MAKING THEIR OWN DECISIONS: STUDENT CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRIC TENDENCIES

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ABSTRACT

The incoming freshman class at a regional university was surveyed to determine student consumer ethnocentricity. The CETSCALE was utilized in a paper and pencil survey. All students had been tasked with reading a common reader book; in this case, the book explored global product sourcing. Results showed that white, right-leaning males from rural areas had the highest levels of consumer ethnocentrism, consistent with the conservative ethos of the region. Females, urban students, non-whites and left-leaning students had lower consumer ethnocentrism scores. Overall, the sample leaned toward being less consumer ethnocentric than might be expected when compared to a theoretical midpoint of the scale, yet scored three points on average more ethnocentric than students nationwide in prior studies. A regression with CETSCALE as the dependent variable was calculated; five binary variables were shown to be significant predictors (Male, Rural, White, Right-Leaning, and Had Not Read Book). **JEL Classification:** D1

INTRODUCTION

The effects of globalization are far reaching as countries around the world wrestle with the impacts of imported goods versus domestic products. Further complicating these effects are issues of fair trade, sweatshops, lost jobs, and downturns in local economies. To counteract globalization effects in the U.S., messages of patriotism, buying American, and boosting the economy become filters for buying behavior. Although buying behavior is likely influenced by home life, moving to college and living on one's own creates a need to discern a basis for purchases, whether from loyal or ethical standpoints, or simply out of necessity. When "buy American" filters meet larger global awareness, consumer ethnocentrism could potentially be influenced as students matriculate into college.

The purpose of the present research is to examine consumer ethnocentric tendencies of incoming freshmen using students from West Texas A&M University (WTAMU), a public regional Division II school with 7900 students located in the Texas Panhandle. Although university students have been sampled, the focus of most studies is the development of the Consumer Ethnocentrism Tendencies Scale (CETSCALE; e.g., Shimp & Sharma, 1987) and cross-cultural comparisons (e.g., Durvasula, Andrews, & Netemeyer, 1997). This study focuses specifically on burgeoning attitudes of U. S. university students now making purchasing decisions on their own as influenced by the university setting for the first time. Additionally, being part of the incoming freshman class, participants were asked to read the same text about the garment industry. This study examines the possibility of students being influenced through educational tools about the global market. Race is an included factor in this study since most research on the CETSCALE does not focus on race as a potential antecedent to consumer ethnocentrism. A review of the consumer ethnocentrism literature and corresponding hypotheses follows.

CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM AND AWARENESS

Rooted in sociology, ethnocentrism was introduced by Sumner (1906) and defined as the proclivity to view your own ethnic group as superior to other groups (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Shimp and Sharma adapted this concept, defining consumer ethnocentrism as "the beliefs held by consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products" (1987, p. 280; Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995). Purchasing foreign-made products can be perceived as damaging to the local economy because of loss of jobs and even entire industries to foreign markets. Additionally, there is a social identity attached to consumer ethnocentrism, whereby a consumer belongs with the patriotic in-group, or is in the out-group because of willingness to purchase imported goods (Huang, Phau, Lin, Chung, & Lin, 2008). The CETSCALE is a widely used measure of consumer ethnocentric tendencies.

CETSCALE

Developed by Shimp and Sharma (1987) in response to a call for greater attention to consumer ethnocentrism by marketing and consumer behavior scholars, the CETSCALE is designed to measure how consumers are inclined to act toward foreign-made goods. There is no shortage of research testing the CETSCALE related to country of origin in a global market (e.g., Cumberland, Solgaard, & Nikodemska-Wolowik, 2010; Hamlin, Ellouzi, & Canterbury, 2011; John & Brady, 2011; Martin & Eroglu, 1993; Parker, Haytko, & Hermans, 2011; Spillan, Kang, & Barat, 2011; Yoo & Donthu, 2005). CET Scores have ranged from 85.07 in Korea (Sharma et al., 1995) to 32.02 in Russia (Durvasula et al., 1997) with the U.S. falling in the middle at 51.92 (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Surprisingly there are only a few studies conducted about the U.S. market as researchers have sought to understand consumer ethnocentric tendencies in other countries. This is likely the reason race has not been tested as an antecedent in most studies as well.

Consumer ethnocentrism affects how products are viewed and whether they are purchased, moderated by the perceived necessity of the product and the perceived economic threat of foreign competition (Sharma et al., 1995; de Ruyter, van Birgelen, & Wetzels, 1998). "Highly ethnocentric consumers are probably more prone to biased judgments by being more inclined to accentuate the positive aspects of domestic products and to discount the virtues of foreign-made items" (Shimp & Sharma, 1987,

p. 287). Consumers are known to evaluate products by the image of the country from where the product originates if other factors of quality are not present (Martin & Eroglu, 1993). Thus, the choices made about products do not always reside in the tangible characteristics, but are influenced by ethnocentric tendencies (Nakos & Hajidimitrou, 2007). When faced with a choice of products, consumers are motivated to reduce uncertainty about the product, but only if they are not also facing evaluation uncertainty (Shiu, Walsh, Hassan, & Shaw, 2011, p. 602). "Marketing theory suggests that if a consumer has ethnocentric tendencies he or she will be more likely to purchase locally produced products and to even further perceive these products as possessing higher quality" (Nakos & Hajidimitrou, 2007, p. 58). Consumers will thus rely on their perceptions rather than seeking more information about the product.

Increasing Awareness

Increasing awareness might provide a means for less reliance on ethnocentric perceptions. Common reader programs in which incoming freshmen are expected to read the same text have become increasingly popular as schools seek to achieve a common bond between incoming students, often with the goal of starting conversations about important social issues (Mallard, Lowery-Hart, Andersen, Cuevas, & Campbell, 2008). Providing a text with social importance to students as they begin forming their own purchasing attitudes could potentially impact awareness if not actual buying behaviors.

We provide an additional component by looking at how consumer ethnocentric tendencies might affect intentions to purchase and/or seek out fair trade products. The fair trade label is among the favored of ethical consumption and there has been a significant increase in fair trade products (Bezençon & Blili, 2011). Fair trade seeks to provide equity in international trade with particular focus on marginalized producers.

Although incoming college freshmen as a group have not been studied using the CETSCALE, a variety of demographics applicable to this population have been studied with mixed results. Sharma et al. (1995) theorized that several demographic factors would affect CET including age, gender, education, and income. Additionally, "the CETSCALE is shown to be positively correlated with collective tendencies and with patriotic/conservative attitudes but negatively correlated with cultural openness, education, and income" (p. 34). Bawa (2004) and Sharma et al. (1995) found that women exhibited greater consumer ethnocentric tendencies than men, but other studies found no significant difference between men and women in the CET (Hamelin, Ellouizi, & Canterbury, 2011), the CET and use of services (de Ruyter, van Birgelen, & Wetzels, 1998), or the CET and lifestyle (Spillan et al., 2011). Masculinity was positively related to CET in a study conducted with consumers in Japan (Yoo & Donthu, 2005). Conservative religious values are high among the student

population studied which could result in a masculine societal dimension. With such mixed results but an expected masculine dimension in this study, we put forth the following:

> H1: Males will have a higher summated CETSCALE score than will females.

Geographic regions and lifestyle preferences likely play a role in consumer ethnocentrism. "Extensive geographic differences in consumers' lifestyles and purchase behaviors have prompted many companies to develop regional marketing programs that customize marketing mix elements to regional preferences" (Shimp & Sharma, 1987, p. 288). Additionally, lifestyle influences purchase decisions because it reflects the interests, beliefs, activities, and opinions of the consumer (Spillan, Kang, & Barat, 2011). Many in the student population from which participants were chosen come from rural, conservative areas. Additionally, the region is defined by its religious and politically conservative leanings. Conservatism has been shown to be positively related to consumer ethnocentrism (de Ruyter, van Birgelen, & Wetzels, 1998), therefore,

> H2: Rural dwellers will have a higher summated CETSCALE score than will non-rural dwellers (i.e., city + suburban).

> H3: Right-leaning respondents will have a higher summated CETSCALE score than left-leaning respondents.

Race has not been a factor in most studies conducted using the CETSCALE, presumably because the studies used a fairly homogenous population. In looking at students from a U.S. university, not only are a variety of races represented, but it is possible international students were included in the study population. This has been a neglected focus of CETSCALE research. Along with the religious conservative views of the rural region, patriotism and buying American is a common theme in the rural areas adjacent to the university, with a predominantly white population, so in accordance with other CETSCALE demographic findings, we expect:

> H4: White respondents will have a higher summated CETSCALE score than will non-white participants.

In addition to the demographic variables, this study seeks to determine whether conversations related to global marketing issues might have an impact on consumer ethnocentrism. The following addresses the chosen text and related global market issues.

WHERE AM I WEARING

As part of WTAMU's common reader program, all incoming freshmen were instructed to read *Where Am I Wearing* by Kelsey Timmerman. Timmerman takes an impassioned look at the labels on U.S. clothing and who

put them there. Starting his journey somewhat unsuccessfully and disorganized in Honduras, Timmerman finds that factories often do not want anyone to see what is behind closed doors and workers are afraid to talk to outsiders. Undaunted, Timmerman takes out a second mortgage on his house and funds his travels to factories in Bangladesh, Cambodia, China, and the USA.

Going beyond just thinking about clothes and sweatshops, Timmerman asks the reader to consider the people who make clothes for Americans as he introduces the reader to those he met from the factories he visited. Although often supporting large families on small sums of money, factory life means a life away from

prostitution and landfill mining. Though activists seek a stronger solution, Timmerman argues the need for good working conditions but also argues that some factory workers are grateful for the job that keeps them off the streets. The message Timmerman asserts is that while efforts to create better working conditions is something that should be strived for, Americans need to be aware that boycotting often undercuts the working poor in these countries. These workers need the jobs as much as Americans think they need cheap prices.

During the first six weeks of the semester, the incoming freshmen engaged in conversation and activities related to the book, were invited to participate in a web-interface video chat with factory workers, discussed fair trade markets, and attended freshman convocation with Timmerman as the keynote speaker. These activities, though, occurred after students completed the survey reported herein. As reported below, a large portion of students had read the book prior to being surveyed. It is presumed that by reading the book, students would demonstrate increasing awareness of working conditions and the consequences of positive and negative actions, and these might lead to lower CETSCALE scores. We thereby hypothesize:

> H5: Students who have read *Where Am I Wearing* will have a lower mean summated CETSCALE score than will those who have not read it.

CETSCALE scores could further reveal key information for segmenting target markets for fair trade. Researchers of fair trade marketing found an "ethical purchasing gap" whereby 30% of consumers claim interest in ethical purchasing but only 3% of purchases reflect ethical processing (Bray, Johns, & Kilburn, 2010, p. 597); which potentially indicates a small segmented market (Bondy & Talwar, 2011). Further fair trade research reveals that "behavioral intentions are linked with attitudes and subjective norms," though this might be influenced by other factors such as price (Bondy & Talwar, 2011, p. 366). Consumer ethnocentric attitudes are likely to affect ethical purchase decisions whereby lower ethnocentrism might increase the intent to buy foreign products, particularly if they are produced and distributed under fair trade conditions. In a study of consumers in Japan, CET was found to be negatively correlated to the intent to purchase foreign products (Yoo & Donthu, 2005), which could translate to fair trade products as well. Though the ethical purchasing gap might derail consumers intending to purchase ethically produced products, consumers with high ethnocentrism scores will not meet fair trade target market criteria.

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H6: Students who indicate a desire to purchase a product labeled as Fair Trade will have a lower mean summated CETSCORE than will students who indicated no desire to purchase such products.

H7: Students who indicated they had purchased a product labeled as Fair Trade will have a lower mean summated CETSCORE than will students who indicated no such prior purchase.

It is possible that increasing awareness of global issues might create other values in choosing products aside from the influence of family. However, based on the hypotheses, we expect conservatism to be a strong influence in the decision making of the student participants.

METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

A paper survey was distributed to each section of a required first-year experience course populated by the incoming freshman class. A total of 939 surveys were completed and returned (out of 1180 distributed), although missing data explains lower numbers on individual survey items. It should be noted that, while the response rate is high, students were not forced to participate in the study. Furthermore, individual professors could opt out of including the survey in their respective class sections. Students were asked to provide demographic information, indicate whether they had read the common reader, answer the 17-item CETSCALE (Consumer Ethnocentrism Scale), and respond to several questions relating to awareness of global worker conditions and Fair Trade products.

The 17-item CETSCALE was summated as a new composite variable, with values ranging from 17 to 119 (mean = 54.25; s.d. = 18.27), with the results closely replicating the summated scale for U. S. students (51.92; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Cronbach's alpha was calculated for the 17 questions (alpha = 0.947), the results being consistent with initial calculations reported by Shimp and Sharma (1987).

T-tests were calculated along several demographic variables, including Gender, Race, Political Preference, and Residence. While Gender was truly a binary variable, the others were multi-categorical. These remaining variables were collapsed such that Race was sorted into White and Non-White (including all others), Political Preference into Left-Leaning and Right-Leaning (including Republican, Independent and Libertarian), and Residence into Urban (including City and Suburb) and Rural.

With regard to Gender, males (n = 404) had a mean CETSCALE score of 57.01, while females (n = 446) averaged 51.62 (t = 4.338; p = 0.000). We thus retain H1. Rural students (n = 318) averaged 57.47 on the CETSCALE, while Urban students (n = 531) averaged 52.31 (t = 4.022; p = 0.000). We thus retain H2.

Right-leaning students (n = 676) averaged 55.02 on the CETSCALE, while Left-leaning students (n = 148) averaged 50.39 (t = 2.783; p = 0.006). H3 is thus retained. Finally, Whites (n = 522) averaged 55.39, while Non-Whites (n = 303) averaged 52.11 (t = 2.514; p = 0.012). H4 is thus retained.

These results produce a profile of students demonstrating consumer ethnocentric tendencies. Rural white right-leaning males emerge as a typical student more likely to espouse pro-American buying habits. The above findings are consistent with much of the literature.

A binary variable was collected regarding whether students had or had not yet read the common reader (80% Yes, 20% No). A t-test was calculated comparing mean CETSCALE scores for these two groups. The Yes group (n = 679) averaged 53.58, while the No group (n = 166) averaged 56.94 (t = 2.128; p = 0.034). We thus retain H5. This finding suggests that, in isolation, reading the book and showing a corresponding decrease in consumer ethnocentrism may be related.

Students were also asked to indicate whether they had a desire to purchase products labeled as Fair Trade, as well as whether they had prior purchase experience with Fair Trade products. Among students answering the first question, the Yes group (n = 639) averaged 53.41 on the CETSCALE, while the No group (n = 183) averaged 57.09 (t = 2.421; p = 0.016). For the second question, the Yes group (n = 397) averaged 52.83, while the No group (n = 417) averaged 55.83 (t = 2.349; p = 0.019). We thus retain H6 and H7.

Stepwise multiple regression models with CETSCALE as the Dependent Variable were then calculated with Gender, Race, Political Preference, Residence, and Read Book as independent variables. True binary (dummy) variables were recoded for these measures, with 1s representing Males, Whites, Right-Leaning, Rural, and Have Not Read, and 0s representing the opposites. The model was calculated without an intercept, with the full model specified as:

CETSCALE = B1Gender + B2Race + B3Political + B4Residence + B5Book + e

Table 1
T-Tests for CETSCALE means

Hypothesis	Variable	Category	n	CETSCALE	t	prob
H1	Gender	Male	404	57.01	4.338	0.000
		Female	446	51.62		
H2	Residence	Rural	318	57.47	4.022	0.000
		Metro	531	52.31		
H3	Political	Right-leaning	676	55.02	2.783	0.006
		Left-leaning	148	50.39		
H4	Race	White	522	55.39	2.514	0.012
		Non-White	303	52.11		
H5	Read the	Yes	679	53.58	2.128	0.034
	Book	No	166	56.94		
H6	Desire Fair	Yes	639	53.41	2.421	0.016
	Trade	No	183	57.09		
	Product					
H7	Purchased	Yes	397	52.83	2.349	0.019
	Fair Trade	No	417	55.83		
	Product					

Table 2
Model Summary

Model	R	R Square[b]	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.873[a]	.762	.761	27.888
2	.894[c]	.800	.800	25.560
3	.903[d]	.815	.814	24.624
4	.906[e]	.821	.820	24.235
5	.907[f]	.823	.822	24.117

a. Predictors: POLI

b. For regression through the origin (the no-intercept model), R Square measures the proportion of the variability in the dependent variable about the origin explained by regression. This CANNOT be compared to R Square for models which include an intercept.

c. Predictors: POLI, Please indicate your gender

d. Predictors: POLI, Please indicate your gender, RACE

e. Predictors: POLI, Please indicate your gender, RACE, HOME

f. Predictors: POLI, Please indicate your gender, RACE, HOME, Have you read the book, Where Am I Wearing? by Kelsey Timmerman?

The first variable to enter the regression was POLI, with Right-leaning students having a much higher CETSCALE score than those of Left-leaning students. POLI alone produced an R-square of .762, indicating an exceptionally good fit even for only one variable.

Subsequent variables entered as follows:

POLI→GENDER→RACE→HOME→NOT READ BOOK

The final regression yielded five independent variables, each highly significant predictors. The composite R-square was .823, indicating a very good fit of the model to the data. Political preference, and specifically a conservative slant, was the leading variable in the output, indicating that as we expected, conservatism plays a big role in a student's consumer ethnocentrism.

Table 3
Coefficients[a,b]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	POLI	54.910	1.096	.873	50.122	.000
2	POLI	45.476	1.264	.723	35.967	.000
	GENDER	20.515	1.671	.247	12.277	.000
3	POLI	35.739	1.737	.568	20.571	.000
	GENDER	19.762	1.613	.238	12.254	.000
	RACE	14.329	1.823	.201	7.861	.000
4	POLI	33.724	1.754	.536	19.224	.000
	GENDER	18.609	1.603	.224	11.608	.000
	RACE	12.719	1.821	.178	6.984	.000
	HOME	9.239	1.799	.099	5.137	.000
5	POLI	33.227	1.754	.528	18.944	.000
	GENDER	17.763	1.621	.214	10.958	.000
	RACE	12.453	1.815	.175	6.862	.000
	HOME	8.772	1.797	.094	4.881	.000
	NOT READ BOOK	6.419	2.185	.050	2.937	.003

a. Dependent Variable: CETSCALE

b. Linear Regression through the Origin

DISCUSSION

The stepwise regression reported above is very revealing in that it indicates (and confirms) our initial conjecture that the conservatism of the region would play a large role in CETSCALE scores. The POLI variable was the first to enter the regression, and it alone accounts for 90% of the final R-square value. In other words, all things equal, a student declaring to be right-leaning would automatically be predicted to have a substantially higher CETSCALE score than one declaring left-leaning. The remaining binary variables continued to improve R-square as they were added, with each variable's coefficient being highly significant at $p = 0.01$. Of the five variables included, the smallest contributor to CETSCALE scores was not having read the book. Still, this variables impact was significant, albeit not as pronounced as the others.

If anything, this may not be a criticism of the book, but rather an endorsement of colleges and universities selecting eye-opening books to help raise student awareness to global topics. While the book variable itself may play a small role in the equation, in the broader scheme of things, it may be the catalyst whereby other antecedent conditions (i.e., Gender, Political Preference, Race, and Home) may be offset. As indicated above, students who had read the book had significantly lower consumer ethnocentrism scores.

The average CETSCALE score for this sample was 54.25, which is considerably lower than the theoretical midpoint of 68 (on a 17 – 119 scale). Thus, this group as a whole is already tending toward lower consumer ethnocentrism scores. While there was a significant difference in CETSCALE mean scores between those who had and had not read the book, we are actually observing shades of low consumer ethnocentrism, albeit in a conservative region. It is possible that different results might have been recorded had a different sample been surveyed, particularly one with a mean CETSCALE score close to the theoretical median value, or even higher. Still, the results reflect important findings even among a group that tends toward lower consumer ethnocentrism.

The results reported above may not be generalizable in that the university's students are drawn primarily from Texas (89%), with 61% from the immediate region (WTAMU Quick Facts, 2011). Approximately 66% are white, with 20% Hispanic, 5% African-American, and 6% Other. These demographics are not representative of the State (48.3% White, 35.7% Hispanic, 11.4% African-American, 4.6% Other; Window On State Government, 2011), or the U. S. (63.7% White, 8.7% Hispanic, 12.6% African-American, 15% Other; U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Furthermore, all respondents are of the same academic level and approximate age; thus, findings will be germane to this group, University, and instance. Still, as Shimp and Sharma (1987) point out, geographic differences do exist, and conservative persons tend to be more consumer ethnocentric. Our findings are thus likely to be indicative of the region in which the data were collected.

That age, academic level and region are fairly static across the sample, and thus limit generalizability, it should be noted that the vast majority of prior applications of the CETSCALE, particularly those conducted in the international arena, utilize samples that are not representative of the population. In fact, all international studies are done in isolation between national boundaries, cultures, languages, and other key traits. Furthermore, many of the nations surveyed are so remote and have so little domestic manufacturing of their own as to almost render the notion of consumer ethnocentrism moot. Nations such as Iceland, for example, may only produce food items, and import the bulk of all other consumer goods (Bandyopadhyay, 2011). This inherent limitation, though, is what demonstrates the applicability of the CETSCALE in a wide variety of settings. In the case of global economies with little or no manufacturing base, consumer ethnocentrism can be detected, even if the only comparison is among domestic and imported seafood products.

While there was a significant difference in mean CETSCALE scores between those who had and had not read the book, it may not be possible to conclude that this difference was solely produced by reading the book. It is possible that other variables could have influenced this outcome, as well as the

possibility that those who were motivated to read the book in the first place may have approached it with greater interest, and/or had a higher CETSCALE score prior to reading had that been measured.

Another limitation of the study is that students were not directed to consider any specific product purchases (whether domestic or imported), as studies such as Shimp and Sharma (1987) have done. Had we included such scenarios, it would have been possible to study consumer ethnocentrism in light of a product category, for example, or specific products. Future research could benefit from such an extension as we have started with our focus on an incoming freshman cohort. This could be a particularly fruitful endeavor given that the typical freshman is about to embark on adulthood, and the wide range of purchases that accompany such passage. By the age of 18, most freshmen will likely have purchased little more than the clothes they are wearing, which, of course, was the focus of the book.

Further limiting the study is the issue of fixed-point data collection. Will there continue to be an effect of the book and its awareness-heightening in six months? Five years? Or will these participants come to resemble the average person who has not read the book? The issue of permanence could be explored by tracking selected participants through a longitudinal study to assess these possible changes.

Other future research could expand the current study to multiple nations, particularly exporter nations to the U. S. It would be very interesting to compare and contrast ethnocentrism scores within the U. S., for example, as it pertains to imported vs. domestic garments, and then perform a similar study in a garment exporting nation such as Honduras, Bangladesh, Cambodia or China: nations that Kelsey Timmerman visited in his research for the book. Nations such as these derive significant portions of their economy from exporting, and are thus dependent in large part upon nations such as the U. S. importing their wares.

One contribution this study has made is the inclusion of race as an antecedent. White participants were found to exhibit higher consumer ethnocentrism than Non-Whites, which is not surprising given the white-dominant culture of the region, as well as the tendency toward conservative values. Future research should explore race as an antecedent, but with samples drawn from multiple regions across the country.

Fair Trade products (both desired purchases and actual purchase) resulted in significant differences, with those both desirous and with prior experience having lower mean CETSCALE scores. This is consistent with Shiu et al. (2011) and Nakos and Hajidimitrou (2007). As Bezençon and Blili (2011) report, Fair Trade products are enjoying increasing sales, and it may in fact be attributed to persons with lower CETSCALE scores.

Another contribution of the study is that a solitary cohort of persons of similar age and educational level was utilized. While this limits generalizability, it extends CETSCALE research one step further. Furthermore, the collective patriotic and conservative tendencies of the region from which this sample was drawn, in tandem with it being an academic cohort, render this a particularly unique application of the CETSCALE.

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