



CONSERVATISM, CONSUMER ETHNOCENTRISM, VARIETY SEEKING, CONSUMER COSMOPOLITANISM, AND CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE AS DETERMINANTS OF PURCHASING FOREIGN LUXURY BRANDS

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Abstract:

Geopolitical tensions caused by the war in Ukraine, the migrant crisis, and economic instability are strengthening nationalist sentiments. Conservatism and consumer ethnocentrism are cohesive factors during crises, based on the principle that it is every citizen's moral duty to protect the domestic economy by purchasing domestic products. Some citizens have cosmopolitan attitudes and are open to accepting ideas from other cultures. The aim of the research is to examine the impact of conservatism, consumer ethnocentrism, variety seeking, consumer cosmopolitanism, and cultural intelligence on consumers' decision to purchase foreign luxury brands. The study was conducted in early 2024 in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. The total number of respondents in the sample was 511, and their responses were analyzed using SEM model within the statistical program SmartPLS 4. The results showed that conservatism has not statistically significant, while consumer ethnocentrism has a statistically significant negative impact on the purchase of luxury foreign brands. Variety seeking, consumer cosmopolitanism, and cultural intelligence have a positive and statistically significant impact on consumers' decision to purchase foreign luxury brands. The research contributes by providing information that can be useful to managers in formulating marketing strategies for the market of the Republic of Serbia.

Keywords:

conservatism, consumer ethnocentrism, variety seeking, consumer cosmopolitanism, cultural intelligence.

JEL Classification:

D01, D91, D12

INTRODUCTION

Global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the conflict in Ukraine, and economic instability due to inflationary trends have significantly disrupted the geopolitical landscape and the global market. The closure of national borders, the imposition of sanctions by certain countries, and the shortage of energy resources such as oil and gas have made it difficult to import and export goods. As a result, consumers are facing challenges in purchasing products that were previously

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readily available (Rahbari *et al.*, 2023). Based on the Theory of National Identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which promotes cohesion, unity, and solidarity within a nation, and whose implications are most pronounced during crises when there is a shift from globalization to deglobalization and the need to protect the domestic economy, *conservatism and consumer ethnocentrism have been chosen as the first two research variables in this study*. The fundamental principles of conservatism include respect for the traditions, history, and customs of a nation, a tendency to preserve the spirit of the past, and a lack of innovation and desire for change (Zdravković & Gašević, 2022). Ethnocentrism is a concept that originated in sociology and is based on the principle that the culture of one nation is the best and most dominant in comparison to the culture of any other nation (Bizumic, 2019). Consumer ethnocentrism represents an economic category of this concept and is based on the belief that it is moral and patriotic to purchase domestic products, as imports can lead to the closure of domestic companies and loss of jobs, as well as weaken the national economy, which will affect the reduction of GDP per capita (Lee *et al.*, 2021). Economic policies based on sanctions and protectionist measures negatively impact the development of international trade, so, to some extent, a country must promote openness to other states and globalization processes, even during crises (Fazli-Salehi *et al.*, 2021).

The emergence of social networks, influencer marketing, and the development of transportation networks have made information easily accessible and increased the number of global travels. This has influenced people's perceptions for exploring other cultures, communicating with individuals from different cultural backgrounds, and, as a major marketing implication, their desire to purchase foreign luxury brands (Cleveland & Balakrishnan, 2019). For this reason, in this study, *variety seeking, consumer cosmopolitanism, and cultural intelligence* have been chosen *as the third, fourth, and fifth research variables*. Variety seeking refers to an individual's adventurous spirit, their desire to travel to new tourist destinations, follow fashion trends and buy new products as soon as they appear on the market (Šapić *et al.*, 2019). According to Britannica Cosmopolitanism is a sociological concept which is based on the belief that it is necessary to establish equality between domestic and foreign cultures and the value systems they promote. However, Consumer cosmopolitanism, as an economic dimension of this concept, is based on people's attitudes that it is necessary to purchase well-known luxury brands for their quality, but primarily for the prestige and social status they confer, such as wearing a luxury watch. (Fernández-Ferrín *et al.*, 2020; Fong *et al.*, 2019). Cultural intelligence encompasses a range of metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral competencies and skills that enable an individual to have cultural breadth, sensitivity, and to be successful and effective in multicultural situations (Frias-Jamilena *et al.*, 2018).

LITERATURE REVIEW

An unstable global situation affects changes in people's thinking and leads to a partial shift from globalization to deglobalization attitudes. *Conservatism* gains importance during unstable situations when people feel fear and concern, causing them to revert to their roots and believe in the necessity of protecting their own nation, culture, and tradition, as well as supporting domestic producers who contribute the most to the national economy (He & Harris, 2020). This group of people is characterized by a tendency to maintain the status quo, avoid situations that are inherently uncertain and risky, and as a result, they rarely purchase new products and luxury foreign brands (Tomić Maksan *et al.*, 2019). Instead, they opt for domestic products that are readily available and about which they have all the necessary information on the local market. Previous research (Casando Aranda *et al.*, 2020; Zdravković



& Gašević, 2022) has shown that individuals with a high degree of conservatism do not venture outside their comfort zone and prefer to buy domestically produced goods. Based on this, the first research hypothesis can be formulated:

H1: Conservatism has a statistically significant negative effect on respondents' decisions to purchase foreign luxury brands.

Ethnocentrism represents the belief that one should embrace the values and ideas originating from their own culture while rejecting all suggestions from other cultures. This way of thinking has implications in the fields of economics and marketing, leading to the emergence of **consumer ethnocentrism**, which is the belief that the only fair and correct way is to purchase domestically produced goods (Abdelwahab *et al.*, 2020). A strong domestic industry leads to social welfare and an increase in economic indicators such as the standard of living, gross domestic product (GDP), and growth rates, while purchasing imported products results in negative consequences for the national economy (Marinković, 2017). Individuals with pronounced ethnocentric tendencies respect the traditions and culture of their country, have a strong sense of national pride, and wish to subordinate their personal interests to national interests. Previous research (Cleveland *et al.*, 2022; Pentz *et al.*, 2017) has shown that a high level of ethnocentrism negatively affects the purchase of foreign brands. Based on this, the second research hypothesis can be formulated:

H2: Consumer ethnocentrism has a statistically significant negative effect on respondents' decisions to purchase foreign luxury brands.

Variety seeking involves a global perspective, an open mind, a quest for unique experiences, a continuous desire for innovation, and engaging in unusual adventures that provide memorable experiences. Such individuals typically spend their vacations abroad, explore unconventional destinations, purchase foreign products, use innovative technologies, and make new acquaintances. (Šapić *et al.*, 2019). Essentially, these people have an inherent desire to experience new things. Previous research (Beerli-Palacio & Martin-Santana, 2018; Vlajčić *et al.*, 2019) has shown that variety seeking positively influences consumers' intentions to purchase luxury foreign brands and the third hypothesis can be formulated:

H3: Variety seeking has a statistically significant positive effect on respondents' decisions to purchase foreign luxury brands.

Gillian Brock (2010) states in the part of Encyclopedia Britannica that "**cosmopolitanism**, in political theory, is the belief that all people are entitled to equal respect and consideration, no matter what their citizenship status or other affiliations happen to be". This belief also has implications in the fields of economics and marketing, leading to the emergence of consumer **cosmopolitanism**, that one should purchase products of both domestic and foreign origin. However, according to marketing research consumers with pronounced consumer cosmopolitanism believe that foreign brands are superior to domestic brands in terms of quality, technical reliability, performance, and fashion status (Fong *et al.*, 2019; Prince *et al.*, 2019). This group of people only purchases domestic brands when the foreign brands they prefer are not available for purchase. Previous research (Rabêlo Neto *et al.*, 2022; Srivastava *et al.*, 2023) has established that consumer cosmopolitanism implies the use luxury brands, leading to the formulation of the fourth hypothesis:

H4: Consumer cosmopolitanism has a statistically significant positive effect on respondents' decisions to purchase foreign luxury brands.

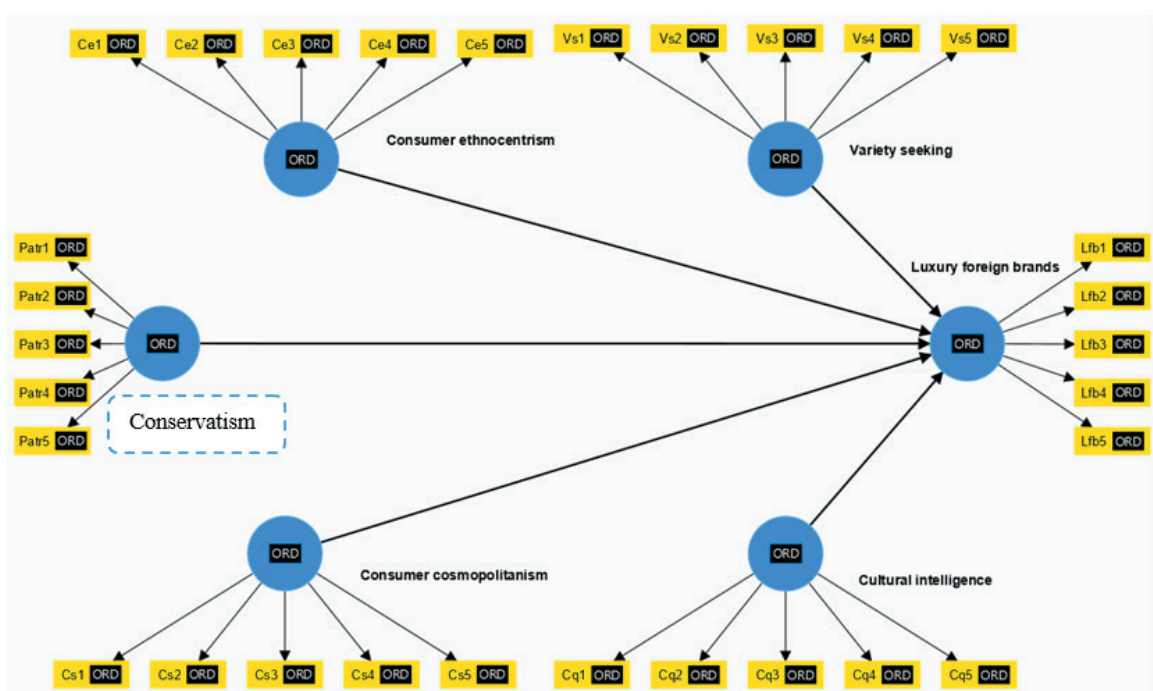


Cultural intelligence refers to a certain level of cultural knowledge acquired through formal and informal education, as well as through travel and life experiences, exchanging views with people from different cultural backgrounds, visiting museums, operas, cultural monuments of other countries, and learning about their cultural heritage (Kromidha *et al.*, 2022) The process of globalization has introduced multicultural situations in all spheres, with employees in multinational companies coming from various countries, student exchanges, and business and tourism travel (Alshaibani & Bakir, 2017). Cultural intelligence encompasses metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral components. The metacognitive component involves possessing cultural openness and sensitivity, the cognitive component relates to knowledge of foreign languages, other countries' politics, their social systems, and similar areas. The motivational component refers to the desire to visit other countries and learn about their traditions and history, while the behavioral component includes verbal behavior (accent) and nonverbal behavior (body movements) that facilitate navigating an intercultural environment (Frias-Jamilena *et al.*, 2018). Previous research (Cui *et al.*, 2019; Hu *et al.*, 2021) has shown that individuals with high cultural intelligence exhibit a preference for foreign brands over domestic ones, leading to the formulation of the fifth research hypothesis:

H5: Cultural intelligence has a statistically significant positive effect on respondents' decisions to purchase foreign luxury brands.

Based on the hypotheses, a research model (Figure 1) was formulated.

Figure 1. Research model within the statistical software SmartPLS 4



Source: Authors



METHODOLOGY AND DATA

Empirical research was conducted in early 2024 in the Republic of Serbia (Belgrade, Novi Sad). Respondents rated statements related to research variables *conservatism*, *consumer ethnocentrism*, *variety seeking*, *consumer cosmopolitanism*, *cultural intelligence*, *luxury foreign brands* on a seven-point Likert scale. Their responses were analyzed using the statistical software SmartPLS 4. The statements used in the questionnaire were adapted from relevant literature that dealt with similar topics, and an overview is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. Statements from the questionnaire

Research variables	Statements	Source
Conservatism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I feel a strong sense of empathy towards my country. 2. It is important to respect the traditions of my country. 3. I don't prefer change and advocate for maintaining the status quo. 	Zdravković & Gašević (2022)
Consumer ethnocentrism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I only buy domestic products. 2. Buying domestic products increases the employment rate. 3. Buying domestic products increases GDP per capita. 	Mishra <i>et al.</i> (2023)
Variety seeking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am very innovative and consider different options I have in the purchasing process. 2. I often research foreign brands. 3. I prefer shopping where I have a wide range of products available. 	Šapić <i>et al.</i> (2019)
Consumer cosmopolitanism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In the purchasing process, I favor foreign brands. 2. Foreign brands have good technical characteristics. 3. Purchasing well-known foreign brands gives consumers a sense of security. 	Rabêlo Neto <i>et al.</i> , (2022)
Cultural intelligence	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I often communicate with people from different cultures. 2. I often travel abroad. 3. I visit monuments of culture and museums of other countries. 	Zdravković & Peković (2021)
Foreign luxury brands	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Buying luxury brands allows me to have status in society. 2. I recommend to my friends to buy luxury foreign brands. 3. I think it's worth paying a higher price for luxury foreign brands. 	Rambocas & Mahabir (2021)

Source: Authors

Respondents were segmented according to demographic characteristics of gender, age, and education (Table 2). In the sample, there are 268 women and 243 men. The largest number of respondents belong to Generation Z, totaling 224 (43.8%). In terms of education, the majority of respondents have completed high school, totaling 281 (55.0%).

**Table 2.** Demographic characteristic of respondents

		Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Gender	Female	268	52.4%
	Male	243	47.6%
	Total	511	100%
Age	Generation X	89	17.4%
	Generation Y	198	38.8%
	Generation Z	224	43.8%
	Total	511	100%
Education	Primary education	15	2.9%
	High school	281	55.0%
	University degree	215	42.1%
	Total	511	100%

Source: Authors

In the sample, there are 268 women and 243 men. The largest number of respondents belong to Generation Z, totaling 224 (43.8%). In terms of education, the majority of respondents have completed high school, totaling 281 (55.0%).

RESEARCH RESULTS

To determine if all research variables were measured using precise and adequate statements, a **reliability analysis** was conducted (Table 3).

Table 3. Reliability analysis

Research variables	Cronbach's alpha	Composite reliability (rho_a)
Conservatism	0.816	0.829
Consumer ethnocentrism	0.848	0.853
Variety seeking	0.865	0.869
Consumer cosmopolitanism	0.737	0.743
Cultural intelligence	0.724	0.807
Foreign luxury brands	0.862	0.894

Source: Authors' calculation using SmartPLS 4 software

The values of *Cronbach's alpha* and *Composite reliability (rho_a)* are greater than the statistical threshold of 0.70, indicating a satisfactory level of correlation among all statements measuring the research variables. Therefore, the research model is considered relevant and precise.



The **Structural Equation Model (SEM)** was implemented to analyze the effects of *conservatism*, *consumer ethnocentrism*, *variety seeking*, *consumer cosmopolitanism*, and *cultural intelligence* on consumers' decision to purchase foreign luxury brands (Table 4).

Based on the stated results, a decision will be made to confirm or reject the research hypotheses. Accordingly, the conclusion will present the implications derived from the conducted empirical research

Table 4. Structural Equation Model

Hypothesis	Original sample (O)	Standard deviation (STDEV)	T statistics (IO/STDEVI)	P values
Conservatism → Foreign luxury brands	-0.065	0.047	1.384	0.166
Consumer ethnocentrism → Foreign luxury brands	-0.353	0.068	5.220	0.000**
Variety seeking → Foreign luxury brands	0.421	0.059	7.100	0.000**
Consumer cosmopolitanism → Foreign luxury brands	0.248	0.048	5.112	0.000**
Cultural intelligence → Foreign luxury brands	0.501	0.064	7.858	0.000**

Level of statistical significance: **0.01; R square=0.468

Source: Authors' calculation using SmartPLS 4 software

The coefficient of determination *R square* is 0.468, meaning that 46.8% of the variability of the dependent variable, *foreign luxury brands*, is explained by the given regression model. *Conservatism* (coefficient= -0.065, *p values*=0.166) has a negative impact on the purchase of foreign luxury brands, however, this impact is not statistically significant, so **research hypothesis H1 is not confirmed**. *Consumer ethnocentrism* (coefficient= -0.353, *p values*=0.000) has a negative and statistically significant impact on consumers' decision to purchase foreign luxury brands, **confirming research hypothesis H2**. On the other hand, *Variety seeking* (coefficient= 0.421, *p values*=0.000), *Consumer cosmopolitanism* (coefficient= 0.248, *p values*=0.000), and *Cultural intelligence* (coefficient= 0.501, *p values*=0.000) have a positive and statistically significant impact on consumers' decision to purchase foreign luxury brands, **confirming research hypotheses H3, H4, and H5**.



DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

According to the research results, conservatism does not have a statistically significant negative impact on consumers' decisions to purchase foreign luxury brands, which contradicts previous research findings where conservatism had a statistically significant negative impact on the purchase of foreign brands (Casando Aranda *et al.*, 2020; Zdravković & Gašević, 2022). On the other hand, consumer ethnocentrism has a statistically significant negative impact on the purchase of foreign luxury brands by consumers, and similar results were obtained in previous studies (Cleveland *et al.*, 2022; Pentz *et al.*, 2017). This can be explained by the fact that conservatism does not have a statistically significant negative impact on the purchase of foreign luxury brands because it is only one of the drivers of consumer ethnocentrism (along with patriotism, national identity, collectivism, moral values, dogmatism, material values, and others). Consumer ethnocentrism, as a broader concept based on the purchase of domestic products and services, negatively affects the purchase of foreign luxury brands. The results showed that the variety seeking has a statistically significant positive impact on the purchase of foreign luxury brands, and previous research has reached similar conclusions (Beerli-Palacio & Martin-Santana, 2018; Vljčić *et al.*, 2019). Additionally, consumer cosmopolitanism has a statistically significant positive impact on consumers' decisions to purchase foreign luxury brands, aligning with the results of previous studies (Rabêlo Neto *et al.*, 2022; Srivastava *et al.*, 2023). Cosmopolitanism encompasses respect for the value systems of both domestic and all foreign cultures, which is why its influence on the purchase of foreign luxury brands is weaker than that of cultural intelligence. The research results indicated that cultural intelligence has the strongest statistically significant positive impact on the purchase of foreign luxury brands among all the listed variables, as it is a comprehensive concept that encompasses various cultural characteristics, which can be defined within metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral competencies. Previous research (Cui *et al.*, 2019; Hu *et al.*, 2021) has also found that cultural intelligence is an important determinant of purchasing foreign luxury brands.

It should be noted that future studies could include additional determinants of luxury foreign brand purchases within the conceptual model, such as consumer xenocentrism, country-of-origin image, level of innovativeness, and similar factors. Furthermore, it would be particularly interesting to analyze how demographic characteristics, such as monthly income levels, influence the purchase of luxury foreign brands, as well as the concept of CRM (Customer Relationship Management). The goal of every successful and globally recognized company is to build a large base of loyal customers who will continue purchasing their luxury brands in the long term.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the empirical research, it was determined that conservatism does not have a statistically significant impact on consumers' decisions to purchase foreign luxury brands, while consumer ethnocentrism has a statistically significant negative impact on consumers' decisions to purchase foreign luxury brands. This result can be explained by the fact that conservatism is only one of the drivers of consumer ethnocentrism, which is a much broader concept. With its more diverse implications, ethnocentrism strengthens consumers' intentions to purchase domestic brands while avoiding the purchase of foreign luxury brands. Variety seeking, consumer cosmopolitanism, and cultural intelligence all have a statistically significant positive impact on consumers' intentions to purchase foreign luxury brands. It should be noted that the impact of cultural intelligence on the purchase of foreign luxury brands is



the most prominent and significant, which is logical given that, of the three variables with a positive impact, cultural intelligence is the broadest concept. It encompasses a range of competencies, such as metacognitive, cognitive, motivational, and behavioral, which allow a person to function effectively in a multicultural environment and influence the formation of purchasing patterns regarding preferences for foreign brands.

The originality of the research lies in the holistic and comprehensive approach to conceptualizing the research model, encompassing the combined impact of these variables on consumers' purchasing decisions. *Theoretical implications* include the advancement of scientific knowledge and filling the research gap in the relevant literature on the impact of these variables on consumers' purchasing intentions. Also, the results presented can serve as a foundation for publishing new papers in the fields of consumer behavior and intercultural marketing. *Managerial implications* are based on providing information that can be helpful in designing an optimal strategy for operating in the Serbian market. In unstable and crisis conditions, it is not possible to apply either a purely global or purely local marketing strategy. Instead, it is necessary to find the right balance and incorporate elements of both strategies to meet the needs of consumers with ethnocentric tendencies as well as those with cosmopolitan views. It is possible for foreign luxury brands to be adapted to the Serbian market by incorporating some elements on the packaging that are characteristic symbols for this cultural area, advertising through local media, and so on. *The limitation of this research* is that it was conducted only in Serbia, and *future studies* could involve conducting research in other neighboring countries to compare the views of individuals from different countries. Additionally, the research model could be expanded by including other significant determinants of luxury foreign brand purchases, such as consumer xenocentrism, country-of-origin image, and similar factors.

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KONZERVATIVIZAM, POTROŠAČKI ETNOCENTRIZAM, TRAŽENJE RAZNOLIKOSTI, POTROŠAČKI KOSMOPOLITIZAM I KULTURALNA INTELIGENCIJA KAO DETERMINANTE KUPOVINE STRANIH LUKSUZNIH BRENDOVA

Rezime:

Geopolitičke tenzije izazvane ratom u Ukrajini, migrantskom krizom i ekonomskom nestabilnošću jačaju nacionalistička osećanja. Konzervativizam i potrošački etnocentrizam su kohezioni faktori tokom kriza, zasnovani na principu da je moralna dužnost svakog građanina da zaštiti domaću ekonomiju kupovinom domaćih proizvoda. Neki građani imaju kosmopolitske stavove i otvoreni su za prihvatanje ideja iz drugih kultura. Cilj istraživanja je da ispita uticaj konzervativizma, potrošačkog etnocentrizma, traženja raznolikosti, potrošačkog kosmopolitizma i kulturalne inteligencije na odluku potrošača da kupe strane luksuzne brendove. Istraživanje je sprovedeno početkom 2024. godine na teritoriji Republike Srbije. Ukupan broj ispitanika u uzorku bio je 511, a njihovi odgovori su analizirani pomoću SEM modela u okviru statističkog programa SmartPLS 4. Rezultati su pokazali da konzervativizam ne ostvaruje statistički značajan, dok potrošački etnocentrizam ima statistički značajan negativan uticaj na kupovinu luksuznih stranih brendova. Traženje raznolikosti, potrošački kosmopolitizam i kulturna inteligencija imaju pozitivan i statistički značajan uticaj na odluku potrošača da kupe strane luksuzne brendove. Istraživanje doprinosi pružanjem informacija koje mogu biti korisne menadžerima u formulisanju marketinških strategija za tržište Republike Srbije.

Ključne reči:

konzervativizam,
potrošački etnocentrizam,
traženje raznolikosti,
potrošački kosmopolitizam,
kulturna inteligencija.

JEL Klasifikacija:

D01, D91, D12