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Differentiation of Polish and Ukrainian consumers' attitudes to Russian brands and international brands remaining on the Russian market

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper was identification and empirical assessment of the differentiation of consumers' attitudes in Ukraine and Poland to Russian brands and other brands offered on the Russian market after Russia's aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022.

Design/methodology/approach – The main research methods include a systematic literature review and the authors' own surveys conducted in November 2022. The research sample comprised 950 consumers – 67% of them were Poles, 30% – Ukrainians and 3% from other countries.

Findings – A respondents' country (Poland and Ukraine) does not impact attitudes to brands offered on the Russian market after Russia's invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Moreover, it does not affect and differentiate emotional engagement in the conflict and assistance to war victims. Cluster analysis resulted in identifying two groups on the basis of consumers' declared emotional reactions to the war. The first group was smaller ($N = 353$, 37.2%), referred to as "indifferent consumers", and was characterized by a greater inclination to purchase brands offered in Russia. The other cluster, referred to as "sensitive consumers" ($N = 597$, 62.8%), comprises those engaged in offering assistance to war victims, showing strong emotions in connection with the aggression and military activities and characterized by a clearly negative attitude to Russian and other offered brands and an inclination to boycott these brands.

Research limitations/implications – A short time horizon, the study confined to two countries, difficulties in reaching Ukrainian respondents due to power failures in Ukraine in the period of conducting the survey (November 2022), a non-representative research sample – overrepresentation of people aged 18–25 years.

Practical implications – The research study contributes to the knowledge about consumer brand attitudes and preferences under unique social, economic and market conditions. These conditions were created by Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, as well as the international and global character of the war in Ukraine. The significant implications of the study refer to brand communication policies and companies' CSR-related declarations. A number of consumers' errors were recorded, resulting from wrong brand retrieval, which were rectified at a later stage as a result of international restrictions imposed on Russia, harsh media criticism and social international embargoes imposed on brands offered in Russia. The marketing communication of contemporary global brands should give consideration to the informative function of CSR activities, and the communication process should be continuous. Critical attitudes and an inclination to boycott brands point to the possible consequences faced by inconsistent and ethically doubtful brand policies. This implication is clearly confirmed by the results of the study.

Social implications – The authors also wish to highlight the implications for practice and society. As mentioned earlier, Polish consumers involved in providing aid to victims of the war also expressed their opposition to the war by boycotting Russian products and international brands remaining in Russia. Popularization of the research

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results obtained by the authors can be a form of sensitizing the public to the need for long-term relief, awakening global awareness of the essence and importance of sanctions imposed on Russia, as well as the possibility of expressing opposition through individual purchasing decisions and boycotting brands still present in Russia.
Originality/value – The study allowed for identifying consumers' differentiated brand attitudes in two countries: a country inflicted by war (Ukraine) and a front-line country, strongly supporting Ukraine (Poland). The research contributes to consumer behavior theories and studies of consumer attitudes and preferences from the perspective of international corporations' CSR activities under the unique conditions of war. Also, it contributes to the knowledge of the mechanism of forming attitudes to Russian and international brands offered in Russia among CEE consumers.

Keywords Ethnocentrism, Consumer attitudes, Consumer boycott, War in Ukraine

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

We aimed to identify and assess the differentiation of Ukrainian and Polish consumers' attitudes to Russian and international brands offered on the Russian market after Russia's aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. The work's objective was complex and multidimensional. On the one hand, it involved consumer attitudes and Russia's unprecedented, brutal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine on the other. According to scientific research standards, the article's specific aim requires concretization. In our case, it referred to two substantive, cognitive and methodological aspects. First, it reflects in an effort to empirically identify and evaluate the impact of Russia's aggression on consumers' reactions in two countries, i.e. Ukraine, a country directly affected by war, and Poland, a front-line country. We also aimed to identify and evaluate the impact of war on consumer market preferences with regard to specific international brands. Second, in the context of research limitations, we aimed to identify the attitudes and behaviors of two consumer segments, i.e. Ukrainians living in Ukraine at the time of the study (November 2022) and those living in Poland after February 24, 2022. The significance of this issue underscores the need for extensive comparative research studies on an international scale.

The article consists of four parts. The first one will present a theoretical framework for the title problem, i.e. a selective approach to the category and mechanism of forming consumer attitudes, preferences and behaviors. Companies' decisions impacted consumers' specific attitudes and behaviors reflected in brand boycotts. The article refers to respective brands as Russian Brands (RB) and international brands remaining on the Russian market (BR).

The second part will present the research problem and research methodology: research questions and hypotheses and the characteristics of the analyzed samples. We identified the research problem and specific objectives starting with an analysis of the reasons for boycotting RB in Ukraine in 2005–2022 and its various forms. We based the analysis on the assessment of Ukraine–Russia trade relations, presenting the reasons for Ukrainians' increasing criticism of RB as a result of political tensions between the two countries.

The third and fourth part will present a results analysis and their critical assessment, along with the discussion and identification of research limitations. Moreover, we set directions for further research studies.

2. Theoretical background

Above all, we aimed to explore Ukrainian and Polish consumers' differentiated attitudes to RB and BR after the invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. Consequently, the theoretical framework focused on the category of consumer attitudes and preferences, including ethnocentric attitudes. It relates to the identification of factors that influence the purchase of brands of specific identity and value in accordance with CSR declarations in the context of the war in Ukraine, stressing the significance of consumers' openness to the question of internationalization and reasons for developing ethnocentric attitudes.

The literature defines the term “attitude” in different ways. The particular disciplines of social sciences stress different aspects of this term, its content and character, its designators and factors that influence and condition the relatively permanent or changeable character of people’s inclination to behave in a specific way and to assess other people and things. For example, Fuson (1943) and Scott (1959) adopted this behaviorist approach. Social and behaviorist psychology stresses that an attitude, apart from reflecting a specific opinion about an object, also involves cognitive processes (e.g. Rosenberg, 1962; Fishbein, 1965). Eagly and Chaiken (1998) claim that an attitude is a latent variable and an internal state of the object’s evaluation. The relative permanence of an attitude is reflected in repeatable reactions to events, situations or institutions.

Attitudes express three components, i.e. cognitive (beliefs, views, opinions), emotional (motivational, positive or negative assessments of people, objects and situations) and actions (Cialdini, 2008). Each component is significant as such and performs a key function in the research of consumer brand attitudes, also in the context of the Ukraine war and its global implications.

From the perspective of this article, a significant element of the theoretical framework and the analysis of attitudes is the category of preferences. On the one hand, it expresses putting something above something else (derived from Latin), and on the other hand, it is an attitude toward an object representing the same category (Eagly & Chaiken, 1998; Solomon, 2006; Zaleśkiewicz, 2022). Preferences concretization involves, e.g. preferences related to products, like imported brands, brands from specific regions, and in this study, RB or international brands in Russia after the Ukraine invasion. Personal preferences result from one’s character, experiences, values, the influence of others’ opinions, family, media and sociodemographic factors like gender, age, location, education and financial status (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981; Foxall, Goldsmith, & Brown, 1998; Barney, 2004; Cialdini, 2008; Aronson, 2011). Preference formation also results from specific situations and events (e.g. Pratkanis & Aronson, 2001). Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, combined with a trade embargo imposed on the Russian Federation by the EU and other industrialized nations (Prohorovs, 2022; Lonardo, 2023) resulted in sudden and radical changes in preferences with regard to the two categories of brands analyzed in this article, i.e. RB and BR. We can observe Changes in preferences during the Ukraine war in the gradual shift from Russian and other brands to products from various countries.

Economic literature presents several theoretical and methodological approaches to research on consumer behavior, attitudes and preferences (e.g. Hansen, 1972; Thaler, 1980; Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1994; Garbarski, 2001; Antonides & Raaij, 1999; Smyczek & Sowa, 2005; Światowy, 2006; Falkowski & Tyszka, 2009; Kotler & Keller, 2012; Rudnicki, 2012; Zalega, 2012; Bylok, 2013; Mróz, 2013; Dąbrowska, Bylok, Janoś-Kresło, Kiełczewski, & Ozimek, 2015; Kieżel & Burgiel, 2018; Olejniczuk-Merta & Noga, 2020). Market behaviors reflect specific needs and revealed preferences and how they can be satisfied in the situation of a given level of income and market conditions. Various theoretical models describe consumer behaviors and their types, created by a given structure of needs and revealed preferences (e.g. Nicosia, 1966; Engel, Kollat, & Blackwell, 1968; Howard & Shet, 1969; Mullen & Jonson, 1990; East, Sing, Wright, & Vanhuele, 2017).

Two main groups of endogenous factors affect consumer behavior: (1) psychological (motives, personality, perception of the world, learning processes, attitudes and their permanence or changeability and the mechanism and conditions of transforming attitudes into behaviors and (2) sociodemographic (gender, age, education, living standards and income, lifestyle and the quality of life) (Foxall *et al.*, 1998; Garbarski, 2001; Kotler, Armstrong, Saundres, & Wong, 2003; Smyczek & Sowa, 2005; Falkowski & Tyszka, 2009; Kwak, Forman, & Zinkhan, 2009; Castells, 2009; East *et al.*, 2017; Bartosik-Purgat, 2017; Mazurek-Łopacińska, 2021; Kotler, Kartajaya, & Setiawan, 2021).

Consumer attitudes and behaviors are closely interrelated. Although correlation analyses bring various results, there is no doubt that in a given situation, behavior results from attitude and that attitudes determine specific decisions and behaviors. However, needs do not always directly affect behaviors and buying decisions. As G. Katona claims, needs result from negative attitudes (Katona, 1960), latent attitudes (Maison, 2004), social proof (Sanak-Kosmowska, 2021) or the occurrence of other external factors. Russia's aggression on Ukraine is an example of a significant factor influencing consumer attitudes.

With regard to external factors affecting market behavior (significant in the context of this article for assessing attitudes to foreign brands), we should give attention to consumers' ethnocentrism. Sumner offers a broad definition of ethnocentrism, treating it as a belief that a given group is of central importance and a reference point for hierarchizing and evaluating other groups (Sumner, 1995). My apologies for the oversight. Various theories, including reference group theory (Merton & Rossi, 1968), explain the concept of ethnocentrism in the context of a collective sense of self-worth (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992) and social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

In the area of marketing, scholars refer to attributing a greater value to a given country's brands and giving preference to domestic brands as consumer ethnocentrism (Shimp & Sharma (1987, pp. 280–289). It manifests itself in adopting two approaches, i.e. a material approach combined with a belief that domestic products represent a higher quality and an ethical approach in which the purchase of foreign brands is disapproved. Concerning the latter approach, Sharma, Shimp, and Shin (1995) stressed the lack of patriotism, regarding the purchase of foreign goods as harmful to the domestic economy, domestic labor markets and the quality of life and inhabitants' living standards. Scholars stress (e.g. Shimp & Sharma, 1987; Szromnik & Wolanin-Jarosz, 2014; Bryła & Domański, 2022) that consumer ethnocentrism relates to a sense of national identity, patriotism and concern about a given country's economic development, and it reflects the belief that imported products pose a threat to the domestic labor market, economic growth, general prosperity and living standards (Reshetnikova, 2023).

In our research, we considered consumer ethnocentrism in the context of the war in Ukraine and brand internationalization barriers.

Xenocentrism is the contradiction of consumer patriotism. It reflects different preferences with regard to domestic and foreign products, making the choice of brands dependent on individual systems of values, needs and financial capabilities. Xenocentrism does not prioritize the place of manufacture or the country of origin as the main criteria for a purchase decision. Instead, it considers a wide range of personal, social, economic and political factors in such decisions (Wolanin-Jarosz, 2015; Bryła & Domański, 2022). In this context, a significant role belongs to the full-fledged war that started in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and whose origin goes back to Russia's annexation of Crimea and Donbas pro-Russian separatism in 2014. The research problem, which we will describe in the next part of the article, relates to this very issue, i.e. Ukrainian consumers' attitudes and market behaviors, changes in attitudes and preferences, reflected in different forms of boycotting RB.

Among the factors which influence the forming of ethnocentric attitudes, exogenic factors play an important role. They entail international events and conflicts (Cheldelin, Druckman, & Fast, 2003), including those of the greatest global impact in the 21st century, e.g. Russia's aggression against Ukraine (Astrov *et al.*, 2022; Bida & Ruda, 2022; Gole, Balu, Negescu, & Dima, 2022; Lim *et al.*, 2022; Lonardo, 2023; Markus, 2022; Short, 2022). The aggression originates from the events of 2014, which led to a full-fledged war on February 24, 2022. From the perspective of the analyzed consumer attitudes, these complex and multidimensional events resulted in the boycott of Russian firms and brands by Ukrainian inhabitants. After Russia's aggression, since March 2022, this boycott, reflecting a change in attitudes and preferences, also included consumers in Poland and many other countries of the democratic world. It covered both RB and BR after the invasion and the embargo imposed on the Russian

Federation by the West (Lonardo, 2023). The research problem includes a synthetic description of Ukrainians boycotting RB before Russia's aggression.

3. Research problem

The starting point for defining the research problem was a synthetic analysis of changes in Ukrainian consumers' preferences and attitudes to RB in the 2005–2022 period, which assumed the form of organized social boycotts of products imported from the Russian Federation. We based the analysis on Ukrainian sources, which constitute a good starting point for presenting Ukraine's perspective in the context of the research problem.

The boycott of RB and manufacturers in Ukraine is political in character, unlike in the case of consumer protests in other countries (e.g. Sanak-Kosmowska, 2023). Until 2006, Ukraine maintained close economic relations with Russia. The Russian Federation was Ukraine's main partner in trade exchange. Figures in Table 1 indicate a radical change in the structure and geography of Ukraine's foreign trade, marking Russia's considerably decreasing role in Ukraine's international trade relations. Apart from macroeconomic and political factors, the above figures explicitly confirm a significant shift of hitherto consumer attitudes and preferences in Ukraine towards ethnocentric attitudes. Noteworthy, in the analyzed period, Ukraine's export to the European Union rose by 65.4% and its import by 11.6%, indicating a clearly pro-European political and economic orientation and the process of setting strategic development goals, marking the country's efforts aimed to integrate with the EU and join its political and economic structures (Lukianienko *et al.*, 2013; Lytvynova, Ignatyuk, Knir, & Liubkina, 2022). Granting Ukraine a candidate status on June 23, 2022, confirmed this state of affairs (Association Agreement, 2022; The European Commission, 2022; Reshetnikova, 2023).

Macroeconomic changes in the structure of Ukraine's foreign trade resulted from the events in Ukraine which led to a series of Russian products boycotts. Table 2 presents a synthetic description thereof.

Economic boycotts in Ukraine in 2005–2006 and then in 2008–2009 related to Russia's "gas blackmail" and the imposition of unfavorable terms of sales and transit to EU countries.

From 2013 to 2014, the boycotts of RB and companies grew due to the Euromaidan events and Russia's import blockade of Ukrainian products that began in August 2013. The 2013–2014 Euromaidan demonstrated strong support for Ukraine's efforts aimed to

Table 1. Structure and dynamics of Ukraine's trade exchange in 2013–2021 (USD billions, dynamics %%)

Description	2013	2019	2021	Dynamics 2013–2019 2013 = 100.0	Dynamics 2013–2021 2013 = 100.0
Total export	62.3	50.1	68.1	80.4	109.3
Export to the EU	16.2	20.1	26.8	124.1	165.4
Export to other countries (excluding the EU and the Russian Federation)	31.3	26.7	37.9	85.3	121.1
Export to the Russian Federation	14.8	3.2	3.4	21.6	23.0
Total import	75.8	60.8	72.8	80.2	96.0
Import from the EU	25.9	24.2	28.9	93.4	111.6
Import from other countries (excluding the EU and the Russian Federation)	26.8	29.6	37.8	110.4	141.0
Import from the Russian Federation	23.1	7.0	6.1	30.3	26.4

Note(s): Export and import volumes do not include Ukraine's territories temporarily occupied by Russia since 2014

Source(s): State Statistics Service of Ukraine: Economic statistics/Foreign economic activity https://ukrstat.gov.ua/operativ/menu/menu_u/zed.htm (accessed 11 January 2023)

Years	Boycott name	The reasons for the boycott	Content and tools	Consequences
2005–2006 2008–2009	“Remember gas – don’t buy Russian goods!”	“Gas” war between Ukraine and Russia, gas blackmail of Russia	Spontaneous movement, through the distribution of leaflets, in trade networks with appeals to refuse Russian goods	- reducing the consumption of Russian products - spontaneous, non-centralized spread in society of the idea of separating Ukrainian interests from Russian interests
2013 2014	“Don’t buy Russian!” “Boycott Russian!”	Blockade by Russia of the supply of Ukrainian goods Euromaidan	Boycott of shops and banks of Russian owners. Over the years, the movement has spread to Belarusian goods due to its support for Russia’s policies.	- a sharp drop in the import of goods from Russia to Ukraine (up to 50%) - a several-fold reduction in the profits of Russian banks in Ukraine
2015–2021	Continuation of the boycott	Continuation of the “hybrid” war	The spread of the boycott to the film and TV industry, the entertainment industry	- rejection of Russian films and series - refusal to concerts by Russian artists - Independence from Russian propaganda
2022	Continuation of the boycott	Russia’s military invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022	Boycott of international companies that have not left the Russian market, strengthening of the boycott of Russian goods	- withdrawal of international companies from the Russian market - closure of branches of Russian banks and companies on the territory of Ukraine - a sharp reduction in the import of Russian goods and services

Source(s): Authors’ research based on: Ukrinform (2022), Legal newspaper (2023), Horbulin V. (2017), Ceheda and Shevchuk (2019)

Table 2. Timeframe and description of boycotts of Russian products and services in Ukraine in 2005–2022

integrate with Europe and weaken relations with the Russian Federation (Lukanienko, Chuzhykov, & Woźniak, 2013; Ukrinform, 2022). In August 2013, in response to the Russian blockade of Ukrainian exports to the Russian market, social campaigns began: “Don’t buy Russian” or “Boycott Russian.” The protests assumed the form of flashmobs at selected supermarkets, filling stations and social media campaigns calling for the boycott of Russian banks, filling stations, concerts and products. In March 2014, the campaign changed its character and became directed against the annexation of Crimea and Donbas (Legal Newspaper, 2023).

Therefore, we may refer to the 2015–2021 period as Russia’s “hybrid war” with Ukraine (Horbulin, 2017; Ceheda & Shevchuk, 2019). Consumer boycotts mainly aimed to enhance the negative impact of the aggression on Russia as a country and its inhabitants. Apart from its clear economic effect, the boycott also served informative and educational objectives, encouraging ethnocentric attitudes and fostering consumer patriotism and pro-European orientation among Ukrainians.

According to TNS Internet surveys, conducted in Ukraine from March to April 2014, 52% of Ukrainians declared a "positive" or "rather positive" attitude to the boycott of RB (*More than a third of Ukrainians. . ., 2014*). It indicated changes in Ukrainians' buying attitudes and preferences. According to the survey, 39% of respondents engaged in the protests. Another survey (July–August 2014) showed an increase in boycott supporters from 52% to 57%. The number of respondents actively engaged in the campaign rose from 40% to 46% (*Poll: support for the ATO. . ., 2014*).

According to another TNS survey of March 2015, 58% of Ukrainians were in favor of boycotts and 45% of respondents actively engaged in boycott campaigns (*Survey shows majority of Ukrainians support. . ., 2015*).

The boycott of Russian products received the most support in the western regions of Ukraine (71%) and slightly less support (approx. 60%) in central (Kyiv – 61%) and northern (60%) regions. A strong rejection of Russian goods became a significant element of identity and patriotic (ethnocentric) attitudes among Ukrainian consumers (*Survey shows majority of Ukrainians support. . ., 2015*; Reshetnikova, 2023).

In May 2014, the Ukrainian World Congress based in New York (UWC) demanded a worldwide boycott of Russian goods in response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the annexation of Crimea occupation of Donbas:

> The UWC is calling for a worldwide boycott of goods made in Russia until such time as Russia respects the sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of Ukraine in accordance with the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances (Ukrainian World Congress calls for worldwide boycott of goods made in Russia, 2022).

Regarding the problem framework, it is important to mention that in 2014–2015, people also boycotted the Russian language beyond Ukraine's borders. Posters and postcards featuring a "matryoshka tooth doll" appeared in several EU countries, such as Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Moldova, Georgia, Italy and Israel.

The presented theoretical framework and literature review allowed us to describe the main research goal, i.e. the identification of consumer attitudes to RB and BR after February 24, i.e. after Russian aggression and the beginning of military action in Ukraine. Identifying the main research goal resulted in establishing the following specific objectives:

(1) identifying differences between Polish and Ukrainian consumers' attitudes to RB and BR;

(2) identifying factors influencing consumer attitudes to RB and BR after Russia's military aggression against Ukraine;

(3) identifying factors differentiating consumer attitudes to BR;

(4) identifying the level of readiness to boycott RB and BR.

To achieve the research objectives, we hypothesized:

H1. Ukrainian consumers buy BR more rarely than Polish consumers.

H2. Ukrainian consumers are more likely to boycott BR than Polish consumers.

H3. Individuals who prioritize price in their purchasing decisions are more inclined to buy RB and brands available in Russia.

H4. The greater the interest in corporate social responsibility issues, the worse the consumers' opinions about BR.

H5. Emotional engagement in the conflict and assistance offered to refugees are significant factors that differentiate consumer attitudes to RB and BR.

The research purpose and the research questions formulated above are components of the research gap that we identified. While there are many publications on Russia's attack on Ukraine in 2022 (e.g. Fomenko, 2022; Kaneya, 2022), none of them specifically cover consumer behavior and product origin in purchasing decisions. In articles concerning war's economic consequences, the authors focus primarily on the market valuation of stocks (Aliu, Hašková, & Bajra, 2022; DeWinter-Schmitt, Jones, & Stazinski, 2022). Due to the lack of previous research devoted to the title issue, we referred to previous conflicts and their consequences on consumer behavior when formulating their research hypotheses. Consumer boycotts of products and brands based on their country of origin include the 2012 boycott of Japanese products in China (Sun, Wu, Li, & Frewal, 2020) and the 2003 boycott of French products in the US (Ashenfelter, Ciccarella, & Shatz, 2007). We also used a metric model describing consumer boycotts of foreign products when formulating the research questions (Altintas, Kurtulmusoglu, Kaufmann, Kilic, & Harcar, 2013).

We conducted the research in Poland and Ukraine between November 4 and 23, 2022, using computer-assisted web interviews (CAWI) and Qualtrics software. The research questionnaire consisted of 14 exploratory and 5 demographic questions. Two exploratory questions remained open, while we closed the others, which required respondents to select a preferred answer or assign a weighting. The questionnaire included five types of questions.

(1) Questions verifying the knowledge about RB and BR after the invasion.

(2) Questions related to consumer attitudes to BR after the invasion and inclination to buy them, brand social responsibility issues and the declared level of consumer ethnocentrism.

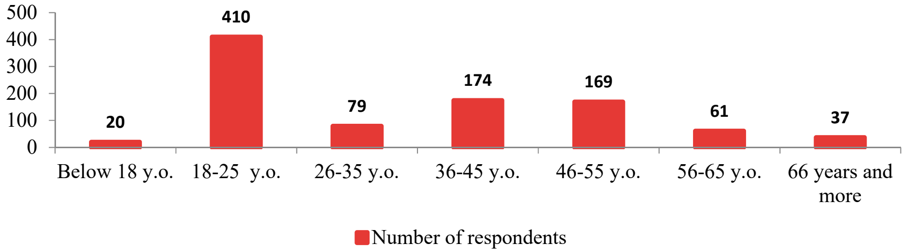
(3) Diagnostic questions related to emotional engagement in the Russia–Ukraine war.

(4) Questions verifying consumers' inclination to boycott BR.

(5) Demographics questions checking gender, age, country of origin and residence.

At first, we showed the survey participants a cover letter explaining the research goal and context along with an anonymity declaration. At this stage, the respondents could also choose the survey language (Polish, English or Ukrainian). The average time to complete the survey was 12 minutes. The representatives of higher education institutions distributed the survey in major academic centers in Poland and Ukraine. The study employed non-random snowball sampling (e.g. Babbie, 2014). Noteworthy, at the time of the survey, the inhabitants of Ukraine were sometimes cut off from media and power supply access. Consequently, collecting responses proved to be a difficult task. We based the results' analysis on Stata and MaxQDA software.

In total, 950 people participated in the study. The analyzed group was diversified in terms of age and nationality. Figure 1 presents the respondents' age structure. People aged 18–25



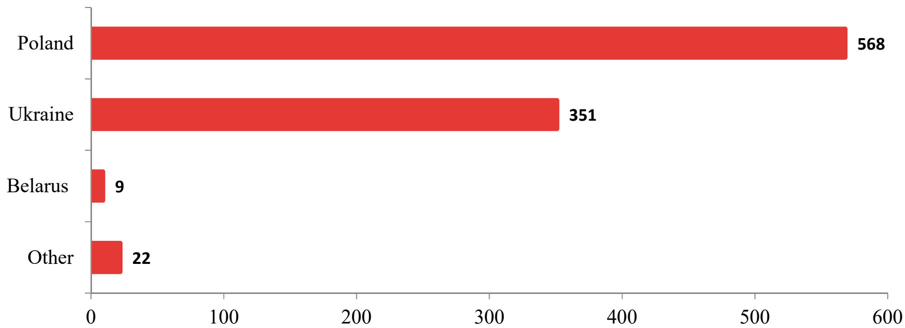
Source(s): Authors' research ($N = 950$)

Figure 1. Surveyed persons by age

(410 respondents, 43%) dominated the sample. The identified overrepresentation of young people resulted from the way in which we recruited them. The analyzed group comprised a total of 612 women (64.4%) and 321 men (33.8%), while 17 participants did not identify their gender (1.8%).

We asked the participants to indicate their country of origin. Figure 2 presents details in this regard. In total, 568 participants declared Polish origin (59.7%) and 351 participants were Ukrainian (37%). The remaining respondents came from such countries as Belarus (9 people), Spain (10 people) and the USA (3 people).

We asked the participants to indicate their country of residence at the time of the survey. In total, 654 respondents indicated Poland (68.8%) and 243 respondents indicated Ukraine (25.6%). The others resided in such countries as Belarus, Spain, France, Germany, the USA, Finland and Italy (5.6%). Table 3 shows a detailed distribution of demographic data including the country of origin.



Source(s): Authors' research ($N = 950$)

Figure 2. Respondents' country of origin

Table 3. Characteristics of respondents from Poland and Ukraine

Description	Poles (N = 568)		Ukrainians (N = 351)		Other nationalities (N = 31)	
Gender:						
- females	353	62.15%	244	69.52%	15	48.39%
- males	204	35.92%	103	29.34%	14	45.16%
- no identification	11	1.94%	4	1.14%	2	6.45%
Age:						
- below 18	6	1.06%	12	3.42%	2	6.45%
- 18–25	242	42.61%	144	41.03%	34	109.68%
- 26–35	47	8.27%	32	9.12%	0	0.00%
- 36–45	91	16.02%	81	23.08%	2	6.45%
- 46–55	121	21.30%	46	13.11%	2	6.45%
- 56–65	36	6.34%	24	6.84%	1	3.23%
- 66 and older	25	4.40%	12	3.42%	0	0.00%
Country of residence:						
- Poland	563	99.12%	70	19.94%	21	67.74%
- Ukraine	1	0.18%	240	68.38%	2	6.45%
- Belarus	0	0.00%	1	0.28%	1	3.23%
- Other countries	4	0.70%	40	11.40%	9	29.03%

Source(s): Authors' research (N = 919)

4. Findings

We subjected the obtained results to qualitative and quantitative analysis. Consequently, we could achieve the research goals and verify the hypotheses. The conducted analysis focused on two key areas:

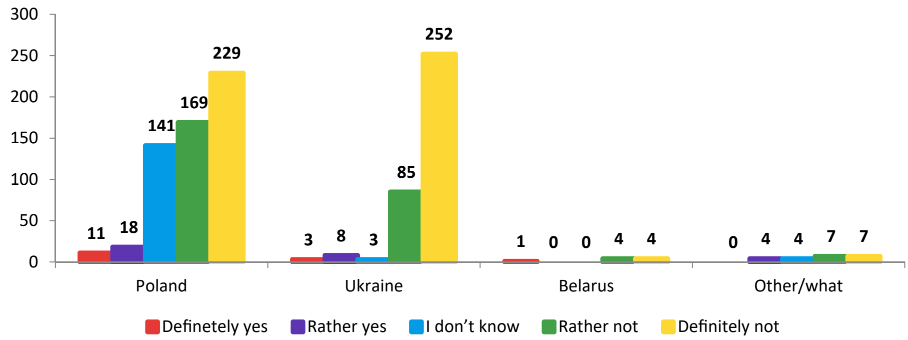
(1) Consumer attitudes to RB and BR;

(2) The identification of variables significantly differentiating attitudes and preferences.

4.1 Consumer attitudes to RB and BR

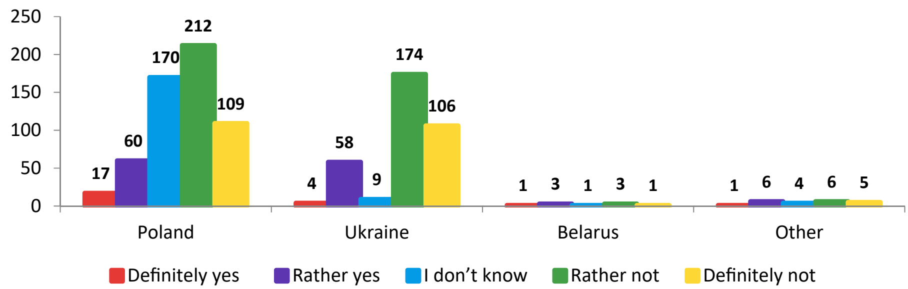
4.1.1 Differences between Polish and Ukrainian consumers' attitudes to RB and BR. Respondents from both Poland and Ukraine declared avoiding the purchases of RB and BR. Most Poles (40%) and Ukrainians (71%) strongly opposed the idea of buying Russian products. The difference in the distribution of answers "I do not have an opinion" is particularly interesting. In total, 25% of Poles and only 0.08% of Ukrainians chose this answer. It correlates significantly with the previously discussed consumer boycotts in Ukraine after 2005. Figure 3 presents a detailed results distribution.

Regarding BR, the most frequent answer was "rather not" (indicated by 37% of Poles – 212 respondents) and 50% of Ukrainians (174 respondents). The qualitative data analysis points to differences in the frequency of "I do not know" answers – 30% of Poles and only 3% of Ukrainians. Similarly, Poles much more frequently indicate the lack of knowledge about BR as a buying decision factor (42% of Poles vs 15% of Ukrainians). Figure 4 shows a detailed results distribution.



Source(s): Authors' research ($N = 950$)

Figure 3. Inclination to buy Russian brands after the invasion of Ukraine



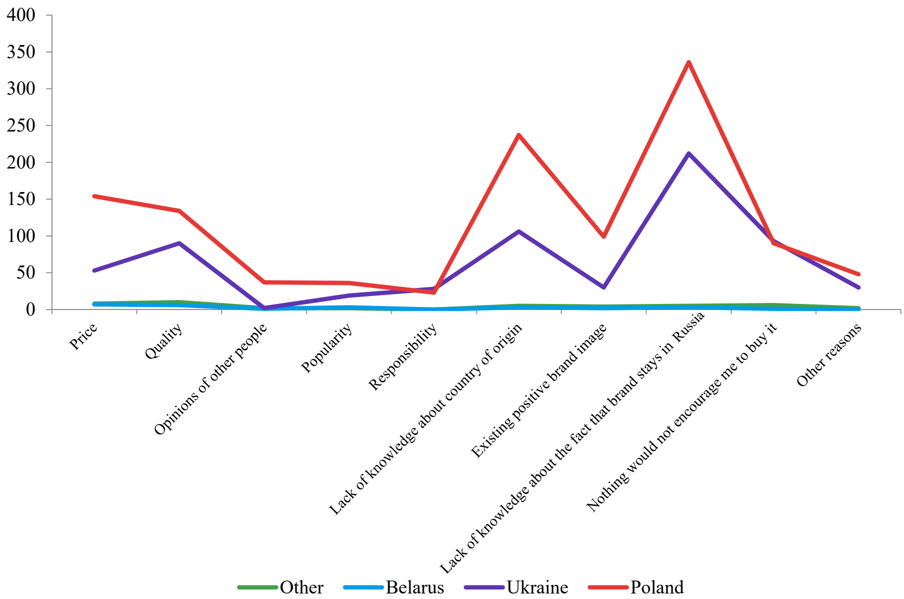
Source(s): Authors' research ($N = 950$)

Figure 4. Inclination to buy brands remaining in Russia after the invasion of Ukraine

To verify H1 (Ukrainians buy BR more rarely than Poles), we checked a statistical correlation between respondents' country of origin and their inclination to buy BR. We found Spearman's rank correlation coefficient to be statistically insignificant (r = 0.127). Regardless of the country of origin, respondents declared avoiding the purchase of BR. Thus, we rejected H1.

Moreover, we also analyzed the reasons for buying BR (Figure 5). Both Poles and Ukrainians indicated their lack of knowledge about brand strategies, marking "lack of knowledge about remaining in Russia" in answer to a multiple-choice question (Poland – 336, Ukraine – 212) or "lack of knowledge about the brand's origin" (Poland – 237, Ukraine – 106). Product prices affect more Poles than Ukrainians (27.11%). Simultaneously, both nationalities pay attention to quality (Poles – 23.59%, Ukrainians – 15.09%). The above answers distribution refers to all age groups except respondents aged 46–55 who most frequently declared quality (29) as the reason for the purchase of BR, apart from the lack of knowledge about the country of origin (52). Respondents indicating the price as the most significant buying decision factor were less inclined to buy BR than respondents indicating other reasons for buying decisions (Spearman's rank correlation r = 0.134). Consequently, we rejected H3.

We also verified the knowledge about BR after the invasion. We asked respondents to recall the brands about which they knew that they were still available on the Russian market. Noteworthy, it was an open question and an answer was not obligatory. In total, 48.4% of respondents answered this question. They mostly indicated brands that remained and received much coverage in the Polish and Ukrainian media (Sanak-Kosmowska, 2023), i.e. Leroy Merlin, Auchan and Decathlon. Moreover, respondents indicated other brands, that appeared on the 2022 Yale List of Shame (Yale School of Management, 2022), including Lacoste, Turkish Airlines, Emirates, Calzedonia and others. Noteworthy, some respondents indicated brands that decided to leave Russia, e.g. LPP, Burger King and McDonald's. The erroneous indications also concerned Danone and Nestle. Figure 6 presents word clouds.



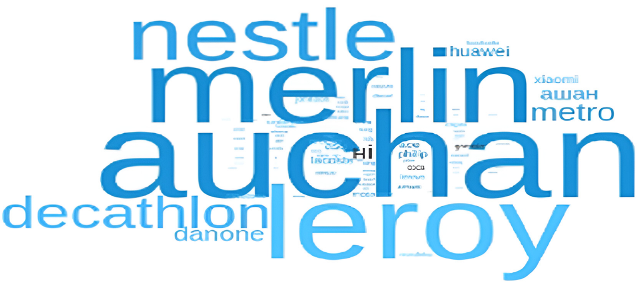
Source(s): Authors' research (N = 950)

Figure 5.
Reasons for decisions to buy brands remaining in Russia

Being aware of the availability of RB both in Poland and Ukraine, we decided to check respondents' knowledge about this issue (Figure 7). We adopted a similar research procedure to the one used for BR. The number of responses was much smaller than in the case of international brands (26.3% of responses). Moreover, we also asked respondents to comment on their inclination to buy brands of Russian origin. Merely 45 out of the total number of respondents (4.7%) – including 29 Poles (5.1%) – declared the purchase of Russian products after the invasion. One of the reasons for such decisions was the lack of knowledge about the country of origin (492 indications, 48%). Meanwhile, 130 respondents indicated price (13.7%, including 103 Poles).

4.1.2 Level of readiness to boycott RB and international BR in Russia. Analyzing the attitudes to BR, we also decided to measure respondents' inclination to boycott them. Sweetin, Knowles, Summey, and McQueen (2013) explored consumers' inclination to "punish" corporate brands for their lack of social responsibility and concluded that consumers do show such an inclination. Table 4 presents the distribution of answers related to product boycotts and willingness to punish BR.

We based the research goals and hypotheses on the assumption that Ukrainian respondents would be more inclined to boycott BR than Poles. This view resulted from the boycott of RB in Ukraine as early as 2005 (previously discussed in the section Research Problem. Contrary to expectations, we found no correlation between the country of origin and inclination to boycott BR (Spearman's test, $r = 0.072$). Poles were inclined to boycott BR to the same degree as Ukrainians. Therefore, we rejected H2. Noteworthy, we recorded the lowest average value (3.69)



Source(s): Authors' research

Figure 6. Word cloud representing respondents' answers to the question: "Which brands remained in Russia after the invasion of Ukraine?"

Source(s): Authors' research

Figure 7. Word cloud of respondents' answers to the question: "What Russian brands remained in your country after the invasion?"

Description	Min	Max	Mean	Standard_ Deviation	Variance
I believe that brands remaining in Russia should be boycotted by consumers	1.00	5.00	4.06	1.16	1.34
Deciding not to make a purchase, I would like to express my anger aroused by brands remaining in Russia	1.00	5.00	4.09	1.20	1.45
Participating in the boycott of Russian brands, I express my opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine	1.00	5.00	4.33	1.14	1.30
I would like to be able to punish international brands remaining in Russia	1.00	5.00	3.84	1.25	1.57
Participating in the boycott of international brands still available in Russia, I express my opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine	1.00	5.00	4.18	1.13	1.29
I would feel guilty benefitting from the offerings of international brands still available in Russia	1.00	5.00	3.69	1.28	1.65
I would feel guilty benefitting from the offerings of Russian brands	1.00	5.00	4.10	1.22	1.50

Source(s): Authors' research ($N = 950$)

Table 4. Respondents' inclination to boycott Russian brands and brands remaining in Russia after the invasion of Ukraine

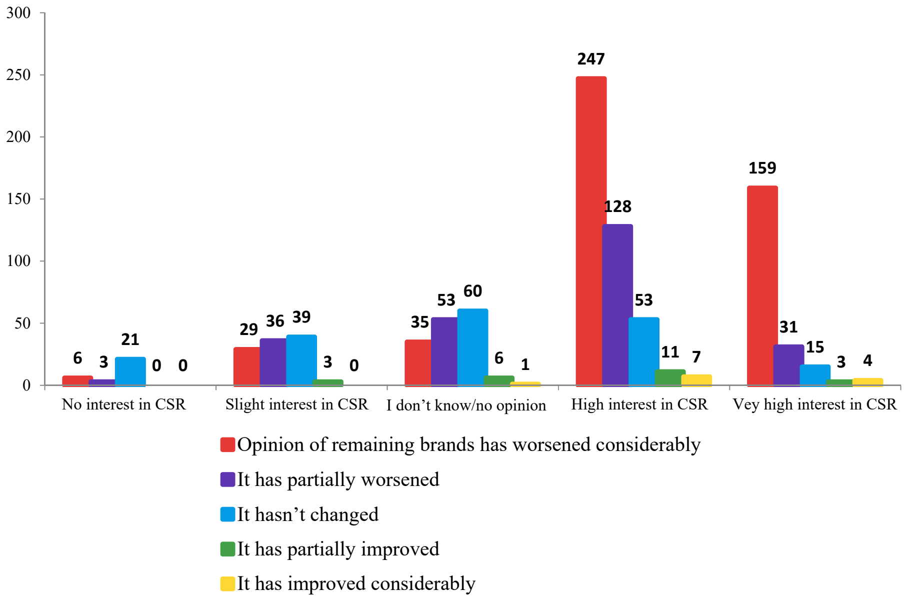
in the case of the phrase related to respondents' own self, i.e. "I would feel guilty benefitting from BR." Meanwhile, we recorded the highest average value (4.33) for the statement "Participating in the boycott of RB, I express my opposition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine."

4.2 Consumers' sensitivity to corporate social responsibility and engagement in offering assistance to war victims as a factor differentiating consumers' preferences and attitudes to RB and BR

4.2.1 Identifying factors differentiating consumer attitudes to BR. Authors assume that one of the significant factors that differentiate consumers' attitudes to RB and BR as well as their inclination to participate in boycotts is the significance attributed to corporate social responsibility. Moreover, the authors also assume that people who support CSR are more likely to express critical comments on RB and BR than those who do not attribute much importance to CSR. To verify research hypothesis H4, we employed Spearman's ranks test for nonparametric variables. The obtained correlation was statistically significant, and its value was negative ($R = -0.443$). Therefore, we could assume a moderate correlation between the level of interest in CSR issues and consumers' attitudes to BR (Figure 8).

Moreover, we assumed that consumers' personal emotional engagement in the conflict and willingness to offer assistance to refugees had a decisive impact on their attitude toward RB and BR as well as on their inclination to boycott them. The study explored emotional engagement based on five sub-scales referring to primary emotions proposed by Plutchik (2001). These were ambivalent emotions aroused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, i.e. surprise and anticipation, and negative emotions, i.e. grief, fear and anger. We originally assumed that respondents' nationality would have a major impact on the intensity of emotions. Therefore, our analysis covered only those respondents who declared Polish and Ukrainian nationality. However, we found the analyzed correlation to be statistically insignificant as Polish and Ukrainian emotions were similar. Table 5 presents a detailed distribution of answers in Table 5.

To find out what other variables (apart from the country of origin) affect respondents' emotional engagement in the conflict, we conducted cluster analysis. We employed K-means clustering and selected the final number of clusters according to the method by Caliński and Harabasz (1974), which relies on index values as shown below:



Source(s): Authors' research

Figure 8. Interest in CSR issues declared by respondents vs opinion of remaining brands

Table 5. Polish and Ukrainian respondents' reactions to Russia's aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022

Respondents' emotional reactions to Russia's aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022	Poles (N = 562)			Ukrainians (N = 342)		
	Average	Standard deviation	Variance	Average	Standard deviation	Variance
Grief	8.07	2.46	6.06	8.29	2.68	7.19
Surprise	6.19	3.07	9.42	7.50	3.03	9.17
Fear	7.06	2.90	8.38	7.53	2.90	8.39
Anger	7.73	2.89	8.36	9.38	1.75	13.94
Anticipation (interest)	5.47	2.71	7.36	5.66	3.96	15.71

Source(s): Authors' research (N = 904)

$$CH(K) = \frac{tr(B(C_K))/(K-1)}{tr(W(C_K))/(n-K)}$$

Figure 9 presents the values of Caliński–Harabasz index and the level of explained variance (%). In accordance with the adopted method, we chose the variance of two clusters because of an appropriate clustering coefficient and a satisfactory level of explained variance.

Figures 10 and 11 present the histograms that compare responses representing the identified clusters. The first cluster is smaller (N = 353, 37.2%) and represents "indifferent consumers," while the other one (N = 597, 62.8%) comprises "sensitive consumers."

4.2.2 Identifying factors influencing consumer attitudes to RB and BR after Russia's military action against Ukraine. Table 6 shows the characteristics of the representatives of identified clusters. We obtained these characteristics through post-hoc tests using the Mann–

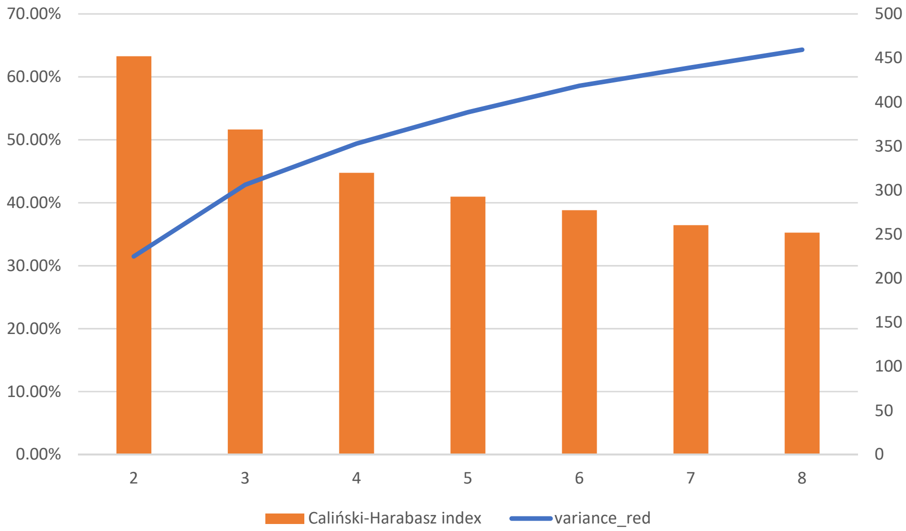


Figure 9. Caliński–Harabasz index and explained variance (%)

Source(s): Authors' research

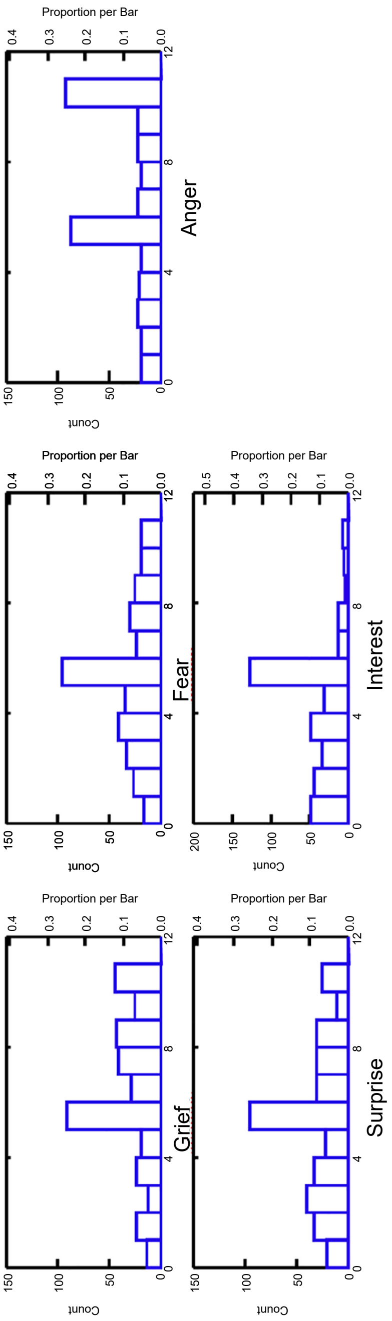
Whitney nonparametric test, focusing on variables with a significant impact on distinguishing the representatives of the clusters ($p < 0.05$). Noteworthy, both the country of origin and country of residence did not significantly differentiate the representatives of the analyzed clusters. Therefore, we confirmed H5.

5. Discussion

The presented theoretical framework and the research problem as well as the obtained results allowed us to draw cognitive and practical conclusions.

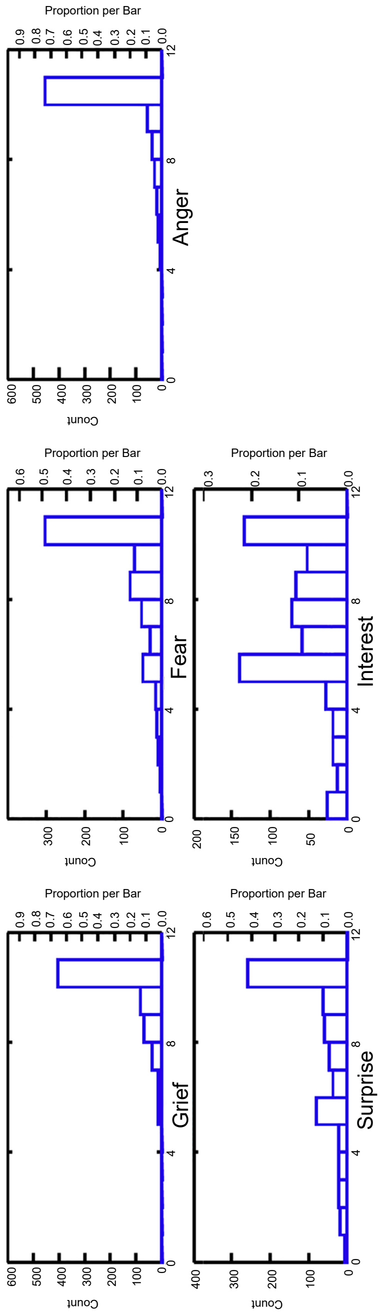
First, the respondents' country of origin (Poland and Ukraine) did not impact their attitudes to RB and BR after the aggression and on consumers' inclination to buy them. Both Poles and Ukrainians expressed their worsening opinion of BR and their intention to stop buying them. The results show that Poles actively engaged in the conflict, not just observing events, but connecting with what was happening across the eastern border and the fate of war victims. The respondents' nationality did not significantly affect their attitudes toward the analyzed brands. This statement directly reflects the strong and enduring support of Ukraine by EU residents through their political, military and financial assistance, along with their approval of EU sanctions against Russia. A survey conducted by Eurobarometer for the European Parliament (October 12–November 7, 2022, $N = 26,443$, 27 member states) points to a 73% support of the EU's pro-Ukrainian initiatives (*EU citizens' support, 2022*).

Second, both Poles and Ukrainians declared their inclination to express their disapproval of RB and BR through product boycotts and a radical change of hitherto preferences and attitudes regarding market offerings. Contrary to our expectations, the respondents' country of origin did not affect their market behavior, and the distribution answers given by Poles and Ukrainians were similar. Importantly, according to respondents' opinions, RB and BR boycotts are a form of expressing their opposition to war and punishing firms for their decision to remain on the market. This conclusion is consistent with the results of social surveys conducted in Ukraine. A survey conducted by Kantar (August 2022, $N = 1,200$)



Source(s): Authors' research

Figure 10.
Histogram illustrating the emotional engagement of respondents assigned to Cluster 1 – "indifferent consumers"



Source(s): Authors' research

Figure 11.
Histogram illustrating the emotional engagement of respondents assigned to Cluster 2 – "sensitive consumers"

Analyzed variable	Cluster 1 – "indifferent consumers" (37.2%, $N = 353$)	Cluster 2 – "sensitive consumers" (62.8%, $N = 597$)
Gender ($p < 0.05$)	A relatively large share of males (164, 46%)	Females are dominant (439, 73%)
Age ($p < 0.05$)	Dominant age – 18–25 (170, 48%)	Cluster is differentiated in terms of age. Dominated by people aged 18–25 (228, 38%) and 36–55 (241, 40%)
Significance attributed to CSR ($p < 0.05$)	Average result 3.425 (maximum result = 5, where 5 indicates the greatest interest)	Average result – 3.874 (maximum = 5, where 5 indicates the greatest interest)
Engagement in assisting war victims ($p < 0.05$)	Average result 3.218 (maximum results = 6, where 6 indicates the greatest interest)	Average result – 3.758 (maximum result = 6, where 6 indicates the greatest interest)
Change of opinion of brands remaining in Russia after February 24, 2022 ($p < 0.05$)	Average result – 2.106 (maximum result = 5, where 1 – considerable worsening, and 5 – improvement)	Average result – 1.666 (maximum result = 5, where 1 – considerable worsening, and 5 – improvement)
Level of consumer ethnocentrism ($p < 0.05$)	Average result in cluster on a scale of ethnocentrism – 12.297 (maximum results – 30, indicating the highest level)	Average result in cluster on a scale of ethnocentrism – 13.845 (maximum result 30, indicating the highest level)
Inclination to boycott brands remaining in Russia ($p < 0.05$)	Average result – 24.264 (maximum results – 35, indicating the highest inclination to boycott Russian brands and remaining brands)	Average result – 30.082 (maximum result – 35, indicating the highest inclination)
Purchases of brands remaining in Russia ($p < 0.05$)	Average results – 3.433 (maximum result = 5, where 1 – definitely yes, and 5 – definitely not)	Average result – 3.845 (maximum result = 5, where 1 – definitely yes, and 5 – definitely not)
Purchases of Russian brands ($p < 0.05$)	Average result – 3.899 (maximum result = 5, where 1 – definitely yes, and 5 – definitely not)	Average result – 4.435 (maximum result = 5, where 1 – definitely yes, and 5 – definitely not)

Source(s): Authors' research

Table 6. Characteristics of clusters

clearly points to Ukrainians' increasing preferences for domestic products and their criticism of BR (Kantar, 2022). Moreover, the results of a survey conducted by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, published on September 20, 2022 (National Democratic Institute, 2022) indicate a significant increase in the role of consumer patriotism in Ukraine and a wide range of its consequences (discussed earlier in the theoretical framework).

Third, the obtained results indicate that respondents' emotional engagement in the Russia-Ukraine war was a factor differentiating consumers. Cluster analysis identified segments of respondents based on their emotional engagement and these segments also showed variations in their stated likelihood to boycott BR and a notable decrease in their willingness to buy them. The cluster analysis yielded several crucial insights. First, the category of "indifferent consumers" was much smaller (37.2%) and dominated by males and younger persons. Older and more experienced respondents were more sensitive. Second, the dominating "sensitive consumers" (62.84%) showed greater awareness of CSR issues and actively engaged in consumer initiatives. Furthermore, they are more inclined to boycott BR and they ranked higher on the scale of consumer ethnocentrism. This group included people who were much less inclined to purchase RB and BR. Third and most importantly, clusters belonging did not depend on the country of origin or residence.

We should also pay attention to a practical conclusion presented in the Discussion, resulting from the qualitative analysis of brands identified by respondents as RB and BR. In particular, we should emphasize the number of false friends. These are brands that respondents mistakenly remember as still existing in the Russian market, even though they have withdrawn. For example, McDonald's, which was not operating in Russia during the survey. However, because of delayed responses to the Russian aggression and the lack of an immediate decision to leave the Russian market, some brands are facing the problem of a negative image created by word of mouth, the response referred to in the literature as "albeit later" (Lim *et al.*, 2022). We may also assume that information overload and information buzz led to respondents' difficulties with retrieving BR after the invasion. Therefore, we recommend that the brands that left the Russian market implement the policy of transparent and consistent communication with the markets.

6. Conclusions

This article aimed to identify and empirically assess the differentiation of Polish and Ukrainian consumers' attitudes to RB and BR after Russia's aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022. This goal has been achieved as a result of theoretical analysis and the authors' research presented in the theoretical part of the work.

The results of the research study indicate that the analyzed respondents – Poles and Ukrainians – had very similar attitudes to the presented groups of products: RB and BR. Moreover, they demonstrated similar inclinations to boycott such brands and declare willingness to stop buying them. Therefore, because of the close Polish–Ukrainian relations, the significant Ukrainian population in Poland before February 24, 2022, and shared cultural similarities, Poles not only observed the conflict but also, in a sense, participated in it. This involvement manifested in their support for war victims, a shift in consumer attitudes toward RB and BR and, notably, their emotional connection to the conflict. The cluster analysis we conducted helped identify two clusters, i.e. "sensitive consumers" (62.8%, $N = 597$) and a smaller group of "indifferent consumers" (37.2%, $N = 353$). These conclusions are consistent with the surveys of all the 27 EU member states, in which 73% of respondents express their solidarity with Ukraine and approve of the EU's support for this country (*EU citizens' support, 2022*).

A significant and interesting result of the research was the role attributed to corporate social responsibility in forming consumer attitudes to RB and BR. The results indicated that the greater the declared interest in CSR, the more critical respondents' opinions of BR (Pajuste & Toniolo, 2022). Delving deeper into this issue, which includes quantitative examinations of brand strategies in specific countries, could present a noteworthy and intriguing avenue for future international research. Future studies, conducted in compliance with methodological rigor, may contribute to research on consumer attitudes and preferences and CSR strategies implemented by global companies (Koźmiński, 1999).

We also wish to highlight the implications for practice and society. As mentioned earlier, Polish consumers involved in providing aid to victims also opposed the war by boycotting RB and BR. Popularization of our research results could sensitize the public to the need for long-term relief, awakening global awareness of the essence and importance of sanctions imposed on Russia and the possibility of expressing opposition through individual purchasing decisions and boycotting brands still present in Russia.

Finally, let us address the research limitations. First, respondents were mostly young people aged 18–25. The use of a non-representative sample might have led to results that differ slightly from what would represent the entire population. Second, the research sample was differentiated in terms of nationalities (Poles – 59.7%, $N = 568$, Ukrainians – 37.0%, $N = 351$) despite our efforts to ensure more equal proportions. This inequality resulted from reasons beyond our control, i.e. difficulties in obtaining responses from Ukrainians due to power shortages and Russia's attacks on Ukraine's critical infrastructure at the time of the survey (November 2022).

Russia's aggression against Ukraine on February 24, 2022, and the full-fledged war that followed is and will be the subject of multidimensional and interdisciplinary research studies (e.g. Astrov *et al.*, 2022; Bida & Ruda, 2022; Gole, 2022; Khudaykulova, Yuanqiong, Khudaykulov, & Obrenovic, 2022; Lim *et al.*, 2022; Lytvynova *et al.*, 2022; Markus, 2022; Prohorovs, 2022; Short, 2022; Lonardo, 2023; Qaisrani, Qazi, & Abbas, 2023). These studies explore the causes and global political, social, cultural and economic consequences of the conflict from the perspective of the presence as well as their future impact on the world's architecture and its particular sectors and areas. In the discussion of the results, we want to lay a special emphasis on this issue. Consequences also refer to the title problem, i.e. radical changes in consumer attitudes and buying preferences not only in a country directly affected by war and a front-line country (Poland), Central European nations and the EU but also on a global scale. The issues we raised provide a platform for future interdisciplinary international research.

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