

BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN THE COUNTRY AND THE FACTORS OF COMPETITIVENESS OF ENTERPRISES

*Vanda Maráková, Anna Wolak-Tuzimek, Marzanna Lament,
Zuzana Tučková*

Abstract

Enterprises desiring to be competitive have to continuously improve and react to the current trends. It is important, therefore, to know consumers' opinions and needs to remain competitive, especially as consumers' behaviour arises from a range of factors and conditions, both macro- and microeconomic. Revenue and the prices of consumer goods, undoubtedly the key determinants that have a direct impact on consumer conduct, decide the market demand, and supply determines the real framework of consumption. Geographical, natural, civilisational, and cultural conditions are among the factors affecting consumers' decisions, influencing consumers' cultural preferences on the one hand and having an impact on consumer behaviour, on the other hand. This paper identifies the factors of enterprise competitiveness in the opinions of Czech, Slovak and Polish consumers. Specialist literature is reviewed, and descriptive statistical methods and exploratory factor analysis (EFA) are applied. The results are analysed on the basis of a survey of a consumer group using STATISTICA 13.0 software. The survey questionnaire relates to an assessment of significance of competitiveness factors used by enterprises. The research carried out can influence the development of theories of business competitiveness, and the results obtained can provide guidance to managers on the selection of key factors of enterprise competitiveness.

Keywords: *competitiveness, enterprises, consumer, country*

JEL Classification: M14, P12

Article history: Received: August 2023; Accepted: December 2023; Published: December 2023

1 INTRODUCTION

Consumer behaviour in the market economy is the basic factor influencing enterprise operations, as this is the level and structure of consumer demand that affect the volumes and ranges of goods produced and services provided.

Consumers wish to satisfy a variety of needs that continue changing in time and motivate certain purchasing behaviours. In addition, the determinants of needs change as well. Consumption conditions for each individual may be different, even though people may have the same socio-demographic-economic characteristics, respond to marketing similarly, function in similar conditions, and have similar value systems.

At present, consumers do not buy products guided solely by their prices, quality, functions or the degree to which they can satisfy their needs. There is an increasingly strong expectation that enterprises will not only offer appropriate products but will also make them while addressing certain principles. Customers appreciate products and enterprises through which they can indirectly – by making a purchase – contribute to value creation for others or to environmental protection.

Consumer opinions in the particular countries may vary greatly. This may be caused by e.g., culture or consumer preferences, the level of national economic development or of market competition. In highly developed countries, with extensive access to a diversity of products and services, consumers' purchases can be guided by the quality and innovativeness of products. Where there is high competitiveness among businesses, consumers may be after good pricing, promotions, and discounts.

Consumer opinions on the significance of competition factors can also be shaped by individual preferences and experiences. What matters to one consumer may not mean the same to another, even within the same country. However, as the global economy develops, a range of brands and products is available in international markets. This may lead to similar consumer preferences, since they have access to similar product options in a variety of markets. What is more, consumer trends and preferences often spread across countries, which may produce similar consumer opinions in various countries. It seems important, therefore, to study consumer opinions from different countries to establish if they have more in common or more differences when they make purchasing decisions.

This paper identifies the factors of enterprise competitiveness in the opinions of consumers from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland. The paper reviews specialist literature and uses the methods of descriptive statistics and exploratory factor analysis (EFA). The results were analysed on the basis of a survey of a consumer group using STATISTICA 13.0 software. The survey questionnaire related to the assessment of the significance of competitiveness factors applied by enterprises. The sample was selected at random. 708 persons were surveyed – 236 respondents from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland each.

The article consists of four principal parts. The first is a review of literature presenting the state of the art concerning the factors of enterprise competitiveness, in particular from the consumers' perspective. The second part discusses the research methodology, and the third the research results. Part four covers the results and compares them to identical or comparable studies.

This study contributes to the development of enterprise competitiveness theory, and the results reveal managerial implications and identify the key factors of competitiveness by enterprises.

2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The purpose of enterprises, especially at the time of globalisation, is to satisfy consumers and maximise shareholder value. Enterprises attempt to gain competitive advantage so that it can be noticed by consumers, which is expected to boost revenue and earn profits. This is corroborated by Mende et al. (2015), Pereira et al. (2020), Zhang et al. (2021), Le et al. (2022), and Pinto et al. (2022), among others. The ability to attain long-term competitive advantage, pre-requisite to a harmonious development in a rapidly changing environment, is particularly valuable. Competitive advantage (always relative) can be seen as a result of an effective use of competitive potential components that allow an enterprise to generate an attractive market offer and effective instruments of competing (Stankiewicz, 2000, p. 79). The choice of factors utilised to achieve competitive advantage is therefore highly important. An enterprise wishing to attain it must offer a product that consumers perceive as supplying a maximum value and more attractive than offered by competitors. Contemporary enterprises try above all to distinguish their ranges from those of their competitors and present a measurable bundle of benefits customers derive from their services or products, which also involves rivalling prices and qualities. Enterprises that desire to maintain a standing competitive position in the market must continue investing, therefore, in innovations and the development of their products and services, or offer distinct price benefits. The competitive advantage of enterprises is founded

on their resources that make up their competitive potential. They are comprised of the following:

1. Human capital – the quality of HR responsible for such areas as marketing, distribution, sales, as well as staff having technical, financial, and managerial competences.
2. Physical resources – fixed assets and IT infrastructure of an enterprise.
3. Financial resources – profits, net assets, profitability of equity, financial liquidity, cash, and accounts receivable.
4. Intangible resources – information, technologies, innovations, company reputation, unique skills, informal links with decision-making centres, patents, licences, corporate culture, product brands, experience, contacts.
5. Organisational resources – decision-making system, the organisation of distribution and logistics network, enterprise size, organisational structure, quality management, links with suppliers and clients, monitoring system.

Based on the elements of enterprise competitive potential, specialist literature is reviewed to identify the factors of enterprise competitiveness from the consumer perspective. The results are included in Table 1.

Table 1 - The factors of enterprise competitiveness from the consumer perspective – a review of specialist literature. Source: the authors' own research

Competitive potential of enterprises	Sources of competitive advantage	Authors
Human capital	Quality of staff	Angelini & Gilli (2022) Buonomo et al. (2022) Herjanto et al. (2022) Shukla & Srivastava (2016)
Physical resources	State-of-the-art technologies	Wang & Li (2022) Andreovski & Ferrier (2019) Handi et al. (2018)
	Research and development	Ključnikov et al. (2022) Nguyen & Malik (2022) Yang & Meng (2021) Monkova et al. (2017)
	Patents and licences	Plečnik et al. (2022) Mohamed & Noorliza (2021) Myagková et al. (2021)
Financial resources	Profit	Pinto et al. (2022) Zhang et al. (2021) Yang et al. (2021) Omopariola (2019)
	Revenue	Le et al. (2022) Mende et al. (2015) Pereira et al. (2020)
	Financial liquidity	Kristóf & Virág (2022) Stavins (2019)
	Profitability	Pinto et al. (2022) Potjanjaruwit (2022) Omopariola (2019)
Intangible resources	Innovations	Wang & Li (2022) Wu (2022) Lament et al. (2020)

		Chen et al. (2021) Xueling et al. (2020)
	Market position	Hudakova et al. (2018)
	Product brands	Pinto et al. (2022) Kim & Hu (2021) Wiktor & Sanak-Kosmowska (2021)
	Reputation and image of enterprise	Rafi-Ul-Shan et al. (2022) Fuentes-Fernández & Gilinsky Jr. (2022) Paulssen & Roulet (2017)
	Activity in international markets	Ginevičius et al. (2021)
	Addressing environment aspects	Cao et al. (2022) Klemke-Pitek & Majchrzak (2022) Sobczak et al. (2022) Yang & Meng (2021) Liao (2016)
	CSR (Corporate Social Responsibility)	Bukowski & Lament (2022) Le (2023) Maráková et al. (2021)
Organisational resources	Enterprise size	Hudakova et al. (2018)
	Management system	Maráková et al. (2021) Wolak-Tuzimek & Luft (2021) Zhang (2019)
	Chains of supply	Ferasso (2022) Sun et al. (2021) Yang et al. (2021)
	Distribution, logistics, marketing	Yu et al. (2022) Pavlenchyk et al. (2021) Petrů (2020)

This review of literature shows a great variety of enterprise competitiveness factors. They should be selected in such a way that an enterprise attains competitive advantage. Factors hard to copy by competition while suited to consumers' opinions and needs are therefore desirable. This is affirmed by the literature, which, beside the traditional factors of competitiveness: employees, e.g., Shukla and Srivastava (2016), management systems and strategies – e.g., Zhang (2019), Wolak-Tuzimek and Luft (2021), customer service – e.g., Yu et al. (2022), marketing tools – e.g., Pavlenchyk et al. (2021), quite broadly understood (product, process, technological) innovations – e.g., Chen et al. (2021), Wang and Li (2022), Wu (2022), also indicates environmental protection - e.g., Cao et al. (2022), Klemke-Pitek and Majchrzak (2022), knowledge management and intellectual property – e.g., Wang and Li (2022), Ključnikov et al. (2022); Myagkova et al. (2021), cooperation in the value chain and shared services – e.g., Sun et al. (2021), Yang et al. (2021), and CSR – e.g., Marakova et al. (2021), Le (2022). The critical literature review confirms that in order to remain competitive, the enterprise must continuously improve, following the current trend. The knowledge of consumers' opinions and needs is essential, therefore, to stay competitive.

Consumer behaviour is not simple to analyse. Consumers, consciously or not, are influenced by factors obstructing or stimulating their conduct. Consumer behaviour arises from a complicated range of factors and conditions, both macro- and microeconomic. Revenue and prices of consumer goods, undoubtedly the key determinants that have a direct impact on consumer conduct, decide the market demand, while supply determines the real framework of consumption. Geographical, natural, civilisational, and cultural conditions, including culture and subculture, seem to be other factors affecting consumers' decisions. The ongoing standardisation of consumption, driven by the development of mass communication, increased social and demographic mobility, as well as the manufacture and propagation of consumer goods of identical or similar characteristics worldwide, makes consumers alike culturally – e.g., Kim et al. (2022), Appiadu et al. (2022), Mehta and Dixit (2016) – on the one hand; on the other hand, geographical, natural, civilisational and cultural conditions produce diverse consumer behaviours – e.g., Asamoah and Chovancová (2016), Szalonka and Sadowa (2018), Chan and Botelho (2010), Leo et al. (2005). The customs and habits of consumers differentiate the structure of consumption. For instance, more of the same product is used in some countries than in others. This is particularly clear in countries of different geographical and natural conditions – e.g., Szalonka and Sadowa (2018). Some differences, though, are present even in neighbouring countries – e.g., Chan and Botelho (2010). The economic position of a country, with a considerable impact on the consumer's financial standing and living standards, must be a major factor differentiating consumer decisions in geographical terms. Economic development and the consequent improvement of the public's revenues have a positive effect on the levels and structure of consumption. A declining economy produces the reverse effects in consumer behaviour.

The variety of factors affecting consumer behaviour makes it hard to anticipate the way a consumer will actually behave in a certain situation. There are a number of interconnections among the factors influencing consumer behaviour. Their interactions make a specific factor dependent on another. As a result, the analysis not of a single, but of several factors feeding back to one another, can produce reliable results concerning consumer behaviour. Therefore, enterprises desiring to remain competitive should know the opinions and needs of consumers, since they change both in time and space. Assuming a variety of results of research into the factors of enterprise competitiveness from the consumer's perspective, they are assumed to vary dependent on geographical location, that is, the country of consumer origin. This leads to the following hypothesis H: country influences the choice of enterprise competitiveness factors.

3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE, METHODOLOGY AND DATA

The determinants of how consumers manage their available resources and satisfy their consumer needs and the conditions of making decisions to buy goods and services continue changing. Therefore, this article identifies factors of business competitiveness in the opinion of consumers from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland. The results obtained may provide practical implications for the business sector.

Purchasing goods and services is an integral part of everyday life, and consumers' purchasing decisions are influenced by a variety of factors. This study assumes that one of the important determinants of these choices is the consumer's country of origin, and therefore formulates research hypothesis H: country influences the choice of enterprise competitiveness factors.

Exploratory factor analysis was used to verify the hypothesis as it offers the possibility of determining a number of latent variables that will sufficiently explain the interrelations among many observable variables. It is aimed at identifying all factors that can in reality be inherent in the correlations of a given system of variables while preserving as much information

as possible contained in the primary variables and then reducing these factors (Marakova et al., 2021, p. 117).

The choice of an optimum number of factors (factor loads) was based on Kaiser’s criterion and Cattell’s scree graph. To improve legibility and arrive at a simple factor structure, the matrix of factor loads was Varimax rotated.

The use of exploratory factor analysis to verify a research hypothesis is due to the possibility of its application to infer the structure of the studied phenomenon, to search for general regularities in the analysed phenomenon. This is particularly important in the study of consumer behavior (reactions) in the market. From an originally large set of variables, as a result of conducting a factor analysis, several main factors are obtained, which determine, for example, the choice of a given product by the consumer.

According to Crawford and Lomas (1980) the use of exploratory factor analysis allows large groups of variables to be reduced to a smaller representative subset, confirming the validity of the research method used.

The Kruskal-Wallis test is another tool serving to verify the research hypothesis. It does not require a range of assumptions. Variable distributions do not have to be close to the normal distribution. The groups are not required to have the same numbers of persons or equal - homogeneous variance. The sole requirements for a Kruskal-Wallis test are as follows:

- The dependent variable should be measured on at least an ordinal scale (a quantitative scale is acceptable as well),
- Observations in groups should be independent from one another, which means an individual in one group should not be part of a group compared.

The research hypothesis is verified based on the results of a survey of 708 individuals – 236 respondents from the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland each.

Correctly completed survey questionnaires were reviewed, which consisted of part one: particulars, the formal characteristics of the respondents, and part two, including some questions on the assessment of significance of competitive factors enterprises use in the consumers’ opinions. The sample was selected at random.

The survey was administered between June and August 2022 via the Google Forms platform.

The characteristics of the research sample are illustrated in Table 2. There were more women among those surveyed (436 respondents, or 61.6% of the total sample). Most men took part in the study in the Czech Republic (102, 43.2% of the sample from that country). As far as age is concerned, most responses were received from those aged 21–25. This group encompassed 189 people and constituted 26.7% of the sample. Most respondents from the Czech Republic and Poland lived in cities with populations from 101,000 to 300,000 (39.8% and 47%, respectively), whereas the Slovakian respondents lived in towns with below 100,000 (36.9%). University educated respondents formed the largest group (43% of the total sample).

Table 2 – The structure of the research sample. Source: the authors’ own research

	Czech Republic	Poland	Slovakia
18-20	7.2	11.4	4.2
21 -25	34.3	21.6	24.2
26 -30	22.0	0.8	17.4
31- 40	23.3	39	22
41 - 50	5.5	13.6	12.3
51 - 60	3.4	8.1	10.6
Over 60	4.2	5.5	9.3
Village	5.1	11.9	30.5

<100	19.9	22.1	36.9
101-300	39.8	47	16.5
301-500	22.5	13.1	0.4
>500	12.7	5.9	15.7
Secondary	28.0	33	2.5
Higher vocational	40.7	17.8	49.2
Higher	31.4	49.2	48.3
Female	56.8	60.2	67.8
Male	43.2	39.8	32.2

In the other part of the survey, the respondents were asked to assign significance to the particular factors of enterprise competitiveness. The responses were recorded along 10-point ordinal scales, with 1 denoting a low and 10 a high significance. Table 3 presents the factors of enterprise competitiveness (observable variables) studied.

Table 3 – Variables forming the database. Source: the authors’ own research

Variable symbol	Name of observable variable
Variables describing the competitive positions of enterprises	
V1	Market share
V2	Financial position
V3	Recognition of enterprise and its products in the market
V4	Customer satisfaction
Variables describing the competitive potential of enterprises	
V5	Financial liquidity of enterprise
V6	Profitability of enterprise
V7	Equity level in enterprise
V8	Customer loyalty
V9	Method of distribution
V10	Integrated IT system
V11	Quality of managerial staff
V12	Creativity of workers
V13	Condition of plant and machinery
V14	Research and development activities
V15	Technical standard of products+
V16	New technology
V17	Creation of strong product brand
V18	Standard of servicing
Variables describing the instruments of enterprise competing	
V19	Quality of product/ service
V20	Quality of servicing
V21	Product brand
V22	Advertising
V23	Public relations
V24	Image of enterprise
V25	Highly qualified staff
V26	Product pricing
V27	Innovativeness of products
V28	Size of product range

V29	Matching of product structure to structure of consumer demand
V30	Implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility

4 RESULTS

An exploratory factor analysis was used to identify factors of business competitiveness in the opinion of consumers from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland, and to verify the research hypothesis. One of the stages of its implementation is the determination of the optimal number of factors, which were established on the following bases:

- Cattell’s scree criterion – a location on a linear graph was found to the right of which characteristic values mildly declined;
- Kaiser’s criterion – only those factors were used whose characteristic values were greater than 1.

By taking advantage of these criteria, eight (for the Czech Republic), seven (for Poland), and six (for Slovakia) factors were identified with characteristic values above 1. The subsequent characteristic values, and thus parts of explicated variance for the particular factors, are in the range <1.04, 9.24> - the Czech Republic; <1.04, 9.56> - Poland; <1.09, 12.41> - Slovakia. These factors explain 70.3%, 63.9%, and 64.09% of the variance of all the 30 variables, respectively.

The characteristic values of the reduced matrix of correlations, which define the variances of the successive factors and their percentage share in the total variance of the entire set, are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. – The results of factor analysis. Source: the authors' own research

Factor	Characteristic value			Percentage of general variance			Accumulated characteristic value			Accumulated percentage		
	C	P	S	C	P	S	C	P	S	C	P	S
F1	9.24	9.56	12.41	30.81	31.88	41.37	9.24	9.56	12.41	30.81	31.88	41.37
F2	3.57	3.15	1.77	11.92	10.51	5.89	12.82	12.72	14.18	42.73	42.39	47.26
F3	1.89	1.76	1.47	6.31	5.85	4.89	14.71	14.47	15.64	49.03	48.25	52.14
F4	1.63	1.31	1.35	5.44	4.38	4.49	16.34	15.79	16.99	54.48	52.63	56.63
F5	1.34	1.18	1.15	4.45	3.94	3.83	17.68	16.97	18.14	58.93	56.56	60.46
F6	1.24	1.17	1.09	4.13	3.89	3.62	18.92	18.14	19.23	63.06	60.45	64.09
F7	1.11	1.04		3.71	3.45		20.03	19.17		66.77	63.90	
F8	1.04			3.48			21.08			70.25		

Table 5a contains the values of factor loads upon Varimax rotation for eight (for the Czech Republic), seven (Poland), and six (for Slovakia) initial factors. The values of factor loads for which the value of correlation coefficient was above 0.6 are highlighted. Adoption of this boundary value helped prevent each factor from being attributed to many variables.

Table 5a – Matrix of factor loads. Source: the authors’ own research

Variable	Factor loads (normalised Varimax)																				
	Czech Republic								Poland							Slovakia					
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F8	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6	F7	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	F6
V1	0.86	0.06	0.02	0.16	-0.01	0.12	0.13	0.11	0.40	0.01	0.59	0.07	0.20	0.22	-0.08	0.04	0.18	0.26	0.14	0.69	0.02
V2	0.79	0.10	0.03	0.16	0.09	0.20	0.19	0.02	0.23	0.06	0.66	0.27	0.06	0.17	0.02	0.39	0.08	0.07	0.16	0.69	0.26
V3	0.70	0.13	0.22	0.03	0.09	0.25	0.24	-0.00	-0.02	0.05	0.32	-0.06	0.09	0.68	0.03	0.59	0.09	0.31	0.05	0.50	-0.01
V4	0.47	0.01	-0.13	-0.03	0.34	0.37	0.14	0.30	0.02	0.23	-0.02	0.02	0.10	0.70	0.20	0.75	0.00	0.18	0.12	0.24	0.09
V5	0.37	0.00	-0.01	0.28	-0.06	0.60	0.03	0.23	0.20	0.02	0.79	0.20	-0.01	0.08	0.13	0.08	0.17	0.15	0.01	0.08	0.73
V6	0.24	-0.08	-0.00	0.34	-0.13	0.64	0.03	0.28	0.16	0.12	0.81	0.25	-0.05	0.05	-0.03	0.25	0.38	0.20	0.10	0.44	0.40
V7	0.32	0.15	0.10	0.37	-0.10	0.60	0.06	-0.09	0.20	0.10	0.67	0.27	-0.08	-0.22	0.19	0.14	0.17	0.17	0.39	0.12	0.66
V8	0.11	0.14	0.07	0.02	0.10	0.75	0.26	-0.01	0.06	0.38	0.13	-0.08	0.19	0.14	0.42	0.54	0.15	0.27	0.32	-0.03	0.07
V9	0.09	0.22	-0.04	-0.03	0.27	0.72	0.29	-0.02	-0.24	0.61	0.08	-0.03	0.31	-0.05	0.06	0.21	-0.07	0.59	0.40	0.01	0.22
V10	0.06	0.13	0.10	0.40	-0.13	0.36	0.42	0.23	0.20	0.06	0.22	0.70	0.10	-0.20	-0.01	0.08	0.14	0.71	0.12	0.17	0.21
V11	0.26	0.18	-0.11	0.16	0.11	0.43	0.58	0.15	0.04	0.14	-0.00	0.01	0.69	0.31	0.05	0.58	0.22	0.36	-0.07	0.13	0.36
V12	0.35	-0.01	0.24	0.37	0.02	0.22	0.51	0.09	0.12	0.06	0.01	0.12	0.80	-0.04	0.15	0.49	0.27	0.54	-0.06	-0.06	0.19
V13	0.20	0.23	0.13	0.07	0.04	0.20	0.77	-0.21	0.19	0.07	0.37	0.72	0.09	-0.06	-0.04	0.43	0.12	0.49	0.13	0.10	0.32
V14	0.17	0.10	-0.08	0.18	0.05	0.07	0.75	0.20	0.21	0.13	0.20	0.84	0.03	-0.00	0.01	0.18	0.15	0.75	0.17	0.21	0.09
V15	0.10	0.09	-0.13	0.56	0.27	0.15	0.54	0.07	0.47	0.13	0.15	0.58	0.04	0.26	0.23	0.41	0.23	0.66	0.23	0.07	-0.01
V16	0.14	0.12	0.00	0.74	0.19	0.12	0.31	0.11	0.49	0.06	0.16	0.57	0.01	0.25	0.20	0.28	0.22	0.69	0.18	0.22	0.07
V17	0.17	0.14	0.12	0.69	0.15	0.20	0.12	-0.07	0.59	0.24	0.29	0.26	0.03	0.16	0.24	0.44	0.49	0.36	0.28	0.15	-0.11
V18	0.11	0.69	-0.09	-0.13	0.25	0.17	0.21	0.04	0.17	0.62	0.11	0.32	-0.05	0.08	0.14	0.72	0.25	0.21	0.23	0.17	0.04
V19	0.16	0.69	0.05	0.04	0.35	0.14	0.10	0.02	0.32	0.60	-0.11	0.14	0.02	0.38	0.19	0.74	0.12	0.11	0.36	0.07	0.08
V20	-0.02	0.71	-0.01	0.37	0.16	0.05	0.03	0.17	0.24	0.70	0.00	0.03	-0.02	0.25	0.18	0.82	0.11	0.21	0.18	0.12	0.14
V21	-0.09	0.77	0.22	0.21	-0.00	0.08	0.05	0.08	0.67	0.22	0.29	0.28	0.03	-0.03	-0.02	0.09	0.65	0.18	0.20	-0.11	0.17
V22	0.18	0.76	0.18	0.11	0.01	-0.04	0.11	0.14	0.40	0.52	0.23	0.12	0.11	-0.11	0.06	-0.04	0.64	0.03	0.17	0.24	0.17
V23	0.09	0.57	0.18	-0.28	0.07	0.12	0.08	0.46	0.67	0.08	0.26	0.37	0.09	-0.15	-0.06	0.22	0.62	0.31	0.06	0.23	0.15
V24	0.09	0.26	0.20	0.05	0.22	0.17	0.13	0.78	0.64	0.10	0.17	0.28	0.01	0.12	-0.11	0.39	0.65	0.14	0.18	0.20	0.05
V25	0.08	0.20	0.35	0.11	0.17	0.02	0.03	0.70	0.15	0.10	0.17	0.50	-0.01	0.06	0.56	0.47	0.43	0.36	0.19	-0.16	0.08
V26	0.06	0.17	0.74	0.04	0.27	0.10	0.05	0.28	0.07	0.22	-0.02	0.02	0.13	0.12	0.77	0.35	0.25	-0.00	0.53	0.09	0.18
V27	0.10	0.15	0.86	0.06	0.13	-0.05	-0.04	0.18	0.54	0.23	0.04	0.04	0.19	0.03	0.47	0.25	0.30	0.57	0.37	0.17	0.00
V28	0.07	0.23	0.17	0.19	0.73	-0.08	0.14	0.19	0.68	0.05	0.16	0.10	-0.04	-0.05	0.41	0.14	0.23	0.28	0.67	0.14	0.07
V29	0.11	0.13	0.14	0.25	0.77	0.06	-0.11	0.24	0.62	-0.02	0.37	0.18	0.07	-0.23	0.24	0.43	0.16	0.30	0.57	0.17	-0.16
V30	-0.02	0.38	0.32	-0.06	0.61	0.16	0.20	-0.07	0.27	-0.03	0.28	0.45	-0.15	-0.43	0.24	0.18	0.19	0.29	0.63	0.09	0.19

Table 5b – Matrix of statistically significant variables describing the factors of enterprise competitiveness enterprises in the particular countries.

Source: the authors’ own research

	V1	V2	V3	V4	V5	V6	V7	V8	V9	V10	V11	V12	V13	V14	V15	V16	V17	V18	V19	V20	V21	V22	V23	V24	V25	V26	V27	V28	V29	V30
C	X	X	X		X	X		X	X				X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
P		X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X				X	X	X	X		X	X		X				
S	X	X		X	X	X				X				X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X						X	X

The information in Table 5a shows the first main factor (F1), covering 30.81% of the total variance, is identified by variables V1-V3 describing the competitive standing of enterprises for the Czech Republic. Factor two (F2), amounting to nearly 12% of the total variance, is identified by V18-V22 defining the instruments of enterprise competition. The third factor (F3), including 6.31% of total information, is identified by variables V26 and V27, which define the instruments of enterprise competition. The next factor (F4), covering 5.44% of the total variance, is identified by variables V16 and V17, describing the competitive potential of enterprises. Factor five (F5), including 4.45% of total information, is identified by variables V28-V30, which define the instruments of enterprise competition. The sixth factor (F6), covering 4.13% of the total variance, is identified by variables V5, V6, V8, V9 describing the competitive potential of enterprises. The next factor (F7), corresponding to 3.71% of the total variance, is identified by variables V13 and V14, describing the competitive potential of enterprises. The final factor (F8), including 3.48% of total information, is identified by variables V23 and V24, which define the instruments of enterprise competition.

For Poland, seven main factors were determined, including factor one (F1) describing nearly 32% of the total variance, identified by variables V21, V23, V24, V28, V29, which define the instruments of enterprise competition. The second factor (F2), covering 10.51% of the total variance, is identified by variables V9, V18-V20, which describe both the competitive potential of enterprises and the instruments of their competition. Another factor (F3), including nearly 6% of the total information, is identified by variables describing the competitive standing V2 and competitive potential of enterprises V5-V7. The fourth factor (F4), covering 4.38% of the total variance, is identified by variables V10, V13, V14, characterising the competitive potential of enterprises. Factor five (F5), containing 3.94% of the information resource, is identified by variables V11 and V12, which describe the competitive potential of enterprises. The sixth factor (F6), covering 3.89% of the total variance resource, is identified by variables V3 and V4, which describe the competitive standing of enterprises. The last factor (F7) including 3.45% of all the information, is identified by variable V26, which defines the instrument of enterprise competition.

Six main factors were determined for Slovakia. The first (F1), covering 41.37% of the total variance resource, is identified by variables V4, V18-V20, which describe all the dimensions of competitiveness. Factor two (F2), covering 5.89% of the total variance, is identified by variables V21-V24, which define the instruments of competition. The next (F3), containing 4.89% of the information resource, is identified by variables V10, V14-V15, which describe the competitive potential of enterprises. Factor four (F4), including 4.49% of the information resource, is identified by variables V28 and V30, defining the instruments of competition. The fifth factor (F5), covering 3.83% of the total variance resource, is identified by variables V1 and V2, which describe the competitive standing of enterprises. The final factor (F6), including 3.62% of all the information, is identified by variables V5 and V7, which describe the competitive potential of enterprises.

The foregoing analysis implies eight main factors were determined for the Czech Republic identified by 23 variables, seven main factors were determined for Poland identified by 21 variables, and six main factors were determined for Slovakia, identified by 18 variables.

The determination of the main factors helped to identify statistically significant variables describing the factors of enterprise competitiveness (Table 5a, Table 5b). An analysis of the data in the Tables 5a and 5b suggests the following conclusions

1. Consumers, regardless of their address, have defined 9 shared statistically significant variables, namely, V2 (financial position), V5 (financial liquidity of enterprise), V6 (profitability of enterprise), V14 (research and development activities), V18 (standard

of servicing), V19 (quality of product/ service), V20 (quality of servicing), V21 (product brand), V24 (image of enterprise).

2. Consumers have identified 9 variables present only in their countries, i.e., 5 variables in the Czech Republic: V8 (customer loyalty), V17 (creation of strong product brand), V25 (highly qualified staff), V27 (innovativeness of products), and V28 (size of product range); 3 variables in Poland, that is, V7 (equity level in enterprise), V11 (quality of managerial staff), and V12 (creativity of workers); and only one variable V15 (technical standard of products) in Slovakia. The remaining variables are present jointly in at least two countries.

These results imply that all the observable variables can be treated as statistically significant, since they at least once identify a main factor defined in at least one of the countries studied.

It can be clearly stated whether or not a country differentiates the choice of enterprise competitiveness factors. Kruskal-Wallis's test was applied to further verify the hypothesis H: country influences the choice of enterprise competitiveness factors. It was assumed p should be greater than the set level of significance $\alpha=0.05$.

Two hypotheses were advanced:

H0: The distributions of competitiveness factors (for particular dimensions, i.e., competitive position, competitive potential, and instruments of competition) are the same for the variable category country.

H1: The distributions of competitiveness factors (for particular dimensions, i.e., competitive position, competitive potential, and instruments of competition) are not the same for the variable category country.

H0 should be rejected, and the alternative H1 accepted if $p \leq \alpha$. Where $p > \alpha$, there is no reason for rejecting H0. The results of Kruskal-Wallis test are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 – Test results for the values of enterprise competitiveness factors divided by the respondents' age. Source: the authors' own research

No.	Null hypothesis	Test	Significance (p)	Decision
1	The distribution of competitive position factors is the same for the variable category country	Kruskal–Wallis test	0.000	Reject the null hypothesis
2	The distribution of competitive potential factors is the same for the variable category country		0.001	Reject the null hypothesis
3	The distribution of the instruments of competition factors is the same for the variable category country		0.000	Reject the null hypothesis

An analysis of probabilities for the particular boundary values in Table 6 implies the null hypothesis should be rejected for the factors defining the competitive position, competitive potential, and the instruments of enterprise competition. This means country is a variable differentiating the choice of enterprise competitiveness factors in all its dimensions in the population studied, which validates the research hypothesis H: country affects the selection of enterprise competitiveness factors.

5 DISCUSSION

The critical literature review identifies a variety of factors affecting consumer behaviour, which makes it hard to fully anticipate how consumers will behave in a given situation. Our research demonstrates that some factors of competitiveness important regardless of a consumer's residence (country) and some specific to a given country only can be indicated. This concurs with existing research, which points to geographical, natural, civilisational, and cultural conditions as some major determinants of enterprise competitiveness. Research draws attention to the proceeding standardisation of consumption and propagation of consumer goods of identical and similar characteristics worldwide, which brings consumers closer to one another in cultural terms. This is corroborated by Kim et al. (2022), Appiadu et al. (2022), and Mehta and Dixit (2016), among others. This is in line with our research into the factors of competitiveness important to all the consumers surveyed regardless of their address (country). These variables relate to enterprise financial situation and image, quality and brand of product. Their importance is upheld by research reported by Pinto et al. (2022), Potjanajaruwit (2022), Omopariola (2019), Kim and Hu (2021), and Kristóf and Virág (2022), inter alia.

However, geographical, natural, civilisational, and cultural conditions produce diverse consumer behaviours, while consumer customs and habits differentiate the structure of consumption. This is confirmed by Asamoah and Chovancová (2016), Szalonka and Sadowa (2018), Chan and Botelho (2010), and Leo et al. (2005), among others. They must be treated as aligned with our results concerning the factors of competitiveness characteristic for selected countries only. Customer loyalty, creation of a strong product brand, highly qualified staff, innovativeness of products, and size of product range are unique to Czech consumers. Three variables are characteristic only for Polish consumers, namely, equity level in enterprise, quality of managerial staff, and creativity of workers. The technical standard of products applies to Slovakian consumers only. The results vary, and it is hard to pinpoint any causes of their differences, since the countries examined are close in respect to the economic development and income status of their populations. This is illustrated in Tables 7 and 8, showing GNP per capita and the rates of its growth in the countries discussed in 2018-2022.

Table 7 – Real per capita GNP in the countries studied in 2018-2022 (€). Source: the authors' own compilation based on: Eurostat
https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/sdg_08_10/default/table?lang=en
[15.06.2023]

Years	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Czech Republic	17,990	18,460	17,400	18,020	18,470
Poland	12,500	13,070	12,810	13,770	14,600
Slovakia	15,580	15,950	15,400	16,210	16,300

Table 8 – The rate of real per capita GNP growth in the countries examined in 2018-2022 (%). Source: the authors' own compilation based on: Eurostat https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/TEC00115/default/table?lang=en&category=na10.nama10.nama_10_ma [15.06.2023]

Years	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Czech Republic	3.2	3	-5.5	3.6	2.5
Poland	5.9	4.5	-2	6.9	5.1
Slovakia	4.0	2.5	-3.3	4.9	1.7

This data on the economic positions of the countries surveyed indicates that the real per capita GNP is highest in the Czech Republic and lowest in Poland. Poland is in turn the fastest developing among the countries examined. These macroeconomic indicators may naturally affect the factors of enterprise competitiveness as perceived by consumers, which was addressed in the analysis of results obtained. Only Czech consumers pay special attention to innovation. This is a major factor commonly highlighted in the literature, e.g., by Lament et al. (2020), Chen et al. (2021), Wang and Li (2022), and Wu (2022). Czech consumers also stress the significance of a strong product brand and trust in such brand. The factor selected by Slovakian consumers – the technical standard of products – can be interpreted as a particular emphasis on state-of-the-art technologies, a major element of innovation. The consumers from Poland named the quality of human resources as unique to them, among other factors. A conclusion can be offered as a summary of these results that Czech consumers are the most aware and demanding, Slovakian consumers focus on technical novelties, while consumers from Poland attach importance to the quality of service.

6 CONCLUSION

The critical literature review implies that consumers may display a variety of preferences and values, which affect the level and significance of the particular factors of enterprise competitiveness. Some may appreciate low prices, while others may be more interested in the quality of products, services or customer support. The brand and image of enterprises matter to customers, too, as they pay attention to quality and reputation. For consumers after new, unique products or services, the competitiveness factors related to innovation will be most important.

The data derived from exploratory factor analysis imply that all the variables considered are statistically significant, as they at least once identify a main factor determined in at least one country surveyed. Consumers have defined 9 variables present only in their countries, namely, 5 variables in the Czech Republic: V8 (customer loyalty), V17 (creation of strong product brand), V25 (highly qualified staff), V27 (innovativeness of products), and V28 (size of product range); 3 variables in Poland: V7 (equity level in enterprise), V11 (quality of managerial staff), and V12 (creativity of workers); and just one in Slovakia: V15 (technical standard of products). The remaining variables occur in a minimum of two countries. The results fail to unanimously affirm the research hypothesis.

The results of the Kruskal-Wallis test evidently uphold the hypothesis, however. For the factors defining enterprise competitive position, competitive potential, and the instruments of competition, the null hypothesis was rejected (since $p \leq 0.05$) and the alternative hypothesis was accepted: the distributions of competitiveness factors (for its particular dimensions, i.e.,

competitive position, competitive potential, instruments of competition) are not the same for the variable category country. This means a validation of the research hypothesis H: country affects the selection of enterprise competitiveness factors.

In conclusion, the aim of the article has been fulfilled, as using exploratory factor analysis, statistically significant factors of business competitiveness perceived by consumers from the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Poland have been identified, and the results of the Kruskal-Wallis test confirmed the research hypothesis H: country influences the selection of factors of business competitiveness.

Managers building their competitive advantages should address consumer preferences and adapt the competitive strategies of their enterprises to the specific requirements and preferences of consumers in a given country.

There is a need for future research focusing on the preferences of consumers from countries more diverse in cultural and social terms. This will be the subject matter of the authors' ongoing work and a research problem of future studies.

Grant support

This study was supported by project VEGA 1/0360/23 Tourism of the new generation – Responsible and competitive development of tourism destinations in Slovakia in the post-COVID era.

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Contact information

Prof. Ing. Vanda Maráková, Ph.D.
 Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica
 Faculty of Economics, Department of Tourism
 Slovakia
 E-mail: vanda.marakova@umb.sk
 ORCID: 0000-0002-1148-8393

Assoc. Prof. Anna Wolak-Tuzimek, Ph.D.
 Casimir Pulaski Radom University
 Faculty of Economics and Finance, Department of Economics
 Poland
 E-mail: awt@uthrad.pl
 ORCID: 0000-0002-2998-909X

Assoc. Prof. Marzanna Lament, Ph.D.
 Casimir Pulaski Radom University
 Faculty of Economics and Finance, Department of Finance, Insurance and Accounting
 Poland
 E-mail: m.lament@uthrad.pl
 ORCID: 0000-0003-3450-5122

Assoc. Prof. Zuzana Tučková, Ph.D.
Tomas Bata University in Zlín
Faculty of Management and Economics, Department of Business Administration
Czech Republic
Email: tuckova@utb.cz
ORCID: 0000-0001-7443-7078