

Are you an “Ethnocentric Buyer”?

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Does this happen with you that while scanning the marketplace to buy yourself a nice branded kurtyou may end up buying it from an Indian brand even if the same is available at a lower price from an imported foreign brand. There may another instance that while looking for good toothpaste like Colgate or Pepsodent for daily use you may even end up buying Meswak, Vicco or Patanjali. You may prefer “desi” over imported brands. Then surely you are bitten by what is called the consumer “ethnocentric” syndrome. Thus, there may be certain class of products for which we may only think of buying from Indian brands even if their foreign substitutes are available. Consumer ethnocentrism specifically refers to ethnocentric views held by consumers of one country, the in-group, towards products from other country, generally known as the out-group. With the removal of trade barriers in India, it has become easier for foreign firms from all over the world to enter the Indian markets and tap its consumers.

But what has been a challenge for the firms is gaining the consumer acceptance for their products. Therefore, the marketing literature poses consumer ethnocentrism a major hindrance in consumer evaluation and acceptance to the foreign products. Most of us are unaware of this term yet practice it in our daily lives. “Ethnocentrism” refers to the evaluation of other cultures according to pre-conceived notions originating in the value system and customs of one's own culture. The ethnocentric views are the result of certain bigoted attitudes and perspectives that have lived till date in our society. Consumers who are thought to be ethnocentric tend to be skeptical about foreign product both morally and economically as they think that it will lead to loss of jobs for their own country leading to impairment of their economy and ethically too it is incorrect to buy foreign goods.

They are more inclined towards their local products thinking that their country makes the best products and may even hold beliefs that foreign goods are lower in terms of quality as compared to their domestic goods. Consumer ethnocentric tendencies as seen through various researches play a significant role in determining the purchase behavior of consumers towards domestically produced goods vis a vis their foreign competitors. It thus becomes evident to study these ethnocentric tendencies and the factors that give rise to this belief among consumers. Factors such as feelings of patriotism, low degree of openness towards various cultures, conservatism, animosity towards other country, income and education level of consumers and age directly influence on the purchasing pattern of customers. These factors can be easily divided into demographic factors and socio-psychological factors, and might be positively or negatively correlated to ethnocentric feelings among buyers.

For example, consumers in India find a certain kind of ethnic pride in using products made from khadi maybe because they feel khadi is related to their own culture and therefore the feeling of patriotism emerges while making its purchases. It is thus evident that brands like Fabindia and Patanjali have flourished in the Indian markets and their success may be rightly attributed to a great extent to ethnocentric attitudes of consumers towards these domestic brands which may be symbolic of our Indian culture. In other words, patriotism and conservatism may be seen as positive indicator of consumer ethnocentrism. Talking about animosity towards other countries, animosity or feeling of hatred or tensions among nations may hinder the sale of foreign products in the country.



Thus, animosity tends to decrease consumer's extent of inclination towards foreign products of nations for which animosity is directed giving rise to ethnocentric tendencies. Education and income levels among the natives of a country have direct implications on their purchase drives. Education exposes people to various aspects of living and changes the way one views the world, they become more open and acceptable to other cultures, religions, races, various kinds of attitudes and perspectives, thus paving way to positive outlook for foreign commodities. Also, it is evident that buyers with higher income are open to imported luxuries, frequent foreign travel, more social interaction; thus making them prone to other cultures. In other words, higher education and income levels lead to decreased ethnocentric tendencies.

Lastly, age as a factor is a positive indicator of ethnocentric tendency as suggested by various studies. The elderly tend to be more conservative and patriotic as compared to the young who are more open to experimenting with new things and are associated with low feelings of national pride. The knowledge of ethnocentric behavior of consumers, the variations therein and awareness about the factors molding it is of utmost importance to foreign marketers who expect to sell their offering in alien lands. The study of the above can be helpful in identifying niches relevant to their products and strategizing its sales properly.