

Marketing and Consumer Behavior

SYMBOLIC CONSUMPTION OF LUXURY: AN EXAMPLE OF LUXURY FASHION GOODS IN RUSSIA

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Abstract. *Despite all changes and crises Russia has developed to one of the most important market for luxury goods in the world. Economic developments in the course of the last decade, rapidly growing high-middle class consumer segments and increasing consumer sophistication changed consumption behavior of luxury services and goods in Russia within a short time. Russian consumer behavior patterns of luxury items can be explained by the theory of conspicuous or symbolic consumption. The motivation for buying symbolic goods usually is highly sensitive to social appreciation and the most visible ones include luxury clothing and accessories, automobiles, stereos and furniture goods. The aim of this study is to determine the factors influencing Russian consumers' intentions to purchase luxury fashion goods. We focus the growing high-middle and middle class consumer behavior patterns. This study attempts to contend practitioners' knowledge and folklore in research hypotheses and to evaluate these in a rigorous quantitative proceeding. We investigate the factors influencing Russian consumers' intentions to purchase goods of luxury fashion brands based on two different models. The "Attitude toward Luxury Brands" (social-adjustive function) quantifies the extent to which luxury brands are facilitating self-expression of the owner and the projection of a particular image in social settings. Additionally, we use the "Attitude toward Luxury Brands" (value-expressive function) in order to quantify the degree to which luxury brands are expressing the buyers's self (beliefs, attitudes, values). Complementing these, we assess consumers' luxury motivation factors. The results of our analysis confirm practitioners' prior beliefs that Russian consumer behavior patterns in the luxury markets predominantly correspond to characteristics of symbolic consumption. Consumers emphasize their individual image and cherish how they look in the eyes of others while consuming luxury brands. Moreover, Russian consumers can be described as perfectionists because they desire the best quality as one of the most salient attributes of luxury products. On the other hand, they consider price of the items while fonding of quality in luxury items and they do not want to exaggerate amounts paid for their shopping. The results exert existence of a highly significant negative relation between the influence of price and frequency of luxury fashion goods purchase in Russia.*

Keywords: *luxury; symbolic consumption; fashion; consumer behaviour; Russia.*

Introduction

During the last years the global luxury goods market has grown significantly and mainly because of the luxury growth in the emerging countries such as Brazil, Russia, India and China (Som, 2011). Russia meanwhile is one of the biggest emerging economies in the world and according to Bain & Company (2013), due to its fast economic development and openness to the foreign brands, Russia is a country which offers a huge growth potential for the luxury goods companies. Indeed, the capital of the country,

city of Moscow is already ranked number fifth after Paris, Milan, London and New York in the ranking of the luxury fashion capitals of the world.

Russian consumers deprived of luxury items more than 70 years because of communism. It impacted their understanding of luxury and their behaviour to reach the luxury items. Russians as a part of Slavonic culture emphasize uniqueness characteristics more than Germanic and Roman/French cultures. They want to distinguish themselves with the unique products from others in the community (De Barnier, Rodina & Valette-Florence, 2006). Consequently, Russian consumer behavior patterns can be explained by the theory of conspicuous, symbolic consumption introduced by the economist and sociologist Veblen (1899). Kaufmann, Vrontis and Manakova (2012) confirm these theoretical backgrounds in the consumption of Russian consumers and claim that Russian consumer behaviour is different from other Western societies' consumers and give very much importance on status consumption, perceived quality, symbolic/status consumption and uniqueness in their understanding of luxury. It is defined, that symbolic goods mostly are products especially sensitive to social influence and the most visible ones; generally they include luxury clothing and accessories, automobiles, stereos and furniture goods. Russian consumers are well known worldwide for their love to expensive luxury goods (Andreeva & Bogomolova, 2008).

Since Russia opened its economic borders, the country has experienced a huge flow of international products into the country. Russian researches Andreeva and Bogomolova (2008) state that today's Russians consumers are even spoiled by luxury choice as there are many companies available in the current market and the companies try to withdraw attention of the consumers to get chosen over other brands. Through the last 15 years, Russians have turned into sophisticated and well-travelled clients, who are aware enough about the world of brands. In addition, rapid expansion of middle high class society brings to the observation a new tendency of luxury consumption in Russia (Andreeva & Marmi, 2012). Namely, luxury consumers, especially those from the lower classes, purchase luxury products because of the special feeling it gives them, and the perceived power they feel to have in the society (Moore & Birtwistle, 2005).

Our research aims to contribute by explaining upper middle class Russians behavior. The divergences and similarities of their behavior in comparison to (the mostly) westernized knowledge of luxury buying is of particular interest for both practitioners and scholars. Because luxury is a hot topic for scholars as the interest on luxury has been steadily growing in research. Furthermore, the same interest exists in practitioners' world and every type of business try to get advantage of this interest in luxury (Urkmez & Wagner, 2015). The former might aim to take directly advantage of a high volume market whereas the latter ones might consider the Russian middle class luxury consumer to be a genotype of non-Western luxury consumer embedded in related cultures e.g. Belarus or Kirghizia.

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. In the second section, we describe the framing of our study by providing a state-of-the-art overview of Russian luxury markets. Subsequently, we summarize explanations Russian consumer behaviour patterns relevant for luxury items. Complementing this, we briefly outline the luxury fashion industry in Russia. In the third chapter, we introduce our research methodology and scales used to collect the data. Moreover, we describe the data and the results of our analysis. In the fourth section, we discuss the relevance of our empirical results and derive both managerial implications and suggestions for further research.

Luxury in Russia

Overview of Russian luxury market

The Russian luxury market is almost completely dominated by non-food specialist retailers such as apparel and accessories, automotive, jewellery etc. The formats of luxury outlets vary from small independent multi-brand shops to luxury department stores and shopping centers with a strong specialization in prêt-à-porter. Single brand boutiques are situated in the main trade streets and places

of concentration of high-net-worth-individuals (HNWI), for example in Moscow, Stoleshnikov lane Kutuzovsky Prospect, Tretyakovsky Proezd, Barvikha Village. By the distribution of companies on different segments, it is obvious that the majority of them are specialized in fashion and accessories segment. Overall, the luxury market in Russia includes fashion, cosmetics, cars and yachts, jewelry and watches, furniture and accessories, and many other products (Quans, 2011). Euromonitor states that the local luxury market including clothing, accessories, watches and jewellery in Russia worthed 6,8 billion in 2013 and constituted the biggest share as a whole (Avins & Karaian, 2014).

In Russia there is a high geographic concentration of luxury goods; Moscow together with Saint-Petersburg, Krasnodar and Yekaterinburg account 70 % of all luxury consumption in Russia. Moscow is not only the center of all luxury transactions and concentration of market operators, but also the city which determines the stylistic trends that affect consumer behavior throughout the whole country (Andreeva & Bogomolova, 2008). The second city in Russia is Saint-Petersburg with its high quality level of life and luxury demand from the local elite. It is also a favourite tourist center and it has become to be an interest center for several luxury companies. They chose to move their headquarters there. This resulted in prosperity of the region with increasing investments from the companies and government. Yekaterinburg, known also as an "Ural capital" of Russia is the center for the northern areas, where consumers have the opportunity to purchase luxury goods but are not willing to cross the country to make this purchase. For this reason, there was a rise of luxury retail in Yekaterinburg during the recent years. Also fast development of other cities like Krasnodar caused Yekaterinburg lose its third status in luxury city list after 2013 and some luxury companies preferred to close their businesses there and move to newly emerging regions like Krasnodar (Euromonitor, 2015).

Consumer behavior patterns toward luxury goods

According to Som (2011), in Russia high class consumers expect luxury products to have a balance between tradition, modesty, and wealth. Interestingly, Russian consumers usually have been seen while buying goods that have much higher prices than they are ordinarily sold at because they like to show off that they can spend that amount of money for a valuable product. However, as stated in Euromonitor report (2015) considering the incredibly rapid changes taking place in Russia, both on macro- and micro-economic levels, Slavina (2007) states that the same changes are taking place in the field of consumption. The Euromonitor research (2015) supports the idea that there are times of wild consumption of goods like just after recent devaluation of national currency rouble, including even fake goods purchased on the market by customers with no idea of quality.

Luxury fashion market in Russia

There are three main luxury fashion goods retailers operating in the Russian market. First place in the market according to the sales forecast belongs to the Mercury group, which is distributor of more than 60 luxury brands in Russia, including such brands as Armani, Balenciaga, Brioni, Bulgary, Dolce & Gabbana, Ermenegildo Zegna, Gucci, Fendi, Tiffany & Co and etc. The next group, Bosco di Ciliegi, is represented by such luxury fashion brands as Etro, Jil Sander, Kenzo, MaxMara, La Perla, Paul & Joe and etc. Finally, JamilCo has a brand portfolio of Burberry, Chaumet, Salvatore Ferragamo, Escada and etc. All those three distributors are actively presented not only in Moscow but also in other Russian cities. It is the tendency that the popularity of high-end fashion is rapidly expanding into the regions. For example, in Sochi, a resort town on the Black Sea, boutiques selling clothes and accessories by Christian Dior and Dolce & Gabbana were recently opened. Despite the fact, that in recent years, many global manufacturers of luxury fashion goods (e.g. Louis Vuitton, Dior, Chanel, Hermès) refused to cooperate with major national retailers and opened their own offices in Russia, the position of Mercury, Bosco di Ciliegi and JamilCo still remains strong and influence the formation of luxury consumer preferences in Russia.

Objective of the study

The main purpose in this study is to understand the Russian middle and upper middle class consumer behaviour for luxury fashion items. Maleva (2008, as cited by Remington, 2011), director of the Independent Institute for Social Policy in Moscow, claimed middle class at the inter-section of three categories: level of income and material well-being; occupational and educational status; and self-identification. In this study, we will take into consideration level of income category and up to 50000 Rubles as middle class and more than 50,000 as upper-middle class as indicated in Maleva's study that the average income in middle class is 60,000 Rubles in Moscow and 50,000 in St. Petersburg. Each society has different dimensions of cultural values and these cultural values are important for the consumers in those countries while making their own purchase decisions (House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman & Gupta, 2004). Especially, in luxury field the concept of relativity is effective in implementing the perceptions of luxury for the people living in a specific country (Urkmez & Wagner, 2015). Accordingly, we try to find out the perceptions for Russian consumers leading to a purchase decision.

Methodology & data

Scales

We adopted two scales in this study. "Attitude toward Luxury Brands" (social-adjustive function) was introduced by Wilcox, Kim and Sen (2009). This scale is indented to measure a degree at which extend luxuries brands are viewed as facilitating self-expression of the owner and to project a particular image in social settings. "Attitude toward Luxury Brands" (value-expressive function) introduced by the same authors is indented to measure a degree to which luxury brands are viewed as expressing something about one's self (beliefs, attitudes, values). Complementing these, we assess the luxury motivation factors following the proposal of Vigneron and Johnson (1999).

Attitudes have social functions such as yielding self-expression (value-expressive function) and promoting self- presentation (social-adjustive function). Social-adjustive attitudes help people keep their personal contacts and relationships (De Bone, 1987). When people behave with social adjustive attitudes toward a product, they buy it to gain social approval in the community. Moreover, when people have value- expressive attitudes, these are helpful to transmit their central beliefs and values to other people around (Katz, 1960). It supports them in expressing themselves in an easier way. Previous researches (Shavitt, 1989; Wilcox et al., 2009) proved that consumers' attitudes toward luxury products may host social-adjustive or value-expressive functions or both of them.

Data Description

The sample frame for the present study was initially built from a database provided by Alumni Association of Graduate School of Management, St. Petersburg State University and Alumni Association of Moscow Higher School of Economics. Both universities are well-known in Russia for the quality of business education and reputation of its graduates. Moreover, the questionnaire was distributed among the citizens of the cities Perm and Yekaterinburg, who have relatively medium-high incomes and have agreed to participate. Total 162 respondents participating in the research, 66 were males (approx. 41%) and 96 were females (approx. 59%). Most of them (70%) were between 23 29 years old with up to 50.000 rub monthly income (51.9 %) (50.000 rub equals to approx. 870 Euro or 970 US\$); 50.000 to 100.000 rub. (40.1%); and finally, 8 % of respondents with a highest income from 100.000 to 150.000 rub. Thereby the total sample gives a representation of middle and upper-middle class respondents, who are being the main targets of the particular research and high growth potential consumers of luxury fashion market in Russia.

Hypotheses and Findings

For precise data analysis of variables and test of hypotheses, total sample of respondents was divided into two main sub-samples: (1) respondents who do not purchase luxury fashion goods (29% of the respondents) and (2) respondents who purchase luxury fashion goods. During the justification of hypotheses the sub-sample of respondents who do not purchase luxury fashion goods was not taken into consideration.

Hyp1.a: Consumers' perceptions of quality affect purchasing decision toward luxury in Russia.

Hyp1.b: Consumers' perceptions of design affect purchasing decision toward luxury in Russia.

Hyp1.c: Consumers' perceptions of brand reputation affect purchasing decision toward luxury in Russia.

Regarding the criteria which affect purchasing decision toward luxury fashion goods respondents were proposed to confirm strength of their agreement or disagreement to perceptions of: (1) quality, (2) design, (3) brand reputation, (4) fashion and (5) brand history. Respondents absolutely agree that perception of quality of the good influence their decision and agree that perception of design and brand reputation influence it too. However, respondents doubt that brand history and fashion have any influence on them. Therefore, *Hyp1.a, Hyp1.b, Hyp1.c, cannot be rejected*, meaning that consumers' perceptions of quality, design and brand reputation affect purchasing decision toward luxury fashion goods in Russia ($P = 0.1$; $\chi^2:77.70$; dof:16).

Hyp2.a: Consumers' perception of quality affects more purchasing decision toward luxury than consumers' perception of design.

Quality ($M=1.88$, $SD= 1.345$) and design ($M= 2.8$, $SD= 1.006$) are strong elements according to responses and statistically significant ($T: -7.076$; sig. (2-tailed) .000) Therefore, *the Hyp2.a cannot be rejected*, indeed the consumer's perceptions of quality affects more purchasing decision towards luxury in Russia rather than consumers' perception of design.

Hyp2.b: Consumers' perception of quality affects more purchasing decision toward luxury than consumers' perception of brand reputation.

Quality ($M= 1.88$, $SD= 1.345$) and brand reputation ($M= 2.61$, $SD= 1.111$) have strong relations and statistically significant ($T: -4.042$; sig. (2-tailed) .000). Therefore, it is concluded that, at 5% level of significance the perception of quality affects more purchasing decision towards luxury comparing with brand reputation and *the Hyp2.b can not be rejected* either.

Hyp2.c: Consumers' perception of design affects more purchasing decision toward luxury than consumers' perception of brand reputation.

Relation of design ($M= 2.80$, $SD= 1.006$) and brand reputation ($M= 2.61$, $SD= 1.141$) is checked and test result shows that the 2-tailed sig. associated with the test is .295, however since it is 1-tail test the sig. needed to be halved by two and the result is .147, which is still higher than .05 and consequently the null hypothesis is retained, which shows that there is no sig. difference between design effect and brand reputation, therefore, *Hyp2.c is rejected*.

Hyp3.a: Russian consumers purchase luxury fashion goods in order to demonstrate their status.

In order to check the hypothesis, respondents were proposed to confirm strength of their agreement or disagreement to the statement "By purchasing luxury fashion goods, I show my status." Regarding status demonstration, 3.5 % of respondents are "absolutely agree" and 41.7 % are "agree", that by purchasing luxury they show their status to the society, nevertheless 38.3 % doubt about this statement. The difference is not that significant; however, *Hyp3.a cannot be rejected* but requires further investigation.

Hyp3.b: Russian consumers purchase luxury fashion goods in order to express their individuality.

For H3b, respondents were proposed to confirm strength of their agreement or disagreement to the following statement “The fashion brands that I like best are the ones that express my individuality”. This is clear that 9.6 % of respondents “absolutely agree” and 49.6 % “agree” that the fashion brands they like best are the ones that express their individuality, and only 15.7 % “disagree” with the statement. *Therefore, Hyp3.b is supported.*

Hyp3.c: Russian consumers purchase luxury fashion goods in order to get respect of a particular social group they belong to.

Respondents were again proposed to confirm strength of their agreement or disagreement to the following statement “It is important for me how I look in the eyes of the social group I belong to.” It is obvious, that for respondents is highly important how the social group they belong to perceives them; 27.8 % “absolutely agree”, 41.7 % “agree” and only 9.6 % “disagree” with the statement. Based on that, *Hyp3.c is supported.*

Hyp3.d: Russian consumers purchase luxury fashion goods in order to receive positive emotions and pleasure.

Hyp3.e: Russian consumers purchase luxury fashion goods in order to reward themselves for achievements.

To evaluate these hypotheses, self-perceptions of the purchasing process itself were challenged. Respondents do not perceive purchasing luxury as usual process; conversely it gives them positive emotions and pleasure. Thereby, *Hyp3.d is supported.* However, respondents did not give that importance to “rewarding themselves” motive, that’s why *Hyp3.e is rejected* but requires further investigation.

Complementing our understanding of Russian middle-class consumer behavior patterns, we have applied Pearson correlation test to see whether there is any other other relation influencing purchasing decision and respondents’ level of income. But the results are normal with a normal distribution. The 1-tailed sig. associated with this test is .231 which is $> .05$ and there is no significant correlation between two variables, which may also be supported by the actual correlation coefficient - .069.

Hyp4.a: Russian consumers purchase luxury fashion goods impulsively.

Respondents were proposed to confirm strength of their agreement or disagreement to the following statements “I plan the decision to purchase luxury fashion goods before.” and “I often buy luxury fashion goods impulsively.” It is therefore obvious, that respondents mainly plan their purchasing decision toward luxury fashion goods in advance (44.3 % are “absolutely agree” and 9.6 % “agree”) and they usually do not buy luxury items impulsively (47.8 % are “absolutely disagree” and 13 % “disagree”). Thus, *Hyp4.a is rejected.*

Hyp4.b: Russian consumers prefer to purchase luxury fashion goods of Western brands.

Respondents were proposed to choose from the list of famous luxury fashion brands the ones they have purchased during the last year. As a result, respondents indicated such brands as Calvin Klein (23.1%), Hugo Boss (22.5%), Givenchy (21.6%), DKNY (18.0%), Giorgio Armani (16.3%), Gucci (10.8%) and Nina Ricci (12.6%). It should be noted that only 2 respondents (1.8%) chose Russian luxury fashion brands among the Western ones. Thus, we claim that the Russian luxury fashion market is dominated mostly by foreign brands and our survey data are inline with factual market shares. Therefore, based on this argument *Hyp4.c is supported.*

Hyp4.c: Russian consumers have low brand loyalty toward luxury fashion goods.

Respondents were proposed to confirm strength of their agreement or disagreement to the following statement “I prefer to buy luxury fashion goods from one or two brands.” Russian respondents disagree that they prefer to buy luxury fashion goods from one or two brands (61.7 % are “absolutely disagree” or “disagree”). It means that during their purchases they like to try new ones and are not attached to the brands they have chosen before and the brands they like the most. Thus, *Hyp4.c is supported*.

Research findings show that Russian consumer behaviour toward luxury is influenced by social values and personal ones. The results support the idea of symbolic consumption: status demonstration is important for Russians in their intentions to purchase luxury fashion products. With an increase of disposable income Russian consumers even purchase more luxury fashion products to show their status, prosperity and success to the society. The same is happening with the prestige: the higher is the income of consumers; the more they symbolize prestige by purchasing luxury fashion goods. Certainly, consumers make a great emphasis on their personal image and on the effect how they look in the eyes of others while consuming luxury brands. Generally, Russian consumers can be described as perfectionists because they desire the best quality as one of the most salient attributes of luxury products. However, factor of price is highly important for them. The study shows that there is highly significant negative relation between the price influence and frequency of luxury fashion goods purchase in Russia. Namely, the more influence on the consumer has a price factor, the less frequently he/she purchases luxury fashion products. This fact is also related to the income level of consumers. Price has less influence on consumers with the higher level of income. This pattern appears to be valid in similar transition economies like Belarus, Kirghizistan, Kazakhstan (Wagner, 2005).

Managerial implications

As Russian luxury market enters a new phase of growth, global brands, operating in Russia or willing to enter it, need to consider a long term perspective in order to achieve a market success. Even though, the concentration of the market is still rather high in capital cities of the country, growing luxury demand in regions should not be overlooked. Therefore, there should be an accurate market entry strategy which assess to what extent a local intermediary can add value. In many cases, global luxury brands lack the necessary knowledge and market's expertise, therefore they can only operate directly after five years of experience. Therefore, it is essential for the companies to get loaded with the knowledge what Russian consumers expect and how they behave. As Russian consumers' perception of quality affect purchasing decision, quality should be the core element to be emphasized by the practitioners targeting Russian consumers. Producers, retailers and designers in the luxury goods industry need to understand consumers of these goods in order to benefit from the market growth trend. Besides quality, characteristics of design and brand reputation are the following leading characteristics for Russian consumers in the decision of purchase. The practitioners should invest on research and design activities and be differentiated with the design of the product without neglecting quality issue of their products. Even before entering into the market, the companies are to start their promotion campaigns to create brand familiarity by emphasizing the reputation of the brand. As consumption behaviour of Russian consumers partly rely on conspicuous consumption, brand reputation might be a good argument for them to earn prestige in the society.

Furthermore, purchasing luxury fashion products are a way of showing their status and expressing their individualities. Companies should adjust their marketing campaigns in accordance with conspicuous and symbolic consumption. Emotions have an important place in the purchase decisions of consumers. The consumers want to feel enjoyed by the shopped items. Practitioners might accentuate the joy and happiness concepts in their advertisements. Especially, the professional working people in our current age want to distract their attention and be away from their personal and work stress. Thus, it is a good opportunity for the practitioners to give this message to the consumers that shopping from their stores or trying their goods on will make them happy and to create the shopping atmosphere accordingly.

Contribution and further research

This is one of the few attempts at understanding Russian consumer behaviour and conceptualizing two scales on Russian consumers. In this study, by focusing on middle and upper middle class consumers in Russia we provide empirical evidence how luxury fashion consumers in Russia think and behave and feel when shopping luxury items. Findings reveal the fact that Russian consumers are typical examples of conspicuous consumption. Their purchases are shaped by social and personal values. The findings contribute to the conspicuous consumption and symbolic consumption theories by revealing the typical shopping attributes of Russian consumers in accordance with the recent previous researches (De Barnier et al., 2006; Kaufmann et al., 2012). However, it is important to notice that quality and brand reputation sequentially are the most important characteristics for Russian consumers while choosing their luxury products. Although they like purchasing items to show off, their purchases are not impulsive ones and cost of the product is a consideration while making their decision. With these features Russians are different from Western consumers however, have some similarities with Asian societies (De Barnier et al., 2006; Mo & Roux, 2009). They care the uniqueness issue in their purchases. They want to have “tangible utilitarian benefits” in luxury items which are closely related to high quality and aesthetics design besides brand reputation. The same type of study might be applied to other nations BRIC nations like China or India. Because of some similarities between Russian and Chinese consumers, similar findings might be expected in China and other Asian societies. However, we might expect different findings in another BRIC country, India. Another future interesting study might be tracing country of origin and its impact on Russian luxury fashion consumers and their perceptions. Although the consumers buy these luxury items as they are French or Italian luxury brands, this does not change the fact that these products are produced in other third countries, mostly Far East countries. Future empirical studies dealing with these issues might give a better understanding of the consumers for the practitioners and thus, they might come up with more successful applications.

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PERSONAL BRANDING: THE MARKETIZATION OF SELF IN THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

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Abstract: *The self-centric nature of today's society, along with the strong attraction chains of the celebrity culture favoured the self concept entering the dominant marketing logic. This paper aims to bring to the fore deeper conceptual grounds of today's personal branding socio-economic reality by turning to Goffman's impression management and Giddens' 'reflexive project of the self' concepts and discussing them within the new dynamics of the communication and identity spaces opened by the digital world. In addressing these issues we lay stress on three embedded dialectical dimensions of the personal branding: control or lack of control over our Self construct, genuine or plausible authenticity; consistency versus contextualization of personal branding. On the one hand, we argue that in terms of control people are rather focused on the projective phase than on the corrective impression management one. On the other hand, when faced with an accelerated process of multiplication and fragmentation of identities, the problem of authenticity should be re-evaluated within a relativist logic. Moreover, coping with multiple audiences, as well as coping with multiple identities, brings out additional consistency challenges for the personal branding process. In this context, we think that approaching personal branding as a Self-network rather than a Self-monolith construct can help in overcoming these dilemmas by redefining them in non-conflictive terms.*

Keywords: *personal branding; impression management; self project; authenticity; digital word.*

Introduction

Even if we are now rather focused on the challenges brought by the knowledge society and the ever-changing digital landscape, the social imagery of the consumer society (Baudrillard, 2005) and the society of spectacle (Debord, 1994) continues to be defining for understanding our glocal practices and identities. The marketing logic seems to have conquered every social field, from politics, to education or culture. In this context, the dominant approach was to lay stress on the fact that "the pivotal social and personal experience of the modern age is to be a consumer" (Craig & Beedie, 2008, p.130), thus describing and anticipating the evolution of this new *homo consumus*. But consumption is not only about social practices, as it is also about social identities, "the global expansion of the consumption culture facilitating the display of new identities via the commodification of a diversity of identities" (Jafari & Goulding, 2013, p.66). Nevertheless, we are not only consumers, but also those who provide things to be consumed, and, even more important, those who are being consumed. Hence, the Self itself has entered the commodification radar becoming integral part of this over-marketization process.

Beyond the new labelling of this process of self-marketization, we argue that it reflects also the incremental interest in a wide spectrum of self-presentation social practices. Within a highly competitive marketing logic, people become more and more aware and interested in gaining advantage over the others and differentiating themselves from the others. "Called by the brand", we end up becoming a brand *per se*, as "we are CEOs of our own companies: *Me Inc.*" (Peters, 1997, p.1). The market builds around and for selves required not only new practices, but also a re-contextualization of the marketing imagery, bringing forward new concepts like personal brand(ing). Thus, starting from the beginning of

the 2000, the concept of personal branding has become "the most effective way to clarify and communicate what makes you different, special, and valuable" (Arruda & Dixson, 2007, p.29).

The emergence and proliferation of "personal branding" practices was also favoured by the ascending wave of the celebrity culture, as we are now living in a celebrity-saturated world, where everyone seems to be involved in either producing or consuming celebrities (Rein, Kotler, & Stoller, 1997). This "make noise–make news–make change" model that is fuelled by the celebrity large-scale appeal (Thrall et al., 2008, pp.363-364) is no longer only about well-known public figures, but about a wider set of micro-celebrity practices that made ordinary people take over the self-centric logic of spectacularity and public exposure. The "demotic turn" (Turner, 2010) brought by the golden age of the celebrity culture came with both "ordinary people" becoming much more prominent in media content, but also with them being more interested in personal branding.

With a clear focus on the domino effect of the digital wave upon self-presentation practices, our analysis comes to reaffirm the importance of connecting the marketing nature of personal branding with the approach of personal branding as social construct, balancing out the role of the personal branding content with the role of the contextual factors involved in this process. Therefore, we turn to two conceptual anchors that we argue to be embedded in what "personal branding" is standing for in terms of self-presentation and self-management today: Goffman's impression management concept and Giddens' self as project approach. How far does personal branding go from impression management? Is personal branding more or less than an updated version for the management of Self as a reflexive project?

Nevertheless, beyond this brief conceptual placement of the personal branding in a wider interdisciplinary map, in the present paper, our interest lies primarily in understanding the challenges embedded in the dialectic nature of the personal branding concept. Therefore, we will focus on three main dimensions: control or lack of control over our Self construct, genuine or plausible authenticity; consistency versus contextualization, laying stress on the impact of the digital in addressing these issues. As the digital landscape allows for high third party contribution in what is rather a co-construction process of our personal branding, to what extent can we control the ongoing (re)configuration of Self, and, moreover, how consistent and authentic is it?

Self-presentation and self-management conceptual anchors of personal branding

In this section we argue that personal branding is more than just a new colonization field of branding, laying stress on two conceptual approaches that come to enrich the marketing logic of defining personal branding as the unique point of differentiation for yourself as commodity. In a consumption culture where branding is merely omnipresent (Olins, 2005), personal branding was not a disruptive new concept, nor a simple conceptual transfer from products and services to persons. We, thus, briefly address two components of the personal branding, self-presentation and self-management, that social scientists had already discussed before the actual personal branding concept came to light.

The first one, *impression management*, can be placed within the wider framework of the performance studies, being the core concept of Goffman's social dramaturgy theory. Building its conceptual map around the "life as theatre" metaphor, Goffman (1959) defines impression management as the main aspect of a performance, referring to the way an actor succeeds in controlling and directing the audience reactions towards accepting and validating a certain self image projected by him(self). Our self-identity thus comes as an output, as "a dramatic effect: the self is an effect of a performance, the way in which we present ourselves in everyday life" (Clarke, 2008, p.511).

Caught up in this process of performing in front of a public, the social actor has to cope with this permanent swing between "to be" and "to seem to be", between self as performer and self as performed. Thus, impression management, as both strategic and normative regulatory process of self-presentation, can be seen as "the conscious or unconscious attempt to control images that are real or imagined in social

interaction" (Schlenker, 1980, p.6). But what is at stake in this type of dramaturgical engagement in self-presentation acts? What purpose does this management of impression serve?

There are two main dimensions that we can find embedded in the impression management process: one related to an aspirational self-presentation purpose or our attempt to provide an idealized self-image in front of the others, and the other one related to a form of social conformity, that is performing your role "in order to fulfil societal expectations" (Urick, 2014, p.405). Nevertheless, impression management is not only about desirable self-image and strategic manipulation of the impression we leave upon the other, but it is also about a tacit acceptance of this self-presentation game, as "impression management not only happens, it is (also) expected to happen." (Goethals, 2008, p.4).

Nevertheless, Goffman (1959) laid stress on the strategic nature of impression management in terms of self-image gain and brought to the fore the need for expressive consistency and credibility in performing one's role. All aspects of our social performances are thus "designed to enhance the audience's sense of <realness>" (Fine & Manning, 2003, p.46) and to assure our control over the act of performance itself. Therefore, dramaturgical "*discipline*" and "*vigilance*" (Goffman, 1959), are meant to minimize the unpredictable component of social actors' performances and maintain the expressive control. Impression management is thus as much about building and projecting your desired self-image as it is about controlling it, moving the focus to the impressions you leave in your public's mind through your social performances.

The main challenges that impression management has to overcome are related to a) the performance regions (Goffman, 1959) and the vulnerability of unrevealing the backstage activity, b) the fact that role performance is highly context-dependent, and c) the "dance of identification" (Goffman, 1961, p.127) that social actors are forced to cope with, as they are subject to a "composite of multiple selves, each of which projects a set of claims" (Manning, 1991, p.77) attached to that particular role. Due to these multiple identities, which can be complementary or even competitive, the self-concept ends up acting as a "product of the scene that comes off" (Goffman, 1959, p.252), thus highly context-dependent.

If the whole process of *impression management* is rather external-oriented, focused on what and how you can leave the desired impressions on the public you perform in front of, the second approach we want to discuss is rather internal-oriented, as Giddens (1991) finds *reflexivity* to be defining for the late modern age. Self-identity becomes, thus, a reflexively organized endeavour (Giddens, 1991, p.6), which is object to constant redefinitions. We are no longer speaking about passive entities, but about a responsible engagement in building this self-identity as reflexive project of the self. On the one hand, it is thus more about self-concept and self-management than self-presentation, a process that we continuously work and reflect on. On the other hand, consistency is less about maintaining a certain impression on the others', according to the self-image you want to leave or the social expectations connected to the role you perform in a particular context, but mainly about continuity as a "product of the person's reflexive beliefs about their own biography" (Giddens 1991, p.53).

The *self-identity as a reflexive project* is a long-time process of self-actualisation and control triggered by the changes and uncertainties that define the dynamics of the late modern society. This embedded planning and investment in self as project is also an adaptive answer, individuals having no choice but to change themselves in order to adapt to changing social circumstances. In terms of self-construct, people have to cope with this never-ending process of defining and redefining themselves, accepting the fact that we are not what we are, but rather what we do with ourselves (Giddens, 1991, p.75). Moreover, if social dramaturgy was first of all about "dramaturgical loyalty" (Sharma & Grant, 2011, p.8), for Giddens the "first loyalty" of the individual becomes a loyalty to himself (being true to himself in the self-actualization process), as "the project of the self remains one of control, guided only by morality of authenticity" (Giddens, 1991, p.225).

Approaching personal branding as an output of self-marketization, both self-presentation and self-management aspects become important in understanding it as a "process of establishing a unique personal identity" (Khedher, 2014, p.33). The impression management and the self as a reflexive project

brought to the fore three common issues that are constitutive in addressing personal branding as a particular form of the self concept: control, authenticity and consistency. Moreover, all these aspects had to face significant challenges brought by the digital world, as this came along not only with new contexts and means of self-expression, but also with high vulnerability in terms of exposure and control of self-image.

The dialectical nature of personal branding in the digitized world

Personal branding has been mainly defined as "a self-centered and highly individualistic approach to self marketing" (Arruda & Dixson, 2010, p.10), a construct aimed to provide us differentiation and, moreover, to make this differentiation marketable. Similar to how the branding laws work for products, personal branding involves identifying and promoting the individual's strengths and uniqueness to a target audience (Labrecque, Markos & Milne, 2011; Schwabel 2009). However, beyond this highly-market oriented approach on the commodification of self, personal branding is also about "reputation and identity" (Barlow & Stewart, 2004, p.17), attesting to the complexity and interdisciplinary of the concept. This, in turn, makes the personal branding process very challenging, in terms of understanding the self-presentation, self-actualization and self-management aspects.

The digital world brought important changes in personal branding, especially since it became a significant part of our daily life and an important platform for self-presentation. Moreover, it works as a "platform for identity construction, where different facets of the self, or multiple selves, may be explored and expressed" (Labrecque et al., 2011, p.38), thus, imperative for today's discussion on personal branding. It is not only about the accessibility and connectivity provided by the online world, but, in terms of personal branding, it is most of all about the exposure and the dynamic process of communication and self-communication that people are caught up in, which, in turn, require an appropriate impression management (Shafie, Nayan & Osman, 2012).

We argue that, while becoming constitutive for the personal branding process, the digital landscape enhanced its dialectical nature, placing people under a high face management pressure. There are three main vulnerability dimensions that we want to lay stress on in terms of personal branding: one related to the degree of control, the second one related to the authenticity of the personal branding construct and, the last one, related to its consistency. Nevertheless, as we will show further, these dimensions are highly interconnected.

Control versus lack of control over your personal branding

The dominant approach in discussing the impact of the digital world in terms of self-presentation and personal branding is that people have been provided with both accessible means and platforms for public exposure. But becoming more and more visible is as much about the fact that visibility online creates opportunities (Schawbel, 2010), as it is about the fact that it brings greater challenges in terms of control, as "managing multiple online personas is increasingly difficult, and separating social and professional worlds appears nearly impossible without the proper mechanisms for control" (Labrecque et al., 2011, p.49).

To some extent you feel that you have control over the aspects you want to reveal and promote about yourself, over the channels and the moments you choose to do so, and, the online world seems, hence, to empower you with higher flexibility in this regard. Nevertheless, personal branding is not about a one-way process, but rather about a dynamic process of presentation, testing, validation and social negotiation of the self. It is about the way people react to the presentation and performance of self and the way you manage to integrate these reactions in the ongoing process of redefining, but, moreover, consolidating your personal brand.

The visibility and accessibility you are provided with by the digital landscape come along with a comparable level of visibility and accessibility provided to the others, whose reactions become part of

the wider co-construction logic of the personal branding as output. It is no longer only about what you say about yourself or about the significant others you chose to make heard in enhancing your personal branding, but it is also about uncontrolled input about you, which is usually made visible through the online platforms. This input acts as both a challenge and a test for the projected personal branding concept that you feel you control. It is the Achilles' heel, revealing the strength of the entire process, as nowadays "it is more important what others have to say about your brand than what you can say about it" (Manea, 2011, p.11).

When discussing strategies for successful personal branding both theoreticians and practitioners imply a rather high level of control, building on this "self as project" logic, where intentionality and planning are the main coordinates. However, all of these seem to be "aimed at developing reflexivity because they encourage actors to engage in careful and critical self-assessment about their relative strengths and weaknesses" (Wee & Brooks, 2010, p.47). In other words, there seems to be a tendency to focus on self-knowledge and control, underestimating the process of coping with the uncertainty brought by what others have to say about you, as integral part of the personal branding process. Moreover, we argue that, in terms of control, people are more interested in the projective phase (*what I want to deliver as personal brand; my personal brand concept*) than in the ongoing corrective impression management one, where you have to adapt and reconfigure your actions according to the actual evolution of the whole personal branding process.

Genuine versus plausible authenticity of your personal branding

There are at least two aspects that can be looked into in addressing the authenticity of personal branding: one related to the real person-personal branding dyad and the other one related to the offline-online personas beyond the personal branding construct. To what extent do they overlap and to what extent do they reveal the actual/ authentic "self" of a person?

The marketing logic that personal branding as concept is build within, as well as the goffmanian impression management approach of the self-presentation process are rather related to the idea of "ideal self", a self-image that you invest in for receiving a certain type of reaction from the others (i.e. admiration, acceptance, support etc.). In other words, "the self is merely the mask one chooses to wear in a given situation" (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013, p.109), while trying to maximize its gains in terms of self-image. This marketable self as principle of the personal branding process it is thus more about what we call a "plausible authenticity", that is building a personal brand that seems authentic and is accepted as so by the others. "On the one hand, you have the individual, the person, and, on the other hand the marketing, the efforts that each one of us invests in being <different>, building an image that will make us picked out over the others" (Sasu, Ioan & Luca, 2013, p.166); and all of these are about persuasive instrumentalization of authenticity, which ends up becoming a marketing construct itself.

Nevertheless, in a more prescriptive terms, there are authors who lay stress on the value of what can be called the "genuine authenticity" (del Blanco, 2010, p.10), as "personal branding must be about your authentic self" (Salpeter, 2013, p.4). Adopting such a position enhances the reflexivity component of the personal branding process, moving the focus from the aspirational self-presentation purposes (dominant for the goffmanian impression management mechanism) to a form of self-acceptance and maxi-min efficacy principle of self-presentation - that is maximizing the strengths and minimizing the weaknesses. This principle is consistent with Arruda and Dixson's (2010, p.51) idea that the aim of personal branding is "to showcase your positive brand attributes, while diminishing your negative ones", while accepting that "your personal brand is about authenticity, not about perfection" (Bogdan, 2010, p.151).

Still, we argue, that, to some extent even this process of selecting what and when to reveal about you, making some aspects more prominent and others more silent in building your personal brand, is a form of "manipulating" the so-called genuine authenticity, since "the actor is expected to present a self that is constantly working on itself, to better itself" (Wee & Brooks, 2010, p.56). Overrating the positive

aspects is more about biased authenticity than genuine one although is less misleading than other self-marketization practices.

As for the offline-online personas beyond the personal branding process, the main approach is to question the authenticity of the online self(ves) relative to the offline one(s). To what extent is the online self an extension or a distinct self-concept in relation to the offline one? Since the online provides us with an "enhanced potential for editing the self" (Bullingham & Vasconcelos, 2013, p.109), the duality of the digital landscape, as equally useful for revealing aspects about the offline person as well as providing opportunities for creating new personas, ends up challenging the authenticity of the online self-constructs.

However, despite the fact that the digital platforms, especially the social network ones, "provide ample opportunities to fashion desirable and even misleading impressions"(Hall, Pennington & Lueders, 2013, p.959), we argue that there are also embedded regulatory mechanisms in the digital world. One is related to the uncontrolled input brought by the others - especially through social media platforms, and another one to the quest for personal branding consistency, that we will address in the end of this section. Given these aspects, more genuine the authenticity of the personal branding construct, less vulnerable it is, as it requires smaller face management efforts. Thus, in a market-driven logic, it is more efficient to capitalize on your authentic self-concept than invest in a idealized personal branding that is not very well reality-anchored.

Consistency versus contextualization of your personal branding

As we have already mentioned, personal branding is a complex process that covers a wide spectrum of self-presentation and self-management practices, "a reflection of who you are and what you believe, which is visibly expressed by what you do and how you do it" (McNally & Speak, 2012, p.4). Nevertheless, the wide repertoire of social roles we play, as well as the myriad of communication situations and channels that have been significantly enriched by the digital landscape, bring into question the consistency of the personal branding construct.

On the one hand, everyone aims to provide a consistency in terms of the core-elements that speak about their personal brand, looking for "an approach to transmit a single perspective" (Labrecque et al., 2011, p.49) upon themselves. Moreover, this consistency is build around that point(s) of differentiation that work as personal branding anchors. On the other hand, when marketing is more and more about segmentation and customization in terms of brand communication, personal branding is facing this challenge of finding the perfect balance between the need for consistency and the need to adapt each component of the personal branding process to the profile of the audience and the specificities of the communication channels. Between the two extremes (that are both object to high criticism), the undifferentiated monolithic approach and the competing alternative self-concepts that are hard to gather under the same personal branding framework, we argue that personal branding is rather about a *self-network concept* performing within a multi-channel environment.

Therefore, whether we speak about online-offline, personal-professional, rational-emotional, formal-informal dualities that are enhanced in our self-concept matrix, personal branding is primarily about bridges, not boundaries, about connecting them in the most coherent manner. The digital word itself made the connectivity logic more suitable for this type of multilayered ongoing process of self-presentation and self-management. And, to lay stress on the interconnectivity between the three dialectical aspects embedded in the personal branding process, we should add that this consistency balance requires, in turn, an active engagement in controlling as much as possible when it comes to creating, managing and redefining your personal brand.

Conclusion

To understand the complexity of the personal branding concept we have argue that it should be approached as more than just a mechanic extension of the branding process from products and services to people. In line with this broader conceptual framing, we have laid stress on the insightful perspective provided by the goffmanian "impression management" concept in terms of self-presentation practices, and by the "self-identity as reflexive project" (Giddens, 1991) approach in terms of self-management. Both of them bring to the fore aspects regarding the control, authenticity and consistency of the self-concept in relation to the significant others. However, they are limited in explaining the dynamics of today's self-presentation and self-management aspects embedded in personal branding, as the first one is rather offline interaction-oriented and mainly interested in the idealized self-image, while the second one is too focused on the reflexivity of the self-concept, underestimating the strategic engagement into a market that is now build around and for the Self(ves).

Within this accelerated marketization of self, the digital world brought not only new opportunities in terms of visibility and self-presentation means, but also new challenges that laid stress on the dialectical nature of personal branding. From the vulnerability that comes along with the co-construction of online self-image, questioning the control over your personal brand, to the degree of its authenticity and consistency, the online world contributed to the overall process of multiplication and fragmentation of identities and (self)communication contexts.

Nevertheless, we argue that approaching personal branding as a monolithic concept is both a theoretical and a practical trap, as we are not looking for a stable, invariable construct, but rather for a dynamic multilayered and omni-channel self-network. This, in turn, means that the dialectical nature of personal branding is not something that needs to be overcome, but is actually constitutive for the social actor who is actively engaged in this market-driven self-presentation and self-management process. These theoretical aspects should, however, be further discussed and linked to empirical studies that might bring insightful input for an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of the personal branding process.

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EMOTIONS – DRIVERS OF ONLINE VIRALITY CONTENT CHARACTERISTICS OF VIRAL BLOG ARTICLES IN ROMANIA

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Abstract. *This paper offers insights into how online virality is shaped through emotions. It focuses on the analysis of 27 most viral blog articles published during week 23-32 of 2014, according to ZeList, an online media monitoring agency in Romania. The results showed that negative emotions are more used by content creators in driving virality which might be due to a country specific pessimism. However, the analysis revealed that it is in fact high arousal emotions which are most viral. Furthermore, interesting insights appeared with regards to the structure of emotions in a text. The content analysis of the articles revealed a certain structure in most of the viral articles: positive + negative + positive or negative + positive either at the sentence or article level.*

Keywords: *virality; emotions; blog articles; content analysis; Romania.*

Introduction

The way people consume content and the way they produced it has fundamentally changed with the arrival of the internet. Online articles thrive on the number of their readers. In the digital age, information travels extremely fast through email or social platforms. While it is widely accepted that social networks help the dissemination of information (Levin & Cross, 2004), new technologies and the internet are considered to having enhanced the role of these networks in information sharing, knowledge transfer, search, marketing and social news (Lerman & Ghosh, 2010).

Determining the level of virality of an online article before being published can therefore have implications on areas such as content marketing, advertising, public relations, exclusivities, sales, trends forecasts or management reputation (Ahmed, Spagna, Huici & Niccolini, 2013). Hence, there are three interested actors: (1) the content creators, those who could increase their number of readers, (2) the advertisers, those who could consider better monetization strategies and (3) the readers, those who could better filter the relevant content (Tatar, Antoniadis, de Amorim & Fdida, 2012).

Extensive research has already proven that word of mouth influences attitudes and decision making and therefore information diffusion has a direct impact on brand favourability and eventually sales (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). Nevertheless, few studies have focused on why content is being shared. Hence, this paper focuses solely on emotions that determine virality and the perspective of content creators because eventually, in the digital sphere everyone becomes content creator.

This paper makes several contributions by: (1) responding to the request of recent studies that highlighted the need for further research on text characteristics which drive virality, (2) it is highly important for content creators in order to design relevant campaigns; (3) it offers insights into the developing and promising online Romanian market. However, most importantly, it analyzes only the written content of the online viral articles, thus offering highly useful information for those who have a limited budget, as video or photo production is more expensive.

In order to better understand the context of this paper, namely the small but growing digital sphere in Romania, the following section will offer some background information.

Romanian online market

The Romanian online market is still developing and therefore, creating viral content is highly important for journalists, bloggers, marketers, advertisers and PR persons. The readers are highly receptive and engaged through comments, likes and shares on Facebook.

In terms of social networks, Romanians prefer using Facebook, with one third of the population having an account, and about four million being active users (Facebrands.ro, 2014). Twitter plays an important role in news dissemination around the world (Stieglitz & Dang-Xuan, 2013). However, this is not the case of Romania. Surprisingly, Twitter ranks fourth after Instagram and LinkedIn in number of active users on social networks with 71.400 accounts, out of which only 14.199 are active (Zelist, 2013).

Literature review

Previous research has already established the importance of word of mouth and chatter in driving sales (Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009). News always had an expiration date, but given the fact that nowadays news travel extremely fast, it became important not only to discover what is already viral, but to know what it is viral before being published or before being wide spread (Bandari, Asur & Huberman, 2012). One could better spread the news about a cause or a politician could make his/her perspective better known, or a brand could prevent an image crisis. Predicting article popularity before release is therefore extremely valuable to content creators, marketers and readers. This research adds to the body of literature by exploring more the relationship between content characteristics and more precisely emotions expressed in online articles and virality.

There are two main discussions when it comes to research on virality. On the one hand, there are those who have a top-down approach and consider that virality is the result of nodes or highly influential individuals (Hinz, Skiera, Barrot & Becker, 2011) and on the other hand, there are those who support bottom down approach, which state that virality relies rather in the characteristics of the message (Botha & Reyneke, 2013).

Van den Bulte and Yogesh (2007) took on Granovetter (1983) theory of social networks and identified three types of individuals when considering a strategy for virality on social networks. On the one hand, there are those who are hubs, or well connected individuals having the highest number of ties. At the other end there are those who are fringes, who have the least ties, or isolated individuals. In the middle there are the individuals named bridges who connect the hubs to the fringes.

Using this classification, Hinz et al. (2011) discussed information diffusion through social networks and identified several strategies. The first strategy was using hubs as a first stage for seeding, also called "high-degree seeding". Van den Bulte and Yogesh (2007) and Bakshy, Hofman, Mason and Watts (2012) claim that these individuals are the best ones to target as considering epidemiology spread, they are more likely to reach the highest number of nodes within the network.

Although influencers or hubs are extensively used in marketing practice, many researchers did not agree with the so called "influentials hypothesis" (Guerini, Strapparava & Özbal, 2011; Watts & Dodds, 2007). A strong argument against the hubs seeding would be the fact that the overload of messages which reach such individuals might hinder the process of virality by the simple fact that the individual would not have the time to process, filter and validate it in order to spread it further (Hinz et al., 2011). Watts and Dodds (2007) suggested that a critical mass of easily influenced individuals is more likely to lead to virality rather than well connected people. This is what Hinz et al. (2011) named "low degree seeding".

Departing from the low degree seeding strategy, Berger and Milkman (2012) proposed that the characteristics of the message might lead to virality. This is a bottom up virality perspective. However, they were not looking at all the characteristics. Their results pointed out that there is a relationship between emotions and virality. Emotional contagion via computer mediated systems was also supported by Kramer, Guillory and Hancock (2014) using the newsfeed of ($N = 689,003$) Facebook users.

Furthermore, although previous studies discussed rather content characteristics and readers perceptions of virality (Guerini et al., 2011), Google trends (2014) show that people are increasingly interested on “how to drive virality” over the last years. Figure 1 shows a growing trend on searches on Google for “viral content” between 2009 and 2014. The peeks feature articles such as “The 5 attributes of viral content” from Huffington Post. This shows that there is an interest for how to create content which is viral which could come from content creators themselves or marketers. It would be therefore highly interesting to study the perception and experience of these people regarding drivers of virality and more precisely emotions.

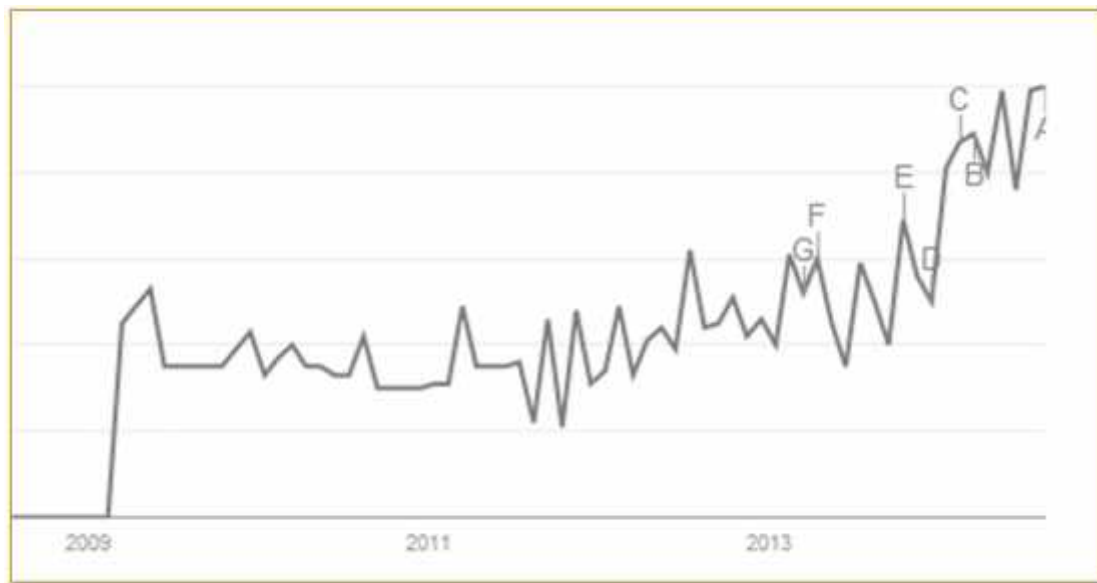


Figure 1. Google Trends (2014) “viral content” between 2009 and 2014, worldwide

- G - San Francisco Chronicle / BuzzFeed's New Self-Serve Ad Platform Gives Discounts Based On Virality
- F - San Francisco Chronicle / Unmetric Announces New Social Benchmarking Tool For Companies to Measure the Virality of Their Competitors' Video Campaigns on YouTube
- E - The Guardian/ How do you value and rank viral content
- D - San Francisco Chronicle/ Newest Digital Marketer Blog Post Examines Latest Virality Case Study
- C - Huffington Post / The 5 attributes of viral content
- B - Economic Times / How do you value and rank viral content
- A - Huffington Post /Can You Architect Virality? Absolutely. Here's How

Virality

Literature broadly defines virality as content spreading quickly from one member to the other, in a community (Guerini, Pepe & Lepri, 2012). Berger and Milkman (2012) looked at virality in terms of the number of times an article is emailed. Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) analyzed number of retweets, defining thus virality in terms of “shares” on Twitter. Given the specificity of the Romanian market, this paper defines virality in terms of the numbers of online transmissions via Facebook, during a specific time.

Emotion contagiousness

Emotion contagiousness refers to emotional diffusion from one individual to another. According to a view of Hatfield, Paige & Rapson (2011, p.26) “people seem to be capable of mimicking others' facial, vocal, and postural expressions with stunning rapidity. As a consequence, they are able to feel themselves into those other emotional lives to a surprising extent”. Forgas (2006) highlighted that emotional affects are highly persuasive and can influence behavioral responses. The experiment done by Kramer et al (2014) on Facebook newsfeeds was the most recent and the largest of its kind proving that emotions can be transmitted through computer mediated platforms.

Table 1 presents a series of emotion classifications from different authors (Cambria, Livingstone, & Hussain, 2012). This study will take into consideration Plutchik (2001)'s classification because it offers the necessary insight for the subject matter. Furthermore, Kamvar and Harris (2011) built an emotional lexicon on Plutchik's (2001) categories which as explained in the coding section helps making better sense of online published text.

Table 1. Emotion classifications (adapted from Cambria et al., 2012, p.146)

Author	Number of emotions	Basic emotions
AUTHOR	6	anger, disgust, fear, joy, sadness, surprise
EKMAN	6	anger, fear, joy, love, sadness, surprise
PARROT	6	desire, happiness, interest, surprise, wonder, sorrow
FRIJDA	8	acceptance, anger, anticipation, disgust, joy, fear, sadness, surprise
PLUTCHIK	9	desire, happiness, interest, surprise, wonder, sorrow
TOMKINS	22	joy, anticipation, anger, disgust, sadness, surprise, fear, acceptance, shy, pride, appreciate, calmness, admire, contempt, love, happiness, exciting, regret, ease, discomfort, respect, like

Content characteristics

Early studies on online virality focused in fact on the first measurements of user activity, trying to predict long term virality (Szabo & Huberman, 2008; Lerman & Ghosh, 2010), for instance by looking at how many users accessed and ranked the article in the first minutes before being published.

The technical oriented researchers looked for url-s, keywords, hashtags and meta data which could enhance the visibility of online content both in social networks and in search (SEO). Nevertheless, this approach could at most convince other users to find and read the article, not to share it. Therefore, it should be the content which should determine the user to share it. In this sense, literature provides few examples as the field is still under researched.

A. Emotional Valence

Research revealed that emotional contagiousness makes people to discuss more about things (Forgas, 2006), thus, emotional content may have an influence on what is being shared. It is a layman belief that negative content spreads faster than positive content. Baumeister, Bratslavsky, Finkenauer, and Vohs (2001) stated that a general principle in psychology is that bad things have more influence than good things, in a vast range of situations, hence the expression “if it bleeds, it leads”. Nevertheless, researchers called for further investigation of the matter (Godes & Mayzlin, 2009). And in fact, Berger and Milkman (2012) tested this theory and revealed that generally speaking positive content is more viral. But they defined virality in terms of articles shared privately to a friend in an individualistic society. It would be interesting to explore this also for articles shared on Facebook. Hence, the first research question: RQ1. Is positive online content used more often than negative online content in viral articles?

Furthermore, Hofstede (2001) argued that when it comes to Europe, there are a range of different cultures, each with its own specificities which should be taken into account. Thus it would be interesting to see the perspective of Romanian content creators.

B. Emotional Arousal

Both Botha and Reyneke (2013) and Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) claim that there might also be something more than valence alone and suggest that research should be done also on level of emotion arousal or activation. Activation is known to trigger action. Therefore, more active emotions might lead to higher number of shares. But this also means that both negative and positive emotions can lead to virality as long as they are high arousal.

RQ2. Is high arousal online content used more often than low arousal online content in viral articles?

Methodology

This paper looks at text characteristics in order to determine what type of content can lead to viral articles hence providing useful information for bloggers who just started and would want to be noticed. This kind of information would also be useful for marketers who would want to get their message spread fast in online, or for other shareholders as mentioned above. Hence, this paper will do secondary data research on online viral blog articles in Romania.

Sampling

This paper will address viral blog articles in Romania. A study published in august 2014 regarding the blogosphere in Romania showed 39% of bloggers report having fewer than 1000 unique visitors per month (Cocioaba & Negrea, 2014). This was the largest group which self-reported their unique visitors from a study which surveyed 578 Romanian bloggers. 1000 shares means that at least 1000 unique viewers read the blog and also shared them to their Facebook network. Therefore, it would make sense to assume that those articles who entered top 10 weekly most viral articles published on refresh.ro during the summer months and have over 1000 shares, thus also over 1000 unique viewers represent a homogenous sample which can be considered viral.

Departing from the criteria presented in Table 2, namely articles with over 1000 Facebook shares identified in top 10 most viral blogs for each given week by ZeList and published on refresh.ro, 27 articles were found during the weeks 23- 32 of 2014, basically covering the month of June, July and the first week from the beginning of August. They were written by 17 different authors. The language used by all of them was Romanian. The articles had various lengths and discussed different topics, from parenting, healthcare, life, etc.

Table 2. Criteria for article selection

Criteria
Article in Top 10 ZeList published on Refresh.ro
Published during summer weeks
Number of Facebook shares > 1000

In order to achieve data triangulation, the number of Facebook shares was also calculated with a online free solution entitled advertica. Advertica (2014) offers differentiated results as presented in Figure 2.

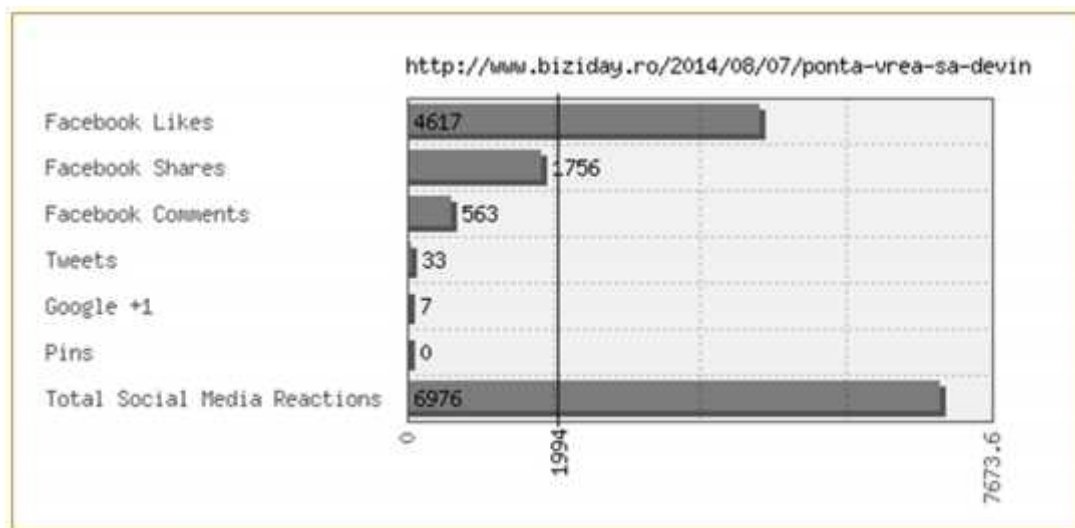


Figure 2. Advertica table showing the results of the number of shares of an article from the top 10 ZeList published on refresh.ro

The articles were distributed as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Distribution of viral articles for the weeks 23- 32 2014 in Romania

Week	Number of articles
Week 23	4
Week 24	4
Week 25	0
Week 26	7
Week 27	1
Week 28	1
Week 29	4
Week 30	0
Week 31	2
Week 32	4
Total	27 articles

Data collection

For the secondary data analysis, the data was already available and it was retrieved as presented in the sampling section. The analysis was conducted on the original text in order to ensure that very little insight is lost. Only the results were reported in English.

Methods of content analysis

For the analysis of the online articles previous literature was found and codes could be extracted easily from the theory of emotions.

Coding scheme

The research questions of this paper inquire on the role of emotions in driving virality by looking at the valence of emotions and their intensity or arousal.

Departing from Plutchick (2001)'s emotion wheel, Raouzaïou, Karpouzis and Kollias (2003) separated emotions in positive and negative but also in very active and very passive emotions. Hence, this paper used as codes the eight emotions identified by Plutchick (2001): anticipation, joy, acceptance, surprise (both in a negative and positive context), fear, sadness, disgust and anger. These were separated in positive and negative emotions as in Figure 6. Furthermore, they were separated according to Raouzaïou

et al. (2003) in high arousal emotions: anger, joy, surprise, fear, disgust and anticipation and low arousal emotions: sadness and acceptance. Table 4 shows the key codes.

Table 4. Table of codes for valence

Code	Code Level 1	Code Level 2
VALENCE (VA)	POSITIVE EMOTIONS (VA-POZ)	Anticipation (VA-POZ-AN)
		Joy (VA –POZ–JO)
		Acceptance (VA – POZ – ACC)
		Surprise (when a positive context) (VA-POZ-SU)
	NEGATIVE EMOTIONS (VA-NEG)	Fear (VA-NEG –FE)
		Sadness (VA –NEG –SA)
		Disgust (VA-NEG-DI)
		Anger (VA-NEG-ANG)
		Surprise (when a negative context) (VA-NEG-SU)

Emotional Lexicons

For the eight basic emotions identified by Plutchik (2001), indicators for sentiment analysis were needed. Kamvar and Harris (2011) built an emotional search engine in order to collect and identify the world's emotions as expressed online, Table 5. Their research led to a list of high frequency seed words for Plutchik's (2001) categories. They will aid making better sense of the content.

Table 5. Key Words, as identified by Kamvar and Harris (2011)

Emotions	Key Words, as identified by Kamvar and Harris (2011)
ANTICIPATION	Bored, nervous, sure, worried, excited, certain, calm, anxious, ready, inspired, hopeful, motivated, optimistic, prepared.
JOY	Better, good, happy, well, special, loved, great, safe, proud, nice, fine, best, wanted, complete, warm, super, alive, high, confident, happier, perfect, excited, relieved, content, beautiful, secure, lucky, blessed, awesome, wonderful, relaxed, liked, inspired, energetic, amazing, loving, glad, giddy, hopeful, accepted, satisfied, refreshed, honored, fortunate, fantastic, optimistic, grateful, fulfilled, incredible, peaceful.
FEAR	Guilty, nervous, helpless, scared, behind, worried, stressed, anxious, afraid, trapped, overwhelmed, tense, desperate, unprepared, queasy, uneasy, threatened, unsure.
SADNESS	Bad, guilty, sorry, sad, horrible, alone, lonely, depressed, terrible, lost, worse, wrong, empty, awful, hurt, dead, crappy, used, uncomfortable, useless, miserable, helpless, broken, shitty, jealous, confused, ashamed, weak, unloved, numb, ignored, drained, worst, hopeless, worthless, stuck, low, disappointed, violated, rejected, crushed, melancholy, incomplete, frustrated, unhappy, lousy, homesick, embarrassed, deprived, blue, hallow, abandoned, lacking, isolated, inadequate, defeated.
ANGER	Mean, used, uncomfortable, mad, upset, angry, jealous, fucked, pissed, annoyed, stuck, frustrated, screwed, bitter.
SURPRISE	Weird, hurt, different, awkward, strange, fucked, confused, odd, lucky, disappointed, overwhelmed, screwed, embarrassed.
DISGUST	Sick, horrible, terrible, wrong, bored, awful, fat, miserable, selfish, ugly, ashamed, pathetic, icky, worthless, gross, evil, disgusting, nauseous, yucky, nauseated, disgusted
ACCEPTANCE	The same, loved, safe, comfortable, dead, okay, lazy, complete, ok, relieved, numb, drained, hopeless, alright, content, secure, normal, beat, relaxed, loving, satisfied, fulfilled, peaceful, defeated.

Content analysis and findings

Content analysis

A problem occurred after applying the codes. Texts had various lengths. Therefore, comparing negative and positive codes in order to determine whether positive online content is used more often than negative online content in viral articles would not give an accurate picture. Longer text would have dictated the results of the study. A similar problem was encountered by Berger and Milkman (2012). However, given the larger sample, they could control for the length of the articles.

Hence, different possibilities were taken into considerations. Attributing the most prominent code to every text would reduce too much the information. At this point, as previous literature was not offering relevant advice, we reached out to the content creators. When discussing with them about the emotions in their most viral articles, they nominated a mix of emotions, both positive and negative.

Hence, two codes per article would still not offer the clear picture, because it would not say which one was used more often, they would cancel themselves out. Therefore, the compromise was to use the three most prominent codes per article, as in the shortest article only three emotions were identified.

The researcher was aware of the fact that this will reduce the material and some important aspects will be lost but this was the best solution in order to be able to respond properly to the research question.

Summary of findings

Finding 1: Negative content is used more often than positive content in viral articles in Romania

The content analysis showed that negative content is used more often than positive content in Romania (Figure 3) which answers RQ1. This is not in line with more recent research which says that positive content is more viral (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Libert & Tynski, 2013). However, these results might be due to a country specific cultural trait. The content creators stressed the negativity of the Romanians which is supported by previous research (Bibu & Brancu, 2008). Therefore, it might just be the case that in Romania, negative content is used more often in viral articles than positive content. Figure 4 shows the most used type of emotions in viral articles.

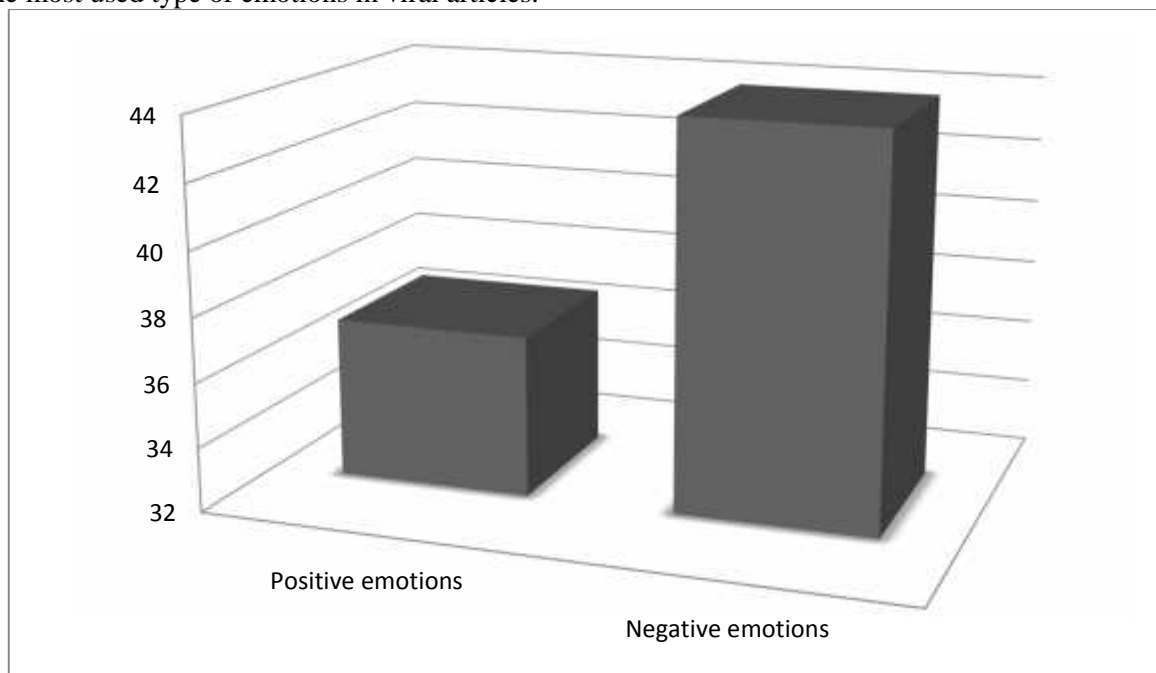


Figure 3. Most used type of emotions according to valence

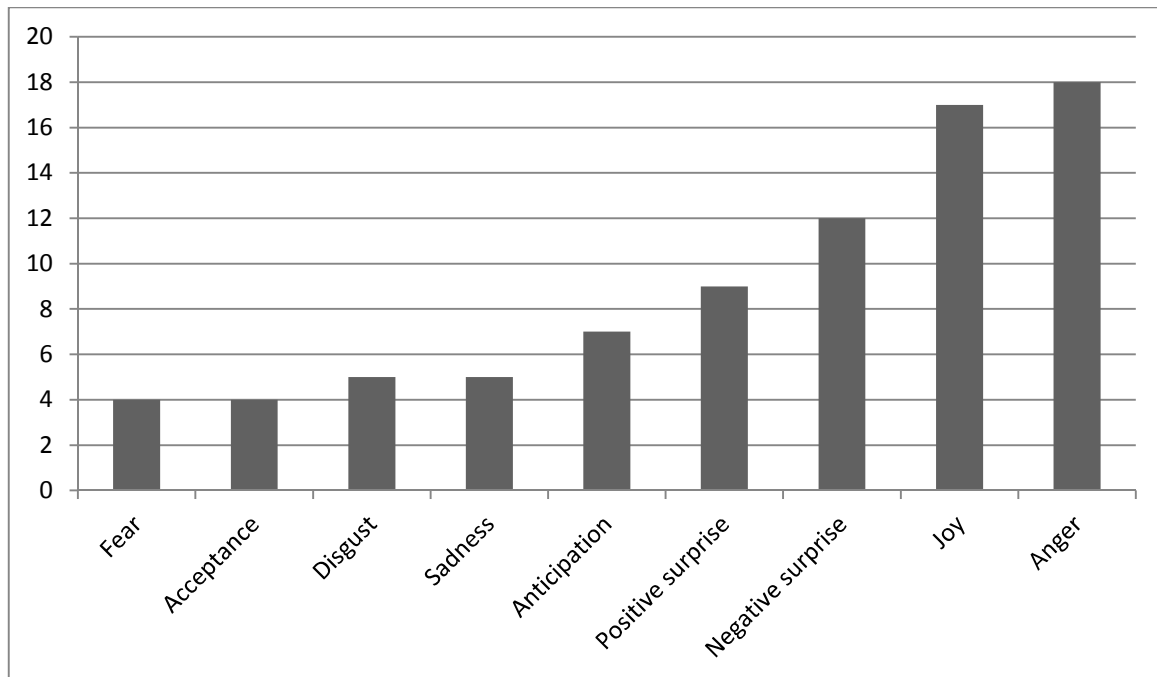


Figure 4. Emotions classified according to their appearance in viral articles

Finding 2: High arousal content used more often than low arousal content in Romania

However, as also previous literature found (Berger & Milkman, 2012; Henz, 2013), the content analysis pointed out that it is not valence alone that influences virality. The content analysis revealed that high arousal content is used more often than low arousal content in viral articles in Romania (Figure 5), which answers RQ2. Anger and joy were previously identified as high arousal emotions which trigger virality by Berger and Milkman (2012) and Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013). Hence, the intensity of emotions influences the virality of articles. Nevertheless, negative emotions continue to be the most viral in Romania, but with an accent on high arousal negative emotions.

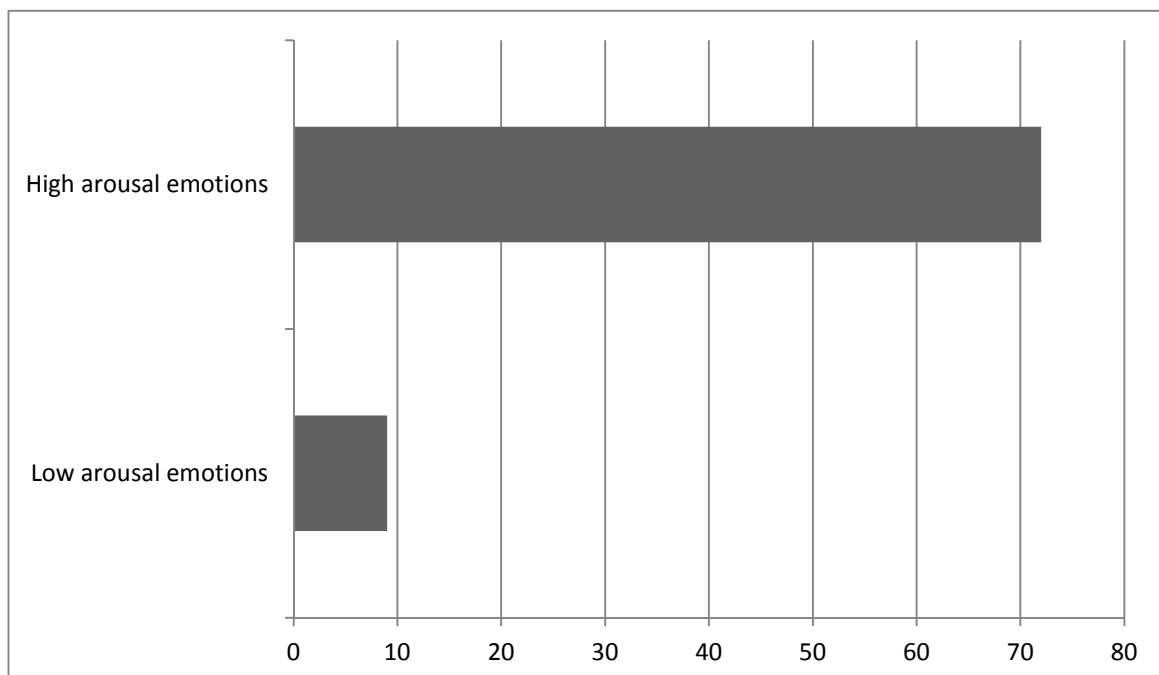


Figure 5. Most used type of emotions according to arousal

Finding 3: The structure of viral articles in Romania

Previous research focused on finding the emotion which triggers virality. "Emotions play a role in whether or not a message will go viral, but there are inconsistent findings regarding which emotions will

result in greater pass-along” Henke (2013, p.113). The originality of this paper resides in the fact that it didn’t look only for one emotion. An interesting aspect which came up as a result of text analysis is that virality does not rely on positive or negative content alone, but rather on a mixture of the two. Furthermore, it is also interesting that the structure consists of high arousal emotions, not of low arousal emotions. This was supported by the text analysis which found this structure: positive + negative + positive or a simplified version negative + positive at the level of the sentence or at the level of the entire articles. Figure 6 explains how most articles contained clusters of positive + negative emotions rather than negative emotion alone.

Related to structure, Libert and Tynski (2013) mention that an emotional roller coaster would trigger virality for video materials. By emotional roller coaster, the researchers mean that the video content should consist of high emotional parts and low emotional parts in order to keep the viewer alert. Teixeira (2012) states that according to the human psychology, we are likely to get bored after a while of experiencing a new feeling. But the researchers are referring to video content alone and it does not apply in the case of this paper. Nevertheless, it does imply that the solution for virality might consist of a mix of emotions and in this case of high arousal emotions.

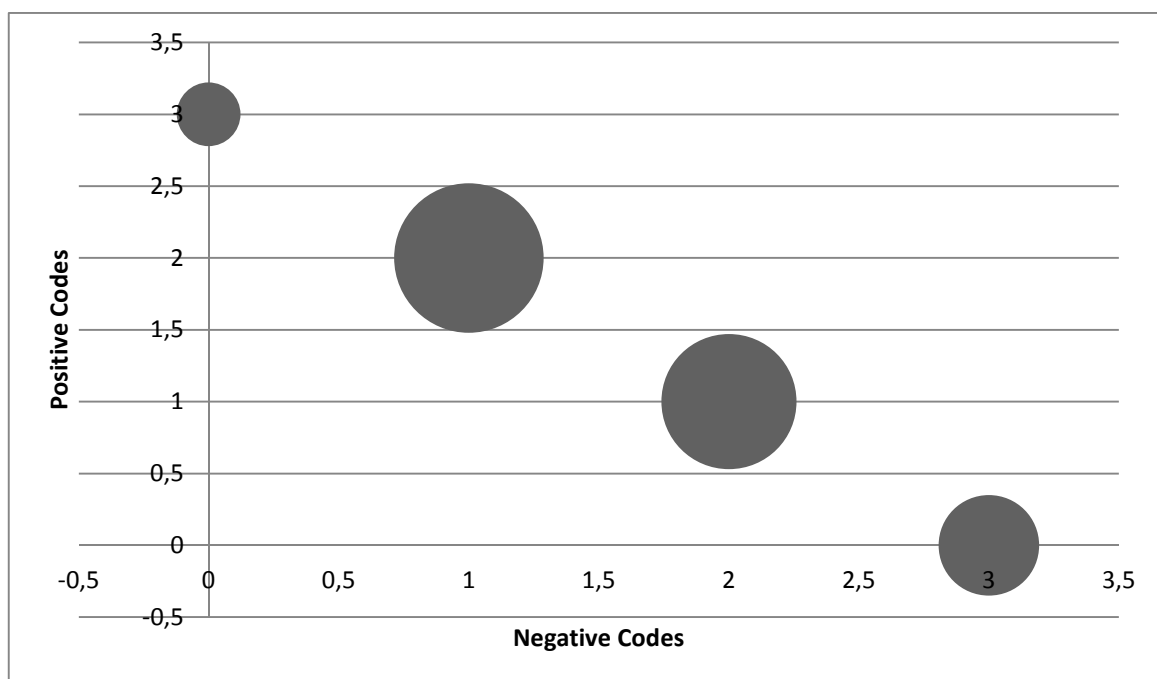


Figure 6. Clusters of articles

Conclusion & implications

This paper aimed to explore whether emotions are drivers of online virality in Romania. In order to do so, it looked at the content characteristics of the most viral blog articles within a given period of time. All the research questions have been answered.

This paper is highly important on the one hand for the literature as the field is underdeveloped. Previous literature has focused on online articles of mainstream media, videos or social networks, the originality of this research resides in the fact that it looks at articles on blogs. Secondly, virality is a subject highly important for marketers because it can help them to spread their message at a lower cost. Thirdly, the results of this paper are relevant for the bloggers themselves because, as it was pointed out in the beginning, Romania is a small, yet growing online market and now it is the perfect time for a blogger to establish himself/ herself as a viral outlet. The findings suggest that content creators should focus on emotions as a main factor of virality.

This paper puts a spotlight on the online Romanian market and shows that valence is important for viral bloggers. Moreover, in creating their viral articles, they use negative emotions, given the country pessimistic profile. Furthermore, the content creators also use high arousal emotions which have a stronger effect in driving virality compared to low arousal emotions. This was the insight of the analysis of their articles.

Thus content creators might be more interested in discussing negative subjects as they are considered as having a higher level of virality in Romania. This is an important implication for marketers who should know that Romanian bloggers might be keener to cover a subject from a negative perspective. Furthermore, the articles that will go viral will contain high arousal emotions. Negative, high arousal emotions associated with a brand can have disastrous results for marketers.

Nevertheless, when analyzing the structure of the emotions within an article, it was observed that most viral articles consist of a mix of emotions. The pattern found at sentence level or text level was positive + negative + positive or negative + positive. Hence, content creators who want to craft viral articles should not focus on a single emotion. This is also relevant for marketers who are interested to pitch stories to bloggers.

Further research & Limitations

Given the limited resources the analysis was conducted only by one coder. More coders could have brought more value. However, further research could be done by using automated emotional analysis, which could increase reliability (Young & Soroka, 2012), at least in the case of valence.

Moreover, emotional valence in relationship to virality should be studied in several contexts because the country specificity might play an important role (Hofstede, 2001). When it comes to intensity of arousal, this paper showed similar results with previous literature (Berger & Milkman, 2012). Furthermore, more research should be done on content creators' perspective regarding virality and on the strategies they use and hence being able to triangulate the data.

Lastly, with the current findings a viral model could be developed and tested quantitatively. Previous literature is limited when it comes to the emotional structure of viral online text content, discussing rather viral video ads Teixeira (2012). This paper opens thus new fields for further research when it comes to online text virality and emotions.

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BES 6001 CERTIFICATION AND GREEN MARKETING IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY: THE ROMANIAN AND UK CASES

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Abstract. *In the quest to develop sustainable buildings, construction material producers have to innovate and to implement strict standards in order to support real estate investors in receiving extra points in the green building schemes. This paper investigates how a technical standard for responsible sourcing of products, such as BES 6001, can be applied in order to improve the green marketing activities of a building material producer. Although responsible sourcing is frequently researched and there are many examples in the literature, the analysis of responsible sourcing in connection to green marketing has not been subject to rigorous analysis. Although the BES 6001 can be obtained by companies from different countries, at the time of this research, the certification was available in only two countries, United Kingdom and in Romania. This study was done through multimethod qualitative research, in order to deeply analyze the implications of this certification in green marketing. The research was prepared through cross case study analysis through in depth interviews with the marketing and sustainable development managers from both Holcim Romania and Aggregate Industries (UK) and through content analysis of the promotional materials and marketing plans related to BES 6001 certification. To date green marketing has not been linked in the academic literature with the certification for responsible sourcing of products. This research revealed that BES 6001 can be utilized as a green marketing tool, even if the context of the construction market is different from one country to another. Responsible sourcing of products has become a norm in United Kingdom, while by comparison, green buildings are the exception on the Romanian market. The paper demonstrates that responsible sourcing of products can be used as a green marketing tool, even if the context of the construction market is different from one country to another. Responsible sourcing of products has become a norm in United Kingdom, because of the increasing numbers of companies from the construction sector that obtained the BES 6001 certification. By comparison, green buildings are the exception on the Romanian market and companies such as Holcim Romania find it difficult to target the decision makers through green marketing.*

Keywords: *green marketing; sustainability; responsible sourcing; construction; BES 6001 certification.*

Introduction

One of the major challenges of the construction industry is to reduce its impact on the environment, taking in consideration that the building sector contributes up to 40% of the greenhouse gas emissions around the globe, mostly from energy used during the lifetime of buildings (United Nations Environment Program, 2007). In this context, a large number of initiatives was taken towards improving the energy efficiency of buildings, such as the green building schemes (BREEAM, LEED, CASBEE, Effinergie, Minergie and PassivHaus) introduced initially in the most developed economies and afterwards extended all around the globe (World Green Building Council, 2009).

In their goal to be a part of developing sustainable buildings, construction material producers have to support the contractors in fulfilling their goals of obtaining better scores in green building schemes (Reed, Bilos, Wilkinson & Schulte, 2013). The green buildings standards have extended also to countries from Eastern Europe, such as Romania, where the interest of the visionary companies in

developing capabilities to excel in the construction and related industries and generate sustained profits is increasing (Romanian Green Building Council, 2014).

Taking in consideration the development of the green buildings in Romania, the need of introducing responsible sourcing certifications, such as BES 6001 is becoming more important. In June 2014, Holcim Romania, the local subsidiary of the Swiss cement producer Holcim, received the first BES 6001 certification for responsible sourcing off all its products: cement, concrete and aggregates. According to Holcim Romania (2014a), through the BES 6001 certification, obtained at “Very Good” level, their customers can be awarded with 2 points in both BREEAM 2011 and LEED 2013 for the responsible sourcing of materials criteria, offering them a better position and advantage in the market by optimizing their scores in respect of Green Buildings Certification Schemes. Holcim Romania was the first company outside United Kingdom to have this external recognition. In this way, the company joined the group of 222 British companies that have received this certification, according to Green Book Live (2014).

This study analyses how did Holcim Romania implement this certification and how is going to deploy this certification in order to make green marketing for its products and services. Until now, research related to green marketing has focused mainly on the developed markets, such as USA, Great Britain, Germany, or on the major emerging economies such as India or China. This research contributes to knowledge because the BES 6001 certification was not a subject of research in connection with green marketing initiatives. Researches on this topic, such as the ones made by Glass, Achour, Parry and Nicholson (2012), were mainly related to responsible sourcing, without targeting the green marketing approach. Still, the research on BES 6001 revealed the fact that this certification is increasing the reputation of a company (Glass, 2011; Glass et al., 2012).

Green marketing has been mainly researched in contexts such as opportunities and challenges (Mishra & Sharma, 2012), impact on stakeholders (Cronin, Smith, Gleim, Ramirez, & Hutchins, 2012), best practices (Bedek, 2011), market segmentation (Choi & Ng, 2011) and less on the connection between responsible sourcing and how this can be used in order to support green marketing. Moreover, as described in the literature review, the construction industry has only recently started to embrace the green strategies and innovation, although is one of the industries with the highest impact on the environment.

Thus, this research contributes to knowledge, as it analysed how responsible sourcing improves the green marketing strategy of two building material producers from two different regions that have contrasting developments of sustainable constructions: Romania and United Kingdom. The British construction industry is one of the most advanced in terms of responsible sourcing of building materials (Glass, 2011; Glass et al., 2012), while Romanian construction companies have just started to develop green innovations, green products and responsible sourcing (Langa & Zegreanu, 2011; Paraschiv, Lang & Olaru, 2011).

Therefore, the final aim of this study is *to investigate to what extent the BES 6001 certification can be used for implementing green marketing in the construction industry.*

BES 6001 certification can become a valuable tool that can be used for making green marketing for sustainable products. That is why, starting from the above mentioned research and continuing with the other studies described in the literature review, four research questions were defined for the purpose of this study:

R1: Which were the main drivers of the companies to pursue such a certification?

R2: How is the BES 6001 certification implemented in Romania and in UK and to what extent can it be used to promote green marketing in the construction industry?

R3: How do marketing managers identify and target the decision makers that are interested in developing green buildings?

R4: How can marketing managers improve the results of green marketing initiatives using BES 6001 certification?

Literature review

According to Pane Haden, Oyler and Humphreys (2009), from the decade of '90, companies have started to be more interested in solving the environmental issues and the vision of sustainable approach in business has changed in the past 20-30 years the progress of humanity. Garbowsky and Rahman (2013) states that especially in the European countries environmental sustainability represents nowadays front page news, as a response to the global warming process. Starting from organic food, continuing with travelling in an environmental-friendly way or reducing the consumption of non-renewable products, people have become aware of the need to live in a better environment. In addition, Edeholt (2012) believes that all stakeholders should start to make a difference in their activities, because the impact of climate change has increased significantly and there are many pessimistic scenarios that might be overcome with a more positive contribution to sustainable development.

One of the most condensed definitions of green marketing was published by Bhalerao (2014), who stated that: "Green marketing is the marketing of products that are presumed to be environmentally safe". This definition is supported by Rex and Baumann (2007) who believes that the aim of green marketing is to include environmental issues in the marketing efforts, with the scope of providing consumers information about the green properties of the products and their advantages.

Polonsky (2001) considered that responsible green marketing has transformed into a complex, integrated, strategic and tactical process from its initial conception in 1970s, having developed a wide set of strategic activities and tactics (Figure 1).

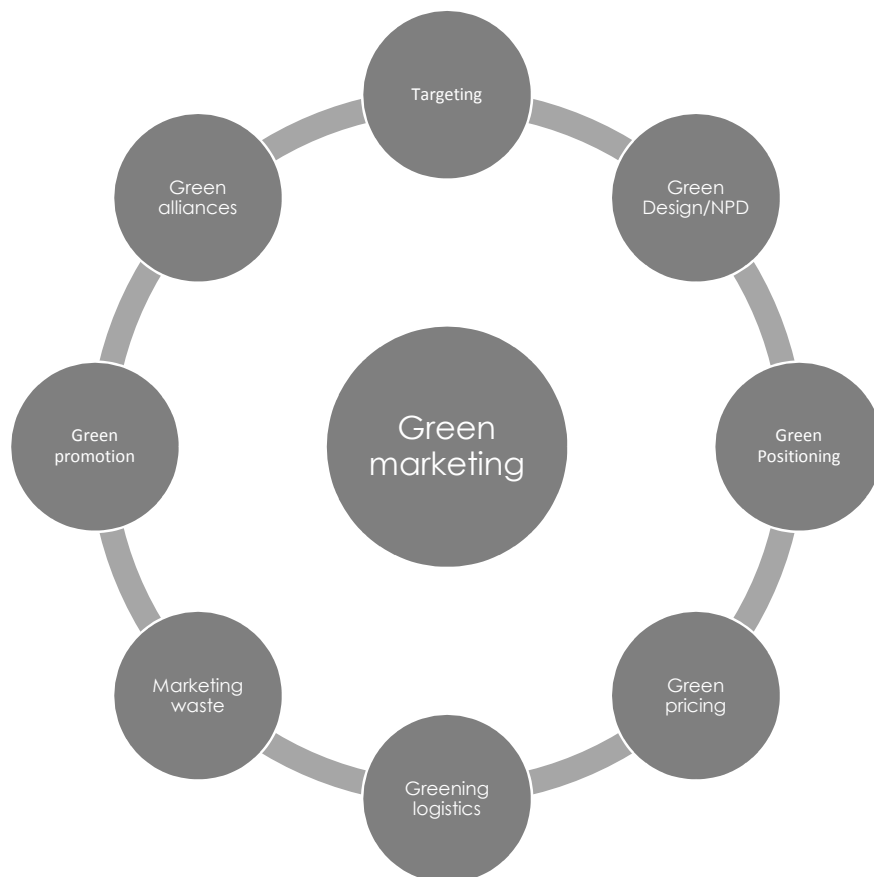


Figure 2. Strategic activities and tactics of green marketing

In order to reach the holistic development and approach mentioned by Polonsky (2001), it was a difficult path. Ken and Andrew (2005) made a research into the history of green marketing and revealed the fact that progress was difficult in this field, because of the tendency of companies to focus mainly on product, communication, selling and costs, while ignoring the customer needs and expectations.

Banyte, Brazioniene and Gadeikiene (2010) supports the idea of creating priorities for green marketing, by searching the needs of green consumers, offering high-value products and services, in order to increase the trust in eco-friendly products. On the contrary, Rettie, Burchell and Riley (2012) believes that green marketing has not proved its efficiency and the fact that companies are developing new products and services that are green is not enough. Companies have to come with effective solutions that satisfy the needs of customers.

Unruh and Ettenson (2010) mention that companies have to ask themselves if their green strategies are credible or vulnerable, because green activists will not hesitate to attack a company if they sense that a company is using green washing.

Green marketing in construction industry

The construction sector has one of the highest impacts on the environment and every little improvement can make a big impact if it is scaled up and multiplied. Over its lifetime, buildings consume enormous amounts of raw material and energy and leave a heavy footprint in the environment. According to the World Green Building Council (2013), buildings are accountable for having a high ecological footprint, over their lifecycle they consume 17% of the fresh water, 30-40% of energy, 40-50% of raw materials, they are responsible for 25% of the wood harvesting and they produce 33% of the CO₂ emissions. That is why starting the 1990s, governments and corporations have started to promote new regulations, certifications and rules for the construction industry. As to Macomber (2013), many areas of the world are already overcrowded and it is expected that by 2050 the urban population to nearly double in size, reaching six Billion.

A research made by Reed et al. (2013) revealed the fact that there are 18 sustainable rating tools for buildings in the world, most of them being in the United Kingdom and Europe. The first Green Buildings Certification Schemes was the one named Building Research Establishment Environmental Assessment Method (BREEAM), was created in 1990 in the United Kingdom (Akadiri, 2013). Since then many different tools have been launched around the world that helped the construction industry to become more environmentally friendly.

In the literature review, the only definition used for describing the responsible sourcing of products is the one of BRE (2009), which states that: "Responsible sourcing is a holistic approach to managing a product from the point at which a material is mined or harvested in its raw state through manufacture and processing, through use, re-use and recycling, until its final disposal as waste with no further value."

Using BES 6001 certification for implementing green marketing

In order to receive the above mentioned green building certifications, developers and construction companies have to receive a certain score, which is obtained by proving that they build a sustainable building that offers them a better position in the market. Developers receive points also for the type of building materials that they used during the construction works and for the responsible sourcing of the products.

Under the BES 6001 Framework Standard, products are assessed by looking at existing quality, environmental, health and safety management systems together with other important criteria including:

- Greenhouse gas emissions;
- Resource use;
- Waste, water and life cycle assessment;
- Local communities;
- Employment and skills.

Although there are research studies made towards responsible sourcing in construction industry, there is a lack of research related to what extent a standard such as BES 6001 can be used in order to improve the green marketing initiatives of a company related to promoting green products and services and supporting sustainable constructions. In addition, the situation is more difficult in Romania, where there are only a few green buildings certified with BREEAM or LEED green standards. This paper aims to tackle this gap and the research objectives of this paper are also related to the status of green buildings development in Romania.

In Romania, there is a positive perception related to green marketing, especially towards cause related marketing made through corporate and social responsibility actions, according to a study prepared by Stancu, Grigore and Rosca (2011).

The initiatives towards sustainable construction started timidly in Romania in 2008, when the Romanian Green Building Council was founded, being the first independent entity that supports and promotes green constructions. Afterwards, other important associations were created, such as the Association of Energy Auditors for Buildings, and the Romanian Facility Management Association (ROFMA).

Methodology and research

This main objective of this research, “*to investigate to what extent the BES 6001 certification can be used for implementing green marketing in the construction industry*”, is a topic that has never been analysed, being a niche topic in the vast discussions related to sustainable development. Taking in consideration that the BES 6001 was obtained only by companies from two countries, UK and in Romania, this study was done through qualitative research, in order to deeply analyse the implications of this certification in green marketing.

This study was made using the multimethod qualitative research through in depth interviews with marketing and sustainable development managers from both Holcim Romania and Aggregate Industries from United Kingdom and through analysing the promotional materials and marketing plans related to BES 6001 certification.

For qualitative research there are two main research methods defined in the literature review, in depth interviews and focus groups. Taking in consideration the context of the research, having analysed two companies from different countries, the in depth interview was the chosen solution. In addition, this research was done through using cross-case synthesis, as Holcim Romania was compared to Aggregate Industries, the local subsidiary of Holcim Group from United Kingdom. The latter has received the BES 6001 certification in 2009 and already has an extended experience in green marketing of sustainable products.

Although responsible sourcing is frequently researched and there are many examples in the literature review, the analysis of responsible sourcing in connection to green marketing has not been subject to rigorous analysis.

In this paper, the research was made through triangulation, by collecting primary data from public information about the companies from Green Book Live, the unique reference source and online listing of environmental products and services, and by analysing secondary data through interviews that aim to answer the four research questions mentioned above.

The qualitative approach was chosen, because most of the research that addressed the issues of BES 6001 and also the ones related to green marketing were making quantitative research, mainly using surveys. The interviews were made with managers from the marketing and sustainable development departments from both Holcim Romania and Aggregate Industries from United Kingdom. In total, there are four interviews analysed in detail.

The companies from this study were chosen through purposive sampling, using the Green Book Live website that comprises all the relevant data and documents referring to BREEAM green building scheme and to BES 6001 responsible sourcing certification. According to Kairuz, Crump and O'Brien (2007), the participants involved in the qualitative research have to be relevant to the objectives of the study and to contribute significantly to the research.

Both companies have many similarities and strategies in common – both of them were the first from their countries to receive the BES 6001 certification, both of them are part of the Holcim Group (Table 1), the biggest producer of cement in the world, and both of them have sustainability at the core of their business.

Table 1. Key information about Aggregate Industries and Holcim Romania (Holcim Group, 2014a; Ministry of Public Finance, 2013)

Information	Aggregate Industries	Holcim Romania
Turnover 2013 (mil. EUR)	N/A	202*
Number of employees 2013	3.956	798
Production units	350	23
Type of operations/products	Aggregates, Asphalt, Concrete, Cement, Precast Concrete Products	Cement, Aggregates and Ready-Mix Concrete

The chosen interviews were selected based on their expertise and knowledge related to the topic, being part of the senior management of their companies or having key positions. The interviews were made with:

- Sustainable Products Manager, Aggregate Industries;
- Marketing Manager Concrete Products, Aggregate Industries;
- Integrated Management System Coordinator, Holcim Romania;
- Marketing Manager, Holcim Romania.

Interview guides and data analysis

In order to make a cross-case and cross-nation analysis two interview guides with 12 questions, closely related to the research objectives, were prepared for the companies that are being analysed by this study, Holcim Romania and Aggregate Industries.

The empirical findings gathered through the interviews with the managers from Aggregate Industries and Holcim Romania were analysed in comparison with the information collected from public information about the companies and their activities related to green marketing and BES 6001 certification.

In order to analyse the content of the interviews with the managers of both companies, the interviews were transcribed and coded in order to make cross comparison between the information. According to Saldana (2013), a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data. The codes were numbered in the order of relevance to the research questions, resulting 12 codes (Table 2).

For the coding, a quantitative analysis of the interview was conducted using the Atlas.ti, a Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS). According to Saldana (2008), the CAQDAS software efficiently stores, organizes, manages, and reconfigures the data coded by the researcher in order to enable human analytic reflection.

Table 2. Defining the codes

Code	Definition	Interview question
Drivers	The main factors that influenced the decision of obtaining the BES 6001 certification	Which were the main drivers in taking the decision of obtaining the BES 6001 certification?
Implementation	Process of implementation	How is the responsible sourcing of products currently implemented by the company?
Management support	Implication and support of the management	To what extent does the management of construction materials producers need the BES 6001 certification?
Green buildings	Status of sustainable building	Which are the barriers/challenges for marketing managers in order to target the decision makers that are interested in developing green buildings?
Pioneer	Why being the first is important	Which were the strategies for implementing the BES 6001 certification in green marketing initiatives from 2011 until now?
Transparency	Public availability of the performance indicators	How does the company communicate sustainability towards its customers?
Barriers	Difficulties in promoting BES 6001 certification	Which are the barriers of making best practices in green marketing in the construction industry?
Green Marketing	Connection between BES 6001 and green marketing	To what extent is green marketing applied in the United Kingdom/Romanian construction industry?
Competitive advantage	The advantage provided by the BES 6001 certification	What makes you think that the BES 6001 certification improved the green marketing strategy of Aggregate Industries/Holcim Romania?
Promotion	Targeting decision makers	Which were the strategies for implementing the BES 6001 certification in green marketing initiatives from 2011 until now?
Consequence	Using BES 6001 in the construction market actual context	Are the companies from the United Kingdom/Romanian construction sector aware of the potential benefits of environmentally responsible innovation?
Innovation	The main eco-innovations of the company	Which are the main eco-innovations of the company and what were their impact on the green marketing initiatives of the company?

After coding the interviews, the three most used codes were “promotion”, “pioneer” and “implementation” (Figure 2). These top 3 codes reveal the fact that BES 6001 certification represents an opportunity for promoting the sustainable approach of the companies, while being the first to obtain it offers an advantage in front of the competition. The second most discovered code, the “implementation”, presents how difficult and resource consuming was to obtain and implement the certification.

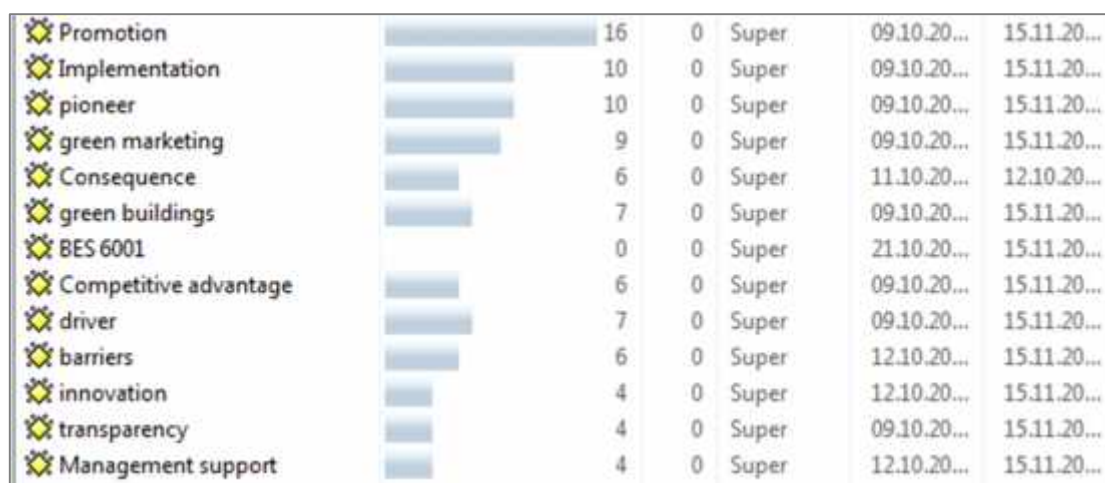


Figure 2. Coding the interviews

Findings

Taking in consideration the qualitative analysis made, the strategies of Holcim Romania and Aggregate Industries can be compared in order to find the similarities and the differences between their approach towards BES 6001 certification and green marketing.

Through the analysis of interviews resulted that the approach in obtaining and implementing the BES 6001 certification was similar for both companies, while the context of the market was totally different. Holcim Romania and Aggregate Industries decided to obtain the responsible sourcing standard in order to gain a competitive advantage by being the first to have a high level certification, useful for developing green buildings. In addition, both companies had the support of their management and had dedicated teams for making the research and preparing the necessary procedures and documentation (Table 3).

Table 3. Comparison between the strategies of Holcim Romania and Aggregate Industries towards BES 6001 certification

Research questions	Similarities	Differences
Which were the main drivers of the companies to pursue such a certification?	Both companies were the first to achieve the BES 6001 certification in their countries.	In United Kingdom one of the main drivers for obtaining the BES certification were the codes and regulations established for building sustainable projects by the Government.
	Both companies spend around 18 months to obtain the certification	
	They had the full support from their management.	
How is the BES 6001 certification implemented in Romania and in UK and to what extent can it be used to promote green marketing in the construction industry?	They establish a team for making research about responsible sourcing and deal with the formalities for receiving the standard.	
	All their suppliers have implemented procedures that allow them to provide raw materials.	
How do marketing managers identify and target the decision makers that are interested in developing green buildings?	Both construction markets are now price oriented and promoting responsible source products is very difficult.	Aggregate Industries benefited from the beginning from BES certification, becoming the supplier of choice for sustainable buildings. Holcim Romania has only 2-3 companies interested in developing green projects.

		In United Kingdom all the new construction projects have to be sustainable. In Romania, there aren't any strict rules and regulations related to sustainable constructions.
How can marketing managers improve the results of green marketing initiatives using BES 6001 certification?	The most efficient communication with decision makers was made through events	Aggregate Industries launched a catchy strapline "The responsible source", that was utilized in all the promotional materials and in their external events
	Both companies launched a new range of products under the BES 6001 certification	Aggregate Industries has a wider range of sustainable products, under the Life Product brand.
	The communications with decision makers is done mainly through sales teams.	Aggregate Industries has 30 products and services brochures mentioning the BES 6001 certification, while Holcim Romania has only two.

Both companies have mentioned that transparency is essential when taking the decision to allocate resources for making responsible sourcing, in order to avoid green washing. In addition, promoting BES 6001 was not an easy task for the companies researched in this study. One of the main barriers for Aggregate Industries when promoting responsible sourcing identified by the company was that the construction companies want to build as cheaply as possible, and the procurement departments might not have the same goals as the Sustainable Development departments and therefore the high ideals are often forgotten. On the other hand, Holcim Romania mentioned another type of barrier for promoting BES 6001, responsible sourcing is a quite narrow niche in a construction market with a more or less favourable evolution.

The major difference in taking the decision to obtain the BES 6001 certification was the context of the construction market. The Government of the United Kingdom was one of the main drivers for developing sustainable constructions and green certifications, while in Romania only the private investors and associations are supporting the development of green buildings.

Conclusions

This study revealed the fact that responsible sourcing of products can be used as a green marketing tool, even if the context of the construction market is different from one country to another. Aggregate Industries and Holcim Romania had many similarities related to green marketing strategies using BES 6001 certification. Still, Aggregate Industries has placed BES 6001 at the heart of its communication with external stakeholders, creating a strapline called "The responsible source", while Holcim Romania is just at the beginning and took the decision to have a more targeted approach towards its customers.

Both companies were pioneers on their markets in terms of receiving the responsible sourcing standard and wanted to have a competitive advantage in difficult market conditions. The informants recognized the fact that the management team was one of the main drivers for implementing this certification and also promoted the green marketing initiatives related to BES 6001.

Responsible sourcing of products has become a norm in United Kingdom, because of the increasing numbers of companies from the construction sector that obtained the BES 6001 certification. By comparison, green buildings are the exception on the Romanian market and companies such as Holcim Romania find it difficult to target the decision makers through green marketing.

There are not only advantages in using BES 6001 for making green marketing. The main barriers of the BES 6001 certification mentioned by the managers of both companies are:

- The narrow niche of sustainable projects in the whole construction industry;
- Customers are mainly interested in having a reduced price for building material products;
- In United Kingdom the private investors decisions depend on Government regulations, while in Romania there are only a few companies that understand what a sustainable construction means.

Targeting the decision makers is one of the most difficult tasks for both companies when making green marketing, especially for Holcim Romania. This study revealed the fact that companies need the support of the Government in reinforcing regulations for sustainable constructions, a conclusion that has been demonstrated also by the researches of (Delmas & Burbano, 2011; Lee, 2009; Serpell, 2013; Shi, Zuo, Huang, Huang & Pullen, 2013). Aggregate Industries benefited from the green initiatives of the Government, such as the National Planning Policy Framework, the Code for Sustainable Homes or the Energy Performance Certificates.

Limitations and further research

The limitations of the study are that the sample size might be considered too small, but taking in consideration that there is only one company in Romania that obtained the BES 6001 certification, this case study will be very useful for further research related to green building environment in Romania.

The aim of this research was not to generalize, but to explore the data that is available related to the responsible sourcing of products and its connection to green marketing and to understand the implications of applying the BES 6001 certification.

Another obstacle in this research might be that the Romanian market is not yet ready for initiatives such as BES 6001 and the gap between United Kingdom and Romania is too large, which might imply a reduced level of validity and reliability.

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THE INFLUENCE OF ONLINE REVIEWS ON BRAND EQUITY AND PURCHASE INTENTION OF SMARTPHONES AND TABLETS IN ROMANIA

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Abstract. *The growth of the internet and the increasing popularity of social media have captured the interest of academics and practitioners. This paper focuses on user generated content (UGC), specifically on reading or viewing online reviews during the information search stage in the purchasing decision process. The paper explores to what extent reading consumer generated online reviews affect Aaker's Customer Based Brand Equity (CBBE) model. Following Aaker's CBBE model and its key dimensions (brand awareness, brand associations, perceived brand quality and brand loyalty), the research focused on achieving two main objectives: (1) investigate to what extent consumer reviews influence the CBBE of smartphones and tablets on the Romanian market and (2) investigate which review platform is the most popular among Romanian customers: Facebook, Youtube, blogs, forums or other sources. The research was carried out in Romania focusing on high involvement products such as smartphones and tablets. The data was collected from December 2014 to January 2015 using a self-administered online survey, distributed via Facebook and e-mail, targeting people between 18 and 34 years old belonging to Generation Y and also known as Millennials. The research results show that: (1) viewing or reading reviews affect all the CBBE dimensions in different proportions and (2) Romanian consumers prefer to view or read reviews from forums, followed by blogs and Youtube.*

Keywords: *brand equity; CBBE; UGC; eWOM; social media.*

Introduction

In nowadays' society social media has led to a transformation of the communication process from unidirectional to bidirectional. Thus, a power shift has occurred and consumers are not only the receivers of brand generated messages, but they can also generate and distribute their own messages related to the different existing brands. Furthermore, consumers can also answer back to the brands whose messages they receive and share brand-related impressions between them.

The proposed topic is important for the marketing domain because user generated content has become the third most trustworthy source of information at a global level according to a Nielsen (2013) report. Thereby, the results of the current study provide brands with insight regarding the changes produced by UGC within CBBE dimensions and the impact on the purchase intention. This insight might help managers realise how they can participate in and use UGC to their brands' advantage.

Literature review

Defining user-generated content

UGC is according to Christodoulides and Jevons (2011, p.102) a new term, although its “fundamental features have been in practice for many years”.

Another definition of the term of UGC can be retrieved from a study by Daugherty, Eastin and Bright (2008, p.1) where it is said that it “refers to media content created or produced by the general public rather than by paid professionals and primarily distributed on the Internet”. This definition seems to have been based on the three characteristics mentioned in the OECD (2007) report regarding UGC. Thus, the first is for the content to be published on a website or social networking site accessible to the general public or to a limited number of people, the second refers to the creative effort required and the third is for the content to have been created by a non-professional or by a professional outside of a marketing context. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p.4) mention in their paper that the term of UGC has been used over the years in order to define “the various forms of media content that are publicly available and created by end-users”. Nevertheless, this definition meets the first two criteria stated by OECD, but not the third because it does not exclude paid professionals.

After reviewing some of the main definitions that exist in the literature, the researcher decided that the one that will be used for the purpose of this study is the one that Christodoulides, Jevons and Bonhomme (2012) adopted in their research. The definition is based on the three criteria proposed by OECD to which Christodoulides et al. (2012, p.54) applied a “brand-related focus”. Therefore, it is the most complete and appropriate definition for the present research, UGC being defined as “consumers creating content that: (1) is made available through publicly accessible transmission media such as the Internet; (2) reflects some degree of creative effort; and (3) is created for free outside professional routines and practices.” (Christodoulides et al., 2012, p.55).

Defining WOM and eWOM

The American Marketing Association (2015) defines word-of-mouth (WOM) as the information shared between friends, relatives or other acquaintances about products, services, promotions etc.

Keller (2007) recognizes the increasing importance of WOM and underlines that it is crucial for marketers to understand the new communication dynamics and to use this knowledge in order to engage the consumers in two-way conversations regarding brands.

The creation of Web 2.0 and social media is what changed everything in the communication process for both brands and consumers and it is also what led to the transition from WOM to electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM).

Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh and Gremler (2004, p.39) define eWOM as “any positive or negative statement made by potential, actual, or former customers about a product or company, which is made available to a multitude of people and institutions via the Internet”.

Moreover, Fogel (2010, p.56) stated in her review of WOM’s measurement issues that the creation of social media offered consumers the opportunity to “interact with, advocate for or rail against brands” while also interacting with other consumers.

The role of UGC

Smith (2009) talks about the social media revolution where every consumer can publish, review and comment, with the balance of power shifting more and more from the message producers to the media audiences (Daugherty et al., 2008). In addition, from the brands’ point of view Blackshaw (2011, p.109)

sees social media and UGC as an important tool that can be used to “guide, shape and reinforce brand strategy”.

In the work by Powers, Advincula, Austin, Graiko and Snyder (2012) it is stated that people not only use social media to connect with their peers but also to gather information utilized in the decision making process for future purchases.

Research was conducted on both the creation of UGC and on UGC consumption, but also on Producer Generated Content (PGC). Cheong and Morrison (2008) conducted a research to compare the consumers' opinion regarding UGC and PGC recommendations. The study revealed that consumers find UGC more credible and trustworthy than PGC regardless of the positive or negative quality of the UGC. In addition, even though the interviewees prefer searching for product-related information on discussion boards compared to Youtube and blogs, they still frequently use this type of social media.

Another study on UGC is the one made by Daugherty et al. (2008) who researched the consumption and creation of UGC and the attitudes that influence these activities. The findings show that UGC creators engage in this action in order to express themselves, connect with others and feel empowered. Thus, the consumption and creation of UGC increases as attitude towards it strengthens, with attitude being a mediator between the two processes.

Christodoulides (2009) reinforces some the findings of Daugherty et al. (2008) by stating in his review on the role that Internet plays in branding that consumers are enabled by the Internet to express themselves and socialize with other people by sharing their experiences regarding the consumption of different brands. He also states that due to the Internet and social media UGC plays an important role in branding and that it can seriously impact the brand equity in a positive or negative way.

Ho-Dac, Carson and Moore (2013) researched the impact of online customer reviews on the sales of the new Blu-ray players and the already mature DVD players. The study's findings indicate that positive or negative online customer reviews increase or decrease the sales volume of the different models belonging to weaker brands but they have no impact on the sales of strong brands. However, a high number of sales lead to more positive reviews which in turn can help increase brand equity. The findings of Ho-Dac et al. (2013) also indicate that positive reviews impact brands on a higher level than negative ones. However, the opposite situation is reflected by the results of the research by Tirunillai and Tellis (2013) that show that the impact of negative reviews is greater than the one of positive ones, leading to a decrease in the stock prices of the companies that produced the negatively reviewed product.

Nevertheless, the perceived contradiction between the findings of Ho-Dac et al. (2013) and Tirunillai and Tellis (2013) might be due to the fact that the two studies took place over different period of time and product categories.

Similar to the findings of Tirunillai and Tellis (2013), the results of Bae and Lee (2010) show that online, negative reviews have a more powerful influence on purchase intention of both females and males compared to positive reviews, with the effect being stronger on female buyers.

The research by Park, Lee and Han (2007) also yielded interesting results regarding the influence of online reviews on the purchase intention indicating that the quality, quantity and number of online reviews influence the purchase decision in different ways.

Robson, Farshid, Bredican and Humphrey (2013) state that online reviews are not useful only to consumers but they also provide marketers with information regarding to the way consumers view their products. Another advantage for marketers is that they can monitor what is being said about their brands and react by resolving different issues that might have been pointed out by consumers.

In addition to the role that reviews play in the consumers' purchase decision as identified in previously mentioned research papers (Ho-Dac et al., 2013, Park et al., 2007), the findings of Shen, Li and DeMoss

(2012) suggest that the importance of online product reviews consists in transmitting to potential buyers the perceived product quality.

Therefore, after reviewing all these research papers it can be said that UGC in general and reviews in particular play an important and complex role in both the brands' and consumers' activity. On the one hand, from the brands' point of view UGC can be used in their communication and branding strategies, to adjust different issues regarding their products that might have been pointed out by consumers and increase sales. On the other hand from the consumers' point of view, UGC is a trustworthy source of information that can play an important role in the consumers' purchase decision being an indicator of the quality of the products.

Defining brand equity and customer-based brand equity models

Due to the large number of studies regarding brand equity it is hard to have only one definition for it, but according to French and Smith (2013, p.1356) "[...] in essence all agree that it relates to the incremental value endowed by a brand to a product or service compared to an unbranded counterpart".

As to customer-based brand equity (CBBE) it can be said that the concept refers to the approach of brand equity from the consumer's point of view. In addition, Keller's (1993, 2013, p.8/69) defines CBBE as "the differential effect that brand knowledge has on consumer response to the marketing of the brand". In Table 1, the five main brand equity models and their dimensions are presented.

Table 1. Brand equity models

Author	Dimensions
Aaker (1991)	Four main dimensions: brand awareness, brand associations, brand loyalty, perceived brand quality + other proprietary assets.
Keller (1993)	Brand knowledge has two dimensions: brand awareness and brand image (brand associations).
Aaker (1996)	The Brand Equity Ten: Loyalty measures – 1. Price premium, 2. Satisfaction / Loyalty; Perceived quality / Leadership measures – 3. Perceived quality, 4. Leadership; Associations / Differentiation measures: 5. Perceived value, 6. Brand personality, 7. Organizational associations; Awareness measures – 8. Brand awareness; Market behaviour measures: 9. Market share, 10. Price and distribution indices
Yoo and Donthu (2001)	Three CBBE dimensions: brand loyalty, perceived brand quality and brand awareness / associations.
Keller (2013)	CBBE pyramid: brand salience, brand performance, brand imagery, brand judgements, brand feelings, brand resonance.

Yoo and Donthu (2001) developed a measurement model of brand equity based on Keller's (1993) and Aaker's (1996) models. The findings of their research lead to the merge of the dimensions of brand awareness and association, thus resulting in a model that comprised only three dimensions: "brand loyalty, perceived brand equity and brand awareness / association" (Yoo & Donthu, 2001, p.6). The results of other research papers indicate that the scale developed by Yoo and Donthu (2001) may fall short on explaining brand equity due to the fact that it fails to make a distinction between brand awareness and brand associations (Gill & Dawra, 2010; Pappu, Quester & Cooksey, 2005).

Also, the results of the research by Pappu et al. (2005, p.151) provide "empirical evidence of the multidimensionality of consumer-based brand equity" thus supporting the CBBE models of Aaker (1991) and Keller (1993).

After reviewing the literature, the researcher has decided that the most adequate model to be used in this study is Aaker's (1991) as it had been successfully used in different studies such as Pappu et al. (2005) and Christodoulides et al. (2012).

Links between UGC and CBBE

An important research paper is that by Christodoulides et al. (2012) regarding the links between the drivers of UGC creation, involvement and CBBE which revealed that co-creation, community and self-concept impact positively the involvement with UGC while the influence of the fourth consumer perception, empowerment, is not significant on UGC involvement. In addition, UGC involvement has a positive impact on brand perceptions through CBBE.

Another finding of this research indicates that CBBE through its theoretical dimensions of brand awareness, loyalty, associations and perceived quality has a positive influence on three out of the four UGC drivers studied: co-creation, empowerment and community. It can be observed that the CBBE dimensions utilized are from Aaker's first model, although the authors mention that in order to tap CBBE they employed eight items from the study of Pappu et al. (2005).

Therefore, it can be said that there are few research paper that focused on the link between UGC and all the dimensions of CBBE, with the one by Christodoulides et al. (2012) being an important example of a study on this subject.

Research objectives

Following the identified literature gap identified in the research by Christodoulides et al. (2012) and also on the reviewed papers, two main objectives were proposed for analysis and the hypothesis to be tested were developed for each objective and CBBE dimension.

Objective 1: Investigate to what extent consumer reviews affect the CBBE of smartphones and tablets on the Romanian market.

1A. Brand awareness dimension:

H0: Reading or viewing reviews does not affect the brand awareness dimension of CBBE.

H1: Reading or viewing reviews affect the brand awareness dimension of CBBE.

1B. Brand association dimension

H0: Reading or viewing reviews does not affect the brand association dimension of CBBE.

H1: Reading or viewing reviews affect the brand association dimension of CBBE.

1C. Perceived brand quality dimension

H0: Reading or viewing reviews does not affect the brand perceived quality dimension of CBBE.

H1: Reading or viewing reviews affects the brand perceived quality dimension of CBBE.

1D. Brand loyalty dimension

H0: Reading or viewing reviews does not affect the brand loyalty dimension of CBBE.

H1: Reading or viewing reviews affect the brand loyalty dimension of CBBE.

Objective 2: Investigate which review platform is the most popular among Romanian customers: Facebook, Youtube, blogs, forums or other sources (such as the reviews posted on the web pages of online retailers).

H1: There is a difference between males and females regarding the preferred review source.

H0: There is no difference between males and females regarding the preferred review source.

Research methodology and design

Method

For the present research quantitative research method was employed using self administered surveys. An argument to support this decision is that for achieving the objectives of the present research a quantitative research method was more appropriate than a qualitative one because the researcher aimed to mainly study the relationship between viewing or reading reviews and the dimensions of CBBE, which is an explanatory research. Therefore, in order to study the links between different variables and to test the developed hypothesis a quantitative approach was needed.

Furthermore, because the survey targeted consumers that read reviews or viewed them on video-sharing platforms before they decided to buy a smartphone or tablet, the researcher considered that the best method to reach the targeted sample was by using an online self-administered survey.

Sample population

The sample population consists of both men and women, who belong to Generation Y, also known as Millennials, who are considered to be the most tech-savvy of all generations (Eastman, Iyer, Liao-Troth, Williams & Griffin, 2014; Gur u, 2012). In addition, according to the research conducted by Littman (2008) those who belong to this generation often do not focus on only one type of media at a time, but they are multitaskers and can divide their attention between several type of media at the same time. Eastman et al. (2014) further underline the importance of mobile technology in the Millennials' lives and their appreciation for social networks.

Although Gur u (2012) stated that there is not a generally accepted fixed period when people from generation Y were born, he has taken into consideration for his research the interval 1980 – 2000. The same interval was also considered for the present study, although for ethical reasons, only those Millennials who are at least 18 were asked to fill in the questionnaire.

Therefore, the participants are between 18 and 34 years old and are comfortable with using the Internet and social media in order to get information about certain brands by reading or viewing consumer-generated content.

Sampling method

For the purpose of the present research the convenience sampling method was employed, as it has also been successfully used in other studies that focused on UGC (Park et al., 2007; Shen et al., 2012).

Data collection

Prior to the actual data collection, a pilot study was conducted so as to avoid any type of problems with the questionnaire that could have compromised the data collection process. The pretesting took place online, using Google Forms, on 21 and 22 December 2014. The researcher decided on 10 participants as being a large enough sample for the pilot study.

After concluding the pilot study, the distribution of the actual survey and the data collection took place starting 23 December 2014 until 5 January 2015. This was not a pre-determined, fixed period of time as the researcher started distributing the survey when all the previous research steps were completed. Moreover, the survey was left open for those 14 days so as to overcome the low response rate and reach the targeted sample size of 100 correctly completed questionnaires. As a result, 104 correctly filled-in questionnaires were collected.

The survey was constructed and distributed online using Google Forms with Facebook being used as the main means of distribution, although some email were also sent so as to reach the targeted number

of questionnaires. On Facebook, the researcher posted the link to the questionnaire on her personal Facebook page and in three Facebook groups where current students and alumni of two big Romanian universities, ASE and SNSPA, can be found.

Data analysis method

The raw data collected from the questionnaires was introduced analyzed using the analytics software SPSS version 20.0. The software provided the necessary basis for the researcher to achieve the objectives of this study.

Results and discussion

Results and discussion

First of all, the findings indicate the popularity of smartphones over tablets as the product about which consumers last viewed or read reviews with the brands that rank the highest in consumers' preferences being Samsung and Apple.

In Table 2 below, the main findings of the current research from Romania and findings of past research from USA can be found.

Table 2. Research findings

Objective	Findings of the current research	Findings of past research	Country of past research
Objective 1	- viewing or reading reviews affect all the CBBE dimensions in different proportions;	Christodoulides (2009) – due to the Internet and social media, UGC plays an important role in branding and that it can seriously impact the brand equity in a positive or negative way;	Review paper
Objective 2	- the preferred reviews source that customers use is forums, followed by blogs and Youtube;	The findings of Daugherty et al. (2008) indicate that the interviewees prefer searching for product-related information on discussion boards compared to Youtube and blogs;	USA

Regarding the results of *Objective 1*, it can be said that first of all, the correlation tests showed that there are statistically significant and positive relationships between viewing and reading reviews and brand awareness, brand associations, perceived brand quality and brand loyalty. In addition, with the exception of the relationship between brand awareness and viewing or reading reviews which is moderate, the ones between the other pairs of variables are strong. Furthermore, the regression tests show that viewing or reading reviews affect all the CBBE dimensions in different proportions.

By looking in Table no. 2 and comparing the current research results for *Objective 1* with the findings of Christodoulides (2009) it can be said that they are similar and that Christodoulide's (2009) observation that UGC plays an important role in branding and that it can impact the brand equity in a positive or negative way is also true for the present research.

In addition, consumer-generated reviews provide consumers with important insight on how their peers perceive different products from different brands, insight that is used by other consumers to make an opinion regarding a certain brand. The current research results also mean that, as other researchers observed (Christodoulides & Jevons, 2011; Robson et al., 2013), UGC is not only important to consumers, but also to marketers who should monitor what is being said about their brands and then try and use the information to their brands' advantage in communication and branding campaigns.

Furthermore, the findings for *Objective 2* indicate that Romanian consumers prefer the same review sources as the ones identified by Cheong and Morrison (2008) in the USA, regardless if they are males or females.

Therefore, these results are a starting point in illustrating the links between CBBE and reviews in the Romanian market and for the smartphones and tablets product categories. This can be said because even though there have been few others research papers on the subject of UGC done in Romania (S vulescu, 2014), it focused on the way UGC is managed in advertising campaigns and not on the links between UGC and CBBE or the purchase decision. Thus, the current paper adds to knowledge by making some interesting links that marketers should take into consideration and try to integrate when building communication and branding campaigns for their brands.

Managerial implications

An interesting aspect revealed by the present research is that nowadays brands also have a social aspect due to the customers' implication in the creation of brand related UGC. Therefore, it could be said that brands are co-created by marketers and consumers, as consumers read both PGC and UGC before making the purchase decision regarding a product from a certain brand. In addition, besides brand co-creators, consumers could also be brand ambassadors by promoting and recommending a brand's products to their peers.

As the research results of S vulescu (2014) show, marketers understand to a certain extent the role that UGC can play in building their brands, but they are not prepared to pass down all the control to consumers. However, when managing UGC and using them in their brands' campaigns marketers should be cautious not to over process the UGC and thus be perceived as lacking credibility.

Another implication resulted from the findings of the current research is that marketers should closely monitor forums, followed by blogs and Youtube in order to know what is being said about them, as they are the main sources from which consumers view or read reviews. Thus, by knowing what is being said about their brands, marketers could adapt their branding or communication campaigns so as to encourage positive WOM or UGC and discourage negative one.

Research limitations and directions for future research

One of the main limitations of the present study is the sampling method used, respectively the non-probability convenience sampling which means the research results should not be generalised. Therefore, future research could replicate this research at a bigger scale by using a probability based research method in order to obtain results that can be generalised for the Romanian population. In addition, the research could also be replicated in other countries to see if the research results between countries are similar.

Future research could also aim to have a similar number of males and females as respondents especially if they will want to compare the intensity of the influence of positive and negative reviews across genders.

In addition, a clear differentiation between the effect of reviews between smartphones and tablets could be made and other products could be introduced in the study in order to see if the results of the present research are reliable across different product categories.

Also, future research could focus on uncovering other factors that along with reviews influence CBBE and the purchase decision, thus offering companies a better overview of the phenomena.

Future studies could also be conducted in order to better understand how to use UGC to build brand equity, as it is a relatively new concept about which few things are known. This type of study could help managers better understand how to integrate UGC in their branding strategy.

Conclusion

To sum up, UGC has been a subject of interest for a long time and its different aspects have been studied by researchers all over the world in order to uncover its implications for both customers and companies, as what consumers say about a brand is a more trustworthy source of information than what brand say about themselves.

The reviewed literature illustrates the complex and important role of UGC for consumers and brand alike. From the consumer's point of view it can be said that there are UGC creators and UGC consumers. First, the current technology enables consumers to express their feelings and thoughts and interact with other consumers at a level that was not possible before Web 2.0. This offers consumers the possibility to create online communities and share content about a multitude of subjects, some of them brand-related. However, not all consumers feel the need to create UGC, some of them viewing UGC more as an information source than a means of expression. Consequently, UGC also can work as an informant and even recommender regarding different brands. UGC can thus influence consumers in buying or not buying a certain product, being an indicator of product quality.

In conclusion, UGC can be an important tool in their brands' activity if managers and marketers invest the time in understanding how to manage it to their benefit in order to build brand equity.

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CITY BRANDING AS RESPONSE TO THE LOCAL VERSUS GLOBAL DEBATE

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Abstract. *“Today, the world is one market; the advance of globalization means that every country, city and region must compete with every other for its share in the world’s commercial, political, social and cultural transactions” (Anholt, 2010a, pp.3-4). “[...] cities rather than states are becoming the islands of governance on which the future world order will be built” (Khanna, 2010). These should be the leading ideas of our future development and this paper discloses the way cities “proactively shape” into this “new paradigm” (Baker, 2011, p.xiii). Globalization, sharpening course for resources and limiting state role are three characteristics that represent strong and decisive challenges for cities, as under-state entities. The paper provides an insight of the globalization, neo-liberalism and place branding process in order to explain the larger picture in which Romania should take its position. The paper proposes an analysis of city branding process as a response to the local versus global debate, highlighting the city branding status in Romania, from the European perspective, as a first step, and further as an opportunity of accessing global community. In reaching this point, the paper provides a broader examination of city branding process, focusing on few successful city branding stories all around the world. The paper uses the qualitative analysis to explore the globalization and city branding process, based on a wide literature review and on case studies of city brands already successfully enrolled in the global community. Regarding the European experience in city branding, the paper benefits from the case-studies of Western and other CEE cities. In the case of analysis of city brand status in Romania, the paper valuably makes use of the academic literature and the content analysis of economic, business, touristic materials to reveal the topics the Romanian researchers focussed on. As methodology, the paper groups the articles, books or any other materials by the topics debated by the authors and compares their point of view and interpretations. The paper presents chronologically and in evolution the practical “actions” taken by Romania in city branding. This paper analyses the city branding strategy not only from the Romania interpretation, as a single entity, but also from the regional context to which Romania must relate to. The paper uses the experience of other Central Eastern European cities with which Romania shares the same (at a certain degree) political, social and economic background, to notice the similarities or differences between the cities of Romania and other countries’ strategies. Second data analysis will offer supplementary information about the effectiveness of city brand strategies. According to our research findings, the city brand is still in its early stages in Romania. The paper reveals that, at the institutional and local level, there is a misunderstanding of city brand, tourism brand and other related concepts and makes the necessary conceptual clarifications. Also, it reveals the gap between the theory and practice of city branding, and the little interest of the authorities and institutions in proper knowledge and developing the city brand strategy. Also, the paper presents other regions’ real global city brands, in order to disclose their model, achievements and strategy. Having in view the opportunities Romania has, as one of the largest countries in Europe and in Central Eastern Europe region, and based on general developments of theory and practice, the paper proposes new interpretations and approaches of city branding in Romania. This paper contributes with the Romanian experience to the growing literature of globalization, economic developments and city branding. Also, its expectations are to offer the necessary conceptual clarifications and means to the authorities and concerned institutions, in order to easy their further actions on city branding and to prepare ourselves (or, at least, soundly inform us) that “we are moving away from the age of nations, to the age of cities” (Chirico, 2014, p.452).*

Keywords: *city brand; globalization; local; Romania.*

City branding and globalization – theoretical approach

Global and local are two terms we cannot, for the moment, dissociate or place in an antagonistic relationship. The place brand concept itself associates these terms: globalization (Giddens, 1990) taken over by (Andrew, 2011, p.52) is “the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa”. He considers globalization as a “process of expansion” of “relations between forms and social

local and distant events” and “local events” though similarly, may have different interpretations or manifestations, depending on their evolution conditions and exemplify through “global relations can lead to prosperity in a city while the same process can cause a downturn in another city” (Andrew, 2011, p.52).

Local is not necessarily defined as the opposite of global. The place is defined in the dictionary as “a point, a portion determined in space” and the local is “a characteristic of a particular place or region; specific to a certain place” (Dexonline, 2015).

“Local development is defined as the expression of local solidarity, creating new social relations, revealing the will of the inhabitants in a region to capitalize local resources” (Dinc & Dumitric , 2010, p.62). The development involves “shifting from one old qualitative state to another new”, implies not only increase, but also change and determines increased quality of local life (Dinc & Dumitric , 2010, p.63). It is a “complex process of improving welfare, in a territory through concentrated actions of local, regional and national players” (Dinc & Dumitric , 2010, p.64). These actions fall within the territory, but in some cases they go beyond it and get overall value – such as environmental protection, measures against pollution or terrorism.

The objectives of local development are – in the economic sense – “economic prosperity and social welfare by creating a favourable business environment...” and involve “the existence of a regulatory and procedural framework, of a local partnership, of a local development strategy and of resources” (Dinc & Dumitric , 2010, p.63). In the context of today’s complex changes, the term “local” expands to “intercommunal, interregional and even cross-border level” (Dinc & Dumitric , 2010, p.63).

We cannot speak of global and local, without referring to the theory of localization – “part of economic theory which analyses the forces determining the location of economic activities” (Dinc & Dumitric , 2010, p.39). Human settlements have developed nearby natural resources needed for daily living, have developed defence systems and communication channels of different complexity, depending on the development phase of engineering and technology. Today, communication and transport are very sophisticated, so the location of economic activity takes on other meanings.

In the evolution of society, locations were well defined in space, being defined as territories, characterized by two axes of study: institutional territory – which belongs to the state and the citizens and relational territory corresponding to the enterprise, the user and the inhabitant” (Dinc & Dumitric , 2010, p.69). Currently, there is a tendency to minimize the importance of the borders (territorial demarcations between countries) in supranational organizations (such as the European Union) and emphasize the relational territory in close connection with the “market”.

Seeing the territory from these two perspectives, one can notice the (imperfect) delineation of governance, specific to the institutional territory associated to “public sphere” and public management, specific to relational territory associated to “private sphere” (P unescu, 2008, p.32). Restraining the state’s role causes the emergence of the new public management and new governance and pluralist governance (P unescu, 2008, p.38). The new public management provides “public sectors being rendered more efficient by reformation according to the model in the private sector [and rely on] the transfer of mechanisms [of the market to] determine its efficiency and awareness to consumer citizen” (P unescu, 2008, p.38). It is an entrepreneurial leadership result and competition-oriented style, fostering decentralization of public service, it is based on contractual relationships (P unescu, 2008, pp.38-39). The new governance aims at the “citizen” and “global needs (quality of life)” that become “central concept” of the doctrine, has rather a partnership than competition nature (P unescu, 2008, pp.38-40).

“Urban development is a form of local development that is centred on the city as the most dynamic and active centre of economic growth, the true engine of growth and development model, the centre of scientific research technological innovation and a true economic incubator” (Dinc & Dumitric , 2010, p.13).

Having in view that we are to “the age of cities” (Chirico, 2014, p.452), few facts about city present status and development perspectives should be mentioned. Five of the top ten global cities are located in Asia (Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, Sydney and Seoul), three in United States (New York, Chicago and Los Angeles) and only two in Europe (London and Paris) (Chirico, 2014, p.453). But five of the most powerful cities are located (each) in United States (New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, Boston, Washington) and Asia (Tokyo, Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai, Seoul, Beijing, Osaka, Shenzhen) and six in Europe (London, Paris, Zurich, Brussels, Rhine-Ruhr) (Florida, 2012a, 2012b cited by Anttiroiko, 2014). According to FDI (2015) report Global Cities of the Future 2014-2015, only eight cities out of Top 25 FDI Strategy cities are located in Europe, four in United States and the other are located mostly in countries with emerging economies. The idea is that the large cities of Asia and South America are recovering and becoming a threat to the European cities.

There are two ways of adapting cities to globalization (Anttiroiko, 2014, p.22): either “cities attract values from global flows and strengthen their export base” or “promote solidarity and sustainability from the local to the global level as a joint effort of local governments and other public bodies and sometimes also in partnership with private sector actors”. Several theories and hypotheses of city development are developed over time, one of the latest being “world city hypothesis”, according to which “economic globalization is articulated through urban nodal points, leading to the restructuring of these cities and the asymmetric relations with cities in terms of a global division of labour” (Anttiroiko, 2014, p.23). The other hypothesis is based on attracting resources and conceptualizes the transition between globalization and city brand by two specific strategies: attracting foreign investment and industrial specialization (Anttiroiko, 2014, p.34). The two hypotheses differ in the perspective they address city development. The first is based on “Marxist-inspired world systems theory”, social equity oriented, and the second is “more pragmatic and institutionally oriented” (Anttiroiko, 2014, p.35).

Definition and characterization of contemporary globalization attract the interest of many researchers (Anttiroiko, 2014; Chirico, 2014; Ritzer & Dean, 2015). Our intention is not to thoroughly analyse the theories of globalization, but we review the features of this process today.

We use the term “contemporary” to temporally delineate the evolution phase of this process. There have always been links between states, regions, cities or other forms of social organization (Chirico, 2014, p.25), with varying degrees of complexity, characteristics and names (Chirico, 2014; Ritzer & Dean, 2015), depending on society development level (communication, production and economic exchanges, lifestyle, etc.) – but until today, “societies were more independent than dependent” (Chirico, 2014, p.25). Today, it is normal that the process be of a qualitative higher level of complexity, and our daily routine life cannot be defined outside of globalization. “Globalization is a transplanetary process or set of processes involving increasing liquidity and the growing multidirectional flows of people, objects, places and information as well as the structures they encounter and create that are barriers to, or expedite, those flows...” (Ritzer & Dean, 2015, p.2).

World Society Theory defines contemporary globalization as “the most recent period of intensifying patterns of inter-societal connections that have been trending for centuries” and stresses “principal of rationality and of rational organizational forms, such as bureaucratic governments and educational systems” (Chirico, 2014, p.25). This theory supports the development of global society separate from the state. In other words, although each entity (country, organization, corporation, etc.) has its own conception, in each of these entities one can notice certain common “patterns” it is based on and which form “a world culture” (Chirico, 2014, p.43).

The theory of global systems considers globalization as “a unique reorganization of social life, altering it in such fundamental ways that globalization should be viewed as marking a new era” (Chirico, 2014, p.25).

Regardless of the viewpoint and the field of interest, the common element of the concept is the global dimension of the process and the interdependence of its components, the depth down of the process, the theorists agreed that the “Globalization is a gradual macro-structuration of the world order, which

implies a development towards a world-scale systemic interdependency and new relationships between national and sub-national political entities” (Robertson, 1990 cited by Anttiroiko, 2014, p.19).

Washington Consensus stipulates that “stimulating private market forces is considered the engine of growth” (Ritzer & Dean, 2015, p.86). Neoliberalism connects the development of a country to “its degree of openness to trade and international financial flows” and to “elimination of customs barriers, to trade liberalization” (Dobrescu, 2013b, p.30). The subtle effect was relocation or moving some production capabilities to countries with cheap, lot, qualified or easily qualifiable labour force areas, such as Asian countries, i.e. it made “technology” available for them to combine it with the “population”, thereby preparing the way for development (Dobrescu, 2010, p.24).

We shall hereinafter characterize these terms from the city brand perspective – a concept that combines globalization – “brand” and local – city. We explain below our view.

In the commercial sense the brand especially developed in the nineteenth century, when transport became possible on long distances and in large quantities and the origin of the goods had to be easily recognized by distant buyers and separated from the manufacturer. They were marked by a distinct sign – the brand, which guaranteed the origin and quality of products (Kotler & Armstrong, 2008; Lipovetsky, 2007). Today branding – techniques, strategies, and management – is found everywhere: “Branding has so much overpassed its commercial origins, that its impact is virtually immeasurable in social and cultural terms. It has spread in culture, sports, fashion, travel, art, theatre, literature, regional and national policy and in almost all other areas we might think of” (Olins, 2010, p.16). “This new paradigm means that ambitious cities have to proactively shape and influence what people think about them and to position with strategic vision” (Baker, 2011, p.xiii).

Similar to the commercial brand, Kavaratzis and Ashworth (2005) and Anholt (2010b) highlight the historic nature of place brand: cities, regions, countries were concerned on the one hand, about individualization as opposed to the other, but also by attracting resources (natural, people, “influence”), sometimes materializing in military alliance, dating, treaties and commercial agreements, etc.

Initially, cities were personalized by coat of arms, logo, flag, and colours. But the contribution that logo or slogan can have in the management of places as brands is rather limited (Govers, 2013). Although for some people branding is about designing the logos and slogans for places, while forgetting that their essence is to make them identifiable as being distinct (Govers, 2013). And it is further explained that name or logo is a tool to identify and recognize, but the essence of branding is to ensure that customers attach distinctive associations to this entity (building the reputation) (Govers, 2013).

“In a globalized world, more and more places compete more intensely, partly because, due to expanded tourism, migration and global access of the media and technology, markets come more frequently in contact with the places and at different levels, and therefore << corporate reputation >> for places becomes more important” (Govers, 2011). It is not about “society merchantability [...] but the awareness that every organization, symbolizing the city or country, must ensure growth and development, attract resources, people, energy and means to itself. To attract them, they must be convenient and it must seduce them – hence, the brand logic” (Kapferer, 2008, p.126).

On the other hand, it is about the residents, the public, public or private players who are living the brand (Govers, 2011), those who should have a favourable perspective and a positive attitude to the city they live in. Affirmation and prosperity of places is conditional today on how they know to use “the business weapons” (Anholt, 2010b). Baker (2011, p.xiii) emphasizes the role of city branding: “Cities and megacities, rather than countries, are becoming more and more the protagonists of different geographical regions”.

We wish to distance ourselves from these “classic” definitions of brand (Aaker, 2005; American Marketing Association, 2015; Kotler & Armstrong, 2008) because they highlight the identity, affiliation and differentiation of product / service in relationship with the manufacturer / owner, which are hardly

proven in the brand context. The place brand is “a network of associations in the consumer’s mind based on visual, verbal and behavioural expression of place, which is represented by purposes, communication, values and stakeholders’ general culture and the overall look of the place” (Zenker & Braun, 2010, p.3).

Cities are often objectively positioned as native places, where we are born, we grow, and we learn, where we work and where our entire existence is flowing. We are linked to them by unique, unrepeatable experiences. For natives, cities are relatively easy to position. But “the perceptions of those who live in a certain place are often different from perceptions of those who visit this place” (Ries & Trout, 2004, p.192) or to investors who either place their capital in the city and / or move their families for a new long-term residence.

City branding is not about logo or slogan. Its definition is still in debate. Branding must go beyond the visual elements and add a coherent, long term and encompassing strategy to them.

City branding – facts and figures

The first chapter presented few insights of city branding and local – global theoretical aspects. This one presents “facts and figures” about city branding. The objective is to identify strategies, their common aspects and results of city branding, using case studies and secondary analyses of international ranking and statistics documents.

The paper is based on the case studies of Barcelona, Budapest and Shanghai. Barcelona is a “classic” of city brand success story (Belloso, 2011). Budapest is a capital city and shares the same communist and post-communist history (Szondi, 2011), as Bucharest, the capital of Romania, Shanghai brings the dynamism of the emerging markets (Wang, Xiaokaiti, Yan & Zhou, 2012). In the end of this chapter, we shall use the secondary analyses to make a comparison between these cities and proved the efficiency and opportunity of this new strategy applied to places.

The common feature of Barcelona and Budapest is that they belong the countries ending with a political regime, commit themselves to democracy and have to differentiate themselves from the „compact, undifferentiated, anonymous and boring mass” (Olins, 2010, pp.140-141) as they were known during the communist regime.

The “process of radical and global transformation” (Belloso, 2011, p.119) of Barcelona has few key success factors: long-term vision highlighted in multiannual strategic plans, proper leadership of the authorities, involvement of the civil society and the city itself values. The first Strategic Metropolitan Plan – more than 10 years period – included new infrastructure, re-urbanization, developing of education and health care systems, new business orientation. At the end of this strategic phase, Barcelona hosted the Olympic Games (1992). The following plans launched in 1994, 1999 and 2003 “continued with the process of redesign and consolidation of the metropolitan area of Barcelona as one of the most important metropolitan areas in the European city network” (Belloso, 2011, p.122) when the cultural attributes of Barcelona were fully exploited in “thematic years” (The Gaudi Year, The Design Year, etc.). More, the city is facing the future with the project 22@Barcelona – an area “offering modern spaces for the strategic concentration of intensive knowledge-based activities” as well as with the candidacy to host the Winter Olympic Games in 2022 (Belloso, 2011, pp.122-123).

The benefits of the branding are highlighted also by the Eurobarometer (European Commission, 2013) ranks: 66% of the respondents to the survey “are satisfied to live in” Barcelona, but it is an expensive city as housing price (61% not considering it “easy to find good housing at a reasonable price). Also, Barcelona is opened to foreigners as 74% of the respondents to the survey considering that “the presence of foreigners is good for” the city, although they are not very well integrated (as 50% stated) (European Commission, 2013, pp.64-69).

Budapest shares the same experience as Bucharest. But its brand story started in 2009 with the setting up of the City Identity Office as well as with the “development of a detailed typography guidebook [outlining] the visual elements of the official logo of Budapest [and how it to be used] by all institutions that belong to the municipality” (Szondi, 2011, p.126). The branding strategy had in view also the identification of “brand values, based on organic and induced values” such as “panorama of Budapest, its waters, lifestyle and architectural heritage [... and] induced values such as creativity, knowledge generation or business friendliness business brand” (Szondi, 2011, p.126). The first concerns had proceeded even setting up of City Identity Office. It is the movement "I love Budapest" in 2004 aimed at "gathering and uniting enthusiastic and involved people who are willing to do something for the city and make Budapest a more exciting, dynamic, successful and likeable place" (Szondi, 2011, p.127), followed by "Let's invent Budapest - a platform for exchanging ideas and concepts, discussing views and counterinterviews about Budapest, the city and how citizens would like to imagine it" (Szondi, 2011, p.127). These actions of gathering people around the brand are beneficial to the brand communities, in terms of content, extend and involvement of young generation.

Another tactic is the organization of mega-events, to attract visitors from Hungary or abroad: Spring and Autumn Festivals, Budapest Fair and Sziget Festival, Budapest positioning itself long time as “Festival City, striving to become one of the leading cultural capitals of Europe” (Szondi, 2011, p.128). Budapest strategy succeed in being designated by the European Union “to host the European Union Institute of Innovation and Technology in acknowledgement of the long tradition of excellence in Hungarian education, research and innovation” and it was ranked as “the sixth most attractive international conference destination in 2009, well ahead of any other Eastern European cities” (Szondi, 2011, p.127). Budapest in ranked in a minor position (only 43%) than Barcelona (66%), as inhabitants satisfying in living in the city, although only 13% consider to be “easy to find housing at a reasonable price” (European Commission, 2013). Its citizens are more generous than Barcelona’s with the foreigners, 43% considering that their presence “is good for the city” and they are better integrated in Budapest (21%) than in Barcelona (14%) (European Commission, 2013).

The live radio and TV broadcast of international events offer the cities unbelievable opportunities of promotion. The events organized or hosted by these cities are broadcast “on spot” worldwide. The city brand is associated with the event itself - content, thematic, participants, etc., but also with aspects specifically related to the city – hospitality, logistics, safety, financial potential, landscape, architectural heritage, culture, etc.

The itinerant events as World Exhibitions – themselves branded – help the host cities to globally transmit their identity, image, equity and promise. World Expo 2010 Shanghai gathered 84 mil. visitors from 193 countries during six months period (Wang, Xiaokaiti, Yan & Zhou, 2012, p.1284). The mega - events have major implications for the host city or country: creating new jobs for internal publics, changing urban landscape usual (new constructions, development or modernization of public services, etc.) and involving all the stakeholders, both internal and external, at the event and, finally, improving international relations (Wang et al., 2010, p.1285).

The city branding process is perceived as "multilevel communication": the level of the tangible physical aspects, the level of the propaganda tools of city marketing and the level of people communication about the city, either direct or through mass media (Wang et al., 2010, p.1285). In this case, Shanghai reduced the gap “between itself and the other superstar cities in terms of economic capacity and dynamics” (Zhang & Wu, 2009 cited by Wang et al., 2010, p.1291), and enhanced “the city identity in terms of combination of a strong personality as a former colonial and an energetic economic centre” (Wang et al., 2010, pp.1291-1292).

City branding in Romania

We would have liked to have followed, in this paper, other similar works (Gertner, 2011; Hankinson, 2010; Hanna & Rowley, 2008) but, as there is very little Romanian literature on place (country, city)

brand, and the most of it is about country or tourism brand, we adapted the classic research methods and methodology to the restrictive dimensions of city brand in Romania.

In order to identify the papers that address the city brand, we used the keywords to select the Romanian publications – articles, books, essays, projects, etc., - to be studied. The list of terms that we use to make the initial selection includes the following key words: city brand, globalization, local, country brand.

After searching by keywords, we found that the literature is very restrictive, in its early stage, we may say, most of them around 2007, when Romania adhered to European Union. It is focused on country brand and Europe Union oriented. Launching Romania's tourism brand - "Explore the Carpathian Garden" – enhances the concerns for launching city brand. But this activity is directed more towards tourism brand and promotion of cities or regions as tourist destinations.

Bucharest City Hall launches a project to determine the identity of the city, in 2012. Bucharest is defined as "the place where the past meets the future and historical heritage meets modernity - a city alive, vibrant, open and welcoming" and the most representative objective are the Parliament Palace, the Romanian Athenaeum and the Arch of Triumph (B365.ro, 2012). Unfortunately, the "new brand" refers to the replacing of St. Dimitrie the Old with the St. Dimitrie the New in the city coat. The new religious picture has a very restrictive impact and it is not, by all means, a brand, but an element in the city coat – purposely a complicate enough logo, not something very accessible, dedicated more to historical objectives, not like a brand. We have found out, from a simple "net information exercise" that Bucharest is a "destination for fun" (Iancu, 2012) or the Russian Church is the symbol of the "Paris of East" or that Bucharest is "one the most liveable cities of the world" (Wandering Earl, 2013).

Comparing Bucharest to other Central – Eastern European cities, we realize its modest rank, according to the European Cities and Regions of the Future 2012/2013 and 2014/2015 (FDI, 2012, 2014): the fifth rank on Top 10 East European Cities, in 2012/2013, and the third position in Top 10 Major European Cities – Cost Effectiveness, in 2014/2015.

Sibiu is the only Romanian city with a larger external vocation – as European Capital of Culture in 2007. Botnaru (2009) and Iohannis (2014) present extensively this project and its impact. But, European Capital of Culture, Olympic Games or World Expo are just itinerant events that contribute profoundly to the city branding, if the authorities properly develop them in a long term strategy. Unfortunately, not continuing the city branding process, or not including these events in a sound vision it will bring the city in the international attention just during the event, after that, the city will be more or less forgotten. Even more, these events are unilateral oriented, focused on just one side of the city – sports, culture heritage, etc., - and are addressed to a relative limited publics, no matter how large they are. After the conclusion of the events, the "echo" will last few years, mainly for the citizens.

Having in view the place brand knowledge in Romania is in its very early stage, and mostly oriented to country brand, and not always properly used, we need to go further with our research, to identify on one hand, the attitude of the Bucharest stakeholders about city brand, and on the other hand, to what extend they are familiar with the general geopolitic environment: globalization, emerging economies, European Union present status, etc., in which Bucharest should be struggling for its position on the global city market. We shall use qualitative analyses with in-depth interviews. The research questions are directed first, to the attitude of the inhabitants about the city brand and the final goals of this strategy applied to Bucharest. The second direction of the interview is oriented to find out to what extend the respondents are familiar with the international political, economic and social environment (globalization process) and the Romanian authorities response to the international challenges.

We conducted our research only in Bucharest, since this was the most representative city of Romania and it should be an outpost of this innovative strategy. The research is based on a qualitative analyses using in-depth interviews with 15 persons, 20 – 60 years old, employed to state or private companies. The interviews were conducted in March – April 2015, lasted about 45 min., the interviewed persons insisted on their anonymity.

Generally, the respondents are familiarized with the “brand” concept, they understand its meaning in importance as contemporary life elements or trend. Only two of the respondents over 45 years (man, engineer, 46 years, man, teacher, 57 years) were reluctant about the concept, but after discussing about their daily buying preferences, they finally accepted that they are brand-oriented, even without acknowledged it. They also consider that “Bucharest may become brand, if you work hard for this” (man, teacher, 48 years) or “anything and anyhow, only to be better for us, because we cannot continue like this” (woman, private entrepreneur, 51 years).

They consider the final goal of Bucharest brand as a “cleaner” and “more civilized” city, emphasizing that Bucharest should attract “people with money” (woman, veterinarian, 32 years), “young and dynamic persons” (woman, private entrepreneur, 37 years, man, private entrepreneur, 35 years), able and willing “to work, to create, to produce” (man, multinational company, higher education, 42 years, man, private entrepreneur, 35 years). The younger respondents would not wish to emigrate to other countries if they had the same professional, personal and economical perspective in Romania, as abroad (man, doctor, 27 years, woman, manager, 25 years). In their opinion we feel the congruence of Bucharest with Romania, as country, the congruence of the local with the national level. The respondents are unanimous in appreciating Bucharest not only as a tourist destination, but also as cultural centre, but “it could become this if someone manages it” (man, doctor, 27 years), “coherently, in a long term project” (woman, manager, 25 years), because “Bucharest is the place where we are living and we shall live all our life” (woman, nurse, 37 years, woman, private entrepreneur, 51 years), “the place where we should live well” (man, teacher, 48 years) and for this reason “we need money, good jobs, great companies” (man, engineer, 24 years, woman, manager, 25 years). In other words, this branding strategy should be oriented “to the businessmen” (man, engineer, multinational company, 42 years), to “investors” (man, engineer, 46 years) because “tourists are good, but they come and go, these one [businessmen, investors] remain here longer” (woman, private entrepreneur, 37 years).

Regarding the values of Bucharest to be used in the branding strategy, the responses are too long and complex, but their common points are historical and cultural heritage and “Little Paris” (woman, nurse, 37 years, man, engineer, 46 years and multinational company, 42 years). The younger respondents referred to the entertainment, clubbing, leisure facilities (woman, student, 21 years, man, engineer, 24 years, man, graphic artist, 30 years), “people hospitality” (woman, pharmacist, 32 years, woman, private entrepreneur, 51 years). The respondents over 45 years old reproached the “pre-revolution economic potential has recently vanished, disappeared” (man, teacher, 57 years, woman, private entrepreneur, 51 years). The regress of the general economic situation generated discussions with the respondents. They hold as responsible for the regression of the society the entire political class, the leaders of all kind and on all the level, their lack of interest and / or education, lack of patriotism (man, teacher, 57 years, woman, private entrepreneur, 37 years). The same unanimous lack of trust in the authorities is the response to the questions about the persons involved in this project. The second part of the interview concerning the general economic, politic and social situation raised few issues we have not even thought about. First of all, it is reduction of the general international situation to the incompetence of Romanian political leaders to manage the country, the relation with the European Union and global environment: “everything goes wrong because all our politicians are concerned to steel more, not to rule this country” (man, engineer, 46 years, woman, private entrepreneur, 51 years, man, teacher, 57 years), “Europe Union did not care about us” (man, graphic artist, 30 years, woman, pharmacist, 32 years, woman, veterinarian, 32 years), “What globalization? Chinaziation maybe, cheap and low quality products made in the “stomach” of the ships on the worldwide ocean” (man, teacher, 48 years). Secondly, the respondents seem not to be familiar with or at least interested in the rise of the emerging markets (respondents younger than 30 years) or they pay tribute to the stereotype of “China equal a communist country” (respondents over 35 years) in evaluating the current international realities.

There are few findings on the research about Bucharest as city brand. First of all, the respondents attitude about city branding is encouraging. They are familiar with the brand, in general, and they trust this strategy when applied to Bucharest. They directed the strategy more to economic and social goals, than to tourism. Tourism is not enough for a proper development of the city, although all the preoccupations

about city branding (improperly named city branding) are addressed mainly to the tourists, not to all the stakeholders of the city.

Unfortunately, there is a general and profound lack of trust in the authorities due to the regression of the quality of life and also, based, on the great corruption scandal that has made the first topics of the news in the last half of the year.

Conclusions

The whole world is certainly moving towards new paradigms. One of these is the place brand, respectively the city brand, meaning that cities strongly compete for any kind of resources: financial, intellectual capital, natural resources, etc. During the last decade we have leaved as in a century (Dobrescu, 2013b). The state – as we usually known as the ultimate authority in a country – has some of its attributes and responsibilities to inferior level, public or private sector. In this situation, cities are undertaking (or should) the responsibility of attracting these resources. Some of the cities have understood and complied with these new requirements. Other cities successfully advanced due to their country emerging economies (Shanghai).

The cities that have understood the rules of the places competition develop successful brand stories, like Barcelona and Budapest. Bucharest, although the most important city in CEE Europe, after Warsaw (as European Union city and as number of inhabitants) is in its very early stage of branding, with few timid and hesitating approaches, hardly named “branding projects”. This situation is due to the gap between the theory of place brand and its practice. These preoccupations had been conducted mainly around 2007, when Romania adhered to European Union, but even then there were confusion between tourist brand, country of origin and country brand. Anyhow, what was studied, written and achieved at that time may be considered as a good start for this new discipline of study in Romania.

But, the proper city branding needs vision, long term perspective, involvement of all stakeholders of Bucharest (and not only) and a central, strong and dynamic element capable to gather all the communities around the project (Olins, 2010; Szondi, 2011).

There are few strong points and encouraging elements. One of them is the favourable attitude of the Bucharest inhabitants about city branding. Unfortunately, it is difficult in identify the central element capable to gather the energies and prompt up this project, due to the general lack of trust in the political leaders or public persons. On the other hand, there are not notable efforts from the authorities to launch such a project. As the respondents answered, there is confusion between the local and national authorities, many of the respondents used to put the local, city, municipal jobs and duties on the expense of the national level politicians. There is a misunderstanding (or a lack of knowledge) that the state has reduced its role, in the favour of cities, in this case. Still, the respondents, of all ages, referred to the state as the cause or solution to all their problems.

Having these facts, the Bucharest branding is compulsory, but choosing the engine of this project is a matter of great sensitivity.

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CROSS-CULTURAL VARIATIONS IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract. *Interest in foreign countries has stimulated cross-cultural research in various disciplines, including marketing. Despite numerous empirical studies, the progress of the discipline is limited, as researchers struggle to systematically compile earlier results. Consequently, they lack a common pool of previous results to support the interpretation of new empirical results. Additionally, the theoretical roots of research need to be systematized. We have assembled the results of 75 (65 empirical and 10 conceptual) studies of cross-cultural variations in consumer behaviour from 2000 to 2014. By categorizing the studies according to 19 features, this study provides evidence that technical topics, e.g., advertising, segmentation, or product variety management still remain undervalued in cross-cultural research. In addition to the dominant evidence on culture-related framing effects and sociological facets we disclose a disproportionate variety of theoretical explanations considering the limited familiarity of the researchers with the cultures under consideration. The classic concepts by Hall, Hofstede and Schwartz are still popular when assessing culture in contemporary studies. This literature review reveals the lack of a unified conceptual approach to define cross-cultural variations in consumer behaviour, as well as contradictions in the terminology used in cross-cultural research. Considering methodological criteria, we conclude that the majority of publications rely on Likert-type scales in self-administrated questionnaires. However, adjustments are necessary in order to establish cross-cultural equivalence and the results of pre-testing the measurement instruments are documented in only one fifth of the studies. Multi-method approaches and qualified treatment of missing values are rare exceptions in cross-cultural research. Building upon these results, we conclude with a discussion of promising venues for further research. We call for a systematic approach of confronting competing theoretical explanations with empirical evidence and a well-structured sequence of pilot and replication studies. Scholars need to clarify the cross-cultural variation they are challenging in a more rigorous manner on both conceptual and methodological levels.*

Keywords: *Business-to-Consumer Markets; consumer behaviour; cross-cultural research; literature review marketing; variations.*

Introduction

Rapidly growing attention to cross-cultural studies in consumer behavior is seen in both academia and business. Researchers have responded to this expanding interest with a remarkable number of studies challenging cross-cultural variations in consumer behavior from different cultures. Interest in foreign markets emerged in the 1950's, and subsequently shaped studies emphasizing cross-cultural differences in marketing journals. In the 1970's, marketing scholars adopted constructs related to consumer psychology, sociological facets of consumer behavior, and consumers' decision-making processes in consumer behaviour-related studies. Moreover, it became a discipline of its own by advancing the methodology of cross-cultural research. (Eshghi, 1985). Development of cultural theories, e.g., Values

Orientation Theory (Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1973), Theory of Informational Context (Hall, 1976) or Cultural Dimensions (Hofstede, 1980), in combination with large country samples, enabled researchers to detect correlations between variables on a cultural level rather than individual. This enhanced studies focusing on the culture phenomena and cultural variations in consumer behavior. However, scholars face a number of intricate connections in cross-cultural research including:

- Systematizing a broad range of theoretical and methodological knowledge of diverse disciplines concerning consumer behavior such as consumer psychology, social psychology, culture studies, anthropology, and marketing.
- Assessing adequacy and adapting established research designs and data collection procedures.
- Generalizing or comparing results from consumer behaviour research procedures refined within one country/culture to a cross-cultural analysis, which creates grounds for biases in methodology.
- Handling of non-static, unpredictable alternations of covariates both on individual (e.g., consumer system of values) and cultural value levels.

This study goes beyond Engelen and Brettel (2011), Salciuviene, Auruskeviciene and Lydeka (2005), and Zhang, Beatty and Walsh (2008); not only by updating recent with publications, but by accentuating the 'cross-cultural variations' in consumer behavior. Divergences are more likely to be reported than cross-cultural conformities in scholarly publications. Moreover, we cover major method biases in the studies and their impact on the interpretation of results, complementing conceptual and methodological issues with a set of criteria challenging the implications for marketing practice. This literature aims to provide both a relevant and rigorous contribution to the research domain.

The rest of this paper is as follows: The structure of this review, then the methodology behind our collection, an analysis, and an interpretation of the data. Then we categorize the studies according to 19 parameters (e.g. theoretical focus, model used, and type of interdisciplinary research). Building on this classification, we explore research methodologies, validity issues, and method biases. In the subsequent section we discuss findings and implications for practitioners. By exploring relevance and rigour related issues we conclude with a brief roadmap providing domains for further research in cross-cultural consumer behavior.

Methodology of this literature review

In order to meet our research objectives it is essential to conduct a comprehensive analysis of existing studies on cross-cultural consumer behavior variations, limiting the amount of studies with scientific criteria to refine search results and enhance relevance. The methodological approach to data search, selection and analysis is summarized in Figure 1.

The search procedure is defined by the scope of our study. Theoretical, empirical and methodological papers in the domain of cross cultural consumer behaviour in B2C markets are taken into consideration. We consider empirical contributions analysing at least two countries' cultures or subcultures. The main target domain has been marketing and publications, either in English or Russian, in scholarly journals from 2000 to 2014, covering 15 years of cross-cultural and consumer behavior research. We identified a limited number of Russian studies dealing with cross-cultural aspects in relation to consumer behaviour. Only two articles meeting the search criteria were included in this analysis. The search procedure demonstrated the predominant use of comparative analysis of decision-making criteria among consumers in the Russian publications. However, these studies examined behavioral constructs without embedding them in cross-cultural models. It is important to get articles in Russian through Yandex on the related topic because as suggested by Hult et al. (2008) the further the country where the study was conducted from the country where the constructs were established the lower the probability of equivalence the theoretical ground has.

The first obstacle in identifying relevant studies for this review is that cross-cultural differences (variations) have not been clearly defined in the domain of cross-cultural consumer behavior. In addition

to statistical testing issues, a widely accepted term for the scope of differences between cultures/countries has not yet been defined.

The next challenge is the loose interpretation of 'culture' (frequently not distinguished from country or national borders) and cross-cultural terms in consumer behavior studies. Additionally, consumer behavior encompasses a very wide range of constructs, including consumers' evaluations, perceptions, attitudes, etc. Thus, the search criteria needed to be adjusted and manually reviewed for each item. Sets of keywords that return the most accurate scope of data for the purposes of this research had to be defined, i.e. both cross-cultural and consumer behavior aspects had to be specified as the main focus of the reviewed studies.

The recent literature in entrepreneurial marketing provided evidence that the main discussion of this evolving topic is not reflected in journals covered by the Web-of-Science (Schuster, Falkenreck & Wagner, 2015). Understanding this, we did not limit our scope to journals with a Thomson Reuters Journal Citation Rank. The search was conducted using eight online databases, namely *Emerald*, *Springerlink*, *Sciencedirect*, *Wiley*, *Taylor&Francis*, *DeGruyter*, *GoogleScholar* and *Yandex*.

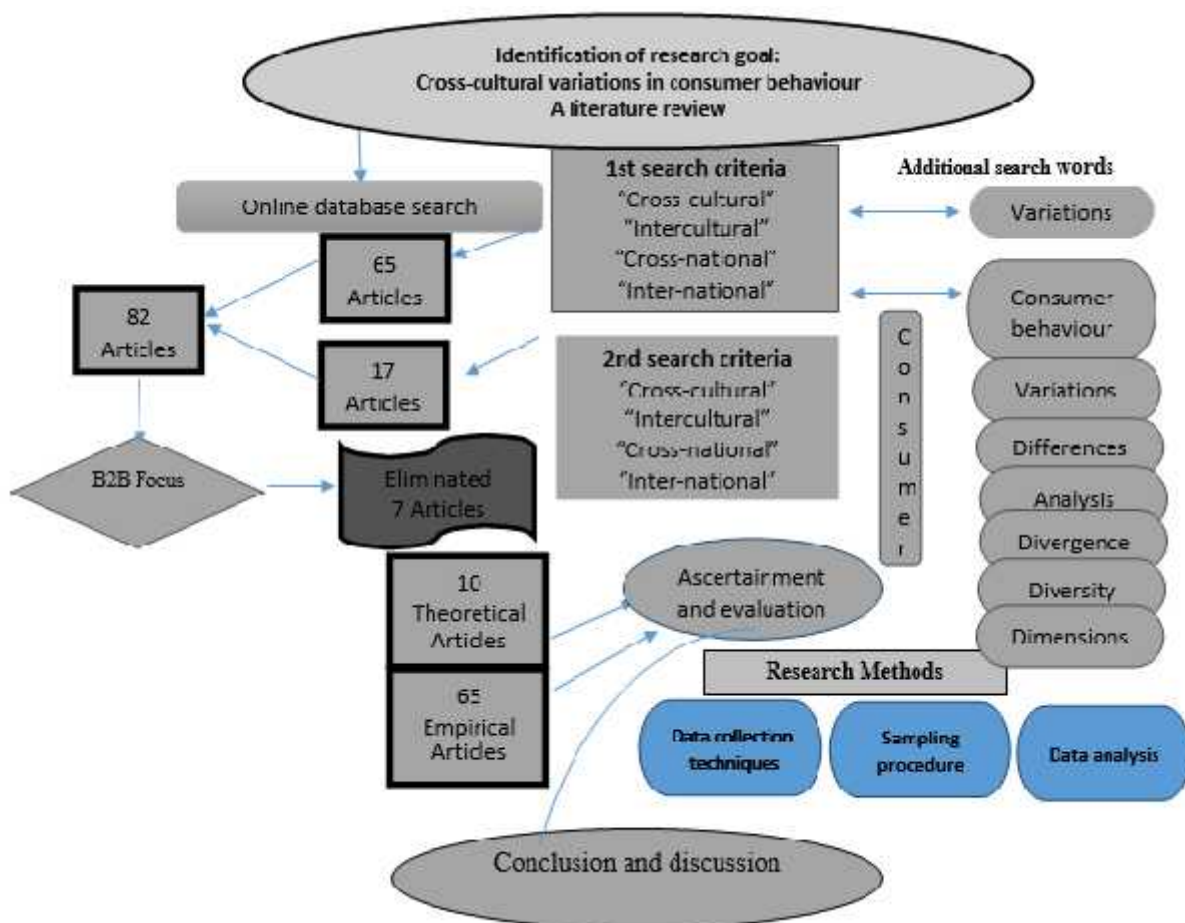


Figure 1. Research Framework

The resulting studies in our corpus have been published in 37 journals covering marketing, business, and industry: Leading are *International Marketing Review* (33%), *Journal of Consumer Marketing* (12%), *European Journal of Marketing* (8%) and *Journal of Business Research* (7%). Approximately one third of all authors are associated with North America (37%), 27% and 21% in Europe and Asia respectively, followed by the Middle East (7%), Australia and New Zealand (6% each). African (2%) and Latin American (less than 1%) are less active. There is a slightly higher percentage of multi-country teams of authors (54%) compared to single-country teams (46%).

Our analysis of the corpus and our interpretation builds on the following 19 criteria.

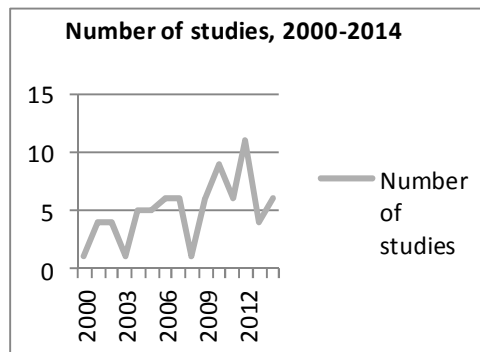
Study description	Market description & Exchange	Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Considered problems • Research gap • Study purpose • Research method/approach • Theories and related constructs • Sample characteristics • Handling of missing data • Data analysis methods • Findings • Practical implications 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature of exchange objects (tangible and intangible goods) • Variables used to describe the market • Consumer inherent impacts (eg. sociodemographics, personality traits) • External impacts on consumer behaviour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cultural focus (number of cultures and type of compared cultures) • Definition of cross-cultural variations • Cultural dimensions • Cultural models • Revealed cultural variations in consumer behaviour

Figure 2. Corpus criteria structured in 3 groups

Incorporating suggestions and procedures from Whitelock and Fastoso (2007), Engelen and Brettel (2010) in our content analysis, we identify the conceptual (theoretical) focus, the research methodology and the practical implications.

Theoretical focus

For the period of 2000-2014 an increase of research domains in cross-cultural differences in consumer behaviour was traced. In three five-year periods, the number of research in this domain has grown from 15 (2000-2004) to 24 (2005-2009) and 36 (2010-2014), based on 12 studies in 2012 alone (Figures 2, 3).



Figures 2. Dynamics of research of cross-cultural studies in consumer behaviour in 2000-2014

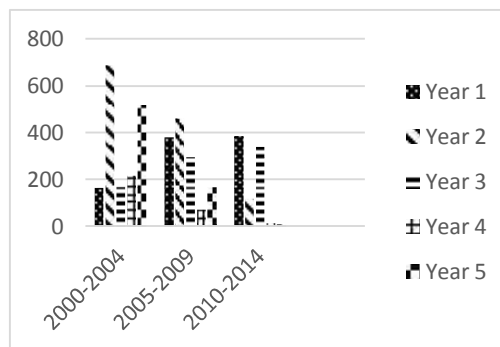


Figure 3. Citation rates per year (according to Google Scholar, 2015)

Our corpus articles were cited by different scholars in later studies. The citation rates help indicate how effective cross-cultural studies have been. The papers in the first period (2000-2004) were cited 1752 times by studies in later years, the second period (2005-2009) were cited 1373 times, and the third period (2010-2014) 860 times. These dynamics indicate increasing research output that passed the journal review processes and were accepted by peer-reviewed journals. Since the number of citations decreases, we conclude that the efficiency of knowledge transfer decreases.

Table 1 provides an overview of the research streams in cross-cultural consumer studies.

Table 1. Research streams in cross-cultural consumer studies

Research streams in cross-cultural research of consumer behaviour		Number of relevant constructs applicable to research streams *		
		Theoretical	Empirical	Total
Cross-cultural research of consumer behavior	Consumer psychology	12	93	105
	Consumer behaviour	4	26	30
	Sociological issues	3	17	20
	Service	1	7	8
	Branding	-	5	5
	Advertising	-	5	5
	Segmentation	1	2	3
	Product variety	3	-	3
	Total			179

*Studies can use more than one construct applicable to different research streams

*Percentage points represent the share of certain constructs among all constructs used

Research in cross-cultural differences in consumer behavior focuses on the study of consumer psychology (60% of constructs are in consumer psychology research), followed by consumer behavior (16%) and sociology (11%). The remainder of studies are affiliated with marketing domains, e.g., service, market segmentation, advertising, product variety, and product quality.

Table 2. Theories in use

Research domain	Theory/Framing	Number of studies
Cross-cultural	Culture theory	1
	Hall's theory of informational context	18
	Cross-cultural development theory	1
	Cultural dimensions theory (Hofstede and Schwartz)	45
Sociology	Social comparison theory	1
	Distinctiveness theory	1
	Theory of conflicts and compatibilities	1
	Social adaptation theory	1
	Institutional (norms & cultural)	1
Behavior, Decision Making, & Psychology	Conspicuous consumption behaviour	1
	Fundamental cognitive theory	1
	Uses and gratifications	1
	Information processing theory	1
	Assimilation theory	1
	Theory of psychological reactance	1
	Expectancy theory – confirmation/disconfirmation	1
	Basic satisfaction theory	2
	Evaluation – apprehension theory	1
	Hedonic consumption theory	1
	Theory of reasoned actions	2
	Media system dependency theory	1
	Prospect theory	1
	Behavioural decision making theory	2
	Theory of planned behavior	1
	Attribution theory	1
Means-end theory	2	

	Variety awareness, re-enchantment, perception and seeking	3
Marketing-Management-related	Corporate branding	1
	Impression management	1
	Global marketing strategy	1
	Service quality theory	1
No theories mentioned		17

*Studies can use more than one theory; percentage points represent the share of articles mentioning a particular theory

As Table 2 suggests, the majority of cross-cultural research in consumer behavior domain (60%) is based on Cultural Dimension Theory.

To explore the dominance of constructs pertinent to the consumer behavior domain, we have ranked them according to their frequency of use in certain time periods. The decision-making process-consumption and evaluation (27%), decision-making criteria (17%), and purchase behavior (17%) rank as the top constructs; the object of increasing research focus in the last five-year period (2010-2014). Analysis in cultures of the examined studies highlights correspondence of these constructs to main stages of the consumer decision-making process.

Table 3. Constructs pertinent to research stream - consumer behavior in cross-cultural research of variations in consumer behavior (timeframe of focus of studies)

Constructs pertinent to consumer behavior (research stream)	Number of relevant constructs pertinent to consumer behavior*			Total
	2000-2004	2005-2009	2010-2014	
Decision-making process: consumption and evaluation	1	3	4	8
Decision-making criteria	-	2	3	5
Purchase behaviour	1	-	4	5
Complaint behaviour	1	1	1	3
Conspicuous consumption	1	-	2	3
Variety seeking	1	1	1	3
Possessions	1	-	1	2
Time orientation	-	-	1	1
Total	6	7	17	30

*Studies can use more than one construct pertinent to research streams

*Percentage points represent the share of certain constructs among all constructs used

In line with the results of the previous research (Zhang et al., 2008, Engelen & Brettel, 2011) our analysis confirms that researchers predominantly use Hofstede cultural dimensions, of which the individualism/collectivism scales are the most widely used in examined studies (70%), followed by uncertainty avoidance (50%), power distance (44%), masculinity/femininity (38%) and long/short-term orientation (21%). All five Hofstede dimensions were used in 24% of the studies in which researchers conduct a full cross-cultural analysis.

In the field of cross-cultural research, the use of Hofstede's cultural model is both criticised and supported. Scholars criticize the relevance of survey method in measuring cross-cultural differences, representativeness of selected samples, choice of country as a unit of cross-cultural research, and insufficiency of Hofstede's dimensions for the study of cultural differences and obsolescence of the search data (Dorfman & Howell, 1988; Jones, 2007; McSweeney, 2002). Moreover, Hofstede model has been widely used in cross-cultural and international research with over 1,000 citations (Sondergaard, 1994). In line with the study by Engelen and Brettel (2010), we conclude that researchers can use more recent cultural models, which expand and supplement Hofstede's dimensions, to reflect the culture dynamics in the last two decades, grounded in a comprehensive database.

Cross-cultural studies predominantly account for cultural (75%), social (55%), economic (20%) factors and the effect of marketing activity (20%) on consumer behaviour. Recently, researchers have considered explanatory factors beyond those traditional ones, such as political factors – especially market regulation of business environment and social media impacts. For instance, Diehl, Terlutter,

Chan and Mueller (2007) discuss consumer expectations of stronger governmental regulation in pharmaceutical advertising and Popova, Frewer, De Jonge, Fischer and Van Kleef (2010) investigate consumer perception of government regulation in food safety. Moreover, Bellman, Johnson, Kobrin and Lohse (2004) reveal the divergences of national information privacy regulations on consumers' privacy concerns.

Data collection techniques: qualitative and quantitative methods

The majority of cross-cultural studies of consumer behavior variations (93%) are conclusive, enabling researchers to draw inductive evaluations of research hypotheses. Only 7% of studies are explanatory, aiming to specify a gap in the research domain. Literary analysis (81%) prevails among desk research methods in examined studies.

Surveys are widely used as a quantitative field data collection method (79%). Structured (self-administrated) questionnaires and Likert type scales are predominantly implemented. The majority of surveys used traditional data collection methods (80% of empirical studies): hand-delivered in public places (hotels, shopping malls, restaurants, etc.); hand-delivered in class, personal interview, face-to-face at respondents' home, door-to-door approach, drop-and-pickup, etc. Online surveys and surveys by mail account for 15% and 5% of empirical studies covered in this study.

Only 21% of examined empirical studies report results or adjustments due to pre-tests conducted both with qualitative and quantitative methods. Multi-method approaches are employed in 12% of the studies considered. Importantly, the usage of multi-method approaches is equally distributed across traditional and online samples. Jahandideh, Golmohammadi, Meng, O'Gorman and Taheri (2014) use a combination of observation, panel discussion, Delphi method, expert pilot interviews, and initial face-to-face consumer interviews and semi-structured interviews of staff in a study of consumer complaint behavior in hotels. In their study of consumption divergences between Koreans and Australians, Sutton-Brady, Davis and Jung (2010) combine questionnaire, consumption diary and phenomenological interviews. This design approach enables researchers to both highlight constructs essential for analysis, and evaluate against large samples. Application of multi-method data collection enhances validity and reliability. Wind, Rao and Green (1991) identified a trend in consumer research to focus on integrated sets of research methods. However, the adoption of the cross-cultural studies of consumer behaviour variations appears to be gradual and is still ongoing.

Establishing cross-cultural equivalence (Diamantopoulos & Papadopoulos, 2010; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998; Wagner, Wetzels & Winklhofer, 2005) in studies of consumer behavior variations presents a number of challenges for researchers. A minimum necessity at the data collection stage and research design development is to account for translation equivalence by using re-translation techniques. These techniques are reported in 43% of examined empirical studies, while 57% provided no information on the methods of establishing equivalence used in their studies. Ko, Kim, Taylor, Kim and Kang (2007) pinpoint the crucial importance of sophisticated re-translation techniques in studies with broad multi-cultural samples.

Data collection techniques: dependent variables

Researchers in our sample worked with 158 dependent variables related to cross-cultural research variations in consumer behaviour. These variables are largely related to consumer psychology, consumer behavior, sociological issues and cultural dimensions. The most frequently were purchase intentions (7% of all dependent variables), attitudes to brand, advertising etc. (5%), perception of quality, brands etc. (5%), service satisfaction and similar (4%), importance of product or service attributes, country of origin, etc. (3%), and symbolic and hedonic meanings, etc. (3%).

Regional focus and related reasoning

Our results suggest that geographic sampling units are shaped on an inter-regional level in the majority of empirical studies (73%). Countries within same region (according to the United Nations) are selected as geographic sampling units in 18% of the studies. Comparative analysis of subcultures/ethnic and racial groups within one country is conducted in 9% of the studies. Cross-cultural analysis of differences in consumer behavior predominantly involves 2 cultures (54%) and from 3 to 10 cultures (29%). Studies with a large range of geographical coverage, which analyse data from more than 10 cultures, account for 11% of empirical studies: 11 cultures (Schumann et al., 2010; Schumann, Nijssen, & Lentz, 2014); 27 cultures (Deschepper et al., 2008); 38 cultures (Bellman et al., 2004); 48 cultures (Budeva, 2010); 56 cultures (Yeniyurt & Townsend, 2003); 58 cultures (Litvin, Crotts & Hefner, 2004). The cross-cultural studies covered 7 regions and 81 nations. Asia and Asia-Pacific attract the most intensive research interest in cross-cultural studies of consumer behavior (66% of studies), corresponding with the dynamic economic development of the region. China and South Korea account for 42% and 30% of studies focusing on this region respectively, followed by India and Japan (21% each). North America and Europe account for 56% and 51% of studies respectively, with the most frequently studied countries in respective regions being the US (82%), Germany (35%) and France (32%). Interest in cross-cultural studies of consumer behavior variations is also seen in Australia and New Zealand (18%). Although these countries are included in Asia-Pacific region, western cultural and political attributes dominate there.

In order to evaluate inter-regional focus of research interest and variations in consumer behavior across geographic settings, we integrated results showing that 23% of studies focus on cross-cultural variations within one region or country, predominantly in Europe and Asia. However, the majority of researchers select inter-regional settings for their studies (74%), focusing largely comparing North America and Asia (20%), and Europe, Asia, North America (14%). Choice of these regions is not only due to differences in cultural backgrounds and the contrast between the East and the West, but trade partnership, and potential growth of target segments, improving economic indicators and level of market development.

Discussion and conclusion

This review reveals conceptual, methodological and practical issues and suggests considerable potential for future research given the range of issues outlined below. Reducing common method biases and ensuring measurement equivalence are the main challenges in cross-cultural research, therefore the majority of recommendations concern these key methodological concepts.

Comparability is ensured when researchers participate in a study embedded in the cultures under consideration and, thus, are familiar with the culture's influence. However, the procedure suggested by Malhotra, Agarwal and Peterson (1996) is not understood in contemporary research designs. Considering the rate (46%) of single country teams of authors in studies covered here, we call for more cross-cultural author teams to ensure the validity of cross-cultural comparisons. The authors of the studies focussed on consumer behaviour, consumer psychology, social issues and a number of marketing topics. This builds a niche for developing up-to-date topics in holistic marketing, especially relationship marketing. Cross-cultural studies in consumer behavior lack a unified approach to the use of terminology and definitions related to cross-cultural variations. Moreover, the studies report divergent impacts due to the high variety of dependents considered. This suggests a promising path for additional research; answering the questions:

- Is it appropriate to consider "cross-cultural variations" as a construct in a consumer behavior domain? Or might it be more profitable to pinpoint similarities instead of variations?
- Is it appropriate to define "cross-cultural variations" only by culture? What about the variation within regions or nations? We did not find any evidence on "inter-cultural variations" that might serve as a benchmark for assessing the "cross cultural variations".

The majority of cross-cultural studies in consumer behavior are based on the Hofstede culture model, it is crucial for future researchers to use more recent cultural models, which expand and supplement Hofstede's dimensions, reflect the culture dynamics in the last two decades and are also grounded in a comprehensive database.

Researchers are advised continue to develop a topology of external factors influencing consumer behaviour. It is necessary to go beyond the practice of fishing for significant differences. Methodologically, there are a number of issues to be addressed in the upcoming research. We agree with other reviews pointing out the lack of qualitative research and multi-methods in this domain. When preparing for data collection, more than half of the researchers fail to use or indicate translation techniques for establishing translation equivalence. However, the translation is not efficient when establishing cross-cultural inequivalence. We posit that it is essential to detail conceptual equivalence, scale equivalence and data collection equivalence. For quantitative studies we can rely on qualified guidance (Diamantopoulos & Papadopoulos, 2010; Steenkamp & Baumgartner, 1998; Wagner, Weztels & Winklhofer, 2005) and translation procedures in the future. However, for qualitative studies suitable procedures need to be developed, evaluated and applied.

There are overlooked opportunities to establish equivalence and sample comparability at the sampling procedure stage (Reynolds, Simintiras & Diamantopoulos, 2003). In addition to the problems of the selection of countries/cultures and theoretical justification, sample sizes and sampling methods challenges such as common method bias need to be addressed (MacKenzie & Podsakoff, 2012). The use of non-probability and probability samples is widely discussed in cross-cultural research, with researchers recommending the use of probability samples despite difficulties obtaining them. Current studies, however, mainly use non-probability sampling techniques. For a systematic assessment of the impact of these procedures we recommend a systematic comparison of results in a meta-analytic method.

As for data analysis methods, researchers use few descriptive types of analysis but employ a broad range and variety of sophisticated statistical tools and methods. However, the results of studies are likely to be biased due to fallacies at the earlier stages of research design (such as conceptual equivalence and handling of data analysis. Although discarding missing data could lead to a selection bias and loss of important data, the majority of studies do not account for this. In terms of practical marketing implications, it can be concluded that without quality-related entries concerning cross-cultural research, academic research should be used cautiously.

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MARKETING: IT'S ALL ABOUT DIGITAL

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Abstract. *The digital economy is more than a hope; it has become a constant presence in our everyday life. Computers, TVs, smart phones, tablets, smart watches, smart gas detectors, even smart clothes: everything seems to be smart and connected. We really live in the era of the Internet of everything, when objects around us become everyday even more intelligent. What changes in such times the marketing practice? As we'll show further, the answer is: almost everything. This is a conceptual paper based on current literature review and statistics on the use of digital tools affecting the marketing practice and even the marketing strategies, besides the current perspective of what we call "digital marketing". We'll investigate the changes in the buying behavior, the increasing sophistication of consumers and their attitudes towards brands while using smart products and mobile media. The aim is to show a change of paradigm in understanding digital marketing not only as a tool of the marketing mix, but as a new philosophy of business.*

Keywords: *digitalization; digital marketing; Internet of everything; smart objects.*

Understanding the digital economy

The term "digital economy" is not new. It was introduced by Don Tapscott, in 1995, being alternatively called "new economy", and characterized by the extent use of the digital information (Tapscott, 2015, p.16). Even since 1995, it has been clear for researchers that the new economy was not just a metaphor for indicating a specific part of the IT&C sector, but an exponentially growing trend expected to dramatically transform the entire economy as we know it.

In the last twenty years, the digital economy has become reality at such a level that the November 2014 issue of *Harvard Business Review* was concentrated around the theme of the Internet of Everything, the next step of Internet of Things (Miklovic, 2014), analyzing especially how information technology is revolutionizing not only communication, but products: "once composed solely of mechanical and electrical parts, products have become complex systems that combine hardware, sensors, data storage, microprocessors, software, and connectivity in myriad ways. (...) The changing nature of products is (...) disrupting value chains, forcing companies to rethink and retool nearly everything they do internally." (Porter & Heppelmann, 2014, p.66).

Everything changes in the era of the digitalization: customers, buying and consumption, products, distribution, promotion, internal organization of companies in order to meet the new market requirements and to address the specificity of their young employees - the digital natives. There is a "digital revolution" (Lanzolla & Anderson, 2010) that we can summarize, but not entirely characterize, by the following facts that we'll present further.

It is commonly accepted (Porter & Millar, 1985; Porter, 2001) that we already experienced two waves of IT that shaped the economic reality. The first wave of IT took place during the 1960-1970, and was defined by the increasing level of automatization (mainly in industry) that led to process standardization and increased productivity. The second wave of IT is the one of the 1980s and 1990s, being synonym with the rise of Internet and with a communication that transpassed frontiers and affected mainly the information and distribution processes. During the second wave of IT, instantaneous communication, global e-commerce and constant sharing of ideas became a comfortable routine. However, products

remained largely unaffected up to now (Porter & Heppelmann, 2014, p.67). At present, with their constant transformation from ordinary products to “smart products”, always interconnected through the technology of embedded sensors, processors, software and cloud storage of collected data, we see now the rise of the third wave of IT. Economy changes: after the standardization of processes, the end of the limited communication and distribution, it is time for the revolution of products – and it seems that there are enough buyers in order to make the transition from classic to digital an easy one.

As shown by Porter (2001): “The great paradox of the Internet is that its very benefits - making information widely available; reducing the difficulty of purchasing, marketing, and distribution; allowing buyers and sellers to find and transact business with one another more easily - also make it more difficult for companies to capture those benefits as profits.” As a matter of fact, because of the second wave of IT, consumers (meaning end users) changed their buying habits and actually gained bargaining power. Consumers buy today online or actively search for information before buying: they migrate from one supplier to the next, from one geographical market to another, because of the simple way to compare and to buy with only one click. Therefore, their behavior and expectations changed and that shapes once more the economic landscape. This changing is expected to continue, at least in quantitative terms (see figure 1 on the evolution of retail e-commerce sales worldwide).

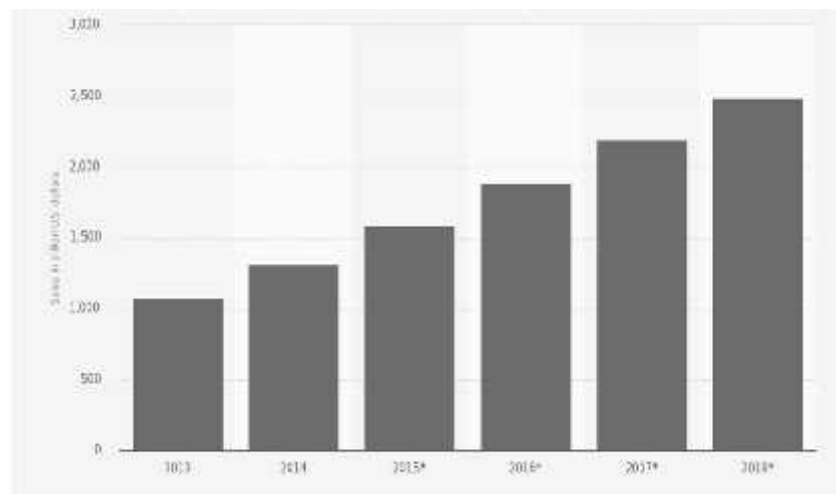


Figure 1. Retail e-commerce sales worldwide expected evolution (Statista, 2015a)

As a direct effect of the availability of information in the digital age, “consumer informedness” is highlighted by researchers (Piccinini et al., 2015): “Consumer informedness means that consumers are well informed about products or services available on the market, with precise prices and attributes, which influences their willingness to pay and changes their purchasing decisions. (...) As consumers become more informed, they develop a certain digital competence. This refers to the ability that consumers develop through Internet and mobile technologies to solve many purchase and service issues online, without the assistance of a company’s intermediary when buying goods and checking the status of their order online” (*ibid.*, pp.1641-1642). Even more: information is commoditized (Shapiro & Varian, 2013), which means that it is sold as another useful merchandise and / or directly shared with almost no cost at all (Small & Sage, 2006). Never before information has been so affordable and visual: each month more than 1 billion people access freely YouTube (Socialbakers, 2015) and 400 million people use Instagram (Statista, 2015b), the photo and video sharing social networking service that enables users to take their own pictures and film their own videos, edit them with a selection of digital filters and publish them online.

Millions of consumers worldwide make already the transition to the smart products: the connected U.S. homes already have connected smoke / CO detectors (7,1%), connected thermostats (5,3%), remote videos (4,2%), connected locks (3,5%), but 40% of owners don’t know the brand of their device, as they buy it specially from service providers or retail outlets (McKinsey, 2015a) – which puts more pressure on smart products’ brand managers in order to create awareness for their brands.

Two forces reshaping the economic landscape are active: technology itself and the constantly increasing sophistication of consumers. Therefore, companies must find new ways to remain on market with classical products and services or to gain market share with new smart products – and that, in a context that valorizes visual aspects, response fastness and generic agility.

Marketing in the digital economy: the shift from “classical” online marketing to the Millennials “approved” marketing

Digital marketing, as the digital economy itself, is not a new concept either. For instance, researchers are discussing even since 1998 on the necessity to develop an integrated perspective on leveraging interactive media for marketing, which they refer to as “digital marketing” (Parsons et al., 1998) or “online marketing”. The 2000s were marked by a continuously increasing attention paid to evolving marketing techniques using digital instruments: e-mail, social media, blogging, automatic customer relationship marketing and, more recently, mobile marketing. For a time, digital marketing tended to be understood as a new form of advertising, therefore the amount of discussions on Internet as the new destination for advertising budgets was – and continues to be - considerable (Meeker, 2015).

Still, technology and consumers behavior changed so fast that digital marketing had to change also from a new form of BTL communication to a new form of understanding strategic marketing: “To be successful, marketers can’t simply add a few digital activities to their traditional plans (as they still do now – *author’s note*). Instead, they must fundamentally re-craft their approach to marketing around the features of new media and digital marketing.” (Wertheim & Fenwick, 2011). This is even more important when speaking of the new category of consumers: the digital natives, also called the Millennials or the Generation Y. “Marketers are rethinking their strategies targeted at Millennials. The brands that were popular with their parents are being rejected by this generation. Having grown up in an even more media-saturated, brand-conscious world than their parents, they respond to ads differently.” (Smith, 2011, p.493).

The digital natives are people born after 1980 / 1981 and they were dramatically influenced by the Internet evolution. Scholars show that Millennials tend to be investigative (Tapscott, 1998), in need to control their environment and to have more time for themselves than for work (Alsich, 2000). This can explain why there are digital natives who prefer to create their own content through blogs, vlogs etc., rather than to consume the existing one. For these new consumers, adapted marketing strategies use coupons, graphics, bright colors, interactivity, and personalization (Smith, 2011, p.496).

The Millennials are anxious and interested to make good impression around them, but they also have big expectations from the other people, from companies and from brands. Real digital omnivores, they spend 71% of their time for media consumption, mainly digital media and structure the collected information in a non-linear way, watching multiple screens at the same time. These characteristics have a direct influence on their buying habits, as they expected especially customized products and services (Mitan, 2014).

The digital natives are the first (but not the only) consumers empowered by the tremendous development of web 2.0, especially by social media, being engaged often in negative reactions especially towards brands (Svulescu, 2014). This fact puts pressure on brands, as they become vulnerable, maybe for the first time in history – a situation classically considered as unacceptable in the classic marketing practice, where brands are not supposed to have weaknesses in front of their audiences (Xia, 2013).

Digitalization and over-exposure to media have led to audiences’ fragmentation and to an expressed necessity of users’ implication. As shown above, Millennials want to be in control, to express their opinions, to be taken into consideration and considered as active participants in communication and not as simple receptors. Therefore, the marketing practice in the digital economy adds a new challenge: brand management evolving paradigm, from simple expression of desired positioning, to co-creation,

interactional focus and multiple layered interactions led by consumers (Quinton, 2013). This means that all cultural changes induced by technology should be considered and that marketers reshape their strategies and techniques putting digital in the center of their activity, not considering it as a new communication channel with selected consumers.

Is this a current practice already or is it more a desirable attitude discussed in the academic environment? The latest European statistics show a complex attitude of enterprises towards digitalization (see figure 2): they still understand digital tools more like a window to show their best to the world, i.e. to consumers (almost all European enterprises have a website). Still, less than half of the European enterprises seem to be prepared to digital personalized interaction with their customers, as there is only a minority of them using CRM systems: 28% at European level (see figure 2). Paradoxically, using CRM is a one of the instruments that enterprises can adopt in order to manage a direct, personalized communication with their customers – one of the aspects that characterize the digital economy at such a level that end users participate actively and continuously to the products' creation (Tapscott & Williams, 2010, p.218).

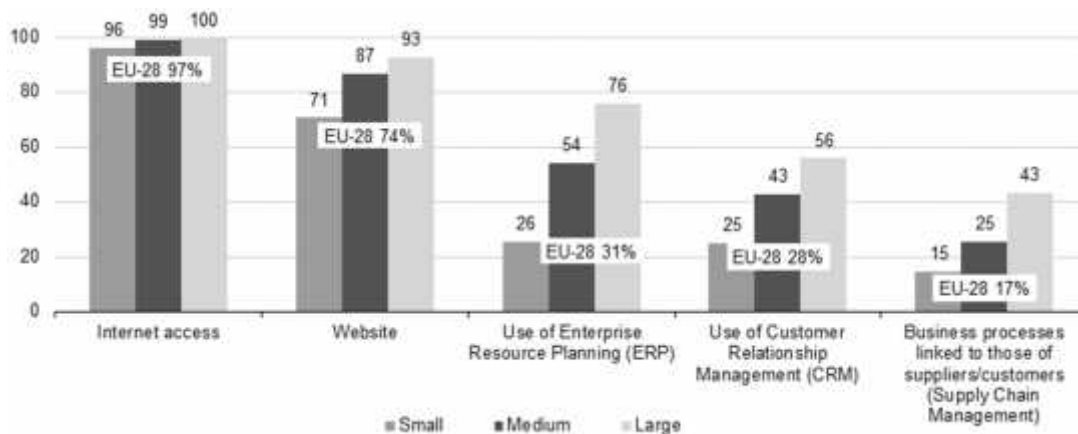


Figure 2. Enterprises adopting technologies for e-business, by size class, EU-28, 2014 (% of enterprises) (Eurostat, 2014)

Should enterprises rethink their ways to do marketing and to manage their brands? The answer is undoubtedly “yes”.

Consumers live today technologically and integrate technology in their everyday life, but this doesn't mean a linearity of the purchasing process. Paradoxically, there are studies showing that even if Millennials are more active at integrating technologies into their daily lives for marketing purposes (by using mobile devices and traditional internet to connect to retailers or brands and to engage in social networking), they “do not use the Internet to purchase products as much as supposed” (Moore, 2012, p.441). As a matter of fact, the first thing that marketers should understand is the trend of the Millennials buying not as much online, despite their appetite for gathering information on the go, including promotional information (*ibid.*, p.442). Even if the digital natives are eager to download and use apps for everyday use, these apps are useful marketing tools for companies only if the Millennials appreciate them as a source of plus value – which can be a difficult task for marketers when trying to address the “dubious Millennial consumer” (*idem*).

Useful, on the go, colorful, clear, attractive, but not too persistent: some studies show that not only that Millennials prefer digital marketing techniques meeting these requirements, but also that the contact frequency between the brand and the consumer, especially through mobile, should be carefully calculated, in order not to irritate the Millennial consumers with too much contact or exaggerate promotional promises (Henrie & Taylor, 2009). Paradoxically, these consumers are attracted to experience and personalization and even if they don't want to be annoyed by too much brand communication, they are less patient then ever in relation with brands (Weber & Prodromou, 2015).

The right mix between credible brand content and appropriate digital advertising frequency seems to be the actual challenge for marketers when addressing the Millennials. Still, this is far to be the only one challenge that marketers face in the digital age: the consumer journey itself is changing and all marketing processes with it.

Further discussions: towards a new business philosophy

The digital revolution shapes a new consumer journey with the rise of the mobile and smart devices: the companies having automation capabilities in gathering and using data from the mobile devices, as well as proactive personalization strategies for consumers, and fast contextual interaction during consumers' use, are more likely to transform the customer journey in a competitive advantage (McKinsey, 2015b). The companies' answer to the increased customer empowerment over the past decade has been a constant race to develop big data and analytics capabilities, in order to be sure that they remain proactive and thus, retain their customers (Edelman and Singer, 2015). This shifts the focus from the brand to the consumer journey, putting pressure on the alignment of gathered data, consumers' digital (especially mobile) communication, products and / or services buying moments and monitored usages.

In the digital age, the product or the brand manager makes place to a new organisational position: the one of the journey product manager (*idem*), in charge with the management of the journey design (the look and feel strategy of the customer journey), the development (of the apps, websites and automatic moments), the analytics (by tracking customers in real time situations of purchasing and usage), the operations (all back-end support for each stage of the journey), and marketing (ensuring that the brand standards are embedded throughout the journey, in all aspects of targeting and personalization). "To build successful journeys, these managers rely on "scrum teams" of specialists from across IT, analytics, operations, marketing, and other functions. The teams are execution-oriented, fast, and agile, constantly testing and iterating improvements." (*idem*).

Consumers prefer today that brands would interact with them using the digital medium as human beings (Van Noort et al., 2014), which puts even more pressure on automation and content creation: automation for back-end processes and content for dialogue situations. And this pressure translates into increased costs: companies must invest in technology, in maintenance and in ensuring data security. It is a topic to be developed, as increased costs led to lower margins or to increased prices.

The future of marketing is more than ever challenged to integrate all aspects influencing the customer experience, an obvious fact in an era when everything is (or will soon be) interconnected. Further research should evaluate enterprises' digital maturity and preparation for integrated customer journeys in all their strategies and tactics, as well as the impact of the costs' transition to a business philosophy of the digital consumer journey as a competitive advantage.

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