Exploring the Influence of Ethnocentrism on Sojourners’ Food Buying Decisions: a Gendered Perspective

Autoria: Christian Tirelli, Maria Del Pilar Martinez Ruiz, Ricardo Gómez-Ladrón-de-Guevara

This study assesses the influence of ethnocentrism on food buying decisions by international university students, distinguishing the results observed in relation to gender differences. This study offers research hypotheses pertaining to the influence of ethnocentrism on evaluations of alternatives, choices, and post-purchase stages. To test these hypotheses, the authors collected data from a sample in a Spanish university, then submitted these data to principal components factorial analyses and linear parametric regressions. The results show that a consideration of gender makes a great difference, in that the influence of ethnocentrism is much greater in food buying decision process for male sojourners.
1. Introduction

An awesome increase in European immigration has arisen in recent years. In Spain for example, people of foreign origin represented 14.1% of the total Spanish population in 2011, or 47.1 million people, whereas in the mid-1990s, they made up only 2.5% of the total (INE, 2011). This phenomenon, combined with the relatively higher birth rates of immigrant populations in Spain, has turned immigration into a topic of great relevance, provoking interest from academics, consumers, and policy makers (e.g., Camarena, Sanjuán-López, & Philippidis, 2011; Durán, 2006). In particular, immigrants’ acculturation is a complex process that demands intricate analyses (Phinney, 2006), and various studies explore immigrants’ adaptation efforts in circumstances characterized by multiculturalism or globalization (Arends-Toth & Van de Vijver, 2003; Belk & Costa, 1998; Güngör & Bornstein, 2009; Peñaloza, 1994, 2001; Thompson & Tambiyah, 1999). Many of these studies in turn address acculturation in relation to food choices, because of the importance of food as a symbol of cultural identity (Bourdieu, 2004; Bugge, 2003; Fischler, 1980; Fox, 2008; Levy, 1981; Nevot & Bernat, 2010; Sobal, 1998).

Camarena-Gómez and Sanjuán-López (2010) explicitly cite the prominence of research centered on immigrant consumers’ perceptions of ethnic foods (e.g., Jamal, 1998; Laroche, Kim, & Tomiuk, 1999; Verbeke & Lopez, 2005), which has been largely motivated by the growth in demand for ethnic food (e.g., Durán, 2006). Other research specifies the food buying behaviors of immigrants who engage for a relatively shorter period with a new culture (i.e., sojourners), such as international university students (Hartwell, Edwards, & Brown, 2011). As the number of students who study abroad has increased (Pitts, 2009; Tafarodi & Smith, 2001), their economic and financial impacts for universities and surrounding areas also increase (Hartwell et al., 2011), which reinforces the need to study the food consumption patterns adopted by these groups.

The studies that analyze sojourners and their food purchasing habits focus mainly on certain cultural variables though—such as cultural differences and acculturation (e.g., Hartwell et al., 2011; Pitts, 2009)—without considering the implications of the sojourners’ ethnocentrism. Thus a clear research gap persists with regard to the influence of ethnocentrism on international students’ food buying decision processes. Moreover, as several authors note (e.g., Dion & Dion, 2001; Güngör & Bornstein, 2009), distinct organizing factors of migrant life can exert unique impacts on immigrants’ acculturation processes. For example, transnational migration has different impacts on men and women, and it modifies the relations between them. Yet the gendered effects of transnational migration have not been studied sufficiently (Pessar & Mahler, 2003; Suárez-Orozco & Quin, 2006), which expands the previously mentioned research gap in terms of how gender might complicate the varying effects of ethnocentrism on sojourners’ purchasing decisions.

To address these research gaps, we analyze how international students’ ethnocentrism influences their food purchase decisions, and we consider potential differences according to gender. We focus our investigation in Europe’s Mediterranean area, which has not been widely studied (e.g., Camarena-Gómez & Sanjuán-López, 2010; Fotopoulos & Krystallis, 2001, Philippidis & Sanjuan, 2002; Scarpa, Philippides, & Spalastro, 2005), and include a sample of international students enrolled in Spanish universities. With this sample, we can offer several key contributions. We consider the influence of ethnocentrism on the food buying decision process for this group of sojourners. In contrast, prior research rarely considers the influence of ethnocentrism on the decisions made by short-term immigrants; most studies note its effects on either local consumers (e.g., Camarena-Gómez et al., 2011;
Chambers et al., 2007; Chryssouchoidis, Krystallis, & Perreas, 2007; Schnettler et al., 2008, 2011b) or long-term immigrants (e.g., Jamal, 1998; Laroche et al., 1999; Verbeke & Lopez, 2005). Furthermore, we provide new evidence regarding the behavior of male and female short-term immigrants to the European Mediterranean region and thus highlight the relevance and need for further research along these lines.

With these goals, we next present our conceptual framework, which reflects our in-depth review of relevant literature. In turn, we propose several research hypotheses related to the likely influence of ethnocentrism on sojourners’ buying decisions, distinguishing gender-specific impacts as well. We assess data collected from 139 international university students in Castilla-La Mancha, Spain, using principal components factorial analysis and linear parametric regressions. From these results, we derive key conclusions and managerial guidelines.

2. Theoretical Perspectives and Hypotheses

2.1 Ethnocentrism, food consumption and gender differences

During acculturation processes, sojourners often experience identity conflicts; the more distant the sojourner’s native culture is from the host culture, the more difficult his or her adaptation becomes (Babiker, Cox, & Miller, 1980; Furnham & Bochner, 1982, 1986; Hull, 1978; Sullivan, 1996; Ward & Searle, 1991). In response, many sojourners increase their consumption of food products from their country of origin, realizing that food products constitute an important symbol of cultural identity (Bourdieu, 2004; Bugge, 2003; Fischler, 1980; Fox, 2008; Levy, 1981; Nevot & Bernat, 2010; Sobal, 1998), so through their consumption choices, they reaffirm their cultural identity (Leong & Ward, 2000). Dietary habits also tend to persist for relatively longer times (Cervellon & Dubé, 2005; Gabaccia, 2000; Jamal, 1998).

Considering the importance of food consumption in sojourners’ adaptation processes, we undertake our investigation of ethnocentrism in this context. With this research into consumer ethnocentrism, we hope to achieve a better understanding of how sojourners compare domestic with foreign products, as well as recognize why they might develop strongly patriotic prejudices, as evidenced in other contexts (e.g., Luque-Martínez, Ibáñez-Zapata, & Del Barrio, 2000). Ethnocentrism represents an emotional response to buying products from abroad (Balabanis, Mueller, & Melewar, 2002), usually related to a consumer’s beliefs in the superiority of his or her own country’s products (Shimp, 1984) and the appropriateness or morality of purchasing foreign-made products (Luque-Martínez et al., 2000; Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Sharma et al., 1995). A clearer understanding of the effects of ethnocentrism in turn should clarify why highly ethnocentric consumers tend to make biased judgments, in which they overevaluate the positive aspects of domestic products while undervaluing the virtues of imported products.

Prior studies consider the influence of ethnocentrism in the buying process for food products. Jamal (1998) discovered that the first generation of British-Pakistanis perceive their own food to be traditional and tasty but oily and problematic and the English foods as foreign, bland, and healthy. Laroche et al. (1999) obtain significant negative correlations between some ethnic identity and acculturation dimensions. For Luque-Martínez et al. (2000), The CETSCALE is a reliable and valid measure of Spanish consumers' ethnocentric tendencies. Rajshekhar et al. (2005) say that patriotism, conservativism, and individualism/collectivism have significant positive relationships with ethnocentrism. Chryssochoidis et al. (2007) infer
that younger Greek consumers (around 35 years) are much less ethnocentric. In this context, Romo & Gil (2012) say that the higher the level of ethnic identity and feeling of belonging among immigrants in Catalonia, the greater the persistence of dietary habits from the country of origin.

A prominent research gap pertains to the influence of ethnocentrism in food purchases by groups of immigrants, whether in general or by sojourners in particular. That is, most research investigates the influence of ethnocentrism on the decision processes of national or local residents. Of the few studies that consider sojourners, only a small sample considers international university students. Studies of international students’ food buying decision processes mainly investigate phenomena such as intercultural adjustments, food acculturation (Furukawa, 1997; Hartwell et al., 2010), or changes in eating habits (Pan, Dixon, Himburg, & Huffman, 1999; Rosenthal, Russell, & Thomson, 2006). Even as we learn about some behaviors, we still do not understand how variables such as ethnocentrism influence their food purchase decisions. This exclusion is worrisome, when we note the growing economic and financial impact of this group of sojourners (Hartwell et al., 2011), as well as their extensive contacts with host country native (Pitts, 1982), which may prompt different adaptation patterns.

In this regard, we also note that gender is a central main socio-demographic antecedent of ethnocentrism (Siemieniako, Kubacki, Glinska, & Krot, 2011), such that women tend to exhibit greater ethnocentrism tendencies (e.g., Han, 1988; Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995; Wall & Heslop, 1986). Therefore, we need to determine if the effect of ethnocentrism on sojourners’ purchases varies by gender. In turn, we can observe whether the gender-specific ethnocentrism tendencies observed among consumers in general also apply to this specific group of university sojourners.

2.2 Research hypotheses

Most studies of buying decisions for food products focus on the final stages, close to the purchase decision. In particular, marketing and strategy studies are more interested in consumers’ evaluations of alternatives, purchase decisions, and post-purchase behaviors. We similarly investigate the impact of ethnocentrism on these key stages in the food buying decision process.

To evaluate alternatives, consumers must face a tremendous variety of options. With the increased globalization of food markets, this process has become more complex; the growing complexity has meant, among other facts, that consumers are faced with an unprecedented selection of food products (Skaggs et al., 1996). They therefore tend to restrict their purchase decisions to a subset of available alternatives—that is, to a consideration set of brands or products (Nedungadi, 1990; Roberts & Lattin, 1991). Consumers evaluate these alternatives on the basis of collected or remembered information, which varies from one consumer to another, such that each person relies on different signals. For example, some studies show that product features related to the country of origin consistently exert significant influences in this stage (e.g., Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2003; Skaggs et al., 1996). Country-of-origin image (COI) is a relevant driver of consumers’ evaluation of products originating from different countries, because it can be used, among others, as an indicator of product quality and acceptability (e.g., Han, 1989; Li & Wyer, 1994). For this reason, consumers frequently use COI as a means of simplifying information processing (Papadopoulos & Heslop, 2003; Schooler, 1965; Skaggs et al., 1996).
In this research vein, Shimp and Sharma (1987) find that consumers who score low on an ethnocentrism scale are more receptive to products made abroad, whereas Huddleston, Good and Stoel (2001) note that consumers who exhibit high ethnocentric tendencies tend to evaluate imported products on the basis of their social acceptance. In general then, consumer ethnocentrism significantly influences consumers’ preferences for various considered alternatives, whether positively or negatively (Baughn & Yaprak, 1993). This influence applies to evaluations of specific categories of products, such as food products. As a matter of this fact, Orth and Firbasová (2003) find consumer ethnocentrism to be the strongest significant predictor of consumers’ evaluations of domestically-made food products in comparison to other demographic variables. In an assessment of levels of consumer ethnocentrism and their implications for product evaluations, Chryssochoidis et al. (2007) show that ethnocentrism affects not only consumer beliefs but also the perceived quality of domestic and foreign products. Chambers et al. (2007) observe that certain ethical issues related to foods—such as helping poorer countries or seeking Fair Trade products—help younger consumers evaluate food alternatives. Schnettler et al. (2011b) also find that consumers use the country of origin of foodstuffs as a signal of product quality when they evaluate diverse food alternatives.

Because this significant influence of ethnocentrism is so common in consumers’ evaluations of alternatives, we anticipate it also is significant in evaluations of food alternatives by short-term immigrants. Formally,

\[ H1: \text{Ethnocentrism significantly influences the evaluation of alternatives by sojourners during the evaluation stage of the food buying decision process.} \]

The concept of consumer ethnocentrism usually includes several key demographic antecedents, such as gender (Siemieniako et al., 2011), because women in general tend to be more conservative (Eagly, 1978), more patriotic (Han, 1988), and more positive than men in their evaluations of the quality of products from their country of origin (Wall & Heslop, 1986). Accordingly, studies reveal that women exhibit greater ethnocentrism tendencies than men (e.g., Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995). Yet among immigrants, women also adapt more easily to the host country, so we might expect a smaller influence of ethnocentrism. For example, Güngör and Bornstein (2009), studying a collective of Turkish adolescent immigrants to Belgium, note gender differences and similarities in the acculturation processes of younger and older adolescents and observe that girls adapt better to the country of destination. This finding is consistent with Phalet and Haker’s (2004) results in their study of acculturative changes in a sample of Turkish immigrants to the Netherlands, which indicated that young women are significantly less conservative than young men in terms of their gender role values. Thus, despite the higher expected influence of consumer ethnocentrism on women, because our study sample consists of short-term immigrants, we propose a contrary hypothesis regarding the expected influence of ethnocentrism:

\[ H2: \text{The influence of ethnocentrism on the evaluation of alternatives in the food buying decision process is greater among men than among women.} \]

Then in the purchase decision stage, consumer ethnocentrism likely continues to exert a significant influence. According to Camarena-Gómez et al. (2011), ethnocentricty largely determines the decision to consume ethnic foods. Schnettler et al. (2008) find that some Chilean consumers wholly reject imported meat products; among ethnic minorities, Schnettler et al. (2010) find that the country of origin for beef products is important but less so than price. Among national consumers of chicken in two Chilean cities, Schnettler et al. (2011a) instead observe a greater emphasis on country of origin than on other attributes, such as presentation or price. Finally, Schnettler et al. (2011b) reveal that national consumers cite
their perception of lower quality as the main reason they reject imported foodstuffs. In view of these studies, we propose, regarding the significant influence of ethnocentrism in the purchase decision stage for food products among sojourners, that

**H3**: Ethnocentrism significantly influences the purchase decision by sojourners in the food buying decision process.

Yet the greater ability of female immigrants to adapt to the host country (e.g., Güngör & Bornstein, 2009; Phalet & Haker, 2004) also leads us to expect a smaller influence of ethnocentrism on women in this stage of the decision buying process. Therefore, we propose

**H4**: The influence of ethnocentrism in the purchase decision stage of the food buying decision is greater among men than among women.

Food buying does not end with a purchase; it continues in the form of post-purchase behavior. After acquiring a food product, consumers experience satisfaction or dissatisfaction. From their perspective, the purchase initiates the beginning of the useful life of the product, which should satisfy the need for which it was purchased. For marketers, this stage is crucial, because a satisfied customer might exhibit loyalty or describe the positive experiences to other consumers (Pal & Rangaswamy, 2003). Satisfaction arises if the chosen alternative meets expectations; if not, dissatisfaction occurs.

Again, consumer ethnocentrism may exert an impact. Verbeke and Lopez (2005) assess the degree of satisfaction among national Belgian consumers and Hispanic immigrant consumers toward Belgian food and Latin American food. Their findings reveal strong satisfaction among the native Belgians with ethnic foods, as well as among Hispanic consumers with Belgian mainstream food, though each group still considered its native food better tasting. In view of these ideas, we propose:

**H5**: Ethnocentrism significantly influences the post-purchase stage for sojourners in the food buying decision process.

Finally, our ongoing consideration of the varying influence of ethnocentrism in men’s and women’s food buying decision processes leads us to propose:

**H6**: The influence of ethnocentrism in the post-purchase decision stage of the food buying decision is greater among men than among women.

### 3. Data and Methods

#### 3.1 Sample selection and data description

The sojourners we study include international university students, for whom increased cross-national mobility, combined with liberalized tertiary education policies, has encouraged more frequent pursuits of academic degrees in countries other than their own (Tafarodi & Smith, 2001). The sample of sojourners in this study consists of foreign university students enrolled in Spain’s University of Castilla-La Mancha during the second half of the 2010–2011 academic year. This university is centrally located in Spain, between the capital Madrid and the Mediterranean coast. The region in which the university is located is representative of the average characteristics of the Spanish population (e.g., no second official language, as exists in other regions near the east Mediterranean edges or the north; population is representative of the average population). To select the specific sample, we followed a probabilistic sampling procedure. In line with the conventional use of questionnaires to examine eating practices, food patterns, and nutritional outcomes to observe how immigrants become socialized into a new culture (Chavez et al., 1994; Hroboticky & Krondl, 1984; Khan, Sobal, & Martorell,
1997; Lee, 1997; Schultz, Soindler, & Josephson, 1994), we collect the pertinent study information using online questionnaires. In Table 1 we outline the technical details.

For the stages of the buying decision process, we adopted the modified purchase decision involvement scale from Mittal (1995), which has been fully validated. In comparing the modified scales empirically, in terms of their unidimensionality, convergent and discriminant validity, and nomological validity, Mittal (1995) confirms the modified scale’s high construct validity and ability to capture variance. For the ethnocentrism statements, we used the CETSCALE, which was first developed by Shrimp and Sharma (1987) to measure consumers’ ethnocentric tendencies about buying foreign versus American-made products. The CETSCALE has been also validated through studies in several countries, and using diverse products, and was found to exhibit a high degree of validity and reliability (Orth & Firbasová, 2003). Finally, we included a block of questions related to respondents’ profiles. The questionnaire was available in both Spanish and English, accessed through an e-mail sent by managers in charge of the International Relations Office at the University of Castilla-La Mancha.

Table 1:
Research Details

| Universe | 683 students registered with University of Castilla-La Mancha during the second semester of the 2010–11 school year a |
| Geographical scope | Castilla-La Mancha region (Spain) |
| Sample size | 139 valid questionnaires |
| Confidence level | 95%; Z = 1.96; p = q = 0.5 |
| Error | 7.45% |
| Sampling procedure | Probabilistic sampling |
| Method of information collecting | Online questionnaire |
| Fieldwork dates | 28 March–10 April 2011 (inclusive) |

3.2 Hypotheses contrast

Before developing the models, we calculated a series of descriptive frequencies, which provide a general idea of the features of the sample. The sample consists primarily of women, consistent with previous studies in this setting (Mora et al., 2011). To test our hypotheses, we conducted factorial analyses of the main components of the exogenous variables, with Varimax rotation using SPSS 19. With this approach, we can identify a reduced set of uncorrelated factors and explain the greatest possible degree of variability in the results. This method also has been used by previous studies, such as in analyses of the influence of various attributes of the commercial establishment on consumer satisfaction at the point of sale in grocery settings (Gómez, McLaughlin, & Wittink, 2004; Martinez-Ruiz, Jiménez Zarco, & Yusta, 2010). Prior to the factorial analysis, we analyzed sampling adequacy by applying a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy; at 0.927, its value is superior to the established limit of 0.5. In addition, Bartlett’s sphericity test returned a high value (significance = 0.000), so we can reject the hypothesis that the correlation matrix is an identity matrix, which would indicate the inappropriateness of a factor model (George & Mallery, 1995). The two factors account for 64.1% of the variation across 17 components.

In particular, the “Economy supportive reasons (ESR)” factor includes variables related to consumers’ concerns about supporting their national economy; it accounts for 52.4% of the
variance. A second factor, “Patriotism (PT),” includes preferences for consuming products made in the home country, and it accounts for 11.7% of variance. To assess the internal consistency of both all components and each factor, we used Cronbach’s alpha and found support for the internal consistency of all components (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.942), for factor 1 (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.924), and for factor 2 (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.917). These values surpass the acceptable alpha level – usually 0.70 or higher (Nunnally, 1978); but also, show internal consistency reliability comparable with previous studies, achieving a Cronbach’s alpha ranging from 0.91 to 0.96 (Good & Huddlestone, 1995; Herche, 1992; Klein et al., 1998; Orth & Firbasová, 2003; Sharma et al., 1995).

We conducted various linear regression parametric models, using as exogenous variables the factors identified and as endogenous variables the different variables related to consumer involvement in three stages: evaluation of alternatives, choice, and post-purchase behavior. Thus the equation for the model in the first stage was:

\[ CIES_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ESR_i + \beta_2 PT_i + \epsilon_i , \]  

where

- \( CIES_i \) is consumer involvement in the evaluation stage;
- \( ESR_i \) is economic supportive reasons;
- \( PT_i \) is patriotism;
- \( \beta_0, \beta_1, \beta_2 \) are the unknown parameters (to be estimated from the data); and
- \( \epsilon_i \) is an error term that picks up any variation in the data unexplained by \( ESR_i \) or \( PT_i \).

The equation for the model in the second stage was

\[ CICS_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ESR_i + \beta_2 PT_i + \epsilon_i , \]  

where \( CICS_i \) is consumer involvement in the choice stage, and the other variables are the same as in Equation 1. Finally, the model in the third stage was

\[ CIPPS_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 ESR_i + \beta_2 PT_i + \epsilon_i , \]  

where \( CIPPS_i \) is consumer involvement in the post-purchase stage, and the other variables are as previously defined. We ran these models for the total sample of sojourners, as well as two samples, split by gender. Table 2 contains the R-square values and parameter estimates.

The results from the total sample indicated that ethnocentrism factors explain the most variability in the endogenous variable for consumer involvement in the post-purchase stage, followed by that in the decision purchase stage, and finally that in the evaluation of alternatives stage. The model for consumer involvement in the evaluation of alternatives stage revealed that none of the factors exerted influences on the endogenous variable. No single factor had a significant influence on the evaluation of alternatives, and thus, we must reject H1. For the model in the purchase decision stage, PT had a positive and significant influence on consumer choice, but the ESR factor revealed no influence, in partial support of H3. In this stage, sojourners appeared influenced only by elements such as patriotism themes. Finally, the model for the post-purchase stage showed that all factors had positive and significant
influences on consumer involvement, in support of H5, though the most important factor influence stemmed from PT, followed by the ESR factor.

Table 2:
Estimation Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model Description: Endogenous Variable</th>
<th>R²</th>
<th>Parameter Estimate, ESR</th>
<th>Parameter Estimate, PT</th>
<th>Constant Parameter</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL SAMPLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer involvement in the evaluation stage</td>
<td>0.008</td>
<td>-0.052</td>
<td>0.075</td>
<td>4.590***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer involvement in the choice stage</td>
<td>0.031</td>
<td>0.005</td>
<td>0.176**</td>
<td>4.741***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer involvement in the post-purchase stage</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.167**</td>
<td>0.223**</td>
<td>3.899***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALE SAMPLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer involvement in the evaluation stage</td>
<td>0.126</td>
<td>0.306</td>
<td>0.436*</td>
<td>4.612**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer involvement in the choice stage</td>
<td>0.269</td>
<td>0.042</td>
<td>0.762***</td>
<td>4.589***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer involvement in the post-purchase stage</td>
<td>0.106</td>
<td>0.122</td>
<td>0.476*</td>
<td>3.685***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEMALE SAMPLE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer involvement in the evaluation stage</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>-0.278</td>
<td>-0.089</td>
<td>4.582***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer involvement in the choice stage</td>
<td>0.002</td>
<td>-0.059</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>4.806***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consumer involvement in the post-purchase stage</td>
<td>0.074</td>
<td>0.365**</td>
<td>0.386***</td>
<td>3.989***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* p < 0.10; ** p < 0.05; ***p < 0.01

When we regressed the models for the samples of male and female sojourners separately though, we uncovered several interesting effects. First, despite the fewer sojourners in the male sample (41 men versus 98 women), the R-square coefficients were significantly higher for men, compared not only with the female sample but also in comparison with the total sample. That is, the highest influence of ethnocentrism, in all stages of the buying decision process, consistently emerged for male sojourners. Moreover, for these men, the patriotism (PT) factor was always relevant, independent of the stage of the food buying decision process being considered. It was especially substantial in the decision stage, followed by the post-purchase stage and then by the evaluation of alternatives stage. The economic supportive reasons (ESR) factor, in contrast, did not exert significant influences in any of the stages of the buying process for male sojourners. Thus, their preferences for consuming products made in their home country strongly influenced male sojourners’ complete food buying decision process.

For women, ethnocentrism factors were relevant only in the post-purchase stage, at which point they grew stronger among women than among men. The factor that influenced them most was PT, followed by ESR. Thus, we can confirm H2 and H4, pertaining to the higher influence of ethnocentrism among men, but we must reject H6. We summarize the results for each hypothesis in Table 3.
Table 3: Hypotheses results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hypotheses</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total sample of sojourners</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H1: Ethnocentrism significantly influences the evaluation of alternatives by sojourners during the evaluation stage of the food buying decision process.</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H3: Ethnocentrism significantly influences the purchase decision by sojourners in the food buying decision process.</td>
<td>Partially supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H5: Ethnocentrism significantly influences the post-purchase stage for by sojourners in the food buying decision process.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender-specific samples of sojourners</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H2: The influence of ethnocentrism in the evaluation of alternatives stage of the food buying decision process is greater among men than among women.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H4: The influence of ethnocentrism in the purchase decision stage of the food buying decision is greater among men than among women.</td>
<td>Supported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H6: The influence of ethnocentrism in the post-purchase decision stage of the food buying decision is greater among men than among women.</td>
<td>Rejected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This investigation reveals several interesting findings. First, when we ignore gender differences, ethnocentrism appears to have no significant influence on university students’ evaluations of alternatives, but it has significant influences in the post-purchase stage and a smaller impact in the choice stage. Thus, the influence of ethnocentrism is greater in the post-purchase stage, when both factors exert significant impacts, whereas only PT has an influence in the purchase decision stage. Ethnocentrism accordingly seems to grow in influence during the purchase process, perhaps as a result of acculturation and temporal contextual influences on immigrants. That is, sojourners might ignore ethnocentrism in their evaluation of alternatives, but after they shop, they start to recognize other variables. Their origin culture likely is so deeply embedded that it exerts a subconscious direct effect on their purchases and post-purchase evaluations, without necessarily influencing their evaluations of food alternatives.

Second, if we consider the genders separately, we find notable differences. Therefore, we assert that gender is a sociodemographic variable that creates key differences in the impact of ethnocentrism. On the one hand, the greatest impact of ethnocentrism is on men; for these sojourners, patriotism always exerts a significant influence, with its highest impact in the decision stage, followed by the post-purchase and then the evaluation of alternatives stages. For women, ethnocentrism factors exert a significant influence only after they have made their purchase. Despite evidence of stronger ethnocentric tendencies in women in general, we find that the greater adaptivity of female sojourners limits the influence of ethnocentrism variables for them to a single stage. This finding is more in line with prior research which reports how girls show better adaptation than do boys.

4. Conclusions
After identifying a persistent research gap, we assessed the influence of ethnocentrism on the buying decisions of a specific group of sojourners to expand extant research. We chose food products as our study context, because they offer a powerful symbol of cultural identity, which likely explains their frequent use in prior literature. We also studied university student sojourners, distinguishing them on the basis of their gender; they offer not only significant volume and economic potential but also interesting and specific characteristics. From our exhaustive review of relevant literature, we developed research hypotheses pertaining to the influence of ethnocentrism on the different stages of the food purchase process among sojourners, according to their gender. To test these hypotheses, we gathered data from 139 foreign students studying in Spain—98 women and 41 men—and conducted diverse factorial analyses of principal components, as well as linear parametric regressions.

With these tests, we identified effects generated by 17 variables, as proposed by Shimp and Sharma (1987). The variables generated two factors related to ethnocentrism: patriotism (PT), which consisted primarily of variables related to the origin of food products, and economic supportive reasons (ESR), which referred mainly to citizens’ beliefs that they should reject products produced in nations other than their country of origin for economic reasons (e.g., fewer jobs in their country, enrichment of other countries). According to a well-validated scale (Mittal, 1995), in the total sample of sojourners, PT reached significance in two stages of the decision buying process (choice and post-purchase), whereas ESR was significant in just the post-purchase stage. In general terms, as the purchase process progresses, ethnocentrism starts to exert more influence, perhaps due to acculturation or the temporal context in which immigrants function. Sojourners rarely take these factors into account in their evaluation of alternatives, but after they shop, they recognize these components.

However, the results separated by gender reveal that ethnocentrism exerts a significantly higher impact on all stages of the buying decision process among men. For women, the influence of both ethnocentrism factors is relevant only in the post-purchase stage. Thus, as a sociodemographic variable, gender makes a key difference in the impact of ethnocentrism. Some studies have identified higher ethnocentrism tendencies in women; our results are more consistent with research that shows that immigrant women adapt better to new environments. Overall, we show that the influence of ethnocentrism in food buying decisions by international university students depends greatly on the gender of the consumer.

Our study thus offers several contributions to extant literature. First, we investigate a specific type of tangible goods, food products, and a specific group of sojourners, international university students who have chosen to study in another country. This feature is relevant; this group of soujourners has prompted growing research interest due to the students’ economic potential, as well as their specific, unique characteristics. We specify that in this group, the influence of ethnocentrism in the food buying decision process is much stronger for men than for women. Furthermore, patriotism is strongly relevant in all decision stages for this group of sojourners.

This investigation also reflects recent trends in research related to changing global lifestyle and consumption patterns—such as studies by Grunert (2003), Mellin-Olsen and Wandel, (2005), Laroche, Yang, Kim, and Richard (2007), Leong (2008), Tambyah and Cngh (2006), Skaggs et al. (1996)—and helps extend them in new directions. Marketers need a better understanding of food consumption patterns by minority communities if they hope to reach these target markets. This drive is especially relevant in countries such as Spain that have experienced considerable recent flows of immigration (INE, 2011). In particular, the influence of ethnocentrism on purchasing decisions should not be underestimated in marketing decisions.
These results also have multiple managerial implications for food manufacturers, importers, and retailers. The strong impact of ethnocentrism in the post-purchase stage, for not just men but women too, suggests that manufacturers and importers should seek to design food packaging that promotes values related to ethnocentrism, which sojourners then can evaluate positively at home, after they have purchased the products. Food manufacturers, importers, and retailers also should encourage product choices at the point of sale through their marketing communications, using special displays, promotions, and merchandising that highlight the country of origin of national products or other signals of patriotism.

Mechanisms to gather consumer opinions about the degree of ESR and PT benefits offered by specific food products, at the point of sale, also could provide valuable insights into how to plan and design the production of food products to better meet the ethnocentric demands of consumers. Finally, advertising should express the ethnocentric benefits of certain food products in advance of the purchase process, especially to male sojourners.

Similarly, the government might consider ways to help immigrants integrate into Spanish society, such as ensuring both their rights and their obligations. Despite European social movements against immigration, which stem mainly from unemployment concerns, prohibiting immigration is not a solution. Rather, we need to study how immigration contributes to the host country’s development and can help the economy grow through immigrants’ own consumption.

Finally, we note that this study attained low R-square determination coefficient values, especially among female sojourners. This issue is relatively common in social science research. However, further research should replicate this study with other sojourner collectives, to deepen our understanding of their decision processes. Regarding the acculturation of immigrants and the impacts on perceived risk, we hope research moves beyond the effect of origin cultures to study the various stages immigrants undergo as they come to perceive themselves as part of a new culture, as well as how this adaptation influences their consumption practices.

References


