PRODUCT CHOICE ATTITUDE FORMATION:
IT IS A MATTER OF A COLLECTIVE OR PERSONAL IDENTITY?

Rigopoulou Irini , PhD
Assistant Professor of Marketing, Athens University of Economics and Business, Greece
Kehagias John, PhD.
Associate Professor of Marketing, R. Feraiou, Patra, Hellenic Open University,Greece
Chiladaki Athina
Researcher, MSc Marketing Services, Athens University of Economics and Business,Greece

Abstract

So far, specific social factors have been recognised as having a strong impact on the formation of consumer attitudes towards foreign products. At the same time, it has been argued that there is a need to explore other parameters that may affect the product choice attitude formation. In this context, this article explores cultural aspects that are associated with both, the collective and the personal identity of individuals by investigating whether and to what extent these aspects influence overall foreign product openness. The results allow us to argue that cultural aspects related to the collective identity have a significant impact on attitudes towards foreign products, while other aspects, related to the personal identity of individuals, seem to affect this attitude formation to a lesser extent .

Keywords: Collective identity, Personal identity, foreign products openness, preference, liking, trust, intention to buy

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Introduction

In today's marketplace where globalization of markets has increased the means and the domination power of global brands within national boundaries, it is essential to understand the importance of the country of origin as a standing out criterion that influences the purchase likelihood. On the other hand, the impact of globalization generates national consciousness and activates ethnocentric tendencies that shape the consumer's behaviour. In this context, the in-depth knowledge and understanding of the factors that determine the relationship and influence the balance between local and global orientation of consumer's intention is of particular importance to marketers. Adopting the dynamic view which claims that situational factors are useful in understanding consumers' judgements and decisions (Donnel et al., 2014), the recession times, that hit the Greek business environment, provide a relevant background in order to approach and forecast consumer's behaviour towards local and imported products.

The following research intends to throw some light on the above topic by focusing on the cultural dimensions of the collective and personal identity that influence the behaviour of consumers feeling strong economic pressure. The contribution of the particular research is twofold: First, it departs to handle specific but so far sporadically investigated cultural dimensions as broader Identity-related constructs that are of great relevance in the particular period, since they are related to the perceived economic and cultural threats. This

contribution of the particular study is in line with Escalas' view, (2013) that the broad conceptual approaches which were followed so far are out-dated and should not be preferred by researchers, since other, more "granulated" approaches focused on specific situations and self-related aspects, may offer much more valuable insights into consumer decision making. The second contribution of our research stems from the fact that we are investigating four different aspects of foreign product openness, namely : liking, preference, trust and buying intention which have not so far been simultaneously treated.

Theoretical background – Literature review

The particular paper falls within the theme of product nationality and explores issues associated with consumer ideologies (Dmitrovic & Vida, 2010). More precisely, the particular research explores consumer ideologies that are being affected by stimuli related to product nationality. Placing the study in a broader perspective, it falls within the domain of consumer preference formation (Axsen et al., 2013; Obermiller & Spangenberg, 1989; Veglegh & Steenkamp, 1999) and is closely related to the consumer culture theory which refers to "*theoretical perspectives that address the dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the market place and cultural meanings*" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005, p. 868).

In general, the formation of those consumer ideologies accrues through both cognitive as well as affective and normative processes. This also occurs because of the mutual influences that exist between those three processes around which major theories have been developed . Theories like the information integration theory, the categorization theory and the accessibility-diagnosticity model and the Halo effect theory (s. Dmitrovic & Vida, 2010, p.151-152), are some of the main approaches that explore cognitive processes, while the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) and the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1981) intend to interpret the consumption choices through affective mechanisms. Lastly the study utilises, the consumer ethnocentrism construct (Shimp & Sharma, 1987;Shih-Tung et al., 2013) which is closely related to normative dimensions and is being widely used in order to capture normative processes. In this later approach, it is argued that there are four factors that form ethnocentrism: socio-psychological factors, political, economic and demographic ones.

It must be also realised that, in a globalised world, "cognitive information may be losing its meaning…" (S. Liefeld, 2004; Samiee et al., 2005), in contrast with the affective processes which seem to have a negative effect on consumer ethnocentrism in several ways.

Finally, it must be taken into consideration that social structure seems to play an important role in the self-concept development, (Andronikidis, 2013), one shouldn't undervalue that "*…the recent economic recession reminds us that the normative facet of processing mechanism gains its importance in times of economic hardship…*" (Dmitrovic & Vida, 2010, p. 161). Within this quite wide conceptual framework, the particular research is based on normative dimensions and particularly on the ethnocentrism view as regard to the cultural identity dimensions.

The formation of attitudes, perceptions and, ultimately, preferences towards products of different origins and backgrounds, is being affected by the interaction of the individual with the social context in which he/she belongs. Signaling theory justifies this by recognising that the purpose of most human behaviours is to signal value to others and the interactivity between the individual and his/her social context leads to the formation of distinctive identities. As far as product selection, consumer attitudes toward products, preferences and consumption decisions, various approaches for utilising and combining normative, affective, cognitive perspectives have been developed. Among them, the one proposed be Vida (2008) claiming that affective and normative constructs, (namely consumer ethnocentrism and

patriotism) are stronger determinants of domestic consumption than rational (cognitive) mechanisms, could be considered as the dominant view.

In addition, the personal identity, which according to Erikson (1950), represents one's set of goals, values and beliefs, builds the collective identity, which largely refers to groups to which one is a member. This notion refers to the social identity, and the cultural identity, which are both an aspect of the self and a reference for a group to which one belongs, or the national identity which is understood as the set of meanings owned by a given culture that sets it apart from other cultures, or any other kind of group identity. The social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) has been defined as the set of values internalized from the groups to which one belongs, as well as the affective valence assigned to group membership. As mentioned earlier, although the social identity refers to any group to which a person belongs, the cultural identity refers to specific cultural groups.

Several socio-psychological constructs concerning the relationship of the individual with "in-groups" or "out-groups" plays a central role in the formation of his/her attitudes, beliefs and behaviour. These are, *Patriotism* (in-group directed antecedent) (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004). *Cultural openness, Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism or Anti-globalisation* are "other-directed" antecedents to the formation of product attitudes, while *Consumer Ethnocentrism* (CE) belongs to the normative factors, since, according to the Shimp & Sharma (1987), *CE is an individual's tendency to view domestically manufactured products as being superior ...and hence, CE deals with the consumer beliefs about the appropriateness and morality of purchasing foreign-products.* Sharma et al. (1995) later proposed that the antecedents to ethnocentrism include consumer openness to foreign cultures, patriotism, collectivism-individualism and conservatism. At the same time, patriotism, nationalism etc., are among the main "in-group" identifiers. Our decision to examine the particular cultural-related personal identity dimensions is based on the fact that, as it is widely recognized, "…*when competitive pressures increase in the domestic market place, consumers' affective and normative responses may become prevalent*."(Dmitrovic et al., 2009, p.524).

Research Framework
Objective
Given the dynamic character of the collective identity formation and the particular political and economic as well as social conditions that prevail in Greece at this point in time, the particular research explores the impact of cultural-related personal and collective identity dimensions on foreign products openness.

Methodology
We utilized theory and empirical knowledge regarding collective and personal identity in order to investigate the foreign product openness by Greek consumers. Before proceeding with the main constructs of our research, we should note that we incorporated a filter question as regard the respondents' prior travel experiences. This was decided since as Samiee et al. (2005) suggest that travel experience along with socioeconomic status, foreign language skills and gender, are influencing consumers' proficiency at recognising foreign brand origin. "In-group" directed antecedents (like patriotism) as well as "other-directed" antecedents (like cultural openness, anti-globalisation and cosmopolitanism) were chosen. Moreover, dimensions that are embodied in Personal Identity, which are related to Values- and beliefs-driven cultural-related dimensions and may have an indirect impact on the particular attitude formation, were also included in the survey. These were: Job-related competitiveness, Immigrant-related workforce and Cultural threat, as well as Perceived

Household economic confidence. The established measures that were utilised in order to form our research tool, are presented next in the results section.

After checking the robustness of the selected constructs, we first explored the mutual interaction of collective and personal identity factors. Then, the endorsement of each to the product openness was investigated by searching for possible moderating impact either from CI or from PI on the dependent variable of product openness.

Sampling

The main research procedure is built on a pre-test of the research tool, among ten individuals. Important observations were made at this stage and were utilized further in the main research stage, on the basis of which the instrument was fine-tuned. Regarding the main research procedure, data were collected by means of a self-completion questionnaire that was administered to respondents, which were adults consumers who are responsible for household purchases. A total of 144 fully completed questionnaires from the described sample safeguarded the external validity of the study.

Results

Regarding the results of Reliability analysis of the scales utilized in our study, Cronbach alpha proves that all reliability scores are above or very close to .7, the threshold Nunnally (1978) recommended for basic research, indicating good reliability. More precisely, the coefficients for the collective identity dimensions were as follows: Cultural openness (7 items based on de Royter et al. (1998); Suh & Kwon's (2002) scales), a=.890, Patriotism (10 items based on Kosterman and Feshbach's (1989); Heath and Tilley (2005) scales), a=.901, Anti-globalisation (6 items based on Levanon and Lewin-Epstein (2009) scale), a=.694, Cosmopolitanism (4 items based on Cleveland and Laroche (2007) scale), a=.692. As regards the Personal Identity dimensions, Job-Related Competitiveness (6 items based on Sivadas et al. (2008) scale), a=.732, Immigrants-Related / Workforce Threat (5 items), a=.759 and Immigrants-Related / Cultural Threat (3 items), a=.730, and Households Economic Confidence (2 items), a=.802, all based on Levanon and Lewin-Epstein (2009) scale, and Attitudes toward Foreign Products (Preference, Trust, Liking, Intention to Buy), Cronbach a=.830.

The distribution of the particular dimensions showed that the mean scores were from positive (around 4), to neutral (around 2.5-3 in a 5-point scale). More analytically, Overall Cultural Openness (N:144), MS=4.33, Overall Cosmopolitanism (N:144), MS= 4.23, Overall Job-Related Competitiveness (N:143), MS=3.86, Overall Patriotism (N:142), MS= 3.47, Overall Anti-globalisation (N:144), MS=2.94, and Overall Immigrants-Related / Job-Related Threat (N:144), MS=2.96, Overall Immigrants-Related / Cultural Threat (N:144), MS=3.02, Overall Household Economic Confidence (N:144), MS=4.61.

For the Scale Intercorrelations, Correlation analysis proved that most of the dimensions were found to be significantly and positively related to the rest, or at least to some of them. Of course, since the dimensions selected were occasionally measuring contradicting notions (ie. Immigrants threat and globalisation) it was expected that some dimensions would either not be significantly correlated or negatively correlated with others.

To test our proposed models, we conducted regression analysis examining whether collective and/or personal identity dimensions predicted attitudes towards foreign products. As illustrated in Table 1 below, the overall model fits well, since Overall Identity dimensions significantly predicted Overall Attitude. The same applies for the Overall Collective Identity dimensions on Overall Attitude, but not for the Personal Identity ones. When Personal Identity dimensions were tested, their effect on Overall Attitude as well as on each of the four

attitude-related indicators disappeared. Only three models were proved to have significant predictability on p<.05 level. These are: Job-Related Competitiveness to Preference, Job-Related Competitiveness to Intention to Buy and Immigrants-Related / Cultural Threat to Liking. This sporadic and still weak predictability demonstrates the lack of predictability of the Overall Personal Identity dimensions on Overall Attitude.

On the contrary, as far as the collective dimensions are concerned, Anti-globalisation and Patriotism appear to be strong predictors of the Overall Attitude formation and its indicators separately (preference, trust, liking, buying intention). However, among those predictors exceptions exist, mostly related to Cultural Openness and Cosmopolitanism.

Table 1: Regression Analysis	Adjusted R^2	df	F	Sig	
OVERALL IDENTITY DIMENSIONS					
Collective & Personal Identity → Overall Attitude	**.186**	**2**	**7.539**	**.000**	**s.s.**
Collective & Personal Identity → Preference	**.158**		**6.377**	**.000**	**s.s.**
Collective & Personal Identity → Trust	**.066**		**3.028**	**.013**	**s.s.**
Collective & Personal Identity → Liking	**.121**		**4.926**	**.000**	**s.s.**
Collective & Personal Identity → Intention to Buy	**.141**		**5.680**	**.000**	**s.s.**
COLLECTIVE IDENTITY DIMENSIONS					
Overall Collective Identity → Overall Attitude	**.102**	**4**	**5.058**	**.001**	**s.s.**
Overall Collective Identity → Preference	**.130**		**6.340**	**.000**	**s.s.**
Overall Collective Identity → Trust	.023		1.834	.126	n.s.
Overall Collective Identity → Liking	**.057**		**3.150**	**.016**	**s.s.**
Overall Collective Identity → Intention to Buy	**.059**		**3.224**	**.014**	**s.s.**
Cultural Openness → Preference	-.014	7	.714	.660	n.s.
Cultural Openness → Trust	.016		1.333	.239	n.s.
Cultural Openness → Liking	-.010		.799	.590	n.s.
Cultural Openness → Intention to Buy	.028		1.581	.146	n.s.
Patriotism → Preference	**.108**	**10**	**2.707**	**.005**	**s.s.**
Patriotism → Trust	.033		1.484	.152	n.s.
Patriotism → Liking	**.119**		**2.908**	**.003**	**s.s.**
Patriotism → Intention to buy	**.067**		**2.005**	**.038**	**s.s.**
Anti-globalisation → Preference	**.146**	**6**	**5.082**	**.000**	**s.s.**
Anti-globalisation → Trust	**.071**		**2.822**	**.013**	**s.s.**
Anti-globalisation → Liking	**.060**		**2.526**	**.024**	**s.s.**
Anti-globalisation → Intention to Buy	**.121**		**4.290**	**.001**	**s.s.**
Cosmopolitanism → Preference	-.007	4	.761	.552	n.s.
Cosmopolitanism → Trust	-.010		.634	.639	n.s.
Cosmopolitanism → Liking	-.004		.862	.488	n.s.
Cosmopolitanism → Intention to Buy	-.014		.509	.729	n.s.

PERSONAL IDENTITY DIMENSIONS					
Overall Personal Identity → Overall Attitude	-.002		.686	.409	n.s.
Overall Personal Identity → Preference	-.003	1	.521	.472	n.s.
Overall Personal Identity → Trust	-.003		.641	.424	n.s.
Overall Personal Identity → Liking	.002		1.233	.269	n.s.
Overall Personal Identity → Intention to Buy	.006		1.878	.173	n.s.
Job-Related Competitiveness → Preference	**.055**	**6**	**2.385**	**.032**	**s.s.**
Job-Related Competitiveness → Trust	.015		1.372	.230	n.s.
Job-Related Competitiveness → Liking	.007		1.171	.326	n.s.
Job-related Competitiveness → Intention to buy	**.071**		**2.800**	**.013**	**s.s.**
Immigrants-Related /Workforce Threat →Preference	.003	5	1.089	.369	n.s.
Immigrants-Related /Workforce Threat →Trust	-.019		.467	.801	n.s.
Immigrants-Related /Workforce Threat →Liking	.024		1.710	.136	n.s.
Immigrants-Related /Workforce Threat → Intention to Buy	.027		1.779	.121	n.s.
Immigrants-Related / Cultural Threat → Preference	-.008	3	.640	.591	n.s.
Immigrants-Related / Cultural Threat → Trust	-.012		.424	.736	n.s.

Immigrants-Related / Cultural Threat → Liking	**.049**		**3.453**	**.018**	**s.s.**
Immigrants-Related / Cultural Threat → Intention to Buy	.016		1.760	.158	n.s.
Households Economic Confidence → Preference	.004	2	1.285	.280	n.s.
Households Economic confidence → Trust	-.014		.028	.972	n.s.
Households Economic Confidence → Liking	-.006		.539	.584	n.s.
Households Economic Confidence → Intention to Buy	.001		1.091	.332	n.s.

Managerial Implication and Further Research

Are there other emerging forces of ethnocentric and collective actions versus global integrity? Which is the unique mix of local and global consumer's identity that will be activated during this period of economic attack? Will the multi-cultural influences inhibit or fuel the consumer's ethnocentric tendencies? The above research questions emerge and invite researchers to provide answers, particularly during turbulent times when many threats become challenges redefining and readjusting the economic scenery. It is therefore crucial to recognize and reinforce the healthy forces that will be able to rebuilt and resume the economic confidence, suggesting new strategies and tactics in order to internalize values like country and community as well as to influence consumption patterns. Apart from the above questions that remain unexplored and are thus calling for further research, the particular study joins the research body which recognizes "the importance of looking beyond Consumer Ethnocentrism Theory at other relevant psychographic variables.." (Sharma, 2011,p285) in order to understand the consumers' motives and behaviour. The particular study also allows us to argue that consumer's attitudes toward foreign products are collectively rather than personally influenced. Along this line, consumers disconnect their consumption patterns from their economic confidence or even from their own identity as citizens and/or workers, probably because they believe that foreign products are their only option, or simply because they fail to connect openness towards products with openness towards foreign countries or even foreigner people.

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