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Cultural Similarity, Consumer Ethnocentrism and Product Necessity in Evaluation of Malaysian Products: Indonesian Consumer Perspective

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the role of cultural similarity as moderation between consumer ethnocentrism (CE), lack of availability of domestic products, and foreign products necessity in influence consumers' attitudes towards foreign products. A survey conducted on 446 respondents of Indonesian consumers. Findings of this study showed that consumer ethnocentrism has a strong negative effect on consumers' attitudes towards foreign products. This study also has proved the moderating role of cultural similarity in evaluating foreign products. However this study failed to prove the role of cultural similarity in weakening the influence of CE on attitude towards foreign products.

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Keywords: availability of domestic products; cultural similarity; consumer ethnocentrism; foreign products; product necessity

1. Introduction

The geographical proximity between Indonesia and Malaysia, leads to many imported food and soft drink products from Malaysia to Indonesia. Imports of foods and beverages during the first quarter of 2012 reached 1.2 billion US dollars and are dominated by Malaysian products (Antara, 2012). Many Malaysian products entered Indonesia through

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the border between West Kalimantan-Indonesia and Sarawak-Malaysia. Beside the geographical factor, the cultural similarity is another factor that also plays a role in consumers' attitude towards the acceptance of Malaysian products. "The cultural similarity between countries is one of the factors considered by consumers ethnocentric in evaluating foreign products," (Sharma et al., 1995; Watson and Wright, 2000; Hsu and Nien, 2008; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004).

Recently, the role of cultural similarity is studied in international marketing, (Watson and Wright, 2000; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004; Ma, et al., 2012), but it is still limited. Shimp and Sharma (1987), who have done ethnocentrism approach in a consumer's perspective, describe ethnocentrism as a belief that was developed in the process of purchasing foreign products. The main impact of the consumer ethnocentrism (CE) is directing consumers to the purchase domestic products as counter to the purchase of foreign products (Shankarmahesh, 2006). Some studies have found the effects of CE on attitudes and evaluation of foreign products, (Sharma et al., 1995; Javalgi et al., 2005; Russell and Russell, 2006; Kottasz and Bennett, 2005).

Several studies have shown that consumers tend to like products originating from countries that have similar cultures compared to countries whose cultures differ from the home country of consumers. (Ma et al., 2012; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004). Cultural similarities between certain countries of origin (COO) with consumer home country might weaken the influence of CE on consumers' evaluations towards foreign products, (Sharma et al., 1995; Balabanis and Diamantopoulos, 2004; Watson and Wright, 2000). In addition, lack of availability of domestic product (Nisjeen and Doglass, 2004, Watson and Wright, 2000) and foreign product necessity (Sharma et al., 1995; Huddleston, 2000; Javalgi et al. 2003) are other factors that consumers consider in evaluating foreign products.

The limitation of previous ethnocentrism studies (e.g. Sharma et al., 1995; Javalgi et al., 2003; Hsu and Nien, 2008) did not consider the factor of cultural similarities between countries as moderation between CE, lack of availability of domestic products and product necessity in attitudes towards foreign products. Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) and Ma et al. (2012) tried to examine the role of cultural similarity in weakening the effect of CE on consumer evaluation towards foreign products, but these studies failed to prove it. Therefore, it requires further testing.

Theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985) states that attitude is shaped by two things which are behavioral beliefs and outcome evaluation. "Attitude as a favorable or unfavourable evaluation of the behavior". (Saffu et al., 2010). Therefore, based on the theory of planned behavior, this study hypothesize that CE, Lack of availability of domestic product and product necessity factors can influence consumer attitudes towards foreign products. This study reexamine theories consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp and Sharma, 1987; Sharmat et al., 1995) and expands research Ma et al., (2012) in the context of cross-border trade in developing countries, where the availability of domestic products is still limited and the needs of consumers for foreign products. This study aimed to examine the role of cultural similarity as moderation in evaluating of foreign products. In addition to the CE, this study considers lack of availability of domestic product and foreign products necessity as antecedents of consumer attitudes towards foreign products.

2. Literature Review

2.1. CE and Attitude towards Foreign Product

Attitude is a consumer evaluation which shows its influence on the final action, such as purchase (Saffu et al., 2010). Shankarmahesh (2006), stated that CE showed a general tendency of buyers to avoid all imported products regardless of the price or the quality considerations, for reasons of nationalism. The results of recent studies generally show that there is a relationship between ethnocentrism and attitudes towards foreign products (Sharma et al., 1995 and Javalgi et al., 2005). Other studies claim that the more ethnocentric consumers have the greater attitude of rejection towards foreign products (Kaynak and Kara, 2002; Sharma et al., 1995; Watson and Wright, 2000). Sharma et al. (1995) states that ethnocentric tendencies represent an antecedent to attitudes towards foreign products.

H1 : Consumer ethnocentrism (CE) negatively influences attitudes towards foreign products

2.2. Lack of Availability of Domestic Product and Attitude towards Foreign Product

Watson and Wright (2000), stated that many studies of COO are more focused on the examination of the influence of CE in a condition which domestic companies are able to produce products that consumers need in a country. A

country may have limited alternative of domestic products in certain product category. Under circumstances where required products by consumers are not capable of being produced by domestic companies, then ethnocentric consumers have no choice but to buy imported goods. Thus, there is a tendency that consumers will have a positive attitude and accept foreign products. In countries such as New Zealand, Watson and Wright (2000) found that consumer loyalty to domestic goods did not include all categories of products, because the domestic industry was not able to produce all types of products. In Netherlands, Nijssen and Douglas (2004) also found that lack of availability of domestic alternatives have positive influence to evaluation of foreign products.

Therefore, we state that consumer attitude towards foreign products could be affected by the lack of availability of domestic products.

H2: Lack of availability of domestic products has a positive influence on attitudes towards foreign products.

2.3. Product Necessity and Attitude towards Foreign Product

Consumers will perceive the products differently whether those products are required either for personal usage or for the domestic economy (Sharma et al., 1995). Some results indicate that the foreign products necessity can moderate CE and attitudes towards foreign products (Sharma et al., 1995; Huddleston et al., 2000; Ruyter et al., 1998; and Javalgi et al., 2003, Kottasz and Bennet, 2005). Necessity is the main reason for consumers to make a purchase. Consumers tend to have a better acceptance of foreign products that they need. Huddleston et al., (2000) found that the perceived quality of a product is differentiated based on the need of the product. Therefore, consumers will positively evaluate foreign products that they need.

H3: The foreign products necessity has a positive influence on attitudes towards foreign products.

2.4. Product Necessity and Attitude towards Foreign Product

Culture has a very important effect on the consumer's decision making because culture affects attitudes, norms, and other cognitive processes (Putit and Arnott, 2007). According to the social identity theory, consumers in one nation are likely to share the values and pride that the home country stands for and they look for ways to differentiate their national social identities to others, (Ma et al., 2012). Sharma et al. (1995) states that "ethnocentric consumers might differentiate countries based on their similarity to home country as either in-group or out-group". Therefore, when consumers evaluate foreign products from the same cultural value system, consumers will project their national identity to people who are similar to them (Ma et al., 2012). The cultural similarities of the products country of origin with home country also have the potential to affect CE. Watson and Wright (2000) and Hsu and Nien (2008) state that the cultural similarity between countries is one factor that can influence the ethnocentric tendency effect on consumers attitudes towards foreign products.

Study of Lanzit and Loeb (1996) in Canada and the United States, also the study of Watson and Wright (2000) in New Zealand both found that more ethnocentric consumers have better attitudes towards foreign products from countries that have a cultural similarity with the home country of consumers. Ma et al. (2012) study result found that the cultural similarities between the home country consumer and COO foreign products have a positive impact on consumers' evaluations and willingness to buy foreign products and weaken the negative effect of CE towards their willingness to purchase foreign products. Therefore, the perceived cultural similarity in consumer can either strengthen or weaken evaluation of foreign products.

H4: COO Cultural similarities with Home Country Consumers have a moderating role in evaluating foreign products

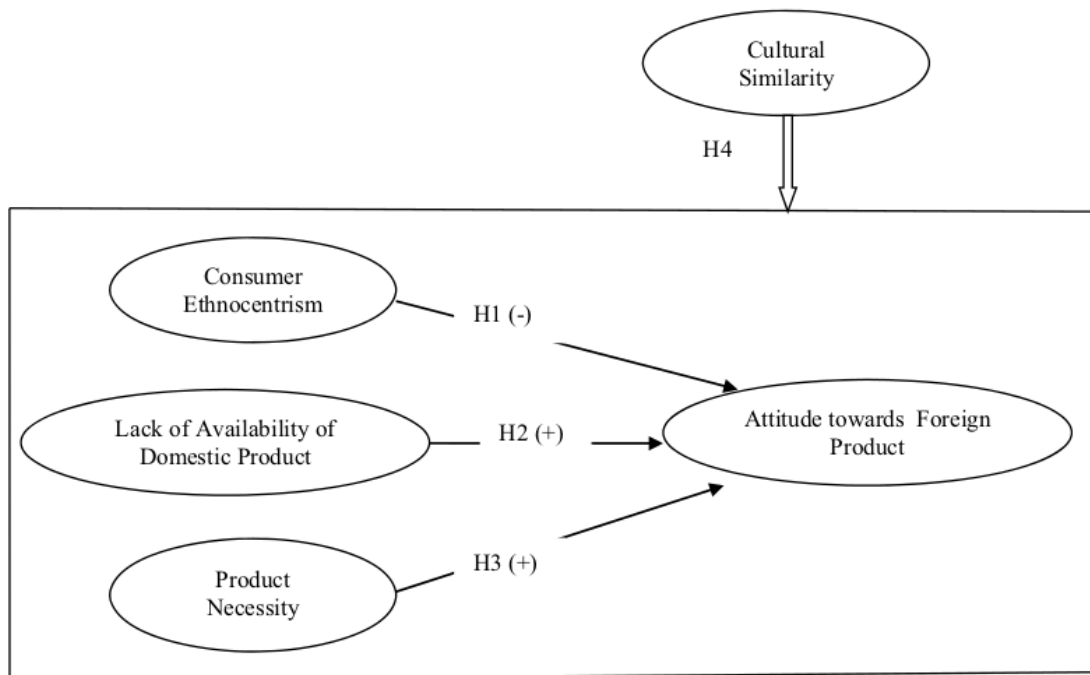


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework.

3. Methods

A survey was conducted on 446 respondents in West Kalimantan, Indonesia. Malaysia became the largest exporter of food and beverage products categories in Indonesia (Antara, 2012). Malaysian products enter Indonesia through West Kalimantan border. The entrances through the border are in Jagoi Babang-Bengkayang and Entikong-Sanggau district. Therefore, the province of West Kalimantan is an appropriate setting in this study. Respondents were distinguished into two groups. The first group that consists of 259 respondents stated that Indonesia has cultural similarities with Malaysia and the second group that consists of 187 respondents stated Indonesia does not have cultural similarities with Malaysia.

A convenience sampling method was used in data collection. The sample of this research is comprised of 48.2% male and 51.8% female. The majority of the respondents have a fairly good education, 52.2% of them completed high school and 43.9% of them have university degree. Most of respondents (46.6%) aged between 31-40 years.

The multi-group structural equation modeling (SEM) model was used in data analysis. The multi-group SEM can be used in the study with a moderating variable, (Jimenez and Martin; 2009). Cultural similarities variable in this research is treated as a moderator variable. Analysis in this study uses two stages, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and Structural Model testing. CFA was conducted to evaluate the fit indicators of each construct. A analysis of the structural model was applied to test the model fit and hypothesis testing. Each construct was measured with multiple items. Measurement of items were rated in Likert scale with a scale range of 1-5 from strongly agree to strongly disagree. With the exception of cultural similarities which were treated as a multi-group moderation. Consumer group who perceived that Indonesia have cultural similarities with Malaysia was coded 1. In contrast, consumer group who perceive Indonesia does not have culture similarities with Malaysia was coded 0. Reliability

construct can be measured using Cronbach Alpha and construct reliability. Generally, the reliability values denoting around 0.80 is considered very good, (Kline, 2011). Measurement of each construct can be seen in Table 1 as follow.

Table 1. Measurement of Constructs.

| Items of Construct | Source |
|---|---|
| Consumer Ethnocentrism | |
| 1) The products made in Indonesia are the first, last and leading | Shimp and Sharma (1987); Klein <i>et al.</i> (1998) |
| 2) Purchasing foreign products is not Indonesian | Shimp and Sharma (1987); Klein <i>et al.</i> (1998) |
| 3) It is not the right thing to purchase foreign products as it can lead to Indonesian to experience unemployment | Shimp and Sharma (1987); Klein <i>et al.</i> (1998) |
| 4) We should purchase product that is produced in Indonesia instead letting other countries get rich by oppressing us | Shimp and Sharma (1987); Klein <i>et al.</i> (1998) |
| 5) We should purchase from foreign countries only on products that we do not attain from our country | Shimp and Sharma (1987); Klein <i>et al.</i> (1998) |
| 6) Indonesian consumers who buy foreign-made products are responsible for the placement of a countryman (Indonesia) out of the job | Shimp and Sharma (1987); Klein <i>et al.</i> (1998) |
| Lack of Availability of domestic product | |
| 1) Lack of availability of domestic (Indonesia) food/soft drink products which is decent with appropriate price criteria | Nissjen and Douglass, 2004 |
| 2) Lack of alternatives of domestic (Indonesia) food/soft drink products which can compete with food/soft drinks products from Malaysia | Nissjen and Douglass, 2004 |
| Product Necessity | |
| 1) I feel the necessity towards Malaysian food/soft drink products is basic | Sharma et al.(1995) |
| 2) I feel the necessity towards Malaysian food/soft drink products is something substantial | Sharma et al.(1995) |
| Attitude of Foreign Product | |
| 1) I have positive attitudes towards Malaysian food/soft drink products | Reid & Levy (2008) |
| 2) Malaysian food/soft drink products is appealing to me | Lee (2000) |
| 3) I dislike Malaysian food/soft drink products *) | Lee (2000) |
| 4) I think Malaysian food/soft drink products are bad *) | Lee (2000) |

*) negative item

4. Result

The data analysis was conducted in two phases. The first is the internal consistency of the construct in the test by CFA and Cronbach's α . The test results indicate that by using standardized loading estimate on all of the indicators that measure the construct is above 0.4. This shows that the constructs in this study had good convergent validity. Value Construct Reliability and Cronbach's α for all constructs were above 0.8 (Table2). This indicates that the level of acceptance of internal consistency. Thus it can be said that the validity and construct reliability in this study is acceptable levels.

Table 2. Reliability Testing

| Construct | Items | Construct Reliability | Cronbach's α |
|--|-------|-----------------------|---------------------|
| Consumer Ethnocentrism | 6 | 0.813 | 0.810 |
| Lack of Availability of Domestic Product | 3 | 0.889 | 0.887 |
| Product Necessity | 2 | 0.855 | 0.855 |
| Attitude towards Foreign Product | 4 | 0.806 | 0.811 |

In the second phase, testing the structural model with using SEM-Multi Group analysis. It is done to test the Goodness-of-fit index and research hypothesis testing. The model fit test of original model resulted $X^2 = 472.082$, Prob 0.000, TLI = 0.872, CFI = 0.896, IFI = 0.890, PNFI = 0.687 and RMSEA = 0.063. These results indicate that the values were still below the established standards. Therefore, modification of the model by connecting covariance between error of the indicators as it is suggested from the results of modification indices. Modifications were conducted by connecting covariance between e-13 (item of attitude towards foreign product-1) with e-14 (item of attitude towards foreign product-2). The test results of model fit after the modification (Table 3) shows that the values already are within the specified limits.

Table 3. Multi-group Analysis (Moderating Role of Cultural Similarity)

| Model | Std Estimate (β) | S.E | t-value | Sig | Hypothesis |
|--|----------------------------|-------|---------------|-------|---------------|
| Group 1 = Cultural Similarity | | | | | |
| CE → Attitude of Foreign Product | -0.534 | 0.072 | -5.124 | *** | H1a: Accepted |
| Lack of Availability of Domestic Product → Attitude of Foreign Product | 0.178 | 0.034 | 2.495 | 0.013 | H2a: Accepted |
| Product Necessity → Attitude of Foreign Product | 0.194 | 0.044 | 2.806 | 0.005 | H3a: Accepted |
| Group 2 = Cultural Dissimilarity | | | | | |
| CE → Attitude of Foreign Product | -0.447 | 0.101 | -3.858 | *** | H1b: Accepted |
| Lack of Availability of Domestic Product → Attitude of Foreign Product | 0.101 | 0.057 | 1.296 | 0.195 | H2b: Rejected |
| Product Necessity → Attitude of Foreign Product | 0.107 | 0.047 | 1.463 | 0.144 | H3b: Rejected |
| Goodness-of-fit index (after modification) | | | | | |
| | $X^2 = 368,304$, DF = 168 | | TLI = 0,914 | | PNFI = 0,706 |
| | Prob = 0,000 | | CFI = 0,931 | | |
| | CMIN/DF = 2,192 | | IFI = 0,932 | | |
| | | | RMSEA = 0,052 | | |

Note: X^2 : Chi-square statistic, RMSEA: Root-Mean-Square-Error of Approximation, CFI: Comparative Fit Index, IFI: Incremental Fit Index, TLI: Tucker Lewis Index PNFI: Parsimonious Normal Fit Index (PNFI), $P < 0.05$

Results showed that consumer ethnocentrism has a strong negative effect on both the consumer groups who perceive products COO have cultural similarity and the consumers who perceive no cultural similarity with products COO. CE negative influence on attitudes towards foreign products in the consumer group that believe it has cultural similarities with Malaysia (-0.534) is stronger than the group of consumers who feel they have no cultural similarities with Malaysia (-0.447). Products necessity effect was significant on attitudes toward foreign food products from Malaysia in Indonesian consumer group who feel culturally similar to Malaysia. However, these effects were not significant on the group of consumers who feel Indonesia does not have the same culture with Malaysia and for the lack of domestic products availability on the attitude towards Malaysian products as well. Thus it can be said that the

hypothesis 4 (H4) which states that cultural similarity serves as a moderator in the evaluation of foreign products can be proved in this study.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study has proved that CE has strong negative effect on attitudes towards foreign products. The higher the love of consumers for domestic products, the higher the rejection of foreign products is. This study supports the findings of Sharma et al. (1995), Ruyter et al. (1998), Javalgy et al. (2005) and Kottasz and Bennett (2005). This study was not able to prove the role of cultural similarities moderation in weakening the negative influence of CE on consumer attitudes towards foreign products. The results of this study are consistent with studies by Balababanis and Diamantopoulos (2004) and Ma et al., (2012) in which had found that cultural similarities were not shown playing a role in weakening the influence of CE on consumer preferences towards foreign products.

Managerial implication of this study is that foreign companies should make good planning in marketing their products in countries with high consumer ethnocentrism. In the formation of product quality image, marketers need to consider avoiding a strong relationship with the brand of the country of origin even though the country has cultural similarities with the consumer home country. It is because the role of cultural similarities is not able to reduce the negative impact of CE on consumer evaluations towards foreign products, even in the context of cross-border trade. Marketing communication about cultural similarities may be useful to build a profitable product.

Other factors that consumers consider in evaluating foreign products are the lack of availability of domestic products and foreign products necessity. This study supports the findings Nijssen and Douglas (2004). The more lack of availability of domestic product allows consumers to have a positive attitude and a better reception on foreign products. It is accordingly to the opinion that was expressed by Watson and Wright (2000) and Balabanis and Diamantopoulos (2004). Another reason that leads to the acceptance of foreign products is the need for such products. The more the necessity for a product makes consumers increasingly open to accept foreign products. This study provides evidence that cultural factors greatly influence the evaluation of consumers towards foreign products.

This study shows the positive effect of the lack of availability of domestic products and foreign products necessity on the consumer evaluation towards foreign products, in conditions which consumers are looking for the factor of cultural similarity between their country and COO of product. This study has shown that cultural similarity may weaken the effect of lack of availability of domestic products on attitudes towards foreign products as well as it is on the product necessity. When consumers perceive cultural similarities between products COO and their home country, they tend to be positive minded about the products and increase the acceptance of these products. Vice versa, in case of consumers perceive their country has cultural dissimilarities with the COO of products, they tend to be negative minded about the products and then reject the products.

Managerial implication of these findings is that in countries that have a low ethnocentrism, marketers could establish a strong brand image by linking it to the country of origin of the products that have cultural similarity with the consumers home country. Marketers can design a communications program of cultural similarities in building the brand image of their products in order to get into the country market.

Limitation in this study is the categories of products tested were food and beverages which are included on products with low involvement. Watson and Wright (2000) explain that the effect of CE on the attitude is not the same for all of product categories. Therefore, future researcher can test culture similarities as a moderation in the category of products with high involvement, such as cars and electronics. CE factors influence weakened at a time when consumers perceive their country has no cultural similarities with COO of product. In fact on that consumer group, influence of the lack of availability of domestic products is not significant on attitudes towards foreign products. Similarly, product necessity is proved to have a significant influence in a state of consumers regard there is cultural similarity factor with COO of the product. These findings provide evidence that the product necessity is an antecedent attitude towards foreign products, which in contrast to the research by Sharma et al. (1995), Ruyter et al. (1998), and Javalgy et al. (2003), which place product necessity as a moderating variable between CE and consumer attitudes towards foreign products. This research was conducted on foreign products from COO of developing countries (Malaysia) in the context of cross-border trading. The quality of Malaysian products is not much different from the

quality of Indonesian products. For future research there is an opportunity for further testing on the cultural similarities between consumers and products COO of developed countries that have better image and product quality.

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