Our level of ethnocentrism shapes the brain’s response to domestic and foreign products

17/03/2020

Research news

> **Researchers from the University of Granada have analysed the brain’s response to domestic and foreign products, using functional magnetic resonance imaging**

When consumers go to the supermarket, they are exposed to significant amounts of information about the product they want to buy, such as the brand, special promotions, guarantees, or packaging appeal. One traditional feature that has aroused great interest among marketing researchers is the ‘country of origin’ label, which indicates where the product was made and assembled.

Consumer behaviour studies agree that the origin of a product acts as an indicator of its quality—that is, we use a country’s reputation to infer product quality. Those who believe Samsung to be a Japanese brand show a stronger preference and are willing to pay more for Samsung products due to the high-technology image of Japanese products, unlike those from North Korea, for example.

Recent research, on the other hand, concludes that certain consumers (for example, those from developed countries such as Spain) show a greater inclination toward products manufactured in their own country than toward foreign products, regardless of the image they have of the foreign countries in question.

These consumers are considered ethnocentric, as they have a negative view of importing foreign products because they consider it unpatriotic or detrimental to their own nation’s economy and employment.

Although the way in which we evaluate foreign products is largely automatic and unconscious, no studies to date have analysed how the level of a consumer's ethnocentrism influences their cerebral evaluation of domestic and foreign products.

Now, a study by researchers from the University of Granada (UGR) has found that highly ethnocentric consumers experience stronger neural reactions to rewards and self-interest in domestic products, coupled with a high level of cerebral activation associated with the perceived risk of foreign products.

Functional magnetic resonance

In the UGR study, conducted in Spain, sophisticated techniques were used to understand how consumers cerebrally process products manufactured in Spain vs. those from abroad. To conduct this research, the authors worked with a sample of 30 participants (male and female), who, after indicating their own ethnocentrism levels, had functional magnetic resonance imaging (FMRI) performed on them while evaluating domestic Spanish products vs. foreign ones (from the USA and China) and indicating their preferences toward them.

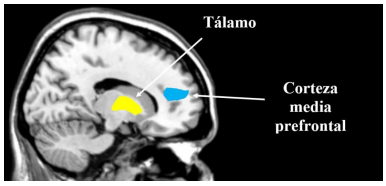
The brain image results indicated that those consumers who presented higher levels of ethnocentrism experienced cerebral reactions more strongly associated with reward and self-interest, such as activation in the striatum and medial prefrontal cortex. By contrast, when the more ethnocentric consumers evaluated foreign products, they experienced greater neuronal risk compared to less ethnocentric individuals.

"These results are interesting as they will enable national companies to use relevance and reward for consumers as arguments in their communication campaigns to encourage the acquisition of their products. They can also play on the risk of buying foreign products. These results, therefore, point to the need for foreign companies to implement collaborations or brand alliances with local firms as a way to reduce the negative neural processing of foreign products," explain the authors of this work.

Bibliography:

Casado-Aranda, L.-A., Sánchez-Fernández, J., Ibáñez-Zapata, J.-Á., & Liébana-Cabanillas, F. J. (2020). How consumer ethnocentrism modulates neural processing of domestic and foreign products: A neuroimaging study. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 53, 101961. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jretconser.2019.101961

Image captions:



The more ethnocentric participants experienced greater activation of the medial prefrontal cortex (blue) when exposed to Spanish products, while the thalamus (yellow) was more strongly activated when they evaluated foreign products

Media enquiries:

Juan Sánchez Fernández

Department of Marketing and Market Research, University of Granada

Tel.: +34 958 240936

Email: @email

José Ángel Ibáñez Zapata

Department of Marketing and Market Research, University of Granada

Tel.: +34 958 240970

Email: joibanez@ugr.es

Francisco José Liébana Cabanillas

Department of Marketing and Market Research, University of Granada

Tel.: +34 958 242380

Email: franlieb@ugr.es

Luis Alberto Casado Aranda

Department of Marketing and Market Research, University of Granada

Tel.: +34 652 026 171

Email: lcasado@ugr.es