

The Influence of Consumer Ethnocentrism on Consumer Purchase Intention of Domestic Food Products

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ABSTRACT Purpose – this paper aims to examine the correlations among customer gender, age, place of residence, purchase intention and consumer ethnocentrism. and outlining how do Palestinian consumer demographic variables are related to their level of ethnocentrism and to what level do consumer ethnocentrism could affect their buying intentions toward domestic food products.

Design/methodology/approach – This paper made use of purposive sampling technique to select 185 Palestinian consumers from Ramallah city. Standardized scales that measured customer purchase intention and consumer ethnocentrism were adapted into a questionnaire format and used for data collection after they were revalidated for cultural relevance.

Findings – Seven hypotheses were tested in the study. Results showed significant positive relationships among customer age, purchase intention and consumer ethnocentrism ($p < .01$). Additional result revealed significant positive relationship between purchase intention and consumer ethnocentrism. Still, gender and place of residence did not influence consumer ethnocentrism neither purchase intention. It was concluded that customer age and consumer ethnocentrism were related to consumer purchase intention of food products.

Research limitations/implications – The study was conducted only in one city in Palestine, in addition, the small sample size may affect the generalizability of the findings.

Practical implications – The study results could have important implications for the Palestinian decision and policymakers by raising the awareness about

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the Palestinian consumers ethnocentrism level and its effect on their food brands choices. Also, it's important for helping Palestinian food producers and company managers to better comprehend their consumer buying behavior.

Originality/value - This paper study a unique turbulent market and studied how consumer ethnocentrism in a market that is still under occupation is affecting the consumer behavior in that market.

KEYWORDS: Palestine, food sector, ethnocentrism, intention to buy, consumer behavior, demographic.

JEL CODE: M31, M39

Introduction

The last decade witnessed the election of some ethnocentric politicians as Orban in Hungary and Donald Trump in the USA and many other trends as the Brexit in the UK which show that at present we live in a world where ethnicity, ethnocentrism, authoritarianism and exclusionary tendencies have resurged (Bizumic, 2018). In addition, the world became more interrelated and globalized (Bizumic, 2018; Guo, Tu, & Cheng, 2018) with different technological, political, economic, and societal forces that generates extraordinary opportunities and threats for companies that compete in the international marketplace (Carpenter, Moore, Alexander, & Doherty, 2013). For example, over the last decades, markets all over the world have integrated into a joint comprehensive marketplace, and global consumer culture has grown in almost everywhere of the world. However, the escalation in ethnocentric attitudes in a gradually globalized world is clearly connected. Globalization threatens ethnic groups by homogenizing and threatens their local norms, values, and practices. Therefore, people may fear that globalization and try to neutralize or avoid its negative consequences. As a result, individuals restate their ethnic attitudes in the form of ethnocentrism and turn to ethnocentric and nationalistic policies and politicians (Bizumic, 2018).

Globalization combined with improvement in transportation systems, new technologies, and rise in global media platforms encouraged most of the international companies to move towards global business (Che Aniza Che, Alam, Khalid, & Mokhtaruddin, 2018; Das & Saha, 2017). This situation led to an increase in the competition in international as well as local market and

creates a massive competition among domestic and foreign producers that forced institutions to increase their investments and find new innovative marketing technics. Therefore, as customers exposed to countless products from different countries (Das & Saha, 2017) and can easily buy foreign products but they still encounter internal conflicts about whether to purchase domestic or foreign products (Guo et al., 2018). So it became worthy for researchers to study customers ethnocentrism and determine whether they had preferential biases for domestic products over foreign products or not (Das & Saha, 2017).

Evaluating consumer ethnocentrism levels is deeply important to strategic decision making in the international marketplace because of its ability to give decision makers a signal for what level of standardization and specialization to apply in their strategies. Consumer ethnocentrism is also significant to international positioning, international branding, market entry mode decisions, and the materialization of country-of-origin effects (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015).

Thereafter, as the disposition towards consuming foreign products might cause economic decline of one country due to the weak competitiveness of local products, higher unemployment level, and decrease of local currency level (Che Aniza Che et al., 2018), this study hope to investigate this issue and try to provide deeper insights of the effect of ethnocentrism on purchase activities and could be used as a guidance to improve national manufactured food producer's marketing strategies.

Research problem

Be domestic or foreign goods, demographic, psychographic, cultural and social factors are important in assessing consumer behavior. Therefore, this exploratory research explores the association between consumer ethnocentrism and consumer purchasing intentions to highlight the effect of Palestinian consumers ethnocentrism on their purchasing intentions toward food products and to define the relationship between ethnocentrism and purchasing intention.

Literature review

Ethnocentrism

In 1906, the ethnocentrism concept was originally commenced by a sociologist named William Sumner (a Polish Jew working in Austria-Hungary) (Bizumic, 2018; Han & Guo, 2018; Park & Yoon, 2017). He saw ethnocentrism as a misconception that influences people to believe that their ethnic group is superior and more important than other ethnic groups and that all other ethnic groups are not as good as their own (Bizumic, 2018; Michailova, Piekkari, Storgaard, & Tienari, 2017; Park & Yoon, 2017; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015; Souiden, Ladhari, & Chang, 2018). Sumner defined ethnocentrism as; “when one’s own group is seen as the center and a reference for all others”(Bizumic, 2018; Che Aniza Che et al., 2018; Das & Saha, 2017). Therefore, the focal features of ethnocentrism comprise pride in local culture and perception of the imperfection of all other cultures (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). Ethnocentrism in developed countries is more applicable because of the tendency of the individuals to assess their made in product as of higher quality (Das & Saha, 2017; Lobo, Qing, & Chongguang, 2012; Michailova et al., 2017; Park & Yoon, 2017) and the reverse is applicable in developing countries (Lobo et al., 2012).

Ethnocentrism can be formed as a result of disconnected realities such as history lessons, personal encounters, mass media, the love for own country (Lee, Lee, & Li, 2017) or as result to different political and economic events that could form consumers attitudes toward domestic and imported products (Park & Yoon, 2017). That for, the level of ethnocentrism will affect the way consumers think about domestic products and their believes and attitudes toward them (Souiden et al., 2018; Vabø & Hansen, 2016). However, customers who are more open to other cultures and have the attitudes of ethnocentrism, patriotism, and conservatism, are more likely to have negative perceptions about imported products (Sharma & Wu, 2015) even when they recognize the superiority of imported products (Lee et al., 2017).

Thus, Consumers with high levels of ethnocentrism will perceive imported products as a threat to local economies, governments, organizations, and individual and seek to preclude the growing of foreign firms to neutralize this threat (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). Therefore, ethnocentric consumers believe that its inappropriate to buy and consume foreign imported products, because doing so could damage their country’s economy (Che Aniza Che et al., 2018; Das & Saha, 2017; Memery, Lindgreen, Megicks, & Angell, 2015; Park & Yoon, 2017; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015; Souiden et al., 2018) , intensifies

unemployment (Das & Saha, 2017; Guo et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2017; Memery et al., 2015; Park & Yoon, 2017), and considered as immoral, irresponsible (Guo et al., 2018), and betraying their local economy (Che Aniza Che et al., 2018; Guo et al., 2018; Lee et al., 2017) thereafter, they will buy domestic products regardless of their quality and prices (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015) especially if they recognize and observe the influence of their buying behavior on local suppliers, retailers and the wider community (Memery et al., 2015). This consequently translates into positive buying intentions and use and they will buy foreign products only when they cannot find a domestic alternative to buy (Das & Saha, 2017). On the contrary, lack of ethnocentrism representing an acceptance to buy and consume foreign made products (Das & Saha, 2017; Park & Yoon, 2017; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015) and judge products according to their quality regardless of where it is made (Das & Saha, 2017).

However, ethnocentrism can be seen as a normative based belief that buying domestic products will be beneficial for the country, the economy and citizens (Carpenter et al., 2013), and have a negative attitude towards international markets, products, and companies (Carpenter et al., 2013). With this perception and attitude, consumers show a systematic preference for domestic products, accompanied by a refusal of buying foreign products (Brodowsky, Stewart, & Anderson, 2018; Guo et al., 2018; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). Consumer ethnocentrism also gives consumers feelings of belongingness (Park & Yoon, 2017) that can define which purchase behavior is suitable or unsuitable (Das & Saha, 2017; Park & Yoon, 2017; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). Therefore, ethnocentrism can be used to expect consumers' behavior towards product purchase intention (Che Aniza Che et al., 2018; Vabø & Hansen, 2016).

Personality and national identity

Therefore consumer ethnocentrism representing a type of attitude that is directly different from global consumer culture, (Bizumic, 2018). But, because of global trade policies, consumers are overwhelmed with more overseas products than ever before. Previous researches that study the effect of products country-of-origin in developed countries have discovered that consumers prefer domestic products, especially when there is a shortage in the information about the product and the relationship between country-of-origin and the image of imported products is particularly strong when consumer ethnocentrism is involved (Lobo et al., 2012).

Consumer ethnocentrism is a personality trait, and therefore complies to the definition of personality as inner, individual characteristics that govern and

reflect how consumers respond to different stimuli in the environment (Vabø & Hansen, 2016). Hence, there is a strong relation between ethnocentrism and national identity. Ethnocentric people's tended to view the world as "us versus them", this view stems from their reflexively stable personality which make them more inflexible in their buying behavior toward foreign product offerings (Lee et al., 2017). Ethnocentrism can be seen as a pervasive personality trait that is part of one's ideological system or what is called the "authoritarian personality" according to Freudian psychoanalytic theory that shaped as a result to different childhood experiences (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015).

However, ethnocentric tendencies are more durable and stable than attitudes (Balabanis & Siamagka, 2017). nevertheless, ethnocentric behavior may not be static, especially in emerging countries. Instead, it may change because of changes in consumer values over time – growing of individualism and declining of collectivism values - as a result of rapid economic development and globalization in a given region, which will affect consumer behavior towards domestic versus foreign brands especially for younger generation (Han & Guo, 2018).

Demographic variables

Consumer's ethnocentrism degree affected by the individual's demographic factors (Che Aniza Che et al., 2018; Hassouneh, 2017). It was found that in most countries education (Bada & Onuoha, 2018; Hassouneh, 2017), income (Bada & Onuoha, 2018), and ethnicity will negatively affect ethnocentrism, while young, female, and socially lower class individuals found to be more ethnocentric consumers than others (Che Aniza Che et al., 2018). However, the majority of the studies concluded that as people get older, they became more ethnocentric due to increased cosmopolitan lifestyle and they are generally more traditional and nationalistic. On the other hand, as people get more educated, their ethnocentrism reduced, and females are more ethnocentric than males (Das & Saha, 2017). Finally, it was found that the nature of the society to be collectivist society individualist is also affect the level of consumer ethnocentrism (Souiden et al., 2018) where collectivist societies in general showed a higher levels of consumer ethnocentrism (Bada & Onuoha, 2018).

Purchase Intention

People are faced with plentiful food choices every day, although the need for food is vital and basic in nature but it is still complicated due to the multi-

factors and dimensions that affect the food buying decision (Che Aniza Che et al., 2018; Vabø & Hansen, 2016). Such factors can be summarized and divided into three main groups. First, it is the *product or food-related factors*, which rely on the food properties and components, sensory attributes as smell and taste, functional factors and nutrient content. Second, *environmentally related factors* as economic and socio-cultural issues. Finally, *consumer-related factors* that include personality and psychological factors. Moreover, Consumers have different drivers to purchase local foods as moral, health, quality, price, shopping benefits, local support and ethical sustainability (Vabø & Hansen, 2016). In addition to the previous factors, there still many other factors that influence consumer purchasing intention at different levels, especially in the contexts of country of origin and consumer attitudes (Che Aniza Che et al., 2018). Moreover, according to the theory of planned behavior, consumers intentions to complete their buying behavior determines their performance in completing that behavior (Che Aniza Che et al., 2018) and for purchase behavior to be performed opportunities and resources, as accessibility to the product, must be existing and without such circumstances, it would be problematic to complete a purchase, regardless of how favourable the intentions may be (Lobo et al., 2012).

Various marketing researches study the purchase intention as one of the outcome variables that clarified consumer behavior in decision making (Brodowsky et al., 2018; Che Aniza Che et al., 2018; Lobo et al., 2012). However, cultures and subcultures impacted consumer's purchase intention in different ways. But still intentions cannot act as attitudes (Che Aniza Che et al., 2018) but still it describes a consumer's prediction about what product to buy from competing or similar brands in the market (Bada & Onuoha, 2018). Therefore, intention can be seen as a motivation to exert effort to complete a behavior, and performed when the product is similar with the consumer self-image or reflect themselves (Che Aniza Che et al., 2018, p. 5).

However, Consumer's ethnocentric attitude could impact their decisions to buy either a foreign or home-made product (Bada & Onuoha, 2018). Thereafter, companies can fail to market their products internationally if they did not understand how customers in global markets respond to country-related manufacturing decisions and messages, since not all of the consumers' responses to such decisions in a similar way. So, managers should understand and familiar how consumer characteristics as ethnocentrism influence their purchases behavior (Brodowsky et al., 2018).

Research design and sample

This study considered all customers of domestic and foreign food brands in different Palestinian regions as a population and applied a simple random sampling. To maximize the chance of reaching a wide socio-demographic sample, a bilingual questionnaire in English and Arabic language was developed, internet administration was chosen for its effectiveness and efficiency. It reaches the focal demographic group within a specified budget and time frame. The questionnaire was electronically prepared and distributed through different social media sites and email lists. Data were collected over December- 2018. The participants were asked to show their attitudes and opinions toward buying domestic and foreign food brands. A total of 191 participants voluntarily took part, but 185 completed surveys were used in the actual data analysis. A profile of the sample respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sampled population (N=185).

| Socio-demographic characteristics | Percentages |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| Gender | |
| Male | 45% |
| Female | 55% |
| Age | |
| Less than 18 | 4.3% |
| 18-28 | 30.8% |
| 29-39 | 27% |
| 40-50 | 23.8% |
| 51-61 | 13.5% |
| More than 61 | 0.5% |
| Residence | |
| City | 15.1% |
| Village | 42.7% |
| Camp | 42.2% |

Source: SPSS results

The questionnaire was divided into two parts, the first part is designed to collect respondent’s personal information, and the second part contains 10 questions depending on a fourth Likert Scale ranging from ‘strongly disagree’ (1) to

‘strongly agree’ (4), that designed to acknowledge respondents’ perceptions and attitudes.

To analyze the data and infer the relationship between the variables a Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 21 software by IBM was used. Frequencies, descriptive statistics, and correlations were used to test research hypotheses and determine which factor has the most and the least impact on consumers purchasing intention.

Research hypothesis

- H1:** There is a significant relationship between consumer gender and consumer ethnocentrism level.
- H2:** There is a significant relationship between consumer age and consumer ethnocentrism level.
- H3:** There is a significant relationship between consumer residence place and consumer ethnocentrism level.
- H4:** There is a significant relationship between consumer gender and consumer intention to buy domestic food products.
- H5:** There is a significant relationship between consumer age and intention to buy domestic food products.
- H6:** There is a significant relationship between consumer residence place and consumer intention to buy domestic food products.
- H7:** There is a significant relationship between consumer ethnocentrism level and consumer intention to buy domestic food products.

Scale reliability

The scale was tested for reliability by using Cronbach Alpha coefficient. For the test purposes the scale was tested for reliability by taking the whole scale by including all the items in the test, after that, the reliability test taken for the two computed variables of ethnocentrism and buying intention by taking the related items for each one on the computed variables. All values surpassed the recommended value of .70. Also, no items were deleted from the scale since all of the items shows a strong correlation with the total score (lower $r=.367$)(Field, 2005). The results of reliability tests shown in table 2.

Table 2: Cronbach Alpha coefficient

| | Cronbach Alpha coefficient |
|---|----------------------------|
| All items | .801 |
| Consumer Ethnocentrism | .739 |
| Buying intention toward domestic products | .734 |

Source: SPSS results

Data analysis

To determine the level of Palestinian consumer ethnocentrism and their purchasing intentions toward domestic food products, respondents were asked to identify their attitudes toward ethnocentric behaviors and their support to the idea of buying domestic products on a scale of 1-4, where 1 is strongly disagree and 4 is strongly agree. Then, the mean and the standard deviation of each variable were calculated as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive data

| Buying decision evaluation criteria | Mean | Standard deviation | N |
|---|------|--------------------|-----|
| Ethnocentrism (computed variable) | 3.39 | .480 | 185 |
| Only import foreign food products if there is no substitute. | 3.39 | .773 | |
| Buy domestic food products to support local economy. | 3.46 | .608 | |
| Buying foreign food products will increase unemployment rate. | 3.30 | .717 | |
| Preference to buy domestic food products. | 3.17 | .739 | |
| Buying domestic food products is a duty. | 3.61 | .572 | |
| Purchasing intention | 3.35 | .415 | |
| Positive attitude toward consuming domestic food products. | 3.32 | .582 | |
| Support purchasing domestic food products. | 3.51 | .553 | |
| Domestic food products worth buying. | 3.26 | .608 | |
| Already buying domestic food products. | 3.25 | .621 | |
| Continue buying domestic food products. | 3.38 | .616 | |

Source: SPSS results

The descriptive data in table 3 show that the Palestinian consumers are ethnocentric consumers since the mean value for the computed variable (ethnocentrism) was 3.39 on a scale of 1 to 4. The sampled consumers also show that they support and encourage the idea of buying domestic food products and not buying foreign food products unless there is no domestic substitute. They also believe that supporting domestic food producers is every Palestinian consumer duty and not doing that could increase unemployment rates and hurt the national economy. These conclusions were supported with mean values higher than 3.17.

The second part of the questionnaire was designed to identify the consumers buying intentions toward domestic food products. The mean value for the computed variable (buying intention) was 3.35 on a scale of 1 to 4. Therefore, the sampled consumers show a tendency to buy and consume food domestic products and they have a positive attitude toward domestic products, also they think that domestic food products worth buying, and they will continue buying them in the future. These conclusions were supported with mean values higher than 3.25. Furthermore, standard deviation values show that respondents' answers are not highly dispersed.

Correlations test

The study supposed that the consumer's demographics of gender, age, and residence place will affect both of the level of consumer ethnocentrism and buying intention. According to correlation coefficient shown in table 4, we can conclude the occurrence of a statically significant positive relationship between age and ethnocentrism at $P < .001$ and the magnitude, or strength, of the association is approximately weak ($.1 < |r| = .286 < .3$). Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis (H2). also, there is statically significant positive relationship between age and buying intentions at $P < .05$ and the magnitude, or strength, of the association is approximately weak ($.1 < |r| = .157 < .3$). Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis (H5) On contrary, gender and place of residence show a statically insignificant relationship with ethnocentrism with P values of .383 and .280 respectively. Also, their relationship with buying intentions was statically insignificant at P values of .485 and .106 respectively. Hence, we can accept the null hypothesis and reject the alternative hypotheses (H1, H3, H4, and H6). Finally, the data analysis approved the occurrence of statically significant positive relationship between consumers ethnocentrism level and their intention to buy domestic products at $P < .001$ and the magnitude,

or strength, of the association is approximately moderate ($.3 < |r=.475| < .5$). Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis (H7).

Table 4: correlation coefficients

| | | Ethnocentrism | Purchasing Intention | N |
|-----------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|----------|
| Gender | Pearson Correlation | -.022 | -.003 | 185 |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | .383 | .485 | |
| Age | Pearson Correlation | .286 | .157 | |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | .000 | .017 | |
| Residence | Pearson Correlation | -.043 | -.092 | |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | .280 | .106 | |
| Ethnocentrism | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .475 | |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | | .000 | |
| Purchasing Intention | Pearson Correlation | .475 | 1 | |
| | Sig. (1-tailed) | .000 | | |

Source: SPSS results

Research findings and conclusions

The study conducted to study the relationships between the Palestinian consumer demographics and the level of consumers ethnocentrism and intention to buy domestic food products, in addition to study the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and their buying intention toward domestic food products. It was found that older Palestinian consumers tend to show higher levels of ethnocentrism while their gender and place of residence did not affect their level ethnocentrism. However, Palestinian consumers show a tendency toward buying domestic product due to their believes and motives to support the national and local economy and reduce the unemployment rate.

Moreover, Palestinian consumers, prefer to buy domestic food products over foreign imported products and believe that domestic product worth to

be bought and consumed. This behavior is related to consumers age where older consumers has a stronger believe in comparison to younger consumers. Therefore, it was found that age is significantly related to consumers intention to buy while the place of residence and gender did not show any effect on the consumers intention to buy.

Finally, we can say that Palestinian consumers are similar to many consumers around the world in that they have a high level of consumer ethnocentrism that influence their intentions to buy and support domestic product and not buying imported product unless there is no domestic alternative as a national duty to support their country economy.

These results could have very important implications for the Palestinian decision makers. Policy makers should work on raising awareness about the negative impact of consuming Israeli products on the local market. Palestinian producers and company managers should also improve their products quality to increase Palestinian consumer satisfaction towards the local products.

Limitations

The study was conducted only in Ramallah city which is one of the major cities in the Palestinian territories in addition, the small sample size in the present study may affect the generalizability of its findings to the larger population.

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