



Do ethnocentric consumers really buy local products? ☆

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ABSTRACT

While the impact of consumer ethnocentrism on preference for local products has received extensive attention by researchers, this research provides further understanding by investigating the impact of commitment to a consumer's place of leaving on consumer's attitudes towards local product and on effective purchase of local products. Based on the concept of behavioral commitment from Kiesler's theory (1973), this research shows that a consumer with a high degree of ethnocentrism has a more favorable attitude towards local products than the one committed to his place of life. However, when it comes to effective purchase of local products, a consumer who is strongly committed to his place of life tends to purchase local products more than a consumer with a high level of ethnocentrism. This research contributes to existing research in supporting Kiesler's argument that consumer behavioral commitment has a stronger effect on local product purchase than beliefs (in this case ethnocentrism). In terms of practice, this research may orient retailers, manufacturers and public organizations to strengthen consumers' commitment to their place of life.

1. Introduction

As pointed out by Siamgka and Balbanis (2015), since the last financial crisis, there has been a worldwide rise in the nationalist discourse which defends national / local products / companies. This posture can go as far as disrupting the international trade, which has been falling since 2014 despite the global economic recovery (World Bank data base, 1990–2015). This type of nationalist discourse tends to exacerbate consumer ethnocentrism and the literature on ethnocentrism (Xie et al., 2015; Fischer and Zeugner-Roth, 2017) underlines how this variable tends to encourage the consumption of local products. Defined as "the beliefs held by consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products" (Shimp and Sharma, 1987, p.280), ethnocentrism is manifested through a social value that discriminates against products that are manufactured outside the area of the local community (Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Nguyen et al., 2008; Steenkamp and De Jong, 2010; Xie et al., 2015).

This construct is related to the literature on the country of origin (COO). Literature in the field of marketing has long stressed the importance of the role played by the origin of the product ('country of origin') in consumer purchasing decisions (Schooler, 1965; Tan and Farley, 1987; Peterson and Jolibert, 1995; Kreckova et al., 2012; Strizhakova and Coulter, 2015). As well as price, brand name, or the possibility of a guarantee, the origin of the product is considered as an

essential attribute of consumer choice (Papadopoulos and Heslop, 1993). To explain the choices consumers make in the area where they live, researchers have deliberately placed themselves in the cognitive world of the individual. Thus, the preference for local products rather than global products is deeply rooted in the values and beliefs of individuals in relation to their own countries (Nijssen and Douglas, 2011).

The COO literature primarily relies on cognitive factors in order to explain the buying preference for local products. However, it is possible to assume that other factors explain this purchasing preference for local products. Yildiz (2007), Julienne (2013) and Yildiz, Heitz-Spahn and Belaud (2017) show that beliefs or attitudes cannot explain any future consumer behavior and that it is necessary to take into account actual behaviors. These results show how behaviors can generate other behaviors consistent with the former. Moreover, these behaviors can have a greater impact than attitude, as revealed in the study by Yildiz (2007) and confirmed by Julienne (2013) who also demonstrated a higher predictability of behaviors over attitudes and beliefs. Thus, in line with Bourdieu's work on behaviors that engender other behaviors coherent with the first (habitus), and more specifically with reference to Putnam's (2000) work on behavioral civic engagement, we may ask if some behaviors reinforce the importance of other behaviors such as the purchase of local products.

In fact, ethnocentrism encourages consumers to choose local

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products, with the aim of supporting the local economy. However do consumers who contribute to supporting their local area through their activities, such as local commitment, show a more favorable attitude towards local products? This is a question that our research seeks to answer.

Building on the theory of behavioral commitment developed in social psychology by Kiesler (1971), we analyze the effect on the attitudes individuals express, in terms of local products, as a result of commitment in local activities. As a corollary, we may also consider whether the effects of acts of commitment by individuals in their local areas might be greater than the effects produced as a result of ethnocentric attitudes. Thus, our main research question is: Are ethnocentric people the only ones to have a favorable attitude and to be more inclined to buy local products instead of global products?

Our research contributes to the COO literature, including the explanation of consumer preference for local products on several aspects. 1 / It suggests a complementary approach to the analysis of the ethnocentric attitude by taking into account the behavioral commitment of an individual towards the community in his place of life and the impact on the purchasing act of local products. 2/ It shows that the civic acts of commitment of the consumer in his place of life has a higher explanatory power than ethnocentrism.

Reviewing the relevant literature, three concepts seem to be worthy of further consideration: consumer's ethnocentrism, the degree of behavioral commitment of the consumers within the area where they live, and the consumer's purchasing behavior in terms of local products. In the methodological section that follows, we propose metrics to measure these constructs; we then check their validity and test their theoretical relationship with propositions. Finally, we conclude with the contributions, limits and ideas for future research that arise from this work.

2. Theoretical development

2.1. Ethnocentrism and attitudes towards local products and ethnocentrism

Arising from ethnological and anthropological work, ethnocentrism reflects a tendency for people to reject those who are different from themselves and to prefer those whom they perceive as similar (Sumner, 1906). The precursors (Shimp and Sharma, 1987) of the construction of the scale of measurement for individual ethnocentrism conclude in their first study (1987, p.280) that consumer ethnocentrism encompasses "the beliefs held by consumers about the appropriateness and morality of purchasing foreign-made products".

Fernández-Ferrín and Bande-Vilela (2013) have shown that the concept of ethnocentrism can be used at the national, regional and local levels. The work of Onozaka and McFadden (2011) indicates that a local product is preferred to a domestic product, being itself preferred to an imported product. Therefore, the terminology of the concept refers throughout the article to a national, regional or local product.

The stream of research is based on literature from the field of marketing, about countries of origin (COO). Research in this area focuses on the concept of country of origin in the assessment of a product. Authors here demonstrate the effect that the signal - "origin" - can have on bringing into the minds of consumers beliefs and attitudes that may favor, or disfavor, a product of a certain country of origin. For example, various studies have examined the impact of the image of a region in explaining how products originating from it are evaluated.

The origin of the product is an extrinsic attribute, allowing consumers to infer the quality of the product, but it can also have a symbolic meaning. In this sense, the origin of the product, when linked to a national identity, can carry with it strong emotional attachment towards certain trademarks and products (Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999).

Therefore, in the process of making the decision to buy a product, the consumer has a tendency to differentiate between the products that originate from within their own country and those from outside of it.

Therefore, the ethnocentrism of a consumer, influenced by an exaggerated nationalism, affects their attitude and intentionality towards product purchase.

In fact, individuals who have an elevated tendency towards ethnocentricity are likely to avoid buying foreign products for nationalistic reasons, because doing so would be seen as harmful to the national or local economy, or simply considered unpatriotic (Durvasula et al., 1997).

Moreover, the literature on ethnocentrism has demonstrated that this construct affects the attitude of consumers to domestic products (Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Herche, 1992; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004). Shimp and Sharma's (1987) study shows that consumers with a high level of ethnocentrism tend to assess foreign products in a negative way, and ascribe a much higher quality to domestic products, compared with foreign ones. In line with this work, the research of Vida and Reardon (2008) confirms these results and concludes that consumer ethnocentrism is a normative component in the formation of consumer preferences.

Thus, an elevated tendency towards ethnocentricity will result in a rejection of foreign products manufactured outside of their own group. Steenkamp and De Jong (2010) characterize this as the tension generated between local products and those manufactured globally, outside the area considered as a community for an individual with elevated ethnocentrism.

Other factors affecting attitudes towards local versus global products have been examined by researchers.

The factor of nostalgia is an example, which is something linked to the need of an individual to recreate the kind of local consumer environment that existed in the past (Holbrook, 1993). For people with a tendency towards nostalgia, the present and the future represent ever-increasing globalization (Steenkamp and De Jong, 2010). Another factor that has been studied is environmentalism, which is an expression of the tendency of consumers to attach a large importance to the environment and reject consumer products that cause pollution (Steenkamp and De Jong, 2010). Thus, for environmentalists, more local production means less waste generated and fewer resources used (Bougherara et al., 2009). As a result, the individual will have a more positive attitude towards local products than those produced globally.

For some researchers, these latter factors have a direct impact on attitudes towards local versus global products (Steenkamp and De Jong, 2010). For others, these factors represent antecedents to ethnocentrism (Shankarmahesh, 2006). A proportion of studies on ethnocentrism focus on ethnocentrism generated by the local culture in areas where consumers live (Saffu et al., 2010; Wang and Chen, 2004; Spielmann and Babin, 2011; Fernández-Ferrín and Bande-Vilela, 2013). Fernández-Ferrín and Bande-Vilela (2013) have showed that an individual's ethnocentrism can also be manifested at national and regional level, as well as locally. The work of Onozaka and McFadden (2011) indicates that a local product will be preferred to a national product, which is itself preferable to an imported product. For Lusk and Anderson (2004), it is primarily protectionism and ethnocentrism that compel the consumer to choose a national product. These findings generate the following propositions:

H1: elevated ethnocentrism leads the consumer to adopt a favorable attitude towards local products from their own area (a) and, therefore, to be less favorable to globally produced products (b).

2.2. Attitudes towards local and The act of commitment to a local area

Attitudes towards local products have been studied by considering a variety of different threads, including three main ones. The first arises from the disciplines of sociology, human geography and environmental psychology. This initial thread is focused on the link between the individual and his environment: both physical and geographical. The ideas involved here, such as identifying with a place (Proshansky et al.,

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