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Who are Xenocentric Consumers? A Review of the Demographics and Socio-Psychological Attributes

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Abstract: In sociology, xenocentrism represents the preference for out-group cultures, norms, and values over the in-group. In marketing, consumer xenocentrism refers to consumers' favoritism for foreign-made products. The findings of previous studies have shown that various factors influence consumer xenocentrism, including the perceived quality of foreign products, the desire for social status, and cultural stereotypes. This paper focuses on the profiles of xenocentric consumers that distinguish them from in-group consumers. Besides demographic differences, socio-psychologically, xenocentric consumers are more open to other cultures and belong to marginalized groups. Understanding the profiles of xenocentric consumers may help marketers of both local and foreign brands segment and approach their target markets innovatively.

Keywords: *Consumer Xenocentrism, Out-Group Favoritism, Profile*

1. Introduction and Background

From a sociological perspective, xenocentrism refers to "the view of things in which a group other than one's group is the centre of everything, and all others, including one's group, are scaled and rated with reference to it" (Kent & Burnight, 1951). Xenocentrism can lead to feelings of estrangement from one's own culture or community and may even result in a loss of cultural identity (Mueller et al., 2016).

Consumer xenocentrism refers to the tendency of consumers to prefer foreign goods over domestic ones, even when domestic products are of equal or superior quality. It is also defined as "the admiration or preference for a specific cultural out-group or out-groups over the cultural in-group to which one belongs" (Cleveland & Balakrishnan, 2019, p. 417).

The growing availability of foreign products in developing and emerging markets, driven by globalization, has made the study of xenocentrism increasingly important (Lawrence, 2012; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016; Camacho et al., 2020). Notably, consumer xenocentrism represents one of the significant topics in marketing literature (Nguyen & Pham, 2021; Camacho et al., 2020; Rettanai Kannan, 2020; Rojas-Méndez & Chapa, 2020; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016). The primary focus of most existing studies on consumer xenocentrism is on examining its antecedents, outcomes, moderators, and mediators. These contributed to the development of the consumer xenocentrism model and the application of relevant theories.

Despite the importance of understanding and analyzing the antecedents and outcomes of consumer xenocentrism, it is equally crucial to understand the profile of xenocentric consumers to assist local and international marketers in effectively segmenting their target consumers. According to Keillor et al. (2001), "..companies should prioritize their international segmentation approaches to consumer characteristics rather than country characteristics because a successful strategy lies in effectively matching product attributes to consumer attitudes, values, and lifestyles".

Hence, this paper aims to review and integrate the findings of existing studies on consumer xenocentrism to build profiles of xenocentric consumers. The review focuses on demographics and socio-psychographic variables, which are amongst the most extensive grounds for market segmentation (Hooley et al., 2020). It also focuses on developing country contexts, as consumer xenocentrism is more prevalent among consumers in developing nations (Rojas-Méndez & Chapa, 2020). According to Nguyen and Pham (2021, p. 9), "...consumers who constitute out-group reference like xenocentric ones will show favorable evaluation toward purchasing non-local products, and this proclivity is observed more intensely in developing or emerging markets". On the other hand, consumer xenocentrism is less common in Western countries, and its effect would be minimal and often unnoticed (Mueller & Broderick, 2010).

Many consumers in North Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia tend to have a more favorable view of the images presented by Western, more developed countries, and often reject their own local cultures (Mueller & Broderick, 2010; Batra et al., 2000; Nguyen & Pham,2021). Even though local products are often of higher quality and cheaper, consumers in developing economies prefer foreign goods (Mueller & Broderick, 2010; Mueller et al., 2016). Generally, the products originating from the USA, Western European countries, Japan, and South Korea are perceived as having greater value. The purchases of those products are likely associated with status, growth, and modernity (Mueller et al., 2016).

Practically, understanding xenocentric consumers and their profiles is significant to both local and foreign brands' producers in dealing with the evolution of the business environment and the complexity of consumer behavior. As highlighted in Diamantopoulos et al.'s (2025) work, xenocentric consumers could represent an attractive segment for domestic firms willing to adopt foreign branding strategies.

2. Literature Review

Defining Consumer Xenocentrism: Stier (2010) defined xenocentrism as an unreflective and disproportionate focus on "the other," with a strong preference for imported materials or goods. Xenocentrism is classified as deviant behavior in psychology because it deviates from societal norms. It is unusual for a person to value another country's goods, services, styles, ideas, and other cultural elements. However, in the age of globalization, xenocentrism is challenging to avoid, and it is not an unusual phenomenon, even among people who love their country and support the government's policy. It is due to people's extensive exposure to other cultures and products, which may influence their behavior.

Xenocentrism is also observed in several controversial topics, such as religion, politics, and social organizations, where individuals frequently in contact with foreign countries tend to embrace and promote foreign culture (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016).

The opposite construct of xenocentrism is ethnocentrism (Kent & Burnight, 1951; Sumner, 1906). Ethnocentrism refers to the tendency for individuals to view their own culture, beliefs, and values as superior to those of others and to judge other cultures by their own standards (Sumner, 1906). Consumer ethnocentrism refers to consumers' preference for local products due to sentiments that purchasing foreign products is considered un-national and could negatively impact local economies (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Sharma et al., 1994; Gurhan-Calli, 2018).

While consumer ethnocentrism is often driven by feelings of patriotism and loyalty to one's own country (Sharma et al., 1994; Shankarmahesh, 2006), consumer xenocentrism tends to be driven by a desire to be seen as sophisticated or cosmopolitan (Wang et al., 2020; Mueller et al., 2016).

Consumer xenocentrism is evident across various product categories, including food, clothing, electronics, and luxury goods. For instance, generally, consumers from developing countries prefer to purchase designer clothing produced in Italy or France or high-end electronics made in Japan or South Korea over similar products produced domestically. In a study involving Thai consumers, Thoumrungroje et al. (2024) found that xenocentric consumers commonly could not recognize the superiority of domestic products and, even if they do, they still prefer (inferior) foreign products. The study concludes that the country of origin (COO) will likely override other cues for xenocentric consumers, which often result in sub-optimal product choices.

For measuring consumer xenocentrism in developing countries, X-Scale was created and validated through a study conducted by Rojas-Méndez and Chapa (2020). The development of the scale has further facilitated research in this area.

The Profile of Xenocentric Consumers: This section discusses the groups of consumers classified as xenocentric based on the findings of previous studies. It focuses on the demographic and socio-psychological variables. Gender - Rojas-Méndez and Kolotylo's (2022) work found that men are more xenocentric than women. Men were more likely to be influenced by the perceived status and prestige associated with foreign products. On the other hand, women were more likely to be influenced by the functional and utilitarian aspects

of the products. This difference in motivation may also contribute to the gender difference in xenocentrism. Nam's (1998) study highlighted that women living in male-oriented societies tend to display foreign product bias.

Level of income - The definition of "high income" varies depending on the context and location, but generally, it refers to those who earn significantly more than the median income in their area. Marketers of luxury goods and services, such as high-end cars, designer clothing, and exclusive travel packages, often target high-income consumers. Past studies have shown that consumers from higher-income groups in developing countries tend to be more xenocentric (Seta & Sutarso, 2023; Nguyen & Pham, 2021).

Younger consumers - Generally, younger consumers refer to those belonging to the millennial generation (born between 1981 and 1996) and Generation Z (born after 1996). In most countries, young consumers are a key demographic group for many businesses and marketers, representing a large and growing population segment with substantial purchasing power. They are more likely to be early adopters of new technologies and products and tend to have different preferences and behaviors than older generations. They prefer experiences over material possessions, such as travel, dining out, and attending events. Younger consumers are also more open to diversity and inclusiveness and choose brands that reflect their values and beliefs.

Previous studies have shown that younger consumers tend to be more xenocentric than older consumers (Mueller et al., 2016; Nguyen & Pham, 2021). This attribute is similar to what is highlighted in sociology (Kent & Burnight, 1951), where younger people are more xenocentric because they view preferences for out-groups as expressing their freedom.

For instance, a study conducted in China indicated that younger consumers tend to purchase foreign products as a form of rebellion or defiance against authority (Mueller et al., 2016). Nguyen and Pham's (2021) work demonstrated that consumer xenocentrism has a positive influence on the intention of young Vietnamese consumers to purchase foreign products. The study involved respondents aged 18 to 30 years.

Occupation and education - A "white-collar employee" refers to an individual who performs professional, managerial, or administrative work in an office or other formal setting across various industries, including business, finance, law, medicine, education, and technology. Their knowledge-based work and professional attire often characterize them.

White-collar occupations are a significant and growing part of most countries' workforces, reflecting the countries' increasing focus on knowledge-based industries and services. Employees in the white-collar sector and those with a higher education level were found to be more xenocentric (Mueller et al., 2016; Seta & Sutarso, 2023; Nguyen & Pham, 2021). This contrasts with ethnocentric consumers, who are primarily blue-collar workers with lower levels of education (Shankarmahesh, 2006).

Social status - The relationship between xenocentrism and social status is one of the most recurring themes in xenocentrism literature. For example, in China, the consumption of foreign goods was linked to the symbolic significance of rank and prestige (Mueller et al., 2016). This preference is evident even though foreign goods are expensive in China due to prevailing currency exchange rates (Sun et al., 2014). According to Tang et al. (2022), Chinese consumers favored foreign goods for better quality, which helped them display their status or indicate that their status had improved.

A previous study also indicated that consumers from lower-status groups tend to have a strong desire to purchase high-status products from foreign countries to enhance their social status (Wang et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2022). Thus, it can be concluded that signaling one's status not only comes from wealthy consumers but is also found in the lower-status group for hedonic reasons. Previous studies showed that the perceived hedonic value and reputation are among the determinants of consumers' purchase decisions of foreign brands (Sun et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2020).

Disagreement with national government - From a socio-psychological perspective, individuals who rebel against their home country's politics or economic policies are often referred to as xenocentric (Kent &

Burnight, 1951; Lawrence, 2012). Those dissatisfied with their country's policies tend to 'visualize' themselves as 'migrating' to other countries (Lawrence, 2012).

As highlighted in Mueller and Broderick's (2010, p.7) study, consumers' oppositional purchasing reflects civic disloyalty or disagreement. One of the examples quoted in their study was Belk's work (1982) that "the American purchase of Swiss-made Volvo during the 1970s was a symbol of opposition against US Vietnam War policy and support for Sweden's policy criticizing the same".

Exposure to other cultures - Consumers exposed to other cultures tend to be more receptive to culturally relevant products and services and may place a greater emphasis on authenticity, sustainability, and social responsibility. They may have unique needs and preferences shaped by their diverse experiences and knowledge (De Mooij, 2021). They are more likely to be xenocentric than those who are not, and they are typically younger (Lawrence, 2012).

Research has shown that individuals who have received their education overseas, work for a multinational corporation, or have international relations are more likely to be xenocentric and, therefore, prefer to purchase products from other countries (Mueller et al., 2016; Seta & Sutarso, 2023).

Consumer in former colonies - The term "consumer in former colonies" refers to individuals residing in countries that were formerly colonized by other nations, primarily in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. These consumers may have distinct cultural and historical backgrounds shaped by their countries' colonial past, influencing their purchasing behaviors and attitudes toward foreign goods and services (Appadurai, 1996).

According to Wallach (2002) and Mueller and Broderick (2010), consumers of former colonial countries tend to be highly xenocentric. The colonial influence can be linked to feelings of inferiority toward one's culture and superiority toward the colonizers' ways of life. In other words, colonization has led to a negative self-image and an overvaluation of Western culture (Mueller & Broderick, 2010). It also resulted in consumers' preferences for international products over locally made ones (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016; Batra et al., 2000).

Marginalized people - Marginalized people are individuals or groups who are excluded, disadvantaged, or discriminated against in society due to various factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability, or economic status. The United Nations (2016) defines marginalization as pushing a group or individual to the fringes or margins of society, where they have limited access to resources and opportunities and may experience social exclusion, discrimination, and poverty.

Some examples of marginalized groups include indigenous people, ethnic and racial minorities, people with disabilities, refugees and migrants, low-income and homeless individuals, and children and youth. Marginalized consumers may also be underrepresented or misrepresented in advertising and media, making it challenging for them to find products that cater to their needs and preferences. Culturally, they are more xenocentric. They believe they do not belong to the national group or, in extreme cases, that their national group rejects them. To revolt, they identify with an out-group (foreign countries) and are thus xenocentric (Prince et al., 2016; Kent & Burnight, 1951; Mueller & Broderick, 2010).

3. Managerial Implications and Recommendations

Xenocentric individuals develop their perceptions of foreign cultures by exploring their personal needs for social status or lifestyle, thereby reflecting their current status quo (Rettanai Kannan, 2020; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016).

The profiles of xenocentric consumers may provide input to foreign and local brand producers in innovatively segmenting and approaching their target markets. For instance, according to Diamantopoulos et al. (2025), regional firms may strategize their brands to 'look' foreign through product design, merchandising, labelling, and advertising in targeting xenocentric consumers. The aim is to create associations of "foreignness" in the consumer's mind. Adopting foreign brand strategies may help reduce the rejection of local brands among xenocentric consumers in their domestic market (Rojas-Méndez & Kolotylo, 2022). At the same time, local firms

could leverage the brands' "foreignness" positioning to target consumers in other countries (Diamantopoulos et al., 2025).

A limitation of this paper is its scope, which primarily focuses on consumers in developing countries. Different or similar profiles of xenocentric consumers could result in reviewing consumer xenocentrism studies across nations, regardless of the nation's economic status. Nonetheless, as addressed beforehand, xenocentrism is more prevalent in the context of developing or less developed countries. Conceptually grounded in sociology, people from these countries are more likely to admire the out-group's (i.e., other countries') cultures, norms, and values.

Future research may consider studying consumer xenocentrism across product or service categories to form more detailed profiles of xenocentric consumers. A comparative study and review between developed and developing countries may broaden the understanding of the xenocentric profiles of those markets. Additionally, although most previous research has found a positive relationship between xenocentrism and socio-economic factors, such as income and education, it is essential to note that this relationship may be complex and dependent on various factors.

4. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to develop profiles of xenocentric consumers through a review of past studies involving respondents primarily from developing countries. Xenocentrism tendencies began with fascination, admiration, and love for foreign cultures. The review showed that xenocentric consumers are predominantly men, young, high-income earners, and those in white-collar occupations (Mueller et al., 2016; Seta & Sutarso, 2023; Nguyen & Pham, 2021). They tend to have a high level of education and exposure to other cultures, and they often associate the purchase of foreign brands with prestigious social status (Wang et al., 2020; Tang et al., 2022; Mueller et al., 2016; Seta & Sutarso, 2023). Most consumers in former colonial countries tend to be xenocentric (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2016; Mueller & Broderick, 2010). Xenocentric consumers also seem to purchase foreign products as a symbol of disagreement with national government or policies, and some of them are from marginalized groups (Lawrence, 2012; Prince et al., 2016; Mueller & Broderick, 2010). Consumer xenocentrism is the opposite concept of consumer ethnocentrism (Diamantopoulos et al., 2025). The differences in demographics and socio-psychological profiles of those consumers may have a different impact on business strategies.

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