Altruism and Consumer Purchase Behavior

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ABSTRACT. An important issue in the purchase of a product in the global marketplace is the impact of that purchase on other individuals within that country. The purchase of a major and technologically complex product can have an effect on employment as well as other economic factors that impact the well-being of that country. This paper reports research that examines the relationship between altruism and consumer purchase behavior involving domestic and foreign products. Three dimensions of altruism are measured: consumer ethnocentrism, cognitive moral development, and prosocial behavior. Consumer purchase behavior is examined in the context of past automobile purchases based on method of acquisition, region-of-origin, and purchase price. The results indicate that consumer ethnocentrism varies based on region-of-origin and that prosocial behavior varies based on method of acquisition and region-of-origin. Implications for policy makers and for the managers of global products are also presented. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <http://www.HaworthPress.com> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

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INTRODUCTION

In today’s global economy, environmental and humanitarian issues are increasingly important to consumers. Companies and brands that are perceived positively on these dimensions have a real chance to take advantage of people’s growing sense of altruism (Marketing Week, 2005). Altruism provides a useful basis for understanding this motivation that consumers may possess (Bendapudi, Singh, and Bendapudi, 1996; Goodhead, 1991; Goolsby and Hunt, 1992; Gyu and Patton, 1989; Henry, 2000; Price, Feick, and Guskey, 1995; Rieck, 2000; Webb, Green, and Brashear, 2000). Research on altruistic behavior in the context of consumer purchasing behavior represents a new and exciting application of the research stream that has developed on altruism (Federouch, 1990; Olsen, Granzin, and Biswas, 1993). Altruism involves actions taken by an individual that voluntarily benefit another person without the expectation of reward from external sources (Bar-Tal, 1976, p. 7; Berkowitz, 1972; Krebs, 1970; Macaulay and Berkowitz, 1970; Turner and Valentine, 2001). Although altruism has been investigated in much of the past research in a social or psychological context, it has direct applicability to purchase decisions in an international context (Saffu and Mamman, 2000; Cleveland, Kalamas, and Larroche, 2005; Guagnano, 2001; Rowlands, Scott, and Parker, 2003).

Altruism is an increasingly seen topic in the ethics and business literature (Gassler, 1998; Kelly and Hoffman, 1997; Locke and Woiceshyn, 1995; Mitchell, 1999; Turner and Valentine, 2001). The impact that altruism has on purchase behavior is an important subject of ethics research and it is also relevant to business firms, policy makers, and the economies of the countries that they operate in. Automobile manufacturers are increasingly aggressive in marketing their products outside of their home markets (Smith, 1997) and substantial portion of trade deficits for countries such as the United States is in automobiles and automobile parts (Federal Reserve Bulletin, 1992).

The research presented here addresses how the elements of altruism impacts actual purchase behavior. Consumer purchase behavior is examined in the context of past automobile purchase characteristics based on method of acquisition (bought new or used), geographic region of automobile origin, and purchase price. Altruistic intent is measured on three dimensions: consumer ethnocentrism, cognitive moral development, and prosocial behavior. Although there are numerous elements that influence purchase decisions, altruism is considered to have an important secondary effect (Simon, 1993; Weaver, Evans, and Luloff, 1992). The results indicate that consumer ethnocentrism varies based on region-of-origin and that prosocial behavior varies based on method of acquisition and region-of-origin. Altruism is discussed next, followed by a review of how altruism has been reported to impact purchase behavior.

BACKGROUND

The problem of defining altruism is addressed by many authors. August Comte (1798-1857) (1875), credited with first use of the term, maintained some social behavior was unselfishly motivated to benefit others (p. 556). Since Comte, there has been disagreement about the precise definition of altruism, however, many authors agree that helping behavior voluntarily benefits another without the expectation of reward (Berkowitz, 1972; Krebs, 1970). Batson (1991) has most recently defined altruism as a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare (p. 6). Research into the construct is directly traced to several theoretical sources: Gouldner’s (1960) proposition regarding the prevalence of the universal norm of reciprocity; Leed’s (1963) suggestion regarding the prescription of the norm of giving; Piaget’s (1932) and Kohlberg’s (1958, 1969) approach toward the development of moral judgment; Aronfreed’s (1970) conceptualization of conscience development; and Rushton, Russell, and Wells’ (1984) “genetic similarity theory” suggesting a biological basis for ethnocentrism, the universal tendency for people to favor their own group over others (Booth, 1979; Worcel and Cooper, 1979). These theories explicitly discuss social conditions for helping behavior or implicitly offer a basis for such conduct.

This theoretical framework approaches the explanation of altruistic behavior in terms of an interaction between cultural, cognitive, and behavioral determinants (Bar-Tal, 1976, pp. 14-37). Based on this framework, we examine altruism in terms of three dimensions: (1) ethnocentrism—the universal tendency for people to favor their own group over others (Rushton, Russell, and Wells, 1984) applied to consumer behavior by Shimp and Sharma (1987); (2) cognitive moral development—the way in which individuals acquire, through time, an
increasingly accurate understanding of their moral obligations (Rest, 1979); and (3) prosocial behavior—that behavior which is carried out to benefit another without anticipation of external rewards and performed for its own end and restitution (Bar-Tal, 1976, pp. 4, 14-37; Kohlberg, 1969; Rushton, 1989). Ethnocentrism represents a cultural basis for altruism. Cognitive moral development represents a cognitive basis, and prosocial behavior is a behavioral basis.

**CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM**

Consumer ethnocentrism is based on the universal tendency for people to favor their own group over others (Booth, 1979; Levine and Campbell, 1972; Sumner, 1906; Worcel and Cooper, 1979) and represents the beliefs held by consumers about the propriety of purchasing foreign products (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). Ethnocentric consumers may regard the purchase of imported products as being wrong as such purchases negatively impact the domestic economy, increase unemployment, or are unpatriotic. Non-ethnocentric consumers may evaluate foreign products on their own merits without regard for the origin of their manufacture. Consumer ethnocentrism provides the individual with a sense of identity and an understanding of what purchases are acceptable or unacceptable (Shimp and Sharma, 1987).

Social scientists have considered similarity in demographic, physical, and psychological characteristics to be an important factor in marriage, attraction, friendship, and group cohesion (Byrne, 1971). It has been reported that people are more likely to help members of their own race or country than they are to help members of other races or foreigners (Cunningham, 1981; Rushton, 1989). As applied to consumer purchase behavior, domestic products have historically provided the frame of reference for the evaluation of foreign products (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). Though large numbers of consumers now are willing to consider foreign products as alternatives to domestic items, some consumers staunchly refuse to buy imported products and chastise fellow consumers for doing this. They claim buying foreign goods puts domestic workers out of work, hurts the economy, or is unpatriotic. However, they may moderate this position when domestic products are judged as being of lower quality, or when they hold higher conspicuous consumption values (Cheng and Chen, 2004). Other consumers are equally vocal in defending their right to buy whatever products they wish, regardless of place of manufacture.

**COGNITIVE MORAL DEVELOPMENT**

Cognitive moral development is defined as the way in which individuals acquire, through time, an increasingly accurate understanding of the nature of their moral obligations (Rest, 1979). Research has documented the process of moral development to warrant generalizing the progressive nature of moral development hypothesized by Kohlberg (1969) across many populations and cultures. For example, a recent study indicates the potential influence of culture, education, sex, and gender in the cognitive moral development of business professionals and graduate business students in India and the United States (Kracher, Chatterjee, and Lundquist, 2002) (for reviews, see Blasi, 1980; Brabeck, 1984; Gibbs and Widaman, 1982; Krebs, 1978; Snarey, 1985). Cognitive moral development may be considered a preliminary condition for the individual to exhibit prosocial behavior and consumer ethnocentrism.

In developing his theory of moral development, Kohlberg (1969) regarded cognitive moral development as a process of development through a maximum of six stages. In each stage moral reasoning becomes more complex as individual thought patterns and structures become increasingly complex. At the preconventional level (stages 1 and 2), simple immediate consequences to the individual (i.e., punishments and rewards) form the basis of moral judgment. Reasoning at the conventional level (stages 3 and 4) emphasizes compliance with the roles or norms of appropriate behavior established by peers, family, and society at large. At the principal level (stages 5 and 6), moral judgment criteria transcend group norms as the individual becomes increasingly egocentric and develops an increasing strong personal commitment to self-selected universal principles.

**Prosocial Behavior**

Prosocial behavior is defined as voluntary behavior that is carried out to benefit another without anticipation of external rewards and is performed under two circumstances: for its own end and as an act of restitution (Bar-Tal, 1976, pp. 4). Research has identified four variables that influence prosocial behavior: (1) personality traits, (2) temporary psychological states, (3) social roles and demographic variables, and (4) social norms. The personality traits of the socially responsible person are based on the discovery of a pattern of concern about broad ethical and moral problems (Gough, McLosky, and Mehl, 1952).
Temporary psychological states are influenced by positive and negative emotions, role models, and the interaction effects between characteristics of benefactors and recipients (Berkowitz, 1983; Cialdini, Darby, and Vincent, 1973; Clark and Isen, 1982; Isen and Simmons, 1978; Kidd and Marshall, 1982). The level of responsibility individuals and bystanders in a group assume when they intervene in an emergency (Darley and Latane, 1968; Latane and Darley, 1968), and the role of empathy in motivating witnesses to relieve the distress of another in need also influence the temporary psychological state (Batson and Coke, 1981; Smith, Keating, and Stotland, 1989). Although a benefactor or recipient shares similar attributes or social roles such as sex, age, ordinal position, social class, and nationality, the resulting predisposition is not a guarantee that prosocial behavior will result. Social norms are the fourth type of independent variable affecting the motivation to help. Although their precise role in explaining and predicting human social behavior remains unsettled, social norms as a determinant of prosocial behavior have been upheld (Berkowitz, 1972; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; McKirnan, 1980; Pepitone, 1976).

**Altruism and Purchase Behavior**

As firms offer their products on the marketplace they expose consumers to multiple product cues (Chao and Rajendran, 1993). Among the cues is the “made-in” label identifying the goods as being of domestic or foreign manufacture. The identification of this cue introduces the country-of-origin (COO) effect into the consumer decision-making process. In the present research, COO is termed “region-of-origin” as individual countries are not examined. Certain consumers are unaware of a product’s COO, while others search for such information (Reiterson, 1966; Hampton, 1977). Consumers may also develop stereotypes of countries and/or their products (Anderson and Cunningham, 1972; Bilkey and Nes, 1982; Gaedeke, 1973; Morello, 1984; Nagashima, 1970, 1977; White, 1979; Wall and Heslop, 1986) and that these impact their purchase behavior (Graham, Shipley, and Krieger, 1988). The influence of COO may be greater for some products than for others (Gaedeke, 1973; Lilis and Narayan, 1974). There is increasingly the influence of cosmopolitanism (Gouldner, 1957; Merton, 1957), whereby consumers may transcend their local cultures using broadly based standards of quality and efficiency to make their choice of product (Cannon and Yaprap, 2002).

Given that consumers may consider country-of-origin in their product consideration process, altruism can be a motivating force in the purchase of a product or service. This is particularly true in the context of early adopters of a product. It has been reported that altruism is a force behind the purchase of renewable electricity for early adopters (Wiser, Fowlie, and Holt, 2001). The use of an altruistic appeal for early adopters was used by Toyota in the marketing of its first gas-electric hybrid automobile (Child, 2003); since that time Toyota has endeavored to advertise the product based on a more general appeal to potential customers. Supporting the strategy that Toyota has undertaken, purchase motivations have been shown to shift from materialistic motivations to altruistic concerns as an individual ages (Goodhead, 1991).

**RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND METHOD**

The research framework seen in Figure 1 identifies the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism, cognitive moral development, prosocial behavior, and purchase behavior based on whether the automobile was purchased new or used, the automobile’s region-of-origin, and purchase price. The specific hypotheses tested are:

- **H₁**: Consumer ethnocentrism differs between individuals based on method of acquisition.
- **H₂**: Consumer ethnocentrism differs between individuals based on the purchased vehicle’s region-of-origin.
- **H₃**: Consumer ethnocentrism differs between individuals based on the vehicle’s purchase price.
- **H₄**: Cognitive moral development differs between individuals based on method of acquisition.
- **H₅**: Cognitive moral development differs between individuals based on the purchased vehicle’s region-of-origin.
- **H₆**: Cognitive moral development differs between individuals based on the vehicle’s purchase price.
- **H₇**: Prosocial behavior differs between individuals based on method of acquisition.
- **H₈**: Prosocial behavior differs between individuals based on the purchased vehicle’s region-of-origin.
- **H₉**: Prosocial behavior differs between individuals based on the vehicle’s purchase price.
Sampling Frame and Measures

The study population consisted of a multistage cluster sampling of households from six suburban towns located in Maricopa County, Arizona. Six street intersections were randomly chosen from standard municipal maps available from local political jurisdictions and a 40-address sampling frame was devised, based upon the 40 addresses nearest the intersection. Thus, 1,440 (6 x 6 x 40) addresses made up the sampling frame. From this frame, 18 addresses were randomly selected from each of the previously designated 36 intersections (Greene and Plank, 1994). This resulted in 648 addresses being selected. The study utilized a drop-and-collect technique to collect survey data (Brown, 1987). This methodology provided the best opportunity to increase response rates attributable to personal contact with the lead author and to explain the nature of the survey at length.

Consumer ethnocentrism was measured using the CETSCALE (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). The scale contains 17 items relevant to the beliefs held by consumers about the appropriateness of purchasing foreign products. Respondents were instructed to respond to a 5-point Likert-type scale format addressing seven facets of consumers’ orientations toward foreign products: (1) consumer ethnocentric tendencies, (2) price-value perceptions, (3) self-interest concerns, (4) reciprocity norms, (5) rationalization-of-choice, (6) restrictions-mentality, and (7) freedom-of-choice views.

Rest’s (1986) Defining Issues Test was used to measure cognitive moral development. The DIT has been used in over 100 studies involving 5,000 subjects (Rest, 1976). Subjects were presented six social problems and were asked to select a course of action and rate twelve issue statements on a five-point scale of importance determined to be the most important in each ethical judgment. At the end they were asked to rank order four issue statements in the order of their importance. The primary index from the DIT used in analysis of the subject response was the P% score representing the relative importance given to principled considerations in determining ethical judgment. The P% score represented the percentage of total possible scores (0-95) assigned to statements, with higher scores indicating a higher level of cognitive moral development.

The Self-Report Altruism Scale (SRAS), a 20-item test developed by Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981) was used to measure prosocial behavior. This scale lists 20 everyday prosocial behaviors (e.g., making donations to charity, giving directions to a stranger) and asks respondents to rate the frequency with which one has engaged in these prosocial behaviors by specifying either Never, Once, More than once, Often, or Very often. Multiple-choice single response questions were used to generate a profile describing the distribution of respondents in categories addressing the method of vehicle acquisition, its region-of-origin and the vehicle’s purchase price. Vehicle acquisition was measured by categories consisting of “bought new,” “bought used,” “company provided,” and “other”-a “catch-all” category for any/all remaining methods of acquisition, for example, gift. Vehicle purchase price was measured by categories corresponding to: less than $15,000, $15,000-$19,999, $20,000-$29,999, $30,000-$39,999, $40,000-$49,999.

Respondent heads of household were instructed to choose between an American or Japanese automobile product. The definition of “foreign” for the purpose of this research was based on the location of the parent company. Automobile products were chosen as they represent a very important economic sector and historically account for a large portion of trade deficits between the United States and Japan (Baily, 1993). After being presented with the hypothetical problem that one of the cars
they drive is no longer suitable and that they are about to purchase a new car, respondents were asked to choose one of the two outcomes in a self-administered questionnaire, and the choice outcomes (Kerlinger, 1986) were then coded as either 0 or 1.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

A total of 252 questionnaires were returned and 212 responses were usable for an effective response rate of 32.7%. The response rate was considered acceptable and is consistent with previous studies using the drop-and-return survey procedure (Brown, 1987). Of the 212 respondents, 98 (46.2%) were male and 114 (53.8%) were female. The average ages of these individuals were 52 (range = 18-65+). Seventy-four percent of the sample was married living in a household consisting of two adults. The level of education ranged from having a high school education or less to having a postgraduate degree with the average respondent having attended college (M = 2.9; Standard Deviation = 1.3). The average respondent’s total household income was above average approaching $50,000 per year. A comparison of the demographic profiles (age, education, and household income) of the respondents revealed no difference between the sample and the general population from which it was drawn.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability of the scales used in this study was tested using coefficient alpha and the split-half method. The internal consistency reliability of the 17-item CETSCALE was 0.9534 consistent with the 0.94-0.96 range reported by Shimp and Sharma (1987) in the development of their scale. Split-half coefficients yielded a correlation of 0.8318. These coefficients exceed the 0.65 reliability coefficient that Mehrens and Lehmann (1973) reported suggesting acceptable reliability. The internal consistency reliability of the DIT’s six social problems was 0.7886, consistent with Rest (1986). Split-half coefficients yielded a correlation of 0.6280. Although the split-half coefficient was slightly less than 0.65 suggested by Mehrens and Lehmann (1973), the marginal difference between them was not expected to jeopardize the reliability of this instrument, given its widespread use (Rest, 1976) and its reputation for reliability (Goolsby and Hunt, 1992). The coefficient alpha of the 20-item Self-Report Altruism Scale (SRAS) was 0.8518, consistent with the 0.78-0.87 range for internal consistency reliability reported by Rushton, Chrisjohn, and Fekken (1981). Split-half coefficients yielded a correlation of 0.6770. Both of these coefficients exceeded the 0.65 reliability coefficient that Mehrens and Lehmann (1973, p. 122) suggest as acceptable reliability.

Validity of the scales used in this study was established with Pearson product moment correlation coefficients computed using factor analysis. Estimates of the initial factors for the items, their loadings, and eigenvalues within the scales were obtained from principal component analysis. Factor analysis confirmed the multidimensional composition of consumer ethnocentrism. Over 57.7% of the total variance of the CETSCALE was attributable to the first item. The remaining 16 items together accounted for 42.3% of the variance. Factor analysis, as expected, indicated factor 1 loaded heavily, that is, the scores were greater than 0.6, in three clusters addressing orientations toward consumer ethnocentrism and self-interest concerns. Correlation coefficients generated for the DIT confirmed the multidimensional composition of moral development. Factor analysis, as expected, indicated heavy and moderate loading against the related constructs of general aptitude, comprehension of moral issues, law and order orientation, and political tolerance with moral development. The resultant loadings reinforce the validity of Rest’s test as an objective measurement instrument for levels of cognitive moral development. Examination of variables comprising these factors indicates heavy and moderate loads against constructs of moral reasoning, nurturance, sensitive-attitude, social responsibility, empathy, and prosocial values. The resultant loadings reinforce the discriminant validity of the SRAS as means for demonstrating the broad base of the prosocial behavior trait.

Correlations were run between the three elements of altruism. It was found that cognitive moral development was correlated to consumer ethnocentrism and to prosocial behavior. Consumer ethnocentrism and prosocial behavior were not correlated, however. These results indicate that as predicted by the literature, cognitive moral development is related to the two defined elements of altruism. However, consumer ethnocentrism and prosocial behavior are distinct from each other. The data in this research were analyzed using One-Way ANOVA performed to test the hypotheses that address the various relationships of constructs in the research framework (Table 1). One-Way ANOVA, the standard method for analyzing variation in means, most reasonably reflects a model describing the relationship between a set of independent variables and dependent variables (Kirk, 1982; Montgomery, 1984). The
### Results by Hypothesis

**H₁:** Consumer ethnocentrism differs between individuals based on method of acquisition. The computed F-value of 0.301 in ANOVA is less than the critical value of 2.65 indicating that there are no significant differences (at the 0.05 level) between mean scores for vehicle purchase. Since the hypothesis proposed consumer ethnocentrism differs between individuals based on a new or used vehicle purchase, the hypothesis is not supported.

**H₂:** Consumer ethnocentrism differs between individuals based on the purchased vehicle’s region-of-origin. The computed F-value of 12.625 in ANOVA is greater than the critical value of 3.04 indicating that there are significant differences (at the 0.05 level) between the mean scores for the region-of-origins of origin (Table 2). Since the hypothesis proposed consumer ethnocentrism differs based on the purchased vehicle’s regions-of-origin, the hypothesis is supported. Post hoc analysis using Gabriel’s test indicates that consumer ethnocentrism is significantly higher for buyers of European and Domestic automobiles compared with Asian automobiles.

**H₃:** Consumer ethnocentrism differs between individuals based on the vehicle’s purchase price. The computed F-value of 0.315 in ANOVA is less than the critical value of 2.26 indicating that there are no significant differences (at the 0.05 level) between the mean scores of the six purchase price groups (Table 3). Since the hypothesis proposed consumer ethnocentrism differs based on vehicle purchase price, the null hypothesis is therefore not supported.

**H₄:** Cognitive moral development differs between individuals based on method of acquisition. The computed F-value of 0.195 in ANOVA is less than the critical value of 2.65 indicating that there are no significant differences (at the 0.05 level) between the method of vehicle purchase (Table 1). Since the hypothesis proposed cognitive moral development differs between individuals based on new or used vehicle purchase, the hypothesis is not supported.

**H₅:** Cognitive moral development differs between individuals based on the purchased vehicle’s region-of-origin. The computed F-value of
1.557 in ANOVA is less than the critical value of 3.04 indicating that there are no significant differences (at the 0.05 level) between the mean scores of the regions-of-origin (Table 2). Since the hypothesis proposed cognitive moral development differs based on the purchased vehicle’s region-of-origin, the hypothesis is not supported.

$H_6$: Cognitive moral development differs between individuals based on the vehicle purchase price. The computed F-value of 0.626 in ANOVA is less than the critical value of 2.26 indicating that there are no significant differences (at the 0.05 level) between the six purchase price groups (Table 3). Since the hypothesis proposed cognitive moral development differs between individuals based on the vehicle purchase price, the hypothesis is therefore not supported.

$H_7$: Prosocial behavior differs between individuals based on method of acquisition. The computed F-value of 4.493 is greater than the critical value of 2.65 indicating that there is a significant difference (at the 0.05 level) between the mean scores for a new or used vehicle purchase (Table 1). Since the hypothesis proposed prosocial behavior differs between individuals based on a new or used vehicle purchase, the hypothesis is supported. Post hoc analysis using Gabriel’s test indicates that prosocial behavior is less for consumers that purchased a new automobile compared with those who acquired a previously owned automobile.

$H_8$: Prosocial behavior differs between individuals based on the purchased vehicle’s region-of-origin. The computed F-value of 5.482 is greater than the critical value of 2.65 indicating that there is a significant difference (at the 0.05 level) between the mean scores of the regions-of-origin (Table 2). Since the hypothesis proposed prosocial behavior differs between individuals based on the purchased vehicle’s region-of-origin, the hypothesis is not supported.
origin, the hypothesis is supported. Post hoc analysis using Gabriel’s test indicates that prosocial behavior is greater for consumers purchasing European vehicles compared with both Asian and Domestic automobiles.

\( H_g \): Prosocial behavior differs between individuals based on the vehicle purchase price. The computed F-value of 1.024 in ANOVA is less than the critical value of 2.26 indicating that there are no significant differences (at the 0.05 level) between the mean scores of the six purchase price groups (Table 4). Since the hypothesis proposed prosocial behavior differs between individuals based on the vehicle purchase price, the hypothesis is therefore not supported.

**DISCUSSION**

The results indicate that certain purchase characteristics are associated with different levels of the dimensions of altruism. The research compared levels of consumer ethnocentrism, cognitive moral development, and prosocial behavior with method of acquisition, region-of-origin, and purchase price. Consumer ethnocentrism was found to vary based on region-of-origin and prosocial behavior varies based on method of acquisition and region-of-origin. The results further indicate that consumer ethnocentrism, cognitive moral development, and prosocial behavior do not vary based on a vehicle’s purchase price.

Region-of-origin of an automobile purchase was found to have a significant difference across two dimensions of altruism. It was found that consumer ethnocentrism was higher for buyers of European and domestic automobiles compared with Asian automobiles. Prosocial behavior was found to be higher for buyers of European automobiles compared with both domestic and Asian automobiles. Cognitive moral development was not different across these dimensions. These findings are quite interesting as in both cases the European region buyer showed a higher level of altruism relative to the consumer ethnocentrism component compared with the prosocial behavior component, despite the fact that they had purchased a foreign product. What is of even greater interest is that European automobile firms, much more so than their Asian counterparts, do not attempt to create an image that they produce or employ Americans in the domestic market. Asian firms by comparison go to great lengths to convey messages related to how their products are often produced in the United States and that they are an integral part of the United States economy.
The difference in the results for consumer ethnocentrism and prosocial behavior as they relate to European and Asian regions-of-origin may be accounted for by genetic similarity in human relationships, an important factor in altruism (Byrne, 1971). According to Rushton, Russell, and Wells' (1984) "genetic similarity theory," genetic likeness affects various relationships with implications for small and large group behavior (both national and international) (Rushton, 1989). In 1989, Rushton connected the theory with altruism, suggesting that genetically similar people tend to seek one another out and direct altruism to genetically similar individuals. This concept has been successfully applied to the study of consumer behavior (e.g., Berkman and Gilson, 1978; Markin, 1974) potentially accounting for the higher level of consumer ethnocentrism that buyers from the study population exhibit in their purchase of European automobiles.

Prosocial behavior was found to vary based on method of acquisition with purchasers of new automobiles having a significantly lower level of prosocial behavior than purchasers of previously owned automobiles. These results may be accounted for by the education and income effects on prosocial behavior, assuming that higher incomes are associated with purchasers of new automobiles. The buyer of a new, higher priced vehicle compared with a used less expensive vehicle may be assumed to possess a higher income and educational levels.

Limitations of the Research

A concern in research of this type is the prospect of other underlying demographic variables, such as education and household income driving the variables that were examined in relation to altruism. In order to test for the impact of age, education, and household income on method of acquisition, region-of-origin, and purchase price, a chi-square analysis was performed. The results indicate that age was independent of acquisition ($X^2 = 17.886, p = 0.119$), region-of-origin ($X^2 = 35.332, p = 0.064$) and purchase price ($X^2 = 40.523, p = 0.095$). There was a relationship between education, region-of-origin ($X^2 = 17.503, p = 0.025$) and method of acquisition ($X^2 = 027.544, p = 0.036$), but independent of price paid ($X^2 = 13.307, p = 0.864$). Finally, household income was related to region-of-origin ($X^2 = 25.89, p = 0.102$), and price paid ($X^2 = 50.815, p = 0.255$), but independent method of acquisition ($X^2 = 87.865, p = 0.0$). These results indicate that although demographic variables are related to some of the results observed, they are clearly not the sole reason for the relationships observed in the research.

Global products, and particularly those in the automobile industry, have a mixed pedigree. For the purpose of this research, the differentiation between "domestic" and "foreign" was based on the location of the parent company. A Honda, manufactured in the United States, would be considered a "foreign product," whereas a Ford produced with parts made throughout the world, would be considered a "domestic" product. This obviously creates a limitation to the research, although it is based on the reality of the marketplace as perceived by the consumer. In addition, there are other dimensions of a foreign or domestic brand image that may impact the consumer's choice besides altruistic influences. For example, Japanese products, in general, may be seen as superior in quality to the point that it outweighs any altruistic influence on the choice of a domestic product. Future research is suggested to control for this influence.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The present study applied a research framework for understanding certain purchase characteristics associated with different levels of the dimensions of altruism—consumer ethnocentrism, cognitive moral development, and prosocial behavior tested in the context of a vehicle's method of acquisition, region-of-origin and purchase price. It has extended work on altruistic behavior to include product characteristics in an international context.

There are several directions for future research that should be noted. First, additional studies need to be conducted applying the model of altruistic behavior in other industries. Applying the model in the context of another industry would determine whether the findings of the present study are consistent across product lines or if they are product specific. An application of the model to purchase choice for industrial products should also prove to be useful. Finally, it would be valuable to undertake research to both verify and further understand the findings of this study. This is especially true with respect to the finding that consumer ethnocentrism was higher for buyers of European and domestic automobiles compared with Asian automobiles. That consumer ethnocentrism is higher for European buyers, while Asian carmakers target domestic buyers of their products with messages that focus on this issue represents an interesting business and ethical dilemma.
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