Consumer Ethnocentrism: It's Antecedents and Consequences with Reference to "Millennials in India"

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Abstract: With the removal of trade barriers in India, it has become easy for the foreign firms from all over the country to enter the Indian markets and tap its consumers. But what has been a challenge for the firms is gaining the consumer acceptance of the foreign products. Therefore, the marketing literature poses Consumer Ethnocentrism a major hindrance in consumer evaluation and acceptance to the foreign products. **"Ethnocentrism" refers to the** evaluation of other's culture according to pre-conceived notions originating in the standards and customs of one's own culture. **Consumer ethnocentrism** specifically refers to ethnocentric views that are held by consumers in one country, the in-group, towards products from another country, the out-group (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Consumer ethnocentric tendencies as seen through various researches play a significant role in determining the purchase behaviour of consumers towards domestically produced goods and foreign products.

This paper aims to study the factors triggering ethnocentric tendencies amongst the consumers and discussing the millennial segment of the consumer population in India in depth in the present context as this is still an unexplored dimension of Consumer Ethnocentrism. The millennial population is chosen as the focal point of the study because this segment forms 65% of the total population and thus, their purchase behaviour poses economic implications for marketers. The attempt is to fill the gap in the current consumer marketing literature relating to "Consumer ethnocentrism" in India as this concept is still in its infantry stage due to lack of awareness in the country. The paper also attempts to trace the history of such a concept in our country and how such a concept revived itself in the wake of current developments in the country.

Based on findings from the study, the paper spells out various strategic implications for both domestic and international marketers in gaining acceptance of their products among different markets, consumer segments, niches and provides directions for future researches.

Keywords: Consumer ethnocentrism, CET Scale, Millennials, Antecedents

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Consumer Ethnocentrism

The term Consumer ethnocentrism is a modified version of the original concept of "Ethnocentrism" given by Sumner in 1906. Going by what ethnocentrism means, Consumer ethnocentrism is defined as an evaluation of beliefs held by the Indian consumers about their own products in relation to the foreign products. Ethnocentrism is a human universal phenomenon and almost a universal syndrome of bigoted attitudes and behaviours of people (LeVine & Campbell, 1972). LeVine and Campbell believe that this feeling among humans compels them to view their own symbols, values and objects that signify their nations pride and attachment whereas that of the other becomes a matter of contempt. It typically points towards the attitudes of a consumer due to which he/she is likely to weigh his own products and services favorably as compared to ones imported from outside the country. This attitude jumps on to become a stereotype that it is unethical, immoral, unpatriotic and harmful to buy or consume the products that come from the out group (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). The psychology behind such an attitude is understood well by some and explained as- consumers have a sense of proclivity to those symbols, objects and values to which they can identify rather than those which are unknown to them (Sumner, 1906).

It can even be defined as a sensation that one's own group has regarding a mode of living, values and prototype of adaptation that are superior to other groups (Haviland, 1993). These ethnocentric beliefs or sensations of the person tend to divide the society across different races, religion, cultures, etc.

Consumers who are indifferent between buying foreign or Indian are believed to violate the cultural norms of the domestic country. But an ethnocentric buyer on the other hand believes that alien offerings alter the consumption patterns and also lead to economic losses for the country by way of causing loss of jobs.

Consumers who are thought to be ethnocentric tend to be skeptical about foreign product both morally and economically as they think that it will lead to loss of jobs for their own country and morally it is incorrect to buy foreign goods as it impairs their economy. They are more inclined towards their local products thinking that their country makes the best products, boasts itself superior and that foreign goods are lower in terms of quality as compared to their domestic goods. For example, consumers in India find pride in using products made from khadi maybe because they feel khadi reflects their own culture and therefore the feeling of patriotism emerges while making its purchases.

Until mid-eighties, no definite scale existed for the purpose of measuring ethnocentric sentiments as relevant to the domain of consumer behaviour and marketing phenomena (e.g., Sharma and Shimp, 1987, Luque-Martinez, Ibanez-Zipata, & Barrio-Gracia, 2000). A few instruments that existed at that time were too generic that could be useful for the measurement of ethnocentric tendency prevailing among consumers. Shimp and Sharma in 1987 made the pioneering attempt by constructing a multi-item scale for measuring consumer ethnocentric tendency also known as the CET SCALE. The CET SCALE is a 17-item scale used for the purpose of identifying the ethnocentric attitude of a consumer, which has been popularly used in several studies across countries.

Several studies have summarized the outcomes of product country of origin studies and suggest that a product's origin is a vital factor in determining how it will be received by buyers and what kind of purchase behaviour it would derive (Bilkey & Nes, 1982).

However, recent studies have revealed that consumers in the less developed economies prefer to buy products which come from outside. So, ethnocentrism does not find much ground in these countries. Consumers of these countries have shown preference for imported goods (Agbonifoh & Elimimian, 1999).

Moreover, evidence in developed countries suggests that CET that is consumer ethnocentric tendency is particularly strong among them as they are in a way more "alert economies" and know how to protect themselves from other nations. These economies feel that they are threatened by foreign competitors taking away their employment and destroying their culture (Vida & Reardon, 2008).

Antecedents of Consumer Ethnocentrism

By antecedents we mean the factors such as feelings of patriotism, low degree of openness towards various cultures, conservatism, animosity towards other country, collectivism/individualism, income and education level of consumers and age which directly influence the purchase behavior of customers. These factors can be easily divided into demographic factors, product related factors and socio-psychological factors, and might be positively or negatively correlated to ethnocentric feelings among buyers. Figure 1.1 enumerates the antecedents of Consumer ethnocentrism:

Socio-Psychological Factors

Patriotism and Conservatism

Patriotism can be defined as "strong feelings of attachment and loyalty to one's own country, but without any corresponding hostility towards other nations" (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004). It seems that consumers in India find a certain kind of ethnic pride in using products made from khadi maybe because they feel khadi is related to their own culture and therefore the feeling of patriotism emerges while making its purchases. It is thus evident that brands like Fabindia and Patanjali have flourished in the Indian markets and their success may be rightly attributed to a great extent to ethnocentric attitudes of consumers towards these domestic brands which may be symbolic of our Indian culture. In other words, patriotism may be seen as positive indicator of consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Also, that a conserve person would always like to cherish the traditions and those bigoted social and cultural institutions that have survived the test of time and are less welcoming to changes.

Cultural Openness

Cultural openness is defined as willingness of people belonging to a particular culture to interact with people from other culture and experience their customs and values (Shankarmahesh, 2006). With increased exposure, consumers are getting influenced by real time information available on different media like TV, internet, smartphones, etc. Because of the changing dynamics of the environment, the erstwhile stable indicators of consumer behaviour i.e. beliefs, values and customs (constituents of culture) are also undergoing change. Culture is becoming increasingly de-territorialized and penetrated by elements from other cultures, resulting in cultural contamination, cultural pluralism and hybridization (Criag & Douglas, 2006). Various studies have found a negative relationship persists between cultural openness and CET (Shimp and Sharma, 1987 & Howard, 1989). These studies have quoted that "travel opportunities can broaden one's mind" (Berkowitz, 1962).

Collectivism

Collectivistic persons are likely to show ethnocentric tendencies since their actions carry a relative dimension. They consider what effect they will have on a particular social group. Hofstede (1976, 1980) divided cultures in terms of collectivism and individualism. He has defined a "Country Individualism Index" (IDV) and calculated the index scores for forty countries. The people in a country with high IDV score tend to be more individualistic and the people in a country with low IDV score tend to be more collectivistic.

Nicholson, Lee, Hemmasi, and Widdison (1993) have found in their research that people from collectivistic cultures tend to be more ethnocentric than people from individualistic cultures. Thus, the people in collectivist cultures are likely to be strongly ethnocentric as they tend to obey the norms of the in-group or the society. They think about the effect of their behaviour on society and feel responsible for their actions or behaviour. Whereas self-absorbed, self-centered or self-indulgent are the words used to describe an individualistic person as he/she acts for his own benefit and thus will show lesser degrees of ethnocentrism.

If we consider developed economies like USA, Japan and Canada, products from more developed countries are generally perceived to be more positively by consumers as values of collectivism, cooperation and collaboration are prominently visible in their population as compare to less developed countries like India.

Animosity towards other Countries

Talking about animosity towards other countries, animosity or feeling of hatred or tensions among nations may hinder the sale of foreign products in the country. Thus, animosity tends to decrease consumer's extent of inclination towards foreign products of nations for which animosity is directed giving rise to ethnocentric tendencies. As mentioned above, the case of India proves to be a good example. During the colonial rule, the nationalist leaders provoked people to abandon foreign clothing imported from Britain as a sign of their hatred towards them and promoted the use of Khadi.

The following figure enumerates the factors triggering ethnocentric tendencies in Consumers:

Demographic Factors

Education

Education exposes people to various aspects of living and changes the way one views the world, they become more open and acceptable to other cultures, religions, races, various kinds of attitudes and perspectives, thus paving way to positive outlook for foreign commodities. A recurring theme of findings of past studies concluded that educated people are less conservative and less ethnic in their prejudice against artefacts and thus education makes them less averse to imports due increased visibility of the outer world (Klein, Ettenson, & Krishnan, 1999).

Gender

As far as gender is concerned, an overwhelming body of evidence supports the axiom that women score higher on CET scale than men (Bruning, 1997 & Sharma *et al.,* 1995). The logic underlying this assumption
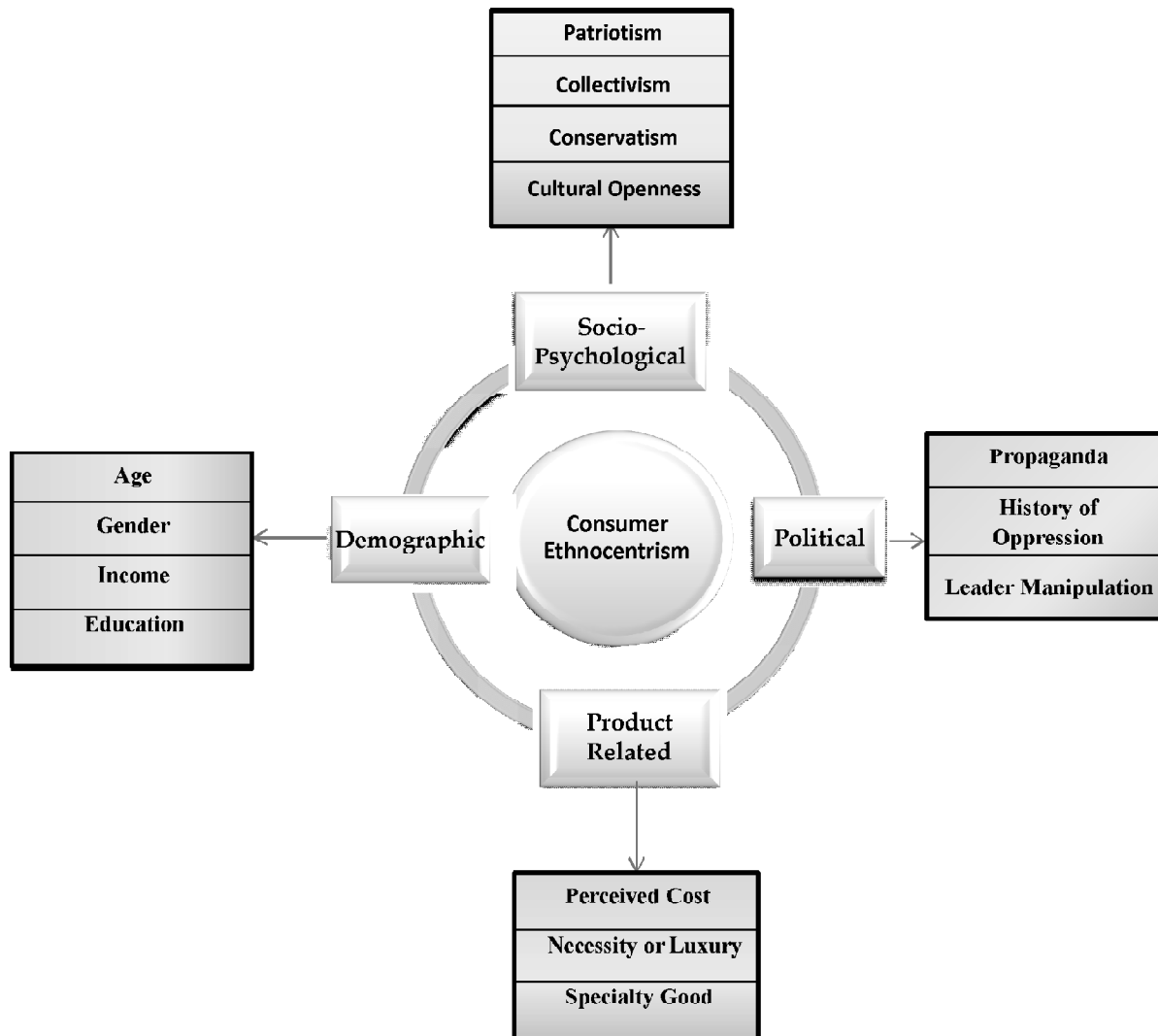
Figure 1.1: Antecedents of Consumer Ethnocentrism

is that women are more considerate, conservative, and conformist and play a collectivist role in life as compared to the opposite sex (Eagly, 1978 & Han, 1988).

Income

It is evident that buyers with higher income are open to imported luxuries, frequent foreign travel, more social interaction; thus making them prone to other cultures as provided by Sharma *et al*. In other words, higher education and income levels lead to decreased ethnocentric tendencies. Though studies conducted by Han (1988) reveal no significant relationship between income and CET among consumers.

Age

Lastly, age as a factor is a positive indicator of ethnocentric tendency as suggested by various studies. The elderly tend to be more conservative and patriotic as compared to the young who are more open to

experimenting with new things and are associated with low feelings of national pride. The younger generations are easily influenced by their environment which makes them an easy target for global marketers to sell their products in the country.

Education, age, gender and income levels among the natives of a country have direct implications on their purchase drives.

Product related Attributes

Perceived Cost of the Product

The perceived cost of the product is another factor that affects ethnocentric attitudes of the consumer during the purchase process. If he feels very strongly for the country and wants to buy domestic but if he perceives the cost to be high, then he/ she may suffer a drastic drop down in his CET score towards the product and may end up not buying it.

Necessity or Luxury Good:

When we talk about attributes that are product related- the product may be a necessity or a normal good. These attributes will influence the ethnocentric tendencies operating in a purchase situation (Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995). Thus, Sharma says that if a product is found to be a necessity product such as salt or milk, the less inclined ethnocentric tendencies the consumer will have towards the product.

Specialty Product

The product may be a specialty of one country or region that derives the consumer off ethnocentrism. For example, while buying shawls or stoles one may prefer to buy Pashmina which is a specialty in that category and therefore one may not think of going for domestic.

Political Factors

History of Oppression

Political histories of different countries determine the level of CET in a society. Huddleston, Good, & Stoel in their study explained higher CET scores in Poland compared to Russia by arguing that consumers who are native to countries that have a long history of oppression (such as Poland) tend to be more ethnocentric than those belonging to countries that were conquerors (such as Russia). The same is true in the case of India as first instance of "Ethnocentrism" was experienced when the nation was under the colonial rule of the British and went onto abandoning their goods and buying "Indian". However, it can be argued that consumers of conquering nations will tend to view their own country products as more superior and preferable compared to those of conquered nations which is the "out-group".

Propaganda

Rosenblatt, 1964 suggested political propaganda as one of the important antecedents of ethnocentrism. He argued that leaders can trigger or influence group ethnocentrism by raising the bogey of threat by out-

groups. To estimate the extent of such a propaganda on CET in a society is an empirical question. It might be of much interest to look at the role of "political freedom" or "democracy" as a complementing force in the relationship between political propaganda and CET. In other words, the key issue is whether consumers belonging to democratic countries are less likely to be driven by political propaganda than those living in authoritarian environments.

In summary, the extent and direction of influence of both political propaganda and political history are both empirical questions that require further investigation.

Leader Manipulation

It has been seen that a particular behaviour of a leader may mainly instigate a group towards another group. Thus, a person may act as a leader in a purchase decision affecting the ethnocentric attitude of another one making the actual purchase and this act may be against his natural instinct.

Relevance

India being a large transnational economy since 1991 has revolutionized itself in terms of literacy levels, purchase behaviour, income levels, industrial growth, keeping in view the vicious competition the domestic marketers are exposed to foreign products. With population of approximately 1.2 billion, annual growth rate of GDP averaging to 6.08% and literacy rates souring to 74.04% (Census Of India , 2011), the country presents a lucrative market and growth opportunity for multinational organizations. These multinationals have shot hard to tap the hidden potential in the new markets thinking that their offerings will easily be welcomed. According to a study by Mckinsey Global Institute (MGI), a country like India is likely to emerge as the fifth largest consumer market in the world by 2025 and the second largest "emerging consumer hub" (Pal, 2000). There has been a gradual surge in the average spending of a consumer and its economic reforms have led to this increase in consumption expenditures (Paswan & Sharma, 2004).

After the operation of the economic policy of 1991, the Indian markets have gone a 360 degree transformation where it has seen evident entries of both big and small foreign brands and at the same time a boom in the number of domestic brands on the retail shelves. Factors such as increased exposure to media, rising levels of consumer awareness and consequent rise in the quality of products offered by domestic firms and leadership campaigns run by leaders like Narendra Modi and others to buy Indian have paved way for ethnocentric beliefs in buyers yet again posing threat to the multinationals and alien firms entering the country.

But the fact remains that consumers in the country are free to choose the products or service they like or any brand they prefer. Keeping in view the dynamic consumption pattern followed by the youth of the country it is worth researching the belief and attitude of the population, particularly the millennial population in depth towards globalization vs localization quandary considering that such a category of our population constitutes almost 65% of the total as quoted by an Economic Survey. This segment has a bawling for foreign brands, Batra *et al,'s* (2000) paper provides an account of literature that furnishes possible reasons for the average Indian youth's fondness towards foreign products and why it ultimately calls for an empirical research altogether. The reason for the same could be escalated to the following factors: search for status symbols in the hierarchy-conscious Indian society, changing expectations, low self-esteem vis-a-vis the

(erstwhile) foreign rulers, rising income, increasing opportunities of contact with the West, privatization and deregulation of the emerging markets and cultural receptiveness to symbolism of brands (Townsend, Cavusgil, S, & Yeniyurt, 2004).

Therefore, for a developing country like India where market provides enormous potential to domestic as well as foreign brands for growth, it becomes important to study the attitudes and beliefs of consumers (the millennials) towards Indian as well as alien products and services and this paper enumerates enough reasons to study their perspective on ethnocentrism.

History of Consumer Ethnocentrism in India

Prior to Indian independence in 1947, the British era is classified as one with modern governing practices in the name of "Enlightenment Rationalism" which led people to battle with their ethnic conflicts (Chakrabarty, 1995). Indians were forced to buy foreign as against their own country originating products. At that point of time, a gradual wave of realization hit the countrymen that the imports are actually harming their moral and economic well-being. This wave though was termed as "nationalism" and not "ethnocentrism" all over the country. The key difference between the two is that "ethnocentrism" is a by-product of "nationalism" (Heath & Sen, 2007) and that ethnocentrism does not require an external or internal stimuli, it is a voluntarily generated feeling. It is important to mention that Mahatma Gandhi was the source for promoting such ideas among the natives. That was the first time that feelings of ethnicity emerged among them and compelled them to boycott these imports and adopt khadi and cotton made clothes specifically made in India. People found a certain kind of pride in buying their own "desi" goods.

Post-independence during the period of 1950's-80's, the country barred imports of various foreign products into the boundaries to protect the interest of its own industries and small producers. Only Indian products prevailed in the markets for a long time and a large part of it was financed out of government subsidies in order to promote them and therefore, people could no longer realize the value of their own goods, and thus the feeling of ethnocentrism gradually died. It was only in 1991 that when the new economic reforms were passed that allowed liberal rules for imports and greater role of foreign brands in the Indian markets, people were subsequently exposed to the foreign lifestyle by way of their products. Where the choice of every Indian was pretty much Indian Airlines if one had to fly within India. In 1991 East West Airlines was launched with nicely dressed hostesses. Then in 1992, there was Jet airlines. Same ways if one had to bank he/she needed to wait to get any transaction done that day meaning that he would be at the mercy of *Sarkar*. Then in 1994 came ICICI, HDFC, UTI (Axis). We had more choice and were rather showered by the power of choice. A year later India became a member of the World Trade Organization (WTO) and consequently the Indian government was committed to systematically reduce barriers to trade. By this time nobody could imagine these would ultimately dig big holes and pits in the economy and somewhere the economy would suffer both economically and morally.

People started looking for better substitutes ignoring the country of origin dimension for the satisfaction of their needs. But it must not be denied that by opening up Indian markets to global companies through the reform programme, made the need to be competitive – to defend one's own market position- a compulsion and offer a price which appeals to the Indian audience. "Ethnocentrism" was still far from the line of thought and realization in this period among Indians in spite of various scholars working on concepts

of Consumer ethnocentrism and trying to popularize it outside the country. Over time as consumers became rational and educated enough to understand and comprehend the effects of various policies in the country subsumed with the advent of Indian entrepreneurs, the value of "Indian" was starting to be realized. Later on leaders like Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Dr. Manmohan Singh and the present PM Mr. Narendra Modi etc. slowly worked upon the image of Indian goods in the minds of Indians by focusing on improving the native handicrafts industry, setting up SEZs and attempting to lurk manufacturers to set up factories there, carrying on focused growth reforms for IT and Telecom sector of the country, etc. Mr. Narendra Modi's "Make in India" campaign is an initiative launched with the goal of making India a global manufacturing hub, by encouraging both multinationals and domestic companies to manufacture their products in India. This initiative can encourage entrepreneurs to start up their own business or shake hands with foreign firms to produce jointly for the country and be a part of the global skill pool as India lags behind in "Home-grown brands" like German cars, French wines or Swiss chocolates.

These steps have proved to be a milestone to set up a benchmark for India both in the minds of Indians and Foreign nationals and this way they have been successful in reviving the roots of ethnocentrism again. Though many may not be aware of this term yet practice it in their daily lives today.

Millennials in the Country

Millennials as defined in the above section are "the people who are born between 1980-2000". In Indian context their numbers range between 700 million and 701 million of the 1.2 billion population estimated during the Census of 2011 and currently they form almost 65% of the total population of the country. This number is more than 503 million residents of the European Union. Contrary to the US economy, the millennials there form only a quarter of their populations i.e. 25%. But when compared, the two stand on the same stature in terms of attitudes, zeal to work, adaptable and to changes, both are more upbeat than their elders about their futures and more rational than before when asked to make choices for themselves or the society in general. The per capita income in U.S dollars of the Indian millennial (a person reaching young adulthood around the year 2000), was $ 2,400 while those above 45 years earned about $ 2,150 in 2015 as reported by the Economic Times 2016.

Many believe that millennials will lead the changes in an economy and lead it to prosperity. This fact is well reflected by the "Millennial Survey" carried out by Deloitte in 2015 where in eighty per cent of the millennial aspire to reach a higher managerial position within their place of work. Thus, certainly it is not there size that captivates the marketers. The truth is that millennials are classified with special attributes and dynamic attitudes which are non-static just like the ever changing marketing environment. They are seen embracing multiple modes of self-expression. Three-quarters of these millennials have created a profile on a social networking site. One-in-four have posted a video of themselves online. Most millennials have placed privacy restrictions on their social media profiles. They are less skeptical than their elders; they believe government should put more sincere efforts to solve people's problems. And lastly, **they aren't influenced at all by advertising.** Only 1% of millennials on an average believe that their purchases are driven by advertisements. Millennials believe that advertising is all spin and not authentic. Thus, it is therefore well comprehended fact as to why they are the focal point of various marketing firms to be dealt as a separate niche altogether. All these characteristics act as ceiling on the marketing strategies of the firms barring them from easily reaching out to them.

These attributes do not point out that they are less ethnocentric or patriotic towards their country but it's just that the form that ethnocentrism takes among these millennials looks a bit different from one that persisted in previous generations. They may look less patriotic than the rest of the generations at first glance, but coming of age in the era of globalization and being a more racially diverse generation may simply mean that traditional symbols of democracy hold less meaning for this cohort, they may only be driven by the ideals of the country and not by symbols.

The recent report released by the Goldman Sachs of 87 pages based on the Indian consumers in detail, points that there are eight clusters in the population which actually drive 75% of the total consumption in the economy. But it is the urban educated mass, including the graduate students who hold basic corporate, SME and government jobs, in general the blue collar job holders who will push and derive the consumption in the next 5-10 years in the country (Sachs, 2017). It is therefore hard for both domestic and foreign firms to ignore these trends and draft out strategies to target this section of the population. Firms need to understand the attitudes and beliefs that the so called "Gen Y" carries towards products made in their own country (the country of origin products) and those that are imported from abroad. And with the available literature this area has gone unsearched when it comes to researching and identifying their ethnocentric tendencies, areas that have been studied relate to segregating population variables on the basis of age group and then sampling from groups of 18-25, college students ranging from 19-22, 25-35, etc. yet millennial as an independent variable has gone unexplored in the country till now even though we know that it forms the most important part of the potential consumer groups from the point of view of global producers and domestic producers. Empirical researches conducted in this field by: Singh and Kewlani on young management graduates in 2013 revealed that such class of consumers are moderately ethnocentric (Singh & Kewlani, 2013); Sanjay and Ritika from the University of Delhi have dealt with the same research area and found that for all the respondents (majority of whom fell in the age group of 25-44 years), age is the only demographic variable which is significantly and positively correlating with consumer ethnocentrism. Thus, older people are sought to be more ethnocentric in making their purchases as compared to the younger ones. This is in line with previous researches which too reveal relatively a higher level of consumer ethnocentrism present among older people (Schooler, 1971 and Klein, Ettenson, & Krishnan, 1999).

But the objective of all of these researches has been either to validate age as a factor influencing or driving consumer ethnocentric feelings among people and not considering the millennials as a unique set from the rest of the population and then carrying out a comprehensive research specifically designed for addressing and exploring the "millennial dimension" of the country with regard to their ethnocentric behaviour in the market place towards varying products and brands. Thus, this paper has furnished enough data about millennials to carry out further research in this area, and calls for an empirical research in this area to validate the above points.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, we have sought to define the concept of consumer ethnocentrism and tried to study its relevance in Indian context. This concept in its pristine form has not been explored in dearth with regard to Indian consumers. Therefore, a thorough review of the related literature, antecedents and consequences of CET was provided along with an integrative framework along with tracing its roots in Indian history. It

has been realised that such tendencies were strongly present earlier during the British raj in the country however it lost its momentum in the late 50s to 80s as the country became a closed economy for the purpose of protecting and promoting its domestic industries. It again appeared as a strong force in the 1990s when India opened its trade doors to other countries and in 2000s when political leaders started promoting Indian industries when they realized that they lagged behind in the race when it came to taking pride in own country products.

During the discussion of the antecedents, the study recorded all the factors that trigger the phenomena of consumer ethnocentrism and we have segregated the factors into socio-economic, demographic, product related and political but it is only further research that can validate which all factors are applicable to the consumers of a developing nation like India. Shimp and Sharma (1987) and Olsen *et al* (1993) point out that domestic marketing teams have an edge over others because of the prevalent ethnocentric tendencies in consumers and therefore can tap them by promoting the "native" image so that international competitors can be held at bay.

In contrast, it will be prudent for the international marketers and retail stores who intend to sell foreign products in India to initially focus upon those set of consumers who are less ethnocentric.

Moreover, the important aspect of the paper highlights the role of millennials in driving the consumption of an economy like India, especially when they constitute almost two-third of the total population. Thus, it is interesting to study the nature of their purchase behaviour towards own country products and towards the imports and what implications it will carry for domestic and foreign firms with respect to their selling strategies and gimmick. It henceforth calls for further research into this area.

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