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Moderating Effect of Brand Love on the Consumer Ethnocentrism and Foreign Product Purchase Intention Relationship¹



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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study aimed to explain the moderating role of brand love in the effect of soft and hard ethnocentrism on consumers' intention to purchase foreign products.

Desing/methodology/approach – The data were collected through GoogleForms from 385 participants residing in Ankara and using foreign branded products in the ready-to-wear sector by using convenience sampling method. The research model was tested by Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) with Smart PLS 4.0 statistical programme.

Findings – According to the research results, hard and soft consumer ethnocentrism negatively affect foreign product purchase intention. In addition, it was found that brand love has a moderating effect on the relationship between soft consumer ethnocentrism and foreign product purchase, while brand love has no moderating role in the effect of hard consumer ethnocentrism on purchase intention.

Discussion – Global brands can prioritise various strategies to attract ethnocentric consumers and increase brand love. For example, by sponsoring national sports teams, they can support activities that local people are proud of and thus reinforce brand affection. Similarly, demonstrating corporate social responsibility through socially beneficial projects such as environmental protection or education can help build an emotional bond with consumers. Presenting products with designs appropriate to the local culture, for example, a fashion brand adding local motifs to its collection, can both create a positive perception and strengthen brand love. In addition, emphasising regional production activities with messages such as 'supporting local labour' in advertising campaigns can help consumers establish a deeper connection with the brand. These strategies can contribute to brands receiving both emotional and commercial positive feedback from a global perspective.

1. Introduction

Globalization, especially since the 2000s, has not only shaped economic and political processes but has also played a crucial role in the transformation of individuals, businesses, and consumer behavior. The process of globalization has paved the way for the emergence of an international marketplace where needs and aspirations are increasingly similar across different geographies. While this situation has created opportunities for companies to gain cost advantages and global competitive advantage through economies of scale, it has also created serious challenges for domestic producers. However, some consumers have preferred to support local producers out of loyalty to their country and culture, and this situation has brought the concept of consumer ethnocentrism onto the agenda. Global brands have had to reconsider their strategies to retain local markets under the influence of consumer ethnocentrism. Consumers have started to choose products and services not only to meet their needs but also to express themselves, to strengthen their image in society, and to build relationships with brands to which they feel emotionally attached. In this context, brand love strategies have become a critical tool for global brands to intervene in consumer preferences and create brand loyalty. In order to keep up with this transformation in the markets, global brands out as an important tool that can

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contribute to maintaining the competitive advantage of global brands by balancing consumers' tendencies towards domestic products. A review of the literature reveals many studies that examine the effect of ethnocentrism on purchase intention for foreign products (Renko et al., 2012; Nguyen et al., 2022). Turkey has managed to create very successful brands in the garment industry worldwide. It is also known as a production base for many global brands. The selection of the ready-to-wear sector in the study is due both to the superior position of local brands as competitors in the Turkish market and because it is the sector where many consumers can buy products. This study examines the moderating role of brand love in the effects of soft and hard ethnocentrism on consumers' foreign product purchase intentions.

2. Theoretical Background

Consumer Ethnocentrism

The concept of ethnocentrism was expressed and used descriptively by Sumner in 1906 and consumer ethnocentrism has been discussed in the marketing literature by Shimp (1984). Shimp and Sharma (1987) defined consumer ethnocentrism as an individual's attitude towards the appropriateness of preferring foreign products and the moral dimensions of this preference. In general terms, the tendency of consumers to prefer domestic brands over foreign brands is called consumer ethnocentrism. The Consumer Ethnocentrism Tendency Scale (CETSCALE) was developed by Shimp and Sharma (1987) to measure the ethnocentrism tendencies of American consumers. Some studies consider the CETSCALE scale as one-dimensional (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Martinez et al., 2000; Klein, 2006) as well as two-dimensional (Makanyeza et al., 2003; Douglas & Nijssen, 2003; Chryssochoidis et al., 2007; Ramayah et al., 2011; Jiménez-Guerrero et al., 2014). Consumers with high levels of ethnocentrism accept domestic products as more specialized than foreign products produced in other countries and prefer to buy domestic products rather than foreign ones (Chryssochoidis et al., 2007). In the literature, there are studies in which consumer ethnocentrism is considered in two dimensions as soft and hard ethnocentrism (Chryssochoidis et al., 2007; Ramayah et al., 2011). Compared to hard ethnocentrism, which is measured by the more radical statements in the CETSCALE reflecting strong national feelings, soft ethnocentrism reflects an approach that advocates the protection and preference for domestic products rather than a complete rejection of foreign products. Although studies examining the dimensionality of the reliable and valid unidimensional CETSCALE have shown different results (Luque-Martinez et al., 2000; Jiménez-Guerrero et al., 2014), there is evidence that a two-dimensional structure is appropriate (Chryssochoidis et al., 2007; Ramayah et al., 2011).

Marketing managers use purchase intention to predict future sales and determine how their actions affect consumers' purchase behavior (Morwitz et al., 2007). Consumers' experiences, likes, and dislikes guide their purchase intentions as they gather information about products or services, evaluate alternatives, and make a final decision about the product or service (Zeithaml 1988; Dodds et al., 1991; Yang et al., 2009). The effect of consumer ethnocentric tendencies on purchase intentions has been examined by many researchers (Yelkur et al., 2006; Chryssochoidis et al., 2007; Nguyen et al., 2008; Evanschitzky et al., 2008). Studies show that consumer ethnocentrism has a direct and negative effect on consumers' purchase intention towards foreign products (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Klein & Ettensoe, 1999; Cutura, 2006; Kavak & Gümüşlüoğlu, 2007; Evanschitzky et al., 2008; Renko et al., 2012). Ethnocentric consumers tend to perceive the quality of domestic products as superior to the quality of foreign products (Wang & Chen, 2004). Highly ethnocentric consumers tend to make inconsistent judgments when comparing domestic and foreign products, overemphasizing the positive aspects of domestic products, and underemphasizing the positive aspects of foreign products (Martinez et al., 2000). Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) found that consumer ethnocentrism positively relates to consumer preferences for domestic products. Ocass and Lim (2002) examined the effect of consumer ethnocentrism dimensions on brand preferences and found that highly ethnocentric consumers are strongly influenced by brand preferences when purchasing foreign products.

Klein and Ettensone (1999). Suh and Kwon (2002) support the negative relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and intention to purchase foreign products with strong statistical evidence in their studies. According to Shimp and Sharma (1987), consumers refuse to buy foreign products because they believe they harm the national economy and cause unemployment. Herche (1992) said that consumer ethnocentrism influences consumers' preferences to purchase locally produced goods rather than foreign goods and that ethnocentric tendencies influence purchase behavior more than demographic or marketing mix variables.

Wang and Chen (2004) found in their study that ethnocentric consumers tend to perceive local product quality as superior to foreign product quality. Watson and Wright (2000) examined the effect of ethnocentrism on consumers' attitudes towards foreign products when the local market does not provide a local substitute for certain products and found that ethnocentric consumers prefer products from neighboring countries with a close cultural background. There have been studies on the effect of ethnocentrism on purchase intention for foreign products. However, this study includes the effect of two different dimensions of ethnocentrism on purchase intention for foreign products.

After analyzing the research in the literature, the hypotheses that ethnocentrism tendencies affect the purchase intention of foreign products are as follows:

H1: Hard consumer ethnocentrism effects purchase intention for foreign products.

H2: Soft consumer ethnocentrism effects purchase intention for foreign products.

Brand Love

One of the most important factors affecting foreign product purchase intention is perceived product quality (Wei, 2008; Haque et al., 2015). Accordingly, consumers tend to purchase foreign branded products that they perceive as high quality. Since brand name is considered as an external indicator of product quality (Kapferer and Laurent 1983, 1989), it is a strategic tool for businesses. However, the brand is not only a sign of functional quality; it is also important for establishing emotional bonds with the consumer. One of the concepts used to express the emotional bonds established between the brand and the consumer is brand love. Ahuvia (1993) conducted the first empirical study on brand love, which is of marketing interest. The fact that consumers form emotional bonds with objects or brands that they believe have a positive relationship with their self-image and use the term 'love' figuratively to express their attachment to these objects or brands reveals the concept of brand love (Akgözlü, 2020). According to Batra, Ahuvia, and Bagozzi (2012), brand love is a relationship that involves long-term behavioral, cognitive, and emotional elements. Carroll and Ahuvia (2006) define brand love as the degree of passionate emotional attachment a satisfied consumer feels towards a particular brand. Brand love is an important variable to study because it indicates a stronger consumer-brand relationship compared to positive brand attitudes and satisfaction (Karjaluoto et al., 2016; Thomson et al., 2005). Many studies examine the effect of brand love on purchase or repurchase intention (Borges, Cardoso, & Rodrigues, 2016; Can & Mühürdaroğlu, 2019; Fetscherin, 2014; Onurlubaş & Altunışık, 2019). Research suggests that brand love positively and significantly affects purchase intention.

Although, up to our knowledge, no study has addressed the moderating effect of brand love on the relationship between ethnocentrism and foreign product purchase intention, one of the important weapons that businesses can use to reduce the negative effect of consumer ethnocentrism on foreign product purchase intention is their brands and the emotional ties that consumers establish with the brand. Emotional bonds established with foreign brands are expected to moderate the relationship between, especially, soft ethnocentrism and purchase intention in a positive way. Thus the hypotheses are formed as follows:

H3: Brand love moderates the effect of hard consumer ethnocentrism on foreign product purchase intention.

H4: Brand love moderates the effect of soft consumer ethnocentrism on foreign product purchase intention.

3. Method

This research examined the the moderating role of brand love in the effect of soft and hard ethnocentrism on consumers' intention to purchase foreign products. The research model is shown in Figure 1.The Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) was preferred to test the hypotheses (Hair et al., 2011), and the Smart PLS 4 statistical program was used.

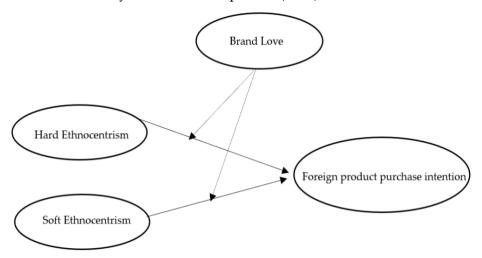


Figure 1. Research Model

Sample and Data Collection: Since it is not possible to list all consumers who prefer foreign brand products a non-probability sampling procedure is adopted. The data was collected online from 385 participants aged 15-64 residing in Ankara who use foreign brand products in the ready-to-wear sector using a snowball sampling method. Although four hundred and twelve participants were reached, incomplete or inappropriately filled 27 questionnaires were excluded from the final data set. Majority of the participants are female (59%) and 44% are between the ages of 15-28 and 42% are between 29-46. Regarding the level of education, approximately 50% of the participants have a bachelor's degree while 19.2% have a high school graduation degree.

Measurement: An online survey was the preferred data collection tool for the study. The study and the questionnaire were approved by the Ethics Committee of Ankara Hacı Bayram Veli University (HBV) with the decision numbered E-11054618-302.08.01-134938 and dated 11.02.2022. After presenting the the purpose of the study and asking for voluntary participation, the scales that will be used to measure the variables in the research model are included in the questionnaire. Participants were asked to answer questions considering their favourite foreign brand in the ready-to-wear sector. To measure the foreign product purchase intention, a scale consisting of six items, originally developed by Klein (1998) and used by Dal and Korkmaz (2019), is adopted. The scale items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree and 5: strongly agree). Brand love has been operationalized by 8 items (Carroll, Ahuvia, 2006; Yılmaz, 2019). A 7-point Likert scale was used for the these items (1: strongly disagree and 7: strongly agree). In the next part of the questionnaire, the Consumer Ethnocentrism Scale (CETSCALE), which was developed by Shimp and Sharma (1987) and used by Alparslan (2015). The scale items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale (1: strongly disagree and 5: strongly agree). Finally, participants were asked to indicate their demographic characteristics in the last section.

4. Findings

4.1. Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

Before testing the research model, exploratory factor analysis was used to examine the two-dimensional structure of the Consumer Ethnocentrism Scale. Using principal component analysis and the varimax rotation method, a 3-dimensional structure was obtained in the ethnocentrism scale. When the factor loadings of the items were analyzed, the 17th, 13th, 9th, 10th, and 16th items were removed from the scale because they loaded on more than one factor. The items that loaded on the first factor, which explained 37.62% of the total variance, were named 'Hard ethnocentrism' as the factor reflects a hard and strong national attitude towards imported products and foreign countries (Chryssochoidis et al.,). Most of the items loaded on the second factor, which explained 26.98% of the total variance, were designated as 'soft ethnocentrism', as the items represented a softer approach toward foreign products (Chryssochoidis et al., 2007).

Table 1. Factor Structure, Factor Loadings and Explained Variance Ratios of The Ethnocentrism Scale

	Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Explained Variance
Hard Consumer	CET 12	0,829		
Ethnocentrism	CET 14	0,799		
	CET 5	0,768		
	CET 7	0,764		37,620
	CET 6	0,711		
	CET 15	0,691		
	CET 11	0,682		
Soft Consumer	CET 3		0,862	
Ethnocentrism	CET 4		0,760	26,988
	CET 2		0,732	
	CET 1		0,700	
	CET 8		0,610	
KMO=0,916				
Bartlett's Test of Sphe	ricity =0.000			

4.2. Measurement Model

Before hypothesis testing, psychometric properties of the constructs were assessed. For this purpose, a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was run with all the variables using the "SmartPLS 4 Package". Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) is "used to test whether there is the necessary level of relationship between factors, which variables are related to which factors, whether the factors are independent of each other, and whether the factors are sufficient to explain the model" (Özdamar, 2004). Two items of foreign product purchase intention (PI4, PI6) and one item of the brand love (BL8) scales were eliminated since the factor loading estimates were less than 0.70 and negatively affected these constructs' average varieance extracted (AVE) values. After deletion, CFA results indicated that each construct's Cronbach Alpha (CA) and Composite Reliability (CR) coefficients were above the recommended cutoff (0.70) providing evidence of internal consistency (Table 2). Also, convergent validty was observed: each construct's average variance extracted (AVE) were above the critical threshold of 0.50 (Hair et al. 2017).

Table 2. Measurement Model Analysis Results

Scales	Items	Factor Loading	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	(CR)	(AVE)
	BL 1	0,823	0,938	0,947	0,721
	BL 2	0,883			
	BL 3	0,851			
Brand Love	BL 4	0,906			
	BL 5	0,857			
	BL 6	0,914			
	BL 7	0,691			
	PI 1	0,827	0,869	0,910	0,718
Foreign Product Purchase	PI 2	0,858			
Intention	PI 3	0,846			
	PI 5	0,858			

Dimensions of consumer ethnocentrism

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	CET 5	0,786	0,853	0,922	0,630
	CET 6	0,789			
Hard Consumer	CET 7	0,820			
Ethnocentrism	CET 11	0,789			
	CET 12	0,819			
	CET 14	0,820			
	CET 15	0,732			
	CET 1	0,846	0,902	0,894	0,629
Soft Consumer	CET 2	0,720			
Ethnocentrism	CET 3	0,759			
	CET 4	0,839			
	CET 8	0,797			

The Fornell and Larcker criterion (1981) and the HTMT criterion (Henseler et al., 2009) were used to test the discriminant validity. As shown in Table 3, the square roots of the AVEs for all the constructs (diagonal values) were higher than the inter-construct correlations, providing evidence for discriminant validity according to Fornell and Larcker (1981). Henseler et al. (2009) suggested calculating the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT) of correlations to test discriminant validity in structural equation models. The HTMT criterion was also met as the the construct correlations were below the critical threshold (0.85). In addition, "variance inflation factors" (VIF) values were smaller than 3.0 indicating no problem of multicollinearity (Hair et. al. 2014) (Table 4).

Table 3. The Discriminant Validity Results

Fornell and Larcker Criterion						
	Hard Ethnocentrism	Soft Ethnocentrism	Foreign Product Purchase Intention	Brand Love		
Hard Ethnocentrism	0,794					
Soft Ethnocentrism	0,651	0,793				
Foreign Product Purchase	-0,596	-0,523	0,847			
Intention						
Brand Love	-0,090	-0,121	0,169	0,849		
		HTMT Crit	erion			
	Hard Ethnocentrism	Soft Ethnocentrism	Foreign Product Purchase Intention	Brand Love		
Hard Ethnocentrism						
Soft Ethnocentrism	0,729					
Foreign Product Purchase Intention	0,662	0,585				
Brand Love	0,107	0,124	0,155			

4.3. Structural model assessment

 R^2 values are analyzed to show the extent to which exogenous variables explain the variance in endogenous variables, and f^2 values are analyzed to test the effect size. R^2 shows the extent to which factors explain each other and it is desirable to be greater than 26% (Sönmez Çakır, 2019). The R^2 value of the foreign product purchase intention scale was 0,407 indicating . This value indicates that the independent variables in the model explain 40,7% of the total variance of the dependent variable. This means that the explanatory power of the model on the dependent variable is at a moderate level. To test the effect size, f^2 values were analyzed. According to the analysis results, $f^2 = 0.018$ for brand love, $f^2 = 0.176$ for hard consumer ethnocentrism, and $f^2 = 0.054$ for soft consumer ethnocentrism (Cohen, 1988: 413)). These values indicated that the effect of brand love on the dependent variable was weak, hard consumer ethnocentrism was at a medium level and soft consumer ethnocentrism was between weak and medium. The results show that hard consumer ethnocentrism had a more significant effect on the dependent variable.

 Variables
 VIF

 Hard Consumer Ethnocentrism→Foreign Product Purchase Intention
 1.755

 Soft Consumer Ethnocentrism→Foreign Product Purchase Intention
 1.771

 Brand Love → Foreign Product Purchase Intention
 1.024

 Brand Love*Hard Consumer Ethnocentrism→Foreign Product Purchase Intention
 1.911

 Brand Love*Soft Consumer Ethnocentrism→Foreign Product Purchase Intention
 1.910

Table 4. Model Values of VIF

The research model was tested using partial least squares path analysis (PLS-SEM) with the Smart PLS 4.0 statistics program. The results are presented in Table 5. The results showed that hard consumer ethnocentrism and soft consumer ethnocentrism negatively impact foreign purchase intention (β = - 0.429, p = 0.00 and β = - 0.235, p = 0.00, respectively). According to these findings, as consumer ethnocentrism (both hard and soft) increases, consumers' intention to purchase foreign products decreases. Thus, H1 and H2 were supported.

Moderating role of brand love was also assessed. The results revealed an insignificant hard consumer ethnocentrismXbrand love interaction for foreign product purchase intention (β = - 0.051, p = 0.455) thus H3 was dismissed. On the other hand, the results revealed a significant soft consumer ethnocentrismXbrand love interaction for foreign product purchase intention (β = 0.123, p = 0.035). Thus, H4 was supported. In other words, brand love moderates the relationship between soft consumer ethnocentrism and purchase intention of foreign products. Specifically, as brand love increases, the negative impact of soft consumer ethnocentrism on purchase intention weakens. The hypotheses tested in the study and their rejection/acceptance status are as follows:

H1: Hard consumer ethnocentrism has an effect on the intention to purchase foreign products. The first hypothesis is accepted.

H2: Soft consumer ethnocentrism has an effect on foreign product purchase intention. The second hypothesis is accepted.

H3: Brand love moderates the effect of hard consumer ethnocentrism on foreign product purchase intention. The third hypothesis is rejected.

H4: Brand love moderates role in the effect of soft consumer ethnocentrism tendency on foreign product purchase intention. The fourth hypothesis is accepted.

Table 5. Research Model Hypothesis Test Results

Hypothesized path	Standardized β	Standard Deviation	t	р	Result
Hard Consumer Ethnocentrism -> Foreign Product Purchase Intention	-0,429	0,071	6,082	0,000	Accepted
Soft Consumer Ethnocentrism -> Foreign Product Purchase İntention	-0,235	0,055	4,291	0,000	Accepted
Brand Love* Hard Consumer Ethnocentrism -> Foreign Product Purchase İntention	-0,051	0,069	0,747	0,455	Rejected
Brand Love * Soft Consumer Ethnocentrism -> Foreign Product Purchase Intention	0,123	0,058	2,109	0,035	Accepted

5. Conclusion and Discussion

This research examines the moderating role of brand love in the effect of the soft and hard dimensions of ethnocentrism on consumers' intentions to purchase foreign products. The findings are evaluated in the context of the apparel sector, which is the focus of the study and cannot be generalized to other sectors. The first and second hypotheses of the study are accepted and supported in line with studies in the literature (Renko et al., 2012; Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Klein et al., 1998; Cutura, 2006; Berg et al., 2017). Consumers' national sentiments may lead them to develop biased approaches toward foreign products in their decision-making processes. The fact that consumers with high levels of ethnocentrism tendency believe that buying foreign products will harm the local economy and employment can be effective in the emergence of this result and is interpreted as preventing consumers from approaching products or services impartially.

Lantz and Loeb (1996) found that consumers evaluate domestic and foreign products differently according to the degree of their ethnocentric feelings. Chryssochoidis et al. (2007) argued that hard consumer ethnocentrism conceptually refers to intense and severe nationalistic behaviour and an almost hostile attitude towards foreign products and encompasses a general hard attitude towards imported products and foreign countries in general. The third hypothesis of the study supports similar results with the studies in the literature and is rejected. Consumers with hard ethnocentrism tend to emphasize the advantages of domestic products and ignore the advantages of foreign products under the influence of national feelings. Between domestic and foreign products of the same quality, their preference for domestic products can be explained by economic and employment concerns. Global brands should pay more attention to strategies such as national sponsorship and corporate social responsibility projects to attract this group of consumers. In addition, product adaptation to local culture and values, advertising campaigns highlighting support for local labor, and investment in regional production activities can reinforce these consumers' national sentiments and create a positive brand perception. As the degree of ethnocentrism of the consumer increases, the tendency to prefer local products also increases. While these studies reveal the effect of ethnocentrism on the intention to purchase foreign products, they once again reveal the important role played by national feelings in consumers' decision-making processes.

The fourth hypothesis of the study was accepted. The moderating effect of brand love on the soft consumer ehinocentrism and foreign product purchase intention relationship suggests that even consumers with a soft ethnocentric tendency can exhibit a stronger intention to purchase foreign products if they have a strong emotional attachment to the brand. According to previous studies, the opinions of consumers with soft ethnocentrism dimension towards foreign products are more moderate compared to those of consumers with hard ethnocentrism dimension towards foreign products. Consumers with soft ethnocentrism have sympathy for domestic products rather than hard national feelings, and brand love has succeeded in relatively softening the negative effect of ethnocentrism on foreign product purchase intention. Considering this result, global brands can moderate consumers' national and hard feelings with soft ethnocentrism tendency if they carry out projects for the country's economy, employment or social life.

Brands operating in markets where ethnocentric consumers are also present can prioritise local employment in the markets they sell to in order to turn negative sentiment in their favour, source as much of their raw

material needs from the country they sell to as possible, and contribute to the national economy. In addition, they can continue their activities with the products they produce in the country they sell to by making investments such as setting up production facilities in the countries they sell to for consumers who are sympathetic to domestic products. They can shape their marketing mix with strategies that target the cultural and national values of consumers in the markets where they are present, and carry out activities such as donations, sponsorship and aid to country associations and institutions as part of their corporate social responsibility. They can attract the attention of ethnocentric consumers and differentiate themselves from their competitors with a corporate citizen identity that values the cultural and national values of the country in which they are present.

This study is limited to Ankara province due to time and cost constraints; a larger and more comprehensive sample can be used in future research. Consumer ethnocentrism is making purchase decisions within the framework of national feelings based on the perception of products and services as domestic or foreign. The literature suggests that a significant proportion of consumers pay attention to information about the country of origin of a product before making a purchase (Hugstad & Duur, 1986). Future studies can investigate whether the country of origin moderates the effect of ethnocentrism tendency on purchase intention for foreign products. As noted by Wang and Chen (2004), consumers may perceive products produced in a technologically advanced country as being of higher quality, making country of origin information an important factor. In future research, an empirical analysis between ethnocentrism and foreign product purchase intention can be conducted by comparing products from different countries. In addition, studies on hard and soft ethnocentrism are limited; in this context, future research can explore the behavioral differences between these two groups in depth by dividing consumer groups according to their hard and soft ethnocentrism tendencies. Experimental research can analyze consumer behavior more comprehensively by including the price variable. In today's world of rapid digitization, examining how social media manage ethnocentrism and how this is reflected in consumer behavior is possible. In addition, by examining the impact of technology-based and innovative products on ethnocentrism, it is possible to address how consumer attitudes towards these products interact with ethnocentric tendencies.

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