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Abstract

This study aims to determine how political views coupled with intensity of religious feelings affect consumers' willingness to pay for products from various countries of origin. Analyzing a survey of 442 Israeli shoppers we find that consumers are willing to pay about 15% more for local produce. This premium increases substantially when considering produce from origins that are in conflict. Support of local products is stronger for consumers who report right leaning political preferences and for more religious consumers.

Keywords Country of Origin, Political Views, Religiosity, Willingness to pay

1. Introduction

Consumers preferences to local products are affected by perceptions of quality, ethnocentrism, patriotism, and nationalistic feelings that supports (hurts) local producers' efforts to build a competitive advantage (Gao, Zhang, & Mittal, 2017; Steenkamp, 2014). These feelings affect mutually the perceptions and the choice process by changing the importance weights of the functional and affective considerations (Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). The emotional value toward foreign competitors, was termed 'country equity' (Shimp, Samiee, & Madden, 1993). Positive or negative emotions toward local or global countries may add or subtract from the value that is determined by economic considerations (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Sympathy (positive) or animosity (negative) for countries that are in a conflict with the home country thus decrease (increase) the willingness to pay for local products. Animosity and nationalism, though being different constructs, affect preferences in a similar manner. Both reduce the willingness to buy from countries that are perceived to be different or a threat. The asymmetric of negative (outgroup) versus positive (in-group) (Waytz, Young, & Ginges, 2014) added to the notion that bad is stronger than good (Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, & Vohs, 2001) suggests that nationalism and animosity are expected to increase the price premium more than ethnocentric feelings. In this study we push the boundaries of the relationship between ethnocentric and animosity feelings both by examining a range of levels of conflict between countries, and by measuring purchase intent through willingness to pay measures. This allows us to quantify the potential revenue effects to local industry of animosity resulting from national conflicts.

We use the results of a survey of supermarkets, hypermarkets and grocery store patrons in Israel to test for the impacts of political conflict on willingness to purchase foreign products. Israel is a good choice for such study since the Israeli and Palestinian conflict is perhaps one of the most visible examples of how nationalist feelings can lead to extreme and

dangerous actions in the name of promoting their own social identity (Kelman, 1997). We find evidence that individuals are willing to pay a premium to avoid purchases of produce from countries in conflict with Israel. Moreover, price responsiveness is weakest when choosing between Israeli and Palestinian goods (the two are in active and intense conflict for more than 70 years). The relationship between price sensitivity and intensity of political conflict appears to be related to political views. While these results may not be directly generalized to all political conflicts, they demonstrate the plausibility of using such conflicts for economic advantage in the market for local goods.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses Construction

Consumers' judgments of a brand can be explained by psychological models (Silberhorn, Boztuğ, & Hildebrandt, 2017), sociological considerations (Escalas & Bettman, 2005) and signaling models (Erdem & Swait, 1998). Psychological and sociological models deal with how brands can be used to create either external or internal identity or meaning. Signaling models view a brand as a signal for quality that reduces pre-purchase uncertainty (Wernerfelt, 1990). Since country image can generate associations with both the quality of functional attributes, as well as emotions and social benefits, COOL can serve each of these three brand functions (Kotler & Gertner, 2002). Consumers' expectations regarding production quality, safety and environmental impact are tightly connected with consumers perceptions of specific country attributes and image (Roth & Diamantopoulos, 2009). In the context of produce, which are the subject of our empirical study, a unique set of inputs associated with a local production region may contribute to superior quality. In addition to superior quality, if exists, consumption of local produce increase benefit from having lower transportation and lower environmental cost (Grunert, Hieke, & Wills, 2014) and consuming more ecologically sustainable produce (Tobler, Visschers, & Siegrist, 2011).

National reputation can play a major role in adding value or influencing decisions more generally (Hong & Wyer Jr, 1989) even when the local quality of the product is not superior to the imported alternative. For example, Japanese consumers were much more favorable toward a Japanese made product—even if the product appeared to be below market standards for quality (Gürhan-Canli & Maheswaran, 2000). Preferences for local products, even in the case where local produce is not easily differentiated in terms of freshness or product quality, are still feasible if it provides some socio-emotional attachment value (Cordes et al., 2003) or if consumers perceive that consumption of local produce helps them in building a stock of personal reputation as being virtuous individuals who support the local community or local labor (Maronick, 1995). In addition to ethnocentrism the magnitude of the willingness to accept imported produce is expected to be affected by animosity—a different psychological construct from ethnocentrism (Klein, Ettenson, & Morris, 1998; Nijssen & Douglas, 2004; Riefler & Diamantopoulos, 2007) that affects perceptions and choice in a similar manner to nationalism.

Though nationalism and patriotism are recognized as powerful forces that have shaped geopolitics over the last two centuries (Gellner, 2008), the psychological foundations and implications of both are still heavily debated. In the past patriotism and nationalism were used as synonyms, but now, for more than a century, they are distinct constructs (Viroli, 1995). Patriotism is generally defined as a love for one's country (Mirriam-Webster 2018), while nationalism is usually characterized as pairing this love of country with a feeling of superiority and desire for power over other nations. As such, while both are tied to a national identity, these feelings lead to distinct goals (Blank & Schmidt, 2003). These differences are reflected in attitude to minorities, and as hypothesized later to COO that are culturally different. The ideas of nationalism or patriotism are closely associated with the individual's conception of their own identity (Blank & Schmidt, 2003; Kelman, 1997). These feelings can

be strong and can motivate individuals to take specific actions (McCauley, 2001).

Nationalism becomes a particular driver when countries come into conflict. In this case, nationalism is associated with animosity toward countries that have come into conflict with the home country (Jung et al., 2002). Animosity is expected to be lower for countries that are perceived to be culturally similar to the importing country, increasing the willingness to purchase from those countries (Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1994; Watson & Wright, 2000).

Choices that are driven by animosity imply that the preference for local produce is motivated by hate of the other rather than preference for the local. Because hate is the strongest emotional motivation (Cameron, 2009), bad is a stronger than good (Baumeister et al., 2001) and negative bias (Rozin & Royzman, 2001) it will lead to a lower willingness to pay for imports from countries which consumers dislike. We hypothesize that animosity is likely to have stronger effect on price premium relative to ethnocentric and patriotic feelings. At the extreme case when ethnocentrism, nationalism and animosity feelings are very strong consumers may be willing to pay infinite premium for local products, i.e., refrain from buying imports. Hypotheses 1 and 2 are therefore suggested:

H1: The mutual effect of ethnocentrism and animosity is likely to reduce the sensitive to price when choosing between local goods and products from countries for which they harbor animosity.

H2: Animosity is likely to increase the likelihood that consumers would pay an infinite price premium for local products when the COO is in a conflict with homeland without having a significant effect on price premium when the origin is not perceived to be a threat.

The literature suggests ethnocentrism is related to a set of beliefs that include political views (Rydgren, 2008), collectivism versus individualism and intensity of religious beliefs

(Gorsuch & Aleshire, 1974; Lantz & Loeb, 1996). Consumers who hold more traditional and conservative views about the world tend to be more religious and display more pride in their country (Schmitt, Realo, Voracek, & Allik, 2008). Thus, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Consumers who are more religious and those who support right leaning parties are more likely to refrain from buying imported products from countries that are in active conflict either political, cultural or economic.

Scholars find that higher levels of education and income, which are naturally likely to be positively related, are negatively correlated with the level of ethnocentrism. Educated individuals are less conservative (Ray, 1990) and have lower pride in their country (Rose, 1985). Age was found to be positively related with ethnocentrism, suggesting older consumers tend to value domestic products more highly (Chrysochoidis, Krystallis, & Perreas, 2007; Han, 1989) while younger consumers tend to be more cosmopolitan (Bannister & Saunders, 1978) and therefore are expected to be less ethnocentric. The finding about the effect of gender on preferences to local products are mixed. On one hand females are less individualistic (Singelis, Triandis, Bhawuk, & Gelfand, 1995) and differ in the views of group attachment (Baumeister & Sommer, 1997) leading to potential higher acceptance of global imports. On the other hand females are more ethnocentric (Sharma et al., 1994) which lead to believe that they would prefer local products.

H4: Socio demographic, life style and political variables are expected to affect ethnocentrism and animosity in the following directions: Younger and more educated consumers are more likely to be more opened to imports while the effect of gender is unclear. The effect of income on the price premium for local is expected to be positive.

In order to explore the role of non-price and income variables in shaping demand for local products and test out our research hypotheses we conducted a survey of 422 Israeli consumers. In the next section, we describe the methodology of the survey.

3. Methodology

Respondents were approached at the exit (entry) of grocery stores, and were asked to participate in a survey that would consume approximately 10 minutes of their time. The questionnaires were handed out to buyers who agreed to participate in our survey. Conducting the interview close to supermarkets and in proximity to shopping is believed to increase the relevance of the answers and increase their validity. This added validity and relevance is somewhat of a counterbalance to the hypothetical bias inherent in survey data. Alternative approaches using economic experiments can be used to address hypothetical bias, but may suffer from poor external validity due to non-random selection of participants, or due to failures to place participants in realistic choice contexts (Roe & Just 2009). It is often difficult to find an experimental subject pool that is similar to the policy relevant population, and even more difficult to simulate the relevant decision environment. We thus opt for interviewing real buyers over potentially obtaining more accurate responses from a less representative sample of participants. We recruited 442 participants, 255 of which were females and 197 males. The ages of participants ranged from 18 to 78.

Consumers' attitude and perceptions about the importance they attribute to buying local products in general, and, buying local vegetables and fruits in particular were measured using a 7 point Likert type closed form questions. For example, "Buying imported fresh agricultural products is unpatriotic (1 strongly disagree, 2 do not agree...6 agree, 7 strongly agree). The information about consumers' choices between local and imported fresh produce were collected using two methods. The first is a simple choice task in which consumers were

directed to make a choice between a local and imported vegetable of the same quality given a set of prices. At the first stage, the prices of the local and the imported produce were identical. In the second choice task, the price of the imported produce was kept constant while the price of the local produce rose a half shekel (12.5 Eurocents). In the last choice task the price difference between the local and the imported vegetable was 3 NIS (0.75 Euro). An example of a hypothetical choice is the following “The price of Pink Lady apples imported from the U.S. is 12.9 NIS per kilo. The price of the Israeli Pink Lady apples is the same—12.9 NIS per kilo. Which apple would you choose? Israeli ____ U.S. ____”. After that task, respondents were asked to write the price of the imported vegetable that would cause them to prefer it to the local one. We added contingent valuation method (CVM) questions (Hanemann, 1984) to our survey for all the produce that were of interest to gauge consumer valuation. CVM is preferred over other methods in the case of hypothetical (Boyle, Holmes, Teisl, & Roe, 2001), and is less cognitively demanding (Louviere et al., 2000). Because consumers are not likely to allocate cognitive resources to a survey (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008) the CVM method is commonly understood to dominate the hypothetical choice method. The open ended CVM questions asked consumers to report the price of the imported vegetable (fruit) that will cause them to prefer it. For example, “The price of Israeli grapes is 20 NIS (5 Euro) per kilo, what is the highest price of Spanish grapes that would cause you to prefer Italian grapes over local grapes? ____ (write zero if you are not willing to purchase imported grapes from Spain for any price).

Consumers had to choose between local and imported apples, tomatoes, cucumbers, grapes and garlic. The choice of products is based on actual imports (the five largest in terms of volume of produce that are imported) and the country of origin was chosen to reflect actual largest share of imports from certain country. The countries of origin were the U.S (apples), Italy (grapes), China (garlic), Jordan (tomato), and the Palestinian authority (cucumber). This

research design increases the relevance of the products and countries but has its cost as there is a one-to-one identity between the importing country and the imported product. This limitation prevents us from estimating the net effect of animosity as it doesn't allow the independent variation in product and country necessary to isolate separate effects on product and country. Levels of sympathy (animosity) toward the different COO were collected in earlier survey suggesting that most of the Israelis dislike Palestinians (79%), Egypt and Jordan draw lower level of dislikes (less than 50%) while only around 1% dislike the US (1.1%)¹. In the next section we present the empirical results of our survey.

4. Empirical Results

Analyzing consumers' choices reveal that about 61% of the respondents are not willing to purchase Palestinian cucumbers regardless of their price. When compared to the percent of consumers who are not willing to consider purchases from Italy (8.6%), China (15.6%) and the US (16.1%). The large difference between the proportion of consumers who refrain from buying Palestinian produce and from friendly countries can be termed the hatred premium. The significant proportion of consumers who refrain from buying imported produce from Palestinian origin reveal that although prices are an important consideration in consumers' choices between local in imported fresh products, under certain conditions animosity may have stronger effects than income when it comes to consumers' choices. The results are suggestive that both animosity and ethnocentrism play a role in the willingness of consumers to purchase produce from other countries. This is highly suggestive that feelings of affinity or animosity are helping to shape consumer preferences. This finding supports Hypothesis (1).

¹ 68% of the Israelis to not trust Palestinians and 89% of the Palestinian do not trust Israelis (<https://www.idi.org.il/articles/3330>. Israelis hostility toward Palestinians) is 3 time folds than sympathy level (https://en.fips.huji.ac.il/sites/default/files/floersheimeeng/files/maoz_compromise_with_the_palestinians.pdf)

The tradeoff between ethnocentric, patriotic and nationalistic feelings and income are relevant only for the segment who does not refrain from buying from a certain COO. These feelings reduce the sensitivity to price but still by definition in the segment who is willing to purchase foreign there is an upper limit to the price premium consumers are willing to pay for their beliefs. Table 1 displays the results of our random effects logit estimation. The regression is a random effects logit, with effects defined at the individual level. We display the marginal effects of this regression. Because interaction effects are relatively data intensive, we treat religion as continuous variable in the interaction terms. This may hide some effects that are unique to specific categories within the spectrum.

Table 1: Results of the Random logit estimation of willingness to tradeoff local for global products.

Choice		Coefficient	Marginal effect
Price premium		1.668*** (0.317)	0.217*** (0.057)
COO	Italy	-1.42* (0.768)	0.043 (0.051)
	Jordan	-1.43* (0.74)	-0.111 (0.49)
	Palestine	-2.24** (0.749)	-0.222*** (0.049)
	USA	-0.612 (0.735)	0.059 (0.492)
COO*Price Premium	Italy	1.664*** (0.381)	

	Jordan	1.156*** (0.32)	
	Palestine	0.182 (0.324)	
	USA	1.025***	
Age		-0.055*** (0.124)	
Education		0.088* (0.047)	
Family (4 and more)		3.325*** (0.009)	
Political views	Liberal	6.728** (0.326)	
	Right	-1.0363** (0.272)	
Price premium * Religiosity		-0.18*** (0.047)	-0.02*** (0.0054)
Lives in Tel-Aviv		1.01* (0.538)	
Constant		-1.018 (1.09)	

*** significant at 0.01 or less, ** significant at 0.05 or less and * significant at 0.1 or less.

When examining the impact of the price premium interacted with country of origin, we find that higher premiums are more likely to lead to purchasing the global product for all but the Palestinian Authority. The effect of the interaction for Palestinian Authority is insignificant while being positive and significant for other COO. This result perhaps signals that price is not as large a determining factor when products from the Palestinian Authority as other countries. Again, price playing less of a role than the country may be evidence that animosity toward the Palestinian Authority. This finding supports Hypothesis 2.

We find that religiosity has a strong cross effect relationship with the price premium at which one is willing to switch to global produce. The relationship between political preferences and purchases of global goods is significant, with those on the political right the least likely to purchase global goods. These findings support our third hypothesis (H3). There is likely a close relationship between political and religious preferences and our analysis indicates that the two variables contribute to preference of local produce in a similar manner. Finally, there is mixed evidence for H4 (age, education and gender). While there is no significant impact of gender and marginal significance for education on purchases, age has a significant and negative impact on selection of the global product. Thus, those in older generations are less likely to purchase Israeli products generally. Consumers who leave in Tel-Aviv are less likely to pay price premium for local produce. Tel-Aviv residents are more secular relative to other Israeli cities. Place of residency serves as another indicator to the role of religiosity. Larger household serves as a proxy for lower income per capita explaining the lower willingness to pay price premium for local produce at lower income groups.

Conclusions

Globalization and the diffusion of global brands is a threat to local brands that are facing intense competition, both from higher quality brands from above and low price

commodities from below. Globalization and the threat to local products may stimulate emotions, positive toward local brands (LB) and negative toward certain COO. These emotions may increase consumers' willingness to pay premium for local products (Batte, Hooker, Haab, & Beaverson, 2007). The extent by which the willingness to pay (WTP) for local products is likely to be moderated by active and historical political conflicts that flourish animosity feelings. In a chaotic and contentious world, examples of political conflicts are not in short supply and they affect both perceptions of quality and choices. Animosity and ethnocentrism are affected by political views and level of religiosity. The direct effect of political views and level of religiosity animosity on the choices between local and global products have not received much attention in the literature. This paper addresses this research void by analyzing the direct effect of political views and level of religiosity on the willingness to pay for produce that are imported from COO that vary in their level of friendliness/level of conflict with the homeland.

We found that consumers' willingness to accept (demanding high discount) for imported fruits and vegetables are higher for countries of origin that are in a higher level of conflict with Israel such as the Palestinian authority. Most of the Israeli consumers are willing to pay up to 15% price premium before they switch to imported products. The discount is higher for countries in conflict relative to friendly countries from which a significant proportion of consumers are not willing to purchase even with infinite discount (zero price). The willingness to pay premium price for local brands for fresh produce is lower than the absolute value of the discount consumers request for buying imported produce from COO that are in active conflict with their nation. That is hate is more effective than love. We find that political views affect the discount that is demanded to convert from local to imported products. Consumers who support right wing parties have a stronger support in local production. The high correlation between religiosity and political views and the non

linear relationship between level of religiosity and nationalism resulted in a choice to use political views rather than level of religiosity in explaining preferences for buying local produce.

Both country of origin labeling and local branding increase the likelihood of purchase of local fresh produce. Their effectiveness in serving as non-price competitive mechanism varies depending on the characteristics of consumers and the attributes/types of fresh produce. Practical implementation of our study suggests that in general when the mass of foreign completion is from countries of which the level of animosity is low strengthening LB and relating it to ingroup identity will be more efficient while when the hostility level is high highlighting the origin will do.

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