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Naučni članci/Scientific papers

The application of SCONET scale in the research of consumer ethnocentrism in Serbia

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Abstract: The study investigates whether SCONET is a reliable and one-factor scale that can be applied to measure consumer ethnocentrism (CE) in the context of the Serbian market. Additionally, the study investigates whether there is a connection between CE measured by the SCONET scale and consumer intention to buy domestic products. The aim was to investigate the strength of the link between CE and consumer purchasing intentions, i.e. to find out whether the relationships between variables are in line with previous research that involved the application of the popular CETSCALE. The research is based on the works of the authors who point to the shortcomings of CETSCALE and emphasize the need to create a new measuring instrument that would be used to measure CE. The analysis was realized based on the responses of 182 respondents in the survey of consumers in Serbia. Data were collected from the respondents electronically during June 2021. Statistical analyzes that were applied to draw conclusions are exploratory factor analysis and simple regression analysis. In addition, the analysis involves the application of descriptive statistics. The results have showed that the SCONET scale is a reliable and one-factor measuring instrument and that CE, measured by this scale, shows a statistically significant impact on consumer intentions to buy domestic products. The paper expands existing research on CE based on the new SCONET scale and formulates practical guidelines for domestic producers and traders. In accordance with the results, it is possible to create adequate marketing strategies for different categories of consumers, depending on the degree of ethnocentric tendencies.

Keywords: *CETSCALE, SCONET, consumer ethnocentrism, purchasing intentions*

1. INTRODUCTION

Understanding consumer behavior (CB) is a key success factor in business (Bakti, Sumaedi, Rakhmawati, Damayanti &Yarmen, 2020), and consumer decisions during the buying process are an indicator of the extent to which a marketing strategy is aligned with market demand. The changes that are happening in the modern business environment lead to consumers being faced with a diverse offer of domestic and foreign products and a wide choice of services (Makanyeza & Du Toit, 2017). While some consumers prefer foreign products, others show strong preferences for domestically produced products and have a negative attitude towards imported products (Nijssen, Douglas & Bressers, 1999; Zdravković, 2021). One of the reasons that can explain such behavior is that consumers consider buying foreign products as wrong, immoral and unpatriotic (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). In this sense, an important segment of CB research is the research of CE. CE is a concept that analyzes CB and their relationship to products and services of domestic and foreign origin. Research on this phenomenon has been of interest to a large number of researchers for many years (Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Vida & Dmitrovic, 2001; Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004; Quang, DinhChien & Long, 2017; Balabanis & Siamagka, 2017). Ethnocentric consumers give priority to domestic products in the buying process, and such behavior has favorable effects on the business of domestic companies and on the overall national economy. They prefer domestic products and services, while on the other hand they perceive foreign products and services negatively and have no inclination to buy them.

The most famous scale for measuring ethnocentric tendencies is CETSCALE, which was created by the authors Shimp & Sharma (1987). With some adaptations, the scale has been applied in the research of this concept in different market contexts. However, in recent years, research by authors has highlighted the shortcomings of the popular scale and pointed to the need to create a new scale that would be used to measure CE (Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015; Maison, Ardi, Yulianto & Rembulan, 2018).

There are a large number of studies dealing with CE research in which ethnocentric consumer tendencies are examined using CETSCALE.

The aim of the research is to determine whether the SCONET scale is applicable for examining the level of CE in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, as well as whether individuals with pronounced ethnocentric tendencies show a preference for purchasing domestically produced goods. Additionally, a comparative analysis will be conducted regarding the purchase of domestic and foreign products from the perspective of the category to which the products belong. However, there is a small number of studies at the global level, especially in the context of Serbia, where the SCONET scale is applied.

2. LITERATURE OVERVIEW

2.1. CETSCALE and SCONET

Shimp and Sharma (1987, p. 280) define CE as "consumer belief in the morality of buying foreign products". CE is the result of care and affection towards one's own country and fear of negative consequences due to the import of foreign products and later serious problems for the development of the domestic economy (Ejiofor, Nkamnebe & Otika, 2019). CE is built on the preferences of domestic products and services, not negativity towards any other country (Josiassen, Assaf & Karpen, 2011). Shimp and Sharma (1987) developed a custom-built scale for measuring CE, which, with certain adaptations, is also used in modern research on CB (Jiménez-Guerrero, Gázquez-Abad & Linares-Agüera, 2014). CETSCALE (*Consumer Ethnocentric Tendencies Scale*) is a valid and efficient measuring instrument used to answer the question why some consumers prefer domestic products to imported ones, even in situations when imported goods are cheaper or the quality of imported products is objectively better (Balabanis, Diamantopoulos, Mueller & Melewar, 2001). CETSCALE is a useful tool used for analyzing consumer attitudes, behaviors, and purchasing intentions (Luque-Martínez, Ibáñez-Zapata & Barrio-García, 2000). The scale has been applied in research conducted in developed economies, such as Australia (Acharya & Elliott, 2003), Germany (Jiménez-Guerrero et al., 2014), the United States (Balabanis & Siamgaka, 2017). In recent years, there is ongoing research on CE even in developing countries, where CETSCALE has also been applied, such as Zimbabwe (Makanyeza & Du Toit, 2016), India (Khan & Rizvi, 2010); Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bešlagić, Bećirović &

Čavalić, 2017), Nigeria (Ejiofor et al., 2019). The scale has found its application in numerous studies on the impact of demographic characteristics on CB (Josiassen et al., 2011; Bešlagić et al., 2017; Gasevic, Tomasevic & Vranjes, 2017; Haque & Maheshwari, 2015). It has also been used in research on CE and the relationship of this concept with socio-psychological characteristics of consumers such as animosity (Ahmed, Anang, Othman & Sambasivan, 2013; Marinković, 2017; Fakharmanesh & Mijandehi, 2013) and lifestyle (Acikdilli, Ziemnowicz & Bahhouth, 2018; Gasevic, Vranjes & Tomasevic, 2019). In recent years, the scale has also been applied in the research focusing on various product categories (Chryssochoidis, Krystallis & Perreas, 2007; Orth & Firbasová, 2003; Quang et al., 2017; Haque & Maheshwari, 2015). There is also extensive research focusing on the service sector, for example banking sector research in Kenya and Indonesia (Maina, 2016; Laksamana, 2016), health sector in Serbia (Rakić, Rakić & Stanojević, 2018). In the context of Serbia, the most significant research in which the modified CETSCALE was applied focus on CE (Kragulj, Parezanin & Miladinovic, 2017; Marinković, Stanišić & Kostić, 2011).

Despite the fact that CETSCALE is the most popular and most frequently used measuring instrument for the research of CE (Chryssochoidis et al., 2007), there has been a growing number of criticisms of this scale in recent years. The authors Khan and Rizvi (2010), Siamagka and Balabanis (2015) and Maison et al. (2018) state the shortcomings of CETSCALE and emphasize the need to create a new measuring instrument. The first disadvantage of CETSCALE is reflected in the fact that the scale is too normative, i.e. that the constituent items of this scale do not reveal personal beliefs of consumers but refer to general norms (Vida & Reardon, 2008; Siamagka & Balabanis, 2015). Another drawback is related to the fact that the scale is created from items that reflect conscious consumer beliefs. That is, a large number of items within CETSCALE are of an ideological character, with an emphasis on national identity ("buy Serbian products, Serbian products are better, keep Serbian business..."). Such formulations can be misinterpreted in the age of globalization and the need to respect diversity. The last objection also refers to the questionability of the one-dimensionality of the scale (Khan & Rizvi, 2010). Namely, some studies show different results, and in some cases the one-dimensionality of this measuring instrument has not been confirmed (for example, Lindquist, Vida, Plank & Fairhurst, 2001). The starting point for creating the SCONET scale is the stance of

researchers (Maison et al., 2018) that CE is not only a moral mechanism based on conscious ideology, rather it can have a strong unconscious component based on automatic preference of one's own group (Maison et al., 2018). This psychological mechanism leads to products from one's own country being automatically favored and perceived more favorably than foreign ones (Maison & Maliszewski, 2016). The SCONET scale by Maison et al. (2018) was created from six statements and is used to describe consumer ethnocentric beliefs and behaviors. The newly created scale is free of the nationalist elements that appeared in CETSCALE. The scale is one-dimensional and short. These are three most important characteristics of the SCONET scale that will be applied in this research as well. In addition, the scale is free of strong ideological components, and the first research in which this scale was used showed that consumers who showed a high degree of CE gave priority to national brands in the buying process (Maison et al., 2018). Subsequent research, in two culturally different markets, confirmed that the scale is characterized by good statistical parameters, as well as that the scale is one-factor.

2.2. Purchasing intentions and characteristic behavior of ethnocentric and non-ethnocentric consumers

The intention to purchase is a projection of future CB (Asshidin, Abidin & Borhan, 2016). When it comes to the relationship between consumer purchasing intentions and CE, it has been identified that CE can significantly influence the formation of positive and negative consumer purchasing intentions (Baughn & Yaprak, 1993). CE has a significant positive impact on consumer intentions to buy domestically produced goods (Shoham & Brenčić, 2003; Zdravković, Šapić i Filipović, 2020). In this context, there is a difference in the behavior of ethnocentric consumers who intend to buy domestic products and non-ethnocentric categories of consumers who perceive foreign products more positively. Ethnocentric consumers are more critical of the quality of foreign products and show less willingness to buy them (Rakić et al., 2018). When all product characteristics are perceived as equal, ethnocentric consumers prefer domestic products (Evanschitzky, Wangenheim, Woisetschlager & Blut, 2008), and very often this characteristic of consumers can suggest motivation to buy domestic products even when they know that their quality is lower compared to imported alternatives (Wanninayake & Chonvancova, 2012). In addi-

tion, highly ethnocentric consumers favor domestic products not only when they are of poorer quality, but also when they are more expensive compared to imported alternatives (Ding, 2017). Ethnocentric consumers refuse to buy foreign products because they consider them being harmful to the national economy and causing unemployment (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). In addition, a person may be very ethnocentric with respect to a particular product category but on the other hand favor other categories of products from another country (Jiménez-Guerrero et al., 2014). Alsughayir (2013) state that stronger ethnocentric consumer tendencies can be explained by a lack of travel or a lack of information about other cultures. Some authors point out that the relationship between CE and the intention to buy domestic products in developing countries is less evident than in developed countries (Karoui & Khemakhem, 2019). This means that consumers from more developed countries have a greater tendency to buy domestic products because they perceive them as better, while consumers from developing countries show a tendency to buy foreign products and perceive domestic products as lower quality products (Krishnakumar, 1974) and avoid buying them. On the other hand, less-ethnocentric consumers do not have cognitive prejudices that would prevent them from making reasonable purchasing decisions. They base their purchasing decisions on product-specific attributes and are not guided by unreasonable motives (Supphellen & Ritternburg, 2001), that is, they are very rational in the buying process, so it is unlikely that bias towards domestic products will affect them (Zabkar, Kalajdzic, Diamantopoulos & Florack, 2017). Non-ethnocentric individuals evaluate products of different origins more objectively, because they view origin as an attribute that is relatively less important in shaping their preferences (Diaz, Bernabeu, Prieto & Olmeda, 2011). They tend to be more tolerant of foreign products (Laksamana, 2016), and view products from other countries more positively (Vida & Dmitrovic, 2001) and even prefer foreign to local products (Diaz et al., 2011). In some situations, the influence of CE on CB varies according to product categories (Garmatjuk & Parts, 2015), and consumers may express a tendency to buy one product category from a particular country, but to characterize other product categories from that same country as having insufficient quality (Balabanis & Diamantopoulos, 2004).

On the basis of the previously defined theoretical framework, research hypotheses have been formulated:

Hypothesis 1: The SCONET scale for measuring consumer ethnocentrism is a reliable and one-factor scale for measuring ethnocentric consumer tendencies.

Hypothesis 2: Consumer ethnocentrism has a statistically significant impact on the consumer intentions to buy domestic products.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted during June 2021. The survey method is based on the online questionnaire. The questionnaire was devised in three parts. The first part contains questions about the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The monthly income of the respondents is expressed in relation to the level of the average salary in the country in accordance with the research methodology of the authors (Areiza-Padilla, Cervera-Taulet & Puertas, 2020). The classification of respondents with regard to their age is in accordance with the research of the author Rakić et al. (2018). The second part of the questionnaire is made of statements for measuring CE from which the SCONET scale was created. These statements are taken from the relevant research literature of the author Maison et al. (2018). The last part of the questionnaire refers to the statements that measure the purchasing intentions of consumers. Respondents expressed

the degree of agreement with the proposed findings through the seven-point Likert scale.

Descriptive statistics techniques, exploratory factor analysis and simple regression analysis were used to determine the relationship between these variables and to test the defined hypotheses. The statistical program used to process the collected empirical data is SPSS 25.0.

4. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The sample structure is presented in Table 1.

Women are more represented in the sample than men. This result is consistent with the results of previous research proving that women prefer to participate in online research more than men (Kwak & Radler, 2002). When it comes to the age structure, the youngest age category is most represented in the sample (respondents who are between 16 and 34 years old), which is in line with the data that show that the sample of respondents is dominated by students. When looking at the level of education, the largest percentage of respondents are people who have graduated from college. Together with the respondents who have completed master's and doctoral studies, they form a segment of highly educated respondents. In total, they make up over 65% of the sample. The pre-

Table 1: Sample structure

Variable	Category	Frequency	Valid Percent
Gender	Male	57	31.3
	Female	125	68.7
	Total	182	100%
Age	16 – 34 years	119	65.4
	35 – 54 years	52	28.6
	55 – 74 years	11	6.0
	Total	182	100%
Education	Secondary school	62	34.1
	Faculty	90	49.4
	Master/PhD	30	16.5
	Total	182	100%
Income	No income	71	39.1
	Below average	55	30.2
	0-2 Average salary	49	26.9
	Above od 2 average salary	7	3.8
	Total	182	100%
Occupation	Student	96	52.7
	Employed	86	47.3
	Total	182	100%

Source: Authors

Table 2: Descriptive statistical analysis

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation
1. In my opinion, we should support our national companies by buying domestic products.	6.1044	1.2460
2. If I have a choice between a domestic and a foreign product, I choose the domestic.	5.3352	1.5387
3. Buying foreign products when domestic are available is not right.	4.1703	1.9293
4. It is always better to buy domestic products.	4.6978	1.8090
5. I often buy domestic products.	5.5604	1.2411
6. I think that domestic products are as good as foreign ones.	5.2802	1.3959

Source: Authors

dominant representation of the highly educated is in line with relevant research studies which confirm that they show a greater interest in participating in online research (Singer, van Hoewyk & Maher, 2000). The data show that the largest share of respondents who have no income (39.0%) is in line with the fact that the structure of the sample is dominated by students who are unemployed.

The results of the research show that at the level of the total sample there is a high degree of CE because the average value was obtained (Mean – 5.1914). This interpretation is in line with the recommendations (Marinković, 2017) which state that when seven-point scales are used in research, then all values of arithmetic means above 5 should be considered high. In addition, for each statement within the SCONET scale, the values of the arithmetic mean and standard deviation were calculated, and the results of the descriptive statistical analysis are presented in Table 2.

The most favorable attitude of the respondents was identified with the statement 1, where the highest value of the arithmetic mean was obtained (6.1044). On the other hand, the most unfavorable position refers to the statement 3 where the lowest value of the arithmetic mean was obtained (4.1703). This statement is characterized by the greatest heterogeneity of the respondents' answers, because the highest value of the standard deviation was obtained (1.9293). On the

other hand, the highest degree of homogeneity of the respondents' answers refers to the statement 5, which is characterized by the lowest value of the standard deviation (1.2411).

Checking the reliability and internal consistency of the statements that make up the SCONET scale was realized by applying the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The obtained value is 0.829, which is higher than the recommended reference value of 0.7 (Nunnally, 1978). A similar value (0.85) was obtained in a study by Maison et al. (2018). Factor analysis was applied with the aim of transforming the original variables that make up the SCONET scale into one or more factors. By checking the basic assumptions, it was confirmed that the collected data are suitable for the application of factor analysis. The criterion relating to the minimum sample size was met (the quotient of the number of participants and the items to be analyzed exceeds the recommended ratio of 10:1) (Nunnally, 1978). In addition, in the correlation matrix, all coefficients are greater than 0.3. Bartlett's test of Sphericity, used for justification of the use of factor analysis, was statistically significant (p<0.05). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) indicator also exceeds the minimum recommended value of 0.6.

The results show that the application of the Kaiser criterion for determining the factor results in the isolation of only one factor whose characteristic values

Table 3: Factor analysis results

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.298	54.972	54.972	3.298	54.972	54.972
2	.757	12.608	67.581			
3	.666	11.108	78.689			
4	.505	8.425	87.114			
5	.444	7.403	94.517			
6	.329	5.483	100.000			

Notes: KMO= 0.845; Bartlett's test: p=0.000
Source: Authors

(initial eigenvalues) are greater than 1, which explains 54.972% of the variance from which it can be concluded that the SCONET scale is a single-factor scale with reliable statistical parameters (Table 3). Thus, the hypothesis H1 has been confirmed.

In order to test the second hypothesis, we applied a simple regression analysis. CE was used as an independent variable in testing this hypothesis, while purchasing intention was set as a dependent variable. The test results of the second hypothesis are presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Simple regression analysis (dependent variable: purchasing intention)

Variable	β	t	sig.
CE	.576	9.652	0.000

Source: Authors

A simple regression analysis has found that there was a significant effect of the CE on purchasing intention to buy domestic product (β = 0.576, t = 9.652, p = 0.000), thus we can conclude that the hypothesis H2 has been confirmed. When it comes to specific product categories, the results are presented in Table 5.

Consumers mostly prefer to purchase domestic furniture (36.3%) as well as domestic confectionery products (34.6%). The results obtained are consistent with research by other authors who have identified that consumers generally prefer home-grown food products (Muhamad & Razak, 2004; Evanschitzky et al., 2008). On the other hand, respondents prefer foreign manufacturers of cars (60.4%) and clothing (35.7%). Preferences for foreign cars can be explained by the fact that domestic car production is limited and therefore consumers do not have a negative attitude towards imported products and have no intention of buying them (Nyssen et al., 1999). Authors Muhamad and Razak (2004) also identified that consumers do not prefer to buy domestic cars.

5. CONCLUSION

Research into the phenomenon of CE has become crucial in the process of understanding CB in the global market (Renko, Crnjak-Karanovic & Matic, 2012). Since its creation, CETSALE has been the most popular measuring tool for measuring consumer ethnocentric tendencies. A higher level of CE implies that consumers buy more domestic products compared to foreign ones, and conversely, a lower level of CE refers to a more dominant purchase of foreign products (Balabanis & Siamagka, 2017). However, the shortcomings of the scale motivated researchers to try to create a new instrument. The result of these

Table 5: Product categories

Category	Origin	Frequency	Valid Percent
Chocolate and confectionery	Domestic	63	34.6
	Foreign	11	6.0
	Domestic and Foreign	108	59.4
	Total	**182**	**100%**
Cleaning products	Domestic	36	19.8
	Foreign	46	25.3
	Domestic and Foreign	100	54.9
	Total	**182**	**100%**
Clothing	Domestic	20	11.0
	Foreign	65	35.7
	Domestic and Foreign	97	53.3
	Total	**182**	**100%**
Furniture	Domestic	66	36.3
	Foreign	23	12.6
	Domestic and Foreign	93	51.1
	Total	**182**	**100%**
Car	Domestic	4	2.2
	Foreign	110	60.4
	Domestic and Foreign	68	37.4
	Total	**182**	**100%**

Source: Authors

efforts is the SCONET scale. The results confirmed the reliability and internal consistency of the scale and also confirmed that the scale is one-factor, thus proving the first hypothesis. It has been identified that there is a statistically significant positive impact of CE on purchasing intentions directed towards domestic products. In accordance with the obtained results, domestic producers and traders can create and implement more efficient marketing strategies for different categories of consumers depending on the degree of ethnocentric tendencies. Consumers mostly prefer to purchase domestic furniture as well as domestic confectionery products. On the other hand, respondents prefer foreign manufacturers of cars and clothing.

The scientific contribution is reflected in the extension to the existing research on CE based on the new SCONET scale. The practical contribution of the study lies in highlighting the importance of CE during crisis situations, as it serves as a cohesive factor that implies an increase in GDP and employment rates. The SCONET scale is applicable for measuring the ethnocentric tendencies of consumers in the territory of the Republic of Serbia, allowing marketers to use this scale to determine the level of CE. This information will provide them with an adequate basis for forming an appropriate marketing strategy.

The limitation of the research refers primarily to the small sample and the disproportionate representation of all categories of respondents. Additionally, the research was conducted in the territory of one country. Cross-cultural studies would enable a holistic approach and a comparative analysis of the ethnocentric tendencies of individuals from different nations. The recommendation and directions for future studies could also refer to the application of the scale in other market context. It is recommended to conduct research in continuous time intervals in order to monitor changes in the manifestation of ethnocentric tendencies. The Covid-19 virus pandemic and the time frame of the research have potentially contributed to a higher level of CE. Additionally, the research model could be supplemented with other significant determinants that influence consumer purchase intentions and their choice between domestic and foreign products, such as consumer cosmopolitanism, xenocentrism, country-of-origin image, and so on.

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Apstrakt

Primena SCONET skale u istraživanju potrošačkog etnocentrizma u Srbiji

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Istraživanje se bavi pitanjem da li je SCONET pouzdana i jednofaktorska skala koja se može primeniti za merenje potrošačkog etnocentrizma u kontekstu srpskog tržišta. Pored toga, istraživanje ispituje da li postoji veza između potrošačkog etnocentrizma, merenog SCONET skalom, i namera potrošača da kupuju domaće proizvode. Cilj je bio istražiti snagu veze između potrošačkog etnocentrizma i potrošačkih namera, tj. saznati da li su odnosi između varijabli u skladu sa prethodnim istraživanjima koja su koristila popularnu CET skalu. Istraživanje se oslanja na radove autora koji ukazuju na nedostatke CET skale i naglašavaju potrebu za kreiranjem novog mernog instrumenta koji bi se koristio za merenje potrošačkog etnocentrizma. Analiza je realizovana na osnovu odgovora 182 ispitanika koji su učestvovali u anketi potrošača u Srbiji. Podaci su prikupljeni od ispitanika elektronski tokom juna 2021. godine. Statističke analize koje su primenjene za donošenje zaključaka su eksplorativna faktorska analiza i prosta regresiona analiza. Pored toga, analiza uključuje primenu deskriptivne statistike. Rezultati su pokazali da je SCONET skala pouzdan i jednofaktorski merni instrument i da potrošački etnocentrizam, meren ovom skalom, ima statistički značajan uticaj na potrošačke namere za kupovinom domaćih proizvoda. Rad proširuje postojeća istraživanja o potrošačkom etnocentrizmu na osnovu nove SCONET skale i formuliše praktične smernice za domaće proizvođače i trgovce. U skladu sa rezultatima, moguće je kreirati adekvatne marketinške strategije za različite kategorije potrošača, u zavisnosti od stepena etnocentričnih tendencija.

Ključne reči: *CETSCALE, SCONET, potrošački etnocentrizam, kupovne namere*

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