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EXAMINATION OF CONTACT OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR AND THE COUNTRY IMAGE IN HUNGARY

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ABSTRACT: Nowadays globalization of commerce created an ever increasing competition on both local and international markets. Consumers may find goods in their local shops basically from any country. One of the oldest problems for actors on the international market is how customers perceive the fact that a product is of 'foreign' origin. Researches showed that there is an existing partiality towards a country's locally produced products. Stereotypes about foreigners may have impact on the actual judgment of a product or in other words on the consumer ethnocentrism. Ethnocentric consumers opt not to buy foreign products due to their possible social and economic implications. We might say that cultural differences may never fully disappear as the presence of local preferences can never be ruled out in the international commerce. Perception of local and foreign products greatly depends on the customers' feelings towards their own country. Part of this emotional experience is how one loves his or her home country or if he or she feels the country superior to others. Therefore, it is important to assess customer habits not only on local but on international markets too.

KEYWORDS: country image, rural development, consumer's behaviour

❖ INTRODUCTION

Country of origin image shall be taken into consideration when examining country image. The two concepts are in close connection, there is no distinct boundary between them.

Country of origin image is part of the overall image of a product and it is formed based on the country of origin. Accordingly, country of origin image arises from stereotypes associated with the product merely because it was made in a given country. Country of origin image already comprises the images about products originated from that country. Let's think about our purchasing habits when we make decisions based on land of origin of the product. Germans are known for the exceptional meticulousness, their products are reliable, therefore, we happily buy German products. Locally produced agricultural products and foodstuffs are especially sensitive to country of origin image, as product quality is influenced by several factors such as habitat, natural and human factors. Hungarian agricultural goods, particularly some products (e.g. Szegedi ground paprika, Makó onion, Egri Bikavér (red wine), Gyulai sausage) obtained fame and good reputation. This enables Hungarians living abroad to buy products made in their home country.

In order to comprehensively satisfy customer needs regional products shall comply with various qualifications and regulations. Marking ensures customers that they buy superior quality goods and due to regular controls they get the same quality on long term too.

❖ BACKGROUND OF DEFINITIONS

According to Roth (2006) country image is the entirety of an individual's presumable descriptive and informative knowledge about a given country. It not only refers to the country's industrial, technological and political perception but also to emotions towards the country and pride.

Malota (2004) summarised this as follows: "Country image is all the descriptive, concluded and informational belief that we create about a country. It is the entirety of different beliefs, ideas, impressions that people hold about a given country."

Country image is a picture in our consciousness about a country. Country image indirectly includes the products as well; based on the country image we have preconceptions about the products too. The following factors may influence our attitude positively or negatively:

- Geographic and natural conditions: Having excellent natural conditions agriculture is a dominant sector in Hungary. Owing to natural factors the country is rich in unique regional products such as ground paprika from Szeged or Kalocsa

- Historic factors: historic relations between countries are determinative factor which may influence the formation of customer ethnocentrism. Nowadays this factor became important as well.
- Social factors, including demographics. Age distribution is a significant factor in connection with shaping country the image as younger generation is not able to create ideal image about the country.
- Economic - commercial factors: in this case not only the hard, measurable data such as a country's GDP or unemployment rate shall be considered but also non-measurable factors such as Hungarian type goods that plays also important role in creating the country image.

❖ MATERIAL AND METHOD

We made primary examinations in 2010. The sample is almost representative, 862 questionnaires in total. The questionnaires reached all parts of Hungary, and made sure the distribution age, qualification, occupation and residence.

The questionnaire is the most important device of the primary market research methods. During our quantitative research we used standardised questionnaires, which suited to give numerical data. The standard characteristic of the questionnaire makes it possible that the answers of different consumers are comparable.

We have used SPSS 14.0 program for analyzing the data obtained with questionnaire. From the various calculation options of the program we used the followings: descriptive and diagnostic data analysis, cross table analysis, cluster analysis, factor analysis.

When creating descriptive statistics the goal is to characterize the observations. We may evaluate results numerically or by using diagrams. Program helps analyzing variables of different scales. We can group the available mass data by cluster analysis. The point is to adequately differentiate the different groups and also to form such groups that bear common characteristics within the set. Grouping may be performed by various methods. I chose hierarchic method at the processing.

❖ RESULTS - CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

When launching a new product manufacturers develop a marketing strategy aiming to ensure the long term success of the goods. This strategy includes the following marketing functions:

- analysing customer behaviour and market
- determining the range of products and services to be produced and marketed
- informing potential buyers about the products and services
- organising sales
- influencing customers to buy the goods
- promoting customer relations

Each factor plays important part in the success of products. Probably the most important factor, however, is analysing customer behaviour and market. Profound knowledge on customer behaviour is essential to create good long term relations with them. The factors influencing customer behaviour can

Table 1: Factors influencing customer behaviour

Cultural	Social	Personal	Psychological
Characteristics			
- Culture - Subculture - Social class	- Reference groups - Status and roles	- Age, sex, family lifecycle - Occupation - Income - Lifestyle	- Motivation - Attitude - Personality and self-image - Perception, learning

Source: own collection

be seen on Table 1. Customer behaviour as range of activities performed during acquiring and utilisation of products aiming to enhance customer satisfaction.

The notion of „customer ethnocentrism” was introduced by Shimp et al. Based on their observations they found that several

customers think that French wines are of better quality than local ones, although, it was seldom chosen due to economic reasons.

In connection we can say that the bigger a country's economic competitiveness the weaker the customers' resistance against its products. It was also found that the more similar two countries' cultures are the bigger the customer's acceptance towards the products made in that country.

We asked 800 customers the following question: “Is it right if Americans buy foreign made products?” In another survey they sent emails studying CETSCALE's efficiency and validity.

They came to the conclusion that further researches are needed to gather more information about how demographic, geographic, regional economic factors influence customer ethnocentric values and what roles these factors play in adulthood.

It also needs to be further researched how intimidation affects customer's attitude towards foreign products. Most intimidated manufacturers are those operating on economically less developed areas and in regions where presence of foreign competitors are more evident.

That is why we defined the following: all ideas that distinguish a given country from other cultures. National identity relates to customer ethnocentrism, therefore, it possibly has the same effects. Hence, stronger national identity may have negative effect towards foreign countries' image, thus negative impact on purchase intentions.

❖ RESULTS - ANALYSING CUSTOMER HABITS

Price of traditional Hungarian products could be decreased if vendors were left out of market chain since if we were able to buy directly from the producer we did not need to pay the traders' profit. Therefore, I think Shop of Hungarian Products network is an excellent initiation, here excellent quality products are available directly from the producer.

Traditional Hungarian products need effective communication network. Improvement of information flow would be the most important objective. The research showed that 22% of respondents searched Hungarian spices on the shop shelves. If communication of traditional Hungarian products was more effective demand for e.g. Szegedi ground paprika would be bigger.

Communication of labels protecting Hungarian foodstuffs should be more efficient as the aforementioned trademarks are not widely known. Media publicity could be more appropriate as customers use media outlets such as newspapers, radio and television on daily basis. Not only the reputation of locally acknowledged trademarks should be improved but also those used in the European Union, as reputation of protected geographical indication was very low.

Overall, respondents consider Hungarian products average or good. Customers' ethnocentric behavior needs to be reinforced; if a customer is satisfied with a Hungarian product he or she will chose locally produced goods.

For me it was positive outcome that 82% of respondents replied to be proud of Hungary. In each age bracket nearly same amount of people replied not to be proud of his or her home country. After mentioning the country's successes they reflected positively to the achievements of this small country.

72% of respondents expressed that they would not want to live in other country. The younger generation, however, thinks that their professional knowledge worth more abroad than in Hungary. Therefore, career-starters should be assisted with various grants.

❖ CONCLUSIONS

Due to the globalisation of commerce it is more and more necessary to measure customer habits and preferences.

The ever growing competition requires manufacturers to lay great emphasis on quality. They need to ensure steady and reliable quality and it shall be communicated towards customers as well.

Image of the country of origin is an important influence on how customers perceive goods from other countries. Researches show that customers evaluated similar and fully corresponding products differently because of their country of origin.

Consumer ethnocentrism is not only interesting because it is a global tendency but also because political influences on customer behaviour are particularly evident. Although, political attitude is one of the most important social criteria, contrary to other similar factors such as age, sex, education and social status its influence on customer decisions - other than patriotic purchase - is hardly detectable. We might say that it is such a determinant that buyers are not aware of when they make the customer decisions.

This topic bears special interest as beside its evident economic influences it also has social, psychological and political implications. How it forms a complex and how some of these factors become prominent as a result of various influences have significant actuality in our days. In a world where social issues like sustainable development or fair trade have major impact on forming public attitudes thus economic behavior of people. Moreover, it characteristically became a political grouping criterion not only globally but also here - or especially here - in Hungary where views on buying local products are often confronting.

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