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Review paper

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INFLUENCE OF CULTURAL FACTORS ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR DURING THE CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEAR HOLIDAYS IN THE SOUTHEAST EUROPE MARKET

Abstract

There is a need to research consumer behaviour during the Christmas and New Year holidays, as the holidays are a unique time to observe different customs, festive habits and product purchase patterns, i.e. consumer buying behaviour. Cultural factors have a strong influence on all of the categories listed above. This article emphasizes the significance of understanding and knowing consumer behavior, the application of this concept to local markets, and the impact of cultural factors on consumer behavior. The relevance of the presented research stems from the identification of specific characteristics of consumer behavior during the winter holidays, as well as the fact that this phenomenon is influenced by various cultural factors related to the way of celebrating, customs, decorating the Christmas tree, figurines, symbolism related to the winter holidays, etc. The data on consumer behavior was gathered through a questionnaire-based survey of consumers in the Southeast European market. The study of consumer

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behavior inspired by the aforementioned winter holidays led us to the conclusion that it could be beneficial to gain a better knowledge and understanding of consumer behavior in order to develop appropriate marketing strategies for businesses during this period.

Key words: *holidays, consumer behavior, cultural factors, celebration, symbolism, customs, marketing strategy.*

JEL classification: M31, P36, Z10

Introduction

The need to adapt to the local culture abroad, i.e., to the local market of the country where the entry is made, reflects the complexity of applying marketing when entering foreign markets. Marketing is not as fixed as mathematics, which means that there is not always an exact formula that can be applied in every case. Different countries have distinct cultures and economies, and marketing should reflect this. Consumer behavior research is critical for companies looking to enter a foreign market [5, p.6]. Thus, the purpose of this article is to demonstrate the interconnectedness, complexity, and mutual influence of concepts such as culture, symbolism, holidays, marketing, and consumer behavior. It also aims to emphasize the significance of studying consumer behavior as part of a larger marketing research project, as well as the significance of studying the influence of cultural factors on consumer behavior. The presentation and analysis of the research conducted by the author of this paper is provided as an example of research. The presentation and examination of the study conducted by the author of this paper is provided as an example of research. The research presented here is picturesque and interesting because it deals with a topic that is familiar to all of us, namely the holidays. The concept of New Year and Christmas has a similar meaning for all nations – it brings joy, happiness and optimism. Because of this meaning, people are willing to invest a lot of attention, energy and material resources in celebrating these holidays and thus in shopping and spending during the holidays. The idea to conduct a study on the holidays arose from the fact that consumer behaviour during this period has various

peculiarities and is influenced by different cultural factors related to the way of celebrating, customs, decorating the Christmas tree, symbolism associated with the holidays and the like.

In order for companies to develop appropriate marketing campaigns during this period, especially when operating in foreign markets, it is necessary to have or acquire knowledge of consumer behaviour. The local market in which a company operates or wants to operate has various peculiarities due to cultural factors, such as customs, religion, beliefs, the relationship between tradition and modernity, and also whether it is a collectivist or individualist society, which particularly affects how much influence a family has, as well as the way of celebrating. All this suggests that cultural factors have a major impact on consumer behaviour and on shaping companies' marketing strategies during the holiday season, and therefore holidays are a special topic that deserves our attention.

In the first part of this research, a general theoretical overview of consumer behaviour, culture and cultural factors is given. Then, some of the symbols and customs related to Christmas and New Year are presented. In the second part of the research, the research methodology and the description of the study are presented. Finally, the research findings and observations and conclusions from the study are given, which may be useful for researching consumer behaviour as well as for formulating appropriate marketing strategies by companies for the festive season.

1. Consumer Behavior, Culture and Cultural Factors

Consumer behaviour examines how individuals or groups select, purchase and use products, services, ideas or experiences to satisfy their needs and desires [11, p. 6]. Consumers make decisions related to consumption about how they use their resources such as time, money and effort, and the study of consumer behaviour focuses on how they make these decisions [12, p. 5]. Interest in consumer behaviour is growing not only in the field of marketing, but also in the social sciences in general. This can be explained by the growing awareness of the importance of consumption in our daily lives and how this consumption affects our quality of life, how it shapes our identity and influences the politics and economic development of a

particular country. Consumer culture has become a part of global culture and is spreading to different parts of the world. [11. p. 6] Insights into consumer behaviour are a basis for determining marketing strategies in companies. Companies that ignore the importance of consumer behaviour information in their marketing decisions may experience business failures and losses sooner or later. The behaviour of a human being (the consumer) is stimulated and motivated by various economic, sociological, psychological and other factors [8, pp. 3–4]. Among these factors that influence consumer behaviour are cultural factors.

There are many similar definitions of culture, but in general it is said that culture includes everything that people have created in their environment. [8, pp. 67 – 68]. This may sound too broad, but almost every aspect of human life is influenced by culture, for example, the way people express themselves, how they think, how problems are solved, how cities are planned and laid out, and how economic and government systems are organised. [3, p. 16] Often, however, “it is the most obvious and self-evident, and therefore least studied, aspect of culture that influences behaviour in the most profound and subtle ways. Anthropologists agree on three features of culture: it is not innate but learned; the different facets of culture are interconnected – when you touch a culture in one place, it affects everything else; it is shared and actually defines the boundaries of different groups” [3, p. 16]. Researching the culture of a particular global society or group is useful in analysing how it functions in the community [6, pp. 23].

From a marketing perspective, culture can be defined as a set of beliefs, values and customs that influence consumer behaviour [8, pp. 67 – 68]. Cultural factors have a great influence on consumer behaviour [4, p. 179] To gain knowledge about culture, we need to explore factors of a particular society, such as language, religion, folklore, music, art, laws, customs, eating habits, technology, work habits and so on. Since culture has such a great influence on consumption and the process of consumer decision-making, knowledge of culture is useful for developing promotional activities of companies, especially those operating in foreign markets, where consumer habits and desires are the result of sociological and cultural factors present in those markets. Cultural symbols are becoming

increasingly important in marketing. Consumers often buy products because they mean a symbol of value to them (quality, prestige, etc.). [8, pp. 67 – 68] As far as holidays are concerned, symbolism is very important, which will be presented in the next chapter of this paper. From the description of culture presented, it is clear why it is important to study the influence of cultural factors on consumer behaviour and, in the context of this study, on consumer behaviour during the holidays. In the context of the holidays, we can say that culture has a significant influence on the way of celebrating, then on shopping and purchasing decisions and, for example, on the choice of food consumed during the holidays.

2. Symbols and Customs Related to Christmas and New Year Holidays

The New Year and Christmas holidays are specific in that they are associated with various symbols and customs unique to that period. Since this symbolism is an integral part of celebrating holidays, it is important that we know and understand this symbolism in order to better understand consumer behaviour in relation to holidays and how they are celebrated.

2.1 The Concept and Significance of Santa Claus and the Christmas Tree Decoration Custom

Santa Claus is an imaginary figure that originated in Western Christian culture. The Modern Santa Claus, i.e. the idea of Santa Claus came from the historical figure of the bishop St. Nicholas. Santa Claus is usually depicted as a jolly, elderly man with a white beard, wearing a red coat with a white fur collar and red bonnet, red trousers and carrying a sack full of presents for children. The image of Santa Claus has persisted and his importance has increased through songs, radio, television, children's books and marketing. The story of Santa Claus says that he makes a list of children around the world, categorising them according to their behaviour, and on Christmas Eve (24 December) or Christmas morning (25 December) he gives presents, including toys and sweets, to all children who have behaved well during the year.

In Serbia, due to the influence of socialism and communism and the suppression of religion, the concept of Santa Claus began to be associated with the New Year, thus Santa Claus brings presents to children on New Year's Eve. Accordingly, all advertising campaigns using the figure of Santa Claus, as well as various actions such as the distribution of gifts to children by people playing Santa Claus, focus on the New Year. The importance and role of the figure Santa Claus in New Year celebrations in Serbia is reflected in the fact that there are special agencies in Serbia that "hire" Santa Claus for house parties, company parties, for distributing New Year gifts to children, for organising events, etc. Another custom that was suppressed under the influence of socialism in Serbia, and also in some other countries in the region is decorating the Christmas tree. In Serbia, the Christmas tree is decorated for the New Year (in Serbian it is also called New Year's tree), while among Catholics and Protestants the Christmas tree is usually decorated for Christmas (hence Christmas tree).

2.2 Sending Christmas and New Year Greeting Cards

Recently, we have observed changes in the buying behaviour of greeting cards. While greeting cards used to be bought mainly on the street, in shops and at kiosks, nowadays you see them less. Greeting cards by email, e-greeting cards from various websites and SMS greetings are becoming more common, while cardboard greeting cards are becoming rarer. Sometimes you do not even have to buy them, just download them from the Internet (depending on the copyright). The hectic modern lifestyle and modern technology are slowly replacing the beautiful old tradition of sending cardboard greeting cards and the sweet anticipation and looking in the post-box to see if someone has sent us a greeting card. People were willing to devote more time and attention to this ritual, from making lists of the people they wanted to send a card to putting more effort into buying and choosing greeting cards. [15] Consequently, we can say that users' experiences of buying and sending greeting cards have changed. All these aspects and changes are interesting to observe from the perspective of consumer behaviour analysis.

The history of New Year's cards is also very interesting. New Year greetings can already be found among the ancient Chinese and Egyptians, who transmitted their greetings on papyrus scrolls. New Year greetings also existed in the Middle Ages, in the form of engravings with biblical motifs on small murals that decorated houses at Christmas. They were made by monks and pilgrims, and since they were very expensive and valued, they were a privilege of the nobility. The tradition of sending New Year and Christmas cards originated in England, where they usually showed a happy and cheerful family at the holiday table. The first greeting card was produced as early as 1843, based on motifs by John Calcott Horsley, and distributed by Sir Conrad Cole. The classic sale of New Year's cards began a few years later. The edition of this greetings card was about 1,000, and today only 12 of them remain. One of these 12 copies went under the hammer at auction in 2001 and fetched a price of £20,250. Sending greeting cards was very expensive and more time-consuming than it is today, because the stagecoaches were slow and unreliable. Greeting cards often arrived late, some even after the holidays. With the advent of the railway, long distances were bridged and postal services became faster and accessible to a greater number of users. The motifs on the cards were typically wintry - idyllic depictions in the snow, Santa Claus, sleighs with reindeer, etc. Sending Christmas cards quickly became common all over the world. In the United States, the idea of New Year and Christmas cards came much earlier, but they were not available to a large number of people. The reason was that they were very expensive. Sending greeting cards became more popular in the United States from 1875 onwards, thanks to the mass press and the drop in postage prices. Besides England and the United States, there were also Christmas traditions in Russia at this time. Russians decorated their homes lavishly and sent handmade cards to give away at Christmas. Russian greeting cards featured Christian themes, angels, winter landscapes, churches, motifs from folk tales, etc. The Russian Revolution interrupted this beautiful custom. Due to social circumstances, Christmas became an undesirable holiday, and so the cards, like other Christmas symbols, were banned. However, during the Second World War, Christmas cards began to be used again. The

distribution of cards in our region began in the penultimate decade of the 19th century. The year 1970 was a record year, when four million cards were delivered in Serbia. In 1949, charity cards from UNICEF were distributed all over the world. The author of the first of this series was the seven-year-old Czech Jitka Samkova. Many famous artists, such as Henri Matisse, Marc Chagall, Picasso, Dali and Kandinsky, also later became the authors of the UNICEF's cards. [15]

New Year's cards are usually sent as greetings to loved ones, with best wishes for the upcoming holidays and the next year. "They usually show a Christmas tree, snow, green forests, Santa Claus, sleighs, reindeer and the like. Cards are exchanged now more than ever, but now with a simple click on the phone or computer screen, delivering Christmas wishes in the form of text messages and emails. And this is part of a global ritual in which we all participate. However, modern psychologists interpret it as a custom to congratulate the New Year with good wishes, to renew positive social communication, to eliminate anger, conflict and other unpleasant patterns in human relationships. But it also renews faith in the power of our wishes every year". [15] This raises hope that this beautiful custom will be preserved despite the influence of our modern times.

3. The Importance and Objective of Research

There is a fundamental assumption that business people who want to operate effectively in today's global business environment should be prepared to master the cultural environment of the market they enter. [2, p. 6] When assessing the international marketing environment, the international trading system, the economic environment, the political-legal environment, and the cultural environment must all be considered [10, p. 373] Marketers are becoming increasingly aware of the need to consider culture when developing marketing strategies for different markets [13, p. 183].

Failure to consider the cultural context in the markets in which they operate has led to misunderstandings, miscommunication, costly marketing mistakes, and litigation for many companies. Consideration of cultural context is particularly important in the area

of international business [2, p. 9]. Mistakes that are often made arise from language, religion, or situations where advertising, symbols, or gestures have different meanings in different countries with different cultures [13, p. 183].

From all of this, there is a better understanding of the importance of researching the influence of cultural factors on consumer behavior. Within the factors that influence consumer behavior, attention should be paid to the cultural factors that are the target of this research. The holiday season is a stimulating period when the influence of various cultural factors on the way of celebrating, consumer behavior and the development of marketing strategies by enterprises comes to the fore.

For companies, especially foreign companies, that conduct marketing campaigns to the local population during the Christmas and New Year holidays, it is important to know how the local population in the country in which they operate celebrates these holidays. The aim of the research presented here is to study the influence of cultural factors during the holidays from two points of view – first, the influence of cultural factors on consumer behavior, and second, the influence of cultural factors on the companies that develop marketing strategies under the influence of these factors. These two aspects are interrelated, as knowledge of consumer behavior is certainly essential for companies developing their marketing strategies for a particular market. The research presented in this paper was related to countries that are part of the Southeast European market, and is therefore important for companies that operate or want to operate in this market, but also for anyone who wants to better understand the influence of cultural factors on consumer behavior.

4. Description of Research Methodology

The methodology in this study was determined on the basis of the research to be conducted. Based on the analysis of the object of research itself and the analysis of possible methods and techniques of data collection, the method of data collection by interview was selected, and within it the interview technique – the survey. Surveys can provide information about consumer attitudes, perceptions,

lifestyles and the way consumers make decisions. Measuring consumer behaviour often involves asking what, where, when and how often something happens. [1, pp. 232 – 233] A questionnaire is a data collection tool used in survey research. [14, p. 133] A questionnaire consists of questions that respondents answer in writing. Depending on the form of answers offered to the respondent, a distinction is made between open and closed questionnaires. In closed questionnaires, respondents tick one or more answers depending on the instructions, and in open questionnaires, respondents formulate their own answers to the questions. These two types of questions can also be combined in one questionnaire [9, pp.78 – 79].

In the case of this study, anonymous written self-report in the form of a questionnaire was used as the survey technique. The questions in the questionnaire were formulated to fit the theme of holidays and the specifics related to holidays that were assumed to affect consumer behaviour as well as the development of marketing strategies of companies during this period. The questionnaire was structured according to the principle of gradation and contained several closed answers from which the respondent selects only one. Only one question was a combination of closed and open question, asking respondents to indicate where they were travelling. Respondents were contacted by email and via the social network Facebook, and some respondents were also given a printed questionnaire to complete. The number of returned questionnaires that were sent electronically is small compared to the expected number. A written survey has significant advantages, mainly because of cost efficiency, but also because respondents need to be well read and write. Unfortunately, this is not often the case. Although they are numerous, respondents with good literacy skills often do not have a sufficiently developed habit or sufficient motivation for written communication. Even very literate respondents are sometimes reluctant to complete a questionnaire [7, p. 207]. The fact that respondents are reluctant to complete the questionnaire was confirmed by this research and the difficulty of obtaining a sufficiently large sample. Although the compiled questionnaires were easy to fill in and not time-consuming, the response rate was low and

it was difficult to get people to fill them in and even necessary to remind them to do so.

The research was conducted during the period December 2019 – January 2020 and it consisted of two parts. The first part dealt with the influence of cultural factors on consumer behaviour during the New Year and Christmas holidays. The questionnaire prepared for this part of the research included items such as decoration and decorating the Christmas tree, buying gifts and food, the way of celebrating, customs, figures and symbols related to the holidays, festive music, sending New Year and Christmas cards, family influence – i.e., festive elements influenced by cultural factors. The study of consumer behaviour was conducted through a consumer survey in the form of a questionnaire. Due to the scope of the research, it was not possible to include all South East European countries, so the consumer behaviour survey covered the following countries: Serbia, Macedonia, Bulgaria and Greece. The second part of the research relates to the influence of cultural factors on companies developing marketing strategies during the New Year and Christmas holidays. The questionnaire for companies included elements such as product adaptation (design, packaging decisions, etc.), price adaptation, distribution and advertising mix during the New Year and Christmas holidays, the role of symbolic elements such as the figure of Santa Claus in advertising campaigns, religion and the like. These questions aimed to explore the influence of cultural factors on the development of marketing strategies during the Christmas and New Year holidays. After creating the questionnaire, the author conducted an online survey to find potential companies to send the questionnaire to. The questionnaires were sent to a total of 51 companies during the New Year and Christmas holidays, from December 2019 to January 2020. The method used is a survey by means of questionnaires sent by email to companies in the following South-Eastern European countries: Serbia, Macedonia, Bulgaria, Romania, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Croatia and Montenegro. However, due to the weak response of the companies, it was not possible to analyse the results of this survey as the sample was too small. Since knowledge about consumer behaviour is related to the development of marketing strategies and

the influence of cultural factors plays an important role both in researching consumer behaviour and in developing marketing strategies, these two prepared surveys are linked so that the results of one can be analysed for the needs of the other. Due to the weak response, the business strategy proposal cannot be based on the results of the business survey, but it can be based on the consumer survey presented in this paper.

5. Analysis of Research Results

In the following part, the results of the survey “Influence of cultural factors on consumer behaviour during the Christmas and New Year holidays in the South East European market” are presented through the respondents’ answers in percentage and through the analysis of these results. As for the study of the influence of cultural factors on the development of marketing strategies during the Christmas and New Year holidays, the results of this survey are not analysed here due to the insufficient sample, as the response rate of companies to this survey was low (15.68%).

The structure of the sample for the study of the influence of cultural factors on consumer behaviour during the New Year and Christmas holidays was as follows. The number of respondents in the sample was 51.

Table 1. Sample structure by gender

Gender	Women	Men
%	54.90%	45.10%

Source: Author’s calculation

Table 2. Sample structure by religion group

Religion	Orthodox Christians	Christians (did not declare whether they are Orthodox, Catholic, etc.)	Atheists	SBNR - Spiritual but not religious
%	88.23%	3.92%	3.92%	1.92%

Source: Author’s calculation

Here is an interesting response from a female respondent who answered the question about religion with the abbreviation SBNR,

which is explained as “spiritual but not religious”. Due to the nature of the questionnaire, it was not possible to find out more about what kind of spirituality this was, but the author assumes that the respondent nevertheless distinguished herself from the respondents who answered that they were atheists.

Table 3. Sample structure by nationality

Nationality	Serbian	Bulgarian	Greek	Macedonian
%	78.43%	13.72%	1.96%	3.91%

Source: Author’s calculation

Table 4. Sample structure by age

Age	Up to 25 years	From 25 to 40 years	From 40 to 55 years	From 55 to 70 years
%	15.69%	49.02%	27.45%	7.84%

Source: Author’s calculation

Table 5. Sample structure by educational level

Level of education	Secondary school	College	University	Master	Magister	PhD
%	21.57%	5.88%	41.18%	19.6%	1.96%	9.80%

Source: Author’s calculation

In the following, the author analyses the answers to the questions from the questionnaire about the influence of cultural factors on consumer behaviour during the Christmas and New Year holidays.

Table 6. Answers on the Question 1 from the questionnaire

Do you celebrate Christmas with family or friends?			
Always with family	Always with friends	Sometimes with family, sometimes with friends	I don't celebrate Christmas
88.23%	0%	11.76%	0%

Source: Author’s calculation

The fact that no respondent answered that they only celebrate with friends and that no respondent answered that they do not celebrate Christmas at all is significant because it actually shows that everyone in this sample celebrates Christmas and that the vast majority celebrate Christmas with family, i.e. that family has an important role and significance in celebrating Christmas. Of the vast majority who celebrate Christmas with family only 68.63% are Serbs, while Bulgarians make up 9.80%, Macedonians 3.92% and Greeks 1.96%. Of the respondents of Serbian nationality, only 5.88% celebrate with family and friends occasionally, while the majority of the respondents (68.63%) who always celebrate with family shows that among Serbs the importance of family and the influence of family on Christmas is very high.

Table 7. Answers on the Question 2 from the questionnaire

Do you celebrate New Year with family or friends?					
Always with family	with	Always with friends	with	Sometimes with family, sometimes with friends	I don't celebrate New Year
21.57%		19.61%		58.82%	0%

Source: Author's calculation

If we relate the result of the first question, where all respondents celebrate Christmas, with the result of this question, that all respondents celebrate New Year, we can say that this indicates that New Year and Christmas are of great importance, and that from the point of view of researching consumer behaviour, this indicates the importance of researching these holidays and consumer behaviour during these holidays. Here, the importance of family is slightly lower as there is a larger number of respondents who would sometimes or always choose to celebrate with friends rather than family compared to the previous question. This also shows that Christmas is mostly seen as a family celebration, while this is less the case for New Year.

Table 8. Answers on the Question 3 from the questionnaire

What percentage of your monthly income do you spend on buying gifts for the New Year and Christmas holidays?			
> 5%	> 10%	> 20%	> 30%
31.37%	41.18%	23.52%	0%

Source: Author's calculation

As we can see from the Table 8, 31.37% of the respondents answered more than 5% (and less than 10%), majority – 41.18% more than 10% (and less than 20%), 23.52% more than 20% (and less than 30%) while none of the respondents spent more than 30% of their income on buying gifts for the New Year and Christmas holidays. Thus, most respondents (41.18%) spend between 10% and 20% of their income on buying gifts. In general, the responses indicate that spending on buying gifts for the New Year and Christmas holidays is not very high in relation to monthly income, i.e. moderate consumption.

Table 9. Answers on the Question 4 from the questionnaire

What percentage of your monthly income do you spend on decorations for the New Year and Christmas holidays?			
>5%	>10%	>20%	>30%
86.27%	11.76%	1.96%	0%

Source: Author's calculation

The vast majority of the respondents (86, 27%) reported spending more than 5% of their income (and less than 10%), 11.76% spend more than 10% (and less than 20%), while a small percentage (1.96%) spend more than 20% (and less than 30%). None of the respondents spend more than 30%. Given that the vast majority (86.27% of respondents) only spend between 5% and 10%, this shows that spending on buying decorations for the New Year and Christmas holidays is not significant in relation to monthly income, and is even less significant when compared to the results for buying gifts.

Table 10. Answers on the Question 5 from the questionnaire

What percentage of your monthly income do you spend on food for the New Year and Christmas holidays?			
>5%	>10%	>20%	>30%
33.33%	19.61%	39.21%	7.84%

Source: Author's calculation

Table 10 shows that 33.33% of the respondents spend more than 5% (and less than 10%), 19.61% spend more than 10% (and less than 20%), while most of 39.21% spend more than 20% (and less than 30%) and 7.84% spend more than 30%. Since we can see that a significantly higher percentage of respondents spend more than 20% and 30% compared to the expenditure on decoration, we can conclude that for consumers in this sample, buying food is much more important than buying decoration and that they are willing to spend a significant portion of their income on food. Moreover, the majority of respondents (39.21%) spend more than 20% on food (and less than 30%), which is close to the maximum income share reported in the responses.

Table 11. Answers on the Question 6 from the questionnaire

Do you travel during the Christmas and New Year holidays, how often and where?			
I don't travel	I sometimes travel	I often travel	I always travel
37.25%	49.02%	13.72%	0%

Source: Author's calculation

A surprisingly high percentage of respondents said they do not travel at all this holiday (37.25%), while the majority travel occasionally (49.02%). None of the respondents gave the answer that they always travel. These results are significant for businesses in the tourism industry as they show how many people celebrate Christmas and New Year in their place of residence and how many of them travel to other places. A very small number of respondents indicated where they were travelling to, and of those who did, most indicated Serbia, Montenegro or the surrounding region, Austria and Europe. Only one respondent from Greece said she was travelling to the USA to visit relatives.

Table 12. Answers on the Question 7 from the questionnaire

What is your family's influence on deciding to buy gifts for the New Year and Christmas holidays?			
No influence	Influences to a lesser extent	Moderately influences	Fully influences
41.18%	21.57%	13.72%	5.88%

Source: Author's calculation

Surprisingly, the vast majority of respondents answered that family has no influence (41.18%). Since the results of the previous questions related to who you celebrate New Year's and Christmas with indicate that the role of family in celebrating these holidays is of great importance, it was to be expected that family has a great influence on the purchase of New Year's and Christmas gifts. The family in general can have a major influence on consumption. For this reason, the concept of family was included in the survey. The author's own assumption, as far as Serbia was concerned, was that in a society that is considered collectivist, the influence of the family would be great. However, the results of the survey showed that family is very important when celebrating Christmas, moderately important when celebrating New Year, while the influence on buying gifts is generally low.

Table 13. Answers on the Question 8 from the questionnaire

What is the influence of religion on the customs and the way of celebrating the New Year in your case?			
No influence	Influences to a lesser extent	Moderately influences	Fully influences
39.21%	41.18%	13.72%	5.88%

Source: Author's calculation

A surprisingly large proportion answered that there was no influence (39.21%). The majority of respondents answered that it has a lesser influence (41.18%). Of the majority of respondents who answered that religion has less influence, 33.33% are Serbs, 3.92% Bulgarians and 1.96% Macedonians. The low influence of religion

on the New Year could indicate that most respondents consider the New Year separately from Christmas.

Table 14. Answers on the Question 9 from the questionnaire

What is the influence of religion on the customs and the way of celebrating Christmas in your case?			
No influence	Influences to a lesser extent	Moderately influences	Fully influences
1.96%	23.52%	45.09%	29.41%

Source: Author's calculation

The vast majority answered that it has a moderate influence (45.09%). In contrast to the previous question about the influence of religion on the customs and the way the New Year is celebrated, where a large proportion of respondents answered that there is no influence, here only 1.96% answered that there is no influence. From the overall results we can conclude that the influence of religion on the customs and the way Christmas is celebrated is significant and that the influence of religion on the customs and the way Christmas is celebrated is much greater than the influence on the customs and the way New Year is celebrated.

Table 15. Answers on the Question 10 from the questionnaire

What is the significance and role of the Santa Claus figure in the celebration of New Year and Christmas in your country?			
No significance	Small significance	Moderate significance	Great significance
11.76%	19.61%	47.06%	21.57%

Source: Author's calculation

Since most respondents think that the concept of Santa Claus in the celebration of New Year and Christmas in their country, this suggests that the concept of Santa Claus is important in the celebration of New Year and Christmas. This is a finding that may be useful for companies designing their campaigns for consumers during the New Year and Christmas holidays. In the survey prepared for the companies, there was a question "What is the importance and role of the Santa Claus figure in your company's advertising

campaign for Christmas and New Year?”, but the response was too low to analyse the sample.

Table 16. Answers on the Question 11 from the questionnaire

Do you decorate the Christmas tree for the New Year and Christmas?			
No	Sometimes	Often	Always
5.88%	25.49%	7.84%	60.78%

Source: Author’s calculation

Considering that the vast majority of respondents answered that they always decorate the Christmas tree (60.78%) and that 25.49% sometimes decorate the Christmas tree, we can conclude that the majority of respondents always or sometimes decorate the Christmas tree, indicating the importance of this custom. These results can be useful for companies that use the motif of a decorated Christmas tree in their advertising, and they also provide information about spending on decorations and the like.

Table 17. Answers on the Question 12 from the questionnaire

In case you moved to another country, have the local cultural factors of the country you moved to influenced your way of celebrating New Year and Christmas holidays?			
No	To a lesser extent	To a greater extent	I did not move
41.18%	25.49%	7.84%	25.49%

Source: Author’s calculation

These results show us that when respondents moved to another country, they were not strongly influenced by local cultural factors in terms of celebrating the New Year and Christmas holidays.

Table 18. Answers on the Question 13 from the questionnaire

To what extent has the modern way of celebrating New Year and Christmas suppressed the traditional ways of celebrating New Year and Christmas in your country?			
Did not suppress	Suppressed to a lesser extent	Moderately suppressed	Completely suppressed
33.33%	35.29%	31.37%	0%

Source: Author’s calculation

Although a large proportion of respondents claim that the modern way of celebrating New Year and Christmas has not displaced the traditional way of celebrating, the majority answered that it is displaced to a lesser extent or moderately. It can be concluded that the modern way of celebrating has moderately displaced the traditional way of celebrating New Year and Christmas.

Table 19. Answers on the Question 14 from the questionnaire

Do you listen to local traditional music during Christmas and New Year holidays?			
No	Sometimes	Often	Always
27.45%	49.02%	17.65%	5.88%

Source: Author's calculation

The results of this question that majority of the respondents sometimes listen to local traditional music, 17.65% often listen to local traditional music and 5.88% always listen to local traditional music show us that the importance and presence of local traditional music during the New Year and Christmas holidays is moderate.

Table 20. Answers on the Question 15 from the questionnaire

Do you like the city you live in to be decorated for Christmas and New Year?		
Yes	No	Maybe
90.20%	3.92%	5.88%

Source: Author's calculation

The majority of 90.20% was not so surprising, as the author assumed that most people like to decorate their city, for the visual effect and festive atmosphere. What was more surprising was that there are people who do not want any decoration at all, but in a lower percentage than those who answered maybe. The results show the importance of decorating cities during the New Year and Christmas holidays.

Table 21. Answers on the Question 16 from the questionnaire

Do you send New Year cards?			
No	Sometimes	Often	Always
37.25%	39.21%	7.84%	15.69%

Source: Author's calculation

A large and surprising percentage answered that they do not send (37.25%). The majority sometimes send (39.21%), but this percentage is close to the percentage of respondents who do not send at all. The surprisingly large majority answered that they do not send greeting cards at all, which only confirms what was said earlier in this article about sending New Year cards - that this custom is increasingly being lost. Nevertheless, the majority of 39.21% sometimes send cards, which shows that this custom is still maintained.

Table 22. Answers on the Question 17 from the questionnaire

Do you send Christmas cards?			
No	Sometimes	Often	Always
39.21%	33.33%	11.76%	15.69%

Source: Author's calculation

Again, a large percentage, in this case even the majority, answered that they do not send cards (39.21%), while 33.33% of them answered that they sometimes send Christmas cards. Similarly to New Year's cards, the majority of respondents answered that they do not send Christmas cards at all, which only confirms what was said earlier in this post about sending New Year's and Christmas cards, namely that this custom is increasingly being lost. However, if we take into account all respondents who send cards, some sometimes, some often and some always, the number of respondents who send Christmas cards is still the majority (overall), which shows that the custom of sending Christmas cards is still maintained.

Table 23. Answers on the Question 18 from the questionnaire

Do you buy new clothes for New Year's Eve?			
No	Sometimes	Often	Always
25.49%	58.82%	9.80%	5.88%

Source: Author's calculation

From these results, we can conclude that a significant majority of respondents are buying new clothes for New Year's Eve, meaning that consumers are willing to engage in this type of spending during the holidays. This is certainly important data for the apparel industry and brands who can use this data to intensify their campaigns during the Christmas and New Year holidays. These results also show how much value and importance consumers place on their visual appearance during the holidays and that they want to look festive and fresh in new clothing purchased specifically for the holidays.

Table 24. Answers on the Question 19 from the questionnaire

Do you consider red color a symbol of Christmas?			
No	To a lesser extent	Moderately	Completely
35.29%	17.65%	21.57%	25.49%

Source: Author's calculation

This question is related to holiday symbolism. From these results we can conclude that although the majority of 35.29% of respondents do not consider the red colour to be a symbol of Christmas, a significant percentage of the total do consider the red colour to be a symbol of Christmas. This is significant for companies using Christmas symbolism in their Christmas campaigns and for the impact of this symbolism on consumers.

Table 25. Answers on the Question 20 from the questionnaire

Have the customs of celebrating Christmas and New Year changed in recent years in your country?			
No	To a lesser extent	Moderately	Completely
41.18%	33.33%	23.52%	1.96%

Source: Author's calculation

Of the 41% of respondents who responded that customs in celebrating Christmas and New Year in their country have not changed in recent years, 33.33% of respondents are of Serbian nationality and 7.84% are of Bulgarian nationality. The difference in the overall percentage between respondents who claim that customs

for celebrating Christmas and New Year have changed and respondents who claim that they have not is not large, but when we look at the total number, the majority of those who claim that they have changed moderately or completely is smaller.

Some of the key observations from this analysis are as follows. All respondents celebrate Christmas and New Year, indicating the importance and presence of these holidays. It is therefore important to pay attention to consumption during these holidays. The vast majority always celebrate Christmas with family, indicating that Christmas is considered a family holiday. For New Year, the importance of family is lower and there are respondents who would sometimes or always prefer to celebrate with friends. As far as consumption itself is concerned, consumers are willing to spend most of their income on food in relation to their monthly income, gifts come second and they are least willing to spend on decorations. In terms of travel, a surprisingly large proportion do not travel at all during the holidays, while most travel occasionally. Given that a small percentage travel frequently and no one answered that they always travel, we can see two trends here, and they are - that a large proportion of respondents spend the Christmas and New Year holidays at home and that travelling during these holidays is not so popular. We can also see the trend that most travel to the countries of the region and less to the rest of Europe. While family plays a big role in celebrating Christmas, it has less influence when it comes to buying gifts for the New Year and the Christmas holidays - most respondents even said it has no influence - which is a surprising result. As for religion, it has a small influence on customs and the way the New Year is celebrated, and a moderate influence on celebrating Christmas. Furthermore, a surprisingly large proportion of respondents answered that religion has no influence on the New Year, while it has an influence on Christmas a negligible percentage (1.96%). The vast majority of respondents want their city to be decorated for the New Year. Surprisingly, a large proportion of respondents answered that they do not send New Year and Christmas cards at all, suggesting that this custom is increasingly being lost. Nevertheless, there is still a significant proportion of those who sometimes send cards, which shows that this custom is still

maintained. The vast majority of respondents buy new clothes for New Year's Eve. This trend is also interesting from a psychological point of view – most respondents want to start the new year in something “new” – so here the clothes take on a certain symbolic meaning. This trend is certainly significant for the clothing industry and the brands, for whom this data shows that they should intensify their campaigns during the Christmas and New Year holidays. In terms of the traditional versus the modern, it is important to note that the modern way of celebrating has moderately suppressed the traditional ways of celebrating the New Year and Christmas, while approximately one-third claims that it has not been suppressed at all. Furthermore, while a sizable proportion of those polled claim that Christmas and New Year's customs in their country have not changed in recent years, the vast majority claim that they have changed to a lesser or moderate extent. The fact that the majority of respondents decorate the Christmas tree demonstrates the significance of this holiday tradition. According to the survey results, Santa Claus is important in celebrating the New Year and Christmas in the Southeast European region, therefore businesses should definitely use it in holiday campaigns. The only conundrum is how to coordinate with countries like ours, where the concept of Santa Claus is associated with the New Year rather than Christmas.

Conclusions

By explaining the objective and importance of the research, and analyzing the results of the research, we could see and understand the importance of the New Year and Christmas holidays for marketing, both from the aspect of consumer behavior research and from the aspect of devising appropriate marketing strategies. In the paper, the influence of cultural factors on consumer behavior during holidays was also stressed. The celebration of holidays is related to the specific features of the process of shopping and consumption, compared to other periods of the year. That is why this period is interesting for research. Consumer behavior is greatly influenced by the holidays. During this period, various cultural factors are manifested, some of which appear much more in this period, while

some of them only appear then. All of these cultural factors influence consumer behavior.

This research, inspired by the Christmas and New Year holidays, led us to observations and conclusions that can be useful for researching consumer behavior, as well as for devising appropriate marketing strategies for this period. The results of the consumer survey provided insight into the impact of significant cultural factors on consumers during the holidays, and showed that companies should definitely pay attention to cultural factors when forming their marketing strategies during the holidays. Since all respondents celebrate Christmas and the New Year, companies should invest more in marketing campaigns during the holidays. It has also been shown that Christmas is mostly considered a family holiday, while it has been shown that New Year is less considered a family holiday.

As for consumption, consumption is moderate in relation to income. If we look at decoration consumption, it is not significant in relation to income, while for food respondents are ready to set aside a significant part of income. Companies when combining marketing mix can use these data, while determining the intensity of promotion for certain products, because it was shown that the most should be invested in food advertisements, and for gifts in moderation. The results of the survey also showed that the institution of family is very important in the celebration of Christmas, moderately important in the celebration of the New Year, while as for the influence on the purchase of gifts it influences mostly to a lesser extent. Based on this information, companies should include family themes in their Christmas advertisements, and in moderation at New Year.

Religion has been shown to have a moderate impact on Christmas celebrations, and to a lesser extent on New Year celebrations, so companies should include religious elements more intensively in their Christmas campaigns and less so on New Year's Eve. Most respondents decorate the Christmas tree, which shows that the Christmas tree as a symbol should be included in the marketing campaigns of companies during the holidays. A significant percentage of the total respondents consider red color to be a symbol of Christmas, so companies should include red color in their ads. A significant majority of respondents buy new clothes for the New

Year's Eve, which represents an important data for the companies from the clothing industry. Therefore, they should intensify their campaigns during the Christmas and New Year holidays. Observations and conclusions from this research inspired by the Christmas and New Year holidays can be useful for researching consumer behavior, as well as for devising appropriate marketing strategies of companies for this period, and especially for companies operating in the market of the Southeast Europe.

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UTICAJ KULTUROLOŠKIH FAKTORA NA PONAŠANJE POTROŠAČA TOKOM BOŽIČNIH I NOVOGODIŠNJIH PRAZNIKA NA TRŽIŠTU JUGOISTOČNE EVROPE

Apstrakt

Postoji potreba za istraživanjem ponašanja potrošača tokom božićnih i novogodišnjih praznika zbog toga što period praznika predstavlja specifičan period tokom kojeg se mogu uočiti razni običaji, načini proslave, kao i obrasci kupovine proizvoda, tj. ponašanja potrošača u kupovini. Sve pomenute kategorije su pod velikim uticajem kulturoloških faktora. Ovaj članak stavlja akcenat na značaj poznavanja ponašanja potrošača, na primenu ovog koncepta u nastupu na lokalnim tržištima u međunarodnom marketingu, kao i na uticaj kulturoloških faktora na ponašanje potrošača. Značaj predstavljenog istraživanja proizilazi iz utvrđivanja specifičnosti ponašanja potrošača tokom praznika, kao i iz činjenice da na ovaj fenomen utiču različiti kulturološki faktori koji se odnose na način proslavljanja, običaje, ukrašavanje jelke, figure, simboliku vezanu za praznike i sl. Podaci o ponašanju potrošača prikupljeni su metodom ankete koja je sprovedena putem upitnika prosleđenog potrošačima na tržištu jugoistočne Evrope. Istraživanje ponašanja potrošača inspirisano praznicima dovelo je do zapažanja i zaključaka koji mogu biti korisni za bolje poznavanje institucije ponašanja potrošača, dok ovi nalazi mogu biti u indirektnom smislu korisni i za formiranje odgovarajućih marketinških strategija savremenih kompanija u posmatranom periodu godine.

Ključne reči: praznici, ponašanje potrošača, kulturološki faktori, proslavljanje, simbolika, običaji, marketing strategija.

JEL klasifikacija: M31, P36, Z10