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CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM INFLUENCE IN CHOOSING A HOTEL IN DOMESTIC TOURISM – EVIDENCE FROM ROMANIA AND CROATIA

ABSTRACT

Purpose: The role of consumer ethnocentrism (CE) in choosing a hotel is still not well explored. This research aims to identify if there is a relationship between CE and the preference of Romanian/Croatian respondents for a hotel belonging to a domestic chain vs. international (foreign) chain.

Methodology: Exploratory and descriptive research was performed. The data were collected thorough an online survey, aiming for a quota sample stratified by age and gender. The resulting sample comprises 714 and 832 valid questionnaires in Romania and in Croatia, respectively. Factor analysis, nonparametric correlation analysis, and hypothesis testing were performed.

Results: “Defensive patriotism” and “protectionism” were identified as CE factors. CE is moderately expressed for Croatian and Romanian respondents. Respondents from two countries with higher CE factors prefer a national rather than an international hotel. Customers who grew up in the communist era have higher ethnocentrism scores on defensive patriotism and protectionism and prefer national hotels more than those formed in the post-communist period.

Conclusion: The results of this research relate to the previously revealed regularity that ethnocentric consumers prefer buying national rather than foreign goods and services. The same is now confirmed for respondents’ hotel preferences when engaging in domestic tourism, contributing to closing a research gap. However, the results indicate that polycentric consumers might evaluate hotels by other criteria and not necessarily by their association with an international chain. In addition, in the case of re-checking post-COVID-19 results, the results presented here can serve as a pre-COVID-19 baseline.

Keywords: Consumer ethnocentrism, CETSCALE, defensive patriotism, protectionism, consumer preference, hotel chain

1. Introduction

When a company in general, and an international hotel chain in particular, wants to penetrate a new international market, it is very important to know the behavior of the customers in order to understand their motivations, attitudes and values when buying these services (Jiménez-Guerrero et al., 2014; Niininen et al., 2006). How and why consumers choose to stay in a hotel are some questions that marketers need to answer (Han & Kim, 2010).

Nowadays, competition between hotels has intensified to attract new guests and keep customers loyal. Hotel groups have changed their strategy by consolidating with other brands. This enables them to increase their global presence, get a place in new geographical locations and penetrate deeper into existing high revenue generating markets (Hawkey, 2021). International hotel chains have approximately 40% of the market worldwide and aim to increase this figure to 50% by 2030 (Fleșeriu, 2014). In Europe, there is still a significant proportion of privately-run hotels and low brand penetration, indicating a considerable potential for international hotel chains to gain market share (Hawkey, 2021).

Emerging consumer ethnocentric tendencies constitute a significant concern for companies operating in developed countries. Shimp and Sharma (1987) developed the concept primarily as a consumer tendency to prefer 'made in the country' products vs. those 'made in a foreign country.' It has been thirty years since Herche (1992) showed that consumer ethnocentrism (CE) might drive consumer choices. Although much attention has been given to the research on the CE effect on product purchases, services are less frequently examined. Ethnocentrism received little attention in tourism (Kock et al., 2019; Farah & Mehdi, 2021). Moreover, research on CE effects on hotel choice is even more scarce (Farah & Mehdi, 2021).

When choosing a destination country, tourists show a level of homophily, which primarily stems from opportunity (geographical proximity, low cost, and less time consumption) and similarities (socioeconomic factors, common culture, language) (Kostelić & Turk, 2021), where the latter may arise from home country bias and ethnocentrism (Kock et al., 2019).

Through socialization routines, ethnocentrism and CE are learned early in life (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). Their antecedents

comprise socio-psychological, political, economic, and demographic factors (Shankarmahesh, 2006). CE is related not only to the country of origin but also to the country of residence, and its level will depend on different interactions and influences occurring in an ethnic group or a country (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). Buy local campaigns are conducted in many countries over the world to defend national identities, protect local jobs, restrain imports, and improve trade balances (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). In the tourism and hotel industry, that can be translated into domestic and international hotel chains' intentions to capture the interest of domestic tourists and the loyalty of tourists from the same country of origin as an international chain. While encouraging CE, such actions are not popular only in developed but also in developing countries. While developing countries strive to achieve economic development, they become increasingly attractive to foreign companies.

Weaver et al. (2023) emphasize a geopolitical aspect of tourism, where countries and regions must balance globalization and nationalism, domestic and international tourism, and migration and immigration trends. International mass tourism and immigration tend to wake residents' national and ethnocentric attitudes. These concepts adversely affect companies' export activities, attracting marketers' interest (Farah & Mehdi, 2021).

Global positioning, market entry decisions, and the materialization of country-of-origin effects can be affected by CE (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015), so underlying CE tendencies may affect the survival of international chains in a foreign country.

The sociological, economic, and managerial implications reveal the importance of learning whether the effects of CE exist in the hotel industry. Currently, it requires a deeper understanding of the role of CE in choosing accommodation in a hotel. The findings on CE could help explain the success rate of international chains, but it can also help companies make managerial decisions.

In order to contribute to the understanding of the role of CE in choosing a hotel, this research focuses on two comparable developing countries (Croatia and Romania), with the aim of finding out about the level of present CE. Furthermore, the goal is to examine the relationship between CE, the importance of a hotel belonging to an international (foreign) chain, and a consumer preference for booking

a room in a hotel belonging to a national (domestic) or an international (foreign) chain. As CE relates to the environment where a person grows up, the goal is to examine if a difference exists between the people who grew up in different regimes (i.e., a socialist regime versus an open economy).

2. Theoretical and conceptual background

The concept of CE was introduced by Shimp and Sharma (1987, p. 280). It was defined as "... the belief held by American consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign made products. From the perspective of ethnocentric consumers, purchasing imported products is wrong because, in their minds, it hurts the domestic economy, causes loss of jobs, and is plainly unpatriotic..." Sharma et al. (1995) assume that CE influences consumer choice, but they also assume that social-psychological factors (such as collectivism, patriotism, cultural openness, and cosmopolitanism), demographic variables (i.e. age, gender, education, income) and moderating factors (i.e. perceived product necessity, economical threat) also impact consumer choices and preferences. CE was characterized as a "three-folded phenomenon" (Sharma et al., 1995):

- consumers' concern and love for their own country but also the fear of losing control over the country's economic interests and consequently harming themselves and their country,
- lack of intention to buy foreign products for economic and moral reasons,
- the overall level of CE is considered as the sum of individual tendencies.

CE can be internalized through socialization, depending on the transferred cultural values present in a community, region, or country. According to Piaget's theory, consumer behavior begins at birth and has four stages of development (Piaget, 1947): the sensorimotor period of development (between birth and age of 2), the preoperational period (ages 2-7), the concrete operational period (ages 7-11) and the formal operational period (age 11 and older). Although Piaget does not emphasize the environmental factors, they must not be ignored. Until the age of 7, children are less influenced by external factors, because they see the world from their point of view, are egocentric and think that everyone has

the same view of the world as they do (Šramová, 2017). After the age of seven, children become more susceptible to external factors. At the time, children observe, learn, and internalize communal values and attitudes. In that stage, children begin to develop their cognitive ability for conceptual complexity and logical thinking, so they can (re)think the mental representations created at an earlier stage. Moreover, the concrete operational period is a developmental stage characterized by children's ability to group items by similar properties (or to create a series of items by specific properties). It means that they become aware of the similarities and differences as a basis for grouping and classification, which is also a requirement for any form of ethnocentrism.

Different levels of ethnocentrism can arise from different socialization experiences (Ryan et al., 2007). In the context of two countries of interest, both of which were under the communist regime until 1989 (1990) and in open economies after that period, it can be assumed that there could exist a difference in internalized values and attitudes between people who reached the concrete operational stage in the first regime and those who reached the same developmental stage in the other regime. More precisely, we assume that there is a difference in CE between the people who reached the age of seven in the communist regime and those who reached that age in the open economy regime. So, we can state the following hypothesis:

H1: People that reached the operational stage in the communist regime are more ethnocentric than those from the open economy.

The area of CE in a purchase choice of goods has been thoroughly investigated. Although it does not allow for a direct comparison, it provides a substantial theoretical background from which we draw assumptions about tourist choices and behavior.

Studies show that the ethnocentric attitude is not seen just as an obligation to buy locally made products, but also as a determinant of product perceptions (Pecotich & Rosenthal, 2001; Smaiziene & Vaitkiene, 2013). When having a high level of consumer ethnocentrism, people do not just give higher ratings to domestic products (Acharya & Elliott, 2003; Carpenter et al., 2013), but they are also willing to pay higher prices for them (Drozdenco & Jensen, 2009). However, Siemieniako et al. (2011) argued that a preference for locally produced goods

does not necessitate rejection of imported goods. Still, Siamagka and Balabanis (2015) show that the more ethnocentric the consumers in the US and the UK are, the greater their preference for domestic brands and reluctance to buy foreign products. A study of the Romanian consumer ethnocentric tendencies and the countries towards which they feel animosity (Russia, Hungary, and South Korea) revealed that the country of origin significantly impacted product evaluation, with a notable difference between domestic and foreign products (Licsandru et al., 2013). Another research determined that the consumer ethnocentric tendency related positively to the intention to purchase local products and negatively to products from former Yugoslavia and the European Union (Renko et al., 2012). However, ethnocentric tendencies also depend on age, education level, income level, religiosity, and life satisfaction (Matić, 2013). Stoenescu & Căpățină (2015) find that origin can affect the identity and the perception of a brand among Romanian consumers because consumers still tend to associate them with their country of origin. They see a possibility for competitive advantage in the image of the country of a brand projected to the public.

Consumers that are not ethnocentric, also called polycentric consumers, evaluate products based on other criteria such as quality, performance, and price (Bawa, 2004), or possibly even see them more favorably because they are foreign (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Chang & Cheng, 2011). On the other hand, highly ethnocentric consumers tend to perceive imported products as having lower quality and decreased equity (Shankarmahesh, 2006; Saffu et al., 2010). This attitude can lead to an overestimation of domestic products or an underestimation of foreign ones (Sharma et al., 1995; Cumberland et al., 2010). Highly ethnocentric consumers pay more attention to aspects such as the country-of-origin, while non-ethnocentric consumers pay more attention to other aspects (Cumberland et al., 2010), not feeling at the same time any moral obligation to purchase domestic products (Aryal et al., 2009; Saffu et al., 2010).

Ethnocentrism involves a feeling of superiority over other groups, but it also stimulates a strong social identity, increases self-esteem, group loyalty, and group survival, and reduces inter-group problems (Platenkamp, 2014). According to the same author, it occurred as a crucial concept in tourism studies when examining the Western feeling of superiority

in the postcolonial context. However, the author argues that diverse tourism networks, along with the exchange of cultural elements globally, made way for cosmopolitanism as an opposite construct of ethnocentrism. That approach might explain the lack of continuing research on ethnocentrism in tourism.

Only a few studies analyzing CE tendencies in hotels and tourism-related choices have been identified in the literature review. Elida et al. (2016) found CE relevant to Indonesian people's choices of foreign hotel brands. Kvasina et al. (2018) found unusual results for respondents in southern Croatia: people traveling abroad and having a more expressed interest in traveling abroad have a higher level of CE than those who travel less and have a lower desire to travel abroad. Another unusual finding was that younger people have more pronounced tendencies of CE than older people. Li and Xie (2021) found that in the hospitality industry, the effect of country-related affect on trust (which affects purchase intention) is weaker for consumers with a high level of consumer ethnocentrism. Cassia and Magno (2022) examine the effects of ethnocentrism on international hospitality brands (the case of Starbucks) and find a positive relationship between CE and brand in a domestic country. However, they also find that in the foreign market, ethnocentrism only indirectly affects the brand image.

Oh et al. (2020) investigate determinants of hotel selection in the global travel context and reveal that ethnocentrism has a significant direct relationship with a brand attitude but only an indirect relationship with purchase likelihood. They conclude that ethnocentrism seems to be completely absorbed in a brand attitude. The same authors notice the lack of research on the topic, making a generalized approach used in this industry a challenge.

Kock et al. (2019) also notice the lack of research on the topic and claim that ethnocentrism received little attention in the tourism context, but it has important implications for tourism behavior. They found that tourism ethnocentrism affects tourists' willingness to participate in domestic tourism, their recommendation of domestic tourism, and local support for the growth of domestic tourism. Kock et al. (2020) raise awareness of the possible strengthening of ethnocentrism trends as they reveal a statistically significant relationship between perceived COVID-19 infectability and tourism ethnocentrism. Along with Weaver et al.'s (2023)

warning about the need for a balance between globalization and nationalism, and domestic and international tourism, where the lack of balance might cause the awakening of national and ethnocentric attitudes of residents, these findings additionally motivate further investigation of CE in tourism.

Assuming that similar regularities can occur for choosing a hotel, the following hypotheses are stated:

H2: There is a statistically significant association between CE scores and preference for a hotel from a national chain.

H3: There is a statistically significant negative association between the CE score and the importance of a hotel from an international chain.

3. Methodology

3.1 Measuring consumer ethnocentrism

In order to analyze CE, Shimp and Sharma developed a 17-item scale named the CETSCALE (Consumer Ethnocentrism Tendencies Scale). The original scale was created to test the tendencies related to tangible products (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). De Ruyter et al. (1998) wanted to create an extension of the model that can be used in the service sector. They defined CE tendencies in terms of service products as “*the belief held by consumers about the appropriateness of making use of services provided by foreign companies*” (de Ruyter et al., 1998, p. 187).

In the last 20 years, researchers have used the CETSCALE, adapting the number of items based on what they wanted to analyze. The scale was used not only in developed countries (e.g. the U.S., Germany, France, Japan, etc.) but also in emerging ones (e.g. China, Russia, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, etc.) (Jiménez-Guerrero et al., 2014). Studies have shown that in developed countries consumers prefer domestic over foreign products, while in the emerging countries the reverse is true (Hauge, 2012).

Even if different researchers consider the scale reliable (Nadiri & Tümer, 2010), it has some limitations. The scale measures a degree to which the consumers are ethnocentric and not if they are ethnocentric or not (Bawa, 2004). Furthermore, it does not allow the ranking of consumers based on their ethnocentrism level (Ganideh & Tae, 2012).

Another consideration is a dispute between the researchers regarding the CETSCALE dimension-

ality. A unidimensional scale implies that a single latent construct is located at the base of a set of items (Hattie, 1985). While it is true that in practice no measurement instrument can be perfectly unidimensional (Wright & Linacre, 1989), a measurement instrument must be capable of representing a single dominant factor with its scores. This can be done by obtaining a single latent attribute explaining as much as possible of the variance in individual responses to the items comprising that instrument (Embretson & Reise, 2000). Different research studies show that the scales developed in different countries have two, three or even four dimensions (Jiménez-Guerrero et al., 2014). Most frequently, there are two dimensions named “hard ethnocentrism” and “soft ethnocentrism” or “defensive patriotism” and “protectionism” (Chrysochoidis et al., 2007; Ramayah et al., 2011; Hsu & Nien, 2008). The first component indicates the discouragement of buying foreign products. The second component involves the encouragement to buy domestic products.

Although the scale was used a lot, especially for identifying the level of ethnocentrism in relationship with products, a limited number of studies analyze consumer ethnocentric tendencies in the hospitality industry, and even less in the hotel industry. That limits the comparison of the obtained results.

The CET scale has been utilized in research on consumer behavior in Romania and Croatia. These two countries were chosen because both are developing European countries with similar political and socio-economic influences throughout history. Both were under the communist regime until 1989 (1990) and have had an open economy afterwards. They are part of the EU and border with the Schengen area, which makes them an intermediate migration station. While the tourism sector is an economic driver in Croatia with a share of 16.3% of GDP in 2019, the Romanian tourism sector made 5.3% of GDP in the same year (Statista, 2022a; 2022b). In 2017, there were 721 hotels in Croatia (Ministry of Tourism, Republic of Croatia, 2018). The Croatian sector is dominated by domestic rather than international chains. In 2017, only 59 (8% of the total number of hotels) out of 186 hotels belonging to a chain belonged to an international chain. In 2018, the total number of hotels increased to 754 (Ministry of Tourism, Republic of Croatia, 2018), but those belonging to international chains decreased to 45 accommodation units (Horwath HTL, 2018; Horwath HTL, 2019). In Romania, in 2017, 51 out

of a total of 1,688 hotels were part of international chains, representing just 3.03% of the national market (Cushman & Wakefield Echinov, 2018).

While other studies use this scale in both countries, their focus is not on tourism or the hotel industry but on products and retail, often with the inclusion of other variables far beyond the scope of this research. Even though different scales have been developed to measure ethnocentrism, the CETSCALE is the most frequently used one. To investigate a relatively unexplored topic, we decided to use a well-established scale.

3.2 *The questionnaire used in the study*

This research aims to find out the current level of CE in the two examined countries. Furthermore, the goal is to examine the relationship between CE, the importance of a hotel belonging to an international (foreign) chain, and a consumer preference for booking a room in a hotel belonging to a national or international (foreign) chain. As CE relates to the environment where a person grows up, the goal is to examine if there is a difference between the people who grew up in different regimes (i.e., a socialist regime versus an open economy).

The first part of the questionnaire contains general questions regarding a consumer preference for booking a room at a hotel belonging to a domestic (ownership of the same country of origin) or international (foreign ownership) chain. This is in line with preferences for 'made in the country' products vs. those 'made in a foreign country' (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). An international hotel chain is understood as a hotel chain with foreign ownership, and the domestic hotel chain has domestic ownership. An additional clarification was that the statement refers exclusively to accommodation within the country (i.e. Croatia for Croatian respondents and Romania for Romanian respondents). The item is measured on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 denotes a strict preference for a hotel belonging to an international chain, and 7 denotes a strict preference for a hotel belonging to a domestic chain. The next question was about the importance of a hotel belonging to an international chain. This question should make it possible to conclude whether polycentric consumers find international chains more favorable just because they are foreign (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Chang & Cheng, 2011). The respondents were informed that this statement also refers exclusively to accommodation within the country. The answers

were recorded on a seven-point Likert-type scale (from 1 denoting 'not important at all' to seven denoting 'completely important').

The second part contains the original CETSCALE developed by Shimp and Sharma (1987) with all 17 items translated and adapted to the Romanian and Croatian population. The last part includes demographic information such as gender, age, monthly income, education and marital status. The draft questionnaire was pretested and based on the comments and suggestions provided by the respondents, it was adapted in terms of language and content.

3.3 *Data collection*

The questionnaire was handed out to domicile residents in both countries in June 2018 and March 2019. The sampling method was a quota sample stratified by age group and gender. The age was stratified into the following groups: born in 1964 or before, born between 1965 and 1980, born between 1981 and 1994, and born after 1995. The targeted respondents were Croatian and Romanian adults (18 years or older). The minimum required sample size should comprise at least 385 responses from Croatia and as many from Romania, with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error (Calculator.net, 2022).

3.4 *Data analysis*

Descriptive statistics were calculated to get insight into the sample, distribution of preference between national and international hotels, and distribution of the importance of a hotel belonging to an international chain. The CETSCALE items were analyzed to confirm scale reliability and validity. The reliability was checked using Cronbach's alpha, an appropriate internal reliability measure for Likert-type scales (Taherdoost, 2016). KMO measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity were used to check sample adequacy. The correlation matrix determinant was used to examine possible multicollinearity issues. Principal component analysis was conducted to examine the uni/multidimensionality of the scale. Based on the identified components, means and standard deviations per item and component were calculated for both the Croatian and the Romanian respondents, enabling insight into the CE level in both samples.

In order to examine whether people with a higher level of CE prefer a hotel belonging to a national

chain over a hotel belonging to an international chain, a nonparametric correlation coefficient was calculated and tested for significance.

A nonparametric correlation coefficient was also calculated to check if polycentric consumers find a hotel's association with an international chain more important (the assumed negative correlation between CE and the importance of a hotel belonging to an international chain).

Finally, an independent t-test was applied to examine the difference in CE between the people who reached the age of seven in the communist regime and those who reached that age in an open economy.

4. Results and discussions

A sample of 714 valid responses from Romania and 832 from Croatia was obtained. The majority of Romanian respondents belong to Cluj county (in the west of the country), and the majority of Croatian respondents belong to the region of Istria (in the west of the country). Both regions are developed from a touristic standpoint. While the sample is somewhat large, it is a convenience sample given the method of collection. A non-probabilistic sample of respondents may cause selection bias, which is a limitation in research. The demographic structure of the respondents is presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Demographic variables

Variable	Romania		Croatia	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Age				
18-23 years old	204	28.57%	229	27.5%
24-37 years old	217	30.39%	216	26%
38-53 years old	164	22.97%	193	23.2%
54-77 years old	129	18.07%	181	21.8%
over 77 years old	-	-	13	1.6%
Gender				
Female	398	55.74%	436	52.4%
Male	316	44.26%	396	47.6%
Education				
Basic education	26	3.64%	50	6%
High school	198	27.73%	473	56.9%
Post-secondary	45	6.30%	148	17.8%
University studies	299	41.88%	124	14.8%
Postgraduate university studies	146	20.45%	38	4.6%
Income*				
<1,200 lei/ <1,800 kn	158	22.13%	188	22.6%
1,200-2,200 lei/ 1,800-3,400kn	189	26.47%	159	19.1%
2,200-3,200 lei/ 3,400-5,000 kn	155	21.71%	211	25.4%
3,200-4,200 lei/ 5,000-6,600 kn	96	13.45%	160	19.2%
>4,200 lei/ >6,600 kn	116	16.24%	114	13.7%
Marital status				
Single/not married	264	36.97%	295	35.5%
In a relationship/married without children	178	24.93%	169	20.3%
In a relationship/married with children	272	38.10%	368	44.2%

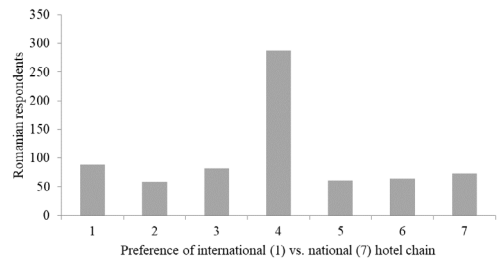
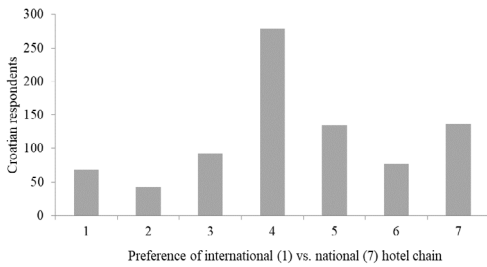
*1 euro = 4.74 lei, 1 euro = 7.39 kuna

Source: Authors

When asked what kind of hotel they prefer (international or national), the distribution differs between the countries. In Croatia, 41.9% and 24.5% of respondents prefer national and international hotels, respectively, while 33.5% prefer to be neutral.

In Romania, the distribution is quite symmetric, i.e. 27.7% prefer national hotels, while 32.2% prefer international ones. Most respondents (40%) do not prefer either national or international hotels (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Distribution of preferences for national (7) and international (1) hotels (Croatia on the left and Romania on the right)

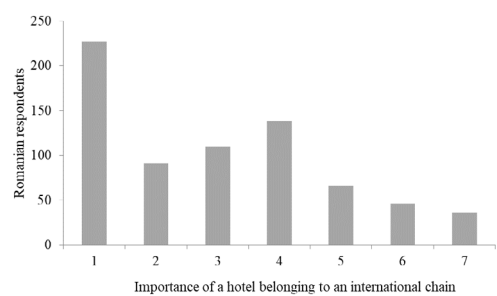
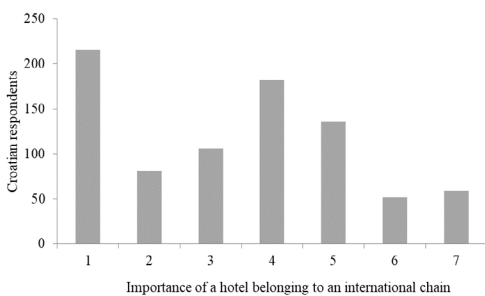


Source: Authors

The distribution of the importance of a hotel belonging to an international chain is asymmetric for both countries. For 35.7% of Croatian and 44.54% of Romanian respondents, it is not important whether a hotel belongs to an international chain. For only 13.34% of Croatian and 11.48% of Romanian respondents, it is entirely or very important

that a hotel belongs to an international chain. That a hotel belongs to an international chain (responses 3, 4, and 5) is neither important, nor unimportant, slightly important, or slightly unimportant for 50.96% of Croatian and 43.98% of Romanian respondents.

Figure 2 Distribution of the importance of a hotel belonging to an international chain (Croatia on the left and Romania on the right)



Source: Authors

4.1 CETSCALE analysis

Factor analysis was performed on 17 variables to find out to which extent the Romanian and the

Croatian population are ethnocentric. Each variable was coded as in Table 2.

Table 2 Coding of questionnaire items into variables

Variable	Item in the questionnaire
V01	1 Croatian/Romanian people should always buy Croatian/Romanian products instead of imported products
V02	2 Only those products that are unavailable in Croatia should be imported
V03	3 Buy Croatian-/Romanian-made products. Keep Croats/Romanians working
V04	4 Croatian/Romanian products, first, last and foremost
V05	5 The purchase of foreign products is non-Croatian/non-Romanian
V06	6 It is not right to purchase foreign products, because that leaves Croats/Romanians out of work
V07	7 A real Croat/Romanian should always buy Croatian-/Romanian-made products
V08	8 We should purchase products manufactured in Croatia instead of letting other countries get rich off us
V09	9 It is always best to purchase Croatian/Romanian products
V10	10 There should be very little trade or purchase of products from other countries, unless absolutely necessary
V11	11 Croats/Romanians should not buy foreign products, because this hurts Croats/Romanians and causes unemployment
V12	12 Curbs should be put on all imports
V13	13 It may cost me in the long run, but I prefer to support Croatian/Romanian products
V14	14 Foreigners should not be allowed to place their products on our market
V15	15 Foreign products should be taxed heavily to reduce their entry into Croatia/Romania
V16	16 We should buy from foreign countries only those products that we cannot get in our own country
V17	17 Croatian/Romanian consumers who purchase products made in other countries are responsible for their fellow Croatian/Romanians losing their jobs

Source: Authors

Cronbach’s alpha is 0.952 for the Croatian sample and 0.956 for the Romanian sample, indicating a high internal reliability of the scales. The extraction method that was used was principal component analysis with an Oblimin rotation. An oblique rotation method was chosen as the two factors are considered to be interrelated. The analysis was done by using the correlation matrix and it yielded two components. Because of some cross-loadings items, items 8 and 9 in the Romanian sample and item 13 in the Croatian sample were excluded from the analysis, and the analyses were rerun.

For the Romanian sample, KMO measure of sampling adequacy (0.953) and Bartlett’s test of sphericity ($\chi^2(105)=8055.439$, $p<0.001$) show that the sample is adequate for this type of analysis. Furthermore, the correlation matrix determinant is $t=0.0000113$, indicating that there is no problem with multicollinearity for this sample. All communalities (Table 3) have a value greater than 0.5, indicating that all retained variables are adequate for analysis.

The analysis yielded two components that explain 67.747% of the variance. Only these two components had eigenvalues greater than 1, and the third one was 0.751.

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Table 3 Pattern matrix and communalities for PCA on the Romanian sample

Variables	Component/factor		Communalities
	1	2	
V14	0.926	-0.136	0.731
V17	0.914	-0.095	0.745
V12	0.885	-0.158	0.648
V11	0.754	0.173	0.749
V06	0.739	0.094	0.635
V07	0.712	0.189	0.697
V15	0.686	0.100	0.560
V05	0.646	0.143	0.544
V10	0.598	0.330	0.694
V16	0.522	0.346	0.598
V03	-0.191	0.964	0.754
V01	0.149	0.759	0.728
V04	0.242	0.717	0.771
V02	0.176	0.703	0.667
V13	0.345	0.551	0.642

Extraction method: Principal component analysis.

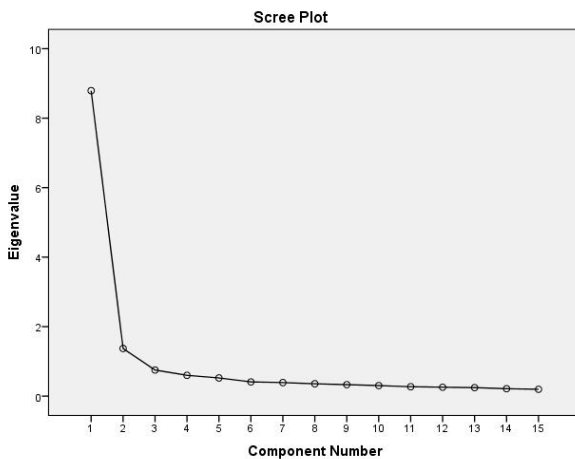
Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser normalization.

Coefficients that are greater than 0.3 and have been retained for that factor are in bold.

Source: Authors

The scree plot (Figure 3) also indicates the presence of two factors. All factor loadings are greater than 0.5 for their corresponding factor.

Figure 3 Scree plot for PCA of the Romanian sample



Source: Authors

For the Croatian sample, KMO measure of sampling adequacy (0.961) and Bartlett's test of sphericity ($\chi^2(120)=9236.202$, $p<0.001$) show that the sample is adequate for this type of analysis. Furthermore, the correlation matrix determinant is $t=0.00001371$, indicating that there is no problem with multicollinearity for this sample. All commu-

nalities (Table 4) have a value greater than 0.5, indicating that all retained variables are adequate for analysis.

The analysis yielded two components that explain 65.574% of the variance. Only these two components had eigenvalues greater than 1, and the third one was 0.800.

Table 4 Pattern matrix and communalities for PCA on the Croatian sample

Variables	Component/factor		Communalities
	1	2	
V17	0.914	-0.113	0.725
V14	0.888	-0.107	0.687
V11	0.882	-0.035	0.743
V06	0.789	0.045	0.668
V05	0.777	0.009	0.612
V07	0.685	0.141	0.604
V15	0.580	0.236	0.556
V12	0.549	0.276	0.557
V10	0.527	0.379	0.659
V03	-0.190	0.932	0.695
V02	-0.025	0.839	0.680
V01	0.040	0.814	0.702
V04	0.215	0.691	0.700
V08	0.314	0.585	0.659
V16	0.288	0.574	0.608
V09	0.368	0.524	0.638

Extraction method: Principal component analysis.

Rotation method: Oblimin with Kaiser normalization.

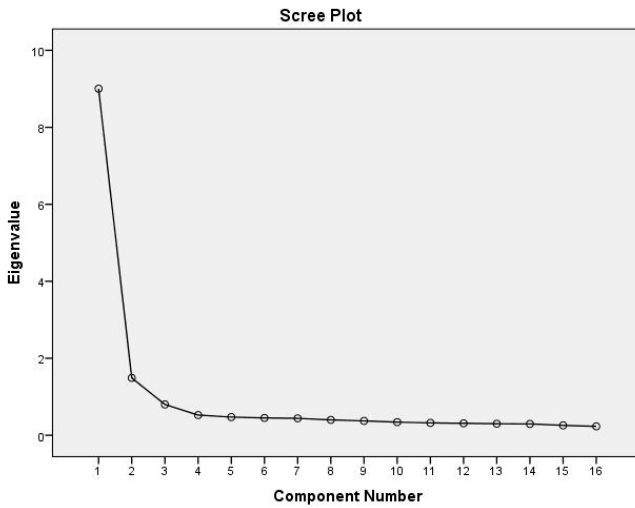
Coefficients that are greater than 0.3 and have been retained for that factor are in bold.

Source: Authors

The scree plot (Figure 4) also indicates the presence of two factors. All factor loadings are greater than

0.5 for their corresponding factor.

Figure 4 Scree plot for PCA of the Croatian sample



Source: Authors

For both countries, the CETSCALE identified two components of CE. The first component, named “hard ethnocentrism” (Chrysochoidis et al., 2007; Ramayah et al., 2011) or “defensive patriotism” (Hsu & Nien, 2008) in other articles, discourages the purchase of foreign products. The second component,

called “soft ethnocentrism” (Chrysochoidis et al., 2007; Ramayah et al., 2011) or “protectionism” (Hsu & Nien, 2008), encourages the purchase of domestic products. The authors chose to name the two components “defensive patriotism” and “protectionism”.

Table 5 Means and standard deviations per item and component for Croatian and Romanian respondents

Component	Items	Croatian respondents	Romanian respondents
Defensive patriotism	V05	3.749 ± 1.83	3.331 ± 1.87
	V07	3.87 ± 1.99	3.574 ± 1.99
	V15	4.145 ± 1.82	3.685 ± 1.92
	V12	4.24 ± 1.84	3.287 ± 1.93
	V10	4.256 ± 1.76	3.867 ± 1.92
	All items (a component)	4.052 ± 1.86	3.567 ± 1.97
Protectionism	V03	5.282 ± 1.63	5.579 ± 1.54
	V02	4.811 ± 1.87	4.795 ± 1.87
	V01	4.794 ± 1.75	4.564 ± 1.78
	V04	4.488 ± 1.81	4.354 ± 1.85
	V08	4.695 ± 1.78	4.413 ± 1.92
	V16	4.672 ± 1.82	4.48 ± 1.92
	V09	4.333 ± 1.86	4.223 ± 1.89
	All items (a component)	4.725 ± 1.81	4.624 ± 1.9

Source: Authors

The averages and standard deviations (Table 5) of responses recorded on a 7-point Likert-type scale indicate that Croatian and Romanian respondents score from 3.331 to 5.282 on CE items. That suggests moderate CE present for respondents in both countries. The mean values are higher for protectionism than for defensive patriotism. Although Croatian respondents have slightly higher scores on defensive patriotism and protectionism, it still lies within one standard deviation.

It can be concluded that CE is moderately expressed for Croatian and Romanian respondents. The following step is to check if CE factors relate to the preference of hotels regarding their affiliation to a domestic or an international chain.

The Spearman correlation was used to see if there is a statistically significant relationship between the two ethnocentrism factors and the preference for

either a national or an international hotel (H2). The same statistical instrument was used to test the two factors and how important it is for the respondent if the hotel is part of an international chain (H3).

4.2 Correlation analysis

The results of the analysis showed that for the Romanian sample there is a significant weak positive correlation between “defensive patriotism” and the preference for a national hotel ($r_s(712)=0.241$, $p<0.001$). It also shown that that there is a significant weak negative correlation between “protectionism” and how important it is for the respondent if the hotel is part of an international chain ($r_s(712)=-0.158$, $p<0.001$), and a significant weak positive correlation with the preference for a national hotel ($r_s(712)=0.250$, $p<0.001$). The results are summarized in Table 6.

Table 6 Correlation coefficients for the Romanian sample

Spearman correlation		Importance of the hotel belonging to an international chain	Preference for either national or international hotels
Defensive patriotism	Correlation coefficient	-0.071	0.241**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.057	<0.001
Protectionism	Correlation coefficient	-0.158**	0.250**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001	<0.001

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), N=714
 Source: Authors

The results of the analysis showed that for the Croatian sample there is a significant weak positive correlation between “defensive patriotism” and how important it is for the respondent if the hotel is part of an international chain ($r_s(830)=0.250$, $p<0.001$), and a significant weak positive correlation with the

preference for either a national or an international hotel ($r_s(830)=0.279$, $p<0.001$). It is also shown that there is a significant weak positive correlation between “protectionism” and the preference for either a national or an international hotel ($r_s(830)=0.339$, $p<0.001$). The results are summarized in Table 7.

Table 7 Correlation coefficients for the Croatian sample

Spearman correlation		Importance of the hotel belonging to an international chain	Preference for either national or international hotels
Defensive patriotism	Correlation coefficient	0.250**	0.279**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	<0.001	<0.001
Protectionism	Correlation coefficient	0.014	0.339**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.685	<0.001

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed), N=832
 Source: Authors

4.3 *The differences in consumer ethnocentrism components and hotel preferences between two age groups (H1)*

Because both countries were under the communist regime until 1989 (1990), the authors wanted to test if there is a significant difference in preference for an international or a national hotel between buyers who reached a specific operational stage in the communist period and those who reached that stage after the communist era. The respondents were divided into two groups (under the age

of seven in 1989 (1990) and over the age of seven). An independent sample t-test was performed. The results for both the Romanian and the Croatian sample show that buyers who grew up in the communist era had a significantly greater preference for national hotels than buyers who grew up after the communist era (Table 8). Furthermore, customers who grew up in the communist era had significantly higher ethnocentrism scores on defensive patriotism and protectionism than those who grew up in the post-communist era. This is true for the Romanian and the Croatian sample (Table 8).

Table 8 Independent sample t-test results for hotel preference and ethnocentrism

Variable	Era	Romania		Croatia	
		Mean/ St. dev.	Sig.	Mean/ St. dev.	Sig.
Hotel preference	Communist	M=4.19, SD=1.879	t(549.533)=3.385, p=0.001	M=4.64, SD=1.738	t(801.921)=4.069, p<0.001
	Post-communist	M=3.74, SD=1.554		M=4.16, SD=1.657	
Defensive patriotism	Communist	M=0.348, SD=1.030	t(574.340)=7.920, p<0.001	M=0.194, SD=0.951	t(830)=5.295, p<0.001
	Post-communist	M=-0.242, SD=0.904		M=-0.168, SD=1.012	
Protectionism	Communist	M=0.243, SD=0.914	t(669.452)=5.635, p<0.001	M=0.090, SD=0.958	t(830)=2.420, p=0.016
	Post-communist	M=-0.169, SD=1.023		M=-0.078, SD=1.030	

Source: Authors

5. **Discussion and conclusion**

Several conclusions may be drawn based on the study results. When asked what they prefer when choosing a hotel, more than 40% of Romanian respondents preferred to remain neutral. Slightly more of them (32.2%) prefer international hotels. In Croatia, almost 42% of the respondents prefer a national hotel, followed by those with a neutral opinion, and just 25% prefer an international one. For most Romanian and Croatian respondents, it is not entirely or very important if the hotel belongs to an international chain (over 80%).

The research confirmed the CETSCALE two-dimensionality (Hsu & Nien, 2008). For both Croatia and Romania, the research yielded two com-

ponents for CE, i.e. “defensive patriotism”, which discourages the purchase of foreign products, and “protectionism”, which encourages the purchase of domestic products. The mean values are higher for protectionism than for defensive patriotism. Croatian respondents have slightly higher average scores on defensive patriotism and protectionism than Romanian respondents, but they still lie within one standard deviation.

CE is moderately expressed for Croatian and Romanian respondents. This means that CE is not going towards a troublesome level for most respondents in both countries, indicating well-balanced globalization and nationalism trends in the observed countries (Weaver et al., 2023).

Even though there is a difference in preference for a hotel, respondents from both countries with higher defensive patriotism and protectionism scores prefer a hotel belonging to a national rather than an international (foreign) chain when engaging in domestic tourism (H2). Kock et al. (2019) showed that tourism ethnocentrism affects tourists' willingness to participate in domestic tourism, their recommendation for domestic tourism, and local support for the growth of domestic tourism. The results of this research also relate to the previously revealed regularity that ethnocentric consumers prefer buying national rather than foreign goods and services (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). The same is now confirmed for the hotel choice of the observed respondents in two countries, contributing to closing a research gap in that area. From the perspective of domestic tourism, this might explain the low shares of hotels associated with international chains in Romania and Croatia.

However, previous research (Hauge, 2012) showed that consumers prefer domestic products in developed countries and foreign products in developing countries. In relation to that finding, our research indicates that either Croatian and Romanian respondents show the same tendencies as respondents from developed countries or the previously established pattern of behaviour between respondents from developed and developing countries diminished. Many respondents from both countries support national hotels and accommodation options because they offer a unique and authentic experience of the local culture, history and hospitality.

Defensive patriotism is positively correlated with the importance of the hotel as part of an international chain in the Croatian sample (H3), while it is not statistically correlated with the importance in the Romanian sample. This might be due to factors like brand recognition as international hotels have a global reputation for quality and consistency or diversity of options because international chains offer a variety of properties, from budget-friendly to luxury resorts. Nevertheless, hotel choice depends on individual preferences and priorities.

In the case of Romania, respondents with a higher protectionism score consider hotels belonging to an international chain as less important than national ones. This is an expected behavior as people that show higher levels of protectionism encourage the purchase of domestic products. However, there was a lack of the expected negative correlation between

the components of CE and the importance of a hotel belonging to an international chain. No statistically significant relationship was observed between defensive patriotism and the above importance in the case of Romania, and between protectionism and the above importance in the case of Croatia. While the lack of CE (or, in this case, the lowest values on the scale) indicates a polycentric consumer that presumably perceives foreign hotels as more favorable (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Chang & Cheng, 2011), these findings do not unequivocally support such approach. Polycentric consumers might evaluate hotels by other criteria, such as quality, performance, and price (Bawa, 2004), but not necessarily by their association with an international chain.

Customers who reached a specific operational developmental stage in the communist era had higher ethnocentrism scores on defensive patriotism and protectionism than those who grew up in the post-communist era (H1). Buyers from both countries who reached that developmental stage before 1989 (1990) prefer national hotels more than those who reached that stage after 1989 (1990). This can be explained by the fact that young people and private sector workers are more individualistic because they have socialized for a shorter period during the communist regime (Mungiu-Pippidi, 2002). Consumers in post-communist societies have created a series of pragmatic interests, triggered by the new open market system (Jong et al., 2011). Even though not directly comparable, the results for Croatia differ from Kvasina et al.'s (2018) results, which found younger people to have more pronounced CE than older people. That is an indication of regional differences within the countries. This means that Stoianescu and Căpățină's (2015) suggestion for the creation of competitive advantage via the image of the country of a brand projected to the public should probably target the regional or even the local public image.

Market analysis should be done, regardless of whether it is an international hotel chain that wants to enter a new market or a local hotel that wants to differentiate itself. Companies should adapt their marketing strategies based not only on Hofstede's cultural distance (Fleșeriu, 2014), but also taking into account consumer ethnocentric tendencies. CE is relevant for global positioning, market entry decisions, and the materialization of country-of-origin effects (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). Moderate consumer ethnocentric tendencies for

respondents in both countries indicate balanced but present CE. National chains in both countries should increase their visibility and recognizability as national/domestic chains. That could contribute to awareness and loyalty of domestic tourists. Moreover, domestic chains should primarily target older customers, while international chains should seize the opportunity of lower ethnocentric tendencies of younger customers.

However, the data date back before the COVID-19 pandemic. Since a relationship between the perceived COVID-19 infectability and tourism ethnocentrism was shown by Kock et al. (2020), which indicates a potential change in consumer behavior due to the pandemic, the levels of CE should be re-checked in both countries. In such case, the results presented here can serve as a pre-COVID-19 baseline.

The geographical area and the sample limit the research conclusions. Further research should be

done on a larger sample in a more general geographical area. Another research limitation is the *ceteris paribus* assumption. Namely, when examining preferences between hotels belonging to national and international chains, other choice criteria (such as quality and price, Bawa, 2004) were disregarded. That opens new questions, for example, as to whether the relationship between consumer ethnocentrism and preference for domestic hotels holds for different levels of quality and price. In addition, other demographic characteristics (in addition to age) can play a role in hotel choice along with consumer ethnocentrism, which remains for further investigation. Some other factors that can be considered in future studies are education, gender, income, marital status, etc. Further research should strive to model ethnocentric consumer behavior in tourism and generalize revealed relationships, including demographic and socio-psychological factors.

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