

## **EXPLORING THE EXTENSION OF CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM ON ETHNOCENTRIC BUSINESS ORIENTATION OF YOUNG ADULTS FROM TWO COUNTRIES**

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**Abstract:** *Many consumer studies have confirmed that in different international settings ethnocentric consumers mostly prefer domestic products. Consequently, consumer ethnocentrism has been considered as a prominent informal barrier for international trade. Even though an ethnocentrism as a personal trait has been a subject of international management studies, ethnocentrism was rarely observed within a context of managers' or owners' decisions that affect business orientations. The purpose of this study was to explore a link among consumer ethnocentrism and ethnocentric business orientations of graduate students as future managers and business owners. The main goal was to and derive implications relevant for consumer and organizational marketing in international environment. The main motivation behind the study was to explore potential extension of consumer ethnocentrism on managerial ethnocentric decision making, and consequently, on ethnocentric business orientation. Research was conducted on a convenience sample of 219 business economics graduates from the University of Rijeka, Croatia and from the University of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Multi-Group Structural Equation Modeling has been employed to explore a linkage among observed concepts. Empirical results indicated a differences among sub-samples from two countries in level of consumer ethnocentrism and its impacts on preferences towards domestic products. However, significant positive relation has been found between consumer ethnocentrism and ethnocentric business orientation in case of both observed groups. Consumer ethnocentrism has been confirmed as predictor of ethnocentric tendencies towards domestic products as well as predictor of ethnocentric business orientations of youth as a future managers and business owners. Research results confirmed that consumer ethnocentrism can be extended from consumer preferences and orientation towards domestic products to managers' ethnocentric decision making, providing ethnocentric business orientation.*

**Keywords:** *Consumer ethnocentrism, managerial ethnocentric decision making, ethnocentric business orientation, millennials*

**JEL classification:** *M21, F, C20*

## INTRODUCTION

General applicability of ethnocentrism within consumer studies has been recognized at the beginning of 1970s. Shimp & Sharma (1987, p. 280) have developed the term “consumer ethnocentrism” representing “beliefs held by American consumers about the appropriateness, indeed morality, of purchasing foreign-made products”. Substantial body of the literature subsequently confirmed an effect consumer ethnocentrism from consumer evaluations, to intentions and behaviors. Consumer ethnocentrism has been often seen as one of the most important informal barriers in today’s global marketplace (Shankarmahesh, 2006). Therefore, companies have recognized the importance of consumer ethnocentrism while developing various strategies regarding foreign markets (Cateora & Graham, 1999).

The concept of ethnocentrism has history of nearly 50-year in International Business research, which can be traced back to Perlmutter’s (1969) article capturing the degree of multinationality existing in the ‘state of mind’ of a firm’s managers (Michilova, Piekkari, Storgaard, & Tienari, 2017). The majority of international business research that explore ethnocentrism deal with organizational strategic models of multinational corporation as well as with international hiring practices. Ethnocentrism affects various consumer decisions, and should also be observed as managerial decision and product evaluation (Myers, 1995, p. 202). Depending on level of ethnocentrism within several stakeholder groups relevant for international corporate management, companies need to develop specific business as well as marketing strategies (Sinkovics & Holzmüller, 1994). The concept of consumer ethnocentrism offers an understanding of a way in which individual and organizational consumers draw comparisons between domestic and foreign products (Luque-Martínez, A., & del Barrio-García, 2000), which means that, according to the consumer ethnocentrism research literature, it is possible to transfer ethnocentrism concept to other stakeholder groups with a particular importance for managers and employers (Sinkovics & Holzmüller, 1994).

The main purpose of this paper is to provide an insight into effects of consumer ethnocentrism (CET) on preferences towards products (domestic vs. imported), as well as potential extension of consumer ethnocentrism on decision making process towards foreign companies and products. Extension of consumer ethnocentrism on managerial/owners’ decision making would consequently provide ethnocentric orientation of business. The paper has been structured as it follows: introduction, theoretical backgrounds of the concept of ethnocentrism from the perspective of consumer studies and international business literature, research methodology, empirical data analysis and discussion. Conclusion was offered with some contributions and limitations of the given analysis.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS**

### **Ethnocentrism in the context of consumer studies**

The concept of ethnocentrism has been introduced in social science by the American sociologist Sumner (1906). Sumner defined ethnocentrism as an “view of things in which one’s group is the center of everything, and others are scaled and rated with reference to it” (Sumner, 1906, p. 13). Subsequently, the ethnocentrism has been observed in different disciplines with relevance to individual-level personality systems as well as to more general cultural and socio-analytic framework (Le Vine & Campbell, 1972). The conceptualization of consumer ethnocentrism is the first attempt to extend the socio-psychological concept in a business context (Sinkovics & Holzmüller, 1994). Lanz & Loeb (1996) consider that Shimp and Sharma’s concept (1987) of consumer ethnocentrism, and the scale they developed to measure it (CETSCALE), concerns the extent to which individuals feel desire or a duty to support the domestic economy in the face of foreign competition. A lot of studies in different research environment confirmed that one of the most important consequence of consumer ethnocentrism is expressed in consumers ‘preferences towards domestic products.

Cross-cultural researches provide a conclusion that nations show different degree of consumer ethnocentrism, irrespective of economic development (Hamin, 2006). Schuh (1994) has defined a framework that requires a connection between different stages of economic development and consumer preferences towards foreign products in developing countries. In accordance with this framework, during the early stages of transition from a state-controlled economy to a market economy, foreign products are preferred because of their good qualities but also because of novelty and motives of status and curiosity. According to Schuh (1994), ethnocentric motives in the background of the buying behavior become dominant as the economy moves towards the middle stage of transition. Since the mid 1990s, studies of consumer ethnocentrism in transition countries in Europe have shown trends of increasing consumer loyalty to domestic alternatives (Jenk, Michel, & Roze, 1995). Some more recent studies also confirmed the influence of consumer ethnocentrism on domestic product preferences in transitional economies Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Macedonia (Dmitrovic, Vida, & Reardon, 2009), as well as in Slovenia (Vida & Reardon, 2008).

### **Ethnocentrism in the context of international business studies**

by the lack of active debate on ethnocentrism in international business research. Authors have proposed a contemporary view on ethnocentrism as an attribute of individuals and collectives (e.g., groups, organizations, countries, and cultures) which delineates a strong sense of positive self-regard, but does not inevitably imply superiority over and/or negativity towards other individuals or collectives. Prevailing ethnocentrism in a country as well ethnocentric Ethnocentrism in the international business literature has been mostly observed in the context of corporate strategic orientations (Malnight, 1995), from the perspective of managerial policies and hiring practices of multi-nationals (Zeira, 1976, 1979), human resource management of multinational companies (Neuliep, Hintz, & McCroskey, 2005), operations of the multinational companies (ie. ethnocentric, geocentric, polycentric, regiocentric), organizational strategy-structure in worldwide activities (Malnight, 1995; Perlmutter, 1969).

Perlmutter (1969) has argued that the collective attitudes of managers toward

‘foreign people, ideas or resources’ impact the quality of decision-making with regard to organization design, control, communication, people management, and the identity of the internationalizing firm’ and ultimately its long-term viability (Perlmutter, 1969, p. 11-12). According to Michilova, Piekkari, Storgaard, & Tienari (2017) Perlmutter’s (Perlmutter, 1969, 1984) contribution to international business research lies primarily in the introduction of a mental model or paradigm to better explain the nature and key characteristics of multi-nationals’ global strategy, structure, and key management processes. Michilova, Piekkari, Storgaard, & Tienari (2017) have stated that in the international business literature the concept of ethnocentrism has been mystified to a great extent attitude in host-country organizations determine the strategy formulation in foreign markets (Sinkovics & Holzmüller, 1994; Zeira, 1979). Ethnocentrism is worth being considered as a determinant from the perspective of international management, especially individual ethnocentrism who might shape and influence the relation between companies, their strategy formulation and relations towards different stakeholder groups (Sinkovics & Holzmüller, 1994).

## METHODOLOGY

### Research propositions

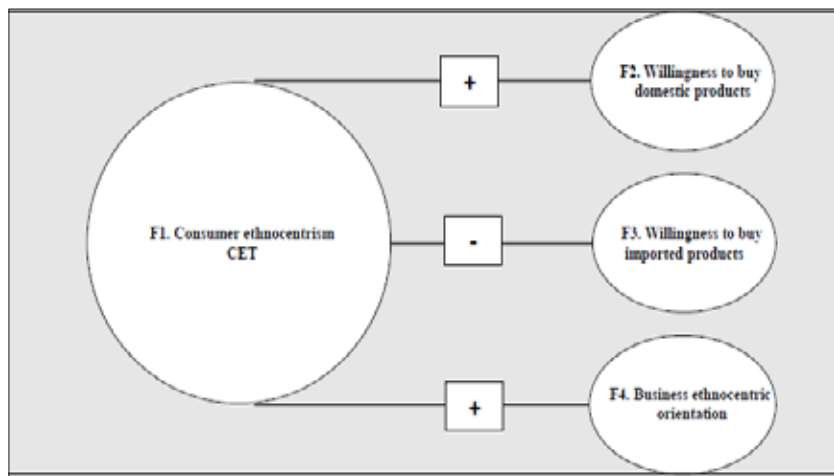
“Ethnocentrism seems to act as a self-defense reflex of local economies, governments, organizations and individuals against the threat of imports and foreign competition” (Saimagka & Balabanis, 2015, p. 66). From the normative perspective, ethnocentric consumers have a view that it is wrong to purchase foreign products because it harms domestic economy, causes loss of jobs and it is unpatriotic (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). From the personal perspective, consumer ethnocentrism represents a trait suggesting the enduring nature of ethnocentrism irrespective of situational factors or socio-economic environment (Saimagka & Balabanis, 2015; Sharma & Shimp, 1995). Based on the individual point of view of supporting the domestic economy by favoring domestic products, consumer ethnocentrism expresses the wish to contribute the economic growth, and thus the domestic overall welfare (Sinkovics & Holzmüller, 1994). Accordingly, it is possible to transfer ethnocentrism concept to other groups, beside consumers, to managers and employers (Sinkovics & Holzmüller, 1994). Michilova, Piekkari, Storgaard, & Tienari (2017) have noted that there is a need to pay closer attention to the dynamics that underlie processes of interaction between managerial cognition and the outcomes of company’s strategies. The varying degree of ethnocentricity, polycentricity, and geocentricity in the companies could be captured in the ethnocentric attitudes of top management (Perlmutter, 1969; Wan, Chen, & Yiu, 2015). Consumer ethnocentrism conceptualization, from the normative and personal perspective, implies general disposition to act in a consistent manner towards foreign products *in toto* (Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Therefore, the concept of consumer ethnocentrism offers an understanding of the way in which individual and organizational consumers draw comparisons between domestic and foreign products (Luque-Martínez, A., & del Barrio-García, 2000).

### Research question and model conceptualization

Considering the above described aspects of consumer ethnocentrism it is reasonable to assume that the concept can be extended from consumers to other groups

such as managers, especially in the domain of decision making process towards foreign companies and products. Accordingly, the main research question of this research is: Does consumer ethnocentrism affect managerial decision making process towards foreign companies and products, and consequently influences ethnocentric orientation of business?

Fig. 1. Conceptual framework



Source: Own estimates

More specifically, this study intends to examine: a) the effect of Consumer ethnocentrism (CET) on preferences towards domestic vs. imported products; b) the impact of Consumer ethnocentrism on decision making process towards foreign companies and products, and consequently business ethnocentric orientation.

### Design of the study

This study is based on primary data collected through a survey questionnaire method. Participants were graduate students enrolled in academic programs at public higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

### Operationalization of the key concepts

For the purpose of this study the shortened version of CETSCALE was used in accordance with study of Kaynak and Kara (2002). Consumer preferences towards domestic and foreign products *in toto* were measured through the items that describes general willingness to buy domestic and imported products (Wang & Chen, 2004). In accordance with theoretical explanations of consumer ethnocentrism as general disposition to act in a consistent manner towards foreign products *in toto* (Shimp & Sharma, 1987) the main research proposition was that concept can be extended from consumers to other groups such as managers. The items for measurement of business ethnocentric orientation, as an extension of consumer ethnocentrism on the domain of managers' decision making process towards foreign companies and products has been developed from two steps. Firstly, the panel discussion was organized including

10 graduate students from the Faculty of Economics, University of Mostar. Students were asked to discuss several statements extracted from the extended theoretical propositions of consumer ethnocentrism on managers' decision process towards foreign products and companies. Discussion resulted with six statements that describe ethnocentric orientations of domestic business managers/owners. As a next step, the other group of 36 graduate students were asked to fulfill the short questionnaire with six extracted statements from the previous discussion group. Exploratory factor analysis with oblim rotation resulted in four items loading on a single factor explaining 74.6% of the variance with Cronbach Alpha 0.87. All items loading was above 0.70. The final questionnaire included a list of statements describing measured concepts. Respondents expressed their degree of agreement or disagreement measured by Likert-type scale of five degrees. Results of ANOVA indicated significant difference between observed samples in case of CET scale only ( $F=17.524$ ;  $df=1$ ;  $p=0.000$ ). Students from Bosnia and Herzegovina express higher level of Consumer ethnocentrism ( $M=14.260$ ;  $SD=3.955$ ) in comparison with Croatian students ( $M=11.707$ ;  $SD=4.846$ )

### Sampling and research procedure

Research was conducted on a convenience sample of 219 graduates from the studies of business economy from University of Rijeka, Croatia and from three public Universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. From the point of this study sampling students from the faculties of economics is appropriate in order to understand attitudes and behavioral intentions of future managers and business owners. In the case of sample from Bosnia and Herzegovina, ethnically structure of sample has been followed by collecting data from business economy graduates at the three the biggest public universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina: Mostar, Banja Luka and Sarajevo. Students were approached by so called 'mall intercepts' technique in the areas of university campuses and asked to voluntarily and anonymously provide their responses on the questionnaire. All participants were born between 1982 and 2004 and belong to the Millennials cohort (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

**Table 1.** Sample characteristics

Croatia		Bosnia and Herzegovina	
Gender/Age	N	Gender/Age	N
Male	69	Male	49
21-23	34	21-23	27
24-26	13	24-26	12
26+	22	26+	10
Female	54	Female	47
21-23	44	21-23	38
24-26	6	24-26	6
26+	4	26+	3
Total	123	Total	96

**Source:** Own estimates



## EMPIRICAL RESULTS

### Data analysis

Empirical procedure in this paper follows multi group structural equation model (SEM) approach. We firstly followed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) to examine relationship between latent variables and their (observed) indicators. To capture potential asymmetries, we used mean adjusted maximum likelihood (MLM) as an estimator (Byrne, 2012, p. 100). After CFA structural equation model (SEM) was estimated (Table 2). As goodness of fit measures Comparative Fit Index ( $CFI \geq .95$ ) and Root Mean Square Error of Approximation ( $RMSEA < .05$ .) were calculated and suggested well-fitting. All calculations were obtained using R package from Rosseel (2012).

**Table 2.** Confirmatory factor analysis – for both samples Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Latent variables (factors)	Group 1 – Croatia			Group 2 –Bosnia and Herzegovina		
	Estim.	S.E.	P(> z )	Estim.	S.E.	P(> z )
F.1 Consumer ethnocentrism (CET)						
It is not good to buy imported products because it leaves citizens without jobs	1.187	0.087	0.000	0.696	0.1420	0.0000
A true citizen should always buy domestic products	1.077	0.107	0.000	0.977	0.1270	0.0000
We need to buy local products and thus not allow others to get rich on us	1.200	0.078	0.000	1.050	0.103	0.000
Citizens should not buy imported products because it endangers the domestic economy and causes unemployment	1.162	0.076	0.000	0.848	0.127	0.000
F2. Willingness to buy domestic products	Estim.	S.E.	P(> z )	Estim.	S.E.	P(> z )
If I have a choice between two products of the same type, I will buy a domestic products	0.961	0.090	0.00	0.981	0.111	0.000
Whenever I have the opportunity, I buy domestic products	1.046	0.079	0.000	1.332	0.132	0.000
I prefer to buy domestic products	1.044	0.081	0.000	1.033	0.133	0.000
F3. Willingness to buy imported products	Estim.	S.E.	P(> z )	Estim.	S.E.	P(> z )
If I have a choice between two products of the same type I will buy an imported product	0.932	0.080	0.000	1.013	0.089	0.000
Whenever I have the opportunity, I buy imported products	1.068	0.075	0.000	1.183	0.077	0.000
I prefer to buy imported products	1.022	0.072	0.000	1.095	0.082	0.000
F4. Business ethnocentric orientation	Estim.	S.E.	P(> z )	Estim.	S.E.	P(> z )
Domestic entrepreneurs/managers should not sell their business to foreigners	1.252	0.093	0.000	0.981	0.161	0.000
Domestic entrepreneurs/managers should not make strategic alliances with foreign companies	0.953	0.098	0.000	0.964	0.123	0.000
Domestic entrepreneurs/managers should not sell technology and knowledge to foreign companies	1.047	0.101	0.000	0.989	0.145	0.000
Domestic entrepreneurs/managers should prefer domestic companies in their procurement	0.789	0.120	0.000	0.572	0.174	0.001

Source: Own estimates

To illustrate reliability of construct several measures were provided. The first measure ( $\omega_1$ ) was obtained following Bollen (1980) and Raykov (2001). The second coefficient ( $\omega_2$ ) based on Bentler (1979) and Bentler (2009). While the third coefficient ( $\omega_3$ ) was calculated as suggested by McDonald (1999) frequently referred as hierarchical omega. Table 3 and Table 4 summarize Cronbach's alpha, Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and three aforementioned omega measures for the case of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, respectively.

**Table 3.** Construct reliability – Croatia group

Croatia	$\alpha$	$\omega_1$	$\omega_2$	$\omega_3$	AVE
F1	0.917	0.917	0.917	0.918	0.737
F4	0.824	0.831	0.831	0.832	0.559
F2	0.909	0.901	0.901	0.900	0.752
F3	0.930	0.932	0.932	0.932	0.821

Source: Own estimates

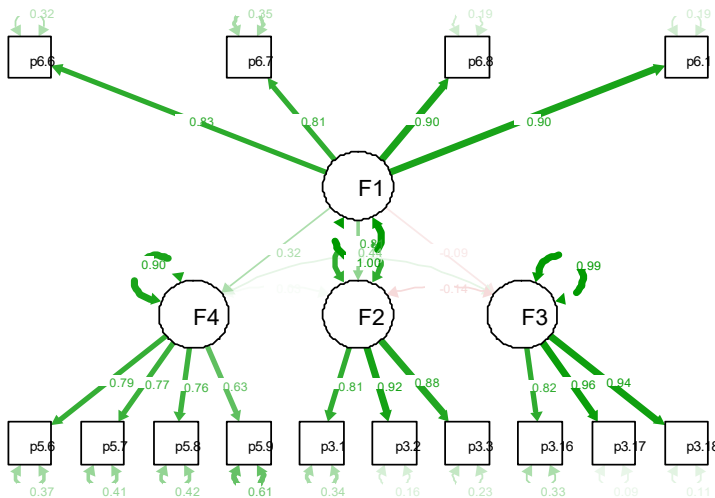
**Table 4.** Construct reliability – Bosnia and Herzegovina group

B&H	$\alpha$	$\omega_1$	$\omega_2$	$\omega_3$	AVE
F1	0.821	0.826	0.826	0.824	0.549
F4	0.746	0.755	0.755	0.754	0.446
F2	0.834	0.842	0.842	0.843	0.645
F3	0.944	0.947	0.947	0.948	0.857

Source: Own estimates

**Fig 2.** Structural model – Croatia group

1



Source: Own estimates



**Table 5.** Hypothesized relations – Group 1 – Croatia

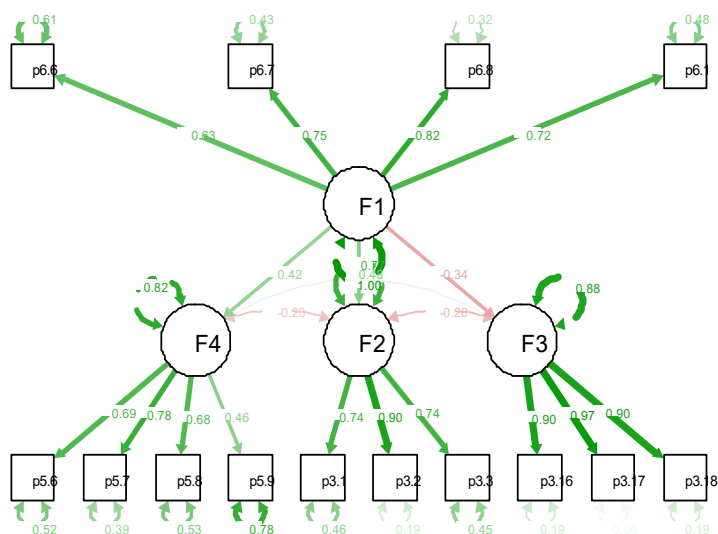
Path	Beta	S.E.	Relations
CET → Business ethnocentric orientation	0.339	*** 0.121	Positive
CET → Willingness to buy domestic products	0.484	*** 0.115	Positive
CET → Willingness to buy imported products	-0.091	n.s. 0.093	Not significant

Notes: \*\*\* -  $p < 0.001$ , \*\* -  $p < 0.05$

Source: Own estimates

**Fig 3.** Structural model – Bosnia and Herzegovina group

2



Source: Own estimates

**Table 6.** Hypothesized relations – Group 2 – Bosnia and Herzegovina

Path	Beta	S.E.	Relations
CET → Business ethnocentric orientation	0.464	*** 0.146	Positive
CET → Willingness to buy domestic products	0.550	*** 0.166	Positive
CET → Willingness to buy imported products	-0.362	*** 0.129	Positive

Notes: \*\*\* -  $p < 0.001$ , \*\* -  $p < 0.05$

Source: Own estimates

In the case of Croatia, consumer ethnocentrism effect on willingness to buy imported products was not significant. However, overall research results have indicated that Consumer ethnocentrism affect managerial decision-making process towards foreign companies and products. Consequently, business ethnocentric orientation of their organization was confirmed.

## DISCUSSION

Ethnocentrism as an attribute is relative to circumstances and besides negative manifestation can also take neutral or positive forms (Michilova, Piekkari, Storgaard, & Tienari, 2017). The concept of consumer ethnocentrism in some cases implies biased cognitive aspects such as beliefs about domestic products superiority (Shimp & Sharma, 1987), but also has a positive forms of manifestation such as a prosociality (Olsen, Granzin, & Biswas, 1993; Saimagka & Balabanis, 2015; Skallerud & Wien, 2019). Prosociality refers to caring for the welfare of others without expectation of reward (Saimagka & Balabanis, 2015; Shimp & Sharma, 1987). Consumer ethnocentrism entails normative and personal perspective, therefore it is reasonably to conclude that ethnocentric disposition to act (Shimp & Sharma, 1987) can be initiated from normative, personal or both of described paths. Even the fact that ethnocentrism is mostly been observed from the point of consumers' reactions, this study has confirmed that effects of ethnocentrism can be manifested at different levels of environments (Neuliep, Hintz, & McCroskey, 2005), including interpersonal (eg. consumer), and organizational environments (e.g. managers and business owners). The main contribution of this study is confirmation that concept of consumer ethnocentrism offers an understanding of the way in which individual and organizational consumers draw comparisons between domestic and foreign products (Luque-Martínez, A., & del Barrio-García, 2000).

This study contributes to the managerial implications from the point of influence of consumer ethnocentrism on individual and organizational consumers, leading to the conclusion that a certain level of consumer ethnocentrism in an observed market can be understand as an indicator of specific informal barrier to the international strategy formulations towards other groups, beside consumers. Also, the fact that this research includes Millennials from two countries contributes to the higher relevance of this study. Millennials represent the largest global consumer group which makes a sizeable contribution to the economy (Stępień, Hinner, & Pinto Lima, 2018). Although some recent researches suggest that Millennials express marginally level of consumer ethnocentrism (Stamule & Steluta, 2017), some other studies have pointed out that formation of consumer ethnocentrism is results of complex interaction of two opposite forces homogenization and globalization, and can be highly research context specific (Gonzales-Fuentes, 2019). Even the facts that Millennials are very often described as a homogeneous global segment, doubts about the homogeneity of this cohort are supported by more recent academic findings claiming that the country-specific and global values or trends co-exist as an attribution of Millennials (Stępień, Hinner, & Pinto Lima, 2018). This research has also confirmed some country-specific characteristics of Millennials, especially in the case of different level of consumer ethnocentrism between sample from two countries. At the same time, the size of sample and only two countries included in the research can be considered as a certain limitation of this study, especially from the point of generalization of the results.

## CONCLUSION

As a direct consequence of formal market deregulation, there is a growing importance of informal market barriers. Ethnocentrism has been considered as a prominent informal barrier to international business, and assessing the levels of consumer

ethnocentrism is fundamentally important to consumer and strategic decision making in the global marketplace (Saimagka & Balabanis, 2015). The research results of this study have confirmed that consumer ethnocentrism can be related to ethnocentric decisions of managers and to shape overall organizational strategies towards foreign products and companies. The main research question has been answered positively confirming that the concept of consumer ethnocentrism can be extended from consumers to other groups such as managers, especially in the domain of decision making process towards foreign companies and products influencing ethnocentric orientation of business. This study confirmed the extension of consumer ethnocentrism from consumer to managerial decision making process, indicating the relevance of this concept, not only for consumer based strategies, but also for overall international business strategies. Consumer ethnocentrism as an attribute of certain market can be a clear indicator of existence of ethnocentrism of different groups such as managers of host country organizations. Therefore, existence of consumer ethnocentrism on a certain country should be treated not only as an important segmentation variable, but also as an important factor that determine behaviors of other stakeholders' groups that might affect companies' success on the concrete market. As it was noted above, including young population from two countries as a part of global cohort Millennials in the research have a lot of positive benefits, still generalization of the research results on overall population is limited. Also, further studies should offer an integrative theoretical approach to ethnocentrism in the international business field. In international business literature Millennials as managers are characterized with a sense of well-being and commitment to social causes (Gerard, 2019; Rawlins, Indvik, & Johnson, 2008), therefore Social Identity Theory might contribute to better insight in various intergroup dynamics in globalized environment and to understanding of decision-making by and within organizations (Tackas-Haynes & Raskovic, 2020). Future studies should observe several markets taking in account a Social Identity Theory in exploration of ethnocentrism to bridging the fields between international business and consumer behavior.

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