

# **A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF ETHNOCENTRICITY IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper explores the effect of ethnocentrism on the shaping of consumers habits in the Middle East. It compares the effect of cultural values on the consumer behavior in an area, which is rich in both the economic wealth of people and their diversity – belonging to different ethnic groups. Businesses need to understand the effect of the culture in shaping consumer habits. Studying the effect of ethnocentrism on the consumer habits is one way of investigating buyer behavior and market segmentation. The analysis builds on the initial results reported in exploratory surveys of consumers in Lebanon and Kuwait (Ziemnowicz, et al 2007 and Bahhouth et al 2008). Consumer market segments that exist among Middle East consumers are examined by the similarities and dissimilarities between people of two countries in the Middle East.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Lifestyles are an expression of an individual's self-concept. It is the total image people have of themselves, which is a result of how people were socialized in their culture. Papadopoulos and Heslop (1993) discussed the effects of a product's country of origin on buyers' perceptions. Roth & Romeo (1992) as well as Kaynak et. al (1998) asserted that consumers have significantly different country images or general perceptions about products made in different countries. Shimp & Sharma (1987), in discussing the consumer's lifestyle, highlighted the concept of ethnocentrism, which represents people's beliefs about the appropriateness and even the morality of purchasing a particular product or service. Ethnocentric consumers favor local products as they deem that products from their own country are the best (Klien, et al., 1998). It influences consumers' behavior when they believe that their national interest is being threatened (Sharma et al, 1995; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). 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 et al, 2001). In this paper, the concepts related to consumer lifestyle, ethnocentrism and their effect on consumer behavior in the Middle East are investigated. Presenting a comparative perspective of Lebanon and Kuwait as developing nations provides a context for understanding lifestyle behavior in that region.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

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 and Tigert, 1977; Kaynak and Kara, 1996). Lifestyles are an expression of an individual's self-concept. It is the total image people have of themselves, which is a result of how people were socialized in their culture. Hawkins, et al, (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 and 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 (Gonzalez and Bello, 2003).

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 remain competent. Nowadays, U.S. businesses are targeting global consumers, whom they need to reach and maintain. Understanding these consumers and knowing their lifestyles become a necessity. Businesses need to understand the effect of culture in shaping consumer habits. 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. Some Middle East Countries such as 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 (Barrel's Price \$50), 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 trillions (Look East, 2007). Knowing the consumers' habit of these nations would be no doubt an interesting subject.

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 (Gonzalez and Bello, 2002).

## **LEBANON AND KUWAIT: COUNTRIES IN THE MIDDLE EAST**

Lebanon is roughly a 150 mile coastline at the center of the Eastern Mediterranean Sea, with Israel bordering it to the South and Syria to the East and North. Despite its small area of 3,344 miles<sup>2</sup> of charm and diversity, it has a broadly estimated population of 3.8 million inhabitants placing it among those countries with the highest population density in the world. Approximately a third of the population is under the age of twenty and the present growth rate of 1.2% is the lowest in the region. Emigrants scattered throughout the globe number more than four times the residents (Al Khalil, 1996), who are also composed of numerous foreign nationals, immigrants or long term residents (Dar Al Nahar, 1995).

Lebanon is synonymous to ethnic and religious diversity with relative freedom of maneuver and autonomy. Eighteen different religious communities of the three monotheist i.e. religions are officially recognized by law and are very active culturally, politically and economically – though Judaism has become less apparent culturally and politically lately, while still active as an economic force. Because of its location at the intersection of the three main continents of the Old World, the Lebanese “mixing pot” has been enriched with numerous cultural contributions from the many invasions, incursions, immigrations and interactions this land has witnessed over the centuries. Any notion of racial, ethnic or even cultural unity – or purity – is thus excluded and openness to the “different” is common. Having the reputation of the land of refuge, hospitality and relative freedom exceptional in the area for the numerous persecuted communities of the Middle East seeking sanctuary, Lebanon experiences a constantly growing influx of different peoples and cultures. The society’s Arabic identity is very peculiar, notably due to its high level of “westernization” and liberalism added to a very typical national cachet. The literacy rate of 90% is one of the highest in the Arab world; it is even higher among the youths more than half of whom educated privately (The OBG, 2005). While staunchly attached to their independence for which they have fought and still struggle to preserve, the Lebanese remain actively engaged in global cultural and intellectual interchanges notably with the surrounding Near East, Arabic, French and Anglo-American cultures (Fauvel, 1975).

Kuwait is an oil rich country, bordering the Persian Gulf, between Iraq and Saudi Arabia. It is relatively a small country with an area of 6,880 square miles. It has crude oil reserves of about 96 billion barrels, which represent almost 10% of world reserves. Petroleum industry represents nearly half of its GDP, 95% of export revenues, and 80% of the government income. Kuwait is a highly industrialized country with a GDP of US\$ 88.7 billion and a per capita income of US\$ 29,566, which is the second highest in the Middle East and the highest in the Arab world. Kuwait’s current population is around 3 million people of whom one third are local or citizens. The foreign population consists mainly of Egyptians, Indian, Pakistani, Filipino, Sri Lankan, and people from other nations, such as Europe and North America. Kuwaitis are predominantly Muslim who represent 99% of Kuwait’s population of whom 65% are Sunni and 35% Shiite Muslims. Kuwait’s official language is Arabic, though only roughly half the country speaks the language primarily, as most of the foreigners speak their nation’s language such as Hindi, Urdu, or Filipino.

Kuwait is a country of social contrasts. Western restaurants such as McDonald's and KFC are found side by side next to the traditional Arabic restaurants. Despite their wealth, Kuwaitis remain faithful to their traditions; religion and family are the center of their focus. Islam is the state's religion, which guides everyday life activities, social or political. Moreover, Islam is a religion based on respect and tolerance. Most Kuwaitis have large families and they respect elderly people. Furthermore, they are known for their hospitality and contributions. Gender separation is still a part of their traditions, where women and men are gathered separately during social activities such as parties or dinners.

## **Research Methodology**

The research methodology used in this paper is based on a model developed Shimp and Sharma (1987). The "CETSCALE measure", is a tool in consumer research for measuring ethnocentricity. It 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 the USA), Netemeyer et al. (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. They recommended the use of this measure in other nations.

## **Data Collection**

As an explanatory study, CETSCALE measure along with the psychographic and demographic variables of consumer behavior were used to test consumer's ethnocentricity (Luque-Martinez, Ibanez-Zapata, & del Barrio-Garcia, 2000). The sample study was made of two parts. The first part consisted of 91 individuals selected from the two main parts of Beirut, the capital city of Lebanon. The second part consisted of 150 individuals selected from the capital city Kuwait, which accounts for 95% of the country's population. A non-probabilistic sampling methodology was used to collect data. 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 (Stover, R. V., and W. J. Stone, 1978; Imperia, G., O'Guinn, T. C. & MacAdams, E. A. 1985.). Respondents were randomly contacted and asked to complete the questionnaire at their own convenience.

## **DATA ANALYSIS**

The reliability analysis of the 37 activities, AIO statements produced a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.9094, which is highly significant. A study with a coefficient 0.65 or better is considered reliable (Girden, 2001).

A factor analysis using Varimax rotations was carried in two steps and only factors with an Eigenvalue greater than 1.00 were retained. In step one, the analysis of AIO statements was conducted to study lifestyle of Lebanese consumers. The analysis produced four factors, which explained 29.755 percent of the total variance. In the second step, the analysis of AIO statements was conducted to study the lifestyle of Kuwaiti consumers. The analysis produced two factors,

which explained 27.12 percent of the total variance. Table 1 summarizes the factor loading of consumers of both countries.

**Table 1: Factor Analysis of AIO Statements (Varimax Rotation)**

<b>Factors and Characteristics</b>	<b>Factor Loading</b>	<b>% of Variance Explained</b>
<b>Lebanon</b>		
Factor 1: Self-Reliance and Leadership	0.59	4.711
Factor 2: Nurturing and Family Orientation	0.796	9.656
Factor 3: Health and Optimism	0.77	8.293
Factor 4: Household Oriented and Industrious	0.59	7.095
Total cumulative variance		29.755
<b>Kuwait</b>		
Factor 1: Self-Reliance and Leadership	.60	14.78
Factor 2: Nurturing and Family Orientation	.66	12.34
Total cumulative variance		27.12

Table 1 includes only those AIO statements that have a factor loading of greater than 0.5 on their respective factors. The first factor loadings show statements that reflect a positive self-image. They explained 4.711% of the total variance of Lebanese consumers, while they explained 14.78% of the Kuwaiti consumers. The second factor “Nurturing and Family Orientation” factor explained 9.656% of the total variance of Lebanese consumers, while it explained 12.34% of Kuwaiti consumers. The third factor, explained 8.293% of variance of Lebanese consumers, while it was insignificant among Kuwaiti consumers. The fourth factor “Household Oriented and Industrious” explained 7.095% of the variance of Lebanese consumers, while it was insignificant among Kuwaiti consumers.

Four factors explained 29.755% of the variance of Lebanese consumers. They reveal certain basic characteristics of the Lebanese people. The Lebanese consumers believe that they are community leaders. They are family oriented and are deeply concerned with the well being of their children. They care for their children and teach them good habits. The Lebanese consumers are health conscious and are likely to do things by themselves and are willing to learn new ways of doing things. While as for Kuwaiti consumers, two factors were significant. These two factors explained 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.

### **Ethnocentrism**

To measure consumer ethnocentrism the 17- item CETSCALE developed by Shimp and Sharma (1987) was used. Tables 2 and 3 show the result of the reliability analysis of these 17 items of both consumers. The Cronbach’s Alpha coefficient of items reported was above 0.91, which is

considered a reasonably high reliability coefficient. Based on this, it can be assumed that all 17 items used are measuring the same construct (ethnocentrism) and, therefore, a summative measure can be used to represent the ethnocentrism score of the respondents. The results of the ethnocentric analysis are shown in Tables 2 and 3 below. The following is table 2 which reflects the ethnocentricity of Lebanese consumers:

**TABLE 2: Ethnocentrism – Lebanese Consumers**

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Item<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>Reliability<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
1	Lebanese people should always buy products made in Lebanon instead of imports	.933	5.08
2	Only those products that are unavailable in Lebanon should be imported	.933	5.30
3	Buy Lebanese made products and keep Lebanese working	.933	6.01
4	Lebanese products, first, last, and foremost	.932	4.85
5	Purchasing foreign-made products is un-Lebanese	.936	3.24
6	It is not right to purchase foreign products, because it puts Lebanese out of jobs	.929	3.85
7	A real Lebanese should always buy Lebanese made products	.930	3.90
8	We should purchase products manufactured in Lebanon instead of letting other countries get rich on us	.929	4.98
9	It is always best to purchase Lebanese products	.930	4.57
10	There should be very little trading or purchasing of goods from other countries unless of necessity	.929	4.44
11	Lebanese should not buy foreign products because this hurts business and causes unemployment	.931	3.96
12	Curbs should be put on all imports	.929	4.27
13	It may cost me in the long-run but I prefer to support Lebanese products	.932	4.96
14	Foreigners should not be allowed to put their products on our markets	.930	2.95
15	Foreign products should be taxed heavily to reduce their entry into Lebanon	.932	4.47
16	We should buy from foreign countries only those products that we cannot obtain within our own country.	.931	4.94
17	Consumers who purchase products made in other countries are responsible for putting their fellow Lebanese out of work.	.928	3.62

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

<sup>2</sup> Calculated using Cronbach's Alpha (Alpha if item deleted).

Table 2 shows that the highest scoring factor was Item 3 and it indicates buying Lebanese products keeps Lebanese working. High scores were reported in most of the items. Items 1, 2, 4, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15, and 16 had scores above 4.0. This indicates that the Lebanese consumers have preference to local products and they view imports as a negative factor that hurts the economy.

Imports are perceived as benefiting the exporting countries and contributing to unemployment in Lebanon. However, the Lebanese consumer is not against foreign products. Item 14 had the lowest score (2.95), which states that foreigners should not be allowed to put their products in the market. This represents that the Lebanese consumer is not against imports but they intrinsically prefer local products.

The mean score on the CETSCALE is 4.44, which is high. The Lebanese consumer appears to accept imports if local products are not available. The Lebanese consumers do not put the blame on imported goods (items 11 and 17 had scores below 4) for high unemployment or a bad economy. This reflects the unique characteristics of Lebanese people. Even though they prefer to consume local products, but they are receptive to the imported goods if the need arises.

**Table 3: Ethnocentrism – Kuwaiti Consumers**

Item No.	Item <sup>1</sup>	Reliability <sup>2</sup>	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

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

<sup>2</sup> Calculated using Cronbach's Alpha (Alpha if item deleted).

Table 3 shows that 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.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although the present study is exploratory, the findings highlight that the lifestyle dimension of Middle Eastern consumers influences their buying habits, which reflects their ethnocentric tendencies. 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. The fact that two factors – “Self reliance and leadership” and “Nurturing and family orientation” - were identified as important lifestyles dimension among both Lebanese and Kuwaitis reflect some common features among the consumers of the Middle East countries. While Lebanese consumers showed two more factors which were household oriented and health concern.

Examining at the CETSCALE measure of ethnocentricity, the Lebanese consumers' mean score was high meaning they accept imports if local products are not available. On the other hand, Kuwaiti consumers mean score 2.92, which is relatively low. This shows that Kuwaitis are less ethnocentric than the Lebanese people. They buy both imported and local products.

This study also shows that the Lebanese and Kuwaiti people share some common characteristics such as self-esteem and family values, but they differ with respect to other factors.

The study showed the unique cultural structure of the Lebanese and Kuwait people. Businesses have to properly position their products in the right place, which reflects the need of designing strategies targeting different market segments. This would let us wonder about the people of the other nations of Middle East. Do they have the same characteristics as those of the Lebanese and Kuwaiti people? The above dimensions provide evidence that more analysis on the specifics of lifestyles is needed in making marketing strategies. Consumers specific include information such as their geographical distribution, economical condition and age. Understanding the consumers' lifestyles and ethnocentric behavior, successful marketing will result, which promote growth and profitability.



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