

Family Enterprises in the Context of Consumer Ethnocentrism and Relationship-Building

Submitted: 25.10.18 | Accepted: 21.01.19

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Previous research on family entrepreneurship has given relatively little consideration to the attitudes of consumers towards Family Enterprises (FEs). The aim of the article is to deepen our understanding of consumer behaviour towards FEs. The paper's theoretical framework is based on two concepts: consumer ethnocentrism and commitment-trust theory in relationship marketing. The article employs a grounded-theory methodology, whose primary purpose is to develop theoretical underpinnings of consumer behaviour towards FEs. The paper is based on latent participant observation and individual in-depth interviews conducted in 2017. The findings indicate that FEs do not communicate their family identity explicitly and that consumers adopt ethnocentric attitudes towards FEs. Furthermore, young buyers should be treated as an important challenge for FEs. The article concludes by emphasizing implications for theory and business practice which are applicable beyond the Polish context.

Keywords: family enterprises, consumers, consumer ethnocentrism, relationship.

Przedsiębiorstwa rodzinne w kontekście teorii etnocentryzmu konsumentckiego i budowania relacji

Nadesłany: 25.10.18 | Zaakceptowany do druku: 21.01.19

W dotychczasowych badaniach nad przedsiębiorczością rodzinną niewiele uwagi poświęcono nastawieniu konsumentów do przedsiębiorstw rodzinnych (FE). Celem artykułu jest przyczynienie się do zrozumienia zachowań konsumentów wobec tych podmiotów. Zastosowano dwie koncepcje teoretyczne: etnocentryzmu konsumentckiego i zaufania opartego na zaangażowaniu w marketingu relacji. Badania oparto na teorii ugruntowanej, by stworzyć ramy konceptualne dla studiów nad FE i ich klientami. W 2017 roku przeprowadzono obserwację uczestniczącą i indywidualne wywiady pogłębione. Studia te wykazały, iż FE nie komunikują otwarcie swej rodzinnej tożsamości, a konsumenci przejawiają postawy etnocentryczne wobec tych FE, które są im znane. Ponadto, poważne wyzwanie dla FE stanowią zachowania młodych konsumentów. Proponowana procedura ma charakter uniwersalny i może być traktowana jako pewne podejście badawcze w wymiarze międzynarodowym.

Słowa kluczowe: przedsiębiorstwa rodzinne, konsumenci, etnocentryzm konsumentcki, relacje.

JEL: D12, D22

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Ministry of Science
and Higher Education
Republic of Poland

The creation of the English-language version of these publications is financed in the framework of contract No. 607/P-DUN/2018 by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education committed to activities aimed at the promotion of education.

1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, family enterprise research has grown considerably (Sageder, Mitter, & Feldbauer-Durstmüller, 2018; Xi, Kraus, Filser, & Kellermanns, 2015; Gomez-Mejia, Cruz, Berrone, & De Castro, 2011). FEs play a significant role in national economies across the world (Bednarz, Bieliński, Nikodemska-Wołowik, & Otukoya, 2017). Nowadays, the conditions of doing business are extremely challenging for FE owners. Apart from concerns about succession or business strategies (DeNoble, Ehrlich, & Singh, 2007; Mazzola, Marchisio, & Astrachan, 2008; Parada & Viladas, 2010), contemporary entrepreneurs cope with rapid changes in consumer needs, expectations, lifestyles and shopping decisions (Basco, 2014; Craig, Dibrell, & Davis, 2008). It follows that there is a need for further research into this area.

Previous studies show that researchers rarely adopt a holistic and systemic approach to the analysis of FE problems (Bednarz, Bieliński, Nikodemska-Wołowik, & Otukoya, 2017; Zellweger, 2017). Their internal dilemmas, as well as the special features of running a business in the conditions of market instability, have been widely investigated, the subject of reputation and image has been raised as well (Binz, Hair Jr., Pieper, & Baldauf, 2013; Sageder, Mitter, & Feldbauer-Durstmüller, 2018; Zellweger, 2017). In general, research has so far focused mainly on the supply side of the market (Pounder, 2015; van Gils, Dibrell, Neubaum, & Craig, 2014), while the demand side has been described in a rather fragmentary way. It seems that there is a gap in the literature on family enterprises that direct their offer to individual consumers (Bednarz & Nikodemska-Wołowik, 2017).

The aim of the article is to deepen our understanding of consumer behaviour towards family enterprises. In particular, it seeks to answer the following research questions:

- Q1: How do consumers define an FE?
- Q2: What attributes do consumers ascribe to an FE?
- Q3: What are consumers' attitudes towards FEs?
- Q4: Which FEs' attributes (if any) attract customers' attention at a point of sales (POS)?

In this context, special attention was paid to the role of shaping relations between family enterprises and consumers as well as to the significance of consumers' ethnocentric attitudes. In the long term, an in-depth understanding of FE customers can result in creating close relations between them and family firms.

The article employs a grounded-theory methodology, whose primary purpose is to develop theoretical underpinnings of consumer behaviour towards FEs. The paper is based on participant observation and individual in-depth interviews with consumers conducted in 2017.

The contribution of this study is threefold. As mentioned above, FEs have been extensively investigated from the supply side's perspective, while this paper is concentrated on individual buyers. While the evolution of consumer ethnocentrism (CET) and relationship marketing have been profoundly explored in extant literature, the links between FEs and CET as well as between FEs and consumer relationships have not been given much consideration.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Essence of FEs

A general conceptualisation of the entrepreneur as an economic phenomenon was provided by Chmielecki and Sułkowski (2017). Although in the current literature there is no consensus on a coherent and codified definition of family enterprises, the concept of the European Commission has been adopted for this paper's purposes.

The EC and experts in the area of FEs have put forward the following description of FE (EC, 2009, p. 4): "The majority of decision-making rights is in the possession of the natural person(s) who established the firm, or in the possession of the natural person(s) who has/have acquired the share capital of the firm, or in the possession of their spouses, parents, child or children's direct heirs; the majority of decision-making rights are indirect or direct; at least one representative of the family or kin is formally involved in the governance of the firm; the person who established or acquired the firm (share capital) or their families or descendants possess 25% of the decision-making rights mandated by their share capital". However, given a significant rise in the number of non-normative family forms (Neyer, Wrzus, Wagner, & Lang, 2011, p. 269; Beauregard, Ozbilgin, & Bell, 2009, p. 49), a contemporary kin may be defined much more broadly than a customary one.

Moreover, while conceptualizing FEs, scholars apply, *inter alia*, the resource-based approach to FEs and indicate a relatively new construct: "familiness". According to Zellweger (2017, p. 137), who developed Habbershon and Williams' concept of "familiness" (1999), the term means "unique types of resources as a result of the interaction between the family and the firm" and it refers also to the kin's composition of resources. Frank et al. (2017) claim that are two elements in the centre of familiness: communication and communicated decisions, particularly in the form of decision premises.

Regarding the significance of buyers from the perspective of FEs, these firms build close relations with their clients. They are "businesses with a human face", which somehow distinguishes them from big multinational "faceless" non-family companies. FEs tend to tailor-make their offer to buyers, who often prefer to be treated as individual customers rather than

mass consumers (Bednarz, Bieliński, Nikodemka-Wołowik, & Otukoya, 2017, pp. 128–129). While considering ethnocentrism, it should be noted that FEs, deeply rooted in regions and traditions, usually play a substantial role in local communities. The Polish FEs' attributes assigned by domestic buyers are presented below in part 4.1. Here, a compiled definition and an estimated number of Polish FEs are worth mentioning. An FE is an entity owned and controlled by at least two family members who exert formal influence over its management and strategy. They amount to circa 800 thousand firms (PARP, 2016, p. 94; IBR, 2018).

2.2. Consumer Ethnocentrism (CET)

Ethnocentrism is defined as “a domain-specific concept for the study of consumer behavior with marketing implications” (Shimp & Sharma, 1987, p. 287). “It is rooted deeply in most areas of intergroup relations” (Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995, p. 27). The concept of ethnocentrism was introduced by Sumner (1906), who hypothesized that people identified themselves as group members (in-groups) and distinguished themselves from out-groups. Then LeVine and Campbell (1972) concentrated on the individual-level personality systems.

Consumer ethnocentrism (CET) means consumers' preference for domestic goods and rejection of foreign ones, indicating a general tendency to avoid imports regardless of price or quality considerations due to patriotic reasons (Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995, p. 27; Stere and Trajani, 2015, p. 42). “The consequences of consumer ethnocentricity include overestimation of domestic products or underestimation of imports, a moral obligation to buy domestic products, and preference for domestic products” (Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995, p. 27).

The last two economic downturns in the 21st century showed that even business giants collapsed. The unscrupulousness, immorality of senior management, numerous abuses and unethical practices came to light. It resulted in a decrease of consumer trust towards corporations with vague, multiple owners (Nikodemka-Wołowik & Zientara, 2012, pp. 316–317). Those circumstances cemented solid foundations for an ethnocentric ambiance (and in consequence – for a positive interest in FEs).

It is believed that buyer perceptions of threat from a large influx of foreign goods can stimulate ethnocentric behaviour (Han & Won, 2018, p. e57). They surveyed buyers from 21 nations in 2016, including Poland; it turned out that younger generations were more open-minded towards various international ideas and tended to engage in more cosmopolitan activities. Older people had more ethnocentric tendencies and were more (socially) conservative. By contrast, a study carried out just two years earlier in Poland showed that although seniors seemed to be more ethnocentric, the difference between them and their younger counterparts was not significant and the correlation between CET and age was weak (Awdziej,

Tkaczyk, & Włodarek, 2014, pp. 20–21). Additionally, when compared to consumers from other post-communist countries, Polish buyers are much more ethnocentric than Slovenian, Hungarian, Czech or Bulgarian, but less than Russian ones (Han & Won, 2018, p. e62).

It seems that consumer ethnocentrism has possible strong influence on FEs. Based on their own research, Carrigan and Buckley (2008, p. 664) underline that there is a tendency for consumers to conflate FEs with small, local businesses. FEs have “a strong local identity and enjoy being part of a business hub that promotes local interests”. It corresponds with the CET concept – a strong, universal consumer phenomenon, important particularly for younger generations. The literature shows that the behavior of young people is influenced by people they are in contact with. Family, with its values, “is one of the most important factors in the formation of an individual’s ethnocentric orientation” (Fernández-Ferrína, Bande, & Galán-Ladero, 2017, pp. 55–56).

2.3. Relationships With Consumers

Relationship marketing is an important concept that appeared in the literature on services marketing in the early 80s (Berry 1983). Morgan and Hunt (1994, p. 22) explored the nature of relationship management (suppliers, lateral organizations, buyers and internal partnerships) and postulated that successful relationship marketing requires relationship commitment and trust. They underlined that both commitment and trust produce outcomes that promote overall efficiency and labour productivity as they lead directly to cooperative behaviours that are conducive to relationship marketing success.

Abosag, Tynan and Lewis (2006, pp. 3–4) came up with definitions of commitment and trust. They defined relationship commitment as a complex phenomenon understood as an enduring desire to maintain the relationship that plays a central role in long-lasting networks. The definitions of trust suggest that it involves one party having confidence in or relying on another party to fulfil its obligations. Performance/cognitive trust is the confidence, willingness or intention of a party to rely on a partner’s performance, reliability/credibility to fulfil promises basing on accumulative knowledge gained through interactions or the party’s reputation in other relationships. Affective-based trust is the confidence a party places in another party based on the feelings and emotions generated by the caring, empathy, politeness, similarity, and concern for the other party demonstrated in their interactions.

The commitment-trust theory proposed by Morgan and Hunt (1996, p. 34) maintains that companies’ networks engender cooperation as well as reduce uncertainty, tendency to leave the cooperation, and the belief that conflict will be functional. The authors posited that “commitment and trust develop when firms attend to relationships by: (1) providing resources, opportunities and benefits, (2) maintaining high standards of corporate

values and allying with partners having similar values, (3) communicating valuable information, including expectations, market intelligence and evaluations of the partner's performance, and (4) avoiding malevolently taking advantage of their exchange partners". All these actions will enable companies and their networks to enjoy sustainable competitive advantages in the global marketplace.

Since the 80s, the relationship marketing literature has grown explosively. So (2007, p. 7) identified 288 relationship marketing articles published between 1987 and 2005 to review the trend of research in the field. However, in current economic and market conditions (changing often in a turbulent and unpredictable way), building close relationships with customers and other business partners is particularly important.

"Consumers believe that they got 'special' treatment while being engaged with a family business" (Carrigan & Buckley, 2008, p. 664). It is so because FEs create strong and intense relationships with customers (Arregle, Hitt, Sirmon, & Very, 2007, p. 83; Binz, Hair, Pieper, & Baldauf, 2013). Furthermore, earning a good reputation seems to be crucial to them (Sageder, Mitter, & Feldbauer-Durstmüller, 2015, p. 13). The results of research on FEs conducted by Orth and Green (2009, p. 257) proved that consumers' satisfaction and loyalty are built by consumer trust. Moreover Smith, Hair Jr. and Ferguson (2014, p. 259) confirmed "a strong, positive relationship between trust and relationship commitment in FE, supporting the conception of trust as an initiator and developer of long-term relationships".

3. Research Methodology

To achieve the objectives of this study, two grounded-theory methods were applied as the most suitable tools (Anninou & Foxall, 2017, p. 555; Johnson, 2015, pp. 263–264). The proposed approach distinguishes our inquiry from extant studies by expanding the area of consumer behaviour research. These methods were deemed to be appropriate to the study of social and cultural phenomena (Iacono, Brown, & Holtham, 2009), allowing the researchers to explore the real world of buyers and to understand their choices. Thus, in an introductory study, qualitative research was employed (Anninou & Foxall, 2017, p. 556). Considering properly the socio-cultural profile of consumers and research infrastructure of a given country, after the qualitative phase, a quantitative survey can be employed (de Panafieu, Weber, & Krason, 1997; Mariampolski, 1997).

The empirical study was deepened in several stages, as presented in Figure 1, while this article is concentrated on the third and fourth stages. The introductory phase served to ascertain phenomena, to identify main subjects and topics of further research. At stage 1, studies of the existing sources with critical analysis and ten expert interviews were carried out.

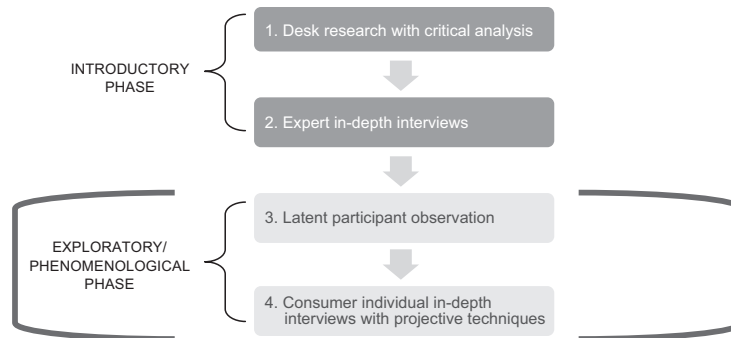


Fig. 1. Phases and stages of the empirical research. Source: Own elaboration based on empirical studies.

In the exploratory/phenomenological phase, field research was carried out in order to observe and understand everyday behaviours of the subjects in their natural environment.

At stage 3, the latent participant observation was used. This method is recommended when gathering data about the social world by interacting with people and observing them in their ‘natural’ setting (Myers, 2009; Melin, Nordqvist, & Pramodita, 2014; Sorenson, Yu, Brigham, & Lumpkin, 2013). The selected locations were in line with customers’ international preferences connected with where they buy. However, the authors were aware of the trend visible in highly industrialized countries: the gradual abandonment of traditional purchases in favour of online shopping (mainly clothing) and rising tiredness of shopping malls (Schlossberg, 2016). The description of the aforementioned method is given in the Table 1.

Method	Sample	Location	Time
latent participant observation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – type: random – arbitrary – size: circa 40 customers observed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – 10 locations in natural surroundings – retail outlets offering consumer goods (FMCG – cosmetics, food & beverages, durables – furniture, household appliances) – the availability of goods coming from Polish family enterprises in POS (mono- & multibrands) – in line with customers’ international preferences – appropriate conditions for playing the role of a client by the researchers 	May–June 2017

Tab. 1. Stage 3 of the research procedure. Source: Own elaboration based on empirical studies.

At stage 4, individual in-depth interviews were conducted. In the 21st century, in-depth individual interviews still constitute the main and successful method of studying human behaviour (Halkier, 2010; Saldana & Omasta, 2018). Besides, projective techniques were used in the aforementioned interviews. They not only enabled the researchers to eliminate barriers between them and informants but also facilitated creativity and stimulated imagination (Mariampolski, 2001). The semi-structured IDI is an appropriate format when the inquiry has a “fairly clear focus” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 479) but allows for following up interviewees’ replies (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 474), ask complex and open-ended questions (Saunders et al., 2009, p. 324).

The aim of IDI was to identify three components of consumer attitudes: cognitive (identification of buyers’ knowledge), affective (diagnosis of their reaction revealing their feelings/emotions), intentional (detection of their decisions and purchasing actions). The description of the implemented IDIs is given in the Table 2.

Method	Sample	Location	Time
<p>individual in-depth interviews semi-structured probing, with an interview guide including 13 points to be discussed</p> <p>with the usage of projective techniques applied (the 3rd person questioning, psycho-drawing)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – type: judgmental – purposive – sample structure: 20 Poles living in Poland – 13 women*, 7 men: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> age 16–19: 3 W 20–25: 3 W, 2 M 26–30: 3 M 31–40: 3 W 41–50: 2 W, 1 M 51–60: 2 W, 1 M – representing 10 voivodeships – making purchases in Poland (i.e. FMCG and durables, like apparel, furniture, household appliances, jewellery – according to the results of the 3 previous research stages in Figure 1.) – active buyers in traditional POS and those who purchase twofold: offline and online – taking independent and independent & joint purchasing decisions – talking to family members and/or friends about errands – exchanging experiences 	<p>country regions adequate for the study purposes</p> <p>places convenient for the respondents natural surroundings</p>	<p>July–October 2017</p> <p>duration of each IDI: 90 minutes</p>

* Despite social changes, women are more involved in shopping than men in Poland.

Tab. 2. Stage 4 of the research procedure. Source: Own elaboration based on empirical studies.

Content analysis was used, which included semantic, pragmatic and sign-vehicle analyses. In order to conduct content analysis, it was assumed that people, through their statements, expressed desires, attitudes and judgments, were determined by the socio-cultural system. "Content analysis is a technique for gathering and analyzing the content of text. The content refers to words, meanings, pictures, symbols, ideas, themes, or any message that can be communicated" (Neumann, 2003, p. 219). "Content analysis is a technique that facilitates the systematic and objective identification and categorization of communication themes or characteristics" (Hsieh, 2012, p. 103). The manner and content of their utterances reflected their individual characteristics and the characteristics of the community they belonged to (Nikodemska-Wołowik, 2008, pp. 99–100).

In the case of pragmatic analysis, the emphasis was on why something was uttered as well as on the classification of statements and behaviours in line with their probable causes and effects. Owing to that analysis, the reasoning was narrowed down, focusing on selected issues. The semantic analysis was also applied – it helped to classify statements and behaviours according to their meaning, frequency of appearing of a given object, its descriptions, occurrence of the same terms for a given object. The sign-vehicle analysis enabled the categorization of the content in line with the psychophysical characteristics of the sign, the frequency of using given words or types of words and the accompanying expression of emotions.

All observations and IDIs were conducted according to ethical standards, in accordance with the codes of the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (ESOMAR) and its counterpart, widely accepted by researchers: Polish Society for Market and Opinion Research (PTBRiO). The proposed research procedure is universal and can be treated as a recommendation and a certain methodological pattern in FE consumer research in various countries.

4. Family Enterprises as Viewed by Consumers: In the Light of the Findings

4.1. FE Defined by Consumers

A remarkably emotional approach to the subject that appeared in the discussion on FE is worth mentioning. Respondents did not conceal their feelings, underlying that work constituted the foundation of such companies, together with commitment and support of all family members, as well as values such as: respect (also to employees), openness. Maintaining and sharing similar values with partners as one of the core elements of the commitment-trust theory in relationship marketing is clearly visible here.

Most of the respondents had some knowledge on the FE concept. It was associated with family-managed companies, inherited from generation

to generation, constituting small and solid entities, long-standing on the market, with traditions. However, in the discussion about what makes them purchase goods from FEs, they stressed trust in FEs and their care for the quality of products and customer service, as well as the focus on the customer. It proves the importance of the performance/cognitive trust and affective-based trust in relationship marketing.

Consumers have their own, quite coherent vision of FEs and the answers they provide can be used to formulate a definition of these entities. In their opinion, FEs are companies in the hands of a given family (traditionally understood) for at least two generations, controlled and managed by closely related persons, within which occupational and private matters are closely related. They added a role of internal trust: “people can trust each other, rely on each other”, “nobody will behave unfairly to each other” (a woman aged 20–25).

They are perceived as small or medium companies, most often operating locally. The respondents noticed also negative aspects, for example: “FEs have funding problems, limited range and are barely profitable” (a man aged 41–50). They are mainly associated with the food industry.

4.2. Attributes Assigned to FEs by Consumers

The family nature of FEs is associated by the respondents with the tradition (tradition becomes an important asset in the assessment of the company), certain values, but also with a conservative approach to business.

The quality of goods and services is the second most important feature connected by customers to FEs. According to Morgan and Hunt’s theory that commitment and trust develop when firms attend to relationships by providing resources, opportunities and benefits, the respondents are encouraged to buy products offered by FEs because they feel that the owner himself or herself sees to the product quality (a woman aged 26–30: “the owner sees to everything her/himself”).

Quality is also connected with intangible assets like: well-known brand, better alignment with buyers’ expectations, creation of new needs, more frequent product upgrades than competitors, easy access to products, convenient location and time of purchase and finally the loyalty of buyers.

Moreover, customers indicate that FEs are traditional, conservative but also trustworthy, responsible, solid and dependable. Some of them have launched well-known brands and offer solid quality of goods and services. Consumers also highlight the ethnocentric attitude towards these companies (Bednarz & Nikodemka-Wołowik, 2017). Surprisingly, the respondents stressed that they did not attach importance to the brand owner.

4.3. Consumers’ Attitudes Towards FEs

Unexpectedly, most of the respondents stressed that the problem is the correct identification and assessment of the producer/owner of the brand, as well as its ethical attitude to doing business.

They emphasized the ambiguity in identifying the brand's capital, the place of merchandise production and doubts related to the proper treatment of employees. During the interviews with consumers, the diffusion of knowledge on FEs with their emotions about these enterprises and the intentions to choose the offer from FEs were observed. Thus, all the attitude components were revealed, but the affective and cognitive ones significantly dominated.

The respondents were asked if they knew FEs and could name their names, although they usually mentioned unknown, small local businesses operating in their environment. Among the mentioned industries, the food industry (confectionery, bakery, butchery, ice-cream parlours) as well as cosmetics, furniture, construction, catering and hotel industry have been mentioned.

In general, there was no remarkable difference in the answers of respondents representing different age groups. The respondents who belonged to the younger generations (aged 16–25) spontaneously, *ad hoc*, discussed this topic. This is a very interesting, although secondary, notion, indicating that young people analyse the labour market and change their optics, being interested in FEs from the perspective of potential outside employees, not family members. Moreover, contrary to stereotypes, the current representatives of the youth do not transfer all their communication activities to cyberspace, valuing personalized close relationships with selected entities of the environment. They need a quiet conversation “in the real world”, with room for in-depth reflection.

Therefore, one can conclude that generally the attitudes were positive, built on the major pillars:

- trust as an effect of a holistic approach to buyers' expectations,
- encouragement to buy goods offered by FEs because the owner him/herself takes care of the product quality,
- ethnocentric attitude towards these companies,
- easy access to goods – convenient location and time of purchase.

4.4. The Attributes of FEs Which Attract Customers' Attention in POS

The interviewees tend to be indifferent to the “family” origin of products. They do not pay much attention to the fact that they make purchases in a shop belonging to kin entrepreneurs, even in places exhibiting this fact (e.g. in the name of a shop). The most important attributes of the place of sale are: the type of store, its convenient location and the opportunity to do other shopping “under one roof”. Customers are also attracted by the quality and a wide range of products. The “Polishness” of products, which is identified (not only in Poland but also abroad) with the safety of their consumption/use, with naturalness, is becoming more and more important for buyers (Bednarz, 2014). Customers fully aware of the origin of FE products are mainly interested in other features: the national origin

of the company, its location, the use of Polish ingredients and packaging, employment of local employees, indirect support of the Polish economy.

According to the interviewees, FEs can be characterized by many advantages. They are sustainable, reliable, more credible and friendly. Thanks to many years of partnership and tight relations between employees and owners, mutual trust, solidarity and the ability to rely on each other can be observed, which is in line with previous research (Rosina, 2018, p. 25). They pay attention to the preservation of old recipes, but also value originality, carefulness about product implementation and service quality for purchasers. Because of the mentioned features, they invoke greater confidence in the offered quality. They use reliable suppliers. Unfortunately, the respondents also stress some disadvantages (potential and real). They think that these enterprises have restricted access to the market and limited scope of operation. They are underinvested and unprofitable, but, what should be emphasized, the profit for the owner is not an end in itself. The problem of nepotism has also been stressed – it may be difficult for people not belonging to the family to be promoted. These enterprises are also eliminated from the market by foreign capital and network business.

The respondents' views about the exposure of the family identity of the company were different. Some respondents answered this question positively, stressing that it is an important attribute emphasizing traditional recipes and production method as well as durability, stabilization and Polishness. This is especially important in the case of food promotion. Those having opposite opinions stressed that family identity raises questions about the aims of the activity, the suspicion of nepotism and doubts about the continuity of operation. They stressed that the most important notions in communication are product quality and proper price.

5. Conclusions and Implications for Further Research

The findings indicate that consumers believe that FEs do not communicate their family identity explicitly. They often cannot attach the origin of an FE offer with a specific kin. When the issue of FEs was discussed during IDIs, the appearance of emotions was remarkable and a visible increase in conversation engagement could be noticed. That affirmation of sharing similar values and ethnocentric attitudes while having close relations with local entities proves that the commitment-trust theory plays a significant role in relationship marketing of FEs. Moreover, respondents spontaneously listed the names of FEs, yet mainly from their own region – local companies.

Consumers are sometimes misguided in considering the family ownership of a company. FEs are generally linked with traditional businesses, such as food industry, cosmetics and apparel branches. A simplification of that kind results from stereotyping of entrepreneurship in Poland. Additionally, buyers' attitudes towards FEs are influenced explicitly by the emotional and

cognitive components, both in a positive way. A proper attitude towards FEs, however, is not reflected in actual shopping decisions or in willingness to buy FE goods. These research results regarding components of attitude are as follows: (a) cognitive component (limited knowledge of FEs present on the market); (b) emotional component (general positive feelings and ideas about FEs); (c) intentional component (still challenging).

Moreover, from FEs' perspective, the generations Y and Z can be treated as a serious challenge. The youth do not distinguish FEs from other companies. In this context, a task for the FE owners emerges – especially young actual or prospective FE successors – to observe these segments of buyers. The aforementioned area should become a subject of in-depth analysis and may contribute to modern research and practice in the field of FE. In the case of activities focused on young buyers, stereotypes must be rejected: even though those generations are rooted in cyberspace, they value personalized direct relations.

This study has a number of limitations. First, the observations took place only in retail stores, not in retail services, in which FEs were represented as well. Second, the lack of possibility of recording the interviews is another shortcoming. However, we had to make compromises, as Polish respondents tend to feel uncomfortable in such circumstances (which is probably the legacy of the communist past). Third, the diversity of different buyers – producers/retailers relationships were not categorized, for example relatively new “consumer insight” was omitted. But as the idea behind the study was new, we tended to open an explorative discussion without superfluous assumptions and to avoid wishful thinking. Nonetheless, such classification is recommended in the forthcoming quantitative research.

Our findings imply that similar studies should be conducted, changing selected research questions from the qualitative phases into research hypotheses that will be statistically verified as a result of a foreseen quantitative survey. Moreover, all the activities performed in the phenomenological phase presented in the article can be used for a detailed preparation of measurement methods, techniques and instruments in a quantitative survey, including a representative random sample of Polish consumers. At the same time, our research procedure can be applied to other cultural settings.

Acknowledgment

The paper was prepared within the scope of the project funded by the National Science Centre (Narodowe Centrum Nauki) No. 2016/21/B/HS4/01600.

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