve themselves in discussing events “back home” and such discussions provide a foundation to represent their acculturation journey via artworks.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

Data analysis employed the grounded theory method as devised by Strauss and Corbin (1998) with an emergent design of inquiry, involving summary description, pattern coding, category formation and reformation, interpretation of themes and negative case analysis (Spiggle, 1994). Transcription took place following each interview. Those transcripts were entered into Atlas Ti, where sorting of the data began. Individual findings were carefully examined to identify all the possible explanations to what was being said by participants and to develop a coding scheme. This coding scheme guided the data analysis to be systematic, logical, and scientific (Weber, 1990). A cross-case analysis was conducted to identify similarities and differences among participants. When the notes revealed insightful ideas, we contacted interviewees a second time to follow up on salient insights. We applied inter-judge reliability to review the notes in joint discussions, defining emerging ideas. The themes that emerged from data analysis represent a patterned response, which capture the main meaningful aspects of the responses.

## **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

An interpretation of qualitative data led to the identification of four major themes, central to the understanding of how and in what sense ethnic artrepreneurs learn and engage with cultures. Our findings suggest that ethnic artrepreneurs’ learning is cyclical in nature consisting of interconnecting stages. Kolb’s (1984) experiential learning theory exposes the principles that a person would learn through discovery and experience and we find support in our data. Following

Kolb (1984), we label and discuss our emerging themes as per four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

#### **4.1. Concrete Experience**

The participating entrepreneurs engage in self-discourse and in interpretation of their own lived cultural experiences and in painting their own perceptions of reality based on their personal involvement with others within their specific cultural/ethnic settings. Participants frequently speak about the extent to which they learn and gain experience from their cultural milieu – an act that sets the scene for their learning cycle but in acculturation terms, provides the basic mechanism for projecting cultural values to others in the multicultural marketplace. Consider the following quote from Jose Guerrero, a Mexican entrepreneur. Jose Guerrero is a Mexican immigrant who worked at the Chicago Park District, joined the mural movement in Pilsen, Chicago and later became a printmaker with his own press, workshop, and classes. He states:

I focus on painting sensations from nature, festivals and deities and these are shown in colors, textures and themes. One of my stylistic traits is the repetition of intuitively selected images that hold constant importance such as: babies, clowns, birdcages, crosses and agave (maguey) plants. These are also portrayed in the vivid Mexican iconography and images of animals, mermaids, flowers, plants, indigenous symbols and other. It represents to me a blossoming and coming alive of nature, of humans.

Kolb (1984) argues that concrete experience involves looking at things as they are, thinking deeply about them, thus diverging from a single experience to multiple possibilities in terms of what this might mean. The key target audience for most of his work is mainstream customers and the quote from Jose Guerrero reveals the key focus of his artistic engagement as being ‘nature, festivals and deities’ and ‘use of imagery’ that holds constant across time and across cultures. He further comments: ‘I represent cultural values of strength, dignity, energy,

survival in my multi-media three-dimensional public art and design landmarks to celebrate family traditions of unity and support in Mexican culture.'

In acculturation terms, Jose's artwork represents his broad worldview, the value that his own cultural traditions hold for him (Appadurai, 1996) and a deep-rooted desire to use Mexican culture as a resource for tapping into the positive feelings that mainstream customers of his artwork hold about nature, beauty and family traditions. His own learning, as in concrete experience, becomes a socially integrated experience (Bandura, 1971; Overton & Ennis, 2006) allowing him to communicate his cultural traditions with consumers of his artwork.

Like Jose, Dayo, a Nigerian born visualist and a scholar makes his living by producing artwork aimed at mainstream consumers and engages in concrete experience by reflecting on sources of creative inspiration: "I am inspired by themes like African women, music and dance, mother and child, Madonna beauty – tribute to Ogun (beauty goddess) and to women emphasizing the diversity in inward and outward beauty of black Africa." He frequently reflects and recalls specific cultural themes, tradition of celebrations, ceremonies and festivals in the royal palace where he grew up.

Adrienne is another African American entrepreneur who focuses on "spiritual African abstract arts that tell a story about the religion of Voodoo". She is inspired by rich history and spiritual connection. Most of her clients are middle class African Americans and White Eastern Europeans. She states: "a favorite thing about my designs is the balance of energy and soul I put out in the universe – cultural meanings from the soul's perspective. The Graffiti and Hip-Hop culture tie directly back to the African culture." While working in the US, Adrienne feels inspired by the metaphorical and abstract elements (Shaules, 2010) of her African culture that

allows her to create artwork that reflects African cultural metaphors to users of her artwork and thus contribute towards marketplace diversity.

#### **4.2. Reflective Observation and Acculturation**

A second set of findings relate to the extent to which participating entrepreneurs engage in sense making whilst watching to further understand and enhance experiences. This is the stage of reflexive observation within the entrepreneurs' learning cycle. At this stage, learning involves watching and reflecting on what one sees, taking what they conclude and watching to see if it works. The entrepreneurs, therefore, start from the detail to constructively work up to the big picture; learn through conversation that takes a logical and thoughtful approach about the ethnic culture. For instance, consider this quote from Nucal, who is a Mexican American entrepreneur in the Pilsen community engaged in studio and guided mural tours:

In my artwork, I still use the icons I used before, but today I am more practical in certain things in terms of American culture. Certain things are more important for me, focusing my artwork in certain areas: The use of my time, not in terms of making money but to be more direct and not circular. Sometimes people in Mexico when I visit, they say that I am more cold, pragmatic. I have to decide when to be pragmatic and when more relaxed - a kind of balance."

He recalls that, in Mexico, his work was more about the Mexican people whereas in the USA, it is more about problematic social issues like immigration. Accordingly, his work changed to 'reflect the people in the street and the solitude of the colors became less colorful, more dark, maybe like the weather.' He comments that his artwork is sometimes critical but he include popular icons like music in his images. This is because he observes and notices musicians in the African American community in Pilsen mixing his artwork with surrealism and situations reflecting absurdity in people. He states: "I am critical of the lifestyle to point the nonsense of the new situations. I mix different images of interactions of different races –

Mexican wrestlers surrounded by buyers, American food.’ He proudly points to an artwork that reflects sarcasm and use of his right to criticize. He is critical of contemporary media that he says ‘manipulates people to buy, to believe in the government, in religion, in goods’.

Other participants speak of the extent to which their search for essential qualities within nature relate to the context of their native culture, which in turn shape their thinking patterns. The entrepreneurs therefore start from the detail to constructively work up to the big picture; they learn through conversation that takes a logical and thoughtful approach about the acculturation process. Consider the following quote from Alehandro Arade, a Mexican entrepreneur, who is a painter and muralist in the Pilsen community:

I paint whatever comes out of my imagination related to my religion e.g. sacred heart, duality (man and woman), faces, demons (eccentric and elaborated with color and twisted for new images). Other images flattering to the eye that fulfils the most basic needs such as aesthetics.

The reference by Alehandro to “how he sees what he sees” reveals the extent to which ethnic entrepreneurs create artwork using not only their personal views and imaginations, but also their self-reflection of their acculturation process. The lens of multicultural psychology applicable here is that of *interactive volition* and *becoming*. *Interactive volition* highlights the fact that one is free to change perspective, repair damaged relationships, form new relationships, strengthen abilities, and work to modify the environment (Smith & Trimble, 2016). The perspective of *becoming* highlights how personal identity and capacity evolve as relationships evolve. This relational paradigm emphasizes ongoing processes and potentials (Overton & Ennis, 2006). Similarly, consider the following quote from Fred (an African American entrepreneur), a conceptual artist and painter living at Hyde Park in Chicago:

My artworks depict respect for life and reverence for nature. As I ponder on the self-destruction of youth, this motivates me to

introduce the concept of peace through my works and also through self-knowledge, I paint what I know and learn. My artwork is therefore experiential, embodying what I already know and am now discovering.

Fred's artwork appears to be an avenue to learn new things about himself and the world and this discovery is a critical part of his experiential learning cycle. Through reflective observation, our participants continue evolving in the learning cycle by responding cognitively and emotionally to their direct experiences. According to Kolb (1984), as one moves through the experiential learning cycle there is the need for this kind of sense-making. As entrepreneurs observe the world around them, they use theories, logic and ideas, rather than feelings, to understand problems or situations. Applied to our context, participating entrepreneurs at this stage look at their experiences critically, determining what is useful or important to remember, and use this information to create novelty in their artworks.

A further illustration is a quote from Hector Duarte, a Mexican entrepreneur who is a public artist and muralist in the Pilsen community:

I start with ideas from my culture then leave the audience with direction to think about a specific idea or situation to try to evoke a response that would come from them. People are absorbed in the textures and sizes of my pieces. I am more interested in the personal interaction my audience have with the work. I consider the images to have some sort of theatrical magic.

Here, Hector conceptualizes meanings in the metaphors and patterns from his culture and tries to make links between these and certain idealistic values. By mapping out their acculturation experience in their artworks, ethnic entrepreneurs can compare their experiences with their ideals. They can also compare their experiences across time and situations, thus promoting reflection and learning whilst acculturating. Similarly, Rose, an African-American entrepreneur, who lives in Chicago and specializes in making masks, reveals the extent to which she engages in reflective observation of her own experience. Rose shows how she obtains



insights from her native culture by reflection and uses this to make sense of her present identity as she acculturates:

My masks especially embody several metaphors associated with humanity and truth in the form of gestures and figurative qualities to create this effect. I am proud of my ancestry as an African but am also internationally oriented and I use my art to plug in missing links in my ancestry. This discovery process enhances the creativity of my products in color, forms and aesthetics with creative shifts each time I create something new.

The quote from Rose illustrates that through reflective observation, she can sublimate her concrete experience and imbue new meanings in her artworks. She then matches the meanings from her artworks to human ideals. These mappings enable her to conceptualize and give structure to abstract, non-experiential realms using perceptual, cognitive resources (Johnson & Hasher, 1987). These mappings can then be recruited to do conceptual work (e.g. theorize about abstract realms) via simulations that exploit their inferential potential (Barsalou, 2003).

#### **4.3. Abstract Conceptualization and Acculturation**

Abstract conceptualization involves looking at things or ideas in new ways, making sense of the abstract thoughts and ideas and putting these into concepts everyone can understand. An example of abstract conceptualizations is the Aboriginal artworks which passes on dreaming stories and knowledge to others in the clan who share the home country of the story; meanings of the artwork must be interpreted by intermediaries (Belk & Groves, 1999). In contrast to such interpretations of meanings, we find in our study that the ethnic entrepreneurs make available the meanings of artworks themselves by converting the artworks into forms easily understandable.

Gabriel Villa, who is a Pilsen Chicago-based artist and muralist, illustrates how he makes sense out of his artworks and converts them into forms that are understood by a universal audience:

My artworks 'flayed' is symbolic of how we uncover who we really are and a renewal like when you peel the skin off something – off a snake or a fruit representing this aspect of renewal. Sometimes my works are drawn on a large scale within a warehouse space and as the audience walks through the space that depicts their evolution.

While referring to a specific artwork involving an image of a man-baby, Gabriel argues that his work represented a creative revolution as it focused on childhood and formative years. Through this work, he aimed to communicate the message that 'we are more than just what we appear to ourselves. We have our own personal creative evolution after our birth'. This echoes the insights provided by Joy and Sherry (2003) who expose how the interplay between embodiment and consumer experience elucidate the aesthetic experience, that is, how the body influences the logic of thinking about art. Victor who works with Gabriel for art exhibitions and who is also a muralist throws more light on these abstract conceptualizations by stating: 'Through our art exhibition, we invite people to walk through the creative spaces and see Pilsen differently.'

In the stage of abstract conceptualization, entrepreneurs use their artworks to review conceptual understanding as they acculturate. Roberto Ferreyra, an active artist, poet, painter and sculptor, exposes how he engages in abstract conceptualization to make what may sound strange understandable by his audience:

It is an uphill battle because there is so much popular culture that is materialistic. I like certain conveniences of technology but I aspire to more freedom. My artwork involves a lot of interactivity with the audience and I also add a sound track to my work on the internet. People are so much more guarded in the United States so I try to build trust.

Roberto explains the influence of acculturation as he moves along his experiential learning cycle. Roberto informs us that during his formative years he developed several reoccurring formal devices to add visual interest to his work and increase its complexity. Not stylistically

restricted to using text, Roberto also integrates iconographical symbols into his work to address the issues with which he is most concerned. As Roberto moved along his experiential learning cycle whilst acculturating, his artworks adopt new imagery, themes and formal strategies. Roberto indicates that he has lived and worked in Chicago producing an idiosyncratic body of work that builds upon previous work, but whose diversity and powerful imagery are direct results of his adopted home. Similarly, Gabriel Villa narrates:

“My works are rooted in the traditions of realism and figurative art, but have developed a number of perplexing stylistic tendencies that defy easy interpretation.”

The roots of these provocative tendencies are found in Villa’s early work that represent his acculturation process. Gabriel informs researchers that when artists relocate geographically they challenge themselves with fresh cultural encounters whose outcomes cannot be predicted. He notes that entrepreneurs such as himself benefit from such immigration that compiles a lifetime of memories.

#### **4.4. Active Experimentation and Acculturation**

Experiential learning for the entrepreneur in the active experimentation stage takes an active form - experimenting with changing symbols or situations depicted. In this stage, the entrepreneur takes what they have concluded and tries it out to prove that it works. The entrepreneur, therefore, takes a practical approach in this phase and is concerned with what really works, as opposed to simply recreating a situation. To survive as distinctive cultural identity, each culture must espouse the market logic and commodify itself so that it is available and present for both direct and mediated consumption (Firat & Venkatesh, 1995). For example, consider this quote from Israel Fernandez, a young Mexican entrepreneur who migrated to Pilsen at an early age, revealing the notion of experiential learning based on active experimentation:

I paint my own reality – sights, sense, smells etc. Metaphors presented in artworks that use human beings and human parts. I am influenced by my culture and many talented artists in Mexico, music and traditions. The colors being used, the spirit of the festivals reflected in the painting. I like the title themes, colors, photographs reflect part of the environment that will no longer exist. I make use of these icons from culture, myths and icons, combine and transform them into something entirely new.

Israel explains how he experiments with cultural icons and symbols to create something novel for his audience. Scholarly work (e.g., Dormer (1997) notes that entrepreneurs respond to circumstances in original and creative ways both in terms of their artworks and in the way the business is developed. As they acculturate, entrepreneurs apply their newly acquired insights by providing incentives and resources that encourage them to set specific and measurable developmental goals for exploration and experimentation. Artworks are used as coaching and mentoring resources to encourage and guide leaders in their experimentation processes. The artworks, thus, become active learning resources. Bridge, O'Neill & Martin (2009) suggest that an essential requirement of the creative business is that enterprising people tend to have more originality. Dayo, An African American entrepreneur throws more light on how artworks are used as a medium for educating, sharing and advocating by entrepreneurs:

The women I paint are representations of nature, creativity, innocence and mystery, abstractions of nature such as animals and reality the world – women with flowers, the galaxy, sky, different stages of day and night, solitude at night, beauty of nature patterns and variety of vivid colors provides many meanings about life. I am interested in designing books, book-covers and t-shirts. It would represent a positive sub-culture for the youth.

Based on his active experimentation, entrepreneurs such as Dayo embark on a collective venture with the young. This position could also be considered as an aspect of cultural reflexivity whereby culture is considered as a project rather than as a set of given, existential conditions in a

society (Askegaarde et al., 2009). Similarly, Arturo Cortes indicates how his acculturation experiences strongly influence his active experimentation. He narrates:

In our tradition, we like to take pictures of the family. After coming here, we see how our neighbors live in America and we started to take pictures of the places and things. I realized Americans liked scenic pictures with no particular focus. Someone sitting on the porch eating corn or ice-cream, pushing his cart outside, people going to work cutting the grass, doing the snow and this would be something else. Before that, I would capture moments of love with the family – I would capture these beautiful moments and people loved the idea. I started selling these photographs and more money started coming in. The way I was taking the pictures started changing.

Arturo illustrates how he actively experiments with shifting his artworks from a Mexican orientation to an American one, from a focus on family to a focus on landscapes and nature. Our findings, thus, depicts that as entrepreneurs move along the experiential learning cycle, both their culture and that of the host country become a resource for their artworks and active experimentation involves a back-and-forth movement between home and host cultures. These findings fall in line with those of Cleveland, Laroche, Pons & Kastoun (2009) that minority groups can learn and adapt to the host/majority culture while concurrently preserving and promoting aspects of their original heritage. Arturo continues:

I remember one day when we had an exhibition, people did not choose my pictures of family, which had a lot of feeling but chose the photograph of the porch. That was when I learnt to develop new ideas for my photographs. When we went to a wedding, I would take a picture of the porch and it went on and on. On the 18<sup>th</sup> street, there was a bridge and I would take a photograph from a low angle and the lighting on the clouds was so nice and people were so impressed with it- the photograph the American way and not the Mexican way.

Arturo throws further light on how he engages in active experimentation through the process of acculturation. He shows how his artworks are modified because of acculturation and experiential learning experiences. Like social entrepreneurship (Dees 1998; Mair & Marti,

2006).), artrepreneurship enhances opportunities for continuous innovation and adaptation of outcomes characterized by social and economic values. In this study, a common motivation of the participating artrepreneurs was the construction of a new social reality through active involvement in artrepreneurship activities related to art and design. It is by reflective interaction that the designer can explore many innovative metaphors and apply them to his artworks through active experimentation. In this way, conventional knowledge is extended to new frontiers.

## **5. Conclusions and Implications**

Previous studies have discussed multicultural national contexts in terms of *intergroup* relations and *intragroup* dynamics by which members of different cultural groups negotiate and defend competing definitions of a superordinate national identity. These studies highlight the cultural values and practices of immigrants as self-defining in situations of intercultural contact or expose the creative ways in which these immigrants affirm cultural differences (e.g. Schwartz et al., 2014). However, our findings reveal that, beyond these, there are other dynamics involving the process of experiential learning during acculturation by ethnic entrepreneurs. We observe several aspects of multicultural psychology emerging as the ethnic artrepreneurs go through an experiential learning cycle as they acculturate: Belonging, connectedness, social engagements that provides information exchange and learning, context broadened to the worldview, repairing and forming new relationships, evolution, self-understanding and mutual enrichment.

We discover that our findings are in line with the learning mechanism reported by the experiential learning theory (Kolb, 1984). We validate studies of Kolb and Fry (1974) that while all four stages retain a focus on primary experience, learning appears to entail possession of different abilities at each stage. A critical insight is that culture and art can be construed as being experientially learned, revolving through distinct stages and resulting in a competency in

expressing cultural insights through culturally sanctioned symbols. If cultural competency is what drives an ethnic artrepreneur's success, and if this artrepreneur is not engaging in art-for-art's-sake, then the mechanisms by which such competency is acquired becomes important to understand. Furthermore, our participants did not learn such skills of the trade through traditional formal education, but had to work towards the desired competency through experience alone, colloquially referred to as the 'school of hard knocks.' Other than a desire to accomplish a certain artistic outcome within the cultural context, they eventually progressed towards success only by looking at what works, reflecting on it, abstracting from it and then being intentionally experimental in generating new variations. Considering artrepreneurship itself as a process of experiential learning, unfolding and evolving towards a competency in a specific craft, is one of the key insights of this research.

Our findings also show that these experiential learning processes are naively and instinctively followed by the artrepreneurs we studied: what was not established was that such steps occur in sequence, or that they occur recursively. We did see that some artists seem to be stronger at some processes than others; e.g., some were adept at active experimentation after having some cultural influences incubate in the recesses of their mind, while others were stronger at reflective observation, trying to capture the sense of the community as is or as it worked out its future. If one element from the paper is to be isolated as a key contribution, it would be that the experiential learning cycle offers rich conceptualizations of how such learning occurs; to the extent that almost all artrepreneurial activity is not the product of formal schools, experiential learning should be the basis of acculturation experiences of our participants. Perhaps then, these are the foundational building blocks of how cultural learning like acculturation happens as 'in the wild'.

## **5.2. *Theoretical implications***

Theory would suggest that ethnic entrepreneurs would actively seek local cultures to open numerous spaces at different stages of their acculturation. In contrast to this viewpoint, our data suggests that ethnic entrepreneurs consciously learn and gain experiences from their cultural milieu producing art that evolves from their embeddedness in their own cultural-ethnic setting. For example, representations of deities and heritage cultural patterns in artistic work allow participants to promote heritage culture. In doing so, our participants appear to act as culturally adaptive communities at a collective level not only promoting diversity to capitalize on cultural assets but also utilizing arts and culture as an economic development tool with the ultimate goal of achieving improvements for the wider community (Benjamin et al., 2006; Smallbone et al., 2005).

Discussion of other entrepreneurial ethnic groups such as Greeks, Chinese, Japanese, Cubans and Koreans have elicited a lively debate on the causes of their success. The production and blending of ethnicity with cultural universals has been noted to create agency and subjectivity (Penaloza & Venkatesh, 2006) as a prelude to transcultural experiences of the multicultural marketplace. Acculturation experiences of our participants suggest that their ethnicity and identities are not mutually exclusive – rather they belong and associate with simultaneously to multiple cultures. In our study, the artistic activities endowed participants with a capacity for self-transcendence – that is, to transcend cultural differences to fit themselves in another's position. Our findings also suggest that the cultural meanings and symbolic artworks of entrepreneurs shaped the contours of their ethnic entrepreneurship as they acculturated and cross-fertilized their ideas through experiential learning.

We find that the nature and type of learning processes adopted by our participants is such



that it is influenced by the inherent characteristics and creative imagination of the entrepreneurs themselves. In other words, the way ethnic entrepreneurs learn coupled with the challenges posed by the acculturation context determine the nature of their learning processes. We find that ethnic entrepreneurs are culturally competent entities and at the heart of their competency is their experience and knowledge of doing business (Carson & Gilmore, 2000) and of creating and recreating art in a culturally authentic manner with a view to project and showcase their own cultural identities to the marketplace. We find that our participants actively learn and educate themselves and others in ways that imaginatively empower and promote respect for diversity, build communities and engage with others in a participatory democratic manner (Garber, 2001). This facilitates their role as ‘bicultural mediators’ (Penaloza & Gilly, 1999) promoting marketplace diversity and transcultural consumption (Voss, 2003) and utilizing contrasting elements from diverse cultural representations (Jamal, 2005). We, therefore, argue that the acculturation and experiential learning are deeply interlinked processes that need further investigation by future research.

### ***5.3. Managerial Implications***

Findings of this study can guide marketers and practitioners developing entrepreneurship ventures within ethnic contexts, which can eventually serve as a foundation for the development of creative industries. The term creative industries represent a change in emphasis towards the economic potential of the arts (Flew, 2005). Thus, our study provides a platform to realize the economic potential of arts, culture and creativity by the consideration of the learning process of ethnic entrepreneurs. The move towards industrialization would accelerate by the support of such learning. Additionally, the consideration of the interplay with acculturation provides new perspectives for cross-cultural collaborations to open business opportunities for ethnic

artrepreneurs and artrepreneurship as a whole. The creativity of artrepreneurs would also contribute to social innovation (e.g., Mehmood, Jamal & Sriram, 2015) in society. Artrepreneurs with a vision are individuals that can offer creative and innovative solutions to social problems and advance creativity, entrepreneurship and community vitality (Murray, Caulier-Grice & Mulgan, 2011). Policy makers could contribute to this process by facilitating the development of partnerships between artrepreneurs, community groups, and industry.

#### **5.4. *Limitations and Directions for Future Research***

As with all research projects, this study acknowledges its shortcomings as limitations. For example, the study employs interpretive methods to explore artrepreneurship and associated learning in an ethnic minority context. Therefore, the findings are context and time bound. Ethnic artrepreneurship represents a diverse community, especially in terms of country of origin and the extent to which artrepreneurs learn, adopt and change over time can differ according to factors like age, social class, education, income, rural/urban residence, gender, length of stay, sense of ethnic identity, exposure to the host and ethnic media and immigration policies adopted by the state. Despite the shortcomings, the study contributes significantly and there is still much to learn in this ethnic artrepreneurship context. Given the increasing significance of ethnic minority markets to local economies, this research can have important practical implications: without squelching the content of their cultural creations, artrepreneurs could be made aware of the processes by which they have been acquiring their art. To the extent that the learning process comes under conscious control, they can speed it up or adapt it to be more intentional. However, would each stage of this learning cycle be equally usable to different cultures? Perhaps artrepreneurs from a masculine culture, as indicated by Hofstede (1991) are better at active experimentation than those from a feminine culture. A generalization of current findings could

be extended by systematically studying artrepreneurs from different cultural groups. Future study may include questions like the intentionality of learning by artrepreneurs across cultures for the development of creative industries or how ethnic artrepreneurs acquire artrepreneurship skills for social and economic sustainability.

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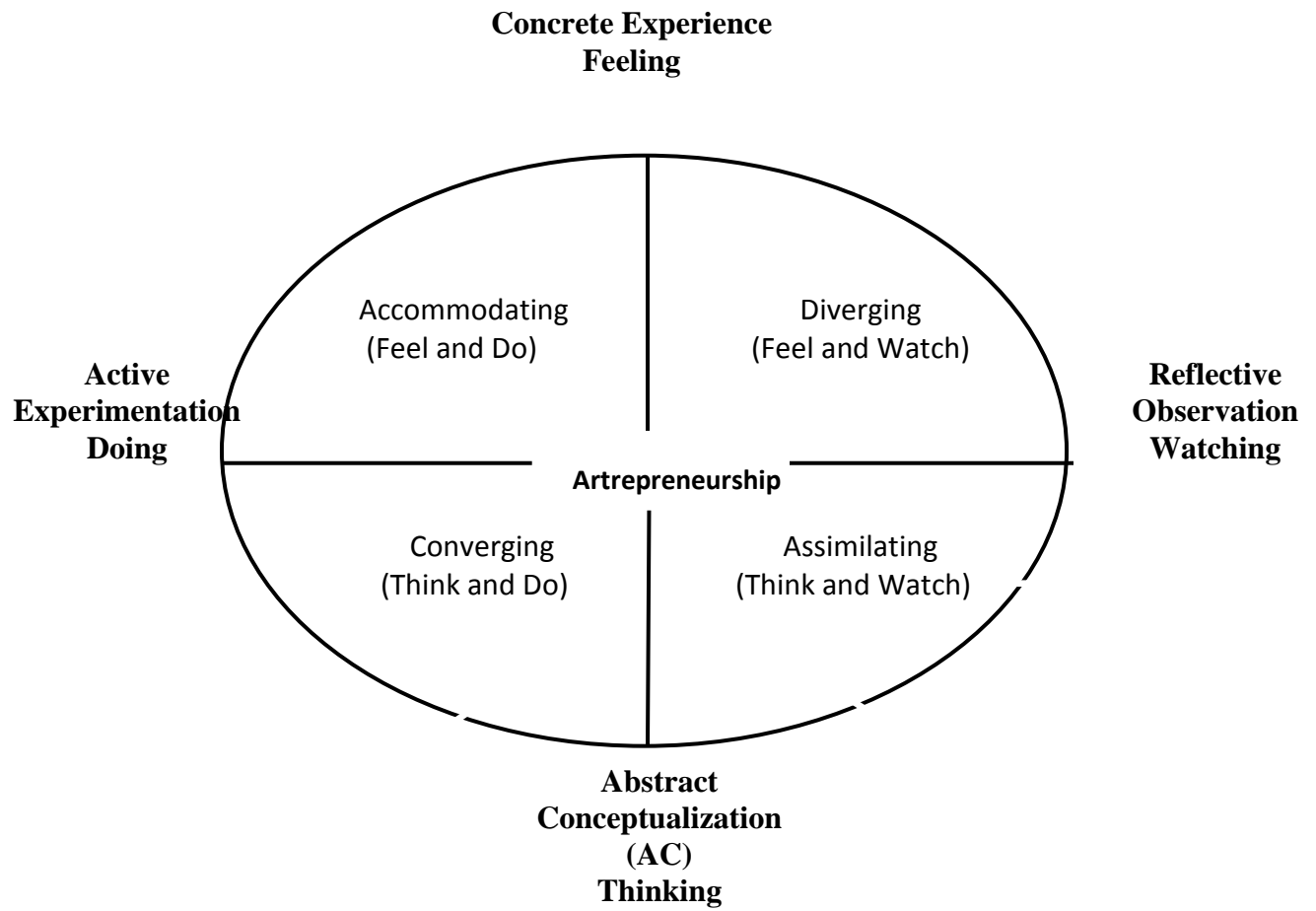
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**Figure 1:** Model of Artpreneurs' Experiential Learning Cycle (Adapted from Kolb's Experiential Learning Cycle)





**Table 1: Participant Information**

**Latino Artrepreneurs**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Profession</b>
Gabriel Villa	Male	High School	Muralist/Teacher
Hector Duarte	Male	Undergraduate	Artist
Rolando	Male	High School	Artist/Performer
Alejandro Arade	Male	Ninth grade	Artist/Photographer
Jose Guerrero	Male	High School	Muralist/Tour guide
Arturo Cortes	Female	College	Artist
Victor	Male	High School	Muralist
Nucal	Male	High School	Artist
Roberto Ferreyra	Male	High School	Sculptor/Poet/Artist
Israel Fernandez	Male	High School	Artist

**African American Artrepreneurs**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Profession</b>
Dayo	Male	High School	Artist
Adrienne	Female	College	Product Development Personnel/Artist
Rose	Female	College	Artist
Koku	Male	College	Artist
Dayo	Male	High School	Artist
Fred	Male	College	Art Educator