

DEMOGRAPHIC PREDICTORS OF COUNTRY-OF-ORIGIN TENDENCIES: A LUXURY SEDAN EXAMPLE

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This study tests the predictor effects of a select set of demographic characteristics on country-of-origin preferences for large American-made luxury sedans. A sample of 646 consumers comprised of 422 civic organization members and 224 university students (i.e., both high and low involvement consumers of the product form tested) was investigated to determine the effects of seven demographic predictors on the consumer's country-of-origin preferences, including (1) marital status, (2) household income, (3) sex, (4) age, (5) education, (6) race, and (7) occupation. The results of the study indicate that age, income, race, and education are significant predictors of general and product specific country-of-origin tendencies.

INTRODUCTION

National identity can be most parsimoniously defined as the extent to which a given national culture recognizes and identifies with its "cultural focus" (Keillor, Hult, Erffmeyer, and Babakus 1996). Clark (1990) states that the culture-centered approach to national identity has the longest history, stretching back into remotest antiquity. A cultural focus is "the tendency of every culture to exhibit greater variations in the institutions of some of its aspects than others so that these focal aspects can be used to characterize [the] whole culture" (Herskovits 1948, p. 542). This means that national identity is the set of meanings that sets it apart from other cultures; "the idea that people of each nation have distinctive, enduring patterns of behavior and/or personality characteristics" (Clark 1990, p. 66). Identifying these areas would allow the marketing decision maker to be global while acting local by providing some indication as to where standardization is possible and specialization necessary.

The notion that such a set of meanings exists is not new (cf., Mead 1951), nor has its theoretical

applicability been ignored in the marketing literature (e.g., Clark 1990). Clark suggests that enduring behavior patterns and personality characteristics are fundamentally important to consumer and strategic decision making in the global marketplace. This phenomenon can impact marketing in several areas, particularly in the areas of country-of-origin tendencies (cf., Maheswaran 1994) and consumer ethnocentrism (cf., Shimp and Sharma 1987).

The objective of this study is to test the predictor effect of a select set of demographic characteristics on country-of-origin tendencies. Specifically, a sample of 646 consumers (422 civic organization members and 224 university students) is investigated to determine the effects of seven demographic predictors, including (1) marital status, (2) household income, (3) sex, (4) age, (5) education, (6) race, and (7) occupation on the consumer's country-of-origin tendencies toward luxury sedans. As such, this research sheds light on the relative importance of the demographic characteristics that are posited to predict country-of-origin tendencies.

HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

Ethnocentrism is defined as the tendency of individuals to reject that which originates from

outside their own culture while, at the same time, being willing to accept that which originates from their own culture without question (Booth 1979; Worchel and Cooper 1979). The fundamental defining characteristic of a purely ethnocentric individual is that person's tendency to categorize other people, and things associated with these people, into a group which they either identify with or "contraidentify" with (Forbes 1985). High levels of ethnocentrism will lead individuals to unquestionably embrace anyone or anything in their identifying group and to systematically reject all which falls outside of this group. Ethnocentrism has been shown to be a highly significant predictor of individuals' willingness to accept that which does not fall within the respondents' cultural orientations (Ho 1994).

While this outlook may manifest itself through identification with religious, racial, and or social class groups, one of the most common forms is identification with one's nationality, i.e., "nationalism" (Forbes 1985). Ethnicity and nationalism are the strongest motivating forces in the modern global marketplace (Pfaff 1994) and it has been predicted that nationalism may lead to the creation of as many as 150 new countries within the next 50 years (Moynihan 1994). One of the ways ethnocentric individuals can tangibly exhibit their cultural orientations and beliefs, particularly nationalism, is through consumptive behavior limited to domestic products (i.e., consumer ethnocentrism).

In this regard, demographic characteristics have been shown to be useful in the evaluation of products and product categories in a variety of domestic and international settings. For example, a couple of decades ago, Schooler (1971) and Tongberg (1972) found that older people tend to evaluate foreign products more highly than younger people. A few years later, Wang (1978) found no such effect. In the late 1980s, Brown, Light, and Gazda (1987) found that a sample of 247 university students had vastly different attitudes towards European, Japanese, and U.S. cars. Similarly, a series of studies suggest that demographics have an effect on country-of-origin tendencies (e.g.,

Barksdale 1982; Bilkey and Nes 1982; French, Barksdale, and Perreault 1982; Han and Terpstra 1988; Hooley, Shipley, and Krieger 1988; Johansson, Douglas, and Nonaka 1985; Samiee 1994). Therefore, it can be expected that demographic characteristics influence the country-of-origin tendencies toward luxury automobile sedans. To examine this proposition, we formally test the following hypothesis:

- H1:** Country-of-origin tendencies toward luxury sedans can be predicted by utilizing demographic characteristics (i.e., marital status, household income, sex, age, education, race, and occupation).

METHODOLOGY

To capture predispositions as part of an advertising copy test, respondents were asked to rate their beliefs concerning: (1) whether or not Americans should purchase only domestically-produced products versus the highest quality products regardless of country-of-origin, and (2) whether American-made luxury sedans were superior to imported makes or vice versa. Responses to the four 7-point items used for this study and the demographic questions were made before exposure to test advertisements. For purposes of our current analysis, results from the advertising study are secondary and not reported.

Sample

The demographic profile for our sample is provided in Table 1. Miller (1991) reported that in America the major purchasers of luxury automobiles come from the middle class; 65 percent of our responses (422) were drawn at the monthly meeting of fourteen separate chapters of a civic organization attracting middle-class persons as members, with the remainder (224) being obtained in class from business students attending a commuter university in the same midwest state as the civic groups. A total of 646 usable questionnaires were obtained, representing both experienced owners and novices. Fifty-five questionnaires were rejected for missing data (all

from the civic organization), resulting in an overall response rate of 92 percent. The civic groups were paid \$2.00 per response, and students added one point (100 point scale) to their final course average. Eighty-seven students preferred to list themselves according to their job rather than their student status.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Four items formed our country-of-origin dependent variable for luxury sedans (Imported luxury sedans are superior in quality to American-made luxury sedans; American-made luxury sedans are superior in quality to imported luxury sedans; I believe that Americans should buy American-made products, not imports; I believe Americans should buy the best products they can, whether these products are made in America or imported). One additional item (There are no significant differences between imported luxury sedans and American-made sedans) was removed from the original group of five to improve reliability. The resulting Country-of-Origin Inventory (COI) for luxury sedans had a coefficient alpha of .75 with factor loadings ranging between .62 and .84 (Shimp and Sharma 1987) and with item-to-total correlations above .35 (Saxe and Weitz 1982).

Fifty-six respondents (8.7 percent) claimed to "Drive an Imported Luxury Sedan," whereas 25.1 percent (162) said they "Drive an American-Made Luxury Sedan." Not surprisingly, Analysis of Variance tests indicate that the group driving imported luxury sedans responded more favorably to imports in general as well as imported luxury sedans than their counterparts reporting that they did not drive an imported luxury sedan (COI = 4.84 vs. 3.74 respectively, $F = 17.039$, Sig. of $F = < .001$). The group driving an American-made luxury sedan responded far less favorably toward imports and imported luxury sedans than the group which did not drive an American-made luxury sedan (COI = 3.18 vs. 4.19 respectively, $F = 35.658$, Sig. of $F = < .001$).

Since the purpose of this analysis is to explore the ability of demographic characteristics to predict

country-of-origin perceptions, multiple regression was run treating the COI as dependent upon the seven demographic variables measured (see Table 1). Default settings for pin and pout were used (.05 and .10 respectively), but since multicollinearity was suspected among certain of the independent variables (e.g., occupation, education, and income), the tolerance level was raised to .80 to help avoid potential problems with the regression coefficients output. Table 2 displays the variables which loaded during our multiple regression analysis.

Though not an *absolute* test for the importance of each predictor, beta coefficients are useful in determining the *relative* weights of the independent variables in the regression equation. In descending order of significance, age, income, race, and education predicted country-of-origin perceptions for luxury sedans. R^2 was low at .14, yet this tendency has long been known concerning the predictive power of socioeconomic variables. For example, Bass, Tigert, and Lonsdale (1968, p. 264) reported the "evidence is overwhelming that R^2 is low when individual household purchase rates are related to socioeconomic variables." They nonetheless empirically demonstrated that demographic segmentation was both feasible and useful for delineating group behavior directed toward specific product consumption.

Our data concur with results produced in the Bass, Tigert, and Lonsdale (1968) study. Despite the low explained variance, the demographic predictors analyzed here clearly identify useful facts concerning country-of-origin tendencies across group categories. To notate these demographic facts, we further analyzed our data using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Only the four significant variables were studied in more depth (i.e., age, income, race, and education). Mean responses could range from a low of one (very pro-domestic, anti-import) to a high of seven (extremely pro-import, anti-domestic); no group exhibited strong polar tendencies in either direction.

Age was the strongest single predictor of country-of-origin perceptions (Beta = -.3621). Table 3

Table 1: Test Sample Demographics

Description	Frequency	Percent
<u>Marital Status</u>		
Missing	0	0.0
Never Married	155	24.0
Married	446	69.0
Separated	5	0.8
Divorced	27	4.2
Widowed	13	2.0
TOTAL	646	100.0
<u>Household Income</u>		
Missing	13	2.0
Under \$19,999	107	16.6
\$20-\$29,999	85	13.2
\$30-\$39,999	83	12.8
\$40-\$49,999	83	12.8
\$50-\$59,999	88	13.6
\$60-\$69,999	66	10.2
Over \$70,000	121	18.7
TOTAL	646	100.0
<u>Sex</u>		
Missing	6	0.9
Male	473	73.2
Female	167	25.9
TOTAL	646	100.0
<u>Age</u>		
Missing	10	1.5
Under 25 Years	149	23.1
25-34 Years	72	11.1
35-44 Years	82	12.7
45-54 Years	74	11.5
55-64 Years	84	13.0
Over 64 Years	175	27.1
TOTAL	646	100.0

Table 1: Test Sample Demographics (Continued)

Description	Frequency	Percent
<u>Education</u>		
Missing	16	2.5
Less Than High School	1	0.2
Completed High School	50	7.7
Some College	308	47.7
Completed College	146	22.6
Graduate School	125	19.3
TOTAL	646	100.0
<u>Race</u>		
Missing	20	3.1
Caucasian	591	91.5
African-American	27	4.2
Other	8	1.2
TOTAL	646	100.0
<u>Occupation</u>		
Missing	9	1.4
Executive/Managerial	161	24.9
Professional	167	25.9
Technical	27	4.2
Marketing/Sales	57	8.8
Service	15	2.3
Secretarial/Clerical	16	2.5
Agriculture/Forestry/Fishing	6	0.9
Mechanical	3	0.5
Construction	3	0.5
Manufacturing/Production	7	1.1
Transportation/Material Handlng.	5	0.8
Laborer/Helper	2	0.3
Retired	30	4.6
Student	137	21.2
TOTAL	646	100.0

**Table 2: Demographic Predictors of Country-of-Origin Perceptions
(Multiple Regression)**

Demographic Variable	B	SE B	Beta	T	Sig. of T
Age	-.2521	.0272	-.3621	-9.282	.001
Income	.0733	.0246	.1152	2.974	.003
Race	.4235	.1483	.1068	2.855	.004
Education	.1176	.0510	.0893	2.308	.021
(Constant)	3.6011	.2380		15.129	.001
Multiple R	.3758				
R Square	.1413				
Adjusted R Square	.1359				
Standard Error	1.2829				

presents COI scores across age cohorts, clearly highlighting a negative correlation. The "Under 25 Years" group mean response was 4.29 versus 3.23 for the group "Over 64 Years." Younger individuals as a group are more accepting of imported luxury sedans and have more positive perceptions of imported products in general. Age also appears to impact Income, the second strongest predictor of COI scores (Beta = .1152). Although country-of-origin tendencies generally become more favorable toward imports as income increases (see Table 4), the "Under \$19,999" group reported the second highest COI mean. Crosstabulation between age and income reveals that 60 percent of the "Under 25" group have incomes less than \$30,000, and 44 percent of those "25 to 34 Years" of age live in households with less than \$30,000 annual income.

Referring to Table 5, African-Americans exhibited a much stronger preference for imported luxury sedans (COI = 4.87) than their Caucasian counterparts (COI = 3.78) measured by the entire four-item scale. Not surprisingly, the "Other" group (comprised entirely of foreign students) also indicated a stronger preference for imported products than the Caucasian group (COI = 4.75). Age may exert an influence here as well, with 63 percent of the African-American group being less

than 34 years old, and all of the "Other" group being less than 34.

Table 6 contains the results of COI responses across education levels (the weakest predictor loaded in the regression analysis). The group with no college experience exhibits somewhat of an anti-import bias relatively speaking (COI = 3.01), reporting the lowest score for any group in any demographic category in our analysis. Seventy-six percent of this segment was over 55 years of age. The education group with an COI score most favorable toward imports (3.99) was the "Some College" segment, 60 percent composed of those under 34 years old (46 percent under 25 years). The "Less Than High School" segment is of insufficient size ($n = 1$) for consideration.

Item Analysis

The final step in our study warrants an analysis at the item level. Perceptions across the four significant demographic predictors to the two items specifically concerned with imported versus domestic luxury sedan quality are detailed in Table 7, whereas perceptions concerning the two "Made in America" items are displayed in Table 8. Univariate F tests, cell sizes for each demographic category analyzed, plus means and standard deviations for each cell are included in both tables.

Table 3: Country-of-Origin Perceptions by AGE
(Analysis of Variance Main Effects)

Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig. of F
145.699	6	24.283	14.330	.001

Category Label	Mean Value	Cell Size
Missing Data	4.15	10
Under 25 Years	4.29	149
25 to 34 Years	4.35	72
35 to 44 Years	4.27	82
45 to 54 Years	3.81	74
55 to 64 Years	3.40	84
Over 65 Years	3.23	175
TOTAL SAMPLE	3.84	646

Table 4: Country-of-Origin Perceptions by INCOME
(Analysis of Variance Main Effects)

Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig. of F
49.923	7	7.132	3.860	.001

Category Label	Mean Value	Cell Size
Missing Data	3.83	13
Under \$19,999	4.11	107
\$20-\$29,999	3.86	85
\$30-\$39,999	3.46	83
\$40-\$49,999	3.48	83
\$50-\$59,999	3.60	88
\$60-\$69,999	3.97	66
Over \$70,000	4.17	121
TOTAL SAMPLE	3.84	646

Table 5: Country-of-Origin Perceptions by RACE
(Analysis of Variance Main Effects)

Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig. of F
38.515	3	12.838	6.926	.001

Category Label	Mean Value	Cell Size
Missing Data	3.58	20
Caucasian	3.78	591
African-American	4.87	27
Other	4.75	8
TOTAL SAMPLE	3.84	646

Table 6: Country-of-Origin Perceptions by EDUCATION
(Analysis of Variance Main Effects)

Sum of Squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig. of F
42.538	5	8.508	4.591	.001

Category Label	Mean Value	Cell Size
Missing Data	3.78	16
Less Than High School	4.25	1
Completed High School	3.01	50
Some College	3.99	308
Completed College	3.78	146
Graduate School	3.86	125
TOTAL SAMPLE	3.84	646

Table 7: Item. Analysis of Luxury Sedan Quality Perceptions

Demographic Variable	N	Imported Luxury Sedans Are Superior To Domestic L.S.		Domestic Luxury Sedans Are Superior To Imported L.S.	
		Mean	Std.Dev.	Mean	Std.Dev.
AGE		F = 7.29		F = 4.50	
		Sig.F = <.001		Sig.F = <.001	
Under 25 Years	149	3.64	1.73	3.33	1.20
25 to 34 Years	72	3.72	1.79	3.29	1.28
35 to 44 Years	82	3.71	1.64	3.23	1.13
45 to 54 Years	74	3.64	1.93	3.31	1.42
55 to 64 Years	84	2.83	1.67	3.89	1.57
Over 65 Years	175	2.81	1.78	3.79	1.61
TOTAL SAMPLE	636	3.32	1.80	3.51	1.42
INCOME		F = 1.98		F = 2.21	
		Sig.F = .066		Sig.F = .040	
Under \$19,999	107	3.46	1.68	3.49	1.20
\$20-\$29,999	85	3.44	1.91	3.51	1.36
\$30-\$39,999	83	2.92	1.68	3.72	1.49
\$40-\$49,999	83	3.11	1.79	3.80	1.60
\$50-\$59,999	88	3.26	1.70	3.66	1.58
\$60-\$69,999	66	3.17	1.57	3.32	1.24
Over \$70,000	121	3.69	2.10	3.20	1.42
TOTAL SAMPLE	633	3.32	1.81	3.51	1.43
RACE		F = 5.50		F = 5.68	
		Sig.F = .004		Sig.F = .004	
Caucasian	591	3.26	1.79	3.55	1.41
African-American	27	4.37	1.55	3.04	1.32
Other	8	4.00	2.88	2.13	1.13
TOTAL SAMPLE	626	3.32	1.81	3.51	1.41
EDUCATION		F = 1.56		F = 6.89	
		Sig.F = .184		Sig.F = <.001	
Less Than H.School	1	6.00	NA	5.00	NA
Completed H.School	50	2.98	1.76	4.46	1.72
Some College	308	3.44	1.76	3.49	1.37
Completed College	146	3.18	1.77	3.34	1.27
Graduate School	125	3.36	1.93	3.39	1.43
TOTAL SAMPLE	630	3.33	1.80	3.52	1.42

*All items are on a 7-point scale with 1 = very strong disagreement and 7 = very strong agreement.

Table 8: Item. Analysis of Product Origin Perceptions

Demographic Variable	N	Americans Should Buy The Best Products From Any Nation		Americans Should Buy Only Products Made In America	
		Mean	Std.Dev.	Mean	Std.Dev.
AGE		F = 9.60		F = 20.41	
		Sig.F = <.001		Sig.F = <.001	
Under 25 Years	149	4.76	1.91	3.92	1.75
25 to 34 Years	72	4.94	1.93	3.96	2.05
35 to 44 Years	82	4.73	1.97	4.12	1.82
45 to 54 Years	74	3.96	2.17	5.04	1.82
55 to 64 Years	84	3.73	2.18	5.06	1.92
Over 65 Years	175	3.60	2.07	5.58	1.44
TOTAL SAMPLE	636	4.23	2.10	4.69	1.88
INCOME		F = 3.30		F = 3.78	
		Sig.F = .003		Sig.F = .001	
Under \$19,999	107	4.69	2.07	4.22	1.87
\$20-\$29,999	85	4.15	2.17	4.62	1.95
\$30-\$39,999	83	3.77	2.08	5.12	1.65
\$40-\$49,999	83	3.84	2.02	5.13	1.72
\$50-\$59,999	88	3.90	2.16	5.02	1.95
\$60-\$69,999	66	4.58	1.96	4.53	1.80
Over \$70,000	121	4.58	2.10	4.39	1.94
TOTAL SAMPLE	633	4.24	2.10	4.70	1.88
RACE		F = 4.94		F = 10.30	
		Sig.F = .007		Sig.F = <.001	
Caucasian	591	4.20	2.09	4.75	1.85
African-American	27	5.48	1.58	3.33	1.66
Other	8	4.25	2.61	3.13	2.59
TOTAL SAMPLE	626	4.25	2.09	4.67	1.88
EDUCATION		F = 3.85		F = 6.11	
		Sig.F = .004		Sig.F = <.001	
Less Than H.School	1	4.00	NA	4.00	NA
Completed H.School	50	3.20	2.19	5.70	1.63
Some College	308	4.44	2.03	4.40	1.87
Completed College	146	4.22	2.10	4.90	1.82
Graduate School	125	4.18	2.11	4.70	1.93
TOTAL SAMPLE	630	4.24	2.10	4.68	1.88

*All items are on a 7-point scale with 1 = very strong disagreement and 7 = very strong agreement.

Referring to Table 7, respondents over 55 years of age were significantly more in agreement with the statement "American-made luxury sedans are superior in quality to imported luxury sedans" compared to those in the four younger age categories, who tended to agree more that "Imported luxury sedans are superior in quality to American-made luxury sedans." As previously discussed, age proved to be by far the most powerful predictor of COI scores among the group of significant demographic independent variables studied here. Tolerance was raised to protect against multicollinearity among the predictors for the regression analysis we utilized, which proved to be a necessary procedure. We find age to be a confound in our item-level analysis.

For example, at first glance quality perceptions across income categories may appear confused with the two lowest income ranges and the highest income group favoring imported luxury sedans over domestic makes. At the same time, those with reported income less than \$30,000 rated American-made luxury sedan quality at similar levels as they rated imported luxury sedan quality (means of 3.46, 3.44, 3.49, and 3.51). This apparent contradiction may be explained by crosstabulation, which reveals age as a likely confound. There is a large correlation between the student group - younger and more positive than older consumers toward imports - and the two lowest levels of income. Several of the oldest respondents - those most positive toward domestic sedan quality - are present as well. For example, 32 percent of the "\$20,000 to \$29,999" income cohort are under 25 years old, whereas 27 percent are over 64 years old.

Ignoring the single respondent who reported a "Less Than High School" education, consumers who have not attended college tend to be significantly more positive about the quality of American-made luxury sedans. Although not statistically significant in our results (Sig. of $F = .066$), less educated consumers are also more negative toward imported luxury sedans. Most of these respondents fall in the oldest two age groups (76 percent are over 55 years).

Finally, African-Americans and the "Other" category significantly perceived imported luxury sedans as higher quality than domestic brands, whereas the

Caucasian group tended to rate the American-made luxury sedans as better quality. Again, age is a possible confound, since the non-Caucasian groups are skewed toward the youngest age range (e.g., 44 percent of African-American respondents were under 25 years of age, and 75 percent of "Other" respondents were under 25). The reader is cautioned concerning the small sample size of both non-Caucasian categories.

Our analysis of the data presented in Table 8 produced similar results as did Table 7 concerning the confounding effects of "Age." Respondents classified in the youngest age categories were significantly more likely to agree that "Americans should buy the best products they can, whether these products are made in America or imported," and significantly less in agreement that "Americans should buy American-made products, not imports." Predictably, the oldest consumers responded in exactly the opposite manner.

Perceptual patterns materialized the same as in the prior table: for example, the two lowest income cohorts responded in a way similar to the highest income group on both items (i.e., generally favorable toward imports). African-Americans were much more positive toward imports than the "Buy American" theme, as was true for those in the "Other" racial category. The "Caucasian" group, with 98 percent of those over 65 years old, was far more positive that Americans should "Buy American" than either of the other race categories. Finally, participants who had never attended college clearly believed that Americans should buy American-made products in lieu of imports.

CONCLUSION

Country-of-origin tendencies represent an important issue for countries that need to increase exports of luxury sedans and for firms that source automobile components in countries that are different from where they are sold. This issue becomes even greater when one considers that the developed markets obtain a very large share of their products and services through imports. In 1990, for example, the U.S. imported more than any other nation (18% of the world's total non-U.S. exports)(Samiee 1994). Most other

industrialized nations are also faced with a large pool of imported brands and products. Therefore, country-of-origin tendencies pose an important dilemma in the "game" of competitive rationality and competitive advantage.

In this study, four demographic characteristics are shown to be significant predictors of country-of-origin tendencies (i.e., age, income, race, and education). For marketing, the general implication of these results is that firms can predict country-of-origin tendencies by examining a select set of demographics, thereby increasing the likelihood of achieving a competitive advantage vis-a-vis their competition. However, our results are likely to be (1) product class specific, and (2) bound by time.

Directions for Future Research

We have developed and tested a parsimonious (only four items) yet reliable product class specific measure for country-of-origin tendencies. Our data concerned luxury sedan automobiles. Future studies should replicate our results across a broader and more comprehensive set of products, both consumer as well as industrial and nondurable as well as durable in nature. An array of profit and nonprofit services should be included to test the flexibility of our Country-of-Origin Inventory. In addition, longitudinal data is needed to test the proposition that our results may be bound by time. Will the younger members of our data set become more negative toward imported luxury sedans as they grow older? Will they come to believe that Americans should buy only American-made products? These and other questions must be answered to further advance knowledge of country-of-origin influences in the purchase decision process.

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