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FOOD CONSERVATISM AND CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM OF YOUNG ADULTS: RELATIONS AND REFERENCES

Abstract. The purpose of this conceptual paper is to make an attempt to evaluate mutual relations and references between food conservatism and consumer ethnocentrism. This paper begins with a theoretical part supplemented by the authors' own research carried with a group of 451 people from March to May 2016. The first part of this paper defines both concepts based on general notions of conservatism and ethnocentrism. Next, an attempt is made to determine the potential similarities that could occur between food conservatism and consumer ethnocentrism. The concept of reconceptualization of consumer ethnocentrism, as presented in 2015 by N.-T. Siamagka and G. Balabanis, was used in order to achieve that. Two research hypotheses were advanced to conclude these considerations. The hypotheses were verified based on the results of the authors' own research carried out with students from three Polish universities to learn their attitudes towards food. A 10-grade version of T.A. Shimp's and S. Sharma's CETSCALE was used in the analysis of ethnocentric attitudes, while the conservative attitude was measured using the authors' 6-grade Food Conservatism Scale (FCS) which is based on CETSCALE and the Food Neophobia Scale and is consistent with the three-element ABC model (Attitude, Behavior, Cognition). In both cases, the respondents used the 5-point Likert scale to adopt a stance on the statements. As a result, both hypotheses were confirmed, which means that ethnocentric and conservative attitudes were found to coexist in some people. Also, the concepts discussed were concluded not to be synonymous, and the differences between them were highlighted.

Keywords: management, traditional foods, consumer ethnocentrism, food conservatism, Likert scale, Food Conservatism Scale

INTRODUCTION

The globalized market makes the participants face a number of new challenges. It offers a tempting diversity and a surprisingly extensive product range, and encourages people to try unknown things. On the one hand, it is a challenge, making a promise of fresh sensations to

the buyer. On the other hand, as it pushes the boundaries, it increases competition and makes the companies fight harder for customers. The inability to deal with such a complex reality can have negative consequences, not only for enterprises, but for entire communities and economies. Hence, the increasing globalization drives a growing interest in consumer attitudes which may

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(to a certain extent) limit the undesirable effects of the growing openness of markets. These attitudes include consumer ethnocentrism and food conservatism.

PURPOSE AND METHODS

This conceptual paper is an attempt to evaluate mutual relations and references between food conservatism and consumer ethnocentrism. The theoretical considerations were supported by the authors' own research carried out with Polish students. The questionnaire used in this research was a short version of Consumer Ethnocentrism Scale (CETSCALE) and the original Food Conservatism Scale (FCS) (Oleniuch and Cichocka, 2018).

THEORETICAL APPROACH

“Ethnocentrism” is a term coined by Ludwig Gumplowicz (Bizumic, 2014) and subsequently employed by William G. Sumner. Gumplowicz defined ethnocentrism as the reasons which make every group of people believe they have always been superior not only to contemporaneous peoples and nations but also to all peoples across the history (Hofman and Kovalev, 1989). “Consumer ethnocentrism” is a subtype proposed by T.A. Shimp and S. Sharma, who defined it in 1987 as the “consumers' inclination to distinguish between in-group (domestic) products and out-group (foreign) products and to avoid buying foreign products for nationalistic reasons” (Shimp and Sharma, 1987). In contrast to ethnocentrism itself, consumer ethnocentrism is economic in nature because it results from “the buyers' affection and concern for their own country and from the fear that they could contribute to a loss of economic control by purchasing imported goods” (Sharma et al., 1995). Purchasing goods from outside their own economy means “behaving immorally, harming it, contributing to the loss of local jobs and being unpatriotic” (Sharma et al., 1995). Therefore, T. A. Shimp and S. Sharma decided that ethnocentrism was likely to be related to patriotism, dogmatism and political and economic conservatism (Shimp and Sharma, 1987).

The relationship between conservatism and ethnocentrism was also noticed by other researchers, including M. N. Shankarmahesh (2006) and S. F. Al Ganideh et al. (2012). When considering conservatism alongside dogmatism and world-mindedness, they found it to be the strongest driver of ethnocentric attitudes.

The indirect influence of conservatism on consumer ethnocentrism was also addressed by P. Fernández-Ferri et al. (2018). While they do not refer to consumer attitudes towards traditional food as conservatism, they analyze its consequences. Note that although the last two or three decades have witnessed increasing interest in consumer attitudes towards traditional food¹, these attitudes continue to be unnamed and undefined.

Similarly to T. A. Shimp and S. Sharma who distinguished consumer ethnocentrism from ethnocentrism, an attempt can be made to define conservatism with a reference to food. So, if conservatism is defined as a “tendency to cherish traditions and social institutions that have survived the test of time, and to introduce changes only occasionally, reluctantly and gradually” (Sharma et al., 1995), food conservatism can be regarded as an attitude expressing an attachment to the current food tradition and the preference for traditional food. And since the conservative attitude “serves the defense of existing values” (Sikorski, 1999), food conservatism would result not only from a devotion to flavors people know, but above all from the desire to protect cultural values and the regional or national identity to which the culinary legacy belongs.

At the same time, as proposed by M. J. Rosenberg and C. I. Howland (1998), followed by I. Ajzen (1998),

¹ Research in this area was conducted by: L. Guerrero et al., *Perception of traditional food products in six European regions using free word association*, “Food Quality and Preference” 21/2 (2010), pp. 225–233; M. Jeżewska-Zychowicz, *Wybrane zachowania młodych konsumentów na rynku żywności tradycyjnej i ich uwarunkowania*, “Żywność. Nauka. Technologia. Jakość” 64/3 (2009), pp. 126–136; V. Lengard Almli et al., *General image and attribute perception of traditional food in six European countries*, “Food Quality and Preference” 22/1 (2011), pp. 129–138; A. Nikolić, M. Uzunović, N. Spaho, *Lifestyle pattern underlying organic and traditional food consumption*, “British Food Journal” 116/11 (2014), pp. 1748–1766; Z. Pieniak et al., *Association between traditional food consumption and motives for food choice in six European countries*, “Appetite” 53 (2009), pp. 101–108; Z. Pieniak, F. Perez-Cueto, W. Verbeke, *Nutritional status, self-identification as a traditional food consumer and motives for food choice in six European countries*, “British Food Journal” 115/9 (2013), pp. 1297–1312; E.D. Rudawska, *Customer loyalty toward traditional products – Polish market experience*, “British Food Journal” 116/11 (2014), pp. 1710–1725; F. Vanhonacker et al., *Profiling European traditional food consumers*, “British Food Journal” 112/8 (2010b), pp. 871–886; S. Żakowska-Biemans, *Żywność tradycyjna z perspektywy konsumentów*, “Żywność. Nauka, Technologia, Jakość” 82/3 (2012), pp. 5–18.

both consumer ethnocentrism and food conservatism should be regarded as attitudes in accordance with the three-element model. This kind of relation between the consumer and an object is expressed through his/her emotions (Attitude), behavior (Behavior) and knowledge or perception of the object (Cognition).

SOURCES OF CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM AND FOOD CONSERVATISM

Because of the definitional similarities of these concepts and the relation between them, as identified by the authors quoted above, the question must be asked whether they are similar or somehow overlapping.

In 2015, N.-T. Siamagka and G. Balabanis subjected ethnocentrism to reconceptualization. When using their model, it is worth considering whether the 5 dimensions they defined for consumer ethnocentrism could also be drivers of food conservatism (Siamagka and Balabanis, 2015).

Prosociality. As noted by many authors, ethnocentrism is associated with an individual's patriotic love and devotion to his/her country (Balabanis et al., 2001; Han, 1988; Lee et al., 2003, Sharma et al., 1995; Wall and Heslop, 1986). The individual gives priority to domestic products over others, even if of a lower quality and at a higher price. Therefore, prosociality is reflected in the commitment to the well-being of the buyer's community and in behaviors that benefit his/her group. According to R. Bénabou and J. Tirole (2004), prosociality derives from a combination of altruism, material self-interest, social image, and self-image. It is therefore a factor that protects the image of one's morality and "controls the good qualities of one's personality" (Caddick, 1982; de Cremer, 2001; Tropp and Brown, 2004).

Similarly, it can be assumed that a conservative consumer is also led by "pure altruism" and "impure altruism." It's just that in the case of the attitude of the conservative consumer the bases are not economic but cultural and, sometimes also, factors building the sense of self-identity. While the preference for domestic goods conceals the desire to support the economy, the preference for traditional food means the desire to protect the culinary legacy (which is part of the history and culture) of the territory concerned. If it is the traditional food of an individual's own community, national identity and patriotism can also be expected to play an important role.

Distorted cognition. As emphasized by W.G. Sumner (1906), the characteristic feature of ethnocentrism is that the group "nourished its own pride and vanity, boasts itself superior, exalts its divinities and looks with contempt on outsiders." Similarly, T.A. Shimp and S. Sharma (1987) concluded that "cognitive aspects, such as perceptions of domestic product superiority or foreign product inferiority, are prevalent dimensions." B. Applebaum (1996) states that "ethnocentric people tend to interpret the world from their ethnic group's point of view."

A similar bias of perception can be expected in food conservatism. However, this time, the comparison is not between groups of people, but between traditional and conventional food. As concluded by L. Guerrero et al. (2009), traditional food is perceived by consumers as being simple, natural and pure. According to M. García-Galán et al. (2010) and B. Ilbery and D. Maye (2006), this results in the attribution of extraordinary taste qualities to this kind of food.

Traditional food is often perceived as high-quality products (Chambers et al., 2007; Fandos and Flavián, 2006) manufactured in a sustainable manner (Åsebø et al., 2007; Risku-Norja, 2008). Similar conclusions came from research carried out by one the authors of this paper who found that Poles believed traditional food to be: expensive and rather fattening and hard to digest, but at the same time tasty, healthy, of high quality and hygienically produced; this might translate into high trust in this kind of food (Oleniuch, 2014).

Insecurity. An element of fundamental importance to consumer ethnocentrism is the heightened perception of threats from foreign products (Shimp and Sharma 1987). In general, consumers associate foreign products with trade deficits and threats to the domestic economy and workforce (Olsen et al., 1993).

When considering similar fears in the context of nutritional conservatism, the above could be perceived as threats to cultural identity and culture itself. European consumers define traditional food products as those "frequently consumed or associated with specific celebrations and/or seasons, passed on from generation to generation and made in a specific way according to culinary heritage" (Vanhonacker, 2010a). J. Jordana (2000) emphasizes that "traditional food is linked to its place of origin and is part of local tradition that ensures the continuation of tradition over time." The European Commission has clarified this period allowing the adoption

of the traditional nature of the product considering that it must be at least 25 years (European Commission (2006). Council Regulation (EC) No.509/2006).

Reflex action. Many ethnocentric tendencies are unconscious and triggered automatically (MacDonald, 2006). According to E. Jo and L. Berkowitz, people act automatically because they have been provided with biased information on national and foreign products throughout their lives. The perpetuation of biased information in the cognitive structure gives rise to reflex behaviors. R. H. Fazio and C. J. Williams (1986) also agree with this view. G.W. Allport (1954) emphasizes that ethnocentrism may be strongly established from an early age in children's memories, well before they come of an age capable of critically evaluating and questioning its appropriateness. In turn, C. H. Hansen and R. Hansen (1988) claim that prolonged exposure to ethnocentrically biased information, in childhood and beyond, results in the formation of ethnocentric attitudes (this is also true for adults). Private institutions and operators capitalize on this situation through promotional campaigns such as "buy locally."

There is an obvious similarity with the development of conservative attitudes towards food. Especially that in contrast to pro-ethnocentric information, which not every consumer is exposed to, knowledge of food, and especially its traditional forms, is received since childhood. The hypothesis that attitudes may be shaped through appropriate information (just as in the case of marketing campaigns based on ethnocentric behavior) is relied upon by social, political or cultural institutions and producers of traditional food when implementing promotional programs for traditional, regional and local foods.

Habituation. The ability to shape attitudes through verbal communication is a proven fact; similarly, the importance of repetitive experiences in shaping habits is emphasized. According to C. Camic (1986), morality inherently entails habit, in which a person develops the habit of "acting and thinking in common." T.A. Shimp and S. Sharma (1987) link the definition of consumer ethnocentrism to morality, and therefore it can be assumed that habits and customs significantly affect the development of these attitudes. According to M.A. Zolfagharian and Q. Sun (2010), "consumers become accustomed to ethnocentrism through frequent repetition of or prolonged exposure to ethnocentric behaviors, such as repeated buying practices. Everyday interactions in different contexts (family, school, friends) are the main

socialization routes through which consumers implicitly develop ethnocentric biases."

In view of the above, it can be reasonably assumed that the development of conservative attitudes starts in childhood, too. This is a period when individuals learn nutritional behaviors in their families and other social groups, and discover the dietary patterns characteristic of their cultural background and culinary traditions of regions where they grow up. This influence can be expected to be greater in conservative families who cultivate traditions and practice a traditional division of roles. However, this obviously requires verification.

In the light of the above considerations, the drivers of consumer ethnocentrism can be assumed to potentially have a significant contribution to food conservatism. Consequently, it can be consistently assumed that these phenomena will coexist in some consumers.

Hence, the following hypotheses can be formulated:

H1: some consumers with ethnocentric attitudes also demonstrate a conservative attitude, and vice versa, and therefore these attitudes do not contradict each other.

H2: some conservative consumers are not ethnocentric while some ethnocentric consumers are not conservative, and therefore these attitudes are not identical.

COEXISTENCE OF FOOD CONSERVATISM AND CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM IN YOUNG ADULTS

The research was carried out from March to May 2016 with a sample of 451 students of four Polish universities (based in Rzeszów, Kraków and Radom). A purposive sampling technique was used. The vast majority of respondents were women and people aged under 25. More than half of respondents live away from their families during their studies. The largest part of the respondents were students based in Rzeszów. One third of respondents have a monthly budget of up to PLN 600.

The research was conducted as a direct interview. The students were asked to fill out a questionnaire during a lunch break (in order not to interfere with the classes). The questionnaire was composed of three parts, with the first and the second part referring to ethnocentrism and food conservatism, respectively. The third part were the socioeconomic characteristics of respondents.

A 10-grade version of CETSCALE by T.A. Shimp and S. Sharma was used in the analysis of ethnocentric attitudes, while the conservative attitude was measured

Table 1. Basic statistical metrics of the variables (conservatism, ethnocentrism)

	Conservatism	Ethnocentrism
Minimum	12	17
Maximum	62	117
Mean	26.35	64.91
Standard deviation	4.95	19.66
1 st quartile	23	5
2 nd quartile	26	64
3 rd quartile	29	76

Source: own elaboration.

using the authors' 6-grade Food Conservatism Scale² based on CETSCALE and the Food Neophobia Scale. In both cases, the respondents expressed their opinions using a 5-point Likert scale.

In the case of both tools, the scales included all three components, according to the three-element model of attitudes, type ABC (affective, behavioral, cognitive), whereas, according to the claim of S. Sharma et al., the behavioral element was predominant (B); in CETSCALE 5 statements are referred to it (additionally 3 refer to elements A and 2 to C), while in FCS element B refers to 3 statements (and additionally 1 refers to elements A and 2 to C).

First, the basic statistical metrics of the variables examined were determined (see Table 1 for a summary).

The consumers were divided into four groups based on the metrics: (1) low level of conservatism / ethnocentrism (below the 1st quartile); (2) moderate level of conservatism / ethnocentrism (between the 1st and the 2nd quartile); (3) medium-high level of conservatism / ethnocentrism (between the 2nd and the 3rd quartile); high level of conservatism / ethnocentrism (above the 3rd quartile). The sizes of particular groups are presented in Table 2.

As shown in Table 2, at least 1/5 of respondents are highly conservative or highly ethnocentric. However,

² The procedure for selecting questions and testing the scale for reliability using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient is described in Oleniuch, I., Cichočka, I. (2018) *An attempt to determine the scale of food conservatism: results of the pilot study*. Humanities and Social Sciences, vol. XXIII, 25 (4/2018), pp. 249–262.

Table 2. Number of respondents grouped by levels of the variable

Levels of the variable	Conservatism		Ethnocentrism	
	n	%	n	%
Low	134	29.7%	125	27.7%
Moderate	111	24.6%	110	24.4%
Medium-high	98	21.7%	115	25.5%
High	108	23.9%	101	22.4%
Total	451	100.0%	451	100.0%

Source: own elaboration.

Table 3. Ethnocentric attitudes among conservative consumers: frequency and percent of respondents

Strongly conservative attitudes	Ethnocentrism				Total
	Low	Moderate	Medium-high	High	
n	34	52	69	51	206
%	16.5%	25.2%	33.5%	24.8%	100.0%

Source: own elaboration.

the largest group consists of consumers at low levels of variables under consideration.

Next, only the groups of respondents at above-average levels of the variables were taken into account in order to verify the hypothesis about the coexistence of both attitudes. Strongly conservative attitudes were represented by 206 respondents; the distribution of ethnocentric attitudes among them is presented in Table 3.

More than 1/3 of people with a conservative attitude to foods are characterized by medium-high levels of ethnocentrism. Every fourth conservative demonstrates moderate (25.2%) or strong consumer ethnocentrism (24.8%).

Strongly ethnocentric attitudes were represented by 216 respondents; the distribution of conservative attitudes among them is presented in Table 4.

Almost every third ethnocentric consumer (29.2%) is also a conservative, and every fourth is at a medium-high level of conservatism (26.4%). Nevertheless, almost 1/4 of ethnocentric people (23.6%) are moderate

Table 4. Conservative attitudes among ethnocentric consumers: frequency and percent of respondents

Strongly ethnocentric attitudes	Conservatism				Total
	Low	Moderate	Medium-high	High	
n	45	51	57	63	216
%	20.8%	23.6%	26.4%	29.2%	100.0%

Source: own elaboration.

conservatives, and every fifth (20.8%) is not conservative in his/her attitude to food.

Therefore, the first hypothesis is confirmed as consumers with an ethnocentric attitude also demonstrate a conservative attitude, and vice versa; this also proves that these attitudes are not contradictory.

The sizes of respondent groups at different levels of both variables were compared later in this analysis. The results of this stage are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5. Conservatism and ethnocentrism: number of respondents grouped by levels of both variables

Conservatism	Ethnocentrism				Total
	Low	Moderate	Medium-high	High	
Low	64	25	29	16	134
Moderate	27	33	35	16	111
Medium-high	20	21	29	28	98
High	14	31	22	41	108
Total	125	110	115	101	451

Source: own elaboration.

People at a low level of conservatism tend to be poorly ethnocentric (64). However, in the group at a moderate level of conservatism, there are nearly as many people at a moderate (33) as at a medium-high level of ethnocentrism (35). People at a medium-high level of conservatism also represent a medium-high (29) or a high (28) level of ethnocentrism. On the other hand, people at a high level of conservatism are often highly ethnocentric (41). This means that in addition to cultural values, the origin of the product is important to them.

People at low levels of conservativeness form the largest part (64) of the group at a low level of ethnocentrism. People at a medium-high level of ethnocentrism are also moderately conservative (35) while highly ethnocentric people are mostly conservative (41).

However, in the case of a moderate level of ethnocentrism, the disproportions in numbers are small. Although the highest number of people represent a moderate level of both variables (33), a significant portion of moderate ethnocentric people are highly conservative (31). In addition to the origin of the product, they place emphasis on its cultural aspects.

Such a distribution of both variables provides grounds for concluding that food conservatism and consumer ethnocentrism are not identical. This confirms the second hypothesis advanced in this paper.

CONCLUSIONS

Consumers may represent both ethnocentric and conservative attitudes towards food, but these are not identical stances. The ethnocentric group also includes buyers who, while having a preference for domestic products, do not focus exclusively on goods that meet the criterion of being traditional. They are only interested in where the goods are manufactured and who owns the producer's company, rather than in the cultural values of the product. Similarly, the group of conservative consumers who appreciate local traditional foods is not limited to those who enjoy only the tradition of their place of origin; it also includes those interested in the tradition of other cultures who are keen to explore it through food (including culinary tourists). The common section consists of people who choose products that meet both criteria, i.e. are produced within a given social group (country, region) and represent the traditions of that group.

Therefore, both attitudes are a factor limiting the output sets of purchasers representing one of the attitudes, narrowing them to a smaller subset. The matter of further research remains motivations and effects in the form of actions of such a narrow subset of consumers, as well as the size of such a group or groups, if the national and regional contexts (with its specificity regarding both the economy, cultural heritage and traditions) are taken into account in the research. The obvious limitation to this research is the desirability of selecting a research sample. Students are a fairly specific group of consumers; as they are the most cosmopolitan and open to novelty,

they demonstrate the lowest levels of ethnocentricity and conservativeness. Therefore, because the research was carried out in this group, the authors are aware that the above findings are of limited use for inference. Nevertheless, the coexistence of attitudes discussed in this paper could be confirmed in a larger group of consumers selected in a representative manner.

This pilot study provides a basis for further and broader analyses of these attitudes and their interrelations on a representative sample of the Polish population. The conclusions based on this research can be used primarily by marketing managers to properly design activities targeted at this specific group of people who have both ethnocentric and conservative attitudes.

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KONSERWATYZM ŻYWIENIOWY A ETNOCENTRYZM KONSUMENCKI – RELACJE I ODNIESIENIA

Abstrakt. Artykuł ma charakter koncepcyjny, a jego celem jest próba oceny wzajemnych relacji i odniesień zachodzących pomiędzy dwoma zjawiskami, to jest między konserwatyzmem żywieniowym i etnocentryzmem konsumenckim. Artykuł otwiera część teoretyczną, którą dopełniają badania własne, zrealizowane na grupie 451 osób, w okresie marzec – maj 2016 r. W części pierwszej przybliżono obydwa pojęcia, wywodząc ich definicje z ogólnych formuł konserwatyzmu i etnocentryzmu. Następnie podjęto próbę wyznaczenia potencjalnych analogii mogących zachodzić między konserwatyzmem żywieniowym i etnocentryzmem konsumenckim. W tym celu wykorzystano koncepcję rekonceptualizacji etnocentryzmu konsumenckiego przedstawioną w 2015 r. przez N.-T. Siamagka i G. Balabanisa. Przeprowadzony dyskurs zamykają dwie hipotezy badawcze. Do ich weryfikacji posłużono się wynikami badań własnych, przeprowadzonymi przez autorki wśród studentów z trzech polskich uczelni, w kontekście ich postaw względem żywności. W analizie postaw etnocentrycznych użyto 10-itemowej wersji CETSCALE T. A. Shimpa i S. Sharmy, zaś do zmierzenia postaw konserwatywnych wykorzystano autorską 6-itemową Food Conservatism Scale (FCS), wzorowaną na CETSCALE i Food Neophobia Scale oraz zgodną z modelem trójelementowym postaw typu ABC (Attitude, Behavior, Cognition). W obydwu przypadkach respondenci ustosunkowywali się do stwierdzeń z użyciem 5-punktowej skali Likerta. W efekcie potwierdzono obie hipotezy, to jest stwierdzono nakładanie się postaw etnocentrycznych i konserwatywnych w wypadku niektórych osób oraz wykluczono synonimiczność omawianych pojęć, wykazując różnice między nimi.

Słowa kluczowe: zarządzanie, żywność tradycyjna, etnocentryzm konsumencki, konserwatyzm żywieniowy, skala Likerta, skala konserwatyzmu żywieniowego

