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PhD Thesis

Summary

Study regarding the influence of self-esteem on the buying intention

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Self-esteem, consumer behaviour, buying process, real self, relational self, social self, behavioral attitude, behavioral intention, conceptual model, structural equations modeling (SEM)

INTRODUCTION

People are different. This is the assertion that justifies the behaviours of individuals, the way they act or make decisions. Family, education, reference groups, the political environment, cultural factors and society as a whole influences each individual, shaping his/her behavior. Whether they have a common interest or share the same passions, individuals have a well-defined role in society, which is different in relation to each person's personality. However, regardless of the factors mentioned above and the aspects that characterize us there is a common element, which we often omit – each one of us is a *consumer*.

Consumption is part of our lives. Most of the time, this is an aspect that factors in coordinating our existence. Regardless of the financial situation or the pleasure of shopping, each person follows this routine.

Thus, consumer behaviour has a dynamic structure: the preferences for certain products change, as well as the predilections for the stores where we go to make purchases. Nowadays, society is dominated by the existence of technologies, which are seen as means to facilitate our existence.

The choice of self-esteem as a central element for this thesis is based on the effects it has on the individual in general and on his behaviour in particular. Self-confidence, the desire to succeed, the success or prestige that people enjoy are just some of the materializations or purposes of self-esteem.

Therefore, the way in which individuals manage their predilection for mobile phones is an aspect that is correlated with their level of self-esteem. Self-confidence and the desire to face daily challenges or, on the contrary, building a virtual reality where to escape are aspects related to self-esteem, the way it has been strengthened throughout life and the level where he/she currently is.

Based on these assumptions, the challenge underlying this scientific approach was the desire to identify the influence of self-esteem on consumer behaviour and especially how it influences the formation of a behavioral intention to purchase a new smartphone among Generation Z.

This thesis is structured in seven parts. Chapter one presents a brief summary of the definitions of the concept of *self-esteem*, which have been formulated over time, both in the field of psychology and in the field of economics, analyzing the components that form the construct and the relationships between them.

Chapter two - "*Measurement of self-esteem*" provides the items that will be used in designing the questionnaire. Being divided into three subchapters, a review of the literature on how to measure the components of self-respect – the real self, the relational self and the social self is made.

The third chapter - "*Self-esteem and consumer behaviour*" is structured in three parts. Thus, is analyzed the influence exerted by self-esteem on attitudes and behavioral intentions, being presented the theories that helped the author build the conceptual model proposed in the thesis.

Chapter four – "*Generation Z*" presents a review on the characteristics of this group, analyzing the main generations mentioned in the literature.

Chapter five - "*Research methodology*" provides information on the proposed conceptual model, research paradigms, objectives and hypotheses. At the same time, are presented the data collection tool, the type of statements included in the questionnaire, but also the target population and the sampling method.

Chapter six - "*Results*" presents information on statistical analyzes that test the validity of data and measurement scales. Also, the tests performed to validate the initial and final measurement model are specified, as well as the structural model. The last part of this chapter presents the status of the hypotheses (confirmation / infirmation of the hypotheses).

In the final part of the doctoral thesis, the chapter "*Conclusions*" presents an interpretation of the results obtained in the previous chapter, highlighting conclusions related to the objectives initially formulated and the theoretical aspects presented in the first three chapters. Based on the conclusions drawn, the limits of the research, the theoretical and managerial implications are formulated, as well as the future directions of research.

Chapter 1. SELF-ESTEEM

Nowadays, individuals increasingly remember the concept of “self-esteem” in order to define the image they have of themselves, namely the way how they think they are viewed by members of their reference groups and society as a whole. Thus, an important aspect that will be pursued in this chapter is the definition of the concept of self-esteem, as well as the analysis of its components.

In this chapter were presented the main definitions that clarified the meaning of the concept of self-esteem, both in the field of psychology and marketing. Based on these, we conclude that self-esteem includes all the attributes and feelings of an individual regarding their own person, as well as those traits that the individual would like to acquire or improve in the future.

Both in the field of psychology, but especially in marketing, the distinction between the real self (actual self) of the consumer and the image he wants to have, or to be perceived as having, becomes important. According to specialists, the actual self is considered to be the individual's perception of the qualities and attributes he currently possesses, while the ideal self (the ideal self-image) refers to the traits he wants to acquire and the manner how he aspires to evolve (Birdwell, 1968).

Over time, it has been shown that not only the real and the ideal self have a major influence on an individual and the behavior he has in society. Discovering the importance attributed to the relational self, more and more specialists have conducted their research in this direction, eliminating the boundary between the influence of the members of the reference group and the influence of society, including them in a single component. Thus, based on the existing studies, some authors have tried to provide a new definition for the concept of self, considering that it has four important dimensions (Jamal and Goode, 2001, p. 483; Achouri and Bouslama, 2010):

- ❖ “The actual self: the real and current image that an individual has of himself;
- ❖ The ideal self: the way the individual would like to see himself or the ideal prototype that he has outlined and wants to achieve;
- ❖ The social self: the way how the individual considers that he is seen by those around him;

- ❖ The ideal social self: the way how the individual wants to be seen by those around him or in other words, the image he wants to create for those around him”.

Thus, self-esteem can be analyzed according to its components, being measured at multiple levels (Du et al., 2017). According to the **theory of social identity**, self-esteem can be derived from both the personal self (the real self) and the social self (Tajfel, 1982). Studies (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Sedikides et al., 2011) have shown that the social self can be divided into the relational self, which includes interactions with family and close friends, and the collective self, which refers to extended social groups (lower intensity of relationships). Regardless of the segmentation of self-esteem and the classification of its components, the concept, that has been analyzed most frequently in psychology due to the influence of the real self, has crossed the boundaries of this field marking the transition to economics. From a marketing perspective, the importance of self-esteem and the need to analyze it lies precisely in the interactions between individuals and the influences exerted by some on others.

CHAPTER 2. MEASUREMENT OF SELF-ESTEEM

In this chapter we have considered three components of self-esteem – the real self, the relational self and the social self. For each of them, various measurement methods were presented. Thus, the statements used to measure each concept were highlighted, as well as the statistical properties of the measurement scales, that have the role of demonstrating the validity of the instruments proposed by specialists.

In order to account for the real self, based on the measurement scales mentioned above and taking into account the advantages and disadvantages associated to each of them, we have opted to use the test proposed by Rosenberg (1965), considering that the small number of statements and the short time to complete the questionnaire are an advantage.

Regarding the measurement of the relational self, the three studies offered a general perspective on this concept, but assumed the existence of a context where to analyze the behaviour of individuals, not providing data that would add value from the perspective of knowing consumer behaviour. Starting from these considerations, for the measurement of the relational self we took into account the scale proposed by Du and his collaborators (2012, 2018).

To measure the social self, we chose to use the test proposed by Kerla and Rapišti in 2013. Thus, we consider that the measurement scale developed by these researchers, through selected statements, best reflects the social self, providing information on the level at which it is located.

The assessment of the components that form the concept of self-esteem allows a segmentation of individuals in relation to this criterion, allowing specialists to identify the share that each element has in the formation of the construct.

CHAPTER 3. SELF-ESTEEM AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

In this chapter we present the main theories that we consider in designing the proposed model. Thus, we start from the premise that the ideal self is based on the **theory of planned behavior**. According to specialists, the central element of this theory is the intention of individuals to have a certain behavior, visible by those around them. The targeted behavior is distinct in relation to each person, taking into account the elements that underlie the motivation felt by each individual, as well as the effort he is willing to make to achieve the goal (Ajzen, 1991). Making a comparison between this theory and the component of self-respect represented by the ideal self, we observed that the latter is practically a planned behavior depending on the way in which the individual wants to evolve or be appreciated by others.

The theory of planned behaviour (TPB) is an extension of reasoned-action theory (TRA) developed by Ajzen and Fishbein in 1975 and revised in 1980 (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Similar to the three-component model of attitudes, TRA considers the cognitive, affective and conative components (Schiffman and Wisenblit, 2015), suggesting that attitudes explain the actions of individuals, being an indicator of their behaviour (Balog and Cristescu, 2009). The theory starts from the premise that researchers must measure the subjective norms that influence a person's intentions to adopt a certain behaviour (Schiffman and Wisenblit, 2015).

The theory of planned behaviour is a theoretical basis that facilitates the understanding of the decision-making process undertaken by consumers. Starting from the theory of reasoned-action, TPB is considered by researchers as a behavioral theory that explains the behaviour of individuals based on their attitudes, being a reference point in the study of actions taken by individuals (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen, 2005; Buaphiban and Truong, 2017). The assumption underlying this theory starts from the idea that consumers typically behave with a high level of sensitivity.

The analysis of decision-making process involves knowing the stages that are part of it and the effects it has on consumer behaviour. Every day, individuals are exposed to an increased number of decisions that need to be made, their importance and impact being different. Moving from

decisions that are considered simple (for example, purchasing products of strict necessity) to those that are complex (choosing a home, a car, choosing the school you attend or a job) it takes place permanently in an individual's life. Exposure to environmental information and the daily challenges of a person's existence lead them to prioritize the decisions to be made. Similarly, most tasks are accomplished by making purchases. Thus, depending on their complexity, the consumer establishes a path of the purchase process, most often the approach involving five steps (Figure No. 1) (Schiffman and Wisenblit, 2015; Kardes et al., 2015; Madsen, 2018).



Figure no. 1: *Decision-Making Process*

Source: (Kardes et al., 2015, p. 234; Ekström et al., 2017, p. 62)

CHAPTER 4. GENERATION Z

According to the generational theory developed in 1992 by Strauss and Howe, individuals are divided into generations or cohorts according to significant historical events or social changes they have experienced. Depending on these, the life experiences felt by people in the same time interval are similar, at the same time being different from the feelings of individuals who did not take part in the event (Howe and Strauss, 1992). Therefore, each cohort has a homogeneous behaviour (Noble and Schewe, 2003), sharing common cultural norms and perspectives, which are different from other generations, which gives uniqueness to each group.

Currently, the literature presents the following generational cohorts (Williams and Page, 2011; Kardes et al., 2015): The Veterans Generation (or World War I Generation - "Pre-Depression Generation"), born before 1930, the Traditionalists (Silent Generation - "Depression Generation"), born between 1930 and 1945, Baby Boomers, born between 1946 and 1964, Generation X, born between 1965 and 1977, Generation Y ("Millennials" or "iYGeneration"), born between 1977 and 1994 and Generation Z ("Baby Bloomers", "Digital Natives" or "iGeneration"), born after 1994.

Being the latest generation analyzed by specialists in order to define behaviour and preferences, there are different opinions regarding Generation Z. The first issue that no unanimous opinion is identified is related to the years that define this cohort. If Williams and Page (2011) as well as Lan (2014) argued that it includes people born after 1994, the upper limit being 2010, Williams (2015) suggested the period 1990 - 2000, and Last (2014), Jacobsen (2017) and Lanier (2017) mentions the period 1996 - 2011. Therefore, with the exception of the differences mentioned, most frequently mentioned interval in the literature is 1996 - 2000 (Dabija et al., 2019). In order to carry out this scientific approach, the author shares the opinion formulated by Williams and Page (2011) and by Lan (2014) and remembers as years of defining Generation Z the period 1994 - 2010.

CHAPTER 5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Starting from the theory of planned behaviour, we propose two conceptual models. The first of these aims to identify the link between the abstract concept of self-esteem and behavioral attitudes, then to identify the influence of attitudes on behavioral intentions.

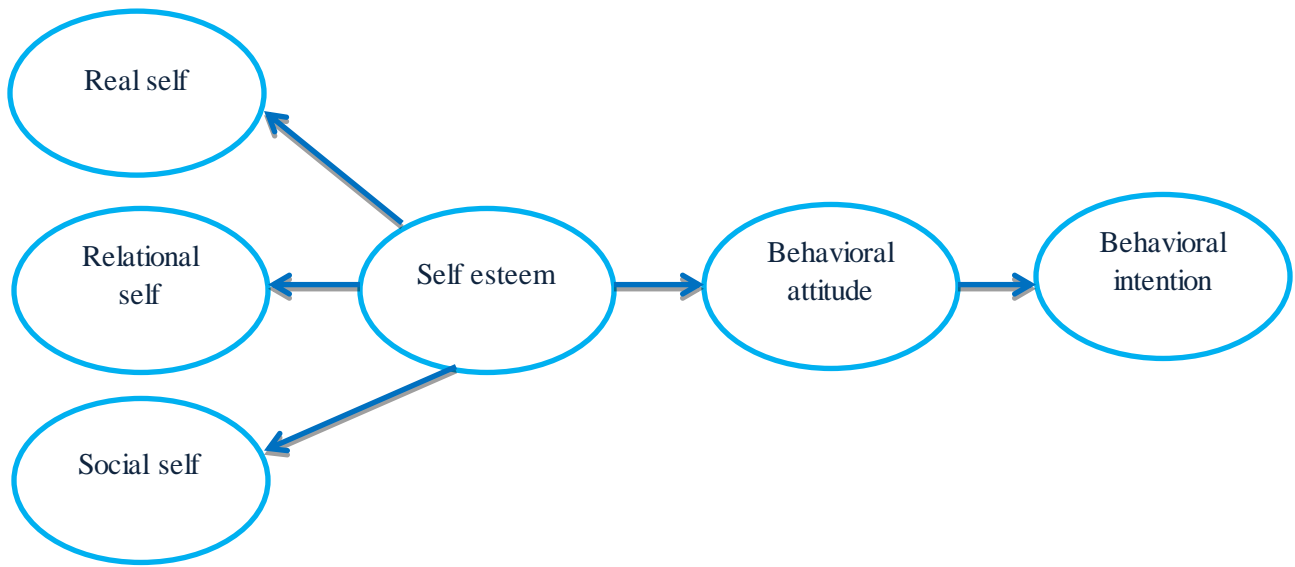


Figure no. 2: *The first proposed conceptual model*

Source: made by the author

The second conceptual model eliminates the aspect of self-esteem and follows the relationships between the three components of self-esteem and attitudes, respectively behavioral intentions.

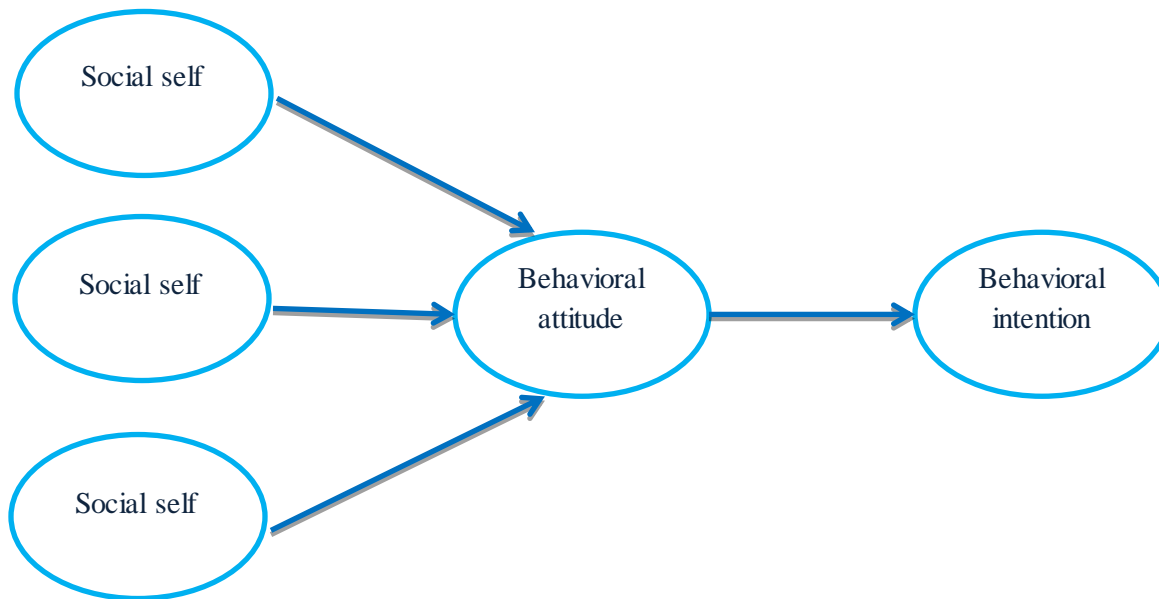


Figure no.3:*The second proposed conceptual model*

Source: made by the author

Next, the chapter provides information on the chosen research paradigm (positivism) and the associated assumptions, which would determine the chosen research method. At the same time, chapter five presents information on the research instrument used - the questionnaire, the measurement scales used, the operationalization of the concepts, as well as the total number of questionnaires applied (1,400). At the same time, are mentioned the objectives and the research hypotheses.

CHAPTER 6. RESULTS

The first step of the data analysis was represented by testing the data quality, an aspect highlighted by the criteria imposed by the Cronbach coefficient (SPSS software).

The structural equations modeling was performed using the AMOS software. Following the recommendations of the literature (Hair et al., 2010) for each proposed conceptual model, the initial measurement model was presented, which included all the variables added to the model. According to the fit of the model, in order to improve the goodness of fit criteria (incremental and parsimonious), the items whose standardized value were less than 0.4 were eliminated, thus obtaining the final measurement model.

Starting from this graphical representation, by eliminating the covariance links, the structural models related to the two proposed conceptual frameworks were obtained. Based on the regression coefficients (sign and level of significance) some of the formulated working hypotheses were validated.

In this chapter, the mediation hypotheses were tested by Bootstrapping methods (AMOS software) (for the first structural model) and by the Sobel test (SPSS software) for the second structural model.

For the first conceptual model, three hypotheses H_{1a} - H_{3a} were formulated, their status being shown in table no. 1.

Table no. 1: *The status of the hypothesis H_{1a} – H_{3a}*

H _{1a}	<i>Behavioral attitudes mediate the relationship between self-esteem and the intention to buy a smartphone by members of Generation Z.</i>	✓
H _{2a}	<i>Self-esteem has a direct and positive influence on behavioral attitudes.</i>	✓
H _{3a}	<i>Behavioral attitudes have a direct and positive influence on behavioral intentions.</i>	✓

✓ - confirmed hypothesis

✗ - unconfirmed hypothesis

Source: made by the author

For the second conceptual model, seven hypotheses were formulated, their status being presented in table no. 2.

Table no. 1: *The status of the hypothesis H_{1b} – H_{7b}*

H _{1b}	<i>Behavioral attitudes mediate the relationship between actual self and the intention to buy a smartphone by members of Generation Z.</i>	✘
H _{2b}	<i>Behavioral attitudes mediate the relationship between relational self and the intention to buy a smartphone by members of Generation Z.</i>	✓
H _{3b}	<i>Behavioral attitudes mediate the relationship between social self and the intention to buy a smartphone by members of Generation Z.</i>	✓
H _{4b}	<i>Real self has a direct and positive influence on behavioral attitudes.</i>	✘
H _{5b}	<i>Relational self has a direct and positive influence on behavioral attitudes.</i>	✘
H _{6b}	<i>Social self has a direct and positive influence on behavioral attitudes.</i>	✓
H _{7b}	<i>Behavioral attitudes have a direct and positive influence on behavioral intentions.</i>	✓

✓ - confirmed hypothesis

✘ - unconfirmed hypothesis

Source: made by the author

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis proposes a conceptual model that measures the influence of three components of self-esteem, analyzing the connection between this construct and the attitude, respectively the behavioral intention. According to statistical analysis, it was observed that the real self exerts the greatest influence on self-esteem. Thus, in order to answer one of the questions addressed in this thesis (*How do we measure self-esteem?*), we propose to quantify each component and build the abstract concept of *self-esteem*.

The thesis aims to analyze whether the influence exerted by the components - *the real self*, *the relational self* and *the social self* on attitudes and behavioral intentions are modified by eliminating the *self-esteem* construct. Thus, the second conceptual model eliminates the abstract concept and treats the three elements as independent variables. In this situation, statistical analysis has shown that, unlike the first proposed model, the elimination of self-esteem leads to an increase in the influence of the social self on behavioral intentions, in the second model, this being the component that has the greater impact on behavioral attitudes.

The analysis of the mediating effect of behavioral attitudes on the relationship between self-esteem and behavioral intentions showed that the connection between the two components is explained by attitudes, that have the role of mediator.

After analyzing the effect of mediation of behavioral attitudes on the relationships between the real self, the relational self, the social self and behavioral intentions, it was highlighted that they are a mediation factor only for the relational self and the social self. Thus, hypothesis H1b is rejected and hypotheses H2b and H3b are accepted.

As a future direction of research, we intend to extend the conceptual models by taking into account the decision-making process. Basically, we propose to follow the influence exerted by self-esteem or by its components on the five stages of the decision-making process: need, recognition, research for information, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post-purchase behaviour.

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