

RELEVANCE OF ETHNOCENTRISM ON LEBANESE BUYING HABITS

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the effect of ethnocentrism on the Lebanese buying habits. People are required to make purchase decisions almost every day (Arnould, et al 2004). Businesses need to understand the effect of the culture in shaping consumer habits. Studying the effect of ethnocentrism on the consumer habits is one way of investigating buyer behavior and market segmentation. This paper studies consumer market segments that exist among Lebanese consumers by using life-style patterns and ethnocentrism.

Introduction

Ethnocentrism means the inclination of people to view their own group as superior and reject people who are culturally dissimilar (Booth 1979, Worchel, & Cooper 1979). It gives the individual a sense of identity, feelings of belongingness, and most important by an understanding of what purchase behavior is acceptable or unacceptable to the in-group. Symbols and values of one's own ethnicity or nationality become objects of pride and attachment, whereas symbols of other groups may become objects of contempt (Levine & Campbell 1972). Consequently, consumers refrain from purchasing imported products because they believe that it hurts the domestic economy and causes the loss of jobs (Shimp & Sharma 1987). In this paper, the concepts related to consumer lifestyle, ethnocentrism, and their effect on consumer behavior are investigated. The results of an exploratory survey of consumers in Lebanon, a small and densely populated nation in the Middle East, are evaluated for potential use by marketing managers.

Literature Review

The relevance of ethnocentricity becomes a critical issue when considering the increasing trend toward free trade and the rapid pace at which national economies are turning global. In coping with these challenges, businesses have to go global to remain competitive. Businesses are targeting global consumers, whom they need to reach and maintain. Understanding these consumers and knowing their lifestyles become a necessity.

Various models have been developed put to explain consumer behavior. Kesic and Prii-Rajh (2003) have associated lifestyle with the way people live and spend their time and money. Lindquist and Sirgy (2003) assert that lifestyle summarizes a collection of individual characteristics and behavior. These characteristics are socio-cultural variables such as age, gender, ethnicity, social group, and religion. Psychographics is one of the main instruments used to analyze and measure lifestyles. It focuses on knowing the characteristics of consumers that affect their buying decisions (Lindquist & Sirgy, 2003). Psychographics also provides a mechanism to investigate the attitudes, interests, and opinions (AIO) of targeted consumers. These preferences are highly important because they allow the prediction of consumer behavior (Gonzalez & Bello, 2002).

Westfall (1962) claimed that a successful marketing model lies in the researchers' ability to come up with variables that distinguish people's actions and decisions. These variables are more involved than just the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics. Wells (1975) argued that demographic profiles have not been deemed sufficient because they lack richness and often need to be supplemented with additional data. Social class adds more depth to demographics, but often needs to be supplemented in order to obtain meaningful insights into consumers' characteristics. "Lifestyle segmentation" has been a useful concept for marketing and advertising planning purposes (Wells & Tigert, 1977; Kaynak & Kara, 1996). Lifestyles are an expression of an individual's self-concept. It is the total image people have of themselves, which is a result of how people were socialized in their culture. Hawkins, et al, (2004) argued that consumers exhibit unique lifestyles, for example, some have been labeled as career-oriented individuals. Lifestyles produce needs and desires that ultimately affect the decision-making of each consumer. They added that feelings and emotions are very important in consumer purchase decisions and both have an effect on the analysis of product attributes. Greater insight into the lifestyle of target customers provides businesses with a variety of ideas for the development of marketing and advertising strategies (Perreault & McCarthy, 2006). The objective of these strategies is to persuade people to assume behavior patterns that are typical of their lifestyles. An important consequence of adopting these patterns is to motivate them to purchase different types of products or services (Gonzalez & Bello, 2003).

Papadopoulos and Heslop (1993) discussed the effects of a product's country of origin on buyers' perceptions. Roth & Romeo (1992) as well as Kaynak & Kara (1998) asserted that consumers have significantly different country images or general perceptions about products made in different countries. Shimp & Sharma (1987), in discussing the consumer's lifestyle, highlighted the concept of ethnocentrism, which represents people's beliefs about the appropriateness and even the morality of purchasing a particular product or service.

A number of studies have highlighted the effect of consumer ethnocentrism and country of origin on consumers' attitudes (Ibanez & Montoro, 1996; Bigne & Marin, 1995). Ethnocentric consumers favor local products as they deem that products from their own country are the best (Klien, et al., 1998). Ethnocentrism also influences consumers' behavior when they believe that their national interest is being threatened (Sharma et al, 1995; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). The greater the consumers attach a higher value for products that are made in their home country compared to other countries, the greater is their ethnocentric tendency (Huddleston et al, 2001).

Studies have shown that consumers in developed countries are likely to identify domestic products as being of higher quality when compared to imported products (Damanpour, 1993; Elliott & Cameron, 1994; Herche, 1992), while the reverse is true for consumers in developing countries (Batra et al., 2000; Bow & Ford, 1993; Wang et al. 2004). Shimp and Sharma (1987) created consumer ethnocentrism as a concept for the study of consumer behavior with marketing implications (Sharma et al., 1995). The majority of lifestyle studies have been carried out in developed nations. There have been only a few studies covering developing nations. This study focuses on the lifestyle of Lebanese people in an attempt to identify consumer market behavior in a developing country. Presenting a perspective of Lebanon as a developing nation provides a context for understanding lifestyle behavior in that country.

Lebanon: A Developing Nation

Lebanon is located on the eastern side of the Mediterranean Sea. It has a 150-mile coastline on its western side, with Israel bordering it to the south, and Syria to the east and north. Despite its small area of 3,344 square miles, it has a high degree of diversity. Although no official census has been conducted since 1932, Lebanon's estimated 3.8 million inhabitants places it among nations with the highest population density in the world (CIA Fact Book). Lebanon's inhabitants include numerous foreign nationals, immigrants, and long-term residents (Dar Al Nahar, 1995). Approximately one-third of the population is under the age of twenty. The current population growth rate of 1.2% is the lowest in the region. A unique characteristic is that Lebanese emigrants are scattered throughout the globe and number more than four times the residents (Al Khalil, 1996).

Lebanon is synonymous to ethnic and religious diversity with relative freedom of movement and autonomy. Eighteen different religious communities of the three monotheist religions are officially recognized by law, and are very active culturally, politically, and economically – though Judaism has become less apparent culturally and politically lately, while still active as an economic force. Because of its location at the intersection of the three main continents of the Old World, the Lebanese “mixing pot” has been enriched with numerous cultural contributions from the many invasions, incursions, immigrations, and interactions this land has witnessed over the centuries. Any notion of racial, ethnic, or even cultural unity – or purity – is thus excluded and openness to the “different” is common. Having the reputation of the land of refuge, hospitality, and relative freedom exceptional in the area for the numerous persecuted communities of the Middle East seeking sanctuary, Lebanon experiences a constantly growing influx of different peoples and cultures. The society's Arabic identity is very peculiar, notably due to its high level of “westernization” and liberalism added to a very typical national cachet.

The literacy rate of 90% is one of the highest in the Arab world. It is even higher among the youth, more than half of whom educated privately (The OBG, 2005). The nation enjoys a highly skilled labor that is comparable to most European nations. The urban population is noted for entrepreneurial and commercial activities. While staunchly attached to their independence for which they have fought and still struggle to preserve, the Lebanese remain actively engaged in global cultural and intellectual interchanges, most notably with the surrounding Near East, Arabic, French, and Anglo-American cultures (Fauvel, 1975).

The century old dispute between Arab and Lebanese nationalists, exacerbated by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict with its ramifications across the whole Middle East, spilled out into the streets of Beirut in the 1970s. Though simplistic accounts of the subsequent wars overemphasize the sectarian nature of the divergence, it remains a much more complex combination of cultural, socio-economic, and political conflicts. Despite the fragmentation of the society and the many redrawing of the divides, the state has endured and its inhabitants remain first and foremost Lebanese, though with varying views about their Lebanese identity (The OBG, 2005).

Research Methodology

Measuring ethnocentricity is a focal point in a number of studies (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Netemeyer et al., 1991; Han, 1988; and Chasin et al., 1988). Shimp and Sharma (1987) developed CETSCALE measure, which is one of the important contributions in consumer research to measure ethnocentricity. The CETSCALE consists of seventeen items scored on a seven-point Likert-type format and represents an accepted means of estimating consumer ethnocentrism across cultures/nations. In a study among four developed nations (France, Germany, Japan, and the USA), Netemeyer et al. (1991) reported alpha levels ranging from 0.91 to 0.95, which provides a strong support to the validity and internal consistency of this measure. They recommended the use of this measure in other nations.

Data Collection

This explanatory study replicates others where the CETSCALE measure – along with the psychographic and demographic variables of consumer behavior – were used to test consumer's ethnocentricity (Luque-Martinez, Ibanez-Zapata, & del Barrio-Garcia, 2000). This study consisted of a sample of 91 individuals selected from the two main parts of Beirut, the capital city. A non-probabilistic sampling methodology was used to collect data. The data was collected through self-administered questionnaires using a drop-off/pick-up method. The drop-off/pick-up is a data-gathering method that incorporates the advantages of both personal interviews and self-administered questionnaires (Stover & Stone, 1978; Imperia, O'Guinn, & MacAdams, 1985). Respondents were randomly contacted and asked to complete the questionnaire at their own convenience.

Data Analysis

The reliability analysis of the 37 activities, AIO statements produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.9094, which is highly significant. A study with a coefficient 0.65 or better is considered reliable (Girden, 2001).

A factor analysis of AIO statements was conducted to study the lifestyle of Lebanese consumers. The resultant factor matrix was rotated using Varimax rotations. The analysis produced four factors, which explained 29 percent of the total variance. Only those factors with an eigen value greater than 1.00 were retained. Table 1 summarizes the factor loading and the four factors extracted from the data.

Table 1: Factor Analysis of AIO Statements (Varimax Rotation)

Factors and Characteristics	Factor Loading	% of Variance Explained
Factor 1: Self-Reliance and Leadership		
I think I have more self-confidence than most people	0.59	4.711
Factor 2: Nurturing and Family Orientation		
When my children are ill in bed I drop most everything else in order to see to their comfort	.50	
My children are the most important thing in my life	0.742	
I try to arrange my home for my children's convenience	0.796	9.656
Factor 3: Health and Optimism		
During the warm weather, I drink low calorie soft drinks several times a week	0.57	
I buy more low calorie foods than the average housewife	0.62	
I have used low calorie foods at least one meal a day	0.77	8.293
Factor 4: Household Oriented and Industrious		
I like to sew and frequently do	0.81	
I would like to know how to sew like an expert	0.59	7.095
Total cumulative variance		29.755

Table 1 includes only those AIO statements that have a factor loading of greater than 0.5 on their respective factors. The first factor loadings show statements that reflect a positive self-image and it explains 4.7% of the total variance. One variable remained in the model and it is that the respondents believe they have self-confidence. The second factor “Nurturing and Family Orientation” explained 9.6% of the total variance. This factor shows the care that the Lebanese people provide to their children. The third factor, which explains 8.2% of variance, focuses on health and physical well-being. The consumers are health conscious and emphasize healthy food. The fourth factor “Household Oriented and Industrious” explains 7.1% of the variance and shows that the consumers try to do things that they can do themselves. It may indicate the desire to do the best for their children.

These four factors explain 29% of the variance. They reveal certain basic characteristics of the Lebanese people. The Lebanese consumers believe that they are community leaders. They are family oriented and are deeply concerned with the well being of their children. They care for their children and teach them good habits. The Lebanese consumers are health conscious and are likely to do things by themselves and are willing to learn new ways of doing things.

General demographic consumer information such as their geographical distribution, economical condition, and age also provided important insight into consumer behavior in Lebanon. The survey reveals no support for the common Lebanese stereotype of the traditional male dominated family. The survey indicated that educational level among females is the same as males and the two-income family has now become the norm. These findings make the Lebanese unique among consumers in the Middle East. Traditions such as the role of the family play a strong influence,

however, the Lebanese lifestyle has changed into more Western-oriented norms. For example, new life-style practices have shifted from a male dominated decision-making into a new joint family-household involvement in purchase decisions.

Ethnocentrism

To measure consumer ethnocentrism the 17-item CETSCALE developed by Shimp and Sharma (1987) was used. Table 2 shows the result of the reliability analysis of these items. Overall, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.9354 can be considered a reasonably high reliability coefficient. Based on this, it can be assumed that all 17 items used are measuring the same construct (ethnocentrism) and, therefore, a summative measure can be used to represent the ethnocentrism score of the respondents. The results of the ethnocentric analysis are shown in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2: Ethnocentrism Measured on 17-Item CETSCALE^a

Item No.	Item ¹	Reliability ²	Mean Score
1	Lebanese people should always buy products made in Lebanon instead of imports	.933	5.08
2	Only those products that are unavailable in Lebanon should be imported	.933	5.30
3	Buy Lebanese made products and keep Lebanese working	.933	6.01
4	Lebanese products, first, last, and foremost	.932	4.85
5	Purchasing foreign-made products is un-Lebanese	.936	3.24
6	It is not right to purchase foreign products, because it puts Lebanese out of jobs	.929	3.85
7	A real Lebanese should always buy Lebanese made products	.930	3.90
8	We should purchase products manufactured in Lebanon instead of letting other countries get rich on us	.929	4.98
9	It is always best to purchase Lebanese products	.930	4.57
10	There should be very little trading or purchasing of goods from other countries unless of necessity	.929	4.44
11	Lebanese should not buy foreign products because this hurts business and causes unemployment	.931	3.96
12	Curbs should be put on all imports	.929	4.27
13	It may cost me in the long-run but I prefer to support Lebanese products	.932	4.96
14	Foreigners should not be allowed to put their products on our markets	.930	2.95
15	Foreign products should be taxed heavily to reduce their entry into Lebanon	.932	4.47
16	We should buy from foreign countries only those products that we cannot obtain within our own country.	.931	4.94
17	Consumers who purchase products made in other countries are responsible for putting their fellow Lebanese out of work.	.928	3.62

¹ Response format is 7-point Likert-type scale (strongly agree = 7, strongly disagree = 1)

² Calculated using Cronbach's alpha (Alpha if item deleted). Overall Alpha = .9354.

Table 2 shows the highest scoring factor was Item 3 and it indicates buying Lebanese products keeps Lebanese working. High scores were reported in most of the items. Items 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, and 16 had scores above 4.0. This indicates that the Lebanese consumers have preference to local products and they view imports as a negative factor that hurts the economy. Imports are perceived as benefiting the exporting countries and contributing to unemployment in Lebanon. However, the Lebanese consumer is not against foreign products. Item 14 had the lowest score

(2.95), which states that foreigners should not be allowed to put their products in the market. This represents that the Lebanese consumer is not against imports but they intrinsically prefer local products.

The mean score on the CETSCALE is 4.44, which is high. The Lebanese consumer appears to accept imports if local products are not available. Lebanese consumers do not put the blame on imported goods (items 11 and 17 had scores below 4) for high unemployment or a bad economy. This reflects the unique characteristics of Lebanese people. Even though they prefer to consume local products, but they are receptive to the imported goods if the need arises.

The respondents were asked to indicate who in the family, the husband or the wife, makes buying decisions for certain items. The results are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Primary Decision Maker for Specific Products (percent responses)

Product Category	Decision Maker	When to Buy	Where to Buy	What to Buy	How Much to Spend
		(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Grocery	Husband	8.8	13.2	7.8	16.5
	Wife	58.2	52.7	60.0	42.9
	Joint	26.4	26.4	25.6	34.1
	Not Reported	6.6	7.7	6.7	6.6
Major Appliances	Husband	12.1	17.6	14.3	17.6
	Wife	22.0	23.1	20.9	13.2
	Joint	54.9	49.5	54.9	58.2
	Not Reported	11.0	9.9	9.9	11.0
Furniture	Husband	9.9	9.9	4.4	15.4
	Wife	20.9	23.1	28.6	14.3
	Joint	61.5	60.4	59.3	62.6
	Not Reported	7.7	6.6	7.7	7.7
Automobile	Husband	41.76	50.55	41.76	41.76
	Wife	5.49	3.30	5.49	4.40
	Joint	46.15	39.56	46.15	47.25
	Not Reported	6.59	6.59	6.59	6.59
Savings	Husband	21.98	26.37	24.18	24.18
	Wife	14.29	13.19	15.38	13.19
	Joint	53.85	51.65	51.65	53.85
	Not Reported	9.89	8.79	8.79	8.79
Vacations	Husband	8.79	6.67	5.49	15.38
	Wife	13.19	15.56	17.58	6.59
	Joint	68.13	68.89	68.13	69.23
	Not Reported	9.89	8.89	8.79	8.79
Life Insurance	Husband	39.56	42.22	43.96	41.76
	Wife	4.40	4.44	4.40	4.40
	Joint	42.86	41.11	39.56	41.76
	Not Reported	13.19	12.22	12.09	12.09

The survey results show that the wife is the primary decision maker in the grocery category. This reflects the nurturing nature of the Lebanese consumer where the wife decides what type of food to buy. Items that affect the whole family, such as looking for appliances, vacations, and savings are clearly joint ones. The husband's or the wife's opinion may carry higher weight where he or she may have more information about an item. For example, in buying an automobile or life insurance, the husband has a much greater say. Almost all decisions, except for groceries, joint household decision-making is common for Lebanese consumers.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings indicate unique consumer behavior characteristics in Lebanon. The highest rated factor was strong family orientation explaining almost ten percent of the variation. This factor – considered the most important – is not surprising considering the significance of family among all the Lebanese subcultures. The study also found that decisions (with the exception of grocery purchases) are now done jointly by both husband and wife. The common stereotype of a male dominated traditional Lebanese family was not supported. Furthermore, two-income families dominated and the education level of the females was the same as the males in the survey. These indicators make consumers in Lebanon unique compared to people in the surrounding countries. Although Lebanon is a gateway to the Middle East – and heavily influenced by traditions – the Lebanese lifestyle has moved more into the Western type. The uniqueness of the Lebanese people is that they have retained their traditional culture of being family focused while simultaneously they have adopted Western life style practices.

Even though the present study is exploratory, findings of the study show that lifestyle dimensions of Lebanese consumers influences their buying behavior, which also reflect their ethnocentric tendencies. This study has a significant impact because it shows that such information is important to marketing professionals in developing strategies that will properly position their product offer and strategies. The fact that four major factors were identified as important lifestyle dimensions among Lebanese consumers is also significant. This underscores the need for more studies related to the specifics of lifestyles that could then contribute to making more effective marketing strategies.

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