

**YOUNG PEOPLE PURCHASE-DECISION PATTERNS:  
A EUROPEAN COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS**

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Abstract:

This paper aims at studying the homogeneity of the young European consuming patterns. Designed for both educational and research objectives, the study is based on a simplified model of young people purchasing behaviour, including decision determinants, influencers and personal values. A common survey referring to a recent acquisition was sent by e-mail to young Europeans in France, Germany, Italy and Spain in order to investigate the various decision patterns. A range of different analyses were ran to determine if nationality is still a relevant issue in understanding young consumers decisions across a more and more integrated Europe. The results confirm a significant impact of national culture on the young people purchase-decision patterns and this effect is globally stronger than the influence of the type of purchased product.

Key-words : cross-cultural research, young people, consumer behaviour, Europe, Internet survey.

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### Introduction: studying the young Europeans consumer behaviour

The issue of consumer behaviour is a key one in marketing literature. A few other fields of economic research have known such an intense and diversified growth in the last decades. Actually consumer behaviour is approached by researchers adopting a variety of interpretative models and with a wide array of multi-disciplinary frames, from economy to sociology, psychology and anthropology. In particular if we consider one of the main issues in consumer behaviour literature, i.e. the drivers of the purchase decision, there is no single and generally accepted model to explain it. According to a shared perspective the different approaches to the understanding of consumer purchase decisions can be grouped as follows (East, 1995; Dalli and Romano, 2005):

- the cognitive approach, which is deeply rooted in the economic science and assumes a rational behaviour of the decision maker, based on the price of the goods and on its attitude to respond to functional needs. The critical variable under this approach is the availability of adequate information about purchase alternatives (price, product functionalities) to support the decisional process (Howard, 1963).
- the external conditioning approach, according to which the purchase decision is a response to external stimuli (Foxall, 1990). The critical variable under this approach is which kind of external stimuli can influence purchase decision.
- the experience and the social interaction - based approach, according to which the present consumer decision aims at the construction of personal identity (Belk, 1988). Following this idea, two main streams have been developed: one focuses on individual consumption decisions. Under this perspective the “emotional” explanation of consumer behaviour has grown significantly, even though the emotional factors were included in the recent development of the cognitive framework (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). The other stream focuses on consumption as a means of social interaction, building on the pioneering sociological contribution of Veblen (1899).

The three perspectives do not necessarily contrast among them, but they may complement each other for a thorough understanding of consumer behaviour in its complexity and differentiated outcomes. This contribution proposes an **integrated model of influencers and determinants of the consumer decision** and tests it empirically. The model also considers the existence of moderating factors in the decisional process, like the **type of product** and the **national culture**.

The young consumer behaviour represents in this framework a relevant research issue because in literature young people are deemed “a collective subject holding a common culture” (Fabris, 2003): this common culture is based on some shared values, on a shared tendency to feel “citizens of the world”, on a common propensity to experience new things and to support new ideas. From this point of view young consumer behaviour is a relevant issue for managers and policy makers too, because they are recognised as a significant market segment (Moschis and Moore, 1979) and they frequently represent the pioneers of new social and consumption trends.

Studying the behaviour of young people is consequently of great interest, given the significant spending of this segment of the population and the importance of their purchases (McNeal, 1999). We should also mention the increasing autonomy of these individuals' purchase decisions, as well as young people's influence in the purchase decisions of others (Lackman and Lanasa, 1993, Armstrong and Kotler, 2000).

In addition, the concept of loyalty has a bearing on the importance of analysing this group, because when a firm gains a young consumer who is loyal to the brand, they will remain loyal for a long period of time. Authors such as Hite and Hite (1994) stress the importance of the age at which the brand takes on importance for young people, in the prediction of the criteria used in the evaluation and purchase decisions made and influenced by young people when they become adults. During decades, marketing managers have been considered the relationships with their most young consumers as very relevant because of during this step of their life young consumers show loyalty to some brands, and this loyalty can stand during a long time. At the same time there are some interesting facts that confirm this. For example and as Loudon and Della Bitta (1995) state, more of the 30% of the brand used by adult women are the same they used when they were young.

Finally, we should mention the role of the group of young people as innovators, adopting and driving, if not creating, new market trends. As Zollo (1995) notes, young people are a very important group from the marketing perspective because of their influence on their parents' spending, their own potential spending in the future, and because they are trendsetters.

Given these characteristics, young consumers are an extremely important segment. However, studies analysing consumer behaviour have fundamentally focused on adults (Engel, Blackwell and Kollat, 1978; Davis, 1976), and their findings have generally not been transferable to young people. More research on young consumer behaviour is necessary, as various authors argue (e.g., Darian, 1998; Hogg et al., 1998).

## **1. Is there a young Pan-European consumer in theory?**

Fifty years after the Rome Treaty and the first steps of creation of a European Community, it is definitely time to see if the young European citizens are sharing some common values and more specifically some similar attitudes towards a very important social activity: consumption. In the late 80's and early 90's, some numerous research was already dedicated to this question and some antagonist theoretical and practical approaches came out. They are basically opposing in the consideration of the European consumers either as a whole target group (and especially the young) or as a mosaic of different local sub-cultures.

### 1.1. The reality of a Pan-European consumer

From a first sociological point of view, with the growing phenomenon of globalisation and multiculturalism, members of different national countries all over the World (and particularly in Western Europe) are moving from country to another, communicating with new numerical technologies and intermixing with each other. Some

sociologists (Appuduri, 1990) have proposed global flows that are “*muting the effect of divisions*” between the traditional national boundaries : mediascapes (Internet, cable and satellite television and channels like CNN...), ethnoscapes (tourism, international exchanges in higher education such as the Erasmus program...), ideoscapes (political ideas like ecology...), techno and finanscapes. Then, culture would no longer be defined by and isolated to a particular country (Craig and Douglas, 2006). Some authors have been recently referring to a new type of consumer becoming (and willing to be) a “citizen of the World”. These individuals are being termed “world minded” or “cosmopolitan” (EPRI, 2006, Thompson and Tambyah, 1999). Nowadays, we should particularly expect the young European people to be affected by this trend. We should consider that they are increasingly exposed to the same ads, the same movies and music, they are sharing some common symbols such as hair dresses, jeans, athletics shoes, watches, as members of the same culture. Some demographers proposed the concept of “Generation Y” or “Echo Boomers” (Paul, 2001). For Northern America and Western Europe, they are defined as people born in the 1980s and 1990s, Generation Y currently includes those in their mid and early 20s, teenagers and children over the age of 6. They were affected by “moments” like the fall of the Soviet Union and the First Gulf War, informed by media like MTV etc. Obviously, the widespread use of personal computers and the Internet is a revolution shared by the majority of Gen. Y members. Most of them spent part of their youth with a home computer and Internet access. They clearly use the Web as a tool for socialization much more so than previous generations. More recently, in Europe, “Generation M” has been introduced as a variant of the Gen. Y label (EPRI, 2006). They are characterised by “a high availability of leisure time, critical but not rebellious thinking, acting even younger than their biological age”. The older are also typically moving out of their parent’s homes later and frequently changing jobs. Sometimes they are described as “*kidults*”. In France, thanks to a popular movie of Etienne Chatiliez, those young people are well-known as “*adulscents*” or “*Tanguys*” (Anatrella, 2003).

From a more serious economic perspective, some studies in Europe have clearly noticed that even if some substantial differences are still existing in the marketing context, some similar trends and developments in “environmental variables and consumer behaviour” are growing. For example, the proportion of service expenditures clearly increases and durable consumption decreases over time, together with the development of environmental and health concern (Leeflang and Raail, 1995).

In the marketing field, a few experiments are available to confirm the hypothesis of a global Young European consumer. Some authors insist on the trends of consumer brands globalisation, especially in some categories such as fashion, cars, beverages and food products. Some international products would answer to the needs of consumer segments that cross the national borders (Hassan and Katsanis, 1994). In Asia for example, some researchers concluded that some common structures in consumption values could exist cross-culturally (Tse, Wong and Tan, 1988) even if national consumers may use different product attributes to express analogous consumption values. Studying the links between involvement and decision-making strategies in 3 different countries (Germany, U.S.A. and Thailand), Alden, Hoyer and Wechaser (1989) concluded that those relationships should possess cross-cultural validity. Using the Consumer Styles Inventory developed by Sproles and Kendall (1986), some authors established that the decision-making styles of young consumers in Korea

were nearly similar to those described in the United States (Hafstrom, Chae and Chung, 1992). Some authors reviewed that cultural differences in decision-making styles are found mostly between “cultural aggregates” (such as Asia, Western Europe, Northern America) and less between national variants within those total cultural groups (Liefeld, Wall and Heslop, 1999). This conclusion is supported by the results of a research focused on cross-cultural differences in materialism. All Western European countries (except Germany) have very low levels of materialism compared to other nations like the U.S.A or Eastern European countries for example (Ger and Belk, 1996). More specifically, in a study ran on 38 nationalities about the use of “marketing universals” such as brand name, price, or retailer reputation as reference criteria for the perceived quality of the product. Dawan and Parker (1994) found that there were a few differences in the use of these signals across national boundaries.

### 1.2. Research focusing on the national cultural differences.

Hofstede Jr., Steenkamp and Wedel (1999) have ran an international segmentation based on consumer-product relations, in 11 European countries. They found that –even if one of their four identified segments was Pan-European- there were significant cultural differences among the European nationalities. The Pan-European segment was made of younger consumers who are more educated people, have higher incomes and live in urban areas. In another paper, the same authors found that consumer innovativeness was influenced by the national culture dimensions in Europe (Steenkamp, Hofstede Jr. and Wedel, 1999).

In an exploratory study focused on family purchasing roles and ran in 5 countries, Green and al. (1983) were able to describe different types of family purchasing patterns across cultures. However, the differences between the two studied European countries (France and the Netherlands) were not really big. Built only on empirical basis, some authors (Luqmani, Yavas and Quraeshi, 1994) proposed a “convenience portfolio matrix” divided into four quadrants in order to visualise the different purchase orientations of international consumers. Some Western European countries can be found in different segments, for example Spain in the “emulating-latent” countries and Germany in the “innovator/leader” group. However, this matrix was not scientifically confirmed.

Obviously, one of the major and most popular contributions to this topic is the research made by Geert Hofstede (1991) about work-related values in 66 countries. On the basis of the scores on power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism and masculinity reported in the study for 17 Western European countries, Kale (1995) developed a culture-based clustering with a view to grouping the “Euroconsumers”. The author identified three clusters and developed some marketing implications to better adapt product positioning and advertising to the cultural characteristics of the groups of countries.

#### Table 1 – Description of Kahle’s Euroconsumers’ clusters

Even if difference in European national cultures is still the dominant theory in the marketing literature, we wanted to test it on a more specific and contemporary young population. After all those long years of European integration and “common spirit building”, we should expect the differences between the nations of the Old Continent to be reduced. There has been a very dynamic trend of research in the late 80’s and early 90’s but a only a few recent experiments have investigated the validity of the Pan-European consumer. For some authors it

is obvious that the effect of culture on decision making styles is surprisingly un-researched and particularly in Europe (Salciuviene, Auruskeviciene and Lideka, 2005, Liefeld, Wall and Heslop, 1999).

Young consumers in Europe represent a galaxy of patterns of behaviour, which calls for an empirical research based on a common survey addressed to young people in different countries having purchased different product categories, in order to contribute to the following research gaps:

- which variables and values most affect young consumer decisions in Europe? Is there any general interpretative model which could explain young Europeans consumer behaviour?
- does the kind of product purchased affect the behavioural pattern of the young consumer?
- is nationality still a relevant issue in understanding young consumers decisions across a more and more integrated Europe? Basically, **are the purchase decisions patterns similar or different among the young European consumers?**

## **2. A classical model to compare the young Europeans' consumption patterns**

To study and compare the young Europeans' consumption patterns, we decided to use a quite simple and classical model, based on the abundant literature available on consumer behaviour. As described in the figure below, we basically studied the impacts of influencers and values on the purchasing decision determinants. We decided to concentrate on relevant factors of the young people decision-process such as influencers and values, because we wanted to consider both the traditional cognitive and the social interaction-based approaches. The several dimensions of the model were obtained and confirmed after a factorial analysis described later in the paper.

Figure 1- Model of young Europeans consuming decision patterns

### 2.1. Decision Determinants

#### 2.1.1. Functional aspects:

In general, a product is designed to perform a particular function: the core benefit. Therefore, products, services and brands can be selected based on functional needs (Park et al. 1986). These functional needs solve a current problem, prevent potential problems and other consumption related problems (Fennel 1978) and refer to rational consumption decisions. Sheth et al. (1991) explain that functional value is derived from characteristics or attributes such as reliability, durability and price. Functional or rational aspects of purchasing behaviour have been seen to be the key influence on consumer choice, however Sheth et al. (1991) identified further dimensions which are also influential in purchase decisions. More specifically depend-ing on the circumstances rational aspects can dominate the decision level (e.g. buy/not buy or the considered products and services) as well as emotional aspects.

#### 2.1.2. Affective aspects:

Certain goods and services have been known to offer emotional value in excess of their functional utility (Hirschman and Holbrook 1982; Sheth et al. 1991; Westbrook & Oliver 1991). Therefore, research has been shown that consumers can acquire emotional value when individuals' feelings or affective states are aroused (Sheth et al, 1991). Advertisers often promote these emotional aspects expected from the use certain products, for instance BMW has used for many years "Sheer Driving Pleasure" as its main slogan. Additionally, research in the field of prestige consumption has repeatedly identified the emotional responses associated with the prestige consumption such as sensory pleasure, aesthetic beauty, or excitement (Fauchois & Krieg 1991; Roux & Floch 1996; Vigneron & Johnson 2004). Hence, the emotional or hedonic value can be describes as the perceived subjective utility and intrinsically pleasing properties acquired from the purchase and consumption of a certain good or service which arouse feelings and affective states, received from the personal rewards and fulfilment (Sheth et al. 1991; Westbrook & Oliver 1991).

### 2.1.3. Economical criteria:

The price of a product can be defined as the trade-off between customers' perceptions of benefits received and sacrifices incurred (e.g. Leszinski & Marn, 1997). In purchase decisions price implies a pervasive influence due to the fact that it is present in all purchase situations (Lichtenstein et al. 1993). Nevertheless, price as a purchase decision determinant is rather complex and customers do not buy solely on the basis of low price. The context, customers' access to information and past experiences also affect price perceptions (Monroe, 1990). Thus, consumers can and do distinguish between objective price (i.e., the actual price of a product or service) and perceived price (i.e., the price as judged by the consumer, respectively the relevant others) (Jacoby & Olson 1977). The individual perception of a good price/value relationship depends on what is important to the individual consumer and if a given value is worth the investment. Additionally, research has shown that the price of a product often has a positive role in determine the rational aspect of quality (Erickson & Johansson 1995; Lichtenstein et al. 1988; Tellis & Gaeth 1990). These studies revealed that consumers often used the price cue as evidence for evaluating quality when choosing between different brands.

## 2.2. Influencers:

### 2.2.1. *Experienced People:*

To explain adolescents' learning consumption skills, communication with perceived experts like e.g. parents regarding consumption activities and modelling parental styles and practices have emerged as key variables (Moschis 1985, 1987; Moschis & Churchill 1978; Churchill & Moschis 1979; Moore & Moschis 1983). Especially with regard to the ownership of products which are high priced and represent a great social risk, young people are likely to model or communicate with their parents and adopt "rational" consumer-related skills, knowledge and attitudes (Moschis et al. 1977). Research shows, that parents teach their children general consumer goals and encourage them to use price or price-quality relationships as criteria in evaluating products (Moore & Stephans 1975; Moschis & Churchill 1978).

While young people acquire consumer behaviour norms by observing their parents, who function as role models, adolescents, however, having a need for independence from their parents and being attracted by the standard

dictated by and under pressures of their membership group, are also likely to look to their peers for models of acceptable consumption behaviours (John 1999).

### 2.2.2. Fashion:

Encouraging conspicuous consumption by using images of attractive and/or famous product users, demonstrating social reward by using the products, and associating the products with luxurious and comfortable lifestyles (Belk & Pollay 1985; Kasser et al. 2004), advertisements have long-term effects as well as short-term effects on adolescents' adoption of inferences about product owners and influence their materialistic values and attitudes (Buijzen & Valkenburg 2003; Chan 2003; Kwak et al. 2002; Moschis & Moore 1982; Yang & Ganahl 2004). More globally, "fashion" as expressed in the media, in the advertisements and by celebrities is a very important attribute used by young consumers when assessing a product (Herbst and Burger, 2002) and branded fashion goods can fulfil emblematic functions (Hogg, Bruce and Hill, 1998). Focused on the influence of reference groups on the consumption of prestige brands, several studies have shown that the conspicuousness of a product was positively related to its susceptibility to reference-group influence (Mason 1992; Bearden & Etzel 1982). Thus, people's desire to possess prestige brands may serve as a symbolic marker of group membership. To conform to the majority opinion of their membership groups, consumers use the perceived extended-self value of prestige brands to enhance their self-concept (Solomon 1983; Mick 1986; McCracken 1986; Belk 1988; Dittmar 1994). Especially the consumer behaviour of young people, who communicate with peers more frequently about consumption matters (Moschis & Churchill 1978; Churchill & Moschis 1979) and who are more susceptible to their influence (Achenreiner 1997) may reflect their status of anxiety and the need for peer approval by using fashion preferences in evaluating products.

### 2. 3. Personal values

Pioneering work of Rokeach (1973), without making distinctions between both approaches, defined the concept of "value" as "*an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct*". The author expresses the incident of values on conducts. In the same line, Marandi, Little and Sekhon (2006) state values are mental images that shape a wide range of specific attitudes, which, in turn, influence the way a person is likely to respond to a specific situation. Schiffman and Kanuk (1997) point out that values and beliefs refer to the accumulated feelings and priorities that individuals have about things and possessions.

Three decades ago, Vinson, Scott and Lamont (1977) wrote an article where they underlined the role of personal values in marketing and consumer behavior. During this time, and as Jayawardhena (2004) stated, two main thoughts have analyzed how personal values would affect consumer behavior: (1) some researchers project personal values in a means-end chain model, and (2) others suggest that values would produce an indirect effect on consumer behaviour through less abstract mediating factors (attitude behaviour hierarchy). Studies have shown a positive relationship among some personal values and consumer decisions. For example, Dibley and Baker (2001) found some relationships among snacks brands consumption and different personal values for



British and Spanish girls. According to Manyiwa and Crawford (2001), values can play a dominant role in guiding consumer behaviour because of people cope with diversity of products that are consistent with their values and group them into groups in order to simplify the process of decision making.

However, Honkanen and Verplanken (2004) and Jayawardhena (2004) have pointed out that many studies found only a weak relationship between values and behaviour and that other constructs could be introduced as mediators/moderators (such as attitudes for example). Homer and Kahle (1988) found that values influence attitudes and that attitudes mediate the value-behaviour relationship. Consequently, the consumer, and particularly the young consumer, acquires products and brands for their functional attributes, but also for their symbolic properties (Elliott, 1999). Products become symbols that consumers use to demonstrate a particular social status, express particular feelings or share certain experiences, as a means of self-expression, to satisfy hedonistic goals or even recall past experiences (Tharp & Scott, 1990).

### **3. An original European research platform to study cross-cultural consumer behaviour**

#### 3.1. A European platform for research and education

The purpose of this project was also to develop **links between research and educational activities**. It is quite usual to collect data from the researchers' student classes but we wanted to go further. Not only our students have been involved in answering and spreading the survey, but this research has also been used as a case-study for marketing lectures such as consumer behaviour, survey methodology and data analysis. Thanks to that, we have been able to collect a large international "convenience sample" but also to consistently motivate and train our students. 5 universities are now taking part in this network (with a future support of an E.C. grant) that is opened to new comers for further research, in the next academic years.

This typical context led us to build a specific methodology, that had to be right balanced between the scientific requirements, the educational objectives and the international working process. Some authors (Salciuviene, Auruskeviciene and Lydeka, 2005, Malhotra, Agarwal and Peterson, 1996, Sojka and Tansuhaj, 1995) have focused on the threats and difficulties of cross-cultural research. In order to achieve our goals, we seriously had to take them into account. The translations problems for example, were dramatically reduced, thanks to a simple and direct wording of the questions. They were designed to be as short as possible, in order to make their translation easier and decrease the probability of any confusion or ambiguity. This procedure is also very useful in the context of Internet studies, where it has been recently established (Ganassali, 2006) that a direct wording would lead to higher-quality responses.

#### 3.2. Our sampling procedure

To avoid big mistakes with the cross-cultural context we also had to control the characteristics of the final study sample. For the first stage of this research program, we started with a general sampling procedure asking all the

involved Universities to collect data on a “varied sample made of national young people aged from 18 to 30”. The instructions were quite broad so that every University could enter the program without too strong prerequisites. We came out with a global sample of 1.880 responses. Then as specified in the literature on cross-cultural research, we had to control the composition of the four national samples on important variables: age, gender and product type. The table below shows the frequency of each category that is **perfectly stable** in every national sub-sample. To obtain that, we had to randomly extract from the initial sample the appropriate cases that will allow us to study a comparable sample. The result of this process is quite frustrating, because we had to come out with a final sample of only 300 persons. But finally, we can rely on this controlled sample on which genders, age groups and product types are equally represented in each studied country.

Table 2 – Final composition of the studied sample

### 3.3. Chosen items in the questionnaire and inquiring procedure.

Firstly, we decided to choose an original procedure, as far as the purchased product was concerned. Usually, most of the experiments focus on one single specific product or (more scarcely) ask the respondents to answer about their consuming behaviour in general. We applied an intermediate procedure, asking them to choose a recent product (or service) they bought. It was also a way to have them refer on a **more tangible and operational experience** and we presume it would have increased the quality and the reliability of the collected answers.

As specified before, the questionnaire wording was direct and simple. To measure the concepts of our basic decision-making model, we chose some classical items from some previous popular experiments. For the decision determinants, we mostly referred to the dimensions studied in a similar cross-cultural research ran on the use of “**marketing universals**” such as brand name, price, or retailer reputation as reference criteria for the perceived quality of the product (Dawan and Parker, 1994). For the values’ group of questions, of course we selected, adapted or updated some items from the Rokeach (1983) **list of values**. For the influencers, our reference work was Moschis and Moore’s (1979) socialisation perspective on decision-making among the young people. In their survey, they assessed **adolescents’ preferred sources of information** in purchasing various types of products.

The common questionnaire was designed with Sphinx Survey software for an Internet collection process, it includes 43 questions and is divided into 11 screens. One can find our English version of the survey, still on-line at <http://ate-j165.univ-savoie.fr/young/youngen/q1.htm>.

## **4. Presentation of the results**

### 4.1. Raw results

## Figure 2 – One way analyses for determinants, influencers and values

The highest scores on decision determinants are being observed for quality and convenience; attributes that are associated with the product functionalities. The second highest score is for the price. In this sense, if we consider the joint influence of both quality/convenience and price, our results would support that globally, young European consumers want useful products with a good value for money. Brand, fashion and image – the more affective determinants – seem to have a lower declared influence on the young people consuming decision patterns. Finally, the environment is found to have a minimal influence in the purchase decisions of this target group.

The second figure shows the important influencers in young Europeans decision-making process. Apparently, none of the influencers really plays an important role in our young target decision patterns. As we can see on the map, all the influencers are located near the low or medium modalities of the scales. Generally, the young respondents do not express relevant influences from other people and advertising during their purchasing decision process.

The hierarchy of values obtained in our study shows that truth, peace and equality are essential values for young people. These results could be a kind of mirror of the contemporary young society. At the same time, with lower scores, autonomy, security, pleasure, competency and conformism values are significantly more important than tradition and power.

### 4.2. Reduction of dimensions in the model

We carried out a principal components analysis of the three groups of variables in the model. The determinant attributes in the purchase decision congregate in three components, described by their functional, emotional and economical natures, respectively. The first component includes three affective attributes : fashion, image and brand. In turn, the functional component is described by other four aspects: brand, convenience, quality and respect for the environment. We should mention that brand loads significantly on both two first components (functional and emotional), demonstrating the logical twofold influence of this attribute in consumer decision-making. The emotional association is related to the identification of the young people with the brand and the functional association is related to the brand as a reference for quality and reliability. Finally, the third component is identified with the price, representing the economical value of the purchase.

### **PRINCIPAL COMPONENT ANALYSIS OUTPUTS (Varimax with Kaiser's normalisation made with Sphinx Survey and SPSS)**

Table 3 – Results of the Principal Components Analysis for decision determinants

The influencers in young people's decision-making can be grouped in two dimensions. The first group represents the impact of celebrities, ads and friends. These "fashion" influencers are used to build value expressions and identity model that young people are trying to achieve. The second group would stand for the effect of experienced people (experts, older sisters/brothers, parents and also boyfriend/girlfriend) in the young

purchasing process. These influencers exert an informative and/or normative power on young people decisions due to their importance, age, experience, etc.

#### Table 4 – Results of the Principal Components Analysis for influencers

Three components of values are distinguished. A first component can be labelled as “universalism”, being described by the following values: peace, equality and truth. A second component consists of power, competency, group and tradition, and can be categorized as a “conformism” dimension. Finally, the third component is characterised as “individualism”, and is described by three values: pleasure, autonomy and security.

#### Table 5 – Results of the Principal Components Analysis for values

### 4.3. A cluster analysis to compare the young European decision patterns

In order to test the homogeneity (or heterogeneity) of the young European consuming patterns, we first ran a cluster analysis on the eight aggregate dimensions of our model, we used the PCA's axis coordinates for :

- the 3 dimensions of the decisions determinants: affective, functional and economical,
- the 2 dimensions of the influencers: experienced people and fashion,
- the 3 dimensions of the personal values: universalism, conformism and individualism,

A hierarchical cluster was ran with Sphinx Survey and SPSS and on the basis of the Ward criteria, we were proposed a solution with 5 groups. Then we ran a second K-means cluster analysis with the two same packages, based on an initial division on the groups came out of the first solution. This final solution is fitting and results with clusters that really make sense.

#### Table 6 – Results from the cluster analysis

As we can see in the tables above, the distribution in the clusters is coherent and unsurprisingly, the analysis of variance on the eight aggregate dimensions is significant for all of them. The clusters can be interpreted as follows :

- 1st cluster : strongest on affective determinants and fashion, strong also on conformity and individualism values : “FASHION VICTIMS”,
- 2<sup>nd</sup> cluster : highest on the functional determinants, on experienced people influence and also on universalism : “PROFESIONAL BUYERS”,
- 3<sup>rd</sup> cluster : they mainly search for economy and universalism, weak on functional and affective determinants : “FAIR TRADERS”,
- 4<sup>th</sup> cluster : weakest on all the influencing dimensions, they seem to be out of the “classical consumption model” : “INDEPENDENT”,

- 5th cluster : very strong on conformism and affective, medium on experienced people influence : “FOLLOWERS”.

Figure 3 – Clusters division per country

Figure 4 – Position of countries on the aggregate dimensions of the model

On these factorial maps, we clearly see that :

- the distribution of the clusters among the countries is very mixed,
- the weight of the aggregate dimensions of the consuming patterns are different from one country to another.

It shows that **the hypothesis of a global young pan-European consumer may be strongly rejected**. The German seem to be more frequently characterised as “followers”, the Italian are clearly fashion-oriented, the French are “Fair-traders” and the Spanish are divided between professional buyers and some other categories. Let us indicate that this division is completely stable when we have the controlled variables change (age, gender and product type).

We can confirm on the map below that the decision patterns are also influenced by the product type, especially for electronic equipments that are linked to professional-buyers functional behaviours. That shows that it was consistent to control this variable in our final sample.

Figure 5 – Clusters division per product

#### 4.4. Multiple régression models

Once extracted the principal components for the decision determinants, influencers and values variables, we decided to create a dataset for each country containing the components scores associated to every single young consumer. As a result, we obtained a classical matrix filed with continuous variables (the 8 components) on which we decide to apply a classical statistical model, the multiple regression models. We aimed at locating the possible linear relation between our target variables (decision determinants) and the explanatory variables (influencers and values).

According to our research hypothesis, we fit 3 different regression models - for the 3 determinants obtained by means of principal components- and we repeated this process for every country involved in the project. For sake of simplicity, we summarised the results in the 3 tables below, that differ only for the target variable:

Table 7 – Results from regression analyses

The reader can simply and quickly observe the presence of many empty cells, in other words the obtained regression models do not reveal a stable and robust relation between the independent and the explanatory variables among the different countries.

In more details, the only country that seems to present a quite stable relation between the variables is Italy. In particular, the affective determinant is influenced by fashion, experienced people and conformism components, confirming the other applied analysis (cluster analysis). Italian young consumer confirm to be “fashion victims”, revealing a probable conditioning power of advertising and celebrities on their emotional aspects regarding consumption behaviours. But they are also faithful to the Italian typical traditional values of group and family.

For the second component (functional), we find significant relations again for Italy that selects the same significant variables (fashion, experienced people and conformism), presenting just an exchange in the  $\beta$ 's values between the 2 first listed variables. The conclusion seems to be reasonable: even if the fashion element is always present in Italian young consumer minds, more attention is given to family and experienced people when the functional elements (in particular convenience and quality) need to be evaluated.

Finally the economical determinant obtains some explanation only in Spain, where values of conformism (i.e. mainly power and group) and individualism (i.e. mainly pleasure and autonomy) seem to drive Spanish young consumer decisions, when they evaluate the prices of goods.

We believe that the absence of consistent links among the other countries probably represents an even more important result. If we can think of a possible model of consumption for Italy, the other countries (France, Germany, Spain) seem to develop completely unstructured behavioural dynamics. The applied model do not reveal some real points of reference for those young consumers, probably because the consumption decisions are driven from a more complex combination of factors not included in our “traditional” consumer behaviour model. This conclusion constitutes a very relevant question for future research.

#### 4.5. Relative impacts of country and product type on young consumer patterns

We ran decision trees for every cluster to test if the influence of the country was stronger than the impact of the product type, the gender and the age. For four clusters, **the influence of the country was significantly higher**. Only the cluster of professional buyers was largely affected by the product type (electronic equipments). In the figure below, we display two examples of decision trees, for the “fashion victims” and “professional buyers” segments. This result suggest that the national differences could be lighter for some typical types of products such as electronic equipments : mobile phones, lap tops etc.

Figure 6 – Decision trees for 2 clusters

#### **Conclusion : transversal groups of European young consumers?**

The main hypothesis of our research is then clearly rejected. Some major differences still exist between young French, German, Italian and Spanish consuming decision patterns. It seems that recent trends of globalisation

and European integration fully described in the introduction of this paper did not produce such a strong homogenisation of the national young people decision styles, as we could have expected. The impact of the nationality on the consuming decision styles is still stronger than the influence of gender, age class and even purchased product category.

Globally, the purchasing decision model that we used in the experiment does not seem to fit very well with the young European decision patterns. It means that probably a more “experiential” approach could be consistent to better understand the dynamics of this new generation consumption process.

However, our results suggest that some similar decision styles exist in some different European countries. Actually, between the two extreme conceptions of homogeneity on one side and national identity on the other side, there be an intermediate vision of the market of young European people: as proposed by Paitra (1993), some “**transversal groups of consumers**” whose purchasing decision styles are quite similar across different countries of the Old Continent.

The second conclusion of this paper is the consistency of a European marketing research “platform” dedicated to studies on cross-cultural consumer behaviours. The issue of convergence of the European consuming behaviours is definitely a key question both for researchers and of course practitioners. From a methodological point of view, Internet seems to be accurate medium, in order to disseminate cross-cultural surveys.

This paper is the first step of an emerging research program. The next study will try to improve the overall process that had obviously some limitations. First of all, because of some too informal instructions given to the participants before the data collection stage, the characteristics of the 4 national samples appeared to be quite different. So we had to randomly extract a comparable sub-sample from the dataset and reduce consequently the number of exploitable observations to 300. Because it was a first attempt, we decided to start with quite a general topic (consuming decision patterns) and this could be considered as a weakness from some academic points of view. On the basis of our first experience and results, we have decided to investigate a more specialised subject for the next season.

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Figure 1- Model of young Europeans consuming decision patterns

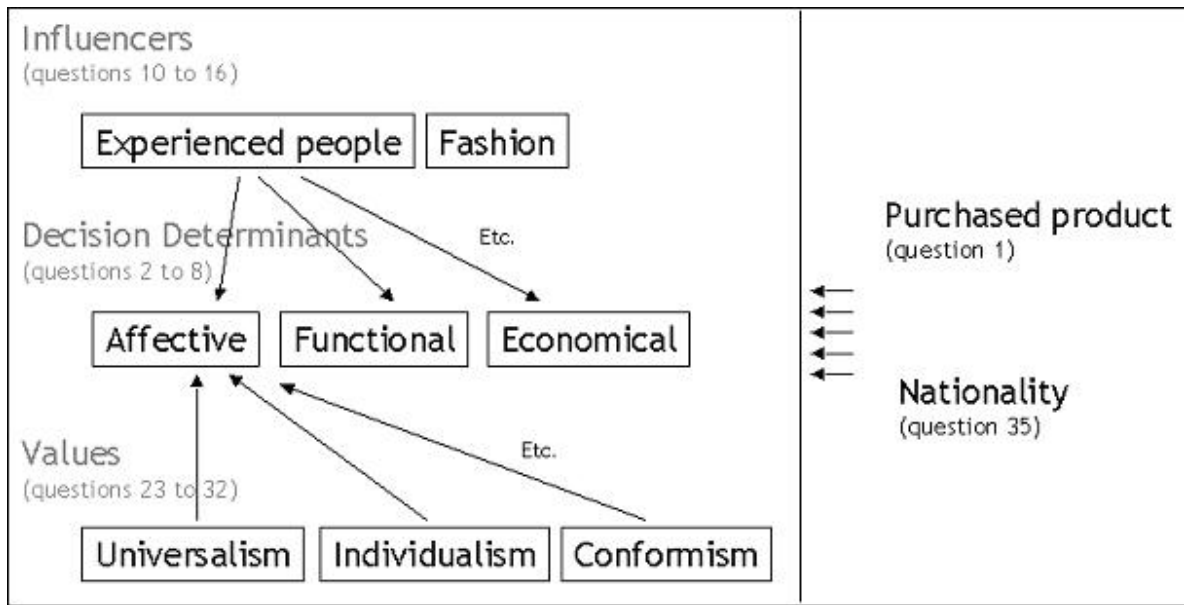


Figure 2 – One way analyses for determinants, influencers and values

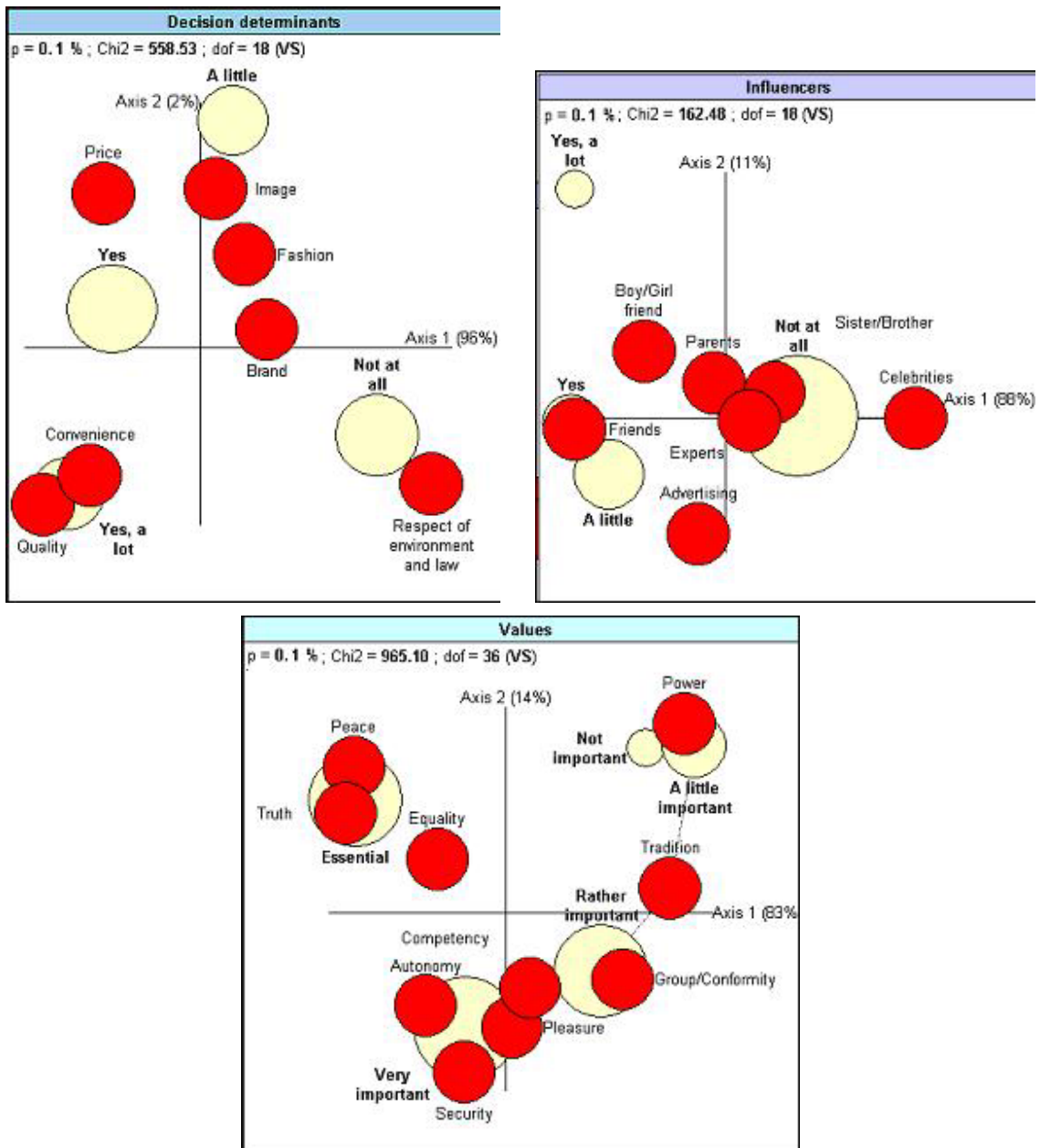


Figure 3 – Clusters division per country

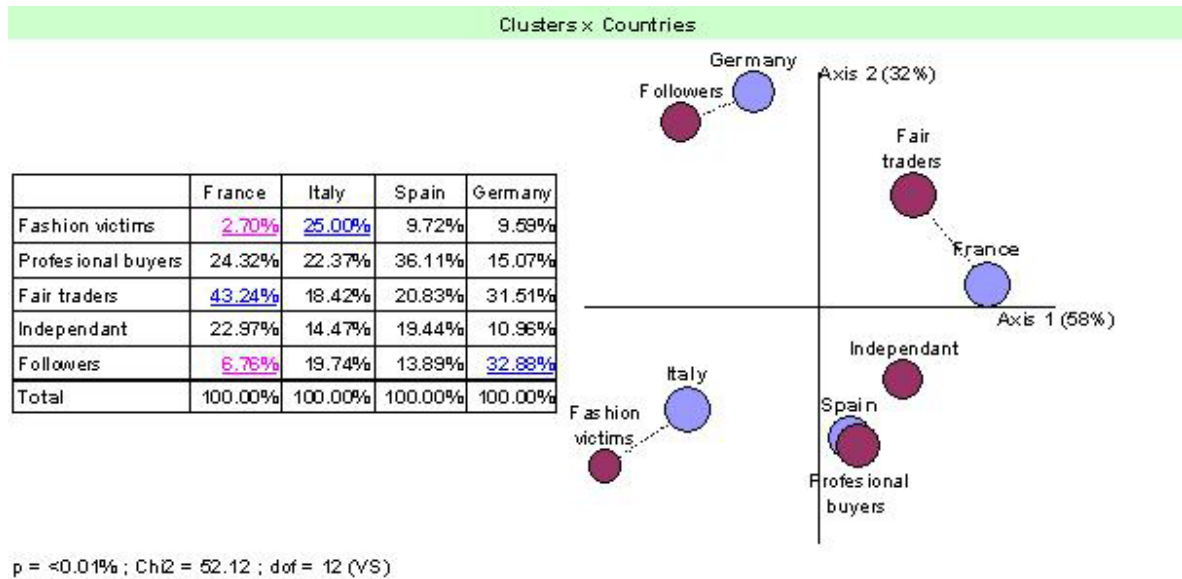


Figure 4 – Position of countries on the aggregate dimensions of the model

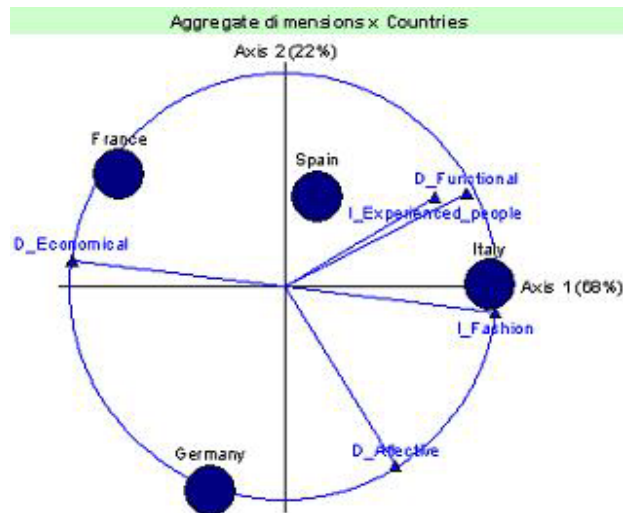


Figure 5 – Clusters division per product

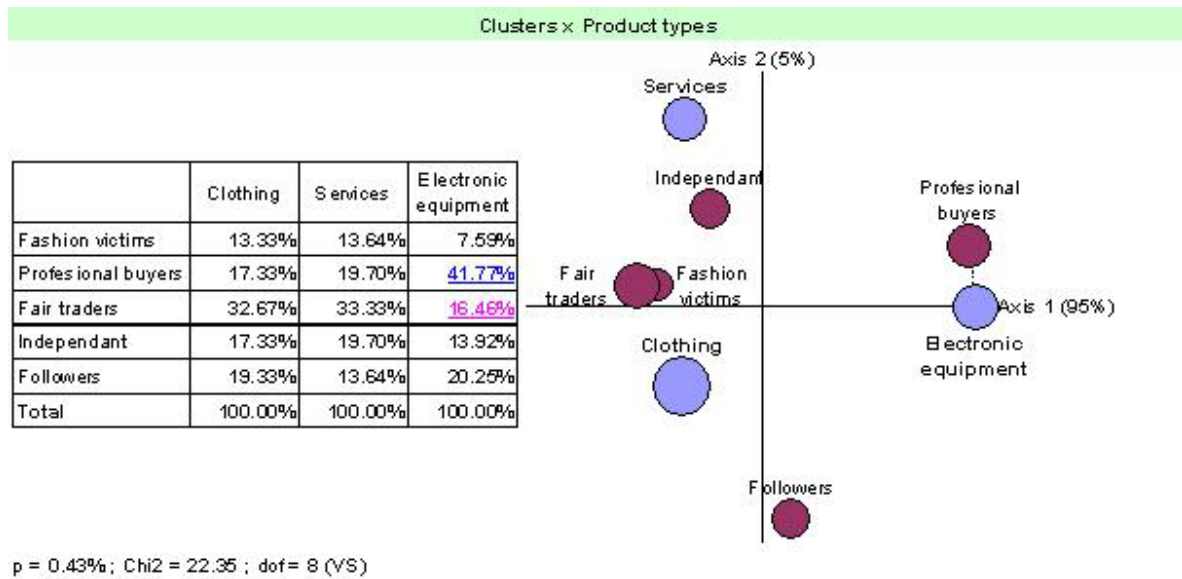


Figure 6 – Decision trees for 2 clusters

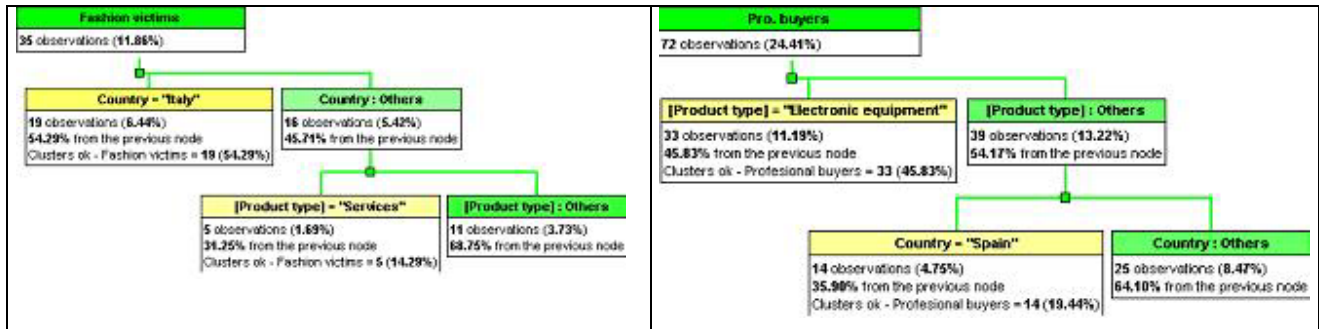


Table 1 – Description of Kahle’s Euroconsumers’ clusters

	Power distance	Uncertainty avoidance	Individualism	Masculinity	Marketing implications
CLUSTER 1 Austria, <b>Germany</b> , Switzerland, UK, <b>Italy</b>	Small	Medium	Medium-High	High	Preference for “high-performance” products, use “successful-achiever” theme in advertising, desire for novelty, variety and pleasure, fairly risk-averse market.
CLUSTER 2 Belgium, <b>France</b> , Greece, Portugal, <b>Spain</b>	Medium	Strong	Varied	Low-medium	Appeal to consumer’s status and power position, reduce perceived risk in product purchase and use, emphasize product functionality.
CLUSTER 3 Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Netherlands	Small	Low	High	Low	Relatively weak resistance to new products, strong consumer desire for novelty and variety, high consumer regard for “environmentally friendly” marketers and socially conscious firms.

Table 2 – Final composition of the studied sample

Gender	Nb	%	Age group	Nb	%	Product type	Nb	%
Boys	137	46%	18-20	40	14%	Clothing	150	51%
Girls	158	54%	21-23	160	54%	Electronics	79	27%
			24-30	95	32%	Services	66	22%

Table 3 – Results of the Principal Components Analysis for decision determinants

Decision Determinants	DED1	DED2	DED3
Fashion	0.848		
Image	0.825		
Brand	0.434	0.669	
Quality		0.637	
Convenience		0.708	
Respect for the environment		0.424	
Price			0.973

=> We get 60% of variance with 3 components : OK

\* DED 1 : Fashion Image & a little bit of Brand =

« **Affective aspects** »

\* DED 2 : Quality, Convenience and also Brand =

« **Functional aspects** »

\* DED 3 : Price = « **Economical aspects** »



Table 4 – Results of the Principal Components Analysis for influencers

Influencers	INF1	INF2
Celebrity	0.825	
Advertising	0.740	
Friends	0.502	
Brother/Sister		0.662
External expert		0.655
Parents		0.600
Boyfriend/Girlfriend		0.468

=> We get 55% of variance with 2 components : quite OK

\* INF 1 : Celebrity, Advertising and Friends = « **Fashion** »

\* INF 2 : Brother/Sister, Parents, External expert =  
« **Experienced people** »

Table 5 – Results of the Principal Components Analysis for values

Values	VAL1	VAL2	VAL3
Equality	0.837		
Peace	0.770		
Truth	0.702		
Power		0.695	
Competency		0.620	
Group		0.526	
Tradition		0.442	
Pleasure			0.821
Autonomy			0.652
Security			0.529

=> We get 56% of the variance with 3 components :  
not so bad with 10 variables...

VAL 1 : Equality, Peace and Truth = « **Universalism** »

VAL 2 : Power, Competence, and Tradition = «  
**Conformism** »

VAL 3 : Pleasure, Autonomy and Security =  
« **Individualism** »

Table 6 – Results from the cluster analysis

Clusters			Axis coordinates for the 5 clusters					
	Nb	% cit.	Fashion victims	Professional buyers	Fair traders	Independant	Followers	
Fashion victims	35	11.9%						
Professional buyers	72	24.4%						
Fair traders	84	28.5%						
Independant	50	16.9%						
Followers	54	18.3%						
<b>Total</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>100.0%</b>						
D_Affective			<b>1.04</b>	<b>-0.34</b>	<b>-0.40</b>	<b>-0.29</b>	<b>0.68</b>	
D_Functional			<b>0.38</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>-0.59</b>	<b>-0.50</b>	<b>0.11</b>	
D_Economical			<b>-0.02</b>	<b>0.15</b>	<b>0.79</b>	<b>-1.36</b>	<b>-0.15</b>	
I_Fashion			<b>1.90</b>	<b>-0.28</b>	<b>-0.29</b>	<b>-0.24</b>	<b>-0.17</b>	
I_ Experienced_people			<b>0.07</b>	<b>1.02</b>	<b>-0.56</b>	<b>-0.51</b>	<b>-0.06</b>	
V_Universalism			<b>0.02</b>	<b>0.50</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>0.19</b>	<b>-1.16</b>	
V_Individualism			<b>0.48</b>	<b>-0.12</b>	<b>0.03</b>	<b>-0.10</b>	<b>-0.11</b>	
V_Conformism			<b>0.61</b>	<b>-0.07</b>	<b>-0.26</b>	<b>-0.54</b>	<b>0.60</b>	

Clusters / D\_Affective p = <0.1% ; F = 31.52 (VS)  
 Clusters / D\_Functional p = <0.1% ; F = 31.93 (VS)  
 Clusters / D\_Economical p = <0.1% ; F = 72.88 (VS)  
 Clusters / I\_Fashion p = <0.1% ; F = 69.52 (VS)  
 Clusters / I\_ Experienced\_people p = <0.1% ; F = 45.79 (VS)  
 Clusters / V\_Universalism p = <0.1% ; F = 34.94 (VS)  
 Clusters / V\_Individualism p = 3.7% ; F = 2.59 (S)  
 Clusters / V\_Conformism p = <0.1% ; F = 15.94 (VS)

Table 7 – Results from regression analyses

**AFFECTIVE DETERMINANT:**

	Fashion	Experienced people	Universalism	Conformism	Individualism
FRANCE					
GERMANY					
ITALY	0.44 (0.1%)	0.22 (4%)		0.2 (3%)	
SPAIN				0.38 (0.1%)	

**FUNCTIONAL DETERMINANT:**

	Fashion	Experienced people	Universalism	Conformism	Individualism
FRANCE	-0.37 (2%)				
GERMANY		0.28 (4%)			
ITALY	0.2 (0.1%)	0.41 (0.1%)		0.19 (4%)	
SPAIN					

**ECONOMICAL DETERMINANT:**

	Fashion	Experienced people	Universalism	Conformism	Individualism
FRANCE					
GERMANY		0.33(1%)			
ITALY					
SPAIN				0.39 (0.1%)	0.37(0.1%)

(The numbers represent the  $\beta$  regression coefficients estimated by the different models, the percentage in the brackets are the levels of significance (p-values) of those coefficients)