PERSONAL AND PURCHASING ALTRUISM: ANTECEDENTS AND INTERRELATIONSHIPS

Thomas L. Powers, University of Alabama at Birmingham
Raymond A. Hopkins, The Boeing Company

ABSTRACT

Altruism can be useful in understanding consumer purchase motivations, especially those related to the purchase of a domestic product where ‘buy national’ motives may be present. In this paper the dimensions of altruism, their antecedents, and the relationships between them are identified based on a survey of 212 consumers. The findings indicate that a total of eight altruism dimensions exist and interact in a manner that reflect two distinct factors of personal and purchasing altruism.

INTRODUCTION

It is well documented that country of origin has an effect on consumer decision-making (Ahmed and d’Astous 2007; Pappu, Quester, and Cooksey 2006); however, the role that altruism may play in this process is not understood (Fenwick and Wright 1999). Altruism is thought to be important in the context of the effect of country-of-origin on consumer purchasing behavior (Jin, Chansarkar, and Kondap 2006; O’Cass and Lim 2002). This is especially true in the context of how it may impact the preference for a domestic as opposed to a foreign product. Given the importance of gaining a further understanding of the motivations underlying buyer preferences for domestic products, research that identifies how altruistic motivations may influence purchase behavior represents an important avenue of investigation. The purpose of this research is to identify the dimensions of consumer altruism and how they may relate to each other as well as to purchase intent.

The construct of altruism examined in this research is based on three traditional elements of altruism: consumer ethnocentrism (Rushton, Russell, and Wells 1984; Shimp and Sharma 1987), cognitive moral development (Rest 1979), and altruistic behavior (Bar-Tal 1976; Kohlberg 1969; Rushton 1989). Consumer ethnocentrism suggests people tend to direct altruism to members of their own race or country (Cunningham 1981). It can also represent beliefs held by consumers about the propriety of purchasing foreign products (Cheng and Zhen 2004; Hamin 2006; Shimp and Sharma 1987). Altruistic behavior represents a voluntary behavior that is carried out to benefit another (Bar-Tal 1976; Krebs 1970). These initial constructs of altruism form the basis of the present research that results in the ultimate identification of two distinct factors of personal and purchasing altruism.

RESEARCH METHOD

The first step in this research was to refine the previously established scales that measure the cultural, cognitive, and behavioral elements of altruism. These scales were for ethnocentrism, the 17-item CETSCALE developed by Shimp and Sharma (1987); for cognitive moral development, Rest’s (1986) Defining Issues Test (DIT); and for altruistic behavior, the 20-item Self-Report Altruism Scale (SRAS) developed by Rushton, Chrisjohn and Fekken (1981).

In order to examine the possible dimensions of altruism across a spectrum of consumers a multistage cluster sampling of households was used with demographics that corresponded to the demographics of the general population of Maricopa County, Arizona, USA, a suburban metropolitan area of approximately one million households. 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 resulting in 648 addresses being selected. The study utilized a drop and collect technique to collect survey data (Brown 1987).

Two hundred fifty-two 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 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 .9534. The internal consistency reliability of the DIT’s six social problems was .7886. The coefficient alpha of the 20-item Self-Report Altruism Scale (SRAS) was .8518. The coefficients of the scales had alphas greater than the 0.70 generally accepted threshold for published empirical research (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994).

A principal component analysis with a varimax rotation was performed and the 38-items from the three scales loaded on eight factors that explain 62.991% of the variance in responses. Based on the items contained in these factors, names for each altruism dimension were developed based on the overall nature of that altruistic behavior (purchasing behavior, personal behavior, giving behavior, other actions) and the level of that behavior (low, moderate, high) if there was more than one factor with similar behavior. Factor 1 contained 16 items and explained 26.922% of the variance in responses constituted a dimension we refer to as Patriotic Purchasing Altruism. Factor 2 contained seven items explaining 14.242% of the variance in the responses constituted a dimension we refer to as High Action Altruism. Factor 3 contained four items and explained 5.544% of the variance in the responses constituting a construct we refer to as Moderate Action Altruism. Factor 4 included three items and explained 3.844% of the variance in the responses constituting a dimension we called Giving Altruism. Factor 5 included one item and explained 3.193% of the variance in the responses constituting a dimension we refer to as Multi-ethnic Purchasing Altruism. Factor 6 included three items and explained 3.041% of the variance in the responses constituting a dimension we refer to as Low Personal Altruism. Factor 7 included two items and explained 3.014% of the variance in the responses constituting Cognitive Moral Development. Factor 8 included one item and explained 3.014% of the variance in the responses constituting a dimension called High Personal Altruism. Reliability of the scales reflecting the new altruism dimensions was tested using coefficient alpha. Internal consistency by inter-item correlations was also calculated to assess the validity of the scale.

As seen in Table 1, the coefficients of the scales had alphas greater or marginally below the 0.70 generally accepted threshold for published empirical research (Nunnally and Bernstein 1994). The inter-item correlation analysis also produced desirable results with correlations ranging from .307 to .556. The results indicate that there are distinct behavioral dimensions of altruism that can aid in the understanding of purchasing behavior.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension of Altruism</th>
<th>Patriotic purchasing altruism</th>
<th>High action altruism</th>
<th>Moderate action altruism</th>
<th>Giving altruism</th>
<th>Multi-ethnic purchasing altruism</th>
<th>Low personal altruism</th>
<th>Cognitive moral development</th>
<th>High personal altruism</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Patriotic purchasing altruism</td>
<td>Pearson correlation: 1.000</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed):</td>
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<tr>
<td>High action altruism</td>
<td>Pearson correlation: -0.025</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed):</td>
<td>0.715</td>
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<tr>
<td>Moderate action altruism</td>
<td>Pearson correlation: -.169*</td>
<td>.479**</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Giving altruism</td>
<td>Pearson correlation: -0.02</td>
<td>.389**</td>
<td>0.125</td>
<td>1.000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Multi-ethnic purchasing altruism</td>
<td>Pearson correlation: 0.076</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.07</td>
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Exploratory model based on the significant correlations between the dimensions of altruism. Figure 1 represents an association between the dimensions of altruism. Table eight previously unidentified dimensions of altruism. The second step of this research was to determine a motivating force in the purchase of a product or service, given a consideration of country-of-origin in the product consideration process. Multi-ethnic Purchasing Altruism, based on the items that loaded on this dimension, like Patriotic Purchasing Altruism, can be considered a motivating force in the purchase of a product or service, involving a moderated consideration of country-of-origin in the product consideration process. High Action Altruism, Moderate Action Altruism and Low Personal Altruism, based on the items that loaded on each of these dimensions, and each in successive levels, can be considered personal extensions of altruistic behavior. Giving Altruism can be considered a reflection of altruistic behavior involving financial costs to the caregiver. Cognitive Moral Development, the progressive way in which individuals acquire understanding of the nature of their moral obligations in complex social systems (Rest 1979), increases understanding of altruism, given the premise that altruism is one aspect of the many that comprise morality (Krebs 1978). Lastly, High Personal Altruism can be considered a level of personal involvement that exposes oneself to greater risk, improves understanding of altruistic behavior in those life threatening situations in which a competent adult, aware of the risk and benefits involved, seeks to unconditionally offer himself in an act of altruism (Walton-Moss and Nolan 2005).

The second step of this research was to determine the individual and collective relationships between the eight previously unidentified dimensions of altruism. The data were analyzed using a Pearson’s correlation analysis measuring the direction and strength of the association between the dimensions of altruism. Table 1 presents a summary of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation coefficients (Pearson’s r) between the different dimensions. Figure 1 represents an exploratory model based on the significant correlations and suggests that the eight altruism constraints interact in a manner that results in two distinct factors: Personal Altruism (Factor 1) and Purchasing Altruism (Factor 2). Personal altruism refers to the level at which an individual is willing to make sacrifices in order to benefit the welfare of others. Purchasing altruism differs in that it results in actions that are more directly related to purchase behavior based on altruistic motives.

Positive correlations were found between Moderate Action Altruism and High Action Altruism, and Multi-ethnic Purchasing Altruism and Patriotic Purchasing Altruism. We also found positive significant correlations between Giving Altruism and High Action Altruism, Low Personal Altruism and Giving Altruism, Cognitive Moral Development and Moderate Action Altruism, Cognitive Moral Development and Low Personal Altruism, Cognitive Moral Development and High Action Altruism, and High Personal Altruism and Moderate Action Altruism. Additionally, we found positive significant correlations between Cognitive Moral Development and Giving Altruism, and High Personal Altruism and Giving Altruism. The findings produced negative significant correlations between Moderate Action Altruism and Patriotic Purchasing Altruism, Low Personal Altruism and Patriotic Purchasing Altruism, and Low Personal Altruism and Multi-ethnic Purchasing Altruism. The hypothesized model seen in Figure 1 is representative of these relationships in combination and provides a means of conceptualizing the overall findings.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The dimensions identified and the relationships between them provide new insights into how specific attitudes and actions may interact and provide a new conceptualization of altruism as related to purchasing behavior. The findings of this study demonstrate that
significant relationships exist between the dimensions of altruism and that based on the exploratory model may result in two distinct forms of altruism, one related to purchasing behavior, and one not. In terms of the limitations of the research it must be kept in mind that the model developed is exploratory only in nature and is based on the correlations observed. This can provide a basis for future research that can be conducted by more sophisticated methods such as SEM or regression models. Despite the exploratory nature of the research, it is important to gain an understanding of the motives that influence consumer choice (Kumar, Lee, and Kim 2009). This study has contributed to the altruistic behavior literature by determining the relationship between eight dimensions of altruism and how they may interact to influence domestic product preference. The research may also provide an avenue of investigation into the other forms of altruism that hypothesized to not be components of purchasing related altruism.

Figure 1. Research Framework

All linkages shown are significant at the .05 level

REFERENCES


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For further information contact:
Thomas L. Powers
Collat School of Business
University of Alabama at Birmingham
Birmingham, AL 35294
Phone: (205) 934-5664
Email: tpowers@uab.edu