PHD THESIS
SUMMARY

“MARKETING RESEARCH ON THE ROMANIAN CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM IN ORDER TO SUPPORT A SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION”

PhD Student: Stere H. Stamule
PhD Supervisor: Prof. univ. dr. Răzvan ZAHARIA

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TABLE OF CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION ............................................................................................................................................................................ 1

1. MEANS TO INFLUENCE THE SUSTAINABLE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR: SOCIAL MARKETING AND NUDGING ................................................................................................................................. 11

   1.1. Defining the consumer behavior ................................................................................................................................. 11

   1.2. The consumer in transformation and the evolution of consumerism ........................................................................... 13

       1.2.1. Vulnerable consumer groups ................................................................................................................................. 13

       1.2.2. Switching to a value-based society ......................................................................................................................... 14

   1.3. Ways to change the consumer behavior ....................................................................................................................... 18

   1.4. Social marketing as a way to induce the consumer's behavior changes ........................................................................ 18

   1.5. Nudging- an innovative tool for inducing sustainable consumption ............................................................................... 23

   1.6. Sustainable consumption behavior .............................................................................................................................. 38

   1.7. The dominant logic of services in marketing- a solution to improve the marketing strategies ................................................................................................................................................................. 41

2. ETHNOCENTRIC CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOR .......................................................................................................................... 44

   2.1. Ethnocentrism and the ethnocentric behavior ................................................................................................................. 44

   2.2. Antecedents of consumer ethnocentrism ......................................................................................................................... 50

       2.2.1. Socio-psychological antecedents ........................................................................................................................... 50

       2.2.2. The economic environment ....................................................................................................................................... 57

       2.2.3. The political environment ....................................................................................................................................... 57

       2.2.4. Demographic factors .................................................................................................................................................. 58

   2.3. Consequences of consumer ethnocentrism ..................................................................................................................... 64

   2.4. Regional ethnocentrism .................................................................................................................................................. 67

3. CAMPAIGNS TO PROMOTE LOCAL PRODUCTS .................................................................................................................. 73

   3.1. European legislation on the promotion of national products and ethnocentric campaigns on the European market ........................................................................................................................................... 73

   3.2. “Buy Romanian” campaigns .......................................................................................................................................... 80

   3.3. Cultural identity and consumption of local products .................................................................................................... 83

   3.4. Ethnocentric trends of Romanian consumers .................................................................................................................. 87

4. THE ANALYSIS OF THE MACROECONOMIC VARIABLES WITH A POTENTIAL OF INFLUENCING THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN FAVOR OF DOMESTIC GOODS ................................................................................................................................. 92

   4.1. Population ............................................................................................................................................................................ 93
4.2. Romanian GDP development ................................................................. 96
4.3. Companies and workforce .................................................................. 103
   4.3.1. Business environment in Romania ................................................ 103
   4.3.2. Employees ................................................................................... 113
   4.3.3. Average salary ........................................................................... 117
   4.3.4. Unemployed ............................................................................... 121
4.4. Analysis of the Romanian education system in statistical data ............... 126
4.5. Analysis of the Romanian culture and the health system in statistical data ............................................................................................................. 142
   4.5.1. Culture ......................................................................................... 142
   4.5.2. Health system ............................................................................. 154
5. QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH ON THE ROMANIAN ETHNOCENTRAL BEHAVIOR ............................................................................................................. 157
   5.1. Antecedents, ethnocentrism, mediators and attitudes .......................... 158
   5.2. The objectives of this research, coordinates and research methodology ............................................................................................................. 161
   5.3. Quantitative research on measuring the Romanian consumer ethnocentrism ............................................................................................................. 164
   5.4. Application of the questionnaire on the attitudes towards local products and towards "Buy Romanian" campaign ............................................. 177
   5.5. Socio-economic development index and correlation with CETSCALE results at county level ............................................................................. 200
CONCLUSIONS ............................................................................................ 205
REFERENCES .............................................................................................. 208
APPENDICES ............................................................................................... 234
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS ............................................................................ 294
LIST OF TABLES ............................................................................................ 297
LIST OF FIGURES .......................................................................................... 302
LIST OF APPENDICES .................................................................................. 306
SUMMARY OF THE MAIN PARTS OF THE PHD THESIS

The global crisis, one of the events that significantly marked the way consumers make choices about their purchases, explains why the main objective of this research has been chosen - to identify the degree of ethnocentrism and its influence factors among consumers on the Romanian market.

The secondary objectives of this paper are to identify marketing tools that can help create a sustainable economy, where an important component is ethnocentric consumption. At the same time, it is desirable to identify the regions with the potential to develop local goods and campaigns to promote them, as well as the sizing of some macroeconomic indicators that best characterize the ethnocentric consumer profile. All these secondary objectives converge to the main goal.

Taking into account the complexity of the paper, the research methodology includes both: content analysis and quantitative research, by applying a questionnaire consisting of 41 items to a sample of 1246 respondents at national level, which were analyzed the help SPSS software in order to build a model for understanding how certain factors could influence the consumer to purchase domestic products.

The literature review is a vast and up-to-date one, comprising scientific articles from international databases, specialized books, National Institute of Statistics Reports, Reports of the National Trade Register Office.

The PhD thesis has a simple structure, consisting of five chapters, preceded by an introduction and ending with conclusions and recommendations, so that it is easy to understand for the target audience.

In chapter 1 "Possibilities of influencing the sustainable consumption behavior: social marketing and nudging" are presented the theoretical foundations of consumer behavior and social marketing, with emphasis on the main trends of thinking in the field. According to the research, there are scientists who have come to the conclusion that the recession of the last years and the period that followed the global crisis could also be seen from a new perspective on the consumer, that of the emergence of a new type of consumer. Decreasing incomes of the majority of the population has led to social problems in the whole society: with difficulties in paying bank rates, problems at work, and so on. All these issues made people change their attitude towards the services of banking institutions, mobile companies, electricity suppliers, heating suppliers, state institutions, etc., regarding the communication policy adopted by them and the services provided, resulting in a decrease of confidence in them significantly. As people start to acquire
better knowledge / information about the products and services they buy, the more they become aware of their usefulness in meeting the real needs, and therefore, the plans for the incomes and expenses of each household will be easier. Having therefore better control over their lives, they will contribute to the sustainable development of the society they live in. To reach such a society, however, there is a need for radical solutions: not to create new products or substitutes for consumers, but to adopt consumer concepts that are responsible for most of the population, reducing consumption, simplicity of volunteering, and sustainable lifestyles (Jamrozy, 2012). This situation should apply not only to industrialized, but also to least industrialized economies with growing economies and populations. Reducing consumption does not mean a radical change in life by lowering the standard of living, but rather increasing happiness and welfare through non-consumption means such as burden sharing, lower consumption in return for increased attention to art, music, family, culture and community (Helm et al., 2012). Such anti-consumerist challenges contain some critical questions about how to promote these concepts to be accepted by consumers. Social marketing will play this role in finding solutions to this approach (Peattie and Peattie, 2009).

Chapter 2 presents the literature review on consumer ethnocentrism, the factors that influence this behavior and the most important empirical analyzes in this field. This is followed by an analysis of the campaigns promoting the consumption of national/regional products.

Chapter 3 “Campaigns to promote local products”, as the chapter title says, focuses on understanding of the legal framework for developing such campaigns, discovering what went wrong to previous campaigns “Buy Romanian” and how did other countries organize them.

Chapter 4 “The analysis of the macroeconomic variables with a potential of influencing the consumer behavior in favor of domestic goods” aims to make the transition to the final chapter, containing a quantitative research that presents the general context, by analyzing the macroeconomic variables that could influence the ethnocentric behavior of the Romanian consumer.

Chapter 5 “Quantitative research on the Romanian ethnocentric behavior” proposes a model for assessing the link between attitudes towards local goods / products and the scale of consumer ethnocentrism trends (CETSCALE), the links between attitudes towards local product campaigns and this scale, as well as the link between a particular profile socio-psychological aspects of the consumer and CETSCALE. These links have been too little researched, so the results will help marketing researchers, policymakers and businesspeople as well.
This research has a multidisciplinary character: marketing, management, economics, sociology, psychology, communication, political science, education, public administration, environmental sciences, and medical sciences.

Doctoral studies have resulted in 7 scientific papers published in the country and abroad.

As a conception, the PhD thesis includes a total of 89 tables and 72 figures distributed per chapter as follows:

- Chapter 1:
  - 4 tables;
  - 4 figures;
- Chapter 2:
  - 1 figure;
- Chapter 4:
  - 8 tables;
  - 66 figures;
- Chapter 5:
  - 39 tables;
  - 1 figure;
- Annexes:
  - 38 tables;

A description of the main topics analyzed and the final results will be made in the next part.

With the liberalization of the markets, there is a "change of power" of historical proportions, the entry into the era of the "virtual state" (Robb, 2007). According to its analysis, globalization takes on the authority of national states. The state’s monopoly over its usual governance functions has come to an end as governance migrates to supranational organizations on the one hand and to new regions, provinces, municipalities and, last but not least, to multinational private actors and organizations non-governmental transnational (NGOs). In this sense, globalization not only transfers governance to conflicts but forces convergence of state institutions and policies.

In this context, one of the most important problems facing the Romanian consumer nowadays is its position towards the avalanche of imported products on the Romanian market. The Romanian consumer is characterized by a lack of experience regarding the consumption of a variety of goods, caused by the gaps in the economic reforms between the Western societies and the former Communist bloc. This makes it vulnerable to the aggressive marketing promoted by most companies operating on the Romanian market. Moreover, he is under constant social
pressure to consume, and this pressure makes him spend his earnings often wrong, with serious consequences on the quality of his life. In the first instance, the political class should support consumers through proper legislation on marketing activities (the size and text of billboards, media content: television, radio, press, internet, display, and cinema). Secondly, corporations could pursue, besides gaining profits on the Romanian market, the sustainable development of society. Third, non-governmental organizations must become more and more active in terms of sustainable consumption. All these forces must intervene on the market with the help of social marketing to educate the consumer towards a healthy lifestyle and a better quality of life.

Over the centuries, businesses have constantly adapted themselves in order to reach potential consumers through a set of expansion environments. Marketing has therefore become a part of a consumer's daily life, as consumers are exposed to advertisements for products and services continuously. Because marketing influences consumer behavior, it also affects how individuals and businesses interact with the environment as a whole.

The paper ends with conclusions and recommendations aimed at:

- improving the campaigns for promotion of local products;
- increasing the involvement of government and industry in encouraging Romanians to buy domestic products,
- taking into account the demographic factors (age, gender, income, education, residence), the socio-psychological factors (salience and empathy), and as well as the consumer attitudes towards local products and campaigns to promote local products, when considering understanding of the consumers' ethnocentrism.

Thus, marketing specialists could improve their campaigns if they understood the network of influence that makes Romanian consumers prefer domestic products versus imports. Consumer cooperation in purchasing local products could be seen as a form of help for workers whose jobs are jeopardized by the success of imported products.

An important finding of this study is the role that government and industry have to play in encouraging Romanians to buy locally. The factorial analysis highlighted the importance of the government-industry factor. Even tough in the national press these campaigns were criticized for their inefficiency. However, the analysis reveals the perceived responsibility of government and industry to work together to encourage consumers to change their behavior in purchasing local products. The discovery, that consumers will buy local products when quality and price are comparable to imported goods suggests the need to pay attention to the quality of the local products. Perhaps it would be necessary to develop national quality policy by government and industry as a guarantee. Product quality issues should generally include considerations of quality,
sustainability and reliability, as they have been found to be important reasons for product evaluation (Parameswaran and Yaprap, 1987; Papadopoulos and Heslop, 1993).

Understanding the ethnocentric trends of the Romanian consumers and the link between to their attitudes towards local products and local product promotion campaigns could help both local and international companies to better allocate their resources in building strategies, develop better marketing plans and policies.

Moreover, companies should still pursue intelligent pricing and value-for-money segments and develop positioning marketing strategies closer to these segments. Similarly, taking into account the findings of differences regarding the variables: age, gender, income, education, residence, these demographic variables could be also better used in segmentation of the market.

Taking into account the sample of this paper, future studies should re-examine the role of genders in cognitive and emotional constructions, because gender differences may be more subtle in the younger population.

The results of the analysis suggest a number of new questions as to what should be further investigated. For example: if direct links between the consumer's demographic characteristics and consumer ethnocentrism continue to exist over different cultures? In comparison with members of individualist cultures, do the members of the collectivist cultures manifest the same systematic variations in their ethnocentric tendencies due to the demographic characteristics? Considering the fact that members of collectivist cultures have other results in terms of cultural dimensions such as masculinity / femininity (Steenkamp et al., 1999), and greater respect for the elderly, the current research should continue on collectivist cultures (Josiassen et al., 2011).

However, the limitations offer great opportunities for future studies. For example, future research could be done on a more representative number of respondents. Moreover, a comparative analysis between two or more countries or between regions could be made.

**Conclusions**

This study aimed to measure the ethnocentric trends of consumers in a transition economy, Romania, and certain factors that could influence these trends; Secondly, it was intended to measure consumer attitudes towards local products and "buy Romanian" campaigns; Thirdly, the link between ethnocentrism, attitudinal attitudes and a socio-psychological profile of the respondents was measured; Lastly, the link between the socio-economic development of the counties of the country and consumer ethnocentrism was assessed. All these have followed the classification of the research in the literature review presented in chapter 2 and the analysis of the European legislation regarding the state support for the local products of chapter 3.
At the same time, this work also aimed at identifying in the literature the different concepts and methods of marketing to come to both the consumer and the companies, in the perspective of the development of sustainable long-term consumption. Among the most important concepts to be mentioned is the role it could play social marketing, nudging and changing vision of the market proposed by the service-dominant-logic concept.

Concerning the ethnocentrism of the Romanian consumer, he presented some differences when certain demographic factors were taken into consideration. Similar to the results of the researchers conducted in other countries, Romanian consumers are more ethnocentric with their aging. As regards the gender role in consumer ethnocentric trends, this analysis has shown that women in this study tend to have a more pronounced inclination towards local products than men. Given that this breakthrough is similar to that of empirical research results from mature market economies; it is a bit surprising, given the importance of gender equality in CEE pre-transition democracies. In an analysis of the impact of the transition socialist regimes on gender division, Grapard (1997) points out that although most women had two full-time jobs (work and household) and socialist regimes were telling them about their emancipation, they appear as a group among the biggest losers in the new political and economic environment, indicating "the feminization of poverty" (Grapard, 1997: 675).

The results of the analysis of the correlations between CETSCALE and attitudinal assertions for both the millennials and non-millennials group show that many of the attitudinal attitudes correlated with ethnocentrism, although not all of them have the same level of correlation.

Regarding the analysis of the correlation of the socio-demographic factors with CETSCALE, the results show that for both the millennials group and the non-millennials group there are significant linear correlations between the socio-psychological variables "salience" and "empathy" and ethnocentrism.

The analysis of the link between the socio-economic development of the counties and the ethnocentrism of the consumers shows a weak and negative correlation. According to the results, as the level of socio-economic development increases, consumer ethnocentrism decreases.

The results of this study appear to be encouraging in the attempt to develop knowledge in this area on the attitudes of consumers in advanced transition economies.

Due to the focus on the consumer in the contemporary business world and the market orientation paradigm, the progress in the consumer behavior knowledge and its dynamics will continue to be crucial for both market researchers / theorists and practitioners (Kaynak 1996; Nowak 1996). Given the historical and environmental factors mentioned in the paper, it can be said that research opportunities in Central and Eastern Europe seem to be abundant.
In the doctoral thesis "Marketing research on the ethnocentrism of the Romanian consumer from the point of view of promoting sustainable consumption", the theoretical, fundamental research is intertwined with the applied empirical one. This gives great credibility to the research results. Some hundred articles published in the last years in international databases (especially ISI Web of Knowledge), numerous books of specialists from abroad and from Romania, papers published in the volumes of prestigious conferences in the field, have been consulted for the elaboration of this paper. In the quantitative research part, advanced statistical methods of data processing were published. Also, the mobility course I have received at the Free University of Berlin, the participation in various events organized by the members of that university that have scientific concerns in my research field and the exchange of ideas with the members of the scientific community from this faculty played an essential role in the process of conceiving and elaborating this doctoral thesis.