

EFFECT OF CULTURE AND TRADITIONS ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN KUWAIT

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ABSTRACT

Globalization is one of the most contemporary challenges that are facing businesses. With the Internet and information technology, markets around the globe are moving closer, which necessitate the need of knowing these markets. Businesses need to understand the effect of culture in shaping consumer habits. This study explores the effect of culture and traditions on the consumer behavior in Kuwait – a member of (CCASG) countries. It studies consumer market segments existing among Kuwaitis consumers by using life-style patterns and ethnocentrism.

Keywords: Culture, buying decisions, ethnocentricity, consumer behavior, global markets, and competition

INTRODUCTION

People are required to make purchase decisions almost every day (Arnould, et al 2004). Studying the effect of ethnocentrism on the consumer habits is one way of investigating buyer behavior and market segmentation. Countries of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG) are drawing the attention of most businesses. They are wealthy nations with oil revenues exceeding 600 billion dollars, and a currency reserve of 1.6 trillion US Dollars, which represents 25% of the global currency reserve (USD 6.3 trillions) and exceeds that of China's reserve, which is USD 1.4 trillion (Look East, 2007). Knowing the consumers' habit of these nations would be no doubt an interesting subject.

Cultural values play an important role in shaping the way consumers make purchase decisions. Tradition and ethnocentricity are examples of these values. Ethnocentricity is a major driving force in shaping consumers' habits. It is the inclination of people to view their own group as superior and reject people who are culturally dissimilar (Taras, Rowney, & Steel 2009; Booth 1979). It gives the individual a sense of identity, feeling of belongingness and most importantly, an understanding of what purchase behavior is acceptable or unacceptable to the 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 (Ailon, 2008; 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 study, the concepts related to consumer lifestyle, ethnocentrism and their effect on consumer behavior are investigated; Study is made of the following sections. The first part is the literature review. The second part is the research methodology, which is subdivided into sample

and data collection, measurement of variables, and data analysis. The third part is made of findings of the study, conclusions, limitations, and recommendations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relevance of ethnocentricity becomes a critical issue when one considers the increasing trend toward free trade and the high pace at which national economies are turning global. In coping with these challenges, U.S. businesses had to go global to stay competent. Nowadays, U.S. businesses are targeting global consumers, which they need to reach and retain. Understanding these consumers and knowing their lifestyles become a necessity. Interest in societal characteristics is clearly visible by the documented research (Berry, Guillén, & Zhou, 2010; Hébert, Very, & Beamish, 2005; Shenkar, 2001; Stahl, 2008). In a study, Oyserman and Lee (2008) addressed the geographically differences in psychological characteristics and values.

Various models were 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 (Sagiv, Schwartz, & Arieli, 2011).

Westfall (1962) claimed that a successful marketing model lies in the researchers' ability to come up with variables that distinguish people's performance. These variables are more than just 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). Life styles are an expression of an individual's self-concept. It is the total image one has of him or her-self, which is a result of how one was socialized in his or her culture. Hawkins, D.I., Best, R.J., and Coney, K.A. (2004) argued that consumers exhibit unique lifestyles, which are labeled 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 have an effect on the analysis of product attributes. Knowledge of the lifestyle of target customers provides businesses with a variety of ideas for the development of advertising strategies (Perreault & McCarthy, 2006). The ultimate objective of these strategies is to persuade people to assume behavior patterns that are typical of their lifestyles. The consequence of adopting these patterns will motivate them to purchase different types of products or services (Berry, Guillen, & Zhou, 2010).

Papadopoulos and Heslop (1993) discussed the effects of a product's country of origin on buyers' perceptions. Roth and Romeo (1992), Kaynak and Kara (1996) asserted that consumers have significantly different country images or general perceptions about products made in different countries. Shimp & Sharma (1987) in discussing the lifestyle of consumer highlighted

the concept of ethnocentrism, which represents people's beliefs about the appropriateness and morality of purchasing a particular product or service. Consumers' ethnocentrism gives the individual a sense of identity, feelings of belongingness and affects their purchase behavior. They believe that purchasing imported products is wrong; it hurts the domestic economy and causes the loss of jobs (Bhuiyan, 1997).

A number of studies highlighted the effect of consumer culture and country of origin on consumers' attitudes (Bond, Leung, & Au, 2004). In a study, Hofstede (2006) addressed consumers' preference as they favor their own country products. Sharma, S., Shimp, T. A., and Shin, J., (1995) discussed ethnocentrism and its influences on consumers' behavior when they believe that their national interest is being threatened. 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, Good, & Stoel, 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; Herche, 1992) while the reverse is true for consumers in developing countries (Batra et al., 2000; Bow & Ford, 1993, Lu., & Zhen., 2004). Shimp & Sharma (1987) created consumer ethnocentrism as a concept for the study of consumer behavior with marketing implications (Sharma, Shimp, & Shin J, 1995).

Majority of lifestyle studies have been carried out in America and Europe (Al-Weqaiyan, 2005). Studies covering other nations are few. This study focuses on the lifestyle of Kuwaiti people, one of the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (CCASG). These countries are Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Emirates, Oman, Bahrain, and Qatar. In general, these countries share some common characteristics, which are religion, oil, political regimes, and traditions. Providing a perspective on consumers' habits in Kuwait sheds light on how lifestyle influences consumer behavior in these nations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample and Data Collection

The sample study consisted of 150 individuals selected from the capital city Kuwait, which accounts for 95% of the country's population (Booz 2007). A non-probabilistic sampling methodology was used to collect data (Lohr, 2010). 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 (Ryan, 2011; Stover & Stone, 1978; Imperia, O'Guinn, & MacAdams, 1985). Respondents were randomly contacted and asked to complete the questionnaire at their own convenience.

Measurement of Variables

Measuring culture and tradition values is a focal point in a number of studies (Sagiv, Schwartz, & Arieli, 2011; Ailon, 2008; Luque-Martinez, Ibanez-Zapata, & del Barrio-Garcia, 2000; Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Netemeyer, Durvasula, & Lichtenstein, 1991; Han, 1988; Chasin, Holzmuller, & Jaffe, 1988). The research model for this study consists of three parts. In the first part, the psychographics measure is 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.

In the second part, CETSCALE measure is used to study the effect of culture and tradition on consumer's behavior (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Netemeyer, Durvasula, & Lichtenstein, 1991). Shimp and Sharma (1987) developed CETSCALE measure, which is one of the important contributions in consumer research of measuring culture and tradition values. CETSCALE consists of 17 items scored on a seven-point Likert-type format and represents an accepted means of measuring consumer ethnocentrism across cultures/nations. In a study among four developed nations (France, Germany, Japan, and USA), Netemeyer., Durvasula, and Lichtenstein,(1991) reported alpha levels ranging from 0.91 to 0.95, which provides a strong support to the validity and internal consistency of the measure (Ryan, 2011). In the third part, consumers' buying decisions at different levels were examined.

The reliability analysis of the items is tested using Cornbach alpha coefficient (Lohr, 2010); a study with a coefficient of 0.65 or better is considered reliable (Joseph, William, Barry,& Rolph, 2010; Girden, 2001). A factor analysis is conducted using Varimax rotations (Ryan, 2011). Only those factors with an Eigenvalue greater than 1.00 are retained (Joseph, William, Barry, & Rolph, 2010).

DATA ANALYSIS

In the first part, a factor analysis of AIO statements using Varimax rotations was conducted to study the lifestyle of Kuwaiti consumers; it produced two factors that explained 27.12 percent of the total variance. Only those factors with an Eigenvalue greater than 1.00 were retained (Hair Joseph, Black William, Babin Barry, & Anderson Rolph, 2010). Table 1 summarizes the factor loading and the two factors extracted from the data. The reliability analysis of the statements produced a Cornbach alpha coefficient of 0.9094, which is highly significant. A study with a coefficient of 0.65 or better is considered reliable (Joseph, William, Barry, & Rolph, 2010; Girden, 2001).

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 am more independent than most people	.51	
I think I have lots of personal ability	.56	
I like to be considered a leader	.67	
I sometimes influence what my friends buy	.60	14.78
Factor 2: Nurturing and Family Orientation		
My children are the most important thing in my life	.70	
I try to arrange my home for my children's convenience	.54	
I take a lot of time and effort teaching my children good habits	.66	12.34
Total cumulative variance		27.12

Table 1 includes only those statements that have a factor loading greater than 0.5 on their respective factors. The first factor loadings show statements that reflect a positive self-image

and explain 14.78% of the total variance. Four variables remained in the model, and they reflect respondents' belief in their self-confidence. The second factor "Nurturing and Family Orientation" explained 12.34% of the total variance. This factor shows the care that the Kuwaiti people provide their children. These two factors explain 27.12% of the variance. They reveal certain basic characteristics of the Kuwaiti people. The Kuwaiti consumers believe that they are self-esteemed. They appreciate their families and are concerned with the well-being of their children. They care for their children and their children's education.

Culture and Tradition Values

In the second part, the 17- item CETSCALE measure is used to test the effect of culture and tradition on consumer's behavior. Table 2 shows the result of the reliability analysis of these 17 items. Overall, the Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.91 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 and, therefore, a summative measure can be used to represent the effect of culture and tradition values of the respondents. The results are shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Culture and Tradition Values Measured on 17-Item CETSCALE^a

Item No.	Item ¹	Reliability ²	Mean Score
1	Kuwaitis should always buy products made in Kuwait instead of imports	.913	3.11
2	Only those products that are unavailable in Kuwait should be imported	.931	2.30
3	Buy Kuwaiti-made products and keep Kuwaitis working	.934	4.01
4	Kuwaiti products, first, last, and foremost	.932	3.85
5	Purchasing foreign-made products is un-Kuwaiti	.918	2.24
6	It is not right to purchase foreign products, because it puts Kuwaitis out of jobs	.919	3.55
7	A real Kuwaiti should always buy Kuwaiti made products	.931	3.05
8	We should purchase products manufactured in Kuwait instead of letting other countries get rich at our expense	.920	3.78
9	It is always best to purchase Kuwaiti products	.934	3.57
10	There should be very little trading or purchasing of goods from other countries unless it is necessary	.969	2.34
11	Kuwaitis should not buy foreign products because this hurts business and causes unemployment	.941	2.88
12	Curbs should be put on all imports	.922	1.99
13	It may cost me in the long-run but I prefer to support Kuwaiti products	.943	4.99
14	Foreigners should not be allowed to put their products on our markets	.910	1.55
15	Foreign products should be taxed heavily to reduce their entry into Kuwait	.937	2.27
16	We should buy from foreign countries only those products that we cannot obtain within our own country.	.930	4.86
17	Consumers who purchase products made in other countries are responsible for putting their fellow Kuwaitis out of work.	.922	3.03

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

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

As Table 2 shows, the highest scoring factor was Item 13 and it indicates Kuwaitis like to support their local products even if it will cost them more. High scores were reported in three items, which are 3, 13, and 16. This indicates that the Kuwaiti consumers are socially responsible people willing to pay more to support the local product. Imports are not perceived negatively as

reflected with the low scores reflected in items 10, 11, 12 and 14. In general, Kuwaiti consumers are not against foreign products. Item 14 had the lowest score (1.55), which states that foreigners should not be allowed to put their products in the market. The mean score on the CETSCALE is 2.92, which is relatively low. This shows that the Kuwaitis are not biased consumers and they tend to make objective buying decisions. The Kuwaiti consumers buy imported as well as local products when available. The Kuwaiti consumers don't put the blame on imported goods (items 11 and 17 had scores of almost 3) for high unemployment or a bad economy. This reflects a unique characteristic of Kuwaiti people.

Buying Decisions

In the third part, respondents were asked to indicate who in the family, the husband or the wife makes buying decisions at different levels. 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	21	11	17
	Wife	77	47	56	65
	Joint	11	27	26	15
	Not Reported	4	5	7	3
Major Appliances	Husband	32	36	44	31
	Wife	12	22	20	28
	Joint	40	41	24	27
	Not Reported	16	1	12	4
Furniture	Husband	38	39	44	41
	Wife	18	23	26	16
	Joint	36	33	29	36
	Not Reported	8	5	1	7
Automobile	Husband	58	50	63	49
	Wife	7	10	5	12
	Joint	26	31	28	34
	Not Reported	9	19	4	5
Savings	Husband	49	57	47	28
	Wife	14	13	13	19
	Joint	30	28	25	44
	Not Reported	7	2	15	9
Vacations	Husband	25	38	49	38
	Wife	23	15	17	22
	Joint	45	37	30	35
	Not Reported	7	10	4	5
Life Insurance	Husband	39	42	49	47
	Wife	23	5	6	4
	Joint	33	31	16	31
	Not Reported	5	22	29	18

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The results clearly show that while the wife has a clear say in buying grocery decisions, the man is the primary decision maker in all other categories. This reflects the true nature of the social fabric of Kuwaitis. The male is the dominant member of the family. The wife's role is significant in decisions regarding food; however, it decreases gradually when it comes to other home decisions such as buying appliances or furniture and is even less significant in the remaining areas. Further analysis should survey a more diverse sample. A limitation of this study may be a social desirability bias. The respondents could have been providing a more socially desirable answer to some of the questions. This study shows that there are differences in the consumer behaviors of the Kuwaiti compared to some of the findings gathered from other CCASG. Marketers should customize their marketing strategies and tailor their approach depending upon the particular nation's consumer being targeted.

CONCLUSIONS

Successful marketers must consider the factors shaping consumer habits in numerous markets in a globalized economy. Given the limitations of this exploratory study, findings indicate that the buying behavior is affected by lifestyle dimension of the Kuwaiti consumers as well as by culture and tradition values. This study has a significant impact because it shows that such information is important to marketing professionals in developing their strategies that will properly position their products in the right place. Two factors that were identified as important lifestyle dimensions among Kuwaiti consumers are thus seen as significant findings. Self-reliance and family orientation explained 27.12% of the variation. This reflects the unique cultural structure of the Kuwaiti people. The Kuwaiti families are still influenced by the old traditions, which are reflected by the male being the dominant member. The clear output of this study is that Kuwaiti people have unique characteristics that may be significantly different from those of any other nations in the region.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are several limitations in the study. The first is the data is primary type, which might be inherently biased. The second is the relatively small sample size. The third is that the variables explained 27.12% of the variations, which is relative low; other variables should be added in future studies. The fourth one is about the external validity of the model, which was not tested.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The output of this study opens the doors for further inquiry about the consumers in the other nations of the CCASG. It is most likely that CCASG do not share the same characteristics as those of the Kuwaiti people. Despite the socio-economic similarities among the CCASG (market size, income, religion, language, etc.), there might be many unique features in each of these markets that need to be identified. Marketers may ignore these differences and thus select a common marketing strategy in the region. However, adopting a standardized strategy may be the less profitable option. This study of consumers provides evidence that further analysis on the

specifics of lifestyles and socio-economic variables (such as occupation and age) might be needed to make better marketing strategies in Kuwait.

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