

Building aware and unaware consumers' trust towards family business: Evidence from Poland

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ABSTRACT

Objective: The objective of the article is to examine what attributes are assigned to family firms by consumers familiar and not familiar with family business in the context of trust-building and purchase intention.

Research Design & Methods: A nationwide quantitative survey on a statistically representative random-cluster sample of 1 091 consumers was conducted in 2018, based on the fundamentals of pre-survey qualitative research.

Findings: This study proves a low level of consumers' familiarity with family firms and indicates attributes assigned to family firms by two segments of buyers. The findings show for which segments the concept of endorsed identity could be influential in the purchasing process, and for which might it be a subordinate stimulus when compared to consumers' trust.

Implications & Recommendations: Although a family firm's origin can serve as a cue to purchase, there is a challenge in educating the audience regarding the low level of consumers' knowledge of family businesses. A legal construct provided in this study may reinforce trust towards family firms accompanied with purchase.

Contribution & Value Added: This study is based on a representative large sample of consumers, additionally divided into two portrayed segments. It proposes a process of how a family business identity may be endorsed. The proposed legal construct is a novelty in the market and has not been investigated in other scientific research.

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INTRODUCTION

As family businesses (FBs) identity communication is gaining more attention for several years now (*e.g.* Nikodemska-Wołowik, 2006; Carrigan & Buckley, 2008; Micelotta & Raynard, 2011; Botero *et al.*, 2013; Beck & Kenning, 2015; Wolf, 2018; Lušňáková, Juríčková, Šajbidorová, & Lenčéšová, 2019), the problem is worth investigating in specific aspects. One of them is individual consumers' perspective towards FB, with a special focus on trust for this type of entity.

Although the importance of trust is recognised in prior studies, the increased uncertainty in the business environment awoke major interest in the role of trust since the mid-1990s (Ma & Orgun, 2006; Bhati, 2015). Regarding the general decrease in trust towards businesses and institutions, which became evident since the financial crisis in 2008, this study attempts to find a guarantee that can be accepted by buyers and help them make purchase decisions. In this context, FB is a convincing example. According to prior research, more buyers trust FBs over non-FBs (Eddleston *et al.*, 2010; Beck & Prügl, 2018; Lude & Prügl, 2018; Rosina, 2018; Košičiarová, Kádeková, Holotová, Kubicová, & Predanociová, 2020). Paradoxically, only 51% of consumers know which firms they buy from are FBs (Edelman Trust Barometer, 2017).

Moreover, firms in developed economies are more likely to brand themselves as family businesses than those in emerging economies (Hall & Astrachan, 2015). This reveals a question: how do firms communicate the fact that they are a FB, especially in post-communist countries, who entered the European Union (EU) in the twenty-first century? A study on Polish firms may serve here as a case in point.

During the market transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, Poland was perceived as a leader of that process (Dąbrowska, 2011; Brunet-Tornton, 2017) and – as an EU member since 2004 – has been a development success, catching up with Europe's most advanced economies (Bogdan *et al.*, 2015). Regarding some socio-economic conditions, Poland was "comparable with Mediterranean and even Anglo-Saxon countries" (Neesham & Tache, 2010, p. 358). But contrary to these countries, Poland avoided recession during the 2008 financial crisis and became the eighth-largest economy in the EU and "Europe's new growth engine" (Bogdan *et al.*, 2015). What is substantial from this research perspective, in Polish society with high family and group collectivism, family *per se* is the most treasured value, not only by elderly citizens but also by young Poles (Trends in consumers' behaviour in Poland, 2017; Zupan *et al.*, 2017). Another rationale for investigating Polish buyers concerns the international milieu. Polish diaspora is one of the largest in the world, and native goods are targeted to meet this segment's needs across the UK, the USA, or Ireland (Burrell, 2016; de Wenden, 2016). Hence, Poland has evinced a profound interest of worldwide inquiries, focused on various economic analyses. However, the issues of consumer perceptions of FB expounded in this paper were mislaid.

In general, prior research demonstrates stronger consumer trust to FB, alongside their poor knowledge of which firm is family owned. Astoundingly, some Polish non-FBs try to take advantage of positive FB perceptions and purport to be kin-owned enterprises, misleading their customers. Thus, the objectives of the article are:

- to examine what attributes are assigned to FB by consumers familiar and unfamiliar with FBs in the context of trust-building and purchase intention,

- to detect if a direct and clear message of being a FB addressed to consumers would have potential.

This article attempts to fill the gap in prior studies regarding buyers' perceptions of FB, divided into two segments: aware and unaware consumers. The article contributes to extant literature by presenting a means how FB identity may be endorsed, *i.e.* enriched by an external, independent brand. The proposed legal construct is a novelty in the market and was not investigated in other scientific research to date. Moreover, according to recent profound overviews of scientific articles on the subject of FBs status and individual buyers, there is a lack of quantitative studies (Botero, 2013; Rosina, 2018; Wolf, 2018). The biggest sample noticed in the aforementioned surveys included 278 one-country respondents, which was not representative (Rosina, 2018). Dated January 2018, our survey covered a representative sample of 1091 buyers, being the first one on such a scale. It contributes to very rare quantitative studies on FBs, the majority of which is conceptual. Therefore, the present article seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What attributes are assigned to FB by aware and unaware consumers?

RQ2: What is the role of endorsed FB identity in trust-building?

RQ3: What is the potential of a proposed legal construct in encouraging buyers to purchase?

The paper is structured as follows. The next section covers the literature review, while section three presents the materials and methods applied in the research, section four exhibits the survey findings accompanied with a discussion, and section five concludes. Although in the existing literature there is no consensus on the codified definition of FB, this article adopted the concept of the European Commission (EC, 2009), which accentuates family ownership, decision-making rights, and involvement in governance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the recent literature review there are few articles that assumed consumers' perspective and directly assessed FBs' perceived trust (Beck & Prüggl 2018; Rosina, 2018; Wolf, 2018).

Research conducted among consumers shows that they associate trust with FB when compared to non-FBs (Orth & Green, 2009; Eddleston *et al.*, 2010; Binz *et al.*, 2013; Binz Astrachan *et al.*, 2014; Beck & Kenning, 2015; Bednarz, *et al.*, 2017; Lude & Prüggl, 2018). This means that trust could be perceived as a key element in the explanation of a FB's success (Cruz *et al.*, 2010; Carrigan & Buckley, 2008). Consumer perceptions of a firm result in trust towards this entity and its products (Vassilikopoulou *et al.*, 2018) and vice-versa: trust becomes essential when discovering means that lead to positive buyers' perceptions of FBs (Wolf, 2018; Botero *et al.*, 2013). Facing the lack of a dominant trust definition, scholars propose a list of terms that prevail in such interpretations (Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2010; Hobbs & Goddard, 2015; Kim & Chao, 2019; Skvarciany, Jurevičienė, Iljins, & Gaile-Sarkane, 2018). Besides, sometimes the concept of trust considers from the position of the "lack of trust" (Ners, 2017) or as one of the factors influencing the economic behaviour (Roudposhti, Nilashi, Mardani, Streimikiene, Samad, & Ibrahim, 2018). Therefore, from our perspective, trust comprises reliability, longevity, business with a human face,

high quality products, and commitment towards local communities. The current study also focuses on FB attributes which regarded Polish consumers' trust.

Regarding purchase intention, an extensive literature review by Bozic (2017) proves that trusting consumers are loyal, committed, and disposed to accept new products and company activities in the market. Thus, willingness to buy is the constituent of trust. As this inquiry conducted no market experiment, the reasoning applied to avowed purchases, another term for the intention to buy. Buyers associate better relational qualities with FBs compared to non-FB counterparts and consequently prefer goods offered by the former (Binz *et al.*, 2013). Zanon *et al.* (2019) noticed the positive impact of consumer awareness of FBs on their actions, including purchase. FBs imprint their values and beliefs into the essence of their firms. Long-lasting family tradition, related to trust, can indicate high quality in the future. From this perspective, Lude and Prügl (2018) find that buyers indicate higher brand trust from the communication of a firm's family nature, resulting in stronger purchase intentions. Hence, this study intends to highlight references to family ownership as a trigger in communication between FBs and buyers.

Communication with consumers through an explicit identity, a properly imparted FB status may underpin trust as one of its strongest values (Mayo & Fielder, 2006). FB identity is understood as a firm self-concept, embracing the idiosyncratic attributes resulting from kin-ownership (Nikodemka-Wołowik, 2006; Botero *et al.* 2013; Blombäck & Ramírez-Pasillas, 2012). Concerning market communication, explicit signals are more effective than indirect messages (Hartnett *et al.*, 2016), furthermore, the possibilities of their effective usage increase significantly in terms of intensive ICT development (Bilan, Mishchuk, Samoliuk, & Grishnova, 2019; Janšto, Polakovič, Hennyeyová, & Slovákova, 2019; Botos, Szilágyi, Felföldi, & Tóth, 2020;). According to Zanon *et al.* (2019), a large number of FBs worldwide explicitly communicate their family status to stakeholders, but there are countries like Poland, in which consumers are not always able to identify themselves as family-owned. This low level of awareness was confirmed by Schwass and Glemser (2016) who suggest that an FB must be positioned in audience's perceptual space. Moreover, a plain communication strategy to capitalize on the FB status is widely recommended (Wolf, 2018; Rosina, 2018). It can create appropriate market advantages for social enterprises, which are kin-owned to a great extent and at the same time they are especially important for the labour market problems mitigation (Bilan, Mishchuk, & Pylypchuk, 2017). Buyers build their trust for a brand on their positive experiences alongside communication activities (Brunner *et al.*, 2019), including available information concerning employer brand (Urbancová & Hudáková, 2017). Correspondingly, Botero *et al.* (2019) advise to explore how the audience perceives FB in regard to the type of a branding strategy used by FB. The authors present three concepts yet do not deliberate the option proposed in the current study. Therefore, this article aims to highlight the importance of designing a clear yet credible message sent to buyers. Prior studies confirm that information from a firm is less credible than the information from an independent source (Brunner *et al.* 2018; Dutta & Pullig, 2011). Nonetheless, scholars claim that the family firm category can be defined as a brand of its own (Botero *et al.*, 2013; Wolf, 2018). To reconcile both perspectives, this article proposes a category of an endorsed mark, similar to an 'umbrella brand,' protected by law. In Polish legislation, comparable to the EU and international regulations, such a

brand is registered by an organization like an association of producers, which enables buyers to distinguish goods or services certified by the proprietor of the brand; in legal terminology: collective certification trademark. Contrary to an individual brand, the owner cannot use the brand him/herself (Regulation (EU) 2017/1001, 2017). Concurrently, the brand is registered for the purpose of licensing it to its members as a sign of membership in that particular organization. According to the signalling theory presented below, the brand sends a message to the buyers that the firm belongs to a certain association and owns the rights to use this mark, which help to shape consumer trust. However, there were only a few scientific papers related to this matter, and most concerned food products. Norberg (2000) argues that these brands can assist consumers in their buying decision.

To achieve the aforementioned goals, this study partly used a concept proposed by Schellong *et al.* (2018), based on signalling theory with an assumption that a FB status is a credible signal to consumers. In signalling theory, a sender sends a signal to a recipient in a communication process with asymmetric information (Spence, 1973). The sender decides how to signal information to the receiver, who interprets this signal. Referring to this theory, Issock (2018) argues that trust becomes a vital factor for purchasing when the buyer feels susceptible. In this paper, three elements were added to a simple model used by Wolf (2018): aware and unaware buyers, the means of communication, a tangible brand and trust embracing purchase intention. Wolf's research focuses on FB identity communication in the signalling theory context. The Wolf's B2B approach extends here to B2C markets and a legal construct with a direct message of being a FB addressed to consumers.

In the previous analyses of FB, consumers were not divided into segments of those familiar and unfamiliar with FB, albeit the two groups emerged. Such an approach is applied in this study in line with Brunner's *et al.* (2019) who uses the signalling theory, exploring brands, purchase intentions, and opposite segments. Moreover, Christidis *et al.* (2011), Woodside and Summers (2012), Wang *et al.* (2015), divide buyers into those aware and unaware while investigating awareness of various market offers. Martin and Strong (2016) link two opposite groups with trust, branding, and purchase intention. The enumerated frameworks orient this article towards a search for the potential direct message signalling FB status. Moreover, they proved the necessity of understanding whether this signal might have a potential influence on trust-building accompanied by purchasing behaviour.

Besides the aforementioned research questions, the above line of reasoning motivates us to propose the following hypotheses:

- H1:** Positive perceptions of FB prevail in both segments.
- H2:** The potential influence of an endorsed FB identity on purchase intention is stronger among aware than unaware consumers.

To summarize, the reviewed literature noticeably indicates that there exists a dearth of knowledge on the relationships comprising buyers' awareness of FB, signalling FB status, trust, and purchase intentions. The approach adopted in this study is presented on the Figure 1.

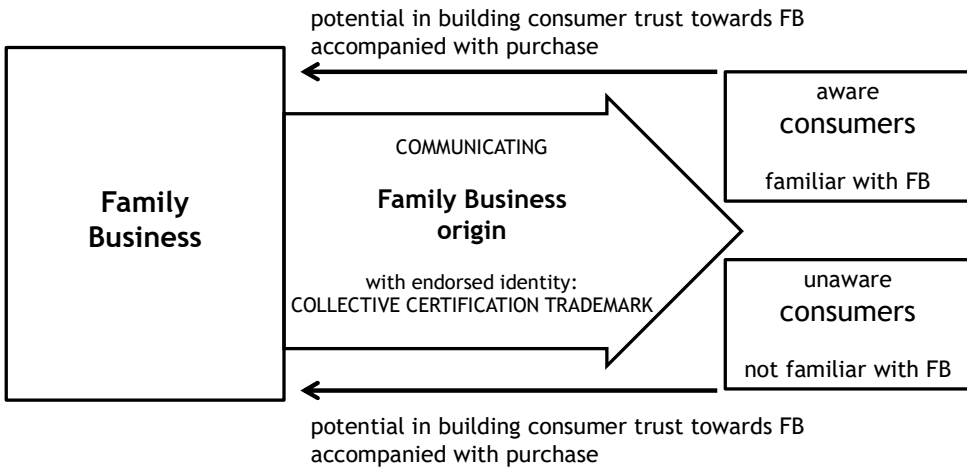


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Source: own elaboration.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

For the purpose of this study, a nationwide quantitative survey of a unique statistically representative random-cluster sample of 1 091 consumers was conducted in January 2018 by using the online survey method. In Poland, it was a ‘neutral’ shopping period, therefore reducing the impact of environmental influences and ensuring the respondents’ accessibility.

Methods and Techniques

The sample covered Polish active buyers – in traditional shops and those who purchase offline and online – aged 16-60 who shared their shopping experiences with others, who potentially and actually influenced other buyers, and who used the Internet on a regular basis.

Adopting these characteristics of the surveyed population ensued from the article’s aims. All these criteria were checked in a filtering question. Before the primary survey, a pilot study was conducted to confirm the research procedure assumptions and comprehensibility of the online questionnaire. It ensured the instrument reliability and validity for complete data collection. This approach was based on the fundamentals of pre-survey qualitative research pursuant to the protocol proposed by Mariampolski (2001), Anninou, Foxall, Saldana, and Omasta (2018) conducted in the second half of 2017. The protocol includes 10 participant observations in 10 shops selected appropriately for the enquiry aims and 20 in-depth interviews with consumers who fulfilled the precise criteria. Describing trust, the respondents used such words as reliability, longevity, business with a human face, high quality products, and commitment towards local communities, which was consistent with prior studies. Thus, later in the survey, trust was replaced by phrases instead of direct investigation. Those stages were vital to prepare, among other things, 14 attributes on the consumers’ associations with FB included in the question: “What are your associations with FB?” And on six statements regarding FB included in the question: “To what

extent do you agree (or disagree) with the following statements on FB in Poland?" In both questions, a five-point Likert scale was applied with opposite answers: from strongly agree to strongly disagree. With support of an external company of high expertise, ABM – Marketing Research Agency from Warsaw, the online questionnaire with three filtering, 11 major, and three personal questions was addressed to eligible respondents. The sample reflected statistics on gender, age, place of living, according to the population marginal distribution in Poland. The respondents also reported their education level, type of household, and assessment of financial status. Descriptive statistics are reported in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondent demographic characteristics

Demographic attribute		n = 1091
gender	Female	51%
	Male	49%
age	16-19	10%
	20-25	15%
	26-30	12%
	31-40	19%
	41-50	23%
	51-60	21%
type of household	alone	8.6%
	with a partner but without children	31.5%
	with a partner and with children	29.9%
	with children but without a partner	6.7%
	with other people	23.3%

Source: own study.

Data Analyses

Frequencies, sums, means, and standard deviations were calculated for full data and separately for groups of aware and unaware consumers and for the demographic variables. Statistical significance level was $p = 0.05$.

The evaluation of test usability was based on reliability analysis: the degree of consistency with which the test results reflected the analysed feature. In the assessment of the cohesion of scale positions, an integrity analysis was performed using the internal consistency method. All items in the test contain more than two categories of answers on a five-point Likert scale; hence, the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability was determined, as this is the best indicator of reliability for such a test. The higher the index value, the more reliable the scale (see: Jakubowska & Radzymińska, 2019).

The factor analysis was used to explain the observed relationship between test questions within individual characteristics. First, Bartlett's test of sphericity was used to verify the null hypothesis that the correlation matrix is a unit matrix ($H_0: R = I$). Then the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Test was used to verify the usefulness of factor analysis for the evaluation of relations between the observed variables. The significance of eigenvalues was assessed by isolating factors using the Principal Components Analysis method (see Kargol-Wasiluk & Wildowicz-Giegiel, 2018). This factor extraction method was used to form uncorrelated linear combinations of the observed variables. The number of factors/attributes for further analysis was determined according to the Kaiser criterion (Kaiser, 1960) and the scree

plot. The Varimax method was used for factor rotation. This method minimised the number of variables that have high loads for each factor, simplifying the interpretation of the factors. Statistical analysis was conducted using IBM SPSS version 25.

Furthermore, according to the literature review (Christidis *et al.*, 2011, Woodside & Summers, 2012; Wang *et al.*, 2015, Martin & Strong 2016; Brunner *et al.*, 2019) and the qualitative stage results, the buyers were divided into two segments. The first one covered 11.37% of the whole sample – n=124 buyers familiar with FBs and portraying such firms with proper criteria – while the second one covered 46.84% of the whole sample: n = 511 buyers with no knowledge of FBs, which was statistically verified. Other buyers declared that they knew ‘something’ about FBs but were unable to provide any details, and their ambiguous answers excluded them from the most of analyses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The innovative and original idea of this paper was to examine what attributes are assigned to FBs by consumers familiar and unfamiliar with FBs in the context of trust-building accompanied by purchase intentions. Moreover, this study aimed to indicate a means of how communicating family-owned business nature, especially in Poland perceived twofold: as a strong economic leader among transition states (Bogdan *et al.*, 2015) yet with a rather traditional family-oriented society (Trends in consumers’ behaviour in Poland, 2017; Zupan *et al.*, 2017).

Attributes Assigned to FBs by Aware and Unaware Consumers in Poland

Most of the buyers from segment 1 could list at least one name of a Polish FB. On the other hand, an overwhelming number of consumers from segment 2 could not give any examples of an FB (Table 2).

Table 2. Two major consumer segments

Segment 1. Aware consumers		Segment 2. Unaware consumers	
could list at least one name of a Polish FB	57.26%	could list at least one name of a Polish FB	14.48%
did not mention any FB	42.74%	did not mention any FB	85.52%

Source: own study.

In general (in the whole sample of 1 091 consumers), the familiarity with Polish FB was stronger among older buyers. Younger consumers aged 20-25 (84.52%) and 26-30 (81.25%) did not list any FB compared to 65.09% of those aged 51-60.

In order to identify groups of attributes characterising an FB, the following question was posed: “What do you associate with FB?” Fourteen starting attributes were assumed. Surprisingly, despite declaring unfamiliarity with FBs, the unaware buyers were able to ascribe some attributes to FBs. Both segments had explicit associations with FBs based on their prior experiences. Such a phenomenon is explained by Woodside and Summers (2012), who claim, that awareness alone does not cause consumer response.

The results of calculations showed that three eigenvalues exceeded the value of one, according to Kaiser’s criterion. As can be seen from Table 3, variables fall into three groups of factors, which can be defined as positive (feature 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 12, 13 and 14 in the group of aware consumers while 1, 4, 5, 7, 12, 13 and 14 in the group of unaware

consumers), neutral (feature 2, 3 and 6 in the group of aware consumers while 2, 3 and 8 in the group of unaware consumers), and negative (feature: 9, 10 and 11 in the group of aware consumers while 6, 9, 10 and 11 in the group of unaware consumers). Trust for FBs understood as reliability, longevity, business with a human face, high quality products, and commitment towards local communities (Hosmer, 1995; Harris *et al.*, 2003; Hill & O'Hara, 2006; Castelfranchi & Falcone, 2010; Hobbs & Goddard, 2015) was reflected in this study in dominant features ascribed by both segments: reliability, long presence on the market, 'human' approach to the client, high quality products, good for the local community (attributes 1, 4, 12, 13, 14).

Table 3. Rotated factor matrix and indicators that determine the suitability of data to detect the structure of FB attributes

FB attributes	Aware consumers n=124			Unaware consumers n=511		
	positive	negative	neutral	positive	neutral	negative
1. reliability	0.828	-0.058	-0.047	0.815	0.223	-0.006
2. relations, managed by family members	0.169	0.031	0.740	0.125	0.826	0.113
3. passes from generation to generation	0.533	-0.158	0.545	0.432	0.775	0.006
4. operates long on the market	0.704	0.081	0.340	0.565	0.266	0.094
5. organic products	0.755	-0.016	-0.253	0.779	-0.012	0.097
6. goods, services a bit more expensive	0.027	0.348	0.564	0.270	0.395	0.517
7. local Polish products	0.818	-0.096	0.173	0.800	0.196	0.055
8. tradition	0.693	-0.178	0.385	0.568	0.595	-0.089
9. with trouble (incompatibilities in the family)	-0.103	0.828	-0.017	-0.008	-0.119	0.837
10. underinvested	0.007	0.837	-0.018	0.088	-0.088	0.800
11. nepotism (favouring family members)	-0.155	0.778	0.223	-0.105	0.296	0.739
12. 'human' approach to the client	0.830	-0.123	0.128	0.824	0.152	-0.015
13. high quality products, workmanship	0.865	-0.025	0.212	0.828	0.182	0.036
14. good for the local community	0.765	-0.109	0.269	0.689	0.408	-0.025
% of cumulative variance, after rotation			37.66	53.49	65.69	
KMO			0.873			0.896
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square		909.358			3506.794
	df		91			91
			0.000			0.000

Source: own study.

Similarly to prior findings, even the unaware buyers in Poland reacted positively to FBs; according to the Edelman Trust Barometer (2017), only 51% of consumers know which firms they buy from are FBs, although the level of trust for them is high among the interviewees. Regarding aforementioned FB's longevity, workmanship, and tradition appreciated by buyers, Becut (2011) argues that consumers seek offers sealed with quality marks with strong identity, highlighted either by emphasised valorisation of well-known products or by the revitalisation of traditional products. Concluding from Table 3, buyers associated three outstanding positive attributes with FB: product quality, approach to buyers, and reliability. The same attributes were indicated by both segments

and can create the basis for distinguishing FB from other firms. Therefore, this research contributes to prior studies in which consumer perceptions of the FB are positive (*e.g.* Orth & Green, 2009; Binz *et al.*, 2013; Rosina, 2018; Sageder *et al.*, 2018). The local origin of products also played a vital role here.

The buyers were also asked about the extent to which they agree or disagree with statements regarding FBs in Poland (Table 4). For this purpose, six opening sentences were formulated. The calculation scheme was the same as in the previous question. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient of reliability for aware consumers was 0.74 and for unaware consumers – 0.72. While considering these results, a particular attention should be paid to statements 4 and 5, which directly refer to sending a message to the audience and agree with the signalling theory (Wolf, 2018; Schellong *et al.*, 2018).

Table 4. Rotated factor matrix and indicators determining the suitability of the data to detect the structure of the consumers' statements

Statements	Aware consumers n=124		Unaware consumers n=511	
	1	2	1	2
1. We need to support FBs, because they are Polish capital; FBs pay taxes in Poland	0.894	0.082	0.812	0.080
2. Poles are unaware of supporting Polish capital	0.155	0.696	0.563	0.013
3. FBs support each other and strongly cooperate with each other	0.510	0.354	0.514	0.537
4. FBs should promote the fact that they are family-owned	0.849	0.121	0.825	-0.015
5. When shopping, it is worth knowing that a product comes from a FB	0.909	0.075	0.790	0.206
6. The products offered by FBs are bought by older consumers	0.033	0.836	-0.068	0.926
% of cumulative variance, after rotation	43.85	66.12	42.49	62.42
KMO	0.757		0.771	
Bartlett's test of sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	252.822		726.509
	df	15		15
	Sig.	0.000		0.000

Source: own study.

The dominant statements (over 80% of volatility resources) of aware consumers were the need for knowledge that a purchased product came from a FB, the duty of supporting Polish FBs, and expectations of FB status promotion. Factor 2 was dominated by the fact that the products offered by FBs were mainly bought by older people. For unaware consumers, the most important statements were supporting Polish FBs, FBs' promotion, and the origin of products. These reports confirm the high potential for FB in the area of communication with this segment. The unaware consumers unquestionably believed that products offered by FBs were bought by elderly people (86.30% of volatility resources). Both segments demonstrated a high level of consumer patriotism, cherishing domestic products by displaying support for Polish FBs and the explicit promotion of FB origin. What is valuable for the entire logic of this study, when compared to buyers from other post-socialist countries, is that Poles are much more ethnocentric

than Slovenians, Hungarians, Czechs, or Bulgarians, but less than Russians (Han & Won, 2018). This aspect is worth further investigation.

In general, both segments showed their positive perceptions of FBs, which confirmed the **H1**: "Positive perceptions of FBs prevailed in both segments."

The Endorsed FB Identity in the Context of Trust-Building Accompanied with Purchase

The purpose of this study was to detect if a direct message of being a FB addressed to consumers may have the potential to trigger *trust-building accompanied with purchase intentions*. To respond to this challenge, the consumers were asked about the potential of a clear brand, apparent on FBs' products and activities. It refers to the FB identity endorsed by the collective certification trademark (CCT), a legal construct we presented above.

In the current research, the perceptions of the potential influence of FB brands were ambiguous. In the whole sample of 1 091 buyers, 46.10% of them, notwithstanding demographic variables, declared that FB brands would not have had an influence on their purchase decision (on a five-point verbal intent scale). However, it would have definitely encouraged 15.49% of buyers and would probably encourage 38.41% of them, so positive answers prevailed (53.90%). Such answers agree with Becut's (2011) findings: FB brands could provide a meaning to identity- and value-seekers. This opinion corresponds with Beltrami and Stafford's (1993) conclusion that a brand can be a crucial factor in evaluating a product. Similarly, Morhart *et al.* (2015) posit that consumer perceptions are based on real evidence judged by provable information, such as labels of origin.

Moreover, tables 5 and 6 present a declared willingness to buy products from Polish FBs, with distinct age and gender groups. Unexpectedly, in the case of unaware buyers, the CCT might attract their attention (41%). Correspondingly, Woodside and Summers (2012) claim that awareness may not be the essential part of consumer decision-making processes. The familiarity with Polish FBs was stronger among the older buyers, as presented in the above section. However, in the whole sample of 1 091 buyers, 20.67% who 'definitely' approved of FB brands were those aged 31-40. That group was also the most enthusiastic about the brand among unaware buyers. It proves that communicating the FB status may be effective in this segment. Moreover, there may be a chance for the aware buyers to become opinion leaders, as word-of-mouth forms the basis of interpersonal influence and determines the relevance of information (Grewal *et al.*, 2003). It still belongs to the major trustworthy sources of consumer information (Sicilia *et al.*, 2016) having a central role in the formation of consumer attitudes (Herold *et al.*, 2016). Thus, **H2** – "The potential influence of an endorsed FB identity on purchase intention is stronger among aware than unaware consumers" – cannot be confirmed as the potential influence of an endorsed FB's identity on purchase is similar in both segments.

Thus, this study contributes to previous research (Beck & Kenning, 2015; Binz *et al.* 2013, Craig *et al.*, 2008, Zanon *et al.* 2019) by suggesting not only that a message of FB origin can be a stimulus for purchase but also presenting a legal construct for the means of such communication. Such a logic was confirmed by Schwass and Glemser (2016) who value the material symbols that express a FB identity.

Prior research robustly proved the positive relation between consumer trust and purchase intention (e.g. Ghai & Sharma, 2019; Ricci *et al.*, 2018; Issock Issock, 2018; Oliveira *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, in this study, by declaring willingness to purchase and choosing

FB attributes that constituted trust, the buyers indirectly showed that the endorsed identity had a potential in trust-building. These results are consistent with the deduction that the FB status might appeal to buyers highly involved in the purchasing process, for whom such a brand could lead to enhanced customer trust (Binz & Botero; 2018).

Table 5. The CCT influence on women's declared purchase decisions

Purchase		Age					
		16-19	20-25	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60
Aware consumers	Definitely yes	0.36%	0.18%	0.18%	0.72%	0.54%	0.72%
	Rather yes	0.18%	0.36%	0.00%	0.72%	1.61%	1.25%
	Rather no	0.00%	0.00%	0.18%	0.00%	0.18%	0.00%
Unaware consumers	Definitely yes	0.54%	0.36%	0.54%	1.79%	1.43%	0.54%
	Rather yes	1.43%	3.05%	2.33%	2.15%	3.05%	2.51%
	Rather no	0.18%	0.54%	0.18%	0.90%	0.54%	0.18%
	Definitely no	0.00%	0.00%	0.36%	0.18%	0.00%	0.18%

Source: own study.

Table 6. The CCT influence on men's declared purchase decisions

Purchase		Age					
		16-19	20-25	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60
Aware consumers	Definitely yes	0,94%	0,56%	0,19%	0,94%	0,75%	1,69%
	Rather yes	0,75%	0,38%	0,56%	0,38%	1,13%	1,31%
	Rather no	0,56%	0,38%	0,38%	0,56%	0,56%	0,56%
Unaware consumers	Definitely yes	0.38%	0.75%	0.19%	1.69%	0.38%	0.19%
	Rather yes	2.25%	2.63%	1.69%	4.32%	4.13%	1.69%
	Rather no	0.38%	0.38%	0.38%	0.19%	0.56%	0.75%
	Definitely no	0.00%	0.19%	0.19%	0.38%	0.38%	0.19%

Source: own study.

However, the perceived credibility of a brand issuer constituted a significant factor in deciding whether the brand would be used in decision-making (Kamins & Marks, 1991; Norberg, 2000). Despite noteworthy studies on third-party certification related to consumer willingness to purchase (Darnall *et al.*, 2018), the crucial issue that surfaced in our research was the choice of a certifier: an organisation conferring a brand and whether the entity would be approved by buyers. Grabber and Lai claim (2011) that the choice of certifier needs bottom-top approach, instead of GOV initiatives and the idea that the effectiveness of endorsed identity depends on relevant marketing and buyer education. Such a solution corresponds to the Polish consumers' mindset.

CONCLUSIONS

As we indicated in the above empirical study, Polish FBs can benefit from attributes that have a strong potential in trust-building accompanied with purchase intentions. Thus, the findings provide important insights that deepen the understanding of buyers' purchasing behaviour towards a FBs' offer from a post-socialist market perspective.

Contrary to prior studies on FBs, we presented a new approach that considers the concept of an endorsed identity, and we investigated the endorsed identity's potential. All this contributes to the literature, dividing buyers into aware and unaware segments and presenting their perceptions of FBs separately. Unpredictably, both groups equally supported explicit signalling of FBs' origin and ascribed positive attributes to FBs, particularly those associated with trust. Although such perceptions prevailed, a low level of the buyers' knowledge of FBs reveals a serious challenge in educating the audience. Occasionally, buyers are misguided, as some Polish non-FBs try to take advantage of these virtues, purporting to be kin-owned enterprises. Furthermore, our findings demonstrate consumers' patriotism, proving that the FB identity may additionally benefit from a clear signal of Polish origin. In this context, Poles are closer to Russian buyers but distant to the less ethnocentric Slovenian or Hungarian buyers. In most of these states bottom-top initiatives are better perceived than GOV ones. Thus, this fact should be taken into consideration when choosing a certifier of the CCT. Although the potential influence of the CCT was ambiguous for some sub-segments presented in this study, the CCT might trigger purchase decisions. In that respect the choice of a proper certifier becomes of highest importance.

Concerning limitations of this study, the current findings are based on declarative answers. Instead, future research may use a market experiment conducted in natural purchase setting with products labelled with the examined trademark. Nonetheless, a large sample survey was the most relevant in the exploration of a new field. However, more advanced econometrics could be applied to verify additional hypotheses. It is worth further examination what criteria should be fulfilled by a prospective certifier responsible for conferring the brand. Moreover, extended and detailed studies on the most promising subgroups from profiled segments would help to shape proper communication activities. When focusing on promotional activities, one particular area that future research could examine is how certifications can lead to affinity marketing. Third-party endorsement – in this case the use of third-party certification – is a major distinguishing feature of affinity marketing. It can leverage group affiliation to capitalize on a pre-established relationship that may add persuasiveness and credibility to the sales message. Consumer affinity is positively associated with product trust, which in turn promotes consumer intention to buy products from the group to which the affinity is directed (Guo *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, this study may open new avenues for research on various factors that create a relationship between FBs and buyers, thus influencing purchase decisions.

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