

## **CULTURE - MAJOR DETERMINANT OF THE EUROPEAN CONSUMER BEHAVIOR**

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*ABSTRACT: Consumers put in the new circumstances of the European Union area is in the process of adapting behavior in market relations, the conditions in which enjoys growing prosperity, the increased degree of civilization. How businesses will respond to their offer of goods to the requirements of the consumers in the European Single Market space is a management process of identifying and meeting the needs of consumers outside the national space enterprise, taking into account the environmental factors specific to each market external. Purchase decision process is identical for all countries, different final decision to purchase, because the influences caused by socio-economic or cultural. Cultural environment is the composition showing the highest rigidity factor change action, therefore, usually followed by guided conduct business in foreign markets is the attempt to adapt and respect the cultural values of each country. Our work aims to highlight the influence of cultural factors, the expression of a specific market requirement, which makes both kinds of products, offered to consumers and purchasing behavior and consumption of a consumer in the EU.*

*Key terms:* culture, lifestyle typologies of the buyers.

*JEL classification:* M16, M21, M31, O52

### **Introduction**

The work of international marketing, the company aims to achieve a guidance system of organization in international market environment, the opportunities of liberalization and democratization of generalized economic, material, in terms of marketing activity, the possibility of simultaneous operation of more many markets by generating a single tender offer for potential international standardization. Companies operating in the Single Market European Economic Area must know best their central element reference - or more precisely that the European consumer, the consumer of the Community. "Their target" consumers can be located on a different stage EU territorial space - in the local markets, national / regional or throughout the European Single Market.

*Consumer Behavior in the European Union (EU) is the resulting complex interface between endogenous and exogenous factors that individual determine all their documents directly related to the purchase of goods / services, which include making a whole before, causing such acts.[Engel,J.,F., & al., 1968, source cited in Dobre, C., 2000 , p. 8].*

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### **1. Exogenous factors affecting the behavior**

Co attractiveness of market segments that make up the European Single Market motivate businesses that offer their addresses with the consumer goods space in the reproduction of an original approach to marketing solutions company proven in other markets and the need to adapt to new target. If national market environment is characterized by a gradual evolution of the factors of influence, which provides the cumulative effect of relative stability of supply and demand situation is of special significance for the European Single Market approach. There are different approaches to the factors consumer behavior and categories are included. In an attempt of synthesis of complex factors that influence the consumer behavior in the Community of European Single Market can group them in:

- Socio-economic variables (external factors);
- Explanatory variables individual (internal factors).

Companies that address their supply of goods / services such consumers should have information about external factors affecting the behavior of the Community, to allow conclusions concerning the economic and social factors, personal and psychological influencing behavior the consumer.

**A. Consumption of goods / services** may become the means of expression of social differentiation, given that the products / services that consumers in EU space uses may be considered signs, which allow them to express their social position.

**B. Membership in a social class** required for consumer spending that sometimes members of a social class with discretionary income it can spend on products in their class, not yet considered necessary. There is an ostentatious consumption of certain social categories, with the task of demonstrating wealth / status of the individual in society (ex. Mercedes car brand in France is the symbol of a successful and upper class social climbing). Gardner B. and S. Levy after admitting that some brands enjoy a reputation for satisfying the demands of a wide variety of consumers, noted that "this is not easy to meet the needs of people" belonging to middle class society and at the same time to draw attention / interest buyers more "sophisticated", belonging to class intellectuals [Kotler, Ph., 1998, p. 366].

Multidimensional nature of social class consumers who can make classification difficult, as some variables (income, for example) to approach a class, and as others (ex. culture and education) to depart from it. These difficulties are added and the phenomena of social mobility that some people may leave their parents' social class to social access to a new level. [Lendrevie, J., & Lindon, D., 1997, p. 161]. Marketing opportunities for businesses as the European consumer purchasing behavior are different depending on the individual groups are reported and that determines the behavior and values.

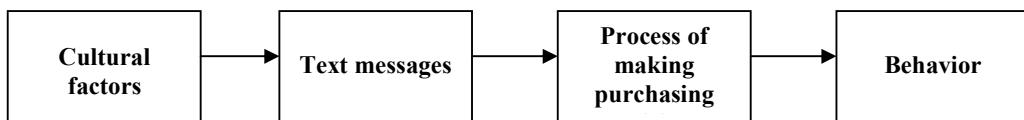
**C. Reference groups** influence consumer behavior and the Community in proportion to perceived risk is very strong for products that express the social status of the client - such as cars and clothing. *Sometimes the reference group may be transformed into one of belonging, the individual is included in the group, which radically changed his consumer behavior and buying purchasing.* For example, public support for the ecological products can be obtained not only when such products are offered and made, but if customers have an ecological behavior in the group which included "**green consumers**". Green consumer is people who actively seek out products with a relatively low impact on the environment and with favourable effects on life quality. Mostly they are educated, informed and usually can even be opinion leaders guiding acre ecological your community living. Surveys show that more women attach greater importance to the acquisition criteria related to ecological optics, making them feel more threatened by lack of attention paid to environmental imperatives and to become more inclined to accept environmental solutions related reasons the quality of their most important customers and the ability / power to influence their purchasing decisions of the whole society and future generations.

The companies' penetration in an EU market area means that they will enter the high-intensity contact with macro components -marketing environment European Single Market and they will be obliged to observe the influence of all these factors to approach their consumers.

## 2. Culture - exogenous variable with significant impact on consumer behavior EU Community Area

Such international cultural event has been studied by several experts, including noted research conducted by Geert Hofstede in the years 1980-1984 and 1991, which enabled him to develop a model hierarchy of the world. They identified four components that define national cultural dimensions [Dumitru, I., 2004, p.115]:

- **Distance from power** - measuring the distance between individuals are in different hierarchical levels;
- **Avoiding uncertainty** - how people feel threatened or not changes future;
- **Individualism Vs. Collectivism** - the relationship between individuals and their peers mainly manifested by individual activity / team;
- **Masculinity. Vs. Femininity** - an inclination to values that are mainly two categories. Cultural influences both in terms of elements within the culture (ex. cultural variability, complexity and cultural hostility) and intercultural elements represented by the heterogeneity and cultural interdependence affects the light action on consumer. [Bradley,F., 2001, p. 164] are considered the following components that change consumer behavior: cultural factors, cultural messages and making decisions by the consumer.[] [fig.no.1].



**Fig.no.1- Influence of culture on the European consumer**

Source, Jeannet, J., Hennessey, H., D. 1995, p. 71

Meaning "all values of the perceptions, desires and behaviours acquired by a members of society from their family or important institutions", *culture is reflected in a set of elements, including material culture, religion, language, system values and attitudes, customs, aesthetics, social organization, education*. Only by taking into account cultural factors can "explain proper consumption models and consumer behaviour in different markets.[Kotler, Ph.. & al., 1998, p.250; 343].

How acting independently in these components of culture creates cultural values - universal or culture-specific - which generates local decision standardization or adaptation of marketing mix elements of the enterprise. [Danciu, V., 2001, p.77].

The main cultural value of a society depends on people's outlook about themselves and about others, about the various organizations, society, values and univers.[Danciu, V., 2001, 78] Related to meet their specific culture more secondary crops materialized in " people groups - different nationalities, religions, ethnic groups and geographic regions - who share their value systems based on common life experiences and situations. Many of these secondary crops constitute important segments of the market, which companies operating in the EU must to meet their needs. It should be borne in mind that consumers belonging to some secondary crops will influence the preference for certain foods, clothing items, agreement options and objectives of their careers. [Kotler, Ph.. & Al., 1998, p. 2].

In the EU Community noted several trends are notable:

- **A trend of homogeneity**, the spread of the Nordic model, characterized among other indices, especially the structure of consumption expenditures, which appear to be geared mainly for housing, health and leisure beyond national borders. The result of this trend is the emergence of "**euro-elite**", yet minority, but technology-intensive products and services. Euroelite possess usually a car, mobile phone, an international credit card with unlimited usage, speak English, they keep their body weight control (play sports) and are sensitive to issues of ecology. Were outlined as three segments of consumers in the EU population, which prove to be the most permeable mixing, in terms of purchasing and consumption behaviour:
  - Young;
  - Opinion leaders;
  - Businessmen.
- **A tendency to Mediterranean re-balance**, (especially the youngs) of the northern and southern lifestyles, each leaving to win by a system of thought and action belonging to other cultural spheres. The notes to the young in Germany and Denmark a trend characterized by exuberance, greater sociability, challenging individual success model focused on work and money. Conversely, young people in Italy and Spain seem to have attracted more than those in the age of this model of individual success. Also noted a greater tendency to equality of persons, between the two groups of gender, dynamic economic and social life by increasing participation of women in such activities.
- **A temporal approach** in terms of representation in business context, the economic Latin temporal patterns normative Anglo-Saxon and particularly the management of American origin. The highlights thus produced European cultural dynamics of international economic changes, cultural patterns worldwide. However, during office who gives the pulse of society, remain in the European community still dominated by national specificities of each country;
- **The existence of large groups of people relatively homogeneous in terms of social values and lifestyles.**

### **3. Lifestyle – essential element to characterize the behaviour of European consumers**

Lately manifested an increased interest in characterizing the population - and hence the Community consumer - in terms of lifestyle. Lifestyle shows, in fact, generally in sour individual acts in society, influenced by cultural and economic factors. Over the life of a person can pass through many lifestyles, each amounting to changes in its value and its purchasing behaviours. [Florescu, C., Mâlcomete, P., Pop, N., Al., 2003, p. 662]

The most common classifications relevant to the lifestyles of consumers in the EU area - named as consumer euro-typologies - belong Advanced Communication Centre (ACC) and RISC Institute, both in France, SRI Europe Europanel and SINUS (Germany).

Research conducted by the ACC every five years - as landmarks with materialism and values, nomadism and rootedness - distinguished 6 groups and 17 subgroups lifestyles of Europeans:

- 1) Ambitious : dandy, Rocky opportunistic businessman;
- 2) "Cocoons": Rocky-ego, Romantics, Squadra - provincial, "withdrawn";
- 3) Materialists: Olvidados (frustrations), alert, cautious;
- 4) Nomanzii: protest, Pioneer;
- 5) Makers: scouts (scouts, hungry for knowledge, spirit citizenship);
- 6) Notables: moralist, traditionalists and ultra-conservators.

SINUS Company GmbH in Germany has identified five social classes and underlying values that influence its European consumer lifestyle:

- 1) Basic guidelines with care to preserve the traditional;
- 2) Orientation to materialistic desire to have;

- 3) Values Elementary: hedonism, delights;
- 4) Values that change: post-materialism - there;
- 5) Values ephemeral: postmodernism - have, to exist, to spoil.

The result of this request was to have identified two types of values - traditional and materialistic - and six social groups: conservative, traditionalist, traditional working class, the current trend, people who set the trend, vanguard, social critics and non privileged. From the perspective of three dimensions of lifestyles, apparent in these studies – “progressive-conservative”, “materialistic-spiritual” and “rational-emotional” ACC is considered first and strongest contrast, distinguishing interests **“euro-progressives”** (dude, business people, protesters and pioneers) and **“euro-conservators”** (careful, vigilant, low - bourgeois, rigorous). The notes and another set of beliefs - that of **“Euro-rockers”** - highly emotional and materialistic, which is not manifest in any of the specific ways the two styles.

All studies so far have confirmed the existence of European lifestyles of different countries beyond the space community, but the similarities are more evident when Europeans richer than the poor. It confirms what R. Lynch noted, already a decade ago, that *“European consumers can now vary from individual groups, distinct, with little in common, in those groups with a common European identity”*. [Lynch, R., 2001, cap.5, source cited in Adăscăliței,V., 2005, p.78-79].

In conjunction with this research specific final consumption goods and services offered in the market resulting expression in a much larger market to a joint application of EU space for durable goods to luxury items and even for some Non-durable goods - pharmaceuticals and cosmetics - as a result of their great homogeneity within the EU. It is noted also for a range of services - banking, insurance, consulting, etc. - A common request in the Community, which also calls for *Euro-consumers*.

### **Conclusions**

Free movement of goods, persons and capital within the EU will mean an increasing homogenization of lifestyles of community citizens. Rising competition compels companies to align internationalization, because otherwise they are threatened by a clear disadvantage in the competition in the market. Conscious orientation towards customer focus organization requires business concern to know the needs, desires and problems existing and potential customers. The whole enterprise market is divided according to certain criteria which market segments is working on a conscious and nuanced.

In the EU economic space, a global market on the 27de countries, for firms address their supply of consumer goods / Customer Community market success of this market offers alternative processing Community standards or different, according to national specificities that range for his Th. Levitt "Think Global, Act Local".

European consumer behaviour requires experienced, analyzed in terms of influences manifested by action external and internal factors that can shape behaviour or purchase and consumption. While there are currently more cultural similarities of the strong, it is the European cultural environment in actually specifies an interpenetration of convergence and the peculiarities across the EU. European single market can be segmented by criteria such as membership of a social class, lifestyle, but also criterias related to European consumers behaviour. The most important cultural factors which affect international business are considered the following: language, religion, education, representations and consumer value judgments manifested by the creation of reference groups, social organization that generate different social classes. Habits seen as a behavioural dimension in market economy conditions, is the fruit of past experiences, who put their mark on the habit of buying, the manner of purchasing differences tooth habits of the population in various EU countries are marked by ethnic traditions, cultural or religious. Entrepreneurs must researche the formative factors of different patterns of consumption and their mode of interaction, their intensity of expression and relationship they have shopping habits.

Over to the EU market and the institutions of pan-European decision making, sense of European identity is growing. A pan-European marketing (Euro-Marketing) will gain importance for SMEs outside of the brands.

***The future will belong to products with an European vocation offered a common consumer-the European consumer.***

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