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**PHD THESIS**

*Summary*

**The influence of lifestyle and ethnocentrism upon  
the consumption of Romanian vegetables**

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## **KEY WORDS**

Ethnocentric, patriotism, global openness, lifestyle, vegetables purchase intent, vegetable consumption behavior, consumption of Romanian vegetables.

## **INTRODUCTION**

The process of restructuring Romanian agriculture after the accession to the EU was very slow and without visible consequences. The most important drawbacks are the reduced capacity to adapt to Community agricultural policies, the lack of financial resources and the inability of Romanian agricultural products to penetrate the European market (Păun, I.O., 2014). Meanwhile, the EU accession created a fierce competition to the domestic agricultural products.

The socio-political and economic background created after the 1989 and the switch to a market economy, divided state-owned large production areas (CAP) into smaller private owned areas. At the same time, the concept of collective (collectivization) created an insurmountable barrier for small producers to gather into modern producer associations. Thus, vegetable producers currently face stiffer competition because they can not continuously deliver large quantities at competitive prices as requested by successfully installed supermarkets in Romania.

Developed countries emphasize the development of small farmers the produce vegetables and fruits as they are considered the engine of urban development. The support is reflected both by financial means (subsidies) and sustaining producers' associations to maintain and develop district (peasant) markets, but also to enter the supermarkets and hypermarkets (Howlett, EA et al., 2012). This strategy could be viable in Romania too if

consumers would favor domestic to imported products.

Safety strategy and food security in Romania put as prerequisite people's welfare, guaranteeing food security and safety to ensure full domestic need of high quality food and achieving a surplus of internal food consumption to export (Peacock, IO, 2014).

Currently, Romania is far from being compatible with the EU as there are important differences between the two of them, for example cereal production per hectare (52%), agricultural production value per hectare (32%), the gross capital (35%), which leads to the impossibility to ensure population's vegetable consumption, leaving room for imported products and thus creating a national security vulnerability and an export deficit (Peacock, IO, 2014).

Ethnic and national identity feelings have an increasing importance in consumer's decisions, despite increasing homogenization and globalization of world markets. Consumer behavior research showed there are two main lines of research: the ethnocentric effect and country of origin effect (Hauge, N. K., 2012) whose purpose is to help develop strategies in the fight of domestic products with foreign ones.

Consumer ethnocentrism, as a single economic form of ethnocentrism manifestation, was introduced as a concept in consumer behavior study by Shimp and Sharma since 1987. They defined it as "the beliefs held by American consumers about the opportunity, morality of purchasing foreign products." To our knowledge, this phenomenon has not been measured on the Romanian population, although vegetable growers have noticed a preference for domestic products to the detriment of imported vegetables.

In the early stages of transition from a state-controlled economy to a market economy, foreign products (especially those from developed countries) will be preferred because of the novelty, higher quality and curiosity reasons. However, if an economy moves to the intermediate stage of transition, nationalist reasons behind the purchase become increasingly dominant, showing people's increasingly ethnocentric tendencies (Shankarmahesh, M.N., 2006; Alsughayir, A., 2013).

The study of the ethnocentric phenomenon and its influence on the behavior of purchasing vegetables is considered relevant nowadays in Romania for at least two reasons. The first reason would be that a high level of population ethnocentricity will help promote domestic products to the detriment of imported products and ethnocentric level knowledge can help establish effective strategies for Romanian vegetables. The second reason considered is that, after 26 years of transition, Romania switched to the intermediate stage, when the nationalist reasons become increasingly dominant (Shankarmahesh, M.N., 2006; Alsughayir, A., 2013).

Among the many factors that influence ethnocentrism (Shankarmahesh, MN, 2006) we chose two factors considered to be the most suitable for Romania's current development phase, namely: patriotism as a positive influence factor and global openness as negative influence factor.

Patriotism is a feeling by which an individual manifests his love and devotion to his country (Anastasiadou, S.D., 2014). Studies show that patriotism has a positive effect on the intentions to purchase domestic products to the detriment of foreign products. So, people with patriotic feelings manifest more ethnocentric tendencies than people who are deficient on these feelings (Sharma, S. et al., 1995; Nirmala, C., 2005; Ishii, K., 2009).

In the current geopolitical context, patriotism and nationalism tend to become more attractive to population, but in Romania, during the communist period, the feeling was taken to an unhappy extreme, and today, after 26 years of transition we believe that these feelings were clarified and normalized among individuals. This is why we considered this a positive factor of influence on ethnocentrism worth studying in buying behavior of the Romanian vegetables.

Because global consumers are considered to be persons whose purchasing behavior is not affected by cultural and national differences, studies have shown that an individual open to global will be less ethnocentric (Balabanis, G. et al., 2001; Suh, T. & Kwon, I.-WG, 2002; Boje, J. et al., 2010). Although studies are not consistent, some of them show that countries in which globalization was introduced by government intervention and state (eg Korea), consumer mentality was a negative factor of influence in the attitude towards foreign products (Schütte, H. & Ciarlante, D., 1998; Suh, T. & Kwon, I.-WG, 2002) and in countries where globalization was introduced by consumers own experiences there is a lower level of ethnocentric tendency towards foreign products (Schutte, H. & Ciarlante, D., 1998; Suh, T. & Kwon, I. WG, 2002). I considered choosing this factor to be a relevant influence factor since Romania went through a slow process of globalization that started in 2007, when it acceded to the EU.

The health benefits of eating vegetables and fruits are significant and widely documented (Della, LJ et al., 2008; Verzeletti, C. et al., 2010), therefore, the main reason why consumers consume vegetables is the desire to nurture healthy (Senauer, B., 1990; Connor, J., 1994). Lifestyle has an important role in maintaining health because it either can cause chronic diseases or can prevent them (Cockerham, W., 2007; Marian, V., 2010). For these two reasons, we considered relevant the study of healthy lifestyle as an influencing factor of Romanian vegetables purchasing behavior.

To measure the six proposed conceptual constructs within the model, validated

measurement scales were used in previous research. These constructs were measured based on respondents' perceptions on various analyzed aspects.

To perform statistical analysis of questionnaire collected data four steps were taken: questionnaire checking to eliminate or correct data that can affect the quality of obtained data; variables codification in SPSS computer software; entering questionnaire obtained data that were administered to the sample and statistical analysis using SPSS statistical software (version 23.0) and AMOS extension (version 23) for the SPSS software.

The data analysis process consisted in completing the six stages: descriptive univariate analysis, testing normality value distribution, verifying used scales reliability, determining factorial scores, testing used construct validity and testing research hypotheses.

To respond to research problem, we structured the work in six chapters, followed by bibliography and appendices.

## **CHAPTER I - CONSUMERS AND VEGETABLE CONSUMPTION**

In this chapter we have tried to highlight the de facto situation of vegetable producers in Romania starting from the world situation, via the European Union situation and reaching the national situation. Also, we tried to present, using the available literature, the buying behavior of vegetables consumers from Romania.

There are several factors that determine individual health conditions: prudence, lifestyle and effective medical interventions are only a few of them. Some doctors say that individual's lifestyle is one of the least effective factors that can influence a person's health and also the autonomy of these choices is controversial (Alpinar, Z. et al., 2010).

The health benefits of eating vegetables and fruits are significant and widely documented (Della, LJ et al., 2008; Verzeletti, C. et al., 2010). According to World Health Organization reports a minimum of 400 grams of fruit and vegetables help prevent many diseases. Empirical studies show that a diet rich in vegetables and fruits is negatively associated with risk of diabetes, obesity, stroke, high blood pressure, weight management (Azagba, S. & Sharaf, F. M., 2011).

In recent decades the European Union (EU) increased consumption of fresh vegetables (organic and non - organic) and fish at the expense of red meat and dairy products. Specifically, consumption of fruit and vegetables in the EU increased from 34 kg per capita per year in 1960 to 42 kg in 1999 (La Via G. & Nucifora, A.M.D., 2002).

Romania's food safety and security strategy elaborated for 2015 - 2030 guarantees food security and safety as the primary condition of the country's population welfare. The major



objective of the Project is to provide high quality full domestic food and to achieve a surplus of domestic food for export (Peacock I.O., 2014).

World Health Organization reports propose a minimum consumption of 400 grams of vegetables and / or fruits that contribute to healthy nutrition. Thus, the necessary yearly vegetables consumption of a person would be 146 kg (0.4 kg x 365 days). In 2004, the necessary vegetables for consumption would be 3.14192 million tons per year and for 2015 of 2.90102 million tons per year.

The number of Romanian residents tends to decrease from year to year, so the 21.52 million people in 2004 fell to 19.87 million people in 2015. The ratio between demand and domestic production of vegetables show a more pronounced deficit in production for 2004 - 7007 (20.81%, 35.79%, 22.93% and 29.72%) and a smaller one in the next period (10.88% - 2008; 7.71% - 2009; 15.36% - 2010 1.43% - 2011; 15.01% - 2012 6.40% - 2013 8.41% - 2014; 13.58% - 2015) .

This gap must be filled with products from imports, but in the coming years, according to Romania's food safety and security strategy, this deficit must be turned into surplus, which in turn should mainly be exported to EU countries. National security is a complex task for both now and future generations. This concept of food security is achieved on three levels (national and / or regional level, household and individual level) and contains three main elements: food security (country, region, community or household level), access to food and how to use it (Blacioti, S., 2009).

## **CHAPTER II - LIFESTYLE – INFLUENCE FACTOR OF RAW VEGETABLES CONSUMPTION**

In this chapter, we introduced the concept of lifestyle, methods for determining the lifestyle, the empirical results of studies that highlight the influencing factors and how they affect vegetables consumption. These factors have been grouped in: *personal factors* (region, age, sex, number of members in the family, the life cycle of the family, income, occupation, education, ethnicity, social class, lifestyle, smoking status) and *external factors* (product, price, distribution and promotion).

At the end of this chapter, we tried to demonstrate the link between a healthy lifestyle and eating vegetables to argue its use in the model we proposed.

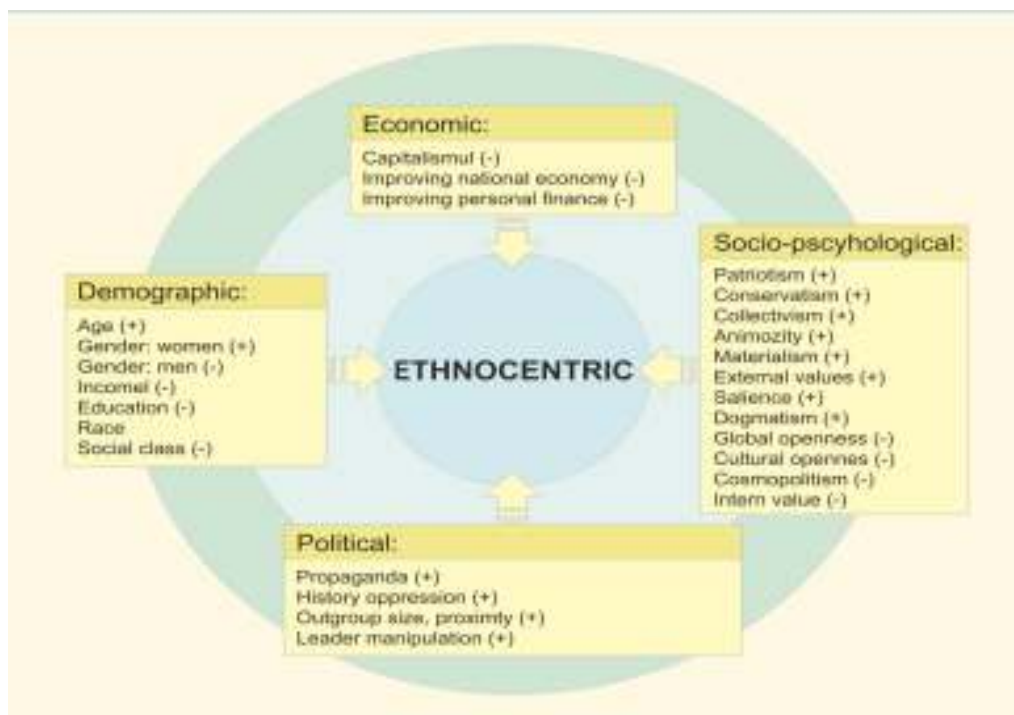
The measurement scale belongs to a psychographic segmentation system, developed upon VALS method, it can predict consumer behavior and provides a higher level of analysis. This scale has been validated (Sanchez, M. et al., 1998) and has been used in other studies

(Fraj, E. & Martinez, E., 2006). It is based on a healthy lifestyle, contains 20 items and is developed on three dimensions: a balanced life, healthy diet and care for the environment.

This scale was applied to a sample of the population in Spain to help determine the dimension of organic food consumption. Analyses showed three lifestyles: life without stress, life with healthy consumption habits and ecological behavior living.

### CHAPTER III - ETHNOCENTRISM AND ITS INFLUENCE FACTORS

In this chapter we defined the concept of ethnocentrism in terms of both human trait and in terms of its influence on consumer behavior. Using mostly *review* materials from literature, we took ethnocentrism influence factors of classification from Shankarmahesh, M.N. (2006) trying to fill with subsequent research results. Classification given by the author is performed on four groups of factors: socio - psychological, economic, political and demographic factors. Each influencing factor was presented in detail from referral to completion and continuing with the completion of empirical results that prove or disprove theoretical hypotheses.



**Figuro no.1. – Influencing factors of ethnocentrism**  
**Source: adapted from Shankarmahesh, M.N. (2006)**

The original version has 17 items, but there are studies that have adapted the scale to fewer items (mostly 10 items), eliminating the original items. This scale is applied using the Likert scale on a 7 length (in 75% of cases) or 5 Likert length (approximately 25% of cases)

(Jiménez- Guerrero, JF et al., 2013).

A scale's unidimensionality is considered by many authors an essential requirement to generate a good measurement instrument and implies that all elements measure a single latent trait (Hattie, J., 1985).

CETSCALE unidimensionality was determined by authors who have proposed it, but the results of some authors showed that this scale can, in some cases, be multidimensional. The number of factors range from 2 to 4 and the most interesting dimensions were: hard or soft ethnocentrism (Chrysochoidis, G. et al., 2007; Jiménez- Guerrero, JF et al., 2013); protectionism, socio-economic conservative or patriot (Marcoux, J. et al., 1997); animosity, economic rationality, morality (Jiménez- Guerrero, JF et al., 2013).

## CHAPTER IV - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this chapter we proposed a research to analyze purchasing behavior of Romanian vegetables by the surveyed population, based on a predetermined set of variables as determinants of direct influencers: patriotism, openness to global, ethnocentrism, healthy lifestyles, purchase intent, respectively with moderating influence: age, gender, education and income levels.

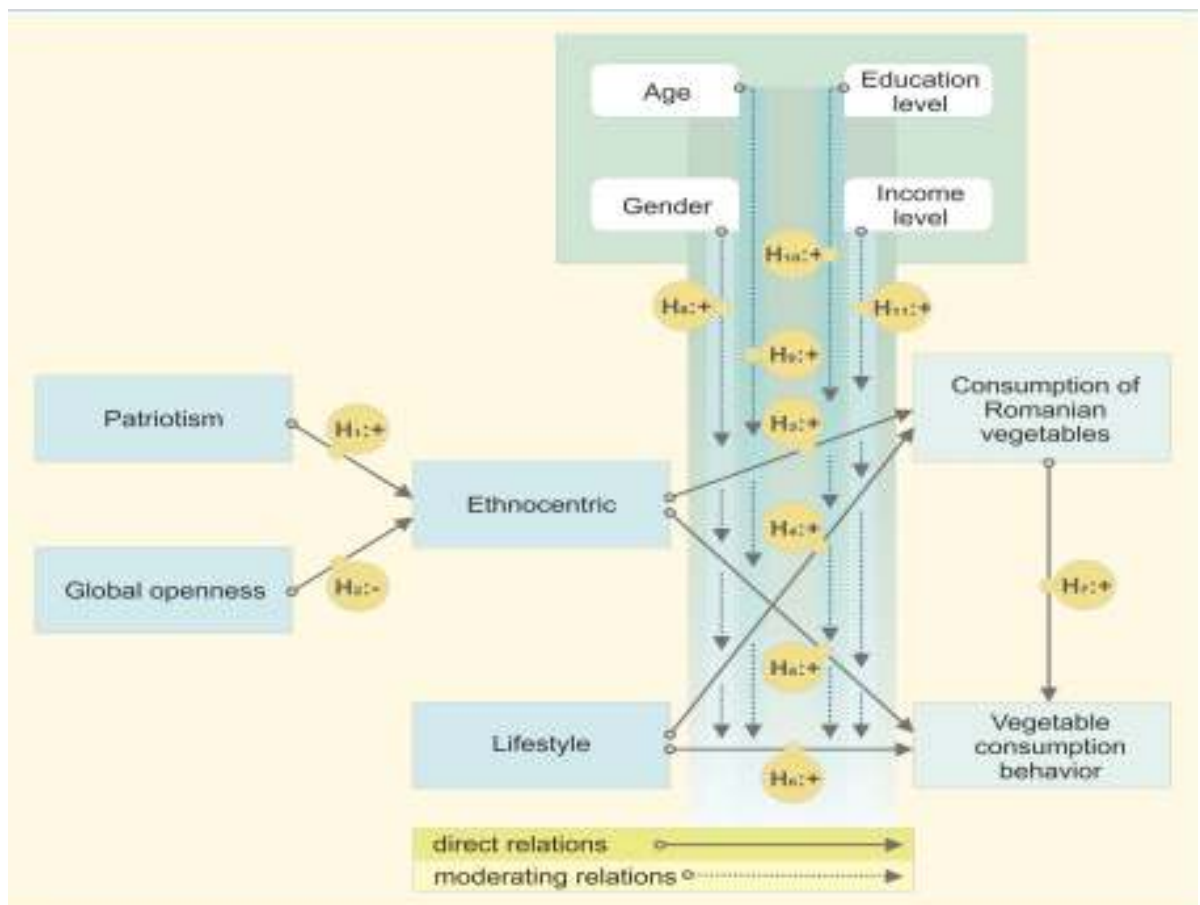


Figure no. 2 – Conceptual model proposed

Starting from the question and objectives for the current research, we sketched the conceptual model of buying behavior of individuals on domestic products. Conceptual model testing was carried out by empirical research applied on a sample of Romanian consumers of vegetables grown in the country and / or imported. The conceptual model proposed integrates determinants and mediators of the construct *Vegetable buying behavior*. Also, this conceptual model aimed to identify and validate the structure of the construct *Vegetable buying behavior* reflecting empirically observed data. On exogenous variables, these are represented by two constructs, *Patriotism* and *Openness to global*, with direct influence on the construct *Ethnocentrism*. In turn, the constructs *Ethnocentrism* and *Lifestyle (healthy)* represent variables with direct influence on *Intent to buy Romanian vegetables* and the three variables exercise together the impact on *Vegetable buying behavior*.

Based on literature analysis we formulated a number of 11 hypotheses that highlight the causal links between conceptual model constructs of Romanian vegetable buying behavior:

- H1: Patriotism influences ethnocentrism positively, directly and significantly.
- H2: Global openness influences ethnocentrism negatively, directly and significantly.
- H3: Ethnocentrism influences positively, directly and significantly the intention to buy Romanian vegetables.
- H4: Healthy lifestyle influences positively, directly and significantly the intention to buy Romanian vegetables.
- H5: Ethnocentrism influences positively, directly and significantly purchasing behavior.
- H6: Healthy lifestyle influences positively, directly and significantly purchasing behavior.
- H7: Intention to buy Romanian vegetables influences positively, directly and significantly purchasing behavior.
- H8: Gender respondents moderate the influence of relationships in the model. In this respect, for women, ethnocentrism and lifestyle (healthy) have a stronger positive effect on (a) intention to buy Romanian vegetables respectively on (b) purchase behavior, than men respondents.
- H9: The more advanced the age of individuals, the stronger the positive effect of ethnocentrism and lifestyle (healthy) on (a) buying intention or (b) purchasing behavior of Romanian vegetables.

- H10: The higher the education level of individuals, the stronger the positive effect of ethnocentrism and lifestyle (healthy) on (a) purchase intent and (b) purchasing behavior of Romanian vegetables.
- H11: The higher the income level of individuals, the stronger is the positive effect of ethnocentrism and lifestyle (health) on (a) the intention of buying or (b) purchasing behavior of Romanian vegetables.

## CHAPTER V – RESEARCH RESULTS

In this chapter we present the results of data analysis from sample structure, following the 6 stages of data analysis: descriptive univariate analysis, testing normality of value distribution, verifying the reliability of used scales, determining factorial scores, testing used construct validity and testing research hypothesis.

Based on the results of statistical processing and modeling of structural equation the relations between patriotism and ethnocentrism were validated, the importance and effect of ethnocentrism and a healthy lifestyle, on purchase intent and on purchasing behavior of native agricultural products (see table 1).

**Table nr. 1 – Main research model testing hypothesis**

Hypothesis	Relation			Regression coefficient ( $\beta$ )	Standard error (S.E.)	Significance level (p)	Result
H <sub>1</sub>	Ethnocentrism	←	Patriotism	0,321	0,024	0,000	Valid
H <sub>2</sub>	Ethnocentrism	←	Global openness	-0,023	0,030	0,417	Invalid
H <sub>3</sub>	Intention to buy	←	Ethnocentrism	0,461	0,024	0,000	Valid
H <sub>4</sub>	Intention to buy	←	Lifestyle (healthy)	0,325	0,032	0,000	Valid
H <sub>5</sub>	Purchasing behavior	←	Ethnocentrism	0,263	0,024	0,000	Valid
H <sub>6</sub>	Purchasing behavior	←	Lifestyle (healthy)	0,171	0,030	0,000	Valid
H <sub>7</sub>	Purchasing behavior	←	Intention to buy	0,532	0,026	0,000	Valid

Consequently, statistically, national values specific for ethnocentrism and the emergence of the intention to buy local vegetables significantly influences purchasing behavior adopted by all respondents in the study.

## CHAPTER VI - CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In this chapter we presented research findings, ie validation, partial validation or invalidation of the 11 issued hypotheses, trying to argue these with previous empirical results.

Assumptions H1, H3, H4, H5, H6 and H7 have been validated, H2, H8b and H11b were invalidated, H8a, H9a, H9b, H10a, H10b and H11a were partially validated.

*The scientific research implications* are:

- studying ethnocentric value orientation or global values, along with measuring the option for a healthier lifestyle or considering their role in shaping attitudes and buying preferences;
- Based on conducted research, a general profile can be outlined and also the socio-demographic particularities of respondents that adopt the purchasing behavior of food products from national geographic area;
- The empirical research component added value in the academic research field, based on actual testing of the conceptual model through simultaneous equations based on data collected from a significantly large and heterogeneous sample of residents.

*Research managerial implications* are:

- establishing a clearer profile of the domestic vegetable buyers based on the important values and lifestyle for different segments of the population, taking into account gender, age, education level and financial position;
- promotion programs orientation and advertising developed by manufacturers and / or retailers to support patriotic values, ethnocentrism and a healthy lifestyle, which positively influences purchase intentions and domestic product buying behavior;
- differentiation through various means (tags, labels, packaging, watermarks) of domestic products over imported ones to attract potential consumers.

*Study limitations* are:

- sampling frame in terms of geographic coverage area, because of the costs, has not provided a nationwide coverage;
- research model does not include all antecedent influence variables of purchase intent, such as those provided in planned behavior model based on rational action of Fishbein, M. and Ajzen, I. (2010), or in the empirical research of Javalgi RG et al. (2005) and Dmitrov, T. et al. (2009) .

***Future directions of research*** include:

- Research replication in other regions or national economies.
- Quantitative research can be improved by performing a combination of quantitative and qualitative research, by completing the research with one based on focus groups in order to identify new influence factors.
- Research can be rethought and oriented towards influencing factors needed to develop a healthy culinary culture.
- Future research can be customized by considering other mediating and moderating variables, by introducing other reasons for choosing vegetables and food, but also in terms of eating habits (vegetarian and carnivorous).

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