

"VALENTINE'S DAY"- IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

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Abstract

"Valentine's Day", celebrated on February 14, is one of the holidays obviously promoted worldwide and which generates an increasing volume of sales of products and services.

Its expansion in the world is due to globalization and increased American and Western European influence in the world.

It can be said that it is a world-class holiday, known in most countries of the world, but not as appreciated in all and without having the same tradition in all countries (in some countries it is taken up relatively recently).

It is not known exactly who Saint Valentine is, remembered on February 14, but this aspect may matter less at present.

It is noted that currently the holiday is popular primarily in English-speaking countries, but also in other countries (on several continents).

Some countries had their own holidays, at least partially close in meaning to "Valentine's Day", but they also adopted Valentine's Day.

"Valentine's Day" is not accepted in all countries; there are countries or areas that have banned this holiday or in which its impact is insignificant.

On the occasion of "Valentine's Day", specific aspects of buying and consuming behavior can be identified. Although there are differences between countries in this respect, similarities can also be found; for example, it can be said that it is the day of flowers and chocolate worldwide.

Keywords: culture, "Valentine's Day", consumer behavior

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Introduction

Culture is a complex notion with many meanings. One of the meanings is that of national culture, and this meaning can be useful in marketing.

The national pattern of a culture reflects a nation's struggle to develop all the traits that define its economic and social structure, but also its way of expression.

The national culture has several dimensions and components. One of the dimensions is represented by traditions and holidays.

Of the many holidays, I chose "Valentine's Day". Initially, this was a holiday characteristic of Western countries, but it has seen an obvious expansion worldwide in recent decades.

The objectives pursued were several:

- to establish what are the characteristics of consumer behavior related to this holiday.
- to find similarities worldwide;
- to determine if there are differences between countries

The methodology included the analysis of published secondary sources (especially online; books, articles, studies on the buying behavior of customers in several countries, on the occasion of this holiday).

One of the most valuable sources of information I have identified was the Mastercard Love Index, a study carried out repeatedly in a large number of countries, related to this holiday.

On the occasion of "Valentine's Day", specific aspects of buying behavior can be identified; and similarities can be found worldwide, but also differences between countries.

For example:

- many gifts are made; but also outings to restaurants or excursions
- most purchases are made in stores, not online; although the proportion differ from one country to another.
- most purchases are made in the last days before the holiday, and especially on the last day.
- for some buyers, it is a stress to find the right gift on this occasion. It is not easy to choose.

1.Culture - factor influencing consumer behaviour

Culture is a complex notion with many meanings. One of the meanings is that of national culture.

The national culture represents the set of material and spiritual values of a society that has reached a certain stage of historical development.

The national culture is based on the common past, linguistic unity and cultural unity.

The effects of culture are deeper than one might think; for example, the regional differences in Romania also have a cultural dimension [6]. And this is true also in many other countries.

The national culture has several dimensions and components. One of the dimensions is represented by traditions and holidays.

Holidays are of two types, laic and religious. In any country there is a succession of holidays, the number of holidays being large often.

Cultures are not static, but they usually evolve slowly. There may be, as an exception, also essential changes in culture over relatively short periods of time, due to rapid technological advances, conflicts between existing values, contact with the values of another culture, or events such as wars.

The image of culture as a static, unified one is not appropriate in an age of globalization [1].

The changes to which culture is subjected do not affect to the same extent all of its components: the material culture (consumer goods, tools, etc.) changes at a faster pace than the spiritual culture (beliefs, mentalities, values); or, in other words, the mentality and values change more difficult.

Values are the core of the culture and can guide behavior. People's purchasing preferences and reasons are determined by the people's values. The well-known specialist Geert Hofstede confirms this aspect: buying and consumption are determined by people's values [9].

There is often an explanation of a cultural nature, where at first glance it does not seem to be.

Another example of the influence of culture is the expansion of the Internet, which is related to the well-being of the population and to the desire to avoid the uncertainty [2].

The last feature, the desire to avoid uncertainty, is a cultural dimension.

The culture change is very slow. However, following the contact between two cultures, the phenomenon of acculturation may occur (ie the process of contact between two cultures, which results in an exchange of values and behaviors, without resulting in a total domination of one of the cultures).

These cultural changes must be in the attention of the marketing specialists, meaning new business opportunities, the emergence of new markets or the increase of the size of these markets

A relevant example is also "Valentine's Day", taken over by Romania, as well as by other countries, which has clear effects in terms of marketing.

2.Brief history of "Valentine's Day"

The origin of this holiday is not clear. The holiday seems to come from antiquity, but there are several variants and it is difficult to say which is the real variant.

Few things are certain; one of them is the name "Valentine", known for a long time; or the fact that there are several saints Valentine.

In Ancient Rome, there was the feast of Lupercalia, between February 13-15, which was dedicated to 2 deities (Lupercus, protector of herds and shepherds; Junona, protector of women). It was a festival dedicated to fertility and finding the pair, not having the exact meaning as today.

The Romans were not Christians, and their holiday did not spread throughout the world, although it should not be forgotten that Rome meant an empire for centuries.

A great impact in the world the measures taken had, after the victory of Christianity, by the Christian religious authorities (more precisely the Catholic ones).

In the year 496, the pope declared February 14 as the day on which Saint Valentine is celebrated. It is interesting that until the declaration of the holiday there were three "Valentine's Day", and that it was not specified to which of them is dedicated the day of February 14. All three had a tragic end, or at least that's what the legends claim.

There is the variant that Saint Valentine was a priest and that he secretly officiated marriages, against the will of the emperor, who wanted bachelor soldiers (considered by the emperor better soldiers than the married ones); and that from prison he sent letters signed "Your Valentine." It is possible that the legend contains a seed of truth [11].

In France, in the XVth century, February 14 was already a celebration of love, celebrated annually [13].

Great Britain, too, ended up in the Middle Ages to celebrate February 14. And let's not forget that Great Britain was the largest empire in the world for hundreds of years, with a great influence on a large part of the rest of the world.

From the UK, the holiday has obviously reached the US, whose influence in the world has steadily increased, up to the role it has today, which has also influenced the takeover of this holiday by other countries.

Over time, it has come to the expansion of the holiday in many other countries, but it should be noted that not in all countries and not as much in all the countries that took it over. There are many cultures in the world, and what is of American or Western origin is not automatically taken over.

The holiday is popular today primarily in two categories of countries: English-speaking countries and other countries (on several continents) [10].

Among the countries that celebrate it on a large scale are: the United States, Great Britain, Australia, Canada, France, Italy, Argentina, Brazil, Mexico.

But the holiday has spread to most countries; in all European countries, in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Philippines.

It should be noted that the holiday is often perceived as American, but recent sources show that in 2018, only 55% of American people celebrated "Valentine's Day" [4], [12].

- "Valentine's Day" has a much weaker impact in Germany compared to the US. In 2020, only 17 percent of Germans said they plan to give their partner a "Valentine's Day" present.

And the average amount per buyer spent in 2019 is more than three times lower in Germany than in the US. [12].

An interesting custom is in Japan: there are two "Valentine's Day"s. On February 14th, the girls give the boys dark chocolate; after a month, on March 14th, the boys white chocolate to the girls. So the basic gift is chocolate.

Currently, it is a holiday associated with romance and altruism [5].

On the other hand, some countries already had their own holidays dedicated to love or fertility, close in meaning to "Valentine's Day", but usually placed at other times of the year compared to it.

Some examples in this regard, with the specification that there are probably others as well:

-in Romania there is the "Dragobetele" holiday, right in February, known for many years. "Dragobete" was the local god of youth, patron of love and of good disposition.

-in Brazil, it is celebrated on June 12 the boyfriend/girlfriend's day, and couples give each gifts (usually greeting cards, chocolate, flowers). Can be noted the similarities with "Valentine's Day".

-it is known in China, although the traditional month of lovers in China is august.

Some countries have kept their own holidays, under the conditions of the strong promotion of "Valentine's Day", but they have also taken over "Valentine's Day". The popularity ratio between the local holiday and "Valentine's Day" differs from country to country.

It is difficult to say what will be the relationship between them in the future; for example in Romania, between "Valentine's Day" and "Dragobete" [16].

It is clear that these local holidays of love have implications in the behavior of buying and consumption, different implications from one country to another.

"Valentine's Day" it is not accepted in some cultures, so we should not be surprised that there are countries or areas that reject this holiday or in which its impact is insignificant. Let us remember, again, that even the Romans did not manage to spread Lupercalia all over the world.

It is worth mentioning that there are countries or parts of them that do not celebrate "Valentine's Day" and that officially discourage this.

The motivations are mainly of a religious nature, and some groups in these countries are protesting against the celebration of "Valentine's Day", which is considered to have a negative influence [17].

3.Aspects of the consumer behavior worldwide, on the occasion of "Valentine's Day"

The consumer behavior on the occasion of "Valentine's Day", includes several specific aspects. These aspects have evolved over time, so today we are talking about the modern, contemporary aspects of the consumer behavior, determined by this holiday.

The tradition of making gifts has remained to this day and can probably be considered the most important aspect of the consumer behavior worldwide.

The sales are so high that it is comparable to BlackFriday in this respect [5].

Although most gifts are still purchased from classic stores, the proportion of internet sales is growing [7], [5].

The total value of shopping on "Valentine's Day" is increasing; this fact, as well as the expansion of the holiday in many countries, shows that the holiday is growing in popularity.

Purchases are usually made in the last few days before the holiday. The last available day is the most important day to buy, for many buyers.

Most gifts are bought in person. For some buyers, it is a stress finding gifts.

Many times, especially in the case of couples, it is known exactly what gift the partner wants.

What gifts are made on this occasion and what is bought especially:

-flowers (they are generally suitable for this holiday; but it should be noted that red roses symbolize love in many cultures).

-jewelry

-watches

-cosmetics

-greeting cards

-chocolate

-chocolate candies

-cakes, cakes, sweets in general

-drinks (especially for men)

-other

-heart-shaped arrangements are specific.

To these are added the trips, the outings to the restaurant, the special meals taken at home together with the partner, the romantic atmosphere.

Even since 1800, on "Valentine's Day", it has remained the tradition of small gifts in the form of greeting cards addressed to the loved ones.

If at the beginning of the holiday, the greetings between lovers were made verbally, it came to a real industry of congratulations, today manufactured to be made as a gift.

Gifts have the role of expressing the feelings of the person who makes the gift, the appreciation of the one who is given the gift, the romance.

Some people will have a unique experience and want to create memories on this occasion.

There are some differences between countries, in terms of favorite gifts. I mentioned chocolate, which is preferred in some Asian countries; but it can be said that it is the day of flowers and chocolate worldwide [3], or almost all over the world.

One of the most valuable sources of information I have identified was the Mastercard Love Index, a study conducted annually on consumers in many countries, based on the analysis of transactions made with debit, credit or prepaid cards, over the last three periods of "Valentine's Day" (February 11-14, for the last three consecutive years).

Among the conclusions of this study, I mention:

-it is done shopping especially in stores, and not online, although the proportion of online shopping increases

-there are some differences between buyers from different continents

-flowers are still fashionable, among the types of gifts.

-globally, in recent years, gifts that include hotel reservations exceed the amounts spent on flowers and jewelry.

-the "economy of love" is growing five times faster than the global economy [14], [15], [8].

Conclusions

Culture is a complex factor influencing consumer behaviour.

There are several meanings of culture, one of which is that of national culture. The meaning of national culture can be useful in marketing.

The national culture has several dimensions and components. One of the dimensions is represented by traditions and holidays.

"Valentine's Day" is hard to say where it comes from, but this is probably less important today. More important is the current significance of the holiday, its worldwide expansion and its implications for the consumers. It can be said that it is a world-class holiday, known in most countries of the world, but not as appreciated in all.

The takeover of "Valentine's Day" in other countries is a proof of the change of mentality of at least a part of the population (especially young people and especially in urban areas).

On the occasion of "Valentine's Day", specific aspects of the buying behavior can be identified; and there are many similarities worldwide, but also some differences between countries.

One of the most valuable sources of information I have identified was the Mastercard Love Index, a study conducted annually on consumers in over 200 countries, based on the analysis of transactions made with debit, credit or prepaid cards, over the last three periods of "Valentine's Day" (February 11-14, for the last three consecutive years).

There are some national differences related to "Valentine's Day".

There are countries that attach less importance to this holiday, more appreciated being the local traditions on the theme of love; and even countries that have banned this holiday, considered as having a negative influence and being contrary to local traditions. I do not comment on this aspect; each country has the right to take the measures it deems appropriate to its own interests.

Regarding "Valentine's Day" in the world, many aspects can be identified, in terms of behaviors:

-the tradition of making gifts has remained to this day and can probably be considered the most important aspect of the consumer behavior worldwide, on the occasion of "Valentine's Day".

-romantic atmosphere

-the form of the heart, the symbol of love. The meaning of the heart form is a universal one.

-gifts are made to the partner (especially flowers, greeting cards, jewelry, cosmetics, chocolate) but also trips and outings to the restaurant.

-purchases are made especially in the last days before the holiday.

-most shopping is done in stores, not online.

In the future, it remains to be seen which holidays will have greater importance: "Valentine's Day" or the local holidays related to love? My opinion is that "Valentine's Day", as a holiday, will remain and grow in size in countries where there is American and Western European influence. Or at least among the young people, this seems the trend.

For example, in Romania, "Valentine's Day" seems to become more popular than the local equivalent Dragobetele. Existing studies show a growing trend in the popularity of "Valentine's Day" compared to the local holiday.

My opinion is that it is difficult to say, at present, what is the popularity ratio between the two holidays, but the imported holiday seems to gain ground, being favored by the intense promotion it gets, compared to the traditional holiday.

In the future, the popularity ratio between the local holiday and "Valentine's Day" remains an interesting subject to study in the countries where this happens.

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