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Local Brands. Impact of Consumer Responsibility for Sustainable Consumption and Ethnocentrism as a Moderating Factor

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Local Brands. Impact of Consumer Responsibility for Sustainable Consumption and Ethnocentrism as a Moderating Factor

In a competitive environment dominated by global corporations, small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with local brands seek innovative ways to differentiate themselves. Sustainability, increasingly significant in consumer decision-making, presents an opportunity for SMES to leverage their environmental responsibility and local connectedness credentials. This study investigates how consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption (CRSC) influences local brand preference (LBP) and purchase likelihood (LBPL), with consumer ethnocentrism (CE) as a moderating factor. Using structural equation modeling (SEM) on representative data, results confirm a sequential relationship between CRSC, LBP, and LBPL. Surprisingly, CE weakens these effects, indicating that factors beyond local connectedness may drive purchasing decisions.

Keywords: sustainability; consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption; local brand preference; local brand purchase likelihood; ethnocentrism

Word Count: 8738

1. Introduction

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) with local brands operating in a challenging and highly competitive environment often have to contend with powerful global brands. Since global competitors typically enjoy economies of scale and wider brand recognition, local SMEs must find innovative ways to differentiate themselves. One option is to leverage environmental responsibility and local identity to build a competitive advantage, given that sustainability is becoming an increasingly critical social concern (Alzubaidi, Slade, and Dwivedi 2021; Epstein 2014), with shifts in consumer expectations reshaping consumer behavior.

Sustainability, defined by the balance between environmental, social, and economic dimensions (Epstein 2014), has already been widely adopted by large corporations, often as part of their brand positioning (Dangelico and Pujari 2010; Schaltegger, Etxeberria, and Ortas 2017). However, for local SMEs, sustainability as a competitive strategy assumes additional meaning when combined with a strong emphasis on local roots. SMEs are uniquely positioned to transmit a commitment to environmental responsibility while capitalizing on their connection to the local community (Llonch-Andreu, López-Lomelí, and Gómez-Villanueva 2016; Roy and Chau 2011). This dual focus of environmental responsibility and local connectedness is potentially powerful strategy for survival and differentiation in competitive markets dominated by global players.

Growing consumer demand for sustainable products represents an opportunity for local brands to attract environmentally aware consumers. Consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption (CRSC)—reflecting individual awareness of and commitment to sustainable practices—has become a significant influence on brand preference and purchase decisions (Alzubaidi, Slade, and Dwivedi 2021; Luchs, Phipps, and Hill 2015). The fact that

local brands manufactured and marketed in restricted geographic segments are perceived as more in tune with community needs and more transparent regarding the environment potentially give local SMEs an advantage over global brands in appealing to pre-environmental consumers. However, this advantageous effect is a hypothesis that needs empirical verification. If verified, however, it would suggest an avenue for long-term survival of SMEs offering local brands, based on the implementation of competitive strategies with the above-mentioned dual focus (environmental responsibility and local connectedness).

Research regarding how to encourage more sustainable consumer behavior has identified several key underlying drivers (White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019). Social influence significantly affects behavior through social norms and identity signaling (Cialdini, Reno, and Kallgren 1990; Goldstein, Cialdini, and Griskevicius 2008), while habit formation, supported by prompts and incentives, is essential to fostering repeated sustainable actions (Kurz et al. 2015; Verplanken 2010). Sustainable behavior is also fostered when an individual's self-concept, including self-affirmation and consistency, is aligned with personal values (Bodur, Duval, and Grohmann 2015; Van der Werff, Steg, and Keizer 2014), and is further influenced by emotional factors like guilt and pride, and by cognitive learning, (Antonetti and Maklan 2014; Carrus, Passafaro, and Bonnes 2008). Finally, a more tangible and localized environmental impact encourages engagement (Reczek, Trudel, and White 2018). However, empirical research into CRSC and its effect on local brand preference (LBP) is, to date, limited.

Our research tries to bridge this gap in our understanding of the impact of sustainability on consumer decision-making regarding local SME brands by analyzing the sequential relationship between three key constructs, namely, CRSC, LBP, and local brand purchase likelihood (LBPL). We additionally consider the moderating role of consumer

ethnocentrism, i.e., pride in local culture and desire to support the local economy (Steenkamp, Batra, and Alden 2003), as potentially strengthening the relationships between CRSC, LBP, and LBPL, enhancing the likelihood that local brands are favored in purchasing decisions.

To test the sequential relationship between the three constructs, we draw on signaling theory (Erdem and Swait 1998), social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 2004), and perceived consumer effectiveness theory (Hanss and Böhm 2012), and apply structural equation modelling (SEM) to data for a representative sample of the Spanish population. Our aim is to demonstrate that local SMEs can leverage CRSC and ethnocentrism to develop competitive strategies that increase their survival prospects. Specifically, we examine the following research questions:

- To what extent does CRSC foster LBP and LBPL?
- How does consumer ethnocentrism moderate the impact of CRSC on LBP and LBPL?

Demonstrating that CRSC-driven consumers prefer local brands can provide valuable insights for local SMEs aiming to compete with global corporations in sustainability-focused markets. Ultimately, we argue that SMEs that effectively position themselves as environmentally responsible and locally engaged are more likely to thrive in a highly competitive landscape.

2. Theoretical Framework and Hypotheses

2.1. Consumer Responsibility for Sustainable Consumption and Local Brands

According to signaling theory (Erdem and Swait 1998), consumers base their decisions on various signals, including environmental, social, and sustainability values (Liu et al. 2014; Baumgartner and Homburg (1996) 2015). This theory provides a valuable framework

for understanding how ‘local’ communicates distinct values to consumers (Özsomer and Altaras 2008). Local brands, often distinguished by their smaller carbon footprints, transparency, and traceability, transmit strong environmental responsibility and community engagement signals in creating jobs and stimulating economic growth (Bryła 2019). Moreover, because local brands frequently provide detailed information on product sourcing and production, they resonate with environmentally conscious consumers who prioritize transparency and traceability.

Local brands are perceived to foster stronger place and community connections (Roy and Chau 2011), to be more authentic, to address local needs, and to adapt to the home market (Dimofte, Johansson, and Ronkainen 2008; Safeer et al. 2022). Furthermore, research documents a growing anti-globalization trend (Liu et al. 2021) and a growing preference for brands perceived to be local, suggesting that local brands signal greater credibility (Mandler, Bartsch, and Han 2021). Consumers who are committed to sustainable practices are likely to respond to these signals, preferring local brands aligned with their values of minimizing environmental impact and supporting local economies (Luchs and Miller 2015).

CRSC emphasizes responsible decision-making regarding eco-product purchases and ethical consumption with long-term implications (Epstein 2014). Judicious consumption habits address basic needs, not wants, and reflect awareness of how excess consumption compromises the Earth’s carrying capacity (Hertwich 2005). Brand positioning strategies can leverage consumer awareness and responsibility to champion a company’s sustainable products/services (Menon and Menon 1997). Such initiatives serve as catalysts for consumers to actively support companies committed to sustainable and ethical practices (Gupta and Kumar 2013). Since local brands often convey these values more effectively than global brands, we hypothesize that:

H1: There is a positive relationship between CRSC and LBP.

Social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 2004) suggests that individual self-concept is partially derived from membership in social groups, and this group identity can impact on attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, and preferences. In a sustainability context, pro-environmental consumers are likely to align with brands that reinforce their pro-environmental social identity, and local brands reflecting sustainability and local community connectedness are likely to resonate more strongly with such consumers (Proudford and Smith 2003), who may feel heightened self-esteem on aligning their consumption with brands that reinforce their identity as environmentally responsible citizens. Consumer brand identification—the alignment between an individual's self-concept and a brand's perceived identity— influences consumer attitudes and preferences (Bhattacharya and Sen 2003) and may drive LBP (Han 2023). Since consumers with sustainability and ethical values are more likely to purchase local brands over global alternatives, we hypothesize that:

H2: There is a positive relationship between CRSC and LBPL.

Perceived consumer effectiveness theory (Hanss and Doran 2020), which reflects a consumer's confidence in their capacity to achieve outcomes aligned with their personal values, plays a crucial role in motivating sustainability-focused consumers by emphasizing that individual actions can lead to positive societal change (Hanss and Doran 2020). Consumers who feel empowered to make a difference through their purchasing choices are more likely to engage in sustainability-related consumption and to favor brands that reflect their environmental and social responsibility values (Izagirre-Olaizola, Fernández-Sainz, and Vicente-Molina 2015). Local brands, by virtue of their local connectedness and transparency, enable consumers to perceive a direct impact on both the environment and local economies. Consumers who perceive their purchase choices to have a meaningful influence are likely to

exhibit a stronger LBP (Roy and Chau 2011), consolidating the LBP connection with purchase decisions (Xu and Wyer 2007). Consumers who prefer local brands based on their values are more likely to follow through with a local product purchase, even in competitive globalized markets. Considering that LBPL, reflecting the interest in purchasing a local over a global brand, is attitudinal and influenced by contextual factors (Ebrahim et al. 2016; Xu and Wyer 2007), we hypothesize that:

H3: There is a positive relationship between LBP and LBPL

2.2. Ethnocentrism as a Moderator

Consumers ethnocentrism (CE) reflects a preference for products/services and experiences that align with an individual's cultural norms and values (Bryła 2019; Kaynak and Eksi 2011; Park, Lehnert, and Kalliny 2018). Since identification with cosmopolitanism or ethnocentrism varies according to personal preferences and experiences (e.g., a person might enjoy international cuisine but prefer products/services closely aligned with their own culture), contextual factors may contribute to the existence of an attitude-behavior gap (Dhir et al. 2020; Srivastava, Gupta, and Rana 2021).

Parallel to globalization trends and growing openness, European and other Western societies are experiencing an increase in social ethnocentrism (Katz-Gerro et al. 2023), i.e., they increasingly emphasize their own culture and resist external influences.

CE, highlighted in the literature as having a significant impact on purchase intentions (Cleveland, Laroche, and Papadopoulos 2009; Grant 1991; Steenkamp, Batra, and Alden 2003; Strizhakova, Coulter, and Price 2012; Zeugner-Roth, Žabkar, and Diamantopoulos 2015), reflects alignment with local cultural norms and values, and strong attachment and responsibility for the local community and its wellbeing. Preserving resources for future

generations inclines responsible citizens to support local sustainability practices (Luchs, Phipps, and Hill 2015; Hanss and Böhm 2012), given the depletion of local resources (water, forests, agricultural land, etc.) and the impact on the availability of locally produced products/services (Bryła 2019; Grant 1991). A local focus promotes local purchases, which in turn supports the local economy and job creation, and promotes pride in local brands, cultures, and norms (Bryła 2019; Grant 1991; Kaynak and Eksi 2011). In more extreme scenarios, CE may lead to rejection of all foreign products (Cleveland, Laroche, and Takahashi 2015; Srivastava, Gupta, and Rana 2021).

Although CE is a well-known moderator, as far as we are aware, it has not yet been fully analyzed in the context of the relationship between CRSC and LBP/LBPL; the only exception is the Keane and Morschett (2017) study of how CE moderates the relationship between perceived localness and purchase likelihood of a brand, which reported non-significant results. Findings are therefore inconsistent regarding whether CE acts as a boundary condition for the linkage between perceived brand localness and outcomes such as purchase intention, quality, prestige perceptions, etc. (Cucato et al. 2023; Liu et al. 2021). Although environmental problems are a generalized concern, individual CE feelings may differ in direction and intensity, depending on knowledge, affected by media coverage and increased societal emphasis on sustainability (Hanss and Böhm, 2012). Another impact is sustainable practices by companies, although consumers may be sceptic regarding their sustainability claims (Satinover, Nichols, Holt 2023). Certain trends reflect growing individualism in contemporary societies, e.g., sustainable urban mobility behaviors have led, not so much to a greater demand for public transport, but to new forms of travel, such as scooters and e-bicycles (Briceno and Stagl 2006). Conflicts between attitudes and behaviors are possible, therefore, when pro-environmental consumers are also ethnocentric. Park,

Lehnert, and Kalliny (2018) pointed to the complex nature of the relationship between pro-environmentalism and behavioral intentions: when multiple identities conflict, one identity may ultimately prevail, meaning that pro-environmentalism may be mitigated or enhanced by a high degree of ethnocentrism.

Since it has been empirically demonstrated that local brands are preferred more by ethnocentric consumers than cosmopolitan consumers (López-Lomelí, Alarcón-del-Amo, and Llonch-Andreu 2019), we hypothesize that:

H4a: CE positively leverages the relationship between CRSC and LBP.

H4b: CE positively leverages the relationship between CRSC and LBPL.

Our model is depicted in Figure 1. Using signaling, social identity, and perceived consumer effectiveness theories as our theoretical framework, we propose that CRSC positively affects LBP and LBPL, that LBP affects LBPL, and that CE moderates those effects.

Figure 1. Model and tested hypotheses about here

3. Materials and methods

3.1. Data and Measurements

Our five constructs were created from adaptations of existing scales: CRSC from Luchs and Miller (2015), LBP from Liu et al. (2014) and Yoo, Donthu, and Lee (2000), LBPL from Dodds, Monroe, and Grewal (1991) and Putrevu and Lord (1994), and CE from Shimp and Sharma (1987), Batra et al. (2000), and Zhou, Yang, and Hui (2010).

Since our study aimed to represent the entire Spanish population aged 18-85 years (38,624,561 individuals as of 1 January 2023), our survey was administered to a representative Spanish sample aged 18-85 years, selected between 2 and 12 January 2023 using the Netquest online panel. Demographic representation was ensured by controlling for

age, gender, and geographical area quotas. Of the initial total of 5,394 invited people, 2,589 completed the survey (response rate 47.99%). Our sample was representative considering a confidence level of 0.95%, an error rate of 1.9%, and a proportion rate of 50%.

Survey items were responded to on a Likert scale, scored from 1 to 5 (lowest to highest agreement). To ensure the reliability and validity of the measurement instrument across different cultural and linguistic contexts, the scale was translated from English to Spanish through a rigorous multi-step process. Initially, the authors conducted a direct translation of the scale into Spanish. Subsequently, two colleagues from the Management department, unfamiliar with the original scale, performed a back-translation to identify any discrepancies. A panel of four Marketing professors from the Business department then reviewed both versions to ensure linguistic accuracy and cultural appropriateness. To assess clarity, comprehension, and cultural fit, a pilot study was conducted using a small sample of students from the University. Based on feedback from the pilot study, refinements were made to enhance the scale's precision.

Sociodemographic data were collected on gender, age, income, education, living circumstances, and purchasing behaviors. No missing data were identified. Details on the constructs, their definitions, and the corresponding items, references, and statistics are available in Appendix A. Table 1 summarizes participant characteristics. Men accounted for 51.83% of the sample, and average age was 49.75 years. Predominant were groups as follows: aged 35-54 (37.5%), middle-to-high incomes (56.9% above €2,001), upper secondary/postgraduate education (around 87%), and living in a family (36.12%).

Table 1. Survey participant characteristics (n = 2,589) about here

3.2. Method

We employed a three-step approach in our quantitative analysis¹. First, to validate the constructs, we implemented confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) (Gatignon 2014), a widely accepted measurement model validation method in structural analyses (Kyriazos 2018), and mandatory before analyzing causal relationships (Brown 2015). Second, to ensure measurement reliability (Hair et al. 2024), we computed Cronbach's α , average variance extracted (AVE), and factor scores, and also assessed discriminant validity using the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) score. Common method variance was also tested by applying the Harman's exploratory factor analysis test. SEM was used to accurately measure the structural relationships between CRSC, LBP, and LBPL. For reviews of CFA and SEM, see Jackson, Gillaspay, and Purc-Stephenson (2009) and Baumgartner and Homburg (1996).

Finally, we used to analyze CE effects on the relationships between CRSC, LBP, and LBPL. We performed moderator analysis (Memon et al. 2019) to determine whether the relationship between any two constructs was moderated by a third variable. Of several approaches to moderator analysis (Cheah et al. 2020), we applied the unconstrained approach combined with a double-mean-centering strategy (Lin et al. 2010). (See Cheah et al. (2020) and Lin et al. (2010) for technical details of the estimation procedure). Analyses were conducted using the R software (R Core Team 2021) “lavaan” (Rosseel 2012) and “semtools” packages (Jorgensen et al. 2022).

¹ Methodological Details Appendix (MDA) and R code, are available on the OSF website at:

https://osf.io/v3bjv/?view_only=d89a6923b89547569874c8773299eada

We also implemented a qualitative study to decode and enrich the interpretation of the CE effects, and so better understand our quantitative results. Using a parallel sampling design with subgroup sampling (Onwuegbuzie and Collins 2015), 24 individuals from different social backgrounds and Spanish regions were selected for in-depth interviews. Content analysis was applied to the interview transcripts to explore the relationship between CE and CRSC, LBP, and LBPL. A coding scheme focused on explicit mentions of key themes was developed to classify the data (Campbell et al. 2013; Weston et al. 2001), and after pretesting on a small sample, the content was manually coded and qualitatively analyzed to uncover deeper insights. The findings, presented below with illustrative quotes, provided valuable insights into the interplay between our constructs.

4. Results

4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis: Measurement Scale Validation

For the CFA used for construct validation, we estimated the model parameters using maximum likelihood regression (MLR) and assessed goodness-of-fit using the root mean square error of approximation ($RMSEA \leq 0.06$; confidence interval (CI) 90%), standardized root square mean residual ($SRMR \leq 0.08$), comparative fit index ($CFI \geq 0.95$), and Tucker-Lewis index ($TLI \geq 0.95$). We also examined the chi-square/degrees-of-freedom (χ^2/df) ratio, adhering to the ≤ 3 rule (Kline 2023). Following Hair et al. (2024), construct reliability was confirmed (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$, AVE > 0.5 , and factor score > 0.7), and discriminant validity was established ($HTMT < 0.85$). Table 2 reports the construct validation results, showing that scale fit was satisfactory, except for $\chi^2/df = 3.46$; however, although it exceeded 3, given the sensitivity of this ratio to sample size (Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen 2008), overall goodness-of-fit was considered acceptable. Harman's exploratory factor analysis test revealed

that one factor explained 24% of variability, below the 50% threshold, and so indicating the absence of common method bias.

Table 2. Reliability and validity results about here

4.2. Consumer Responsibility for Sustainable Consumption and Local Brands

Figure 2 shows structural model depicting the effects of CRSC on LBP, CRSC on LBPL, and LBP on LBPL. The effect of CRSC was positive and high for both LBP ($\beta = 0.357$) and LBPL ($\beta = 0.390$), and that of LBP on LBPL was also positive ($\beta = 0.397$). All effects were significant ($p < .001$) and so confirm H1, H2, and H3.

Figure 2. Structural model results about here

4.3. Moderating Effects of Consumer Ethnocentrism

How CE moderates the CRSC-LBP and CRSC-LBPL relationships is depicted in Figure 3, which shows the model on the left and the marginal incremental effects on the right.

Goodness-of-fit values, which were all satisfactory, were as follows: RMSEA = 0.056 (90% CI: 0.054), SRMR = 0.056, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, and $\chi^2/df = 8.99$.

Concerning the moderating effect, unexpectedly CE had a significantly negative effect on both CRSC-LBP ($\beta = -0.127$) and CRSC-LBPL ($\beta = -0.131$) relationships, indicating that a more ethnocentric attitude does not leverage CRSC regarding LBP or LBPL; therefore, both H4a and H4b are rejected.

Figure 3. Consumer ethnocentrism results about here

4.4. The Lack of a Moderating Effect of Consumer Ethnocentrism: Interview Insights

Considering our quantitative findings indicating that CE may weaken the relationship between CRSC, LBP, and LBPL, we conducted a follow-up qualitative study aimed at exploring why nationalistic sentiments, expressed through CE, failed to enhance the anticipated impact. With the help of a demoscopic company that provided the transcriptions and audio recordings, we conducted in-depth interviews with 24 Spanish informants representing a broad range of ethnocentric attitudes (Catalonia and Basque Country are regions with the least national-ethnocentric perspectives). Informants' demographic and socioeconomic data are detailed in Appendix B. The authors, then translated the interviews in English, and the final translation was reviewed and refined by a native English expert to ensure linguistic precision and fidelity to the original content.

Qualitative insights acquired from the interviewees—who were asked open-ended questions regarding local brands, sustainability, and how a sense of national identity influenced purchasing decisions—shed light on several key factors that help explain the lack of a moderating effect for CE.

While many informants demonstrated a strong feeling of belongingness to their community and valued local products, their consumption choices were not always aligned with CE values.

Many interviewees conceded that pro-environmental individuals tend to prefer local brands as more sustainable, due to reduced carbon emissions from transportation:

"With local products, you save on transportation, and therefore on fuel and emissions

With local products, you're likely contributing less to exploitation elsewhere and more to your local economy" (ID 3: Andalusian, 26 years, rural residence, tertiary education).

Several interviewees confirmed that local brands tend to be viewed as trustworthy, as consumers can obtain firsthand information on production processes:

"If it's local, you have the chance to visit the cooperative or the facility where the product is packaged, or you know someone working in the sector; it's easier to know the process firsthand" (ID 2: Andalusian, 42 years, urban resident, primary education).

However, the interviews revealed several cases where people committed to sustainable consumption might opt for global brands, i.e., a strong sense of local belongingness and pride does not automatically translate into a clear preference for local brands when other factors such as price, perceived sustainability, product quality, and availability are considered.

Consumers with strong sustainability values and a preference for local products are often forced, for budgetary reasons, to choose cheaper, mass-produced global alternatives over more costly and more sustainable local products:

"Being an aware consumer doesn't mean you can always afford to pay for the eco-product. Sometimes you're forced to choose something even if it's not your preferred option: price has a huge impact" (ID 2: Andalusian, 42 years, urban resident, primary education).

Another reason for choosing a global brand is the perception that being local does not guarantee sustainability of a product:

"Just because it's local doesn't mean it's more sustainable. There are many global brands that try to do things right and comply with standards. Local doesn't always meet your ecological criteria" (ID 5: Catalan, 30 years, rural resident, primary education).

Related is a perceived lack of information about the sustainable practices of local brands. If sufficient information about the sustainability of local products is not provided, it is difficult to justify a purchase solely based on CE values:

"If I'm not informed that a local product is more sustainable, I won't know. Maybe if the information was clearer, people would value it more". (ID 22: Valencian, 46 years, urban resident, primary education).

Yet another obstacle to an unconditional preference is the perceived quality of local products:

"A person concerned with sustainability and strongly connected to their community might choose a global brand if the local one doesn't offer the quality they want. Sustainability is important, but quality and price also play a crucial role" (ID 15: Basque, 30 years old, living in a rural area, tertiary education).

Finally, logistical barriers were also cited as another factor. The unavailability of local products in particular retail outlets or the inconvenience of acquiring them may lead consumers to opt for global products:

"If I don't have access to the local product in my usual store or supermarket, I just rule it out. I won't go to another store just to buy it" (ID 5: Catalan, 30 years, rural resident, primary education).

These insights explain the diminished power of CE in purchasing decisions, pointing to a divide between perceptions of sustainability and CE. While CE might suggest a natural preference for local brands, pro-environmental consumers may prioritize products, regardless of origin, that comply with their personal ecological standards or choose on the basis of price, product quality, and availability.

5. Discussion

In response to our first research question regarding the impact of consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption on local brand preference and purchase likelihood, our findings point to a significantly positive impact on both (supporting H1 and H2).

Our study provides empirical evidence validating the hypothesis that local brands can leverage their environmental and connectedness credentials to gain a foothold in the

population of sustainability-conscious consumers (Falke, Schröder, and Hofmann 2022; Izagirre-Olaizola, Fernández-Sainz, and Vicente-Molina 2015; Luchs, Phipps, and Hill 2015). These results underscore the importance of sustainability as a vital differentiator for local brands in an environment dominated by global competitors (Alzubaidi, Slade, and Dwivedi 2021; Epstein 2014). As previously recognized (Özsomer and Altaras 2008), local and global brands signal different values. To sustainability-conscious consumers, local brands convey environmental responsibility (proximity, reduced energy and resource use, and a smaller carbon footprint), social responsibility (job creation and economic growth) (Bryła 2019), and transparency (product sourcing and production). When consumers perceive their purchasing decisions as impactful, they are more likely to exhibit a heightened preference for local brands (Roy and Chau 2011). This preference also reinforces the association between local brand preference and purchase likelihood (Xu and Wyer 2007), confirming the hypothesized positive effect (H3).

Regarding the moderating effects of consumer ethnocentrism, our analysis offers unexpected and controversial insights. Contrary to our hypothesis and previous findings (Cleveland, Laroche, and Takahashi 2015; Sharma, Shimp, and Shin 1995), our analysis suggests that ethnocentrism weakens the relationship between consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption and both local brand preference and purchase likelihood (H4a and H4b are thus rejected).

Although studies report that more ethnocentric consumers typically exhibit a positive attitude to local brands/reject foreign products (Cleveland, Laroche, and Takahashi 2015; Sharma, Shimp, and Shin 1995; Zeugner-Roth, Žabkar, and Diamantopoulos 2015), our findings suggest conflicting attitudes and behaviors in pro-environmental ethnocentric consumers (Auger and Devinney 2007; Gatersleben, Steg, and Vlek 2002; Kollmuss and

Agyeman 2002; White, Habib, and Hardisty 2019; Young et al. 2010). This highlights the complexity of consumer identity and decision-making, suggesting that the alignment of sustainability efforts with local identity must be carefully managed (Cleveland, Laroche, and Takahashi 2015; Park, Lehnert, and Kalliny 2018; Trivedi, Tapar, and Dharmani 2024).

Our qualitative study to better understand this complexity, based on in-depth interviews, revealed that factors such as price, unclear sustainability information, perceived quality, and availability diminish the influence of ethnocentrism on purchasing decisions. Consistent with Acikdilli, Ziemnowicz, and Bahhouth (2018), our sustainability-conscious consumers may prioritize factors other than origin, thereby explaining the weak moderating effect of ethnocentrism on the relationships between consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption and both local brand preference and purchase likelihood. Note also that world-mindedness—reflecting how individuals perceive and address global challenges like sustainability (Salnikova, Strizhakova, and Coulter 2022; Skinner 1988)—is inversely related to ethnocentrism, with empirical evidence (Rawwas, Rajendran, and Wuehrer 1996) indicating that individuals with a more global perspective are less ethnocentric and so less likely to prefer local brands.

5.1. Theoretical Implications

From a theoretical perspective, our research extends the application of signaling theory (Erdem and Swait 1998), social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner 2004), and perceived consumer effectiveness theory (Hanss and Doran 2020) to the local brand context. Our findings demonstrate that by signaling their environmental/social responsibility credentials, particularly among pre-environmental consumers, local brands can strengthen consumer-brand connections (Gupta and Kumar 2013; Luchs and Miller 2015). Our findings also

extend social identity theory by illustrating how consumers align with brands that reflect their values (Tajfel and Turner 2004). Finally, in terms of perceived consumer effectiveness, we show that consumers believing that their purchase decisions can influence corporate behavior feel a shared sense of purpose with sustainable local brands (Hanss and Doran 2020; Srivastava, Gupta, and Rana 2021; Strizhakova, Coulter, and Price 2012).

Our study also provides new insights into the limitations of ethnocentrism as a driver of local brand preference and purchase likelihood. While ethnocentrism has traditionally been linked to a preference for local products, it may conflict with pro-environmental values, complicating consumer choices (Acikdilli, Ziemnowicz, and Bahhouth 2018; Sharma, Shimp, and Shin 1995). Our qualitative findings, which reveal that other concerns (price, quality, availability, and perceived sustainability) often outweigh the importance of local origin, suggest that ethnocentrism may not always enhance support for local brands (Bryła 2019; Fernández-Ferrín et al. 2018; Zeugner-Roth, Žabkar, and Diamantopoulos 2015). This challenge to traditional views highlights the need for a more dynamic understanding of how multiple consumer identities in relation to sustainability and national pride may interact and conflict in purchasing decisions.

In summary, this research into consumer behavior, in addition to questioning the impact of ethnocentrism, extends the theoretical applications of signaling, social identity, and perceived consumer effectiveness theories to the context of sustainable consumption (Trivedi, Tapar, and Dharmani 2024). It underscores the active role consumers play in driving corporate sustainability and calls for further exploration of how various consumer identities shape local brand preferences (Falke, Schröder, and Hofmann 2022; Hanss and Böhm 2012; Luchs, Phipps, and Hill 2015).

5.2. Practical Implications

Specific implication for managers of local brands in terms of strengthening connections with target markets and driving local brand preference and purchase likelihood in a competitive landscape are as follows:

- (1) CRSC significantly influences both local brand preference and purchase likelihood.

To capitalize on this effect and appeal to sustainability-driven consumers, local brands should actively communicate initiatives such as eco-friendly production, local job creation, and community engagement, thereby differentiating their brand from global competitors. Additionally, brands should use strategic signaling to align with consumer values, enhancing perceptions of consumer responsibility and empowering consumers to feel that their choices have a positive impact. This alignment would foster stronger consumer-brand identification, thereby strengthening both local brand preference and purchase likelihood.

- (2) Ethnocentrism plays a mixed role in shaping local brand preference and purchase likelihood. Although ethnocentric consumers may favor local products, a focus on sustainability concerns can potentially overshadow cultural identity. Local brands need to carefully balance messaging to appeal to both ethnocentric and pre-environmental consumers. By promoting sustainability while reinforcing local identity, brands can cater to the values of ethnocentric consumers without undermining the importance of sustainability.

5.3. Limitations and Future Research

Our study of the links between consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption and local brand preference and purchase likelihood has several limitations. First, the research was

conducted in a specific country (Spain), so further studies are needed in other countries to generalize our findings and conclusions. Second, other factors, such as price, quality, etc., as supported by the existing literature, may intervene in and further mediate these relationships. Third, our study does not measure preference or purchase likelihood for local and global brands independently, but for local brands over global brands, nor is our research focused on a specific sector or market. Since consumer intentions vary across industries and contexts, to provide more nuanced insights, future research needs to explore specific settings, considering both sustainable and non-sustainable local and global brand options.

We encourage future studies that incorporate additional constructs such as quality, image, familiarity, etc., examined in contexts of sustainable and non-sustainable global and local brands. This broader perspective would contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics influencing consumer behavior regarding sustainable brand choices.

6. *Conclusion*

This study demonstrates, in relation to local brand preference and purchase likelihood the impact of consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption is positive. In revealing that pro-environmental consumers favor local brands, it suggests that local SMEs can leverage their environmental responsibility and local connectedness credentials in markets dominated by global brands. However, contrary to previous research, we found that consumer ethnocentrism weakens the impact of consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption, pointing to a tension between cultural identity and environmental concerns. Qualitative insights show that the diminished influence of ethnocentrism in sustainability-conscious consumers is due to the prioritization of environmental factors over product origin. This

finding, which challenges traditional views of ethnocentrism, underscores the importance of clear messaging that emphasizes sustainability rather than product origin as a competitive advantage for local brands in driving consumer decisions.

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Declarations of interest: none

Conflict of interest statement

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Ethical approval and informed consent statements

All participants provided written informed consent prior to enrolment in the study.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request. After a 3-year embargo, data will be publicly available at the Spanish Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas.

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Appendix A

Table A1. Brief description of constructs.

Construct	Definition	Reference	Items	Label	Reference
Local brand preference (LBP)	Relative preference for choosing and using a local brand	Yoo et al. (2000)	It makes sense to always choose a local brand, even if global brands offer slightly better services.	LBP1	Liu et al. (2014); Yoo et al. (2000)
			Even if a global brand has a better product portfolio than a local brand, I strongly prefer the local brand.	LBP2	
			Although a global brand offers more convenient products, I still prefer to choose the local brand.	LBP3	
Local brand purchase likelihood (LBPL)	Probability of buying a local brand	Dodds et al. (1991)	I would buy local brands.	LBPL1	Dodds et al. (1991); Putrevu and Lord (1994)
			I certainly buy local brands	LBPL2	
			It is very likely that I buy local brand.	LBPL3	
Consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption (CRSC)	Consumption satisfying basic needs and offering freedom to develop human potential, replicable across the world without compromising the Earth's carrying capacity	Hertwich (2005)	I feel obliged to try to implement sustainable practices where appropriate.	CRSC1	Luchs and Miller (2015)
			It's up to me to bring about improvements in sustainability.	CRSC2	
			I feel a personal sense of responsibility to be more sustainable in my product choices.	CRSC3	
Consumer ethnocentrism (CE)	Favourable attitude to purchasing local brands and rejecting imported products	Cleveland et al. (2015); Sharma et al. (1995)	Purchasing foreign-made products is unpatriotic.	CE1	Shimp and Sharma (1987) Batra et al. (2000); Zhou et al. (2010)
			A real Spaniard should always buy domestic products.	CE2	
			Spaniards should not purchase imported goods, because we need to support our own economy.	CE3	
			Spaniards should try to avoid buying foreign brands whenever possible.	CE4	

Table A2. Univariate statistical items.

Construct	Labels	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Local brand preference (LBP)	LBP1	2.954	1.079	-.055	2.441
	LBP2	2.924	1.086	-.017	2.473
	LBP3	3.006	1.072	-.058	2.568
Local brand purchase likelihood (LBPL)	LBPL1	3.816	.923	-.466	2.990
	LBPL2	3.746	.923	-.371	2.845
	LBPL3	3.808	.907	-.433	2.946
Consumer responsibility for sustainable consumption (CRSC)	CRSC1	3.496	1.055	-.379	2.719
	CRSC2	3.246	1.091	-.247	2.604
	CRSC3	3.538	1.046	-.438	2.796
Consumer ethnocentrism (CE)	CE1	1.941	1.129	.945	2.951
	CE2	2.217	1.246	.601	2.236
	CE3	2.394	1.212	.418	2.190
	CE4	2.113	1.138	.693	2.596

Appendix B

Demographic and socioeconomic data for the 24 in-depth interviewees.

ID	Region	Age	Gender (birth)	Rural/Urban	Residence	Education	Income*
1	Andalusia	31	Female	Rural	Coín (Málaga)	Primary/ Secondary	=
2	Andalusia	42	Male	Urban	Córdoba	Primary/ Secondary	—
3	Andalusia	26	Male	Rural	Rota (Cádiz)	Tertiary	=
4	Andalusia	37	Female	Urban	Granada	Tertiary	+
5	Catalonia	30	Female	Rural	La Pobla de Montornès (Tarragona)	Primary/ Secondary	=
6	Catalonia	39	Female	Urban	Barcelona	Primary/ Secondary	—
7	Catalonia	34	Male	Rural	La Pobla de Segur (Lleida)	Tertiary	+
8	Catalonia	62	Male	Urban	Barcelona	Tertiary	=
9	Madrid	27	Female	Rural	Valdeolmos (Madrid)	Primary/ Secondary	=
10	Madrid	42	Female	Urban	Madrid	Primary/ Secondary	=
11	Madrid	34	Male	Rural	Valdemorillo (Madrid)	Tertiary	=
12	Madrid	47	Male	Urban	Madrid	Tertiary	=
13	Basque Country	18	Female	Rural	Amurrio (Álava)	Primary/ Secondary	=
14	Basque Country	42	Female	Urban	Donostia	Primary/ Secondary	=
15	Basque Country	30	Male	Rural	Leioa (Vizcaya)	Tertiary	+
16	Basque Country	49	Male	Urban	Barakaldo	Tertiary	+
17	Castile- León	21	Male	Rural	Arévalo (Ávila)	Primary/ Secondary	=
18	Castile- León	54	Male	Urban	Valladolid	Primary/ Secondary	=
19	Castile- León	31	Female	Rural	Toro (Zamora)	Tertiary	=
20	Castile- León	41	Female	Urban	León	Tertiary	=
21	Valencian Community	34	Female	Rural	Alfaz del Pi (Alicante)	Primary/ Secondary	=
22	Valencian Community	46	Male	Urban	Alicante	Primary/ Secondary	+
23	Valencian Community	20	Male	Rural	Altura (Castelló)	Tertiary	=
24	Valencian Community	45	Female	Urban	Castelló	Tertiary	+

*Income compared to the majority: = around the same; + above; — below.

Tables

Table 1. Survey participant characteristics (n = 2,589)

Variables	Categories	n	%
Age	< 35 years	591	22.83
	35-54 years	971	37.51
	55-74 years	740	28.58
	> 74 years	287	11.09
Gender	Male	1,342	51.83
	Female	1,247	48.16
Income	< €1000	332	12.82
	€1000-2000	750	28.97
	€2000-3000	732	28.27
	> €3000	775	29.94
Education	< Secondary	379	12.36
	Secondary	894	34.53
	University	995	38.43
	Postgraduate	380	14.68
Living circumstances	Alone	383	14.79
	With non-family	1,212	46.81
	With family	935	36.12

Table 2. Reliability and validity results

Construct	Items	Score	Reliability ^a	
			Cronbach's α	AVE
LBP			0.881	0.712
	LBP1	0.833*		
	LBP2	0.862*		
	LBP3	0.836*		
LBPL			0.904	0.759
	LBPL1	0.866*		
	LBPL2	0.887*		
	LBPL3	0.860*		
CRSC			0.813	0.600
	CRSC1	0.810*		
	CRSC2	0.670*		
	CRSC3	0.834*		
CE			0.894	0.679
	CE1	0.814*		
	CE2	0.828*		
	CE3	0.815*		
	CE4	0.837*		
HTMT discriminant validity ^b				
	LBP	LBPL	CRSC	CE
LBP	1.000			
LBPL	0.460	1.000		
CRSC	0.351	0.447	1.000	
CE	0.457	0.124	0.069	1.000
CFA ^c				
$\chi^2/df = 4.47$, RMSEA = 0.037 (90% CI: 0.040), SRMR $\leq$ 0.028, CFI = 0.99, and TLI = 0.99. n=2589				

Note: ^a Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.7$, AVE > 0.5 (Hair et al., 2024). ^b HTMT < 0.85 (Henseler et al.,

2015). ^c RMSEA ≤ 0.06 (90% CI ≤ 0.06), SRMR ≤ 0.08 , CFI ≥ 0.95 , TLI ≥ 0.95 ; * $p < .001$.

AVE, average variance extracted; CE, consumer ethnocentrism; CFA, confirmatory factor

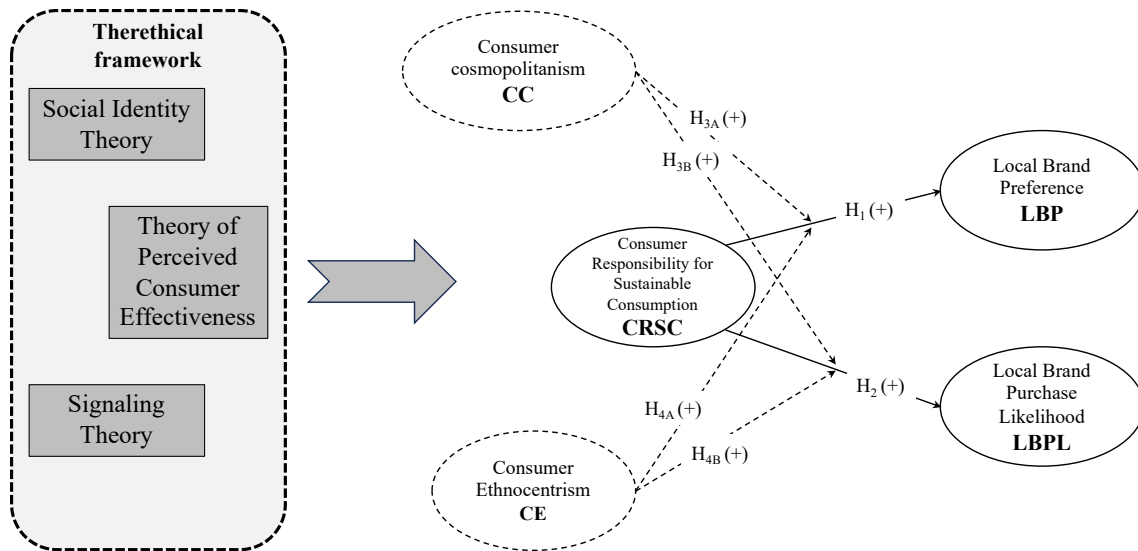
analysis; CFI, comparative fit index; CRSC, consumer responsibility for sustainable

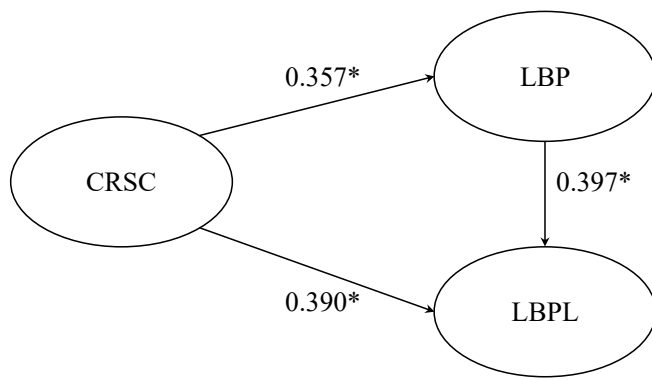
consumption; HTMT, heterotrait-monotrait ratio; LBP, local brand preference; LBPL, local

brand purchase likelihood; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SRMR,

standardized root mean square residual; TLI, Tucker-Lewis index.

Figures





*p<.001

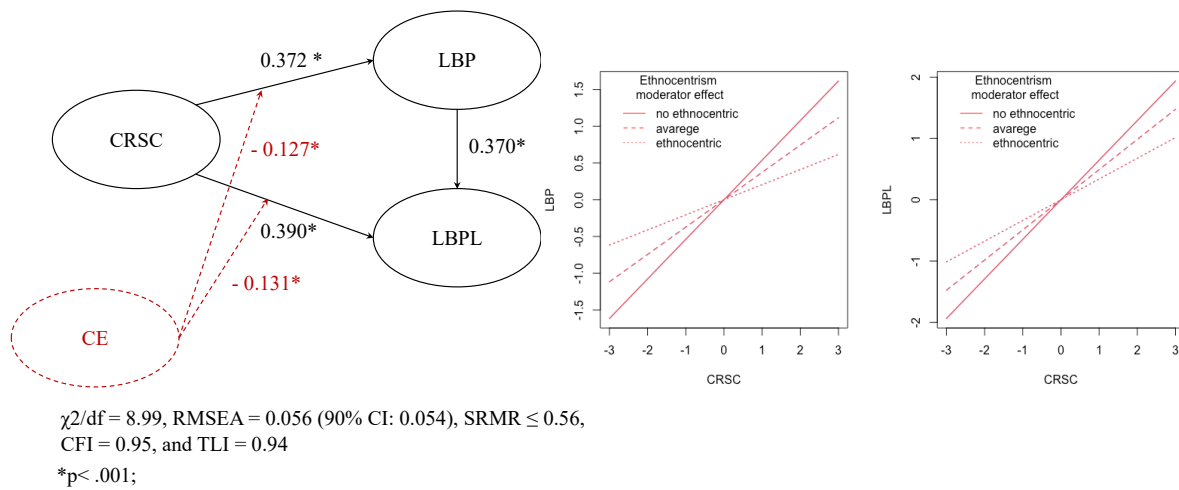


Figure Captions

Figure 1. Model and tested hypotheses

Figure 2. Structural model results

Figure 3. Consumer ethnocentrism result