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An Examination of the Effects of Consumer Ethnocentrism, Consumer Internationalism and Consumer Cosmopolitanism toward Products from China in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effects of consumer ethnocentrism, consumer internationalism, and consumer cosmopolitism on Malaysians' purchasing of electrical and electronic products from China. A reconceptualized consumer ethnocentrism measurement scale was used to capture cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions that previous studies have ignored. A total of 555 consumers were sampled through online questionnaires distributed on social media and used Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling to test the proposed model. The results show that consumer ethnocentrism has a significant negative effect on Malaysian consumers' willingness to buy Chinese products. In contrast, consumer cosmopolitanism was rejected due to opposing path directions, and consumer internationalism was insignificant. Future research should examine multi-dimensional consumer ethnocentrism in other countries and products, and incorporate alternative measurements for consumer cosmopolitanism. The research recommends that managers consider multi-dimensional consumer ethnocentrism when strategizing to market international products, as it provides more depth than simply relying on consumer cosmopolitanism.

KEYWORDS

consumer ethnocentrism; consumer internationalism; consumer cosmopolitanism; Chinese products; Malaysia

Introduction

Many countries are economically affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Among other industries, retailing, manufacturing, services, tourism, and travel struggle to survive the pandemic, and many could not. During these difficult times, ethnocentrism seems to be widespread as governments encourage a "buy-local" strategy as a mechanism to protect their country's economy in hopes of curbing imports, protecting local employment, improving trade balances, and defending national identities. Despite its possible adverse effects on international trade, organizations and companies exploited ethnocentrism to their advantage. In addition, ethnocentrism is used in marketing and promotional efforts to attract ethnocentric consumers.

Ethnocentrism has piqued the interest of numerous academic disciplines, including public health (Grigg and Manderson 2016), sports (Chiu and Won 2022), and business (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2022). Its potential impact on consumer behavior has been acknowledged, as have other closely related constructs such as consumer racism (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2017), consumer animosity (Ettenson and Gabrielle Klein 2005; Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998), and consumer xenophobia (Mueller et al. 2016). Consumer ethnocentrism is a well-researched area and a significant construct affecting consumer behaviors at the international and domestic levels (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2022) across various consumer products and services. It enables marketers and businesses to grasp better consumers' preference for domestic brands and goods over imported ones. However, most previous research on consumer ethnocentrism was

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examined through a unidimensional structured measurement scale developed by Shimp and Sharma (1987). Ironically, it remained unidimensional over many years since its conception, though the measurement scale was modified and improved to suit various research contexts.

In their article, Shimp and Sharma (1987) indicated that the consumer ethnocentrism construct should possess multi-dimensional elements. Without a "three-dimensional structure of consumer ethnocentrism […], the unique influence of its affective, cognitive and behavioral components on consumer perceptions and evaluations toward domestic and foreign products and their manufacturers, services and their providers and even toward diverse countries and cultures" (P. Sharma 2015, 4), a fair and thorough evaluation may be difficult to achieve. Previous research also suggested that ethnocentrism has more than one dimension (Saffu and Walker 2005; Upadhyay and Singh 2006). Additionally, previous studies mainly focused on the effects of consumer ethnocentrism on international foreign product purchases in various contexts. Therefore, the use of the reconceptualized construct and measurement scale is essential. The reconceptualized construct will include previously neglected three dimensions, consumers' affective reaction, cognitive bias, and behavioral preference within the multi-ethnic environment.

The objectives of this study are to primarily examine the effects of consumer ethnocentrism from the perspective of multi-ethnic Malaysian consumers using the reconceptualized consumer ethnocentrism measurement scale developed by P. Sharma (2015) toward Malaysian consumers' willingness to buy products from China. Apart from that, this study examines the combined effects of consumer internationalism (Balabanis et al. 2001) and consumer cosmopolitanism (Cleveland et al. 2014) on Malaysian consumers' willingness to buy (Tian and Pasadeos 2012) products from China. This study answers the call and adds to unveil a country with a Muslim majority on its consumers' "consumption patterns, identities, possessions, and the extended-self from emic and etic perspectives, linked to internationalization, globalization, and localization" (Wilson et al. 2013, 32).

Literature review

Malaysia and its economic relationship with China

In recent decades, the extensive Malaysia-China bilateral commerce, investment, and people-to-people linkages have facilitated amicable bilateral relations between these two countries. Though the relationship dates back to ancient times, it was reignited in modern times in the 1970s when Malaysia opted to abandon its pro-western foreign policy approach. After the Cold War waned in the 1990s, Malaysia's leadership saw China as an economic opportunity rather than an ideological threat (Ngeow 2021). Malaysia invited China to the ASEAN meeting in 1991, which initiated more prominent roles for China with the bloc. In 2004, both countries committed to greater strategic cooperation leading to a bilateral trade boom. Ever since 2009, China became Malaysia's largest trading partner.[1] It is reported that Malaysia attracted RM 600 million and RM 500 million in investment from China in 2018 and 2019, respectively while investing RM 540 million in 2019 and RM 500 million in 2018 in China.

China primarily manufactures machinery, equipment, instruments, and communication-related devices. Globally, the manufacturing products produced by China are estimated to be about 20%. According to the United Nations COMTRADE database on international trade, Malaysia imported electrical and electronic equipment amounting to US$ 14.26 Billion in 2020.[2] Among other well-known Chinese electrical and electronic brands in Malaysia are Haier, Huawei, Midea, Oppo and Hisense.

Despite the commendable foreign investment sizes from both sides, it is also interesting to note that Malaysia, a Muslim-majority country (Wilson et al. 2013; Abdul-Talib and Abdul-Latif 2015), has its skeleton in its closet. The ethnic relations between the main ethnic groups in Malaysia are somewhat complicated. Over the decades, perhaps due to political, economic and social issues, has contributed to ethnic ethnocentrism (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2022), situational animosity (Nijssen and Douglas 2004; Ang et al. 2004) and consumer racism toward ethnic

Chinese in Malaysia (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2017).

Theoretical background

This study uses social identity theory (SIT) (Tajfel 1974; Tajfel and Turner 1986) as the foundation for the proposed model to give theoretical insight into consumer ethnocentrism and consumer behavior. Social categorization, social identification, and social comparison are the three processes that define SIT. According to social categorization, individuals group their social surroundings into categories to comprehend them. Individuals will collectively identify themselves based on distinct unique features or traits once they have been classified in the second process, which is social identification. These individuals establish a group known as the "in-group" based on these attributes or traits to generate pride, self-esteem, self-image, and belongingness. The third process is the social comparison, in which the "in-group" compares itself to the "out-groups," resulting in the "us versus them" mindset and attitude. The primary principle of SIT is that group members search out the supposed negative features of an out-group to improve their self-image. The disparities between groups and the similarities within groups are frequently accentuated throughout this process. When carried to extremes, exaggerations can lead to disputes or tensions between groups. This theory can explain group members' conduct toward the other group(s); in our case, the Malaysians are the in-group, while the Chinese are the out-group. Previous studies on consumer ethnocentrism, consumer internationalism, and consumer cosmopolitanism have used SIT as a theoretical foundation to illustrate the conceptual origin of consumer ethnocentrism as alternate antecedents to consumer behavior (Verlegh 2007; Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2022; Ganideh and Elahee 2018).

Consumer ethnocentrism

Consumer ethnocentrism derives from the concept of ethnocentrism introduced by a sociologist; William Graham Sumner in his 1906 book, Folkways (Potluri, Johnson, and Koppalakrishnan 2022). Ethnocentrism is described as a group of people who regard their own culture as the center of their universe, viewing others exclusively through their values and standards, rejecting those dissimilar to their group while accepting similar ones. Ethnocentrism benefits members of the "in-group" while holding the "out-group" in distaste. Numerous sources, such as nationalism, xenophobia, national or racial superiority, animosity, racism, and feelings of immorality, are postulated as the foundations of ethnocentrism (Diamantopoulos, Davydova, and Arslanagic-Kalajdzic 2019; S. Sharma, Shimp, and Shin 1995; Tang, Liu, and Fu 2022).

Consumer ethnocentrism is one of the most critical factors determining consumers' purchase intentions concerning foreign and local products (Shankarmahesh 2006). It is "the beliefs consumers hold about the appropriateness and morality of purchasing foreign-made products" (Shimp and Sharma 1987, 280). Ethnocentric consumers believe that by purchasing domestic products, they are being patriotic, nationalistic, and morally correct (Klein, Ettenson, and Morris 1998) and that purchasing imported products may damage the domestic economy, resulting in job loss or unemployment in the domestic market (Klein and Ettenson 1999; Shimp and Sharma 1987). These consumers believe that economically supporting foreign countries by purchases is not patriotic and nationalistic, as national interests and economic well-being are threatened by imports, insisting on domestic producers deserve assistance, which justifies the purchases of locally or domestically manufactured goods. (Shimp and Sharma 1987). This shows that consumers' preference for "homegrown" or domestic goods over imported ones reflects the "in-group and out-group" of SIT (Tajfel and Turner 1986) and "us versus them" (Klein 2002; Shimp and Sharma 1987).

Although it is prevalent to assess consumer ethnocentrism at the international level (Ferrín and Vilela 2015), consumer ethnocentrism can be operationalized at a variety of levels, namely national ethnocentrism, regional ethnocentrism (Fernández-Ferrn and Bande-Vilela, (2013; Ferrn and Vilela 2015; Siemieniako et al., 2011), and ethnic ethnocentrism (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib

2017; Ouellet, 2007). Ethnocentric consumers may be biased toward in-groups, exaggerating the benefits of domestic products while downplaying the foreign ones (Banna et al. 2018).

Sub-dimensions of consumer ethnocentrism

Consumer ethnocentrism is a personality feature that could affect customers' views of domestic and foreign products (S. Sharma, Shimp, and Shin 1995). Consumer ethnocentrism is distinct from attitudes and behavior. However, Shimp and Sharma's (1987) CETSCALE shows that many items were related to societal norms regarding domestic versus foreign goods consumption in the United States and their effects on the economy. This phenomenon may explain the strong correlation between CETSCALE scores and consumer attitudes or behavior, but it raises concerns about construct validity (P. Sharma 2015).

Attitudes are cognitive structures that include beliefs, emotions, and behavioral tendencies toward socially relevant individuals, groups, events, or symbols (Hogg and Vaughan 2010). Attitudes can also be seen as psychological predispositions that appear in favor or disfavor of a particular issue. Following P. Sharma (2015), a three-part theoretical framework is proposed to analyze attitudes: emotional, behavioral, and cognitive. Affective responses to the attitude object are the affective component. Attitudes affect behavior in the behavioral component. Finally, the cognitive component includes an individual's knowledge or beliefs toward an attitude object.

Based on the above argument, consumer ethnocentrism can be understood as a comprehensive stance toward domestic and foreign products and services, encompassing affective reactions, cognitive biases, and behavioral preferences. To redefine consumer ethnocentrism as a multi-dimensional construct of "attitude," the ABC framework is employed, which delineates the affective, cognitive, and behavioral dimensions of consumer ethnocentrism as below:

- Affective reaction: Ethnocentrism involves identifying with one's group and feeling suspicious and resentful of outsiders. This may explain why ethnocentric customers choose local over foreign ones, regardless of quality. Consumer ethnocentrism is "emotional" (Acharya and Elliott 2003) or "soft" (Teo, Mohamad, and Ramayah 2011; Chryssochoidis, Krystallis, and Perreas 2007).
- Cognitive bias: Ethnocentrism relies on cognitive biases involving in-group and out-group judgments. These biases include perceptions of events that benefit one's group and of one's group's importance, superiority, strength, and virtues. Previous studies have shown an evaluative bias favoring local products and services over imported ones.
- Behavioral preference: Rejecting foreign items and accepting domestic goods is the most significant feature of consumer ethnocentrism, and it is the construct's third dimension. It goes beyond Shimp and Sharma's (1987) preference for domestic versus foreign products, including the desire to try, repeat purchases and positive word of mouth.

Consumer ethnocentrism and willingness to buy

Frequently consumer ethnocentrism is considered a barrier to foreign product entry to developed countries, as local consumers can recall better and prefer domestic ones (Sousa, Nobre, and Farhangmehr 2018). On the contrary, domestically produced products do not guarantee purchases by the locals. This phenomenon is quite prevalent in many less-developed countries, where there is evidence suggesting that foreign products are preferred over domestic ones (Kiriri 2019; Wang and Xiong Chen 2004). The effect of consumer ethnocentrism on domestic product purchases may differ according to the product or service categories and may have different intensities (Zebal and Jackson 2019; Akbarov 2022). In addition, a recent study found that geo-location and the economic standing of cities could influence the local consumers' level of ethnocentrism (Tang, Liu, and Fu 2022).

On the other hand, there is evidence to suggest that consumer ethnocentrism is also occurring in developed countries (Wang and Xiong Chen 2004; Yagci, 2001), implying that these consumers may view products from less-developed countries as inferior compared to domestically produced products (Balabanis et al. 2001). As a result, producers from less-developed countries may face discrimination as ethnocentric, nationalistic, and patriotic consumers from less-developed countries regard their domestic products as lesser, particularly when comparing branded goods from developed countries (Kiriri 2019; Wang and Xiong Chen 2004).

Consumers in certain countries may have limited product choices available to them (Watson and Wright 2000; Nijssen and Douglas 2004; Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2017), and due to this, sometimes they are "forced" to buy foreign products despite their high ethnocentric levels and preferences for domestic products. Similarly, consumers may ignore their ethnocentric tendencies when product options are available from countries with a favorable country image (Karoui and Khemakhem 2019) or equivalent in price and quality perception (Khan, Ashraf, and Malik 2019).

Interestingly, despite the low levels of consumer ethnocentrism in Malaysia (Han and Won 2018), Malaysia's majority ethnic group, the Malays, were ethnocentric but continued to consume goods and services from the non-Malay locals (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2017, 2022). This suggests a reversed relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and willingness to buy in Malaysia. Perhaps depending on the product category, consumer ethnocentrism levels can be mild (Kiriri 2019; Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2022) or soft (Chryssochoidis, Krystallis, and Perreas 2007), suggesting that locals do not entirely reject foreign products but rather it is their preferences on perceived-to-be higher quality foreign products (Wang and Xiong Chen 2004) and being protective of domestic products. Thus, this study postulates the following hypothesis:

H1: Consumer ethnocentrism has a positive relationship and effect on Malaysian consumers' willingness to buy consumer products from China.

Consumer cosmopolitanism and willingness to buy

Many countries in ASEAN, North American and European regions are considered multi-ethnic and multicultural. Apart from the societies' increasing ethnic diversity and global connectivity, the increased international travel has led to cosmopolitanism among consumers. In multi-ethnic countries like Canada, Switzerland and Malaysia, hybrid cultures have developed, fostering tolerance, understanding, and respect for other cultures (Khoo 2014; Wilkins et al. 2019; Wilson et al. 2013).

Consumer cosmopolitanism is a concept that refers to consumers who are open-minded about foreign countries and cultures. These consumers are receptive to purchasing goods from various countries and cultures (Riefler, Diamantopoulos, and Siguaw 2012). Cosmopolitan consumers are open to new ideas and perspectives and value various products from various national and cultural backgrounds (Featherstone 2002). Though most cosmopolitan consumers are experienced travelers, a sense of cosmopolitanism can also be achieved without necessarily traveling to other countries (Caldwell, Blackwell, and Tulloch 2006).

Cosmopolitan people are often referred to as "international people," as they tend to identify more with the global community than their own national in-group. While cosmopolitan consumers are conscious that they are members of a national in-group, they do not believe this precludes them from being members of an out-group (Thompson and Tambyah 1999). Since these consumers enjoy learning about different cultures and partaking in new experiences, they are drawn to products targeted to out-of-group consumers (Cannon and Yaprak 2001). As a result, these individuals may be seen as pro-out-group since they favor the global out-group from a marketing standpoint (Zeugner-Roth and Diamantopoulos Zeugner-Roth, Žabkar, and Diamantopoulos 2015). Although cosmopolitan consumers appear to favor consuming foreign products or services, they do not necessarily reject domestic products and services as long as they result in realistic consumer experiences (Cannon and Yaprak 2011). These consumers also purchase domestic products and foreign-made products (Riefler,

Diamantopoulos, and Siguaw 2012; Cannon and Yaprak 2002; Cleveland et al. 2011), implying that consumer cosmopolitanism is a neutral in-group construct (Prince, Yaprak, and Palihawadana 2019).

Interestingly, two views on how consumer cosmopolitanism can be captured (Prince, Yaprak, and Palihawadana 2019). According to one perspective, consumer cosmopolitanism can be assessed through three measurements: how open-minded a consumer is toward foreign countries and cultures, how diversity exists through the assorted products available from different cultural backgrounds and countries, and how enthusiastic a consumer is in purchasing products manufactured abroad. The second view regards cosmopolitans as possessing an attitude of cultural openness comprising an eager interaction with one another, being positively receptive toward differentiated cultural experiences and being competent with other cultures. Hence, cosmopolitans favor broader multicultural narratives, hold universal expectations, and do not support specific communities. This may suggest that the identity of cosmopolitans is leaning toward being globally oriented. In short, cosmopolitans are seen as not morally or economically obligated to support domestic products. So much so, these consumers do not worry about any sociocultural threats received by consuming these foreign products and are seen as eager consumers of culturally authentic local and global experiences.

Consumer values are changing worldwide, and it is not a new phenomenon. Cultural and consumer values in rising Asian economies have changed significantly in recent years due to economic success, growing globalization and migration, among many other factors leading to different consumer expectations and behavior (Kueh and Ho Voon 2007; Ali et al. 2020). As a country's economy grows and becomes more open to the rest of the world, cultural values may shift (Oyserman, Coon, and Kemmelmeier 2002). Asian countries like South Korea, Japan and some parts of China where the population are showing tendencies of westernization and individualism, particularly the younger generation (Han 2017; Kueh and Ho Voon 2007; Lim 2001; J. Lee, Wha, and Mckerrow 2010; Ramli et al. 2019; Parker, Haytko, and Hermans 2011).

It is important to note that consumers in emerging markets are more responsive to international life and global brands. Among many other reasons, this is possibly due to the limitation or scarcity of locally produced goods that consumers seek for certain products from other countries (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2017; Han and Won 2018). Likewise, exposure through traveling or living in foreign countries (Ali et al. 2020; Khoo 2014), one's awareness of different lifestyles and consumptions is likely to be influenced, thus increasing the receptiveness toward foreign products (Hasmini et al. 2017). In addition, consumer perceptions toward foreign products and services may have evolved as many developing countries are exposed to western and individualistic concepts (Han, Wang, and Nam 2020). Therefore, it is possible that consumers' attitudes toward foreignness could change, becoming more globalized and less ethnocentric due to this shift (Tang, Liu, and Fu 2022).

Improved connectivity, favorable brand impression, and positive cosmopolitanism ideals are all factors that may influence consumer preference for a specific foreign product or brand (Han, Wang, and Nam 2020). On the other hand, consumer cosmopolitanism may also have an unanticipated cultural antecedent in that particular countries with high cosmopolitanism tend to be countries with a high level of uncertainty avoidance (Han 2017). Therefore, the avoidance of purchasing brands that are perceived as risky may ensue due to this.

There is a mixed opinion of how cosmopolitan Malaysian consumers are; Han and Won (2018) found that Malaysians are below average and are lesser cosmopolitan than Indonesians, albeit more than Singaporeans and Indians. While Hassan, Sabbir Rahman, and Sade (2015) argued that Malaysian consumers have become more affluent, savvy, and cosmopolitan as their wealth, education level, and access to mass media have increased. The Malaysian consumers' lifestyle has become westernized, sophisticated, and cosmopolitan.

Based on the above, it is hypothesized that because cosmopolitan consumers are more receptive and tolerant of various countries and cultures, as well as appreciative of diversity and

novel experiences, Malaysian consumers will be more favorable toward Chinese products, thus:

H2: Consumer cosmopolitanism has a positive relationship and effect on Malaysian consumers' willingness to buy consumer products from China.

Consumer internationalism and willingness to buy

The concept of internationalism in the context of consumer ethnocentrism generally refers to one's favorable attitudes toward people from other countries (Balabanis et al. 2001). Internationalism centralizes the idea of "sharing and welfare" globally, creating sympathy or understanding toward people from different countries. Individuals with a higher level of internationalism demonstrate an optimistic attitude, "open-mindedness and acceptance" regarding their perception of people from different countries and cultures. Internationalism is often discussed as the opposite end of nationalism and patriotism. In contrast, nationalism is the belief that one's country is better than the rest. At the same time, patriotism describes intense connection and commitment to one's country without corresponding resentment toward people from other countries (Balabanis et al. 2001).

Consumer internationalism is closely related to consumer ethnocentrism and consumer cosmopolitanism (P. Sharma 2015). Consumers with high levels of ethnocentrism and low internationalism would have less tendency to purchase foreign products due to potentially harmful economic effects and intense loyalty to one's country (Shimp and Sharma 1987).

Research on internationalism as an antecedent of consumer ethnocentrism often examines consumer preference for buying foreign over domestic products. Nevertheless, studies on the relationship between internationalism and consumer ethnocentrism have reported mixed findings. For instance, several researchers have considered internationalism as one of the potential sources for causing consumers to be ethnocentric, as consumers with low levels of internationalism would show high ethnocentric tendencies toward domestic products (W-n. Lee, Hong, and Lee 2003).

Previous research has shown that younger consumers are more receptive and positive toward foreign products. In contrast, older consumers tend to demonstrate a preference for domestic products (Parker, Haytko, and Hermans 2011). This suggests that younger consumers are more internationalist in their preference and attitude toward foreign goods than older consumers.

However, internationalism was found to have no significant effects on consumer ethnocentrism in countries like the Czech Republic and Turkey (Balabanis et al. 2001). Instead, the findings revealed that consumer ethnocentrism in Turkey was driven by patriotism, while the Czech Republic was motivated by nationalism. The possible causes of these phenomena are narrowed down to the internal economic development issues, where the consumers' empathy was directed inward toward their nations. Similarly, educated consumers have greater familiarity with western cultures; thus, their purchasing behavior would be more rational and objective than ethnic and emotional (Guo and Bunchapattanasakda 2020).

Research has shown that the effects of internationalism on consumers' purchasing tendencies of foreign products may vary among developed and less-develop countries. For example, consumers in developed countries from western Europe and North America tend to favor domestic over foreign products. While consumers in less-developed countries typically perceive domestic products to have less quality than foreign goods (Wu, Zhu, and Dai 2010).

It is interesting to note that consumers' willingness to buy domestic or foreign products is influenced by the country's positive image associated with the products. Previous research revealed that even consumers with high ethnocentrism might purchase products from countries with a positive image, such as Italy (Karoui and Khemakhem 2019). Likewise, consumers with a high level of internationalism may hesitate to purchase products from foreign countries associated with a less positive image. The positive arguments on internationalism lead to the following hypothesis:

H3: Consumer internationalism has a positive effect on Malaysian consumers' willingness to buy consumer

products from China. Please refer to Figure 1 for the proposed model for Malaysian consumers' willingness to buy products from China.

Methodology

This study examines the relationships of consumer ethnocentrism, consumer cosmopolitanism and consumer internationalism in Malaysian's willingness to buy products from China. This study used multiple non-probability sampling approaches, including the self-selection purposive sampling technique (Elbaz et al. 2023) focusing on Malaysian consumers living in a multi-ethnic and multicultural country where Islam is the main religion (Abdul-Talib, Abd-Latif, and Abd-Razak 2016; Fam, Waller, and Zafer Erdogan 2004).

With the help of two (2) research assistants, the authors distributed self-administered online questionnaires through social media, namely Facebook and WhatsApp, to potential respondents (Akbarov 2022). Both popular social media platforms in Malaysia are frequently used for communication (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2017). This approach was chosen due to its higher level of response within a shorter period, translating to lower operational costs (Elbaz et al. 2023).

The approach of this study is similar to previous studies on consumer ethnocentrism (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2017, 2022; P. Sharma 2015) but focused on electrical and electronic products only. Both prominent Chinese and Malaysian brands were used. These brands and product categories were selected based on market presence, brand familiarity, product affordability, and accessibility to most Malaysian consumers (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2022). These products are commonly available in most hypermarkets or retail outlets in Malaysia. The respondents were queried whether they were familiar with the branded products shown in the questionnaire. The Chinese brands (and product categories) used were Haier (refrigerator), Huawei (smartphone), Midea (table fan), and Hisense (television). In contrast, Malaysian brands were Pensonic (table fan), Khind (rice cooker), Acson (air-conditioning unit) and Joven (water heater). This study used a bilingual questionnaire approach containing both English and Malay languages. The Malaysian education system includes and teaches the English language, starting at the primary level until the tertiary level. The English language is also widely used in business and non-formal settings in Malaysia. To produce the items and questions in Malay, the researchers, who are native speakers of the Malay language, initially translated the items and questions using Google Translate. Four researchers involved are bilingual (Malay and English). Subsequently, after necessary editing by the researchers, the bilingual questionnaire was examined and verified by a professional Malay-English translator (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2015; Ganideh and Elahee 2018).

The scales to measure consumer ethnocentrism were based on the reconceptualized version done by P. Sharma (2015), which were divided into three dimensions, namely affective (8-items), cognitive (8-items) and behavioral (8-items). Other scales include 7-item consumer cosmopolitanism (Cleveland et al. 2014), 6-item internationalism (Balabanis et al. 2001) and 6-item willingness to buy (Ettenson and Gabrielle Klein 2005). All measurements used a 5-point Likert scale

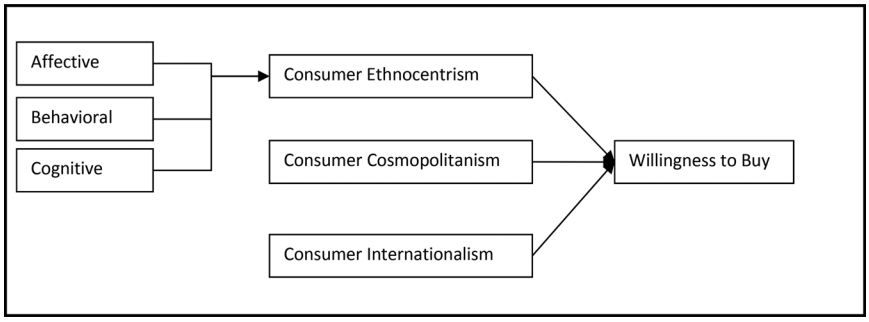


Figure 1. The proposed model for Malaysian consumers' willingness to buy products from China. Adapted from: P. Sharma (2015), Cleveland et al. (2014), Balabanis et al. (2001), and Ettenson and Klein (2005)

(1 = *strongly disagree*, 2 = *disagree*, 3 = *neutral*, 4 = *agree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

SPSS version 26 was employed to analyze the demographic data, while SmartPLS 4.0.9.5 (Ringle, Wende, and Becker 2022) was used to investigate the relationships between the constructs. The measurement model assessment was performed to assess the reliability and validity of the measurement model at the LOC level. In the second stage, the measurement and structural modeling were undertaken at second-order modeling, where causal relationships were evaluated. Results from this two-staged procedure are discussed in detail in the following section.

Results

The respondents were primarily female (68.1%), ethnic Malay (73%) and Muslim (77%). Most respondents are youths, as 84% were categorized within the 18 to 30 age group and had or pursuing higher or tertiary education (95.5%). The majority of the respondents were unemployed (70.4%), which were made up of groups of students (67%), retirees (.5%) and jobless (2.3%). While respondents grouped as employed (29.5%) were made from groups of civil servants (8.6%), executives (7.4%), managers (4.0%) and entrepreneurs (1.1%). Casual and part-time workers were also included and categorized as others (8.5%). Refer to Table 1.

We tested the homogeneity of the respondents in terms of their willingness to buy by age and ethnic groups using One-Way ANOVA, and the results suggested that there are no significant differences.

Table 1. Demographic information ($n = 555$).

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age groups		
• Early adulthood (ages 22–34)	495	89.1
• Early middle age (ages 35–44)	45	8.1
• Late middle age (ages 45–64)	14	2.5
• Late adulthood (ages 65 and older)	1	0.2
Gender		
• Male	177	31.9
• Female	378	68.1
Employment		
• Student	375	67.6
• Executive	41	7.4
• Manager	22	4.0
• Entrepreneur	6	1.1
• Unemployed	13	2.3
• Retired	3	.5
• Others	47	8.5
• Civil servants	48	8.6
Education		
• Primary school	2	.4
• Secondary school	18	3.2
• Certificate/diploma	137	24.7
• Professional certificate	11	2.0
• Bachelor's degree	347	62.5
• Master's degree	28	5.0
• Doctorate / PhD.	7	1.3
• Others	5	.9
Ethnicity		
• Malay	404	72.8
• Chinese	95	17.1
• Indian	16	2.9
• Sabah Bumiputera[a]	7	1.3
• Sarawak Bumiputera[b]	9	1.6
• Orang Asal[c]	4	.7
• Others	20	3.6
Religion		
• Muslim	431	77.7
• Buddhist	75	13.5
• Christian	12	2.2
• Taoist	8	1.4
• Hindu	19	3.4
• Atheist	1	.2
• Others	9	1.6

[a]Indigenous people of Sabah State, located in East Malaysia.
[b]Indigenous people of Sarawak State, located in East Malaysia.
[c]Indigenous people of Peninsular Malaysia.

Specifying, estimating and validating higher-order constructs

Sarstedt et al. (2019) recommended that the same model assessment criteria are generally applicable when analyzing higher-order models as for any Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) study. Although there are four approaches for estimation, this study attempted the embedded two-stage approach. As these approaches generally produce similar results, "there is often no compelling reason to prefer one approach over the other" (Becker et al. 2023, 330). The difference between the approaches is that in their first stage's modeling, the embedded approach models the entire higher-order construct in its first stage by repeating the lower-order constructs' (LOC) indicators to identify the higher-order constructs (HOC). For HOC estimations in PLS-SEM, the algorithm setting is essential. There are two modes to estimate the measurement models: Mode A and Mode B. Mode A is typically used in reflective measurement models (Becker et al. 2023).

As with any PLS-SEM analysis, the same model evaluation parameters apply to higher-order models (Chin (Chin 2010)). However, there are two additional measurement models for higher-order constructs with the following evaluation criteria:

Table 2. Construct reliability and validity—factor loadings, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (rho_a & rho_c), and average variance extracted (AVE) for LOC measurement model.

LOCs	Indicators	Factor loadings	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
CEA	CEA5	0.893	0.921	0.922	0.944	0.808
	CEA6	0.909				
	CEA7	0.910				
	CEA8	0.883				
CEB	CEB1	0.828	0.894	0.895	0.919	0.653
	CEB2	0.822				
	CEB3	0.768				
	CEB4	0.840				
	CEB5	0.811				
	CEB6	0.777				
CEC	CEC1	0.782	0.926	0.928	0.94	0.693
	CEC2	0.845				
	CEC3	0.870				
	CEC5	0.766				
	CEC6	0.806				
	CEC7	0.876				
	CEC8	0.876				

Note: CEA: consumer ethnocentrism (affective); CEB: consumer ethnocentrism (behavioral); CEC: consumer ethnocentrism (cognitive).

Table 3. Discriminant validity—Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio for LOC measurement model.

	CEA	CEB	CEC
CEA	**0.899**		
CEB	0.560 (0.615)	**0.808**	
CEC	0.382 (0.411)	0.741 (0.813)	**0.833**

Note: CEA: consumer ethnocentrism (affective); CEB: consumer ethnocentrism (behavioral); CEC: consumer ethnocentrism (cognitive). Figures in brackets are HTMT values.

"(1) the measurement models of the LOC components and (2) the measurement model of the HOC as a whole, represented by the relationships between the higher-order component and its lower-order components" (Sarstedt et al. 2019, 123).

First, we performed the PLS-SEM algorithm to obtain the scores of the latent variables. The relationships between HOC and LOC are assessed based on reflective measurement models through their loadings, convergent validity, internal consistency reliability, and discriminant validity metrics. All metrics were acceptable (see Tables 2 and 3).

For the next step, the latent variable scores, namely the LOCs; affective, behavioral and cognitive dimensions, were then inserted into a duplicate model with all latent variables. The latent variable scores of these dimensions were then added to the dataset. The second stage's assessment emphasizes the HOC components' reflective measurement model. The loadings for affective, behavioral and cognitive dimensions scored .802, .910, and .806, respectively, as per Figure 2. This indicates that the indicators are reliable, with above .7 scores. The AVE, Cronbach's alpha, ρA and ρC scores for the HOC measurement model are favorable, as depicted in Table 4. Based on Table 5, discriminant validity is established.

Finally, the assessment of the stage two results addresses the structural model. Bootstrapping with 5,000 resamples was used to generate standard errors and t-statistics (Figure 3). The finding suggests that the results of all other structural model evaluations are satisfactory (e.g., significance and relevance for path coefficients and Q^2).

Path coefficients and R-square (R^2) are used to quantify the strength of relationships between latent variables in PLS-SEM. The variance explained is a critical criterion for determining the explanatory power of a structural model in the PLS algorithm. According to Chin (Chin, 1998), R^2 values of 0.19, 0.33, and 0.67 for endogenous latent constructs, respectively, indicate the model's "weak," "moderate," or "substantial" explanatory power. Although the R^2 value of 0.305 is between weak and moderate, Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2011) asserted that an R^2 score of 0.200 can be considered high in some disciplines, such as consumer behavior. Refer to Table 6.

Following that, the path coefficient was calculated using a bootstrapping technique with 5,000 resamples to determine the degree of relationship between the latent variables. The technique generated standard errors and t-statistics. Path coefficient values greater than 0.100 with a significance level of 0.050 may imply the presence of effects or impacts within the model. Paths that were

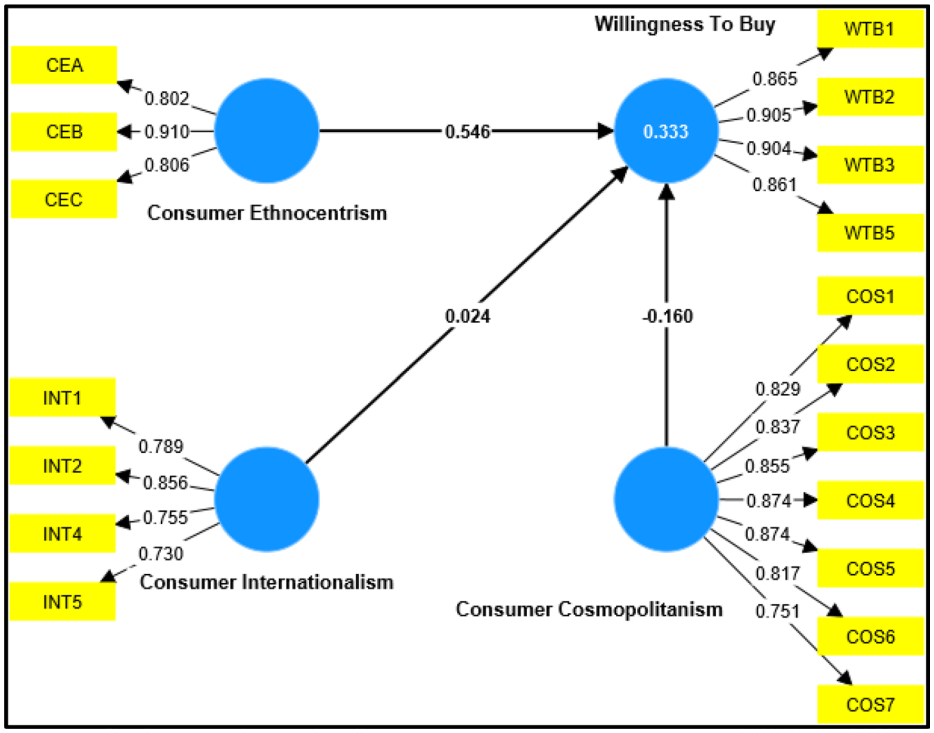


Figure 2. HOC measurement model type I: reflective—reflective.

Table 4. Construct reliability and validity—factor loadings, mean, Cronbach's alpha, composite reliability (Rho_A & Rho_C), and average variance extracted (AVE) for HOC measurement model.

HOCs	Indicators	Factor loadings	Mean	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)	Composite reliability (rho_c)	Average variance extracted (AVE)
CE	CEA	0.802	3.1616	0.793	0.805	0.878	0.707
	CEB	0.91					
	CEC	0.806					
CC	COS1	0.829	4.2196	0.928	0.936	0.941	0.697
	COS2	0.837					
	COS3	0.855					
	COS4	0.874					
	COS5	0.874					
	COS6	0.817					
	COS7	0.751					
CI	INT1	0.789	3.6514	0.793	0.808	0.864	0.615
	INT2	0.856					
	INT4	0.755					
	INT5	0.73					
WTB	WTB1	0.865	3.1117	0.907	0.910	0.935	0.781
	WTB2	0.905					
	WTB3	0.904					
	WTB5	0.861					

Note: CC: consumer cosmopolitanism; CE: consumer ethnocentrism; CI: consumer internationalism; WTB: willingness to buy; CEA: consumer ethnocentrism (affective); CEB: consumer ethnocentrism (behavioral); CEC: consumer ethnocentrism (cognitive).

Table 5. Discriminant validity—Fornell-Larcker criterion and Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio for HOC measurement model.

	CC	CE	CI	WTB
CC	**0.835**			
CE	−0.014 (0.111)	**0.841**		
CI	0.343 (0.412)	0.334 (0.426)	**0.784**	
WTB	−0.16 (0.168)	0.557 (0.645)	0.152 (0.176)	**0.884**

Note: CC: consumer cosmopolitanism; CE: consumer ethnocentrism; CI: consumer internationalism; WTB: willingness to buy. Figures in brackets are HTMT values.

negligible or produced findings that contradicted the initial direction of the hypotheses will not support the hypotheses created (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2011). Due to the low coefficient score and *t* value, H3 was rejected and not supported. The coefficient scores and *t* values of H1 and H2 were greater than 0.100 with a significance level 0.001. However, H2 has an opposing path analysis direction. On this basis, H2 was not supported

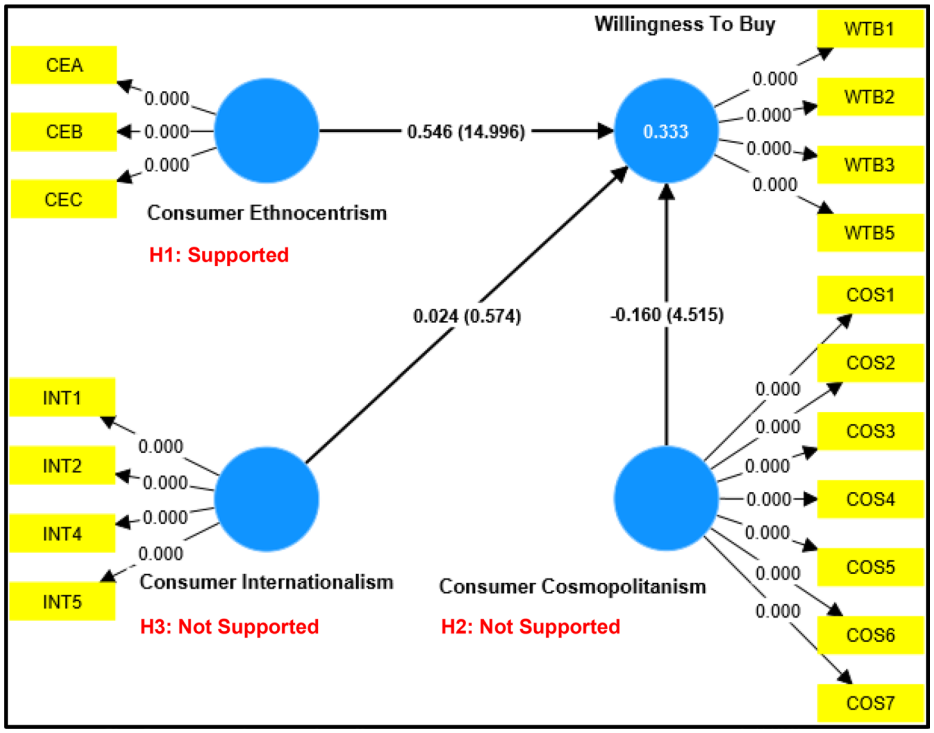


Figure 3. HOC structural model type I: reflective–reflective.

Table 6. Effect size (f^2), coefficient of determination (R^2) and predictive relevance (Q^2).

	f^2 Effect size	R^2	Q^2
Exogenous latent variable			
• Consumer ethnocentrism	0.389		
• Consumer cosmopolitan	0.033		
• Consumer internationalism	0.001		
Endogenous latent variable			
• Willingness to buy		0.305	0.322

and rejected. Hence only one hypothesis was supported.

The predictive relevance of the structural model can be determined using Stone-Geisser's Q^2 (Geisser 1974; Stone 1974). This evaluation "postulates that the model must be able to adequately predict each endogenous latent construct's indicators" (Hair, Ringle, and Sarstedt 2011, 147). According to Table 6, the Q^2 value is greater than zero, suggesting that the path model has predictive relevance for the reflective endogenous variable selected (willingness to buy).

Discussions

This study aims to empirically investigate the effects of the reconceptualized consumer ethnocentrism, consumer cosmopolitanism and consumer internationalism from the perspective of multi-ethnic Malaysian consumers on their willingness to buy products from China. We gathered representative samples from the Malaysian population for this purpose. Our findings suggest several academic and marketing implications regarding Malaysian consumers and products from China.

While acknowledging that previous studies worked to improve the measurements of consumer ethnocentrism (Siamagka and Balabanis 2015), we applied the reconceptualized and multi-dimensional construct of consumer ethnocentrism (P. Sharma 2015) along with consumer internationalism and consumer cosmopolitanism in the same model. Including these two constructs is vital in this current era, where technology and global connectivity to many different countries are very apparent, including the convenience and accessibility to various international products and services.

Consumer ethnocentrism

The result of H1 is similar to previous research (Mostafa 2010; Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2017, 2022), suggesting that Malaysians' consumer

ethnocentrism and willingness to buy has a significant positive relationship as postulated. It is an exciting phenomenon as this indicates that though Malaysians appeared to be ethnocentric ($M = 3.16$), but they are still willing to buy products from China to a certain extent ($M = 3.11$).

Interestingly, it also suggests that ethnic Chinese Malaysians are ethnocentric, implying that they prefer domestic Malaysian products over China's but would still purchase Chinese products. This may be due to the product availability, range and options of Malaysia-made products (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2017), which are not as extensive as China's product imports in Malaysia. Also equally important to consider the e-accessibility through online platforms such as Lazada that provide easier and faster access to China's products, especially during public lockdowns and controlled movement phases (Baker El-Ebiary et al. 2021; Hong et al. 2021).

Similar to previous research, ethnic Malays exhibited similar behavior toward products associated with ethnic Chinese Malaysians, in which ethnic Malays continued to purchase ethnic Chinese products despite being ethnocentric (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2017, 2022). Additionally, based on the mean value of consumer ethnocentrism, our findings are similar to Han (2017), which suggests that the level of ethnocentrism may be weakening and declining in Asia.

Consumer cosmopolitanism

H2 was rejected because the relationship's direction deviates from the predicted direction. Although it is rejected, an interpretation is possible. The negative score (path coefficient = − 0.205) implies a negative relationship between consumer cosmopolitanism and willingness to buy. It is intriguing to learn that consumers in a multicultural country such as Malaysia have a high level of consumer cosmopolitanism ($M = 4.22$) but a relatively low propensity to purchase products from China ($M = 3.11$). Based on the mean value, this may suggest that Malaysians have a lukewarm reaction toward products from China instead of being more positively receptive and tolerant of foreign products.

This could also imply that Malaysians in their early adulthood are exposed to different global cultures and societies (compared to the older generation) and are equally exposed to a wider range of imported products of higher quality and perceive products from China to be of inferior quality. In addition, it may be connected to a recent study indicating that Malaysians perceive goods from the United States and Malaysia to be of higher quality than goods from China (Lascu et al. 2020). Even after a decade, Malaysians are still wary of the quality of goods from China (Sarwar et al. 2013). It is also conceivable that certain product categories or brands from China are perceived as local rather than foreign.

Consumer internationalism

Although the findings show that consumer internationalism does not influence Malaysian consumers' buying propensity of products from China, this does not negate the importance of internationalism in the context of consumer ethnocentrism (Balabanis et al. 2001). Malaysia is still in the developing phase of its economy and, like many other countries, is currently facing many Covid-19-related challenges affecting the economy, the political and social sphere (Shakeel, Ahmed Hassali, and Abbas Naqvi 2020; Wasiul et al. 2020; Carruthers 2020). Due to these circumstances, Malaysians focus internally within their borders and less on outward-looking. Thus, the empathy associated with internationalism (reflected through foreign product consumption) could be expressed and manifested in various ways. This may include many forms of aid, including humanitarian, financial, donation, and education, among many others, where Malaysians express empathy toward the countries-in-need (Malik, Safarudin, and Mat 2018; Htut 2016).

Another exciting implication concerns the reconceptualized consumer ethnocentrism measurement scale, a multi-dimensional attitude construct with distinct dimensions: affective reaction, cognitive bias, and behavioral preference. The affective component represents emotional reactions, while the cognitive component shows a cognitive bias favoring domestic

products and services over international ones. The behavioral component shows a preference for domestic goods and services over imported goods. This result is vital because consumers may have contradicted emotional, cognitive, and behavioral responses. Consumers may view a particular country's products and services favorably. However, they could have greater cognitive reasons (such as premium prices, poor product quality or good services) that could hinder them from purchasing, utilizing, or recommending these products and services. A multi-dimensional measurement could assist international marketers in identifying and understanding these variations. In our case, Malaysians appeared to have favorable affective reactions, cognitive bias and behavioral preferences toward Malaysian products.

The study results further strengthen the measurement's cross-culture, and broad product and services range applicability. Furthermore, unlike previous unidimensional designs, this three-dimensional measurement provides a comprehensive and relevant structure for consumer ethnocentrism (Verlegh 2007).

Limitations and future direction

There are a few limitations to this study. Future research could examine consumer ethnocentrism, cosmopolitanism and internationalism in Malaysia together with other dimensions, including product image, political communication, pro-social, cognition, insecurity, reflexiveness, and habituation (Siamagka and Balabanis 2015), as well as other possible mediators and moderators. Second, the respondents obtained did not reflect the proportion of the actual Malaysian population in terms of gender. Future studies should ensure that the respondents are gender proportionate accordingly, as gender is a significant predictor of consumer ethnocentrism (Akbarov 2022). Though it is frequently pointed out that students or younger consumers are a significant consumer segment and vital future strategies (Abdul-Latif and Abdul-Talib 2022), perhaps future research should focus on including more non-student and non-youth samples. Third, though this study had the non-Malays represented, future research should examine similar models of these ethnic groups toward China exclusively. Likewise, future research could adopt alternative measurements for consumer cosmopolitanism incorporating dimensions such as open-mindedness, diversity appreciation, and consumption transcending borders (Riefler, Diamantopoulos, and Siguaw 2012). Future research should also examine the ethnocentrism effects exclusively on services obtained from China.

Business impact

Additionally, there are business and indirect societal ramifications. For example, business owners can use the findings of this research to correctly reposition their products and brands if that is what they require. Businesses can also examine their target markets and make adjustments due to these findings if necessary.

Social impact

It is occasionally possible for unethical business owners or political parties to take advantage of customer ethnocentrism to achieve their agendas. As a result of appealing to the emotions of specific ethnic groups in this manner, they can affect their sales and drive them. This can be exceedingly harmful and unhealthy in a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country such as Malaysia. To act in this manner is exceedingly unethical for business professionals.

Notes

1. https://themalaysianreserve.com/2020/12/31/china-remains-malaysias-largest-trading-partner-for-11th-year/ accessed on 6 September 2021
2. https://tradingeconomics.com/malaysia/imports/china/electrical-electronic-equipment updated on September of 2021. Lascu et al. (2020), however, reported a higher value of $15.4 billion.

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