

## Ethnocentric Behaviour in the Slovak Population: Do Slovaks Purchase Slovak Dairy Products?<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

*The aim of our paper is threefold: 1. to examine consumers' ethnocentric tendencies in dairy product category; 2. to investigate how demographic variables (age, gender, income and education) influence ethnocentric tendencies, and 3. to explore the impact of ethnocentrism on the willingness to buy domestic products. A sample of 265 respondents was employed in the research to collect the empirical data. To explore the impact of demographic variables on ethnocentrism in Slovak population and to prove the interaction hypotheses, one-way ANOVA tests and linear regression model were employed. The results of the research indicate that consumer ethnocentricity is a significant factor that should be taken into account in creating promotional campaigns for dairy products.*

**Keywords:** *ethnocentrism, country of origin, buying behaviour*

**JEL Classification:** M30

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### Introduction

The willingness of consumers to buy domestic products and accept foreign products is becoming in the era of globalization an increasingly critical issue for marketers. There is a need for a better understanding of the factors that influence consumers' choices of domestic and foreign products.

The concept of ethnocentrism is a sociological concept that refers to a tendency to perceive the products of one's own country as superior to those found in other countries. Ethnocentrism, historically introduced by sociologists and

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psychologists, plays an important role also in business. Shimp and Sharma (1987) were the first to develop an effective instrument for measuring the ethnocentric tendencies of consumers in deciding whether to purchase foreign or domestic products. This multi-item scale, which was named „Consumer Ethnocentric Tendencies Scale“ („CETSCALE“) is an instrument, which uses country of origin as one of the explanatory variables in purchase decisions with respect to foreign and domestic goods.

There have been only few studies investigating the ethnocentric perceptions and judgments of consumers in CEE countries. It might be surprising, given that multinational companies are continually expanding their operations in this geographic area. Testing the reliability and validity of „CETSCALE“ by examining consumers' ethnocentrism in Slovakia has been documented by Sedlakova et al. (2007) in the segment of young consumers – 468 students and this age-specific sample exhibited slightly higher than average level of ethnocentrism. Gajdoš and Dzivakova (2010) focused their survey on respondents living predominantly in Eastern region of Slovakia, documenting region-specific results with below average ethnocentric tendencies. Contrary to this, Kleinova (2009) examined a larger sample of 1,017 respondents and found for selected foodstuffs slightly above average level of ethnocentrism. Recently, Taborecka and Gibalova (2014) reported in their study average ethnocentric tendencies among Slovak consumers. They tested also the impact of two demographic variables and found that older consumers and female population are more ethnocentric than younger consumers and male population.

The aim of our paper is threefold: first, to examine consumers' ethnocentric tendencies in dairy product category; second, to provide empirical evidence about how demographic variables (age, gender, income and education) influence ethnocentric tendencies; and third, to explore the impact of ethnocentrism on the willingness to buy domestic products. To come to the conclusions, we develop hypotheses, indicate research methodology and discuss the academic and managerial implications of our findings.

## **1. Theoretical Analysis of Consumer Ethnocentrism**

The term „consumer ethnocentrism“ has been derived from the general concept of „ethnocentrism“, which was introduced in 1906 by the sociologist William Sumner (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). Ethnocentrism in general refers to a tendency „to regard the beliefs, standards, and code of behaviour of one's own country/ethnic group as superior to those found in other countries/groups“ (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). The theoretical argument behind ethnocentrism

is that individuals associate themselves with and prefer in-groups while dissociating themselves from and rejecting out-groups.

The concept of „consumer ethnocentrism“ was introduced by Shimp and Sharma (1987), who defined it as „the beliefs held by consumers about appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products“. According to Shimp and Sharma (1987), ethnocentric consumers refuse imported goods because they consider that they are harmful to the national economy and cause unemployment. Ethnocentric consumers consider the purchase of imported goods to be an unpatriotic act (Luque-Martinez, Ibanez-Zapata and del Barrio-Garcia, 2000; Han, 1988). They feel a moral obligation to buy domestically produced goods and not imported goods. Huddleston, Good and Stoel (2001) argue that ethnocentric consumers overestimate the overall quality of domestically produced goods and underestimate the quality of imports. However, Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) found that ethnocentric consumers were able to define their positive attitudes towards domestically produced goods better than they were able to define their negative attitudes towards imported products.

With introducing the consumer ethnocentrism construct, Shimp and Sharma (1987) constructed and validated a scale which measured consumers' tendency to favour market offerings from their home country over market offerings from other countries. The resulting consumer ethnocentrism scale (CETSCALE) is one of the most referenced scales in international marketing.

Consumer ethnocentrism is an expression of discrimination against foreign products, where the underlying reason is a domestic preference rather than negative attitude towards any country. Therefore, this discrimination is expected to affect all foreign products. Consumer animosity, on the other hand, relates to consumer negativity towards a particular country because of political or economic reasons.

Several research studies suggest that not all consumers are equally ethnocentric. Consumers that are more ethnocentric, are more patriotic (e.g. Sharma, Shimp and Shin, 1995), more conservative (e.g. Sharma, Shimp and Shin, 1995), more collectively than individualistically minded (e.g. Sharma, Shimp and Shin, 1995), more materialistic (e.g. Olsen, Granzin and Biswas, 1993), more dogmatic (e.g. Herche, 1994) and less educated (e.g. Nishina, 1990).

A close and related concept to consumer ethnocentrism is country-of-origin concept. However, replacing ethnocentrism by country-of-origin concept is not correct, because the two concepts are theoretically different. The product-country image concept relies on the attitude theory. Consumer ethnocentrism, on the other hand, relies on theories relating to in- vs out-groups and the influence of group membership on the behaviour of the individual. If a customer prefers domestic products because of his previous consumer experience, and judgment process,

then the reason for his/her buying decision is product-country reason. This means that a consumer may prefer home products without being ethnocentric.

On the other hand, when a consumer prefers home-country products for moral reasons, for example to protect domestic production from foreign competition, then the underlying reason is consumer ethnocentrism. In this case it could be expected that the consumer would also have a tendency to prefer other home-country products.

The concept of ethnocentricity becomes crucial with the trend towards global business. Companies need to understand consumers' ethnocentrism in order to develop effective marketing and communication strategies within and outside national boundaries. Evanschitzky et al. (2008) demonstrate that consumer purchase behaviour towards foreign vs domestic products can be explained by a combination of demographic variables and country-of-origin effects. Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) find out that consumers' level of ethnocentrism influence their preferences for domestic products. Wang and Chen (2004) in their study find out that country of origin did not influence young Chinese consumers' purchase intention. They believe, this is because of the progressing economic globalization, and because the world is converging and becoming one country.

The influence of ethnocentrism on consumer behaviour deserves importance particularly in international marketing. However, the concept of ethnocentrism is also relevant to domestic marketers, who need to understand the potential of the advantage originating in being „domestic“.

## **2. Consumer Ethnocentrism and Demographic Variables: Research Hypotheses**

According to Shimp and Sharma (1987), older people are generally more conservative, more patriotic (Sharma, Shimp and Shin, 1995) and it has therefore been suggested that older consumers tend to be more consumer ethnocentric than younger consumers. Recent literature dealing with the influence of age on consumers' level of ethnocentrism offers mixed results (Shankarmahesh, 2006). Shankarmahesh (2006) lists several studies, which have found that older consumers are more ethnocentric than younger consumers, but also few studies, which have found that younger consumers are more ethnocentric than older consumers. Watson and Wright (2000) found that the older respondents have a higher tendency to prefer home country products than younger respondents.

Most of the literature demonstrate that older consumers have a tendency to be more ethnocentric in their choice of products (Grundey and Bakowska, 2008; Elliot and Cameron, 1994).

This is supported theoretically by the positive relationships between age and conservatism. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

H1: *Older consumers are more consumer ethnocentric than younger consumers*

It has been suggested that females tend to be more conservative, more patriotic, less individualistic and more concerned about promoting positive feelings among group members (Sharma, Shimp and Shin, 1995). On this basis, Sharma, Shimp and Shin (1995) suggested that women would more likely exhibit greater ethnocentric tendencies than men. Shoham and Brencic (2003) contended that the dominant view is that women are more consumer ethnocentric than men.

Based on the above statements, we propose the following hypothesis:

H2: *Women are more consumer ethnocentric than men.*

Several studies have reported that consumers with higher levels of income exhibit significantly fewer ethnocentric tendencies than consumers with lower levels of income in various countries (Sharma, Shimp and Shin, 1995; Inch and McBride, 2004).

Balabanis et al. (2001) found a positive relationship between income and consumer ethnocentrism and argue that higher-income consumers have a tendency to be more ethnocentric than lower-income consumers. On the other hand Caruana (1996), or Sharma, Shimp and Shin (1995) document a negative relationship between income and consumer ethnocentrism. According to Shoham and Brencic (2003), more affluent consumers tend to be less ethnocentric in their consumption than less affluent consumers. Thus, the literature seems to be divided. We decide to propose the hypothesis regarding the role of income on consumer ethnocentric tendencies:

H3: *Lower-income consumers tend to be more consumer ethnocentric than higher-income consumers.*

Research studies (Watson and Wright, 2000) document that people with a higher level of education tend to be less conservative. Sharma, Shimp and Shin (1995) found that consumers with higher levels of education exhibited significantly fewer ethnocentric tendencies than consumers with lower levels of education. According to Kaynak and Kara (2002), higher level of education is associated with a lower level of consumer ethnocentrism. The following hypothesis is therefore proposed:

H4: *Consumers with higher level of education are less ethnocentric than consumers with lower level of education.*

Additionally to the hypotheses H1 – H4 testing the impact of single demographic variables on consumer ethnocentrism, we explore also whether the relationship

between consumer ethnocentrism and intention to buy domestic products differs with demographic characteristics. Hypotheses H5 – H8 investigate the interacting effects of consumer ethnocentrism and demographic variables age, gender, income and education on consumers' willingness to buy domestic products.

Research in buying behaviour (East et al., 2000) documented that because older consumers have more free time, they obviously look out for more variety than younger consumers. More free time enables to older people to shop around the whole town, to compare prices, services offered, etc. Older consumers do not always rely on a single information about country of origin, but seek out additional information before deciding to purchase. Younger people devote less effort and less time to search for additional information or alternative products. Therefore we hypothesize that younger consumers are more likely to base their decision to buy on their ethnocentric tendencies than older consumers.

*H5: Age has a negative impact on the relationship between ethnocentric tendencies and the willingness to buy domestic products.*

Similar to age, we explore whether the variable gender affects the relationship between ethnocentrism and decision to buy domestic products. Research studies in sociology (Burton, Netemeyer and Lichtenstein, 1995) argue that women exhibit greater consistency between their attitudes and behaviour than men. It was also documented that women demonstrate higher level of future orientation in relation to interpersonal relations than men. For this reason we hypothesize that women exhibit higher harmony between their ethnocentrism and willingness to buy domestic products than men.

*H6: Women exhibit higher impact of ethnocentric tendencies on their intention to buy domestic products than men.*

Higher income consumers are less limited with their financial situation to decide what they can afford to buy. Higher-income consumers are not dependent on finding the lowest price and can afford to buy based on their inner values and attitudes, such as ethnocentrism. Therefore we hypothesize the positive impact of income on the relationship.

*H7: Higher income has a positive impact on the relationship between ethnocentric tendencies and willingness to buy domestic products.*

With regard to education we test the hypothesis about positive impact of higher education on the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and intention to buy.

*H8: Higher education has a positive impact on the relationship between ethnocentric tendencies and intention to buy domestic products.*

### 3. Goals and Methods

Three interrelated questions are examined in our paper. 1. Do Slovaks exhibit ethnocentric tendencies when buying dairy products? 2. How do the demographic variables (age, gender, income and education) influence ethnocentric tendencies? And finally, 3. What is the impact of ethnocentrism on the willingness to buy domestic dairy products? A sample of 265 respondents was employed in the research to collect the empirical data, consisting of 140 (52.83%) female respondents and 125 (47.17%) male respondents. It reflects the proportion of women and men in the national adult population, which consists approximately of 52% female population and 48% male population. 45.28 % of the sample were aged 18 – 40 years, whereas 54.72 % were aged 40 – 70 years, and this also corresponds with the age division in Slovak population.

The questionnaire consisted of four parts. In the first part we aimed to measure the consumer ethnocentrism in the sample based on the CETSCALE (Shimp and Sharma, 1987), which was in regard to our research objectives (one distinct product category) and requirements of Association of dairy products producers in Slovakia modified from the original 17 items to 7 items (Table 1). To indicate the strength of the agreement, we employed a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). In the second part a set of 6 attributes was presented to respondents with the aim to identify how consumers evaluated domestically produced and foreign dairy products (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). A five-point Likert-type scale was employed for this purpose. The third part measured the willingness to buy domestic products on the five-point scale, with polar items „If possible, I avoid to buy Slovak products“, and „If possible, I prefer to buy Slovak products“. The last part consisted of questions specifying the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Mean scores, standard deviations and Cronbach's alphas for the items of CETSCALE are presented in Table 1. The reliability and validity of the modified CETSCALE was tested using principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation. The 7 items of the scale had an eigenvalue greater than 1 (= 5.57). The items explained 59.55% of total variance (which was an acceptable figure).

The scale used to measure consumers' intention to purchase domestically produced dairy products exhibited a high level of reliability (Cronbach's alpha coefficient = 0.949). A single measure for ethnocentrism, computed as an overall mean for the 7 items on the 5-point Likert-scale, was 3.204 (SD = 1.233), which indicates that the respondents have generally positive intentions to purchase domestic dairy products. The average CETSCALE modified score for the seven items investigated accounted for 22.428 points, which is over the average in our scale (19 on a 5 – 35 scale).

Table 1

**CETSCALE Results**

<b>CETSCALE Items (modified)</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>St.Dev.</b>	<b>Cronbach Alpha*</b>
1. Only those products that are unavailable in the Slovak Republic should be imported.	3.22	1.26	0.946
2. Buy Slovak-made products. Keep the Slovak Republic working.	3.49	1.22	0.947
3. Slovak products first, last and foremost.	3.01	1.49	0.948
4. Purchasing foreign-made products is un-Slovakian.	3.20	1.22	0.949
5. It is not right to purchase foreign products because it puts Slovaks out of jobs.	3.03	1.16	0.952
6. Slovaks should not buy foreign products because this hurts slovakian business and causes unemployment.	3.43	1.11	0.950
7. We should buy from foreign countries only those products that we cannot obtain within our country.	3.05	1.17	0.951

\* Overall Alpha = 0,949. Scale used: 1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree.

Source: Own calculation.

Table 2 reports importance of seven products attributes in purchasing dairy products together with the assessment of the attribute performance.

Table 2

**Importance/Performance Evaluation for Dairy Products**

<b>Dairy Products Attributes</b>	<b>Importance Mean (St. Dev.)</b>	<b>Performance Mean (St. Dev.)</b>		<b>Performance Difference</b>
		Domestic dairy products	Foreign dairy products	
		Mean (St. Dev.)	Mean (St. Dev.)	Domestic over Foreign dairy products
Quality of products	4.37 (0.29)	4.10 (0.28)	3.81 (0.54)	+0.29
Packaging design	2.88 (1.23)	3.69 (0.96)	4.01 (0.55)	-0.32
Information/Description				
Content	3.75 (0.92)	4.11 (0.19)	3.89 (0.21)	+0.22
Nutrition Value	4.01 (0.67)	4.06 (0.31)	3.88 (0.42)	+0.18
Price	4.32 (0.14)	3.36 (0.22)	3.81 (0.18)	-0.45
Promotion/Discounts	3.94 (0.80)	3.20 (0.66)	3.88 (0.48)	-0.68
Advertising/Sales appeals	3.73 (1.02)	3.86 (0.48)	4.02 (0.26)	-0.16

Importance scale: 5 = very important; 1 = not at all important. Performance scale: 5 = excellent; 1 = poor; n = 265.

Source: Own calculation.

The evaluation revealed those product attributes, which are important to consumers and in which domestic dairy products might enhance their performance. Domestic producers may improve their position by providing better packaging design, offering more lower-priced items or improving communication/promotion strategy.



#### 4. Results and Discussion

To verify the hypotheses a one-way ANOVA tests for demographic variables and separate regression models for the outcome variables consumer ethnocentrism and willingness to buy were employed. Table 3 presents the results.

Hypothesis H1 stated that older consumers are more ethnocentric than younger consumers. The results in Table 3 indicate a significant and positive effect of age on consumers' ethnocentric tendencies ( $\beta = 0.14$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Older respondents (40+) exhibited higher level of consumer ethnocentrism, whereas respondents aged 18 – 40 years demonstrated lower level of ethnocentrism. Hypothesis H1 is therefore supported.

Hypothesis H2 suggested that women are more ethnocentric than men. The findings support H2 and document that women are more ethnocentric than men ( $\beta = 0.10$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). H2 is therefore supported. This result is in contradiction with the findings of Balabanis et al. (2001) investigating Czech respondents and indicating no significant differences on the basis of gender.

In H3 the impact of income on consumers' ethnocentric tendencies was tested. The results show a negative effect of income on consumer ethnocentric tendencies, indicating that consumers with higher income tend to represent less ethnocentric tendencies ( $\beta = -0.05$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Respondents whose monthly income level was 800 EUR and above, had lower ethnocentric tendencies than those whose monthly income was less than 800 EUR. The results indicate negative, and significant effect of income on consumer ethnocentrism.

Hypothesis H4 proposed that consumers' ethnocentric tendencies differ according to their level of education. Significant differences in consumer ethnocentrism were observed according to level of education. Hypothesis H4 was therefore confirmed. Respondents who had higher education (university degrees), had lower ethnocentric tendencies.

In order to test the interaction hypotheses H5 – H8, we employed linear regression. The regression model shows that consumer ethnocentrism has a strong effect on consumer willingness to buy domestic products ( $\beta = 0.53$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). H5 stated that age has a negative impact on the relationship between ethnocentric tendencies and the willingness to buy, indicating that younger consumers are more likely to transform their ethnocentric tendencies into purchase. The results show significant and negative influence of age on this relationship ( $\beta = -0.48$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). H5 is therefore supported. As for H6, we hypothesized that the relationship between consumers ethnocentric tendencies and their willingness to buy domestic products is stronger for women than for men. The findings document that gender does not have any significant effect on the relationship ( $\beta = 0.08$ , ns), and the H6 is therefore rejected. Regarding the impact of income (H7), the

results show the effect of consumer ethnocentrism on willingness to buy domestic products not to be significantly influenced by income ( $\beta = 0.16$ , ns). With regard to education (H8), positive and significant effect between the consumers ethnocentric tendencies and willingness to buy was found, indicating stronger impact for higher educated consumers ( $\beta = 0.21$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Table 3  
Hypotheses Test Results

Variables	Hypotheses	Consumer ethnocentrism	Willingness to buy
Constant		1.85***	-0.41
<i>Demographic effects</i>			
Age	H1	0.14*	0.18*
Gender	H2	0.10*	0.12*
Income	H3	-0.05**	-0.05**
Education	H4	0.12*	0.14*
Consumer ethnocentrism			0.53***
<i>Interaction effects</i>			
Age – consumer ethnocentrism	H5		-0.48***
Gender – consumer ethnocentrism	H6		0.08
Income – consumer ethnocentrism	H7		0.16
Education – consumer ethnocentrism	H8		0.21*
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>		0.19	0.27
F-statistics		3.38*	21.83***

\*\*\*Statistically significant at 0.001 level; \*\*statistically significant at the 0.01 level; \*statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

Source: Own calculation.

Our research identified the differences in consumer ethnocentrism among demographic consumer segments and the role of demographic characteristics in the relationship between consumer ethnocentric tendencies and willingness to buy domestic products. We found that older consumers have a tendency to be more ethnocentric than younger consumers. This indicates that older population represent an important segment to target for domestic firm. However, older consumers do not let their consumer ethnocentrism to fully influence what they buy; we found a negative and significant impact of higher age on the relationship between ethnocentric tendencies in older consumers segment and their willingness to buy domestic products. When making a buying decision, seniors mostly focus on their experience-based evaluation of the product features. Younger people, on the other hand, rely less on their experience with the product itself and instead base their buying decision on „hard“ information such as the origin of the product. We also found evidence that income has a significant effect on the ethnocentric tendencies of consumers, however, it does not exhibit any significant effect on the impact between customers' ethnocentrism and willingness to buy.

Regarding the gender, stronger impact on ethnocentrism was documented for women than for men, however, the gender does not have a significant effect on the relationship ethnocentrism – buying intentions. Education plays an important and significant role in relation between ethnocentrism and willingness to buy domestic products.

Demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education or income play an important role in examining buyers' decisions. Incorporating demographic characteristics into studies of consumer behaviour increases the managerial relevance (Homburg and Giering, 2001).

## **Conclusion**

The results of the research indicate that consumer ethnocentricity is a significant factor that should be taken into account in formulating promotional campaigns for dairy products.

It is apparent that the ethnocentric tendency of the consumers differs according to age, with older respondents exhibiting higher levels of consumer ethnocentrism. Marketers should take this into account in developing effective campaigns that promote domestically produced goods. Ethnocentric tendencies differ also between male and female consumers in Slovakia. The findings indicate significant role of education level in developing ethnocentric tendencies. Respondents who had higher level of education exhibited lower ethnocentric tendencies.

In summary, based on the findings, older Slovak consumers who have lower income and lower education, are more likely to exhibit ethnocentric tendencies that influence their willingness to purchase domestic products. Marketers should apply this information in positioning their products and targeting the customer segments. Products targeting older and less wealthy customers should be positioned in that they are made domestically. On the other hand, promotional campaigns for the imported goods should not mention country of origin, but stress more the product attributes.

Our findings reveal that measuring consumer ethnocentrism level is important, but not sufficient to understand the impact of the product's origin on purchase behaviour. While two consumer segments may exhibit the same tendency for ethnocentrism, their willingness to buy domestic products may be vastly different. This is an important information for marketing managers. Domestic companies should no longer select target customers based merely on the level of consumer ethnocentricity, because these segments may exhibit high ethnocentric level, but in the same time low influence of their consumer ethnocentricity on the willingness to purchase domestic products. This could also

be the explanation to the failure of some „buy domestic“ campaigns organized by government agencies or industry organizations. There are some examples of these campaigns without expected success (like „Buy Slovak Products“, or „Quality from our regions“) and the present research suggests that a reason may be the inconsistency between consumer ethnocentric tendencies and willingness to buy domestically produced goods.

Our paper is limited by several factors, that should be addressed in future research. The analysis of consumers' attitudes towards domestic products is focused on one distinct product category. The research employs modified CETSCALE framework, which makes the comparison with other studies possible only in limited aspects. Despite these limitations, the results of our paper offer useful findings and pose some valuable managerial implications and direction for future research. Future studies should incorporate additional products and multiple product categories to investigate differences in consumer attitudes between products, evaluate changes in attitudes over time and examine reasons of the occurring changes.

In general, these findings can be used to allocate resources in marketing. These resources should primarily be targeted to those customer segments that exhibit high levels of consumer ethnocentrism, and a strong link between consumer ethnocentrism and willingness to buy.

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