

# ETHNOCENTRISM AND ITS EFFECT ON PREFERENCE OF INDIAN CONSUMERS FOR FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC PRODUCTS

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to explore the relationship between Indian consumers' ethnocentric tendency (CET) and consequent purchase behavior for domestic and foreign products. This research paper examines the relationships between CET and the behavioural outcomes of Indian consumers. The proposed hypotheses are tested for the CET-Consequent Behaviour Framework using the results of the survey of Indian consumers. Besides descriptive statistics, correlation coefficient and regression analysis were applied to examine the relationship between CET and consequent behavioural constructs. This study concludes that a significant relationship exists between consumer ethnocentrism and consequent purchase behavior (overall general purchase intention) for domestic and foreign products. The study has its implication for the domestic marketers as well as foreign marketers operating in India. While domestic firms can overplay the ethnocentric sentiments of Indian consumers in marketing their products, foreign firms have to plan peculiar entry and marketing strategies to deal with such sentiments.

**Keywords:** *Consumer ethnocentrism, Consequent buying behavior, Domestic products, Foreign products*

## INTRODUCTION

Today's consumers are exposed to wide choices than ever before. All this has been possible due to increased globalisation, reduction in tariff and non-tariff barriers, IT revolution, penetration of smartphones, e-commerce. Multinational companies which are facing saturation in demand in developed countries, see developing economies as a potential opportunity to give impetus to the demand for their products. In terms of purchasing power parity (based on GDP), India is third largest economy in the world after China and USA (IMF Report, 2020). Political stability continued economic growth and reform process; demographic dividend of its population combined with robust domestic demand as result of ever growing & consuming middle class has made India an attractive destination for the global companies to venture this market (IBEF, 2020). This also necessitates an understanding of the consumers' perception and evaluation process for choosing

one brand over another. It was observed that consumers can have an inherent preference for home country products even though they may not be superior in quality. The explanation for such behaviour can be traced back to the ethnocentric studies (Sumner, 1906; Adorno et al., 1950; Levinson, 1957). Such ethnocentric tendency of consumers can be a potential threat to the foreign marketer who is planning to venture into the overseas market and therefore need to be studied in the country-context.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE & RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Ethnocentrism refers to an unfavourable attitude towards out-groups and favourable attitude towards in-group. Individuals associate themselves with and prefer in-groups while dissociate from and reject the out-groups (Sumner, 1902; Josiassen et al., 2011). To gauge the preference behaviour of the consumers in the purchase situation, Shimp and Sharma (1987) introduced the construct of 'consumer ethnocentrism'. The effect of ethnocentric behaviour of consumers is an overestimation of domestic products or underestimation of imports, a moral obligation to buy domestic products and a general preference for domestic products. An important contribution of the consumer ethnocentric research (Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Han, 1988; Sharma et al., 1995; Netemeyer et al., 1991; Kucukemiroglu, 1999; Kaynak and Kara, 2002) has been the development and international application of CETSCALE (Consumer Ethnocentric Tendency Scale). The scale was developed by Shimp and Sharma (1987) to measure the ethnocentric tendencies of consumers in a

purchase situation. It is a measure of the buying intention i.e., to purchase or not and therefore, labeled as 'tendency' (Kaynak and Kara, 2002). Accordingly, to study the level of ethnocentricity of Indian consumers, it is hypothesized:

**H1:** Indian consumers tend to be ethnocentric in behaviour.

### Consequent Behavioural Outcomes of CET

The effect of ethnocentric tendency on consumer purchase behaviour is the purchase of domestic products over foreign products. Sharma et al. (1995) empirically found that consumers' attitude towards import is affected by their level of ethnocentricity. Recent researchers have added new behavioural outcomes such as 'reluctance to buy foreign products' (Suh and Kwon, 2002), 'willingness to buy foreign products' (Klein et al., 1998; Suh and Kwon, 2002; Rose et al., 2009; Parker et al., 2011), 'support for foreign products' (Zarkada-Fraser and Fraser, 2002), 'domestic purchase bias' (Olsen et al., 1993; Vida et al., 2008), 'preference for domestic (or foreign) products' (Balabanis and Diamantopolous, 2004; Evanschitzky et al., 2008) and purchase of foreign (or domestic) products (Chan et al., 2009). Accordingly, present study investigates the following hypothesized relationship between ethnocentric tendency of Indian consumers and their consequential behavioural outcomes:

**Attitude towards foreign products:** It is the consumers' general impression towards foreign products. It may be reflected in terms of design, attribute, function, price, and status symbol associated with foreign products. The study by Sharma et al. (1995) found that consumer ethnocentric tendency is negatively related to attitude towards foreign products.

**H2.1:** A negative relationship exists between consumer ethnocentric tendency and attitude towards foreign products.

**Reluctance to buy foreign products:** It is the perceived guiltiness and tendency to avoid buying foreign-made products. A consumer is guilty of buying foreign product when he/she perceives such behaviour to be damaging to the country/countrymen and hence, tends to be ethnocentric. Suh and Kwon (2002) empirically showed a positive relationship between consumer ethnocentric tendency and reluctance to buy foreign products.

**H2.2:** A positive relationship exists between consumer ethnocentric tendency and reluctance to buy foreign products.

**Support for foreign products:** The construct studies the consumers' activism regarding foreign products, for example activism regarding invasion of market by foreign retail outlets. The study by Zarkada-Fraser and Fraser (2002) provides an empirical support for negative relationship between consumer ethnocentric tendency and support for foreign retail outlets as well as foreign products. Thus, if a consumer boycotts a retail store having only foreign products then, it reflects his/her ethnocentric belief.

**H2.3:** A negative relationship exists between consumer ethnocentric tendency and support for foreign products.

**Purchase intention for domestic products:** The construct studies consumers' intention to buy domestic products and services. This behaviour is reflected when the consumer takes extra efforts to buy only home country products by looking at labels and/or especially asking for such products in the retail store. Empirical

studies have consistently confirmed the existence of domestic country bias which is manifested in stronger product preference and buying intention for domestic products (Olsen et al., 1993; Verlegh and Steenkamp, 1999; Nadiri and Tümer, 2010). More ethnocentric the consumers are, stronger the domestic country bias and consequently, their predisposition to prefer domestic products over foreign products (Evanschitzky et al. 2008). Empirically the results have shown a positive relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and intention to purchase domestic products (Han, 1988; Herche, 1992; Xian and Bunchapattanasakda, 2020).

**H2.4:** A positive relationship exists between consumer ethnocentric tendencies and purchase intention for domestic products.

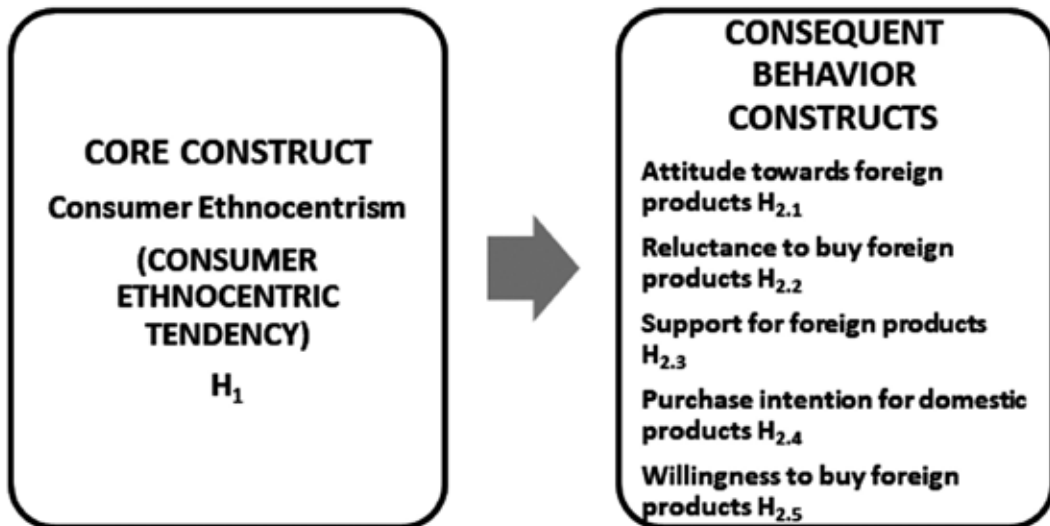
**Willingness to buy foreign products:** The variable 'willingness to buy foreign products' is also studied as a separate variable in addition to 'purchase intention' because all foreign products may not be available in a home country (Klein et al., 1988; Suh and Kwon, 2002). Thus, a consumer may be willing to buy foreign product but can't buy it as it may not be available in the country. Statistically, the evidence shows an inverse linkage between consumer ethnocentric tendency and willingness to buy foreign products (Klein et al., 1988; Suh and Kwon, 2002, Quang et al., 2017).

**H2.5:** A negative relationship exists between consumer ethnocentric tendency and willingness to buy foreign products.

## PROPOSED MODEL

A conceptual model is proposed (Figure 1) to understand the linkages between consumer

ethnocentrism and its consequences. This model is based on the work of Sharma et al. (1995), Shankarmahesh (2006) and Jain and Jain (2010) conceptual framework to study consumer ethnocentrism.



*Figure 1: Framework to study CET and Consequent behaviour relationship*

Source: Adapted from Sharma et al. 1995, Shankarmahesh, 2006; Jain and Jain, 2010

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Current study is based on the survey of 600 consumers located in India. However, only 457 usable questionnaires were ultimately obtained. The questionnaire collected the information about the demographic characteristics of the respondents, ethnocentric tendency of consumer and consequent purchase behavioural dimensions.

The primary data in the form of the responses of consumers was collected through a structured and undisguised questionnaire, which was divided into three sections. The responses for most variables are taken on seven-point Likert-type scale. Part-A of the questionnaire contained multiple choice questions relating

to the demographic description of the respondents. It included the variables viz., age, gender, marital status, education, and income. Part-B contained 17 seven-point Likert-type statements to the measure 'consumer ethnocentric tendency' (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). In Part-C of the questionnaire, 8 statements measured 'attitude towards foreign products' (Nishina, 1991), 4 statements measured 'willingness to buy foreign products' (Klein et al., 1998), 2 statements related to the variable 'reluctance to buy foreign products' (Suh and Kwon, 2002), 4 statements measured 'support for foreign products' (Zarkada-Fraser and Fraser, 2002) and 4 statements pertained to the variable 'purchase intention for domestic products' (Olsen et al., 1993).

The data was analysed using SPSS 20 software. T-test analysis was used to examine the level of ethnocentric tendency of the Indian consumers. The relation between CET and consequent behavioural constructs were examined with the help of correlation coefficient and regression analysis.

## RESPONDENT PROFILE

Consumers were approached via electronic mailing of the questionnaire. Of the 600

consumers approached, 457 questionnaires were received. Accordingly, further data analysis was done with respect to these usable questionnaires only. The demographic characteristics of Indian respondents are studied with respect to the variables such as age, gender, marital status, education, and income. The Table 1 highlights the profile of the respondents in terms of frequencies and percentages of respondents in each category for the variables studied.

**Table 1: Profile of the respondents.**

Profile of Respondents		Frequency	Percent
<b>Age (years)</b>	15-19	49	10.7
	20-29	78	17.1
	30-39	86	18.8
	40-49	95	20.8
	50-59	74	16.2
	60 & above	75	16.4
	Total	457	100.0
<b>Gender</b>	Female	232	50.8
	Male	225	49.2
	Total	457	100.0
<b>Marital Status</b>	Single/divorced	15	3.3
	Married	298	65.2
	Unmarried	144	31.5
	Total	457	100.0
<b>Education</b>	Secondary	19	4.2
	Senior secondary	69	15.1
	Graduate	183	40.0
	Post-graduate	114	25.0

	Professional qualification	72	15.7
	Total	457	100.0
<b>Monthly Family Income</b>	Up to Rs.25,000	42	9.1
	Rs.25,001-50,000	73	16.0
	Rs.50,001-1,00,000	150	32.8
	Rs.1,00,001-1,50,000	72	15.8
	Rs.1,50,001-3,00,000	59	12.9
	More than Rs.3,00,000	61	13.3
	Total	457	100.0

Source: Author

## RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

To ensure that the scales included in the study are reliable, the reliability coefficients were calculated for each scale using Cronbach Alpha coefficient (Nunnally, 1978). Table 2 reports the results of the reliability analysis for all the scale items used in the study. All except one scale, reported the reliability coefficient of 0.70 & above. The four items 'willingness to buy foreign products' scale

had Cronbach Alpha reliability value of 0.42. On analysing each item individually, the results revealed that the Alpha statistics can improve if one item is dropped. Accordingly, another reliability testing was done after dropping this item. The results showed a drastic improvement in the alpha statistic score (0.68). Thus, in further analysis, three-item scale was used for the construct 'willingness to buy foreign products'.

**Table 2: Summarized reliability result for all scale items used in the study.**

S. No.		No. of items	Cronbach Alpha Value
	Core construct:		
1	Consumer Ethnocentric Tendency	17	0.92
	Consequent variables:		
15	Attitude towards foreign products	8	0.82
16	Willingness to buy foreign products <sup>1</sup>	3	0.68
17	Reluctance to buy foreign products	2	0.71
18	Support for foreign products	4	0.72
19	Purchase intention for domestic products	4	0.76

Source: Author

Note:1 Some of the scale items were dropped to improve reliability statistic.

## ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

The level of ethnocentric tendency of the Indian consumer can be judged from the mean CET score obtained from the CETSCALE. Table 3 presents a summary of descriptive statistics for ethnocentric tendency of Indian consumers. The average CET score is based on 17 item

CETSCALE (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). The observed score can lie in the range of 1 (minimum value) to 7 (maximum value) with the expected mean score as 4 (mid value of the seven-point scale). The observed mean CET score is 4.86 (with standard deviation 1.13), which happens to be greater than the expected score of 4.

**Table 3: One-sample t-test result for CET score.**

	Mean Score	Std. Deviation	Test Value = 4			
			T	Df	Sig.	Mean Difference
CET	4.86	1.13	7.53	456	0.00*	0.67

Note: 1. \*Statistically significant at  $p \leq 0.01$

2. Test value of 4 represents the mid-point of the 7-point CETSCALE

On comparing the test value 4 (expected mean score of the CETSCALE) with observed value (4.86) with the help of t-test (see Table 3), the observed mean score of 4.86 is found to be significant (t value = 8.09 and  $p = 0.00$ ). The result thus, indicates that Indian consumers are ethnocentric. These are consistent with the results of the previous studies in India by, Kinra (2006) and Jain and Jain (2013).

### Analysis of the relationship between CET and its behavioural consequences

The relationship between CET and the consequent behavioural constructs viz., attitude towards foreign products, reluctance to buy foreign products, support for foreign products, purchase intention for domestic products and willingness to buy foreign products were first studied using correlation analysis. The Karl Pearsons correlation coefficient together with the means and standard deviations of each consequent construct are presented in Table 4. All the variables are found to be significantly correlated to CET.

**Table 4: Descriptive statistics and correlation analysis of consequent behavioural constructs with CET.**

Consequent behavioural constructs	Mean	Std. Deviation	Correlation with CET
Attitude towards foreign products (AFP)	4.49	1.05	-0.41*
Reluctance to buy foreign products (RFP)	3.86	1.24	0.59*
Support for foreign products (SFP)	4.39	1.42	-0.61*
Purchase intention for domestic products (PDP)	4.92	1.10	0.52*
Willingness to buy foreign products (WFP)	4.53	1.14	-0.57*

Note: \* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

To test the hypotheses pertaining to the relationship of CET and its consequences (which are found significant in the correlation analysis), regression analysis was performed. All the consequent behaviours of CET were regressed with respect to CET with the help of simple linear regression analysis. The results of the regression analysis are reported in the Table 5.

**Table 5: Regression analysis of CET with the consequent behavioural constructs.**

Consequent behaviours of CET	R2	Adjusted R2	F value (sig.)	$\beta$ coefficient	t value (sig.)
Attitude towards foreign products	0.142	0.141	130.39* (0.00)	-0.41	-11.01* (0.00)
Reluctance to buy foreign products	0.32	0.32	391.52* (0.00)	0.59	19.63* (0.00)
Support for foreign products	0.351	0.35	464.83* (0.00)	-0.61	-22.44* (0.00)
Purchase intention for domestic products	0.213	0.212	219.61* (0.00)	0.52	14.69* (0.00)
Willingness to buy foreign products	0.256	0.255	311.23* (0.00)	-0.57	-18.12* (0.00)

Note: \*Statistically significant at the 0.01 level

The result of the regression analysis for the relationship between attitude towards foreign products and CET is found to be negative and statistically significant ( $\beta$  coefficient = -0.41 and  $p = 0.00$ ). Sharma et al. (1995) also found that consumer ethnocentric tendency is negatively related to attitude towards foreign products. The adjusted R2 is 0.141 indicating 14.1% of variance in the variable attitude towards foreign product is explained by CET after adjusting for the sample size. F statistic is also significant at 130.39 ( $p = 0.00$ ). The ethnocentric tendency of consumers affects the attitude towards the foreign product. The proposed hypothesis H2.1 is, thus, supported. The variable 'reluctance to buy foreign products' is regressed on CET. F-value (391.52) is found to be significant ( $p = 0.00$ ). The value of adjusted R2 = 0.32 indicates that the variable CET can explain as high as 32% of variance in the variable, reluctance to buy foreign products. The relationship between variables, CET, and reluctance to buy foreign products, is found to be significantly positive ( $p = 0.00$  and  $\beta$  coefficient = 0.59). This implies that an ethnocentric consumer will be more reluctant to purchase foreign products. Suh and Kwon (2002) also empirically showed a positive relationship between consumer ethnocentric tendency and reluctance to buy foreign products. The hypothesis H2.2 is thus, supported. The variable 'support for foreign products' was regressed on CET. The value of adjusted R2 is 0.351 which is significant indicating that the variable CET can explain 35% of variance in the variable, support for foreign products. F value is also found to be



significant at 464.83 ( $p = 0.00$ ). Zarkada-Fraser and Fraser (2002) empirically found a negative relationship between consumer ethnocentric tendency and support for foreign retail outlets. In the present study, the relationship between CET and support for foreign products is also found to be significantly negative ( $p = 0.00$  and  $\beta$  coefficient =  $-0.61$ ). An ethnocentric consumer will not lend his support for the foreign product on any forum. The proposed hypothesis H2.3 is, therefore, supported. Regressing the dependent variable (purchase intention for domestic products) with respect to independent variable (CET), the adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value indicates that 21.2% of the variance in the variable 'purchase intention for domestic products' is explained by CET. Further, F-statistic is also significant at 219.61 ( $p = 0.00$ ). The relationship between CET and purchase intention for domestic products is significant and positive ( $p = 0.00$  and  $\beta$  coefficient =  $0.52$ ). Thus, an ethnocentric consumer is more willing to purchase domestic products than foreign products. The hypothesis H2.4 is, therefore, supported. The more ethnocentric the consumers are, the stronger the domestic country bias and consequently, their predisposition to prefer domestic products over foreign products (Han, 1988; Evanschitzky et al., 2008). The variable 'willingness to buy foreign products' was regressed with respect to independent variables CET. The value of adjusted R<sup>2</sup> is 0.256 indicating that the variable CET is able to explain 25.5% of variance in the variable, willingness to buy foreign products. F value is also found to be significant ( $p = 0.00$ ). Statistically, the evidence shows an inverse linkage between consumer ethnocentric tendency and willingness to buy foreign products (Klein et al., 1998; Suh and Kwon, 2002). In the present study also the relationship between CET and willingness to buy foreign products is found to be significantly negative ( $p = 0.00$  and  $\beta$  coefficient =  $-0.57$ ). An ethnocentric consumer will be less willing to purchase foreign products and thus the proposed hypothesis H2.5 is supported.

## CONCLUSION

CET was found to be significantly positively related to the variables viz., purchase intention for domestic products and reluctance to buy foreign products. It was also found to have significant negative relationship with the variables viz., attitude towards foreign products, willingness to buy foreign products and support for foreign products. All the proposed hypotheses were therefore, accepted. It can be concluded from the study that Indian consumers tend to be more ethnocentric which is reflected in their buying behaviours investigated through five consequent behaviour constructs in this study.

## MARKETING IMPLICATIONS

When faced with the choice between domestic or foreign product, ethnocentric consumers exhibited negative attitude towards foreign products or were pre-disposed to purchase domestic products. International marketers should inform domestic consumers that the consumption of foreign product is not economically harmful for their country by demonstrating them how their products are helpful in strengthening the host country's economy (example, through joint ventures, domestic production of product components, investments in research and development, etc.). The results are also valuable

for retail chain owners in making location decision in specific country. For example, a chain specializing in imported products could replicate such consumer ethnocentric study in proposed area to know whether the consumers' response will be favourable for a store having more of imported products. The study also indicates the growing opportunities to small manufacturers and start-ups in India as well as global firms to tap on this belief pattern of Indian consumers by taking maximum advantage of government projects like Make in India, Start-up India, Atmanirbhar India, etc. Thus, domestic and foreign marketers should develop their unique strategies to strengthen their foothold in Indian territory while at the same time taking advantage of (in case of domestic marketer) or dealing with (in case of foreign marketer) the ethnocentricity of Indian consumers.

### **LIMITATIONS AND DIRECTION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Although, the present study brings out interesting findings and implications for the marketers, it has certain limitations too. First, though the study is largely from a cosmopolitan and a multi-cultural city but sample was selected on the basis

convenience-quota sampling approach. So, it is not truly representative of India. Second, the present study is based mainly on the research work of Shimp and Sharma (1987) and Sharma et al. (1995). They had developed the CETSCALE as a uni-dimensional concept. Multi-dimensionality of the CETSCALE can be the possible thrust of the future research works. Therefore, there is a need for further studies testing the dimensionality of CETSCALE so as to verify the results of the earlier studies. Third, the present research has not examined the effect of mediator and moderator variables such as perceived equity, perceived responsibility, perceived product necessity, perceived economic threat, country-of-origin effect. These variables can also be incorporated in the future research on consumer ethnocentric study. Another possible area for future research can be the impact of CET on consumers' willingness to purchase products manufactured in a joint-venture set up, involving one home-based firm. Such research can even provide a direction towards entry strategy of the foreign firms in the international market. Finally, the score on the CETSCALE can also be used to reveal the likely impact of made-in India and/or buy Indian theme as a promotional campaign run by domestic industries.

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