

Understanding the Interrelationship Between Country of Origin, Ethnocentrism, and Purchase Intentions

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Abstract

This paper has investigated the effect of consumer ethnocentrism (CE) and country of origin (COO) on purchase intentions (PI). Increasing popularity of foreign brands among Indian consumers over the last two decades created a need for this study. An empirical analysis was conducted on 100 Indian consumers residing in Tricity (Chandigarh - Mohali - Panchkula) to explore the relationship between various factors responsible for foreign brand purchase. Results revealed a negative relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intentions of foreign brands. Furthermore, significant differences were found in consumer ethnocentric tendencies across demographic variables.

Keywords: consumer ethnocentrism, country of origin, purchase intention, indigenous products, foreign brands

JEL Classification: D12, M00, M1, M3, M16

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Globalization in the Indian economy has led to flooding of the markets with numerous products from indigenous and foreign players, providing consumers with various alternatives to choose from. Rapid changes in international trade over the last two decades have led to the generation of a large number of opportunities for producers as well as consumers. On the flip side, it has amplified the intensity of competition in different nations, which wrestle with the consequences and payback of imports and exports. So, endurance of any business, domestic or international, depends upon acceptance of consumers (Khan, 2012). Acceptance or rejection of products by the consumers is influenced by various factors, and one such factor is Consumer Ethnocentrism (CE) (Chowdhury, Micu, & Elahee, 2010; Watson & Wright, 2000). Consumers' ethnocentric tendencies have received a great deal of attention in the recent past by researchers (Chakrabarty & Conrad, 1995; Netemeyer, Durvasula, & Lichtenstein, 1991; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Other factors which affect consumers' purchasing intention to choose products of domestic or foreign category are country-of-origin (COO), knowledge of foreign products, consumer perceptions, and nature of products/services.

Theoretical Conceptualization

➤ **Consumer Ethnocentrism (CE) :** Shimp and Sharma (1987), who originated the concept of consumer ethnocentrism, defined it as the "beliefs held by the consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign made products" (p. 280). According to Sumner (1906), ethnocentrism is a view in which one's own group is the centre of everything, and all others are scales and rated in reference to it. Majority of the studies concluded that consumer ethnocentric tendencies explain the reasons behind more favorable evaluation of

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domestic products against foreign products (Balabanis, Diamantopoulos, Mueller, & Melewar, 2001; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004; Elliott & Cameron, 1994; Hong & Wyer Jr., 1989; Li, Yang, Wang, & Lei, 2012).

In addition to defining the concept of ethnocentrism, Shimp and Sharma (1987) also developed a 17-item construct called CETSCALE to measure ethnocentric tendencies, which has been validated by various researchers across the globe (Lee, Hong, & Lee, 2003; Yoo & Donthu, 2005 in the U.S.; Javalgi, Khare, Gross, & Scherer, 2005; Renko, Karanović, & Matić, 2012 in Europe; Li et al., 2012; Wu, Zhu, & Dai, 2010 in China; Kumar, Fairhurst, & Kim, 2011; Panchanatham, Kathiravan, & Anushan, 2006; Son, Jin, & George, 2013; Spillan, Chaubey, Ziemnowicz, Singh, & Vyas, 2007 in India; Ismail, Masood, & Tawab, 2012 in Pakistan, and many more).

Many studies have examined the impact of consumer ethnocentric tendencies on purchase intentions of foreign products and found a negative relationship (Bamber, Phadke, & Jyotishi, 2011; Li et al., 2012; Nguyen, Nguyen, & Barrett, 2008; Wu et al., 2010; Zarkada - Fraser & Fraser, 2002). Literature suggests that high ethnocentric tendencies lead to negative perceptions and evaluation of products of foreign origin. Thus, highly ethnocentric consumers prefer products from similar cultures if domestic substitutes are not available (Khan, 2012). Demographic variables have also been found to significantly impact ethnocentric tendencies of consumers. Studies of Schooler (1971) and Wall and Heslop (1986) indicated a positive relationship between age and preference for products of home origin. Literature is dominated with studies proposing a negative relationship of ethnocentrism with higher educational levels. Women have been found to be more ethnocentric in earlier literature as they believe that domestic products are capable of competing with foreign products on a quality basis (Wall & Heslop, 1986). Regarding income, various studies have found a negative relationship with ethnocentrism (Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995; Wall & Heslop, 1986).

➤ **Country of Origin :** The country-of-origin (COO) of a product has been defined as the country of manufacture or assembly (Bilkey & Nes, 1982), identified by “made in” or “manufactured in” labels (Ahmed, Johnson, Yang, Fatt, Teng, & Boon, 2004; Nagashima, 1977). Upsurge of MNCs, FDIs, and hybrid products has increased the complexity in understanding the concept of “made in” solely on the basis of the COO concept; thus other cognitive concepts like product knowledge, ethnocentrism, and purchasing intention should also be studied to attain a better understanding of consumer behavior and relationship between the above mentioned constructs. Consumer buying decisions are generally made on the basis of information acquisition, evaluation, and cues (intrinsic and extrinsic). COO is often used as an extrinsic cue for making purchase decisions (Becker, 1986; Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Cordell, 1992; Han & Terpstra, 1988; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2006). Researchers support the view that the stereotypic perception regarding consumers' own country products creates the COO image (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Nagashima, 1977).

➤ **Purchase Intentions :** Purchase intention has been considered to be an effective tool in predicting consumer behavior (Ghosh, 1990) and has been defined as the probability to buy a specific brand after certain evaluation, which can lead to repurchase in the future (MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986). Few other authors have defined it as the subjective judgment by the consumers that is reflected after the general evaluation to buy products or services (Blackwell, Miniard, & Engel, 2001; Hsu & Nien, 2008). Various studies have been conducted to study the impact of COO on buying intention (Khan, 2010; Rezvani, Shenyari, Dehkordi, Salehi, Nahid, & Soleimani, 2012; Yassin & Baharun, 2010), assessment (Ahmed et al., 2004), and perception (Agrawal & Kamakura, 1999; Han & Qualls, 1985; Kabadayi & Lerman, 2011). Previous research studies have established that in developing countries, consumers tend to believe that products made by local producers are not as good as imported products (Batra, Ramaswamy, Alden, Steenkamp, & Ramachander, 2000).

Hence, it can be seen from the review of literature that only a few studies have been conducted on the mentioned variables in India. So, to bridge this gap, the present study aims to analyze the interrelationship between ethnocentrism, country-of-origin, and purchase intentions in the Indian setting. The research endeavors to investigate the interrelationship among the chosen variables and also to study the variations in ethnocentric inclination across demographic variables of Indian consumers.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of present study are given below:

- To explore the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism (CE), country-of-origin (COO), and purchase intention (PI).
- To investigate the impact of CE and COO on PI for foreign products.
- To investigate the demographic characteristics of the consumers with reference to ethnocentric tendencies based on variables such as age, gender, education, and income.

□

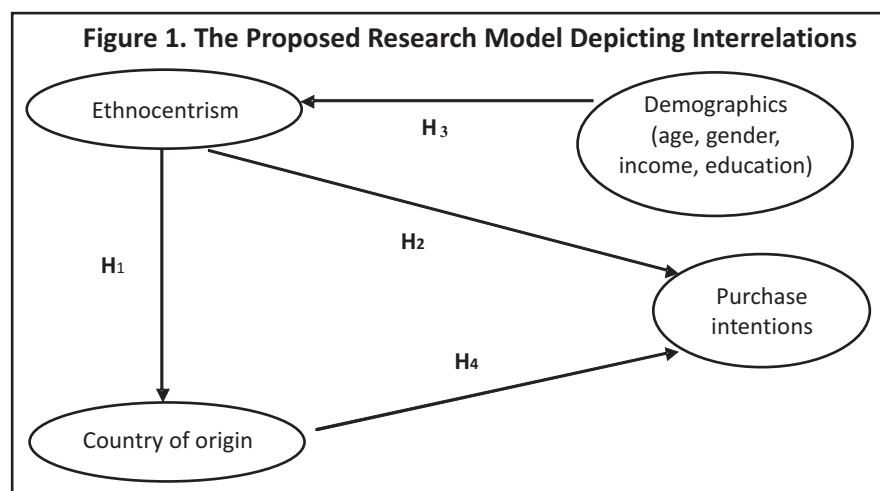
Hypotheses

The hypotheses of the study derived from existing literature are listed below:

- **H1:** CE has a significant negative relationship with COO.
- **H2:** CE has a negative effect on PI for foreign products.
- **H3:** There exist significant differences in ethnocentric tendencies of Indian consumers on the basis of demographic variables such as age, gender, income, and education.
- **H4:** COO sensitive respondents have high PI for foreign products.

The Proposed Research Model

We have proposed a research model to prove the various hypotheses, which is given below in the Figure 1.



Methodology

The empirical quantitative research was conducted in September-October 2013 in the form of a survey among Indian consumers located in the Tricity region. The primary data was collected with the help of a questionnaire prepared to meet the objectives of the study ; whereas, various research articles, websites, and related books were consulted for the collection of the secondary data. The data collection on the relevant constructs of this study was done using the standardized sub-scales adopted from preceding studies, where pertinent and associated work has been done, and slight alterations were made on the basis of the pilot study undertaken to reflect the characteristics of the Indian consumers. For the current research, the constructs, that is, ethnocentrism, COO, and purchase

Table 1. Scale Components

Construct	No. of items	Reliability	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Item number in questionnaire
COO	7	0.76*	3.81	0.67	1,2,3,4,5,6,7
Ethnocentrism	6	0.85*	2.45	0.74	8,9,10,11,12,13
PI	5	0.87*	3.45	0.73	14,15,16,17,18
Total No. of Responses	100				

NOTE: *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation, * denotes values of Cronbach's alpha. All the sub-scales were found to be internally consistent.

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of Indian Consumers

Demographic Characteristics	Freq.	Demographic Characteristics	Freq.
Gender		Monthly Income (in ₹)	
Male	41	Low (<20,000)	40
Female	59	Medium (20000-40000)	28
		High (>40000)	32
Age		Marital Status	
Less than 25 years	44	Married	42
25-34 years	36	Single	58
35-44 years	10		
44-54 years	4		
55 years and above	6		
Educational Levels			
Below secondary level	6		
Secondary level	10		
Graduation	20		
Post-graduation	55		
Ph. D	9		

intention used by Li et al. (2012) and Rezvani et al. (2012) were replicated, while the set of scales used by Bamber et al. (2012) were used. The questionnaire was divided into two parts, where the first part included the scales of the relevant constructs measured on a 5-point Likert scale, and the second part focused on questions regarding the demographic characteristics of the respondents. A sample of 150 consumers was selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling. We used both the online and offline modes for data collection. Out of 150, only 100 questionnaires were retained, where the respondents provided useable responses on all the study variables. The reliability of the scales was checked by applying Cronbach's alpha, and all the items were found to be internally consistent as values of alpha were greater than 0.70. The sub-scale statistics are presented in the Table 1.

Statistical tools in Excel and SPSS were used for the descriptive analysis, Spearman's correlation, regression, and non parametric tests. According to the descriptive statistics given in the Table 1, CE level of the Indian consumers was at a moderate level (Mean = 2.45, *SD* = 0.74), whereas COO (Mean = 3.81, *SD* = 0.67), and PI (Mean = 3.45, *SD* = 0.73) were at a higher level. Hence, it can be inferred that the consumers were moderately ethnocentric regarding foreign products and they gave a lot of importance to country of origin of products before purchasing the same. Also, many of the respondents were found to be quite interested in purchasing products of foreign origin.

Table 3. Correlation Matrix

	CE	COO	PI
CE	1.000		
COO	-.548**	1.000	
PI	-.814**	.646**	1.000

NOTE: ** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 4. Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)	3.479	.399		8.716	.000		
CE	-.574	.069	-.581	-8.304	.000	.794	1.260
COO	.362	.076	.333	4.761	.000	.794	1.260

^a. Dependent Variable: PI

NOTE: CE stands for consumer ethnocentrism, COO stands for country-of-origin, and PI stands for purchase intentions.

Analysis and Discussion

Descriptive analysis has been used to explain the sample characteristics which have been shown in the Table 2. The sample consisted of 41 men and 59 women. It can be observed that 44 respondents were less than 25 years of age followed by 36 respondents who fell in the age group of 25-34 years. Very few respondents were aged above 55 years (approx. 6%). Furthermore, 42 respondents were married and 58 were single.

In terms of monthly income levels, 32% of the respondents were having a high income level, that is, they were earning more than ₹ 40000 per month, 40% of the respondents were having a low income level, that is, they were earning less than ₹ 20000 in a month, and 28% of the respondents were having a medium income level, that is, they were earning between ₹ 20000 to ₹ 40000. In case of educational level, 55% of the respondents were post-graduates, 20% were graduates, 10% had studied upto the secondary level, 6% possessed educational qualifications below the secondary level, and only 9% of the respondents were Ph. D holders. To check normality of data, two tests of normality, that is, Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilks' tests were performed and the results signified that the distributions were not normal as the significance value of $p < 0.05$. Thus, confirming that the distribution was not normal and required non-parametric tests for analysis. So, non-parametric measure of statistical dependence, that is, Spearman's rho correlation was used to find the relationship between each of the four selected constructs with a value as 0.05.

The findings reveal that CE is significantly negatively related to COO ($r = -.548$, $p < .05$) and PI ($r = -.814$, $p < .05$). Thus, the results support the hypotheses H1 and H2. Furthermore, a significant positive relationship was observed between COO and PI ($r = .646$, $p < .05$). Therefore, the hypothesis H4 is also supported (Table 3). Furthermore, multiple regression analysis was used to predict the degree of influence of CE and COO on PI. The results indicate that two predictors explained 62.4% of the variance ($R^2 = .62$, $F(2,97) = 80.33$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, IV's were checked for multicollinearity and no problem of multicollinearity was observed as the values of tolerance were greater than .01 and values of VIF were less than 10 (Meyers, Gamst, & Guarino, 2006, p.212). The results are depicted in the Table 4.

As indicated in the Table 4, the results completely support the H1 (Negative effect, $\beta = -.581$, $p < .000$) and also H4 (Positive effect, $\beta = .333$, $p < .001$). To check whether significant differences existed between the demographic variables (age, monthly income, and educational levels) and CE level, a non-parametric analysis of variance (ANOVA), that is, the Kruskal-Wallis test was applied. The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed no significant differences ($\chi^2_{(2)} = 5.081$, $p = .079$) among the three groups on monthly income based on CE tendencies.

Also, no significant differences ($\chi^2_{(4)}=3.378, p=.497$) among groups of education level have been found. No significant differences ($\chi^2_{(4)}=2.953, p=.566$) have been found between groups of age on the basis of CE tendencies. As the results of the Kruskal-Wallis signify no difference in CE tendencies on the basis of demographic variables, hence, the H3 is rejected.

Managerial Implications

The finding that consumer ethnocentric tendencies are negatively related to country-of-origin preferences is important for managers of foreign brands. Particularly, re-positioning of their products in the minds of high ethnocentric consumers is vital to tap the uncovered segments. Also, results indicated a negative relationship between CE tendencies and purchase intention of foreign products, which require the attention of brand managers to communicate product lines effectively by synergizing the criteria of good quality and reasonable prices. Furthermore, results of this study can be useful for marketers, as they provide insights on consumer purchase behavior, thus helping them to develop effective marketing strategies for Indian consumers in pitching products of indigenous and foreign origin. Furthermore, managers can cater to different segments of consumers by utilizing an effective marketing mix, especially the product mix, so as to change the stereotypical view of foreign brands' better quality. Furthermore, consumers with high ethnocentrism offer a niche market for domestic products, which can be catered to by devising standards, which can enhance the perceived quality of the indigenous products.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has explored the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism, country-of-origin, and purchase intentions. Based on data analysis, it has been concluded that consumer ethnocentrism and country-of-origin are important predictors of purchase intentions regarding foreign products. Furthermore, it was also observed that income levels, gender, age, and educational levels do not impact the consumer ethnocentric tendencies significantly. These results of demographic variables are in contrast to the results obtained by previous research studies conducted in other countries in this area. Also, it was observed that ethnocentric tendencies had a negative moderate influence on purchase intentions towards foreign products among Indian consumers. Thus, the findings of this study have extended the work of Bamber et al. (2012), who only studied the constructs but not the demographic variables.

Limitations of the Study and Scope for Future Research

As no single study is perfect, similarly, this research also has certain limitations. Firstly, the use of non-probability sampling due to lack of time limited the generalizability of this study as the selected constructs are expected to vary with monthly income, educational levels, and age (Sharma et al., 1995). Secondly, only one dependent variable was used, that is, purchase intention, although selected independent constructs may influence other variables as well. Also, the data for the present study was collected from the Tricity region, results of which cannot be fully generalized for pan - India based on the size and location of the sample. Furthermore, the data collected did not follow normal probability distribution, limiting the use of robust statistical tools.

Future research could seek improvisation of the present study by collecting larger sample from different regions of India with diverse demographic characteristics. In addition, the selected constructs can be used to study the behavior of consumers of two or more countries. Furthermore, different product categories can be considered to get deep insights about the concept. Additionally, other extraneous factors like price, quality, and availability can also be taken up to study the ethnocentric tendencies and purchase intentions. Moreover, the use of the fuzzy approach can also be considered as a future dimension of the study.

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