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EXPLORING CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM AS A MEDIATOR BETWEEN AI-BASED MOBILE APP ENVIRONMENTS AND PURCHASE BEHAVIOR: AN EMERGING MARKET PERSPECTIVE

I.Raisal[1], E.S. Embang[2], Z. Ashurova[3],
[1]South Eastern University of Sri Lanka
[2,3] Samarqand International University of Technology
ismarais@seu.ac.lk

Abstract

This paper examines how consumer ethnocentrism mediates the relationship between the artificial intelligence (AI)-driven mobile application setting and the intention to buy items in Uzbekistan, which is an emerging economy that is rapidly transforming towards technological use. A sample of 210 respondents is used in the study as a structured survey and structural equation modeling (SEM) is used to test the relationships among the key variables. The results indicate that there is a strong direct impact of mobile app environments created by AI on the purchase behavior. This relationship is not, however mediated by consumer ethnocentrism. The mobile applications developed with AI use powerful algorithms to provide consumers with customized and effective experiences, boost decision-making and purchase behavior. In culturally rich country such as Uzbekistan, ethnocentrism of consumers, local preference of domestic products over foreign products may play a role in this interaction by inhibiting or promoting the use of technology. However, this paper concludes that ethnocentrism is not only positively associated with purchasing behavior but also it is not significant in mediating the influence of the AI-driven environment. The study points to the changing environment of the consumers in the emerging markets, where the utilitarian aspects such as efficiency and convenience can be more important than the traditional cultural values. The insights can be applied practically to businesses interested in the design of AI-based solutions that are appealing and reflect local and generational tastes. The research adds to the paucity of academic research on AI adoption and its interaction with cultural processes, where it is clear that the strategy should be implemented individually in the context of the transition economy.

Keywords: *Consumer Ethnocentrism, Purchase Behavior*

1. Introduction

With the dynamic international market and the high rate of technological innovation and competition, companies are now turning to the use of advanced technology to improve consumer experiencΩe and simplify their operations through the adoption of AI. Specifically, mobile applications that are AI-driven have changed the landscape of e-commerce and made personalized services possible and helped to enhance decision-making. The use of AI in mobile apps with advanced algorithms and machine learning has become the key to providing personalized and frictionless shopping experience. Product recommendations, virtual shopping assistants, and more make these innovations more interactive and lead to buying decisions (Wang et al., 2022).

The influence of this technology is particularly noticeable in some of the developing economies such as Uzbekistan, where the digital adoption is increasing at a high rate. Regardless of these developments, the interaction between AI technology and consumer buying behavior is still not well understood, especially based on cultural-related aspects such as consumer ethnocentrism. A major determinant of consumer behaviour is consumer ethnocentrism which is the belief in superiority of local products over foreign counterparts. According to previous studies, ethnocentricity may also prevent or enhance the use of new technology, based on the demographics of consumers and their cultural affiliation (Shimp and Sharma,

1987; Vida et al., 1996). Nevertheless, ethnocentrism has not been sufficiently studied as modulator of mediator of the impact of AI-driven environments on purchase behavior, especially in non-Western countries such as Uzbekistan.

AI implementation in marketing brings about special psychological and behavioral processes, including believing in the AI systems, user acceptance, and impact of cultural values (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2020). However, there is a lot of scant information about the interaction of these dynamics and the ethnocentric attitudes, particularly in the ethnically diverse and culturally rich areas. The gap that the research fills is the analysis of how consumer ethnocentrism mediates the effect between mobile app environment induced by AI and the purchase behavior, with the case study of the city of Samarkand in Uzbekistan. The environmental contingency view is also used in this study as a basis which suggests that the performance of technological systems is highly influenced by contextual environmental factors including cultural orientations, social values and consumer readiness. The basic contingency-based arguments propose that the results of organizations and technologies will not be generalized across all situations without assessing the fit between technology and user context. This perspective is especially significant in a context of AI-powered services, as consumer attitudes and reactions to AI personalization and automation are influenced by cultural and situational contingencies in emerging markets.

Consumer ethnocentrism is an important mediating mechanism that deserves further exploration by scholars due to its cultural embeddedness and potential influence on the efficacy of the AI-enabled commercial environments in the emerging economies. In contrast to previous research that has focused on the adoption of AI as an independent variable and ethnocentrism as an independent variable, this study sheds light on the mediating pathway, focusing on how cultural identity can mediate the behavioral outcomes produced by AI-based interactions. The study focuses on mediation with direct effect along, which helps to clarify the underlying mechanism of the relationship between AI-based environments and purchase behavior and helps to increase the explanatory power of previous technology adoption studies by eliminating this conceptual ambiguity. Although there is a tendency to increase the use of AI technologies in e-commerce, the effectiveness of such technologies depends on the compatibility with the culture and the attitude of customers in many cases. The investigation of the interplay of AI-based personalization, culture, and consumer behavior is still limited, especially in new markets. This research aims to address this gap by exploring the mediating effect of consumer ethnocentrism in determining the relationship between AI-driven mobile apps settings and purchase behavior. The knowledge of these interactions will be of use to companies aiming at serving the ethnocentric consumers in the transitioning economies such as Uzbekistan. Thus, the objectives of this study set as under: to examine the direct relationship between AI-supported mobile applications environments and consumer purchase behavior; to test the role of consumer ethnocentrism in mediating such a relationship. This study will also explore the answers for the following research questions:

> *RQ1: How does the consumer purchase behavior directly relate to AI-induced mobile app environment?*
>
> *RQ2: Are consumer ethnocentrism plays a mediation role in this relation?*

In spite of the fact that previous research has discussed how AI and consumer ethnocentrism are adopted as distinct constructs, little empirical researches have been conducted to reveal how the two phenomena are interrelated. The study contributes to the research by examining the mediating position of consumer ethnocentrism in determining the behavioral reactions brought about by the use of AI. Moreover, it provides practical suggestions to companies that operate within culturally sensitive environments, including Uzbekistan, by outlining the tactics that appeal to the local cultural values and anticipations.

In addition, this research places the mediation model within the theoretical framework as it is a new contribution rather than a mere fragmented application of broader AI adoption studies. The empirical study examines if consumer ethnocentrism is a mediator linking the AI-enabled mobile app environment

to purchase behavior in emerging markets. The case of Uzbekistan is especially relevant in its context of the fast digitalization, traditional cultural values and local consumption habits.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

Mobile applications based on AI technology have transformed the interaction between consumers, providing customized suggestions, predictive analytics, and simplified user experiences. These innovations are based on real-time data to make the engagement more engaging and purchase choices more efficient (Huang et al., 2023). Individuality, convenience, and credibility are critical in making consumers embrace AI technologies. The element of trust is critical, in this case, because users will go through issues of privacy and trustworthiness of AI-based suggestions (McKnight et al., 2002; Hengstler et al., 2016). The studies also highlight the promise of AI functionality to match consumer values and cultural identities, thereby increasing their efficiency (Singh et al., 2023). In Uzbekistan, e-commerce is swiftly shifting to the use of AI technologies, which change the purchasing pattern. Nevertheless, there is a lack of research on the mediation of the influence of cultural and psychological determinants on the effect of AI on purchase behavior. This paper will look into these dynamics but more so the AI-driven environments as one of the most important variables that will have a direct impact on consumer purchases.

The marketing research focuses on consumer purchase behavior that is defined as the process of obtaining goods and services based on the attitudes, preferences, and emotions (Kardes et al., 2011). Online trading has increased the usefulness of customized and effective shopping experiences, particularly in the emerging economies in which the use of technology matches the rising consumer demands (Chaffey et al., 2019). Mobile applications run with AI can help to improve purchase behavior because they can be more efficient, personalized, and bring customer satisfaction. Past research also indicates the association between the features of AI and consumer loyalty and consumer engagement (West et al., 2018). Purchase behavior is the dependent variable in this study, which is the result of interactions in the environment of AI.

Cultural identity and economic and moral responsibility lead to consumer ethnocentrism where people show a preference to local products rather than international products (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). Ethnocentric attitude may influence the buying process and in many cases, may act as an obstacle to the acceptance of foreign technologies or products (Luque-Martinez et al., 2000). Ethnocentrism has a subtle effect in mediating consumer behavior in markets such as Uzbekistan. As long as conventional ethnocentric trends emphasize local products, the growing adoption of AI-powered technologies can also change the position of consumers towards convenience and efficiency. Therefore, consumer ethnocentrism is postulated as a mediating factor in the association linking AI-based mobile application context and consumer buying behaviour.

This type of innovation has greatly facilitated the life of the consumer by making life easier and more organized through integration of smart technologies into routine activity, which have also brought about an improved standard of living (Pelau & Ene, 2018). The artificial intelligence (AI), especially in the mobile application, is central in determining consumer purchasing behavior. Using sophisticated algorithms, AI develops personalized shopping experiences and encourages user engagement and trust (Kaplan and Haenlein, 2020). Consumer acceptance is determined by the level of trust, user friendliness and perceived value, which will affect purchase decisions (McKnight et al., 2002).

Depending on the use of AI, consumers may adopt it. As an example, AI-based financial tools tend to be accepted much more than personal assistants or legal consultation devices (Pelau and Ene, 2020). Such influencing factors are performance, social pressure, entertainment value, and usability (Gursoy et al., 2019; Law et al., 2018). The efficiency of AI serving in terms of higher speed, personalization, and efficiency of certain processes can significantly boost the satisfaction of consumers and time of purchase (West et al., 2018). The increasing presence of AI in e-commerce is changing the relationships with

consumers by introducing a real-time customization aspect and more proactive analytics (Huang et al., 2023). Nevertheless, scanty studies examine the role of cultural and psychological variables such as ethnocentrism in mediating influence of AI settings on purchase decision. This paper aims to fill this gap.

H1: AI-generated mobile app settings positively directly impact purchasing behavior.

Consumer ethnocentrism is a set of normative beliefs on superiority of domestic products and about the sense of moral responsibility to contribute to the domestic economy (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). It determines the behavior of purchases by influencing the attitude towards foreign and domestic products (Kim and Pysarchik, 2000). The ethnocentric consumers will be focused on the domestic products and they tend to see buying foreign products as something that may be dangerous to their economy and culture.

Consumer ethnocentrism also has a complicated position in globalized markets, and it may be complicated in the case of its interaction with technological progress. It has been found that ethnocentric attitudes may suppress or facilitate adoption of technology based on culture compatibility and localization of the product (Vida et al., 1996). As an illustration, cultural-specific AI applications can be used to reduce opposition and increase adoption (Singh et al., 2023).

Considering the cultural diversity and the current trends in introducing digital in Uzbekistan, this paper explores the relationship between ethnocentrism and AI-based systems. Exploring the idea of ethnocentrism as a mediator, we want to learn more about how it may determine the decisions to adopt AI and purchase it.

H2: Consumer ethnocentrism is an mediating variable in the relationship between AI-generated mobile app setting and buying.

3. Methodology

This paper takes a quantitative research method to establish the relations between AI-driven mobile application environments, consumer ethnocentrism, and consumer purchasing behavior. To test the hypotheses, a structured survey was adopted to gather the data, and the data was analyzed with the help of structural equation modeling (SEM). The study uses the city of Samarkand, Uzbekistan, as the setting, the location with a strong cultural identity and facing a fast technological uptake.

The respondents were mainly selected from the urban commercial and educational areas of Samarkand city, Uzbekistan, where mobile commerce applications with artificial intelligence are increasingly being used in recent years. The approach used was through universities, shopping centers and digitally engaged social groups. While convenience sampling proved to be effective in reaching active users of AI applications in mobile devices, it also has the disadvantage of being non-probability, which makes it difficult to generalize the results beyond similar urban emerging-market settings. The results should therefore be treated with some caution when trying to draw generalizations to the rural population or to culturally different markets.

The target audience consists of people aged 18 years and higher who have used AI-based mobile apps to shop in the last 6 months. A convenience sampling method was used to get a sample of 230 respondents. Convenience sampling has drawbacks in terms of generalizability, but it was considered suitable based on the fact that this study was exploratory, and its practical limitations on reaching a diverse population in a new market. In order to eliminate the possibility of biases, a certain effort was made to cover respondents of different age groups, gender, and income levels. The total number of 230 participants were given 210 valid responses, which were to be analysed. The population sample was 80 percent women (n =168) and 20 percent men (n=42). The representation of age groups is sufficient to analyze the statistics effectively. The distribution of age was as follows:

Table 1: Age Groupings

Age	Respondents	Percentage
18-24	79	37.61
25-34	56	26.67
35-44	42	20
45-54	22	10.47
55-+	11	5.24
Total	210	100%

The study employed a structured questionnaire, which was built on the validated scales of previous studies. Consumer Ethnocentrism: When a modified CETSCALE was used, this measure was taken (Shimp and Sharma, 1987); Mobile App Environments Caused by AI: And are measured on perceived personalization, ease of use, and trust (adapted Huang et al., 2023); Purchase Behavior: Measured using items based on purchase frequency, satisfaction, and loyalty (adapted to Singh et al., 2023). The answers were recorded based on a 5-point Likert scale, i.e., 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree).

Table 2: Definition of Measures

Constructs	Definition
AI-based Mobile Apps Environment	The concept of the AI-powered technological platform used to provide personalized, efficient, and user-focused experiences. Such environments use real-time data to adjust to individual preferences to provide superior decision-making and smooth consumer interaction (Huang et al., 2023).
Consumer Ethnocentrism	The consumer ethnocentrism relates to the idea of superiority of home products over foreign products based on the sense of cultural identity and moral responsibility. Ethnocentric consumers also see buying foreign products as a detriment to the local economy and unpatriotic (Shimp and Sharma, 1987).
Purchase Behaviour	Purchase Behaviour refers to the actions and decisions made by people in the process of obtaining goods and services based on attitudes and preferences and externally affected by marketing stimuli and technological changes (Singh et al., 2023).
Mediating Role	Defines a process according to which an independent variable (AI-driven mobile app environments) has its impact on a dependent variable (purchase behavior) via an intermediary (consumer ethnocentrism). Mediation offers an understated perspective of causal routes (Baron and Kenny, 1986).

In the current undertaking, the structural equation modeling has been done using AMOS software. The process of analysis has started with the examination of the reliability whereby Composite Reliability (CR) was calculated to assess the internal consistency of the measurement tools. Validity was then investigated through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and construct validity was proven through an evaluation of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The last phase was the testing of the hypotheses by path analysis which helped in the investigation of direct and indirect relations in the model.

4. Results and Discussion

A total of 210 valid responses were included in the dataset, being of different age categories and gender balance. The descriptive analysis revealed that the respondents were highly familiar with AI-based mobile applications, and 72% of them stated that they frequently use these types of platforms to shop. Markedly, younger age groups (18-34) were more involved with AI-driven features, which is consistent with the available literature, where younger consumers are referred to as tech-savvy (Huang et al., 2023).

Table 3: CFA Results

Items	AI_induced_mobile_app	CE	PB
AII1	0.76		
AII3	0.79		
AII4	0.87		
AII5	0.85		
CE 2		0.79	
CE 4		0.87	
CE 5		0.78	
PB 1			0.78
PB 2			0.76
PB 3			0.82
PB 4			0.78
PB 5			0.77
AVE	0.744	0.746	0.782
Reliability	0.811	0.799	0.801

The confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to measure the fit of the measurement model against the loadings of items. This was achieved by means of an iterative procedure that included the systematic restriction of the items that portrayed standardized loadings less than 0.70 (Hair et al., 2019). Therefore, AI13, CE 1 and CE 2 loadings were excluded. One of the items was removed at a time in rigid compliance with the recommended purification procedures, and at each step its omission was examined with respect to theoretical justification, until fit indices of the model could reasonably be considered to be acceptable.

Table 5: Testing Hypothesis 1

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Int
AI-induced mobile app environments → purchase behavior	.355	.076	4.686	***	Significant direct effect; Hypothesis is supported

Note: ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.10

Path analysis indicated that there are a significant and positive correlation between mobile app environment induced by AI and purchase behavior (Est = 0.35, CR = 4.69, $p < 0.01$). These results confirm the hypothesis, which implies that personalization, convenientiveness, and apprehension of the AI-based application can greatly improve consumer buying behaviors. This aligns with the previous studies that accentuate the importance of AI in enhancing consumer engagement and satisfaction (Singh et al., 2023).

Table 6: Testing Hypothesis 2

Path	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Int
AI-induced mobile app environments → *Consumer ethnocentrism*→ Purchase behavior	.129	.072	1.786	.074	No significant mediation effect; Hypothesis is not supported

Note: ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1

To the contrary, consumer ethnocentrism did not support the mediating role (CR = 1.78, p = 0.074). Although ethnocentrism was fairly associated with purchase behavior (Est = 0.12), the impact was not statistically significant as a mediator variable. This finding is consistent with the recent research pointing to the declining influence of ethnocentrism by technologically progressive areas, where people are more concerned with convenience and efficiency than with culture (Khan et al., 2023).

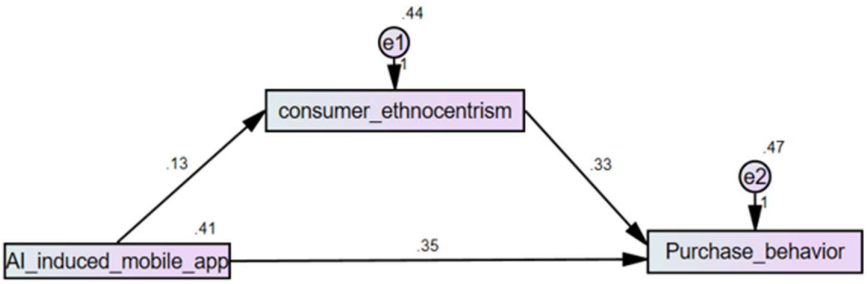

Figure 1: Final SEM-AMOS Network Analysis

5. Discussion

The results align with the previous studies that found that AI-driven personalization can positively affect customer engagement and decision-making due to convenience, trust, and perceived usefulness (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2020; Huang et al., 2023). The findings confirm the environmental contingency view that consumer expectations and market context have a significant influence on technological effectiveness. In the emerging-market context of the Uzbek consumers, the utilitarian technological features seem to be more relevant than the consumption features from a cultural perspective.

The results highlight how AI is changing consumer behavior, especially in developing countries such as Uzbekistan. The direct connection between AI settings and purchasing behavior is also enormous, which underlines the technological characteristics of personalization and trust as potential factors to influence consumer decision-making. Companies that appeal to the ethnocentric market can use these insights to develop AI-based solutions that will appeal to local tastes. Nevertheless, the non-mediating nature of consumer ethnocentrism implies that cultural identity might not be a strong enough factor that can determine the adoption of AI in these markets. Such a nontraditional ethnocentric action can be seen as a transition to a more utilitarian decision-making process brought about by technological progress. Ethnocentrism does not seem to affect younger consumers, as they seem to be more concerned with the efficiency and the convenience of AI-powered solutions.

This result partly contradicts the results obtained from previous research by Shimp and Sharma (1987) and Vida et al. (1996) that have focused on the significant behavioral impact of ethnocentric behaviors on purchase decisions. The current results suggest that ethnocentrism may no longer be a major explaining factor in digital purchasing behavior in technologically changing contexts. Instead, the traditional cultural resistance might be overcome by the convenience, efficiency and personalization offered by AI. This study, therefore, extends the concept of consumer ethnocentrism by providing empirical evidence for the reduced explanatory power of consumer ethnocentrism in a highly digitalised service environment in an emerging economy.

Managerial Implications

Organizations must not ignore the call of making artificial intelligence applications fit the delicate tastes of their audiences. The focus of AI-driven services development should be on personalized interaction so that users will feel that they are recognized and appreciated, thus creating an enhancement of user experience and the brand loyalty will last. Furthermore, the modern marketing paradigms should not be

limited by the false homogeneity of the consumer market. There is empirical evidence that a divide along the level of technology skill and generation will be more effective in the business operation, particularly where the mode of communication and the nature of the promotional message is optimized based on the level of technological comfort that each segment is at.

Theoretical Contributions

In particular, the study builds on the environmental contingency theory, empirically showing that the traditional cultural dispositions may be outweighed in an AI-enabled commerce context by the environmental contingencies of technological benefits. The results of the current study diverge from previous research, which mainly regarded ethnocentrism as a stable predictor of purchase preference, in that they indicated that efficiency and personalization through AI can significantly diminish the behavioural impact of ethnocentric attitudes. Theoretically, the study challenges the notion that ethnocentrism is a constant in digitally transforming societies and brings AI adoption literature to emerging-market contexts that have not been studied.

This study makes a significant contribution to the body of literature since it elucidates the dynamic nature of interaction between an environmental contingency of the AI services and consumer ethnocentrism construct in an emergent market. The empirical findings defy the long-held belief that the influence of ethnocentric dispositions has a consistent effect on technology adoption decisions. Rather the results provide insight into a paradigm whereby the modernization of markets and the ubiquitous nature of digital technologies into everyday life can trigger a shift in the consumer preference, resulting in a changed way in which ethnocentric nature dictates purchasing behaviour and use of a product.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper examined the mediating presence of consumer ethnocentrism in the relationship between AI-induced mobile app settings and purchase behavior aiming at the new market of Uzbekistan. The results demonstrate that there is a strong direct impact of AI-based mobile application settings on the decision to buy, and the personalized and user-oriented technological aspects determine consumer choices. Nevertheless, the hypothesized mediating factor of consumer ethnocentrism was not substantiated and it is possible that the effect of cultural identity on the adoption of technologies is weakening in the technologically developing areas.

These findings bring out a subtle appreciation of consumer behavior in the newly-developing markets whereby the ethnocentric tendencies could be replaced by utilitarian ones that include convenience, efficiency and technological development. The results highlight why companies and policymakers have to realign their strategies in accordance with these changing consumer patterns.

The modern-day organisations are tasked with the responsibility to ensure the improvement of personalization is a priority when developing AI-enhanced applications. Systems with personalized suggestions, flexible interfaces, and regional language support have an increased likelihood of increasing user interaction and satisfaction since technology will be interacted with in regard to their personal preferences and situational requirements. Holistically related to personalization is the development of the trust towards AI systems. As trust is one of the most important factors in the technology adoption, developers and organisations need to provide complete transparency of system functionality, follow the ethical practices of AI strictly, and introduce powerful data-protection systems. These solutions dilute the perceived risk and create continued usage.

Even though the consumer ethnocentrism did not become a powerful mediating parameter, the culturally sensitive design approaches are essential in addressing a variety of viewers, especially those aged older or conservative. Interrelatability and acceptability can be enhanced by embedding of local cultural symbols, communication styles and familiar contextual references in application interfaces and promotional campaigns. On the contrary, younger users display increased sensitivity to advanced AI

capabilities and interactive experiences. To that end, organisations ought to implement segmented marketing tactics which integrate gamified interaction, collaboration with influencers and social-media-oriented communication in an attempt to reach the technologically inclined younger consumers.

Future Research Directions

There are a few ways of further investigation. A comparative cross-cultural study would clarify the role of ethnocentrism in adopting AI in the different cultural settings and would uncover larger trends in the world. It may be explained by longitudinal studies that would allow getting a better insight into the way of the development of attitudes towards AI technologies and the ethnocentric tendencies as the exposure to digital systems grows. Further, the addition of qualitative methods like interviews and focus-group discussions, would allow the researcher to investigate the psychological/cultural processes that lie between to shed light on the external and internal circumstances that are involved in consumer decision-making.

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