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How Regional Employment in the U.S. Automobile Industry Influences Consumer Ethnocentrism

William T. Neese
Troy University, wneese@troy.edu

W. Frank Thompson Jr.
Troy University, wfthompson@troy.edu

Stephen C. Garrott
sgarrott@troy.edu

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William T. Neese, Troy University, Troy, AL

wneese@troy.edu

W. Frank Thompson, Troy University, Troy, AL

Stephen C. Garrott, Troy University, Troy, AL

Abstract **-** The past three decades lay witness to major geographical evolution of the automobile industry in the United States. This study analyzes exactly how CETSCALE scores differ among a population that is currently either more or less economically impacted by automobile production and marketing. The analysis presented in this study illustrates a direct correlation between ethnocentric dispositions among consumers and employment opportunities in the automobile sector across U.S. Census Bureau geographical regions and divisions in each region. Comprehensive statistical details are provided that arguably demonstrate a change in what the phrase "Made in America" means, at least where automobile production is concerned.

Keywords **-** Consumer ethnocentrism; CETSCALE; U.S. Census Bureau regions; U.S. Census Bureau divisions; U.S. automobile industry.

Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and/or Practitioners **-** This is an industry-specific analysis of how employment in automotive-related jobs significantly increases ethnocentricity among consumers according to the relative importance of the industry to their particular geographical area.

Note **-** A previous version of this paper was presented and published in the Proceedings of the 2015 Atlantic Marketing Association Conference.

Introduction

Mass production of the Ford Model T is often thought of as the beginning of the automotive industry in the United States, yet multiple domestic manufacturers had begun operations between 1903 and 1924 (Epstein, 1927). In the period immediately

following World War II, Big Three (i.e., Chrysler, Ford, and General Motors) automobile production dominated both domestic and world market share.

The automobile industry in the United States is undergoing major shifts. Consumption of imports is rising, and the U.S. continues to witness foreign investment in automobile production facilities (BMI Research, 2015). Big-three automakers have lost market share to foreign-owned manufacturers, and automobile production hubs are developing outside of the traditional Michigan and Ohio production zones. These two states have lost more than 43,000 auto industry jobs since 2001, whereas Indiana, Mississippi, Tennessee, and Alabama have added approximately 12,000 jobs (Schill, 2008).

Consumer Ethnocentrism and the CETSCALE

Consumer ethnocentrism is a phenomenon wherein consumers perceive domestic products as inherently superior to imported brands. This construct is known to impact consumption decisions (Bilkey & Nes, 1982; Clark, 1990; Josiassen, 2011; Samiee, 1994; Steenkamp & de Jong, 2010). Consumer ethnocentrism forms within individuals and affects their beliefs, feelings, and behavior (Sharma, 2015). Negative feelings toward a foreign nation (i.e., animosity) can influence consumer ethnocentrism (Chan, Chan & Leung, 2010; Hoffmann, Mai & Smirnova, 2011; Lwin, Stanaland & Williams, 2010), yet positive feelings for a foreign nation (i.e., affinity) can also drive purchase behavior (Oberecker & Diamantopoulos, 2011). Some consumers might even prefer global brands over local products (Nijssen & Douglas, 2011).

One major dimension of consumer ethnocentrism relates to employment opportunities and the economic well-being of fellow citizens (Rhiney, Arnold & Salley-Toler, 2013; Smyczek & Glowik, 2011). The CETSCALE, a ten-item scale used to measure consumer ethnocentrism, captures this employment dimension through several items (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). The CETSCALE has been thoroughly analyzed both in the U.S. and foreign markets to determine its validity and reliability (Chowdhury & Rahman, 2014; Herche, 1992; Netemeyer, Durvasula & Lichtenstein, 1991; Pentz, Terblanche & Boschoff, 2013).

Focus for This Study

Individuals in the United States see foreign competition as a threat to their economic livelihood and quality of life (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). According to its authors, individuals residing in geographic areas where foreign competition is most acute score significantly higher on the CETSCALE. They report that significant differences remain even after demographic and socioeconomic characters are controlled (Shimp & Sharma, 1987).

Given the evolution of the automobile industry in the United States over the previous three decades since the CETSCALE was developed, a systematic and thorough description of regional variances in the ethnocentric tendencies within the United States is warranted. Since the scale was developed, the Southeast region of

the United States has experienced growth in automobile production through Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Do the investments and jobs created influence CETSCALE responses? If the answer to this question is in the affirmative, foreign automobile brands may need to customize their marketing communications across U.S. geographical regions to better reflect the location of production facilities.

Based on the precedent originally established by the two authors of the CETSCALE, the following hypotheses are set forth for testing in this study:

Hypothesis 1 (H1): CETSCALE scores will be significantly different across U.S. geographical regions.

Hypothesis 2 (H2): CETSCALE means will be correlated with regional employment in the automobile industry, with the U.S. Census Bureau region having the most jobs related to automobile production exhibiting the highest mean score and the U.S. Census Bureau region having the fewest jobs related to automobile production exhibiting the lowest mean score.

This study additionally seeks to develop a more precise level of analysis incorporating geographical *division* levels to provide insight concerning how opportunities for employment in the U.S. automobile industry influence ethnocentrism. A map on the Auto Alliance (2015) website illustrates how domestic automobile production in the United States is focused in the East North Central division while foreign automobile manufacturing is concentrated in the East South Central division (http://www.autoalliance.org/auto-jobs-and-economics/auto-facilities). This map shows that 18 of 24 of auto manufacturing facilities in the East North Central division are domestic and 8 of 12 in the East South Central division are foreign brands. Fiat is counted as domestic as Chrysler Automotive is one of the historic Big Three.

This scenario raises the question of if (and how) employment opportunity interacts with consumer ethnocentric tendencies.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): CETSCALE means will be significantly more Buy American (i.e., numerically higher) in geographical divisions with more Big-Three domestic automobile production facilities.

Hypothesis 4 (H4): CETSCALE means will be significantly lower (i.e., more Pro-Import) in geographical divisions with greater foreign direct investment in automobile production plants.

Method

This study combines secondary and primary data to test the above hypothesis. The *Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers* (*Auto Alliance* for short) publishes a list of facts about the automobile industry for each state in America on its website (www.autoalliance.com), which is the source of secondary data used in this analysis.

This analysis also adopts the methodology from Kahle, Liu & Watkins (1992) to form geographical regions using current U.S. Census Bureau regions and divisions.

The primary data necessary for the analysis conducted here is furnished from a random sample of households across the United States using an incentivized traditional mail survey and including a pre-stamped return envelope. Respondents were exposed to print advertisements featuring an array of foreign and domestic automobile brands produced by either a domestic or a foreign automobile manufacturer. The traditional mail survey enabled identification of the respondent's state through the postmark on the return envelope. The dependent variable of interest in this analysis is the ten-item CETSCALE using a 7-point Likert format (Shimp & Sharma, 1987).

Secondary data from the *Auto Alliance* is classified according to the current U.S. Census Bureau scheme for hypothesis testing. The following four U.S. geographical regions with nine divisions are used: (1) the Northeast region, with New England and Middle Atlantic divisions; (2) the Midwest region, with East North Central and West North Central divisions; (3) the South region, with South Atlantic, East South Atlantic, and West South Atlantic divisions, and (4) the West region, with Mountain and Pacific divisions. To test H1, total employment data for each region is presented in table form and compared to CETSCALE means generated through the survey for each geographical area. Prior to that analysis, it must be determined if significant dispersion exists in CETSCALE means across the four geographical categories.

Results

A sample of 336 usable responses resulted from the national mail survey of 2,250 households, for a response rate of 14.9 percent. Data come from 44 out of 50 states. Origination of 22 responses could not be determined from the return envelope and are excluded from this analysis, leaving 314 in the sample. Data appear reasonably consistent with actual population distribution. The top five states in current U.S. population are: California (12.1 percent), Texas (8.4 percent), New York (6.2 percent), Florida (6.2 percent), and Illinois (4.1percent) (http://www.census.gov/popclock). The top five states as a percentage of this sample are: California (9.8 percent), Florida (7.1 percent), Texas (6.5 percent), Illinois (5.7 percent), and New York (5.1 percent). Sample demographics generally match U.S. Census Bureau statistics, but respondents report higher education levels and higher income than the population at large. Hispanic participation is below the national norm.

Seven nonparametric tests were conducted to determine the existence of any statistically significant differences in sample demographics across the four U.S. Census Bureau regions. Using the Kruskal-Wallis test, six demographic variables are not statistically significant: marital status, age, race/ethnicity, education, household income, and occupation. The only variable with a statistically significant difference across geographic regions was sex (Sig. = .04).

Quantitative Analysis

Initial Analysis of Variance results are displayed in Table 1. The level of significance is p = .01 for the ANOVA that tests multivariate CETSCALE means across U.S. geographical regions, validating H1. Individual CETSCALE items are analyzed next to determine the actual source of that difference. Five of these items account for the significance found across U.S. geographical regions for multi-item CETSCALE means. They are: (1) Purchasing foreign-made products is un-American; (2) It is not right to purchase foreign products; (3) A real American should always buy American-made products; (4) We should buy products manufactured in America instead of letting other countries get rich off us, and (5) American consumers who purchase products made in other countries are responsible for putting their fellow Americans out of work. Of these, items 1, 2, and 3 can be interpreted as general expressions of patriotic zeal when purchasing a product is being considered, whereas item 4 has a more overt economic slant (i.e., in the use of the phrase "get rich off us"). Item 5 directly relates to the employment dimension of primary interest in this study based on the phrase "putting their fellow Americans out of work."

Table 1: ANOVA for CETSCALE across Four U.S. Census Bureau Regions[1]

CETSCALE Item[2]	***Category Mean***	***Std. Dev.***	***N***	***Sum of Sq.***	***df***	***Mean Sq.***	***F***
MULTIVARIATE	1 = 3.93	1.55	46	23.35	3	7.78	4.02
	2 = 4.59	1.33	81				
	3 = 4.27	1.34	122				
	4 = 3.88	1.45	65				
	Total = 4.22	1.41	314				
UNIVARIATE	1 = 3.53	1.82	46	27.75	3	9.25	2.59
Item 1: Purchasing foreign-made products is un-American.	2 = 3.91	1.89	81				
	3 = 3.57	2.01	122				
	4 = 3.04	1.70	65				
	Total = 3.54	1.90	314				
Item 2: It is not right to purchase foreign products.	1 = 2.83	1.83	46	44.64	3	14.88	4.26
	2 = 3.85	1.92	81				
	3 = 3.12	1.89	122				
	4 = 2.97	1.79	65				
	Total = 3.24	1.90	314				

Table 1: ANOVA for CETSCALE across Four U.S. Census Bureau Regions (cont.)

Item 3: A real American should always buy American-made products.	1 = 3.50 2 = 4.16 3 = 3.66 4 = 3.15 Total = 3.66	2.16 1.95 1.98 1.98 2.02	46 81 122 65 314	38.12	3	12.71	3.19
Item 4: We should buy products manufactured in America instead of letting other countries get rich off us.	1 = 4.39 2 = 5.24 3 = 4.86 4 = 4.32 Total = 4.78	2.24 1.74 2.02 1.96 2.00	46 81 122 65 314	38.38	3	12.79	3.28
Item 5: American consumers who purchase products made in other countries are responsible for putting their fellow Americans out of work.	1 = 3.46 2 = 4.13 3 = 3.75 4 = 3.25 Total = 3.70	1.94 1.69 2.01 1.89 1.91	46 81 122 65 314	31.22	3	10.41	2.90

1. (1) Northeast; (2) Midwest; (3) South; (4) West.
2. Significant at $p \leq .05$.

U.S. Census Bureau Regional Analysis

To test H2, the level of automobile industry employment within each U. S. Census Bureau region is compared in Table 2 with the CETSCALE means from Table 1. Table 2 also includes the total number of automobile-related jobs by region, the percent of automobile industry jobs per region, and the average percent of each region's job force in the automobile industry. The rank for each region is presented in parentheses in each column, allowing for the comparison that is necessary to test H2. The ranks of each region's employment data and corresponding CETSCALE means exactly match in all four cases, supporting H2. This finding clearly supports the contention that ethnocentrism related to the American automobile industry is at least in-part driven by the benefits and threats associated with household employment, as Shimp and Sharma (1987) proposed almost three decades ago.

Table 2: Size of U.S. Automobile Industry by Census Bureau Region[1]

Region	***Division[2]***	***Total # Auto Jobs***	***% U.S. Auto Jobs[3]***	***% Jobs in Region***	***CET Mean***
REGION 1: NORTHEAST (n=46)	*New England* *Middle Atlantic* TOTAL (RANK)	895,680 (3)	12.3 (3)	2.68 (3)	3.93 (3)
REGION 2: MIDWEST (n=81)	*East North Central* *West North Central* TOTAL (RANK)	3,112,966 (1)	42.8 (1)	7.73 (1)	4.59 (1)
REGION 3: SOUTH (n=122)	*South Atlantic* *East South Central* *West South Central* TOTAL (RANK)	2,478,538 (2)	34.2 (2)	5.24 (2)	4.27 (2)
REGION 4: WEST (n=65)	*Mountain* *Pacific* TOTAL (RANK)	738,931 (4)	10.4 (4)	1.99 (4)	3.88 (4)

1. *Alliance of Automobile Manufacturers State Facts* (http://www.autoalliance.org/) accessed 02-16-2015.
2. *New England*: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont; *Middle Atlantic*: New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania; *East North Central*: Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, Wisconsin; *West North Central*: Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota; *South Atlantic*: Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia; *East South Central*: Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee; *West South Central*: Arkansas, Louisiana, Oklahoma, and Texas; *Mountain*: Arizona, Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Utah, and Wyoming; *Pacific*: Alaska, California, Hawaii, Oregon, and Washington.
3. Column total equals 99.7% due to rounding.

U.S. Census Bureau Analysis at the Division Level

Table 3 displays results of the second ANOVA conducted to test H3 and H4. The multivariate significance level is p = .05 and power is .81, both acceptable. The two highest Buy-American CETSCALE means are East North Central (4.68) and East South Central (4.63), providing support for H3. These two census divisions have the largest number of automobile industry jobs in the United States.

Table 3: ANOVA for CETSCALE across Nine U.S. Census Bureau Divisions[1]

CETSCALE Item[2]	*Category Mean*	*Std. Dev.*	*N*	*Sum of Sq.*	*df*	*Mean Sq.*	*F*
MULTIVARIATE	1 = 3.66	1.44	14	30.52	8	3.82	1.96
	2 = 4.04	1.60	32				
	3 = 4.68	1.28	52				
	4 = 4.44	1.41	29				
	5 = 4.14	1.34	65				
	6 = 4.63	1.35	25				
	7 = 4.25	1.34	32				
	8 = 3.99	1.68	16				
	9 = 3.84	1.38	49				
	Total = 4.22	1.41	314				
UNIVARIATE	1 = 2.57	1.79	14	57.36	8	7.17	2.05
Item 1: It is not right to purchase foreign products.	2 = 2.94	1.87	32				
	3 = 4.00	1.93	52				
	4 = 3.59	1.90	29				
	5 = 3.00	1.75	65				
	6 = 3.32	2.08	25				
	7 = 3.22	2.04	32				
	8 = 3.50	2.03	16				
	9 = 2.80	1.70	49				
	Total = 3.24	1.90	314				
Item 2: A real American should always buy American-made products.	1 = 2.43	1.60	14	99.64	8	12.46	3.23
	2 = 3.97	2.22	32				
	3 = 4.37	1.88	52				
	4 = 3.79	2.04	29				
	5 = 3.37	1.95	65				
	6 = 4.56	1.71	25				
	7 = 3.53	2.08	32				
	8 = 3.69	2.21	16				
	9 = 2.98	1.89	49				
	Total = 3.66	2.02	314				

1. (1) New England; (2) Middle Atlantic; (3) East North Central; (4) West North Central; (5) South Atlantic; (6) East South Central; (7) West South Central; (8) Mountain; (9) Pacific.
2. Significant at $p \leq .05$.

Given significant differences in CETSCALE means for the multi-item scale, analysis of individual items to determine the root source of that significant difference is necessary. As indicated in Table 3, mean differences across geographical divisions for only two of ten items produce the multivariate results. These are Item 1: "It is not right to purchase foreign products" ($p = .04$), and Item 2: "A real American should always buy American-made products" ($p < .01$). The East North Central division produced the highest mean score (4.00) of the nine geographical areas for Item 1. The East South Central division with a 3.32 mean is neither the second highest nor substantially lower than the East North Central mean. This does not support H4. Mean scores for Item 1 are all 4.00 or below, indicating nationwide disagreement with that statement and an overall favorable sentiment toward purchasing imported automobiles. Item 2 also does not support H4. The 4.56 mean score for the East South Central U.S. geographical division is actually higher than the 4.37 mean for the East North Central region. Mean scores on Item 2 again generally indicate favorable sentiment in the United States automobile market for foreign brand labels.

Table 4: Pairwise Comparisons for CETSCALE across Nine U.S. Census Bureau Divisions[1]

CETSCALE Item	*I[2]*	*J[2]*	*Mean Difference (I - J)*	*Standard Error*	*95% CI*
It is not right to purchase foreign products.	3	1	1.43**	.56	[.32, 2.54]
	3	2	1.06**	.42	[.24, 1.89]
	3	5	1.00**	.35	[.32, 1.69]
	3	9	1.20**	.37	[.47, 1.94]
A real American should always buy American-made products.	2	1	1.54*	.63	[.30, 2.78]
	2	9	.99*	.45	[.11, 1.87]
	3	1	1.94**	.59	[.77, 3.10]
	3	5	1.00**	.37	[.28, 1.72]
	3	9	1.39**	.39	[.62, 2.16]
	4	1	1.37*	.64	[.11, 2.62]
	6	1	2.13**	.66	[.84, 3.42]
	6	5	1.19**	.46	[.28, 2.10]
	6	9	1.58**	.48	[.63, 2.53]

1. Mean differences for the two CETSCALE items included in this table are significant at $p \leq .05$.
2. (1) New England; (2) Middle Atlantic; (3) East North Central; (4) West North Central; (5) South Atlantic; (6) East South Central; (7) West South Central; (8) Mountain; (9) Pacific.
Note. CI = confidence interval.
* $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$.

Pairwise comparisons of these two items provide additional information needed to test H4, and are displayed in Table 4. Scrutiny of the language in these two items shed light on ethnocentrism in contemporary America as a result of the widespread acceptance of foreign automobile brands in the domestic market. The implications of this finding are discussed in the final section.

Concluding Remarks

Referring to Table 4, the geographical division most in agreement with Item 1: "It is not right to purchase foreign products" is Number 3, the East North Central division of the United States, which benefits most from Big Three automobile production employment. Although the word *imported* is not directly used, individuals in Michigan may not care if a Toyota is manufactured in Kentucky or Mississippi because that economic activity is not benefitting Michigan households. Those brands are competition for Michigan products regardless of being manufactured in America. The word "foreign" is significant in this statement, as it represents ownership of the brand and not country of production. This result appears to reflect individuals who are steeped in traditional U.S. automobile production for the past one hundred years: Big-Three automobile firms manufacturing cars in Detroit, Michigan.

Conversely, Item 2 states: "A real American should always buy American-made products." The phrase "American-made products" is not brand-specific and can be interpreted to include anything manufactured or assembled on American soil regardless of the nationality of the facility's owners. Respondents from Alabama, Kentucky, Mississippi, and Tennessee (Division 6) agreed with this statement significantly more than households in the New England (1), South Atlantic (5), and Pacific (9) geographical territories. The exact same pattern of statistical significance emerges from East North Central households as well. This seems to suggest that regardless of the brand name, U.S. households are at least partially influenced by the fact that those production jobs are in America and benefit them personally. The *Made in America* slogan is perhaps evolving along with the global automobile industry and taking on a new meaning.

Limitations and Direction for Future Research

This study is limited by the small sample size for a national survey. Although adequate to compute statistical significance, confidence in CETSCALE mean scores would be greater if the sample contained a larger number of participants. The study is further limited because neither the survey instrument nor the commercial mailing list allows households specifically employed in the automobile industry to be identified for analysis. Finally, only one industry is analyzed; comparison of our results with those from different industries will enrich the related literature concerning this topic.

In closing, this analysis demonstrates the influence a changing automobile industry has exerted on the ethnocentric psyche of America, and it illustrates regional differences that have materialized from coast-to-coast. As Shimp and Sharma's (1987)

CETSCALE is taken in new directions (e.g., Sharma, 2015), additional research is needed to capture regional ethnocentric changes brought on by the influx of popular foreign brands. Since global production and marketing have penetrated multiple foreign and domestic markets, future research should explore in more depth than is possible here how foreign and domestic brands produced in the same geographical area coexist in the minds of consumers. Our study indicates acceptance of foreign-owned automobile brands manufactured on U.S. soil as "American-made," but respondents from the Great Lakes region seem conflicted about this. They express negative ethnocentric views toward "foreign" brands, yet support automobile brands that are made in America: perhaps they mean only Big-Three brands. In contrast, respondents from the East South Central were not as negative toward "foreign" brands, but also report the strongest support for brands made in America. Despite the possible need for new scale development, the analysis presented here effectively illustrates the continued usefulness and adaptability of the CETSCALE.

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Author Information

William T. Neese (DBA, Mississippi State University) has been a marketing professor for the past three decades. He has several years of retail management and academic administrative experience, and enjoys working with the local business community. Dr. Neese publishes in the areas of advertising, consumer behavior, marketing education, and the legal-regulatory environment among others, and enjoys teaching a variety of marketing topics.

W. Frank Thompson (DBA, Kennesaw State University) dedicated his first decades-long career to state economic development before becoming a marketing professor. His eclectic research and teaching interests range from supply chain management to art marketing. Dr. Thompson works with numerous businesses from local to global through class projects and community service, leveraging his extensive connections in business and government to benefit his students.

Stephen C. Garrott (PhD, University of Arkansas) has been a marketing professor for over four decades. Dr. Garrott has launched and managed several business ventures of his own, and continues to serve on the Board of Directors for multiple nonprofit organizations. His research and teaching interests are primarily in personal selling and retailing, and he is considered to be a dedicated advisor of students both academically and socially through the marketing club.