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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

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AN EXAMINATION OF FREE DOWNLOADING ATTITUDES: PERSPECTIVES FROM ROMANIA

Summary

Ethics is commonly defined as a moral code that rule or influence people's behaviors, also as customers. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to explore consumer ethics and cultural dimensions in relationship to consumer attitudes toward software downloading. Specifically, the study assesses a sample of Romanian professionals in terms of their own standing on the Hofstede model dimensions (collectivism, masculinity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance) relative to select consumer ethics dimensions, and it addresses the respondents' personal attitudes toward unauthorized downloading of copyrighted material. The target respondents were approached repeatedly through social networking, like Facebook, with 49 respondents agreeing to complete the questionnaire. Obtained results show that Romanian consumers are likely to be more individualistic and as such, they see unethical behavior as more acceptable. Such behavior can be found as typical for many post-communist countries, where economy and society undergo profound and long-term changes and citizens often pay no attention to the issue of moral principles.

Keywords: ethics, cross-cultural differences, unauthorized downloading and distribution, Hofstede dimensions

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Introduction and Background

Culture is an important determinant of consumer decision making⁴ and, as such, it affects all aspects of individual consumption-related behavior, including consumer ethics. While much of research to date continues to ignore consumer ethical decision making,⁵ the study of consumer ethics is highly relevant to marketing.⁶ The present study attempts to examine, at the consumer level, consumer ethics and consumer attitudes toward specific unethical behavior related to illegal downloading in light of different cultural dimensions.

Ethics is frequently defined as a set of moral principles that control or influence people's behaviors, and it can be understood as a set of theorems defining what is good and what is wrong at a given time for a particular group of people.⁷ One aspect of ethical behavior, the relationship between individuals and society, can be assessed using the Hofstede (1980) dimensions.⁸ These dimensions are frequently used to differentiate between consumers at individual and aggregate levels, and they are: individualism/collectivism, representing the relationship between the individual and society, masculinity/femininity, representing the roles of the sexes in society whereby masculinity stands for a society in which gender roles are clearly delineated, with males assertive, tough, and focused on material success and females are modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life; power distance, which represents the extent to which the less powerful members of a society expect and accept that power is distributed une-

⁴ A. Singhapakdi, M.Y.A. Rawwas, J.K. Marta, M.I.A. Ahmed, *Cross-cultural study of consumer perceptions about marketing ethics*, „The Journal of Consumer Marketing” 1999, No. 16 (3), p. 257–272; A.A. Tavakoli, J.P. Keenan, B. Crnjak-Karanovic, *Culture and whistleblowing an empirical study of Croatian and United States managers utilizing Hofstede's cultural dimensions*, „Journal of Business Ethics” 2003, No. 43, p. 49–64.

⁵ S.J. Vitell, A. Singhapakdi, J. Thomas, *Consumer ethics: An application and empirical testing of the Hunt-Vitell theory of ethics*, „The Journal of Consumer Marketing” 2001, No. 2 (18), p. 153–178; P.E. Murphy, G.R. Laczniak, *Marketing ethics: A review with implications for managers, educators and researchers*, in: B.M. Enis, K.J. Roering, *Review of marketing 1981*, American Marketing Association, Chicago 1981, p. 251–266; Z. Swaidan, *Culture and consumer ethics*, „Journal of Business Ethics” 2012, No. 108, p. 201–213.

⁶ R.P. Bagozzi, *Reflections on relationship marketing in consumer markets*, „Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science” 1995, No. 23 (4), p. 272–277; Z. Swaidan, *Culture and Consumer...*

⁷ J. Hernik, *Etyka w działalności małych i średnich przedsiębiorstw województwa zachodniopomorskiego*, in: *Marketing przyszłości. Trendy. Strategie. Instrumenty. Partnerstwo w marketingu*, eds. G. Rosa, A. Smalec, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego No. 558, Ekonomiczne Problemy Usług No. 41, Wyd. Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego, Szczecin 2009, p. 46–53.

⁸ G. Hofstede, *Culture's consequences: international differences in work-related values*, Sage, Beverly Hills 1980.

qually, and uncertainty avoidance, which deals with how individuals handle uncertainty.⁹ Another aspect of culture that is likely also a determinant of attitudes and behaviors related to illegal downloading is attributed to a communist history. Research has suggested that, because communism outlawed competing moral philosophies (such as religion), no unified moral philosophy has emerged as the default dominant philosophy in the former Eastern Bloc¹⁰ and thus, ethics violations are common, often, not perceived as violations at all.¹¹

Ethics in Romania

Within the former Eastern Bloc, Romania, the country of the present study, has its own specific standing when it comes to moral and ethical standards. Romanian consumers were found to be highly acquisitive and materialistic: a study of consumers in fourteen countries of different levels of development found that Romanian consumers were the most materialistic.¹² Due to a legally and morally ambiguous environment, there is sufficient evidence that Romanian consumers continue to resort to strategies that have helped them overcome one of the most oppressive communist regimes, even decades later.¹³ Such approach, as it can be found in literature, is typical for post-communist countries, where citizens often ignore the issue of moral principles.¹⁴

Romania is an attractive market for international brands, with over 21 million educated consumers who have a strong preference for established international brands. Despite its official transition from communism to a market economy, the government continues to play a major role in the way the business is done. Consistent governmental presence and interference in the economy coupled with political turmoil and rapid government turnover has created an environment where corruption is flourishing – Transparency International (2012) gives it a rating of 44 out of a possible 100 points, which is quite high. Perverse incentives created by the state promote a business culture that does not rest on

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ R. Marquand, *New struggle in China: keep up with the chans*, „The Christian Science Monitor” 2006, January 18, p. 1; G. Ger, R.W. Belk, *Cross-cultural differences in materialism*, „Journal of Economic Psychology” 1996, No. 17(1), p. 55–78

¹¹ L. Brouthers, D. Lascu, S. Werner, *Competitive irrationality in transitional economies: are communist managers more rational?* „Journal of Business Ethics” 2008, No. 83(3), p. 397–408.

¹² G. Ger, R.W. Belk, *Cross-Cultural Differences...*; J. Al-Khatib, C. Robertson, D. Lascu, *Post-communist consumer ethics: the case of Romania*, „Journal of Business Ethics” 2004, No. 54 (1), p. 81–95.

¹³ J. Al-Khatib, C. Robertson, D. Lascu, *Post-Communist Consumer...*

¹⁴ J. Hernik, M. Gebarowski, *Ethics as a foundation of management – a valuable resource or a relic in times of crisis?*, „Jurnal Ekonomi Bisnis” 2011, No. 16 (3), p. 147–157.

entrepreneurial spirit, but rather on alternative means of obtaining governmental approval and funding. It is in this context that the ethics of business and consuming urges to be analyzed.

Romania, as one of the most recent states joining the European Union, in 2007, has had to adjust its legal system according to the EU regulations. Recently, the country had to adopt the Anti-Counterfeiting-Trade-Agreement (ACTA), an agreement aimed at enforcing stronger intellectual property rights legislation across the European territory. Romania is also a member of the World Trade Organization, and, as such, it had to adopt the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights – TRIPS in 1995. Along with TRIPS, the membership in the World Intellectual Property Organization provides Romania with legal assistance related to copyright legislation and sets minimal standards of regulation in this field. There are also numerous national government bodies whose primary function is to regulate and enforce intellectual property protection.

It would be important for research to assess, given the national legal situation described above, and in light of previous findings regarding ethics in Romania, how Romanian consumers interface with copyrighted materials and their attitudes regarding unethical behavior, and, specifically, illegal downloading behavior.

Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions and Hypotheses

Romanian respondents have been previously assessed on the Hofstede's dimensions of individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity, power distance, and uncertainty avoidance¹⁵. Hofstede found that Romanians rate high on power distance, with a strong hierarchical order, they rate high on collectivism, on risk avoidance, and on collectivism, and they were found to trend toward the feminine side. Although assessed as highly collectivistic by Hofstede in the past, Romania's transition to a more individualistic society has occurred along with the transition process to the market economy.

Recent research has probed into the relationship between the Hofstede dimensions and ethics. Specifically, research found an inverse relationship between Hofstede's individualism dimension and ethical perceptions:¹⁶ as individualism increases, consumers perceive unethical problems as more acceptable,

¹⁵ The Hofstede Center, *What about Romania?*, <http://geert-hofstede.com/romania.html> (14.01.2013).

¹⁶ R.A. Bernardi, S.P. Long, *Family values, competition and the environment: An international study*, „International Business and Economics Research Journal” 2004, No. 3 (1), p. 1–11.

whereas, in collectivist cultures, consumers look out for their groups, even if the consumer her/himself suffers.¹⁷ As individualism increases in Romania, it is likely that Romanian consumers might perceive unethical issues, such as copyright violations, as more acceptable. It is thus herewith hypothesized that:

H1: Romanian consumers are likely to be more individualistic and to perceive unethical behavior as more acceptable, and thus they are more likely to engage in illegal downloading.

Masculine societies have distinct gender roles, with males assertive, tough, and focused on material success and with females modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life.¹⁸ While Romania rated higher on femininity in the earlier Hofstede studies,¹⁹ it is well likely that the trend is reversing. Romanians are becoming more assertive and driven, focused on career success. Competitive behaviors rarely seen under communism are now becoming the norm for the professional class.

Recent research²⁰ addressing masculinity and ethics suggested that there assertive, masculine consumers might be more tolerant of questionable aggressive behavior than feminine individuals. Given that Romanian society is increasingly more assertive and thus masculine, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Romanian consumers are likely to be more masculine and to perceive unethical behavior as more acceptable, and thus they are more likely to engage in illegal downloading.

Individuals with larger power distance accept and sustain the inequality of power in their society.²¹ High power distance has important implications for ethical decision-making, as it creates pressure on subordinates to perform unethical actions in response to superiors' pressure.²² Also, Yoo and Donthu²³ found that individuals with a high power distance exhibit a lower level of marketing ethics, while Getz and Volkema²⁴ found that cultures with large power distance

¹⁷ Z. Swaidan, *Culture and consumer...*

¹⁸ G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede, M. Minkov, *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*, McGraw-Hill, New York 2010, p. 24–30.

¹⁹ The Hofstede Center, <http://geert-hofstede.com> (14.01.2013).

²⁰ Z. Swaidan, *Culture and consumer...*

²¹ G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede, M. Minkov, *Cultures and organizations...*

²² J.R. Cohen, L.W. Pant, D.J. Sharp, *An exploratory examination of international differences in auditors' ethical perceptions*, „Behavioral Research in Accounting” 1995, No. 7, p. 37–64; Z. Swaidan, *Culture and consumer...*

²³ B. Yoo, N. Donthu, *The effects of marketing education and individual cultural values on marketing ethics of students*, „Journal of Marketing Education”, 2002, No. 24(2), p. 92–103.

²⁴ K.A. Getz, R.J. Volkema, *Culture, perceived corruption, and economics*, „Business and Society” 2001, No. 40 (1), p. 7–30.

have a higher degree of corruption.²⁵ Romanian consumers continue to have a high power-distance even post communism, and they continue to have very formal and hierarchical relationships. Given that Romanians have a higher power distance, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Romanian consumers are likely to have a higher power distance and to perceive unethical behavior as more acceptable, and thus they are more likely to engage in illegal downloading.

Regarding uncertainty avoidance, those who rate high on this dimension have a greater need for consensus and written rules, whereas individuals with low uncertainty avoidance are less concerned with security and are less likely to follow rules and tolerate risks more.²⁶ High uncertainty avoidance consumers are less likely to take risks and are less likely to deviate from established codes of ethics; thus they prefer to follow ethical standards more strictly because these standards reduce ambiguity and thus result in less discomfort.²⁷ Romanian consumers are likely to have high risk avoidance. However, since there is a very small likelihood of enforcement in the case of illegal downloading, they might not be as reticent to engage in illegal downloading. It is thus hypothesized that:

H4: Romanian consumers are likely to have a higher uncertainty avoidance and thus more likely to engage in risk avoidance. However, since there is little likelihood of enforcement, they are more likely to engage in illegal downloading.

Research methods

Data was collected from a judgment sample of primarily young Romanian professionals. The researchers believed that young professionals would be representative of the future of Romania's professional class and they would offer important insights into behaviors and attitudes regarding ethical practice. These young professionals are also thought to be opinion leaders who set the tone for ethical behavior in Romania. The target respondents were approached repeatedly through social networking (Facebook and Yahoo Groups), with 49 respondents agreeing to complete the questionnaire. Of these respondents, 18 are male and 31 female. Most of them are recent university graduates, falling primarily in

²⁵ Z. Swaidan, *Culture and consumer ...*

²⁶ G. Hofstede, *Culture's consequences: international differences...*

²⁷ P. Paul, A. Roy, K. Mukhopadhyay, *The impact of cultural values on marketing ethical norms: A study in India and the United States*, „Journal of International Marketing” 2006, No. 14 (4), p. 28–56.

the 20–24 age group, with a large proportion of the respondents working on post-graduate studies, primarily in conjunction with a full-time job.

The respondents were asked to complete the Hofstede National Cultural Dimensions items,²⁸ and sections the Muncy and Vitell²⁹ component for the ethics of consumption, specifically, questions related to bribing, selling products on the black market, cheating on exams, and giving misleading information to a clerk for an unpriced item. Respondents were also asked questions related to the ethics of free downloading and distribution of copyrighted files and they were asked to complete demographic information.

Results and discussion

On the Hofstede National Cultural Dimensions items, the respondents trended toward individualism, with a mean of 2.21, thus supporting the H1 hypothesis that Romanian consumers are likely to be more individualistic. See Table 1. As such, it is likely that they perceive unethical behavior as more acceptable, and thus they are more likely to engage in illegal downloading. Although assessed as highly collectivistic by Hofstede in the past, Romania's transition to a more individualistic society has occurred along with the transition process to the market economy. A sense of belonging to a social group and respect for tradition and customs matters less for younger Romanians today, more keenly focused on forging their own path to success.

Table 1

Romanian Respondents' Ratings on the Hofstede Dimensions

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Individualism/Collectivism	2.21	.60
Masculinity/Femininity	2.44	.63
Power Distance	2.28	.51
Uncertainty Avoidance	3.21	.71

Source: own research.

Young professionals today are eager to engage in any professional race in order to improve themselves and their life standard. It is also one of the reasons why the respondents trend toward masculinity, with a mean value of 2.44, thus supporting hypothesis H2 that Romanian consumers are likely to be more mas-

²⁸ The Hofstede Center, *What about Romania ...*

²⁹ J. Muncy, S.J. Vitell, *Ethics scale: a modification and application*, „Journal of Business Ethic” 2005, No. 62, p. 267–275.

culine. They are thus also likely to perceive unethical behavior as more acceptable, and thus they are more likely to engage in illegal downloading.

Hofstede perceives hierarchy in an organization as reflecting inherent inequalities, where centralization is popular, subordinates expect to be told what to do, and the ideal boss is a benevolent autocrat.³⁰ The Romanian respondents were found to rate higher on power distance, with a mean of 2.28 for power distance on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates high power distance, whereas 5 indicates low power-distance (see tab. 1). These findings are in line with hypothesis H3, stating that Romanian consumers are likely to have a higher power distance. As such, they are more likely to perceive unethical behavior as acceptable, and thus they are more likely to engage in illegal downloading.

In Hofstede's interpretation, "Romanians maintain rigid codes of beliefs and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas. In this culture there is an emotional need for rules (even if the rules never seem to work), time is money, people have an inner urge to be busy and work hard, precision and punctuality are the norm, innovation may be resisted, security is an important element in individual motivation".³¹ Unlike Hofstede's findings, the present study found that Romanians rank lower on uncertainty avoidance, with a mean of 3.21, thus partially rejecting hypothesis H4, stating that Romanian consumers are likely to have a higher uncertainty avoidance and thus more likely to engage in risk avoidance. This finding suggests either that the national culture has changed since the data were collected by the Hofstede team, or that young professionals are more likely to undertake risks.

In line with H4, however, it is believed that, since in Romania there is little likelihood of enforcement, they are more likely to engage in illegal downloading, in line with H4. The extent to which Romanians are likely to engage in illegal downloading is examined next.

Table 2 includes the Muncy and Vitell³² selected items, coded as follows: 1 = Strongly believe that the behavior is wrong; 2 = Believe it is wrong; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Believe it is not wrong; 5 = Strongly believe that it is not wrong. The items selected for this study were bribing, selling products on the black market, cheating on an exam, and giving misleading information for an unpriced item. Respondents appear to strongly believe that it is not wrong to bribe, with a mean of 4.24, nor to give misleading information to a clerk for an unpriced

³⁰ The Hofstede Center, *What about Romania...*

³¹ *Ibidem.*

³² J. Muncy, S.J. Vitell, *Ethics scale...*

item, with a mean of 4.24. They also don't believe it is wrong to cheat on an exam, with a mean of 3.83. They appear to be slightly more critical of selling products on the black market, with a mean of 2.87. All in all, it appears that Romanians are likely to perceive unethical behavior as more acceptable, in line with the four hypotheses.

Table 2

Selected Muncy and Vitell Dimensions

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Bribing	4.24	1.20
Selling products on the black market	2.87	1.31
Cheating on exam	3.83	1.05
Give misleading information to clerk for an unpriced item	4.24	1.07

1 = Strongly believe that the behavior is wrong; 2 = Believe it is wrong; 3 = Neutral; 4 = Believe it is not wrong; 5 = Strongly believe that it is not wrong.

Source: own study.

According to the Table 3, respondents admit they download copyrighted materials on a frequent basis, with a rating of 2.5 on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates daily and 5 indicates never. The study also found that Romanians usually download without paying for the product downloaded (with an average of 3.58 on a scale of 1 to 4, where 1 indicates payment, and 4 indicates nonpayment). It can therefore be concluded that great majority of the respondents download copyrighted materials for free at some time. Respondents primarily disagreed with the fact that illegally downloading of copyrighted materials constitutes theft, with an average of 3.21 on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 indicates agreement and 5 indicates disagreement with the fact that illegal downloading constitutes theft. Clearly, respondents subscribe to the idea that software and other copyrighted materials are part of the public domain and, as such, they should be downloadable without cost. It also appears that they do not feel guilty (mean of 3.96) or ashamed (mean of 3.88 on a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 indicates agreement and 5 indicates disagreement with the fact that they experience the respective sentiment when downloading illegally). They also don't fear that they will be discovered – with a mean of 3.75 on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates agreement and 5 indicates disagreement with the fact that they fear being discovered when downloading illegally.

Table 3

Romanian Attitudes Toward Downloading

Scale Items	Mean	Std. Deviation
Frequency of downloading (1=daily.... 5=never)	2.50	.92
Likely to pay for downloads (1=yes.... 4=no)	3.58	1.35
Downloading is theft (1=agree.... 5=disagree)	3.29	1.44
It is wrong because it is illegal (1=disagree.... 5=agree)	3.21	1.44
I feel guilty when downloading illegally (5=disagree.... 1=agree)	3.96	1.22
I am ashamed when downloading illegally (5=disagree.... 1=agree)	3.88	1.20
I fear I will be found out when downloading illegally (1=disagree.... 5=agree)	3.75	1.28
Illegal downloading should be punished by law (1=agree.... 5=disagree)	4.00	1.22
Before downloading, I check if covered by copyright (1=disagree.... 5=agree)	3.15	1.37
I am familiar with copyright law (1=disagree.... 5=agree)	2.79	.90

Source: own study.

Further analysis reveals that the respondents do not think illegal downloading should be punished by law, with an average of 4.0, on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates they should be punished and 5 that they should not be punished for illegal downloading. Most respondents neither agreed, nor disagreed when asked if they examined copyright restrictions before engaging in a download. And respondents did not appear to be particularly familiar with copyright law, with the average at 2.79 on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 indicates that they were not familiar with the law and 5 indicates that they were familiar with the law. It is worth mentioning that, in Romania, if discovered engaging in piracy, criminal charges consist of imprisonment from one to four years and requirements for restitution can be up to 10,000 euro. Overall, it appears that Romanians are more likely to engage in illegal downloading, in line with the four hypotheses.

Conclusions

The present study had two primary objectives: first, to explore the cultural orientations of Romanian consumers along the four dimensions of Hofstede's model; and second, to study the consumer ethics of Romanians using ethics items from Muncy and Vitell in relationship to attitudes of Romanian consumers of online products towards illegal downloading. The study found that that Romanians represent a culture with a relatively high respect for hierarchy, char-

acterized by individualism, masculinity, and a lower uncertainty avoidance as tendencies recently imported from the West along with Western business culture. In terms of the ethics of downloading, managers can note that individuals do not seem to associate it with any ethical issues, but rather view it as a normal activity.

One limitation of the current research is that it covered mainly students and young professionals fully present into the digital world, rather than older consumers. There remains a lot of potential for future research with regard to the differences in attitudes, if any, of both digital natives and digital immigrants towards free downloading and distribution of copyrighted materials as the current research based its result primarily on young professionals. Another aspect that the current research leaves unsolved is the ethical approach towards the respect of the rule of law among Romanian people. Future research on this topic is needed in light of an often arbitrary Romanian legislation and enforcement.

DARMOWE POBIERANIE PLIKÓW: PODEJŚCIE UŻYTKOWNIKÓW INTERNETU W RUMUNII

Streszczenie

Etyka jest najczęściej definiowana jako zestaw zasad, które rządzą czy też w jakimś stopniu wpływają na ludzkie życie. Celem artykułu jest zatem zbadanie etycznych zachowań konsumentów w przypadku pobierania oprogramowania komputerowego. W szczególności badanie obejmuje grupę młodych profesjonalistów pochodzących z Rumunii, których zachowanie przeanalizowano zgodnie z modelem Hofstede'a (obejmuje kolektywizm, czyli poczucie wspólnoty, męskość, dystans wobec władzy oraz unikanie niepewności). Grupa badawcza (49 osób, które zgodziły się wypełnić kwestionariusz) została dobrana poprzez strony społecznościowe, m.in. Facebooka. Uzyskane rezultaty pokazują, że młodzi mieszkańcy Rumunii reprezentują bardzo indywidualistyczne postawy, dlatego też postrzegają nieetyczne zachowania jako dopuszczalne, gdyż służą one zaspokojeniu własnych potrzeb. Wydaje się, że takie zachowanie będzie dość typowe dla obywateli wielu przechodzących głębokie i długotrwałe przemiany postkomunistycznych krajów, których mieszkańcy przywiązują niewielką wagę do przestrzegania zasad moralnych.

Słowa kluczowe: etyka, różnice międzykulturowe, nieuprawnione pobieranie i dystrybucja programów, model Hofstede'a

Thumaczenie: Joanna Hernik