

# Chapter 59

## What Do We Know about Europe?

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### ABSTRACT

*This chapter provides a descriptive report on factors influencing the behaviour of European consumers, highlighting their similarities and differences, based on secondary data. The analysis focuses on the presentation of comparable data that could provide clusters of characteristics of consumption among the COBEREN partners. The authors concentrated on describing the society using ten categories: 1) Demography and education, 2) Society, 3) Economy and industry, 4) Health, 5) Lifestyle, 6) Satisfaction and importance, 7) Consumption patterns, 8) Cost of food basket, 9) Leisure time, and 10) Media consumption.*

### INTRODUCTION

Development in technology has led to a considerable increase in the number of individual-based data sources, registers, databases, and information systems that may be of value in consumer behaviour research. These provide both opportunities and challenges.

This chapter will attempt to provide a descriptive report on factors influencing the behaviour of European consumers, highlighting their similarities and differences, based on secondary data.

Secondary data can take on a number of meanings, so it is important that we are clear about what we mean by the term. Secondary data in research are data which have been collected by individuals

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-6543-9.ch059

or federal and state government agencies for purposes other than those of our particular research study. Secondary data are derived from primary data and created in a highly standardized way, making information derived from them comparable to other sources.

Initially, the collection of the information was targeted on national resources from each COBEREN partner country; consequently, each partner provided as much available information as possible from official national resources. However, one of the major barriers we had to face was the lack of comparability of the data selected. Hence, we decided to include already available European data from mainstream European data banks. The selection criteria for the data were based on the accuracy and validity of the European data sources. Data were gathered from Eurostat, Eurobarometer, European Social Survey (ESS), World Value Survey (WVS), European Values Studies, Euromonitor, Reader's Digest Trusted Brands (RDTB), EU Labour Force Survey (LFS), UNECE Statistical Division database, the Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, World Population Prospects and World Urbanization Prospects. All the data were enriched by respective national resources that partners collected either from publications or national data banks, for example countries' statistical survey units.

The selection and gathering of data related to the chapter aims, as the production of the report was largely based on comparison of the data and the overall suggestions of similarities and differences in the European zone of the COBEREN project. For the purposes of the report and for the presentation of those similarities and differences, a further analysis of the data was made. The analysis focuses on the presentation of comparable data that could provide clusters of characteristics of consumption among the COBEREN partners. We concentrated on describing the society using ten categories (sources of these descriptors can be seen in Table 15 in the Appendix):

1. Demographic and education,
2. Society,
3. Economy and industry,
4. Health,
5. Lifestyle,
6. Satisfaction and importance,
7. Consumption patterns,
8. Cost of food basket,
9. Leisure time, and
10. Media consumption.

Information on structure was found for 31 countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

Although these secondary data measures have some benefits, they may not actually answer our underlying research questions. Probably the main advantage of using these secondary data sources is that they already exist; the time spent on the study is therefore likely to be considerably less than the time spent on studies that use primary data collection. Furthermore, another of the most important reasons for using secondary data is the low cost. More specifically, there is no additional cost for data collection. Also, there is not typically a research agenda prior to the collection of the data; therefore, these data are generally free from biases originating from recall or non-response bias. Moreover, these data typically pose fewer problems related to sample size or representativeness, and they have been shown to produce valid and reliable results.

Nevertheless, as mentioned, since data collection and compilation have usually not been done with a current research purpose in mind, secondary data will usually not cover all the aspects of interest of the current investigation. Other disadvantages are related to the fact that their selection and quality, and the methods of

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