

## **Between Recognition and Exoticisation via Marketing Practices and Market Structures: the Case of Roma in Romania**

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### **Abstract**

This paper illustrates how marketing scholarship, seldom explored in Romani Studies, can provide a lens for understanding the realities of Roma as marketplace consumers. It integrates a critical review of ethnic marketing studies with evidence from secondary data produced in Romania. Viewed through a marketing mix lens, findings show how marketing practices and market structures contribute to the marginalisation and exoticization of Roma. The paper's contribution is twofold: (1) it indicates areas for future academic and managerial work aimed at more inclusive marketing practices to benefit all consumers in a multicultural marketplace, including Roma; (2) it demonstrates the value of interdisciplinary work for marketing and Romani Studies.

**Keywords:** *Roma consumers; ethnic marketing; inclusive marketplaces; marketing mix; Roma in Romania*

**Acknowledgements:** The authors wish to thank the various pro-Roma NGOs in Romania that have supported this project ever since its inception, particularly Roma Education Fund. We are also grateful for the financial support provided by the Academy of Marketing UK, the Romanian Ministry of Education, Innovation and Digitalization and Queen Mary University of London.

## Introduction

As a field of research, Romani Studies have been described as “an interdisciplinary subject encompassing fields such as sociology, anthropology, linguistics and political science, centred on the diverse and heterogeneous communities that come under the labels of Roma/Gypsy but also includes analysis of Traveller communities”<sup>1</sup>. Scholars in Romani Studies have observed that the field has made significant advancements in recent years by adopting more rigorous research methodologies<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, as Tremlett, McGarry and Agarin<sup>3</sup> remark, for the discipline to advance, it is crucial for Romani Studies to remain in open dialogue with other academic fields. To achieve this, it needs to continue to inform and to draw on different multi-disciplinary perspectives. In this conceptual paper, we suggest that marketing scholarship, an area seldom explored in Romani Studies literature, can provide a useful lens for understanding the realities of everyday lives and aspirations of Roma<sup>4</sup>. Indeed, extant research recognizes that there are yet few studies exploring Roma’s involvement in the economy, their everyday practices and their experience as consumers<sup>5</sup>. Importantly, such a focus has the potential of informing societal efforts towards integration<sup>6</sup>.

Just as marketing studies are absent from the discipline of Romani Studies, there are also very few studies about Roma consumers in marketing literature<sup>7</sup>. These deficiencies can

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<sup>1</sup> Andrew Ryder, "Co-Producing Knowledge with below the Radar Communities: Factionalism, Commodification or Partnership? A Gypsy, Roma and Traveller Case Study." *Birmingham: University of Birmingham* (2015), 3.

<sup>2</sup> Margareta Matache, “Word, image and thought: Creating the Romani Other”, (2016), FXB Center. <https://fxb.harvard.edu/2016/10/05/word-image-and-thought-creating-the-romani-other/>, accessed on 04.06.2024.

<sup>3</sup> Annabel Tremlett, Aidan McGarry, Timofey Agarin. "The work of Sisyphus: Squaring the circle of Roma recognition." *Ethnicities* 14.6 (2014): 727-736.

<sup>4</sup> Violeta Vajda, "Towards ‘critical whiteness’ in Romani studies." (2015).

<sup>5</sup> Isabella Clough Marinaro, Ulderico Daniele. "A failed Roma revolution: Conflict, fragmentation and status quo maintenance in Rome." *Ethnicities* 14.6 (2014): 775-792.

<sup>6</sup> Annabel Tremlett, Aidan McGarry. "Challenges facing researchers on Roma minorities in contemporary Europe: Notes towards a research program." (2013).

<sup>7</sup> Cristina Galalae, Tana Licsandru, "A Post-socialist Reading of Displaced Images from the Global South: The Case of Roma, Eastern Europe’s Oriental Other." *Postcolonial Marketing Communication: Images from the Margin*. Singapore: Springer Nature Singapore, 2024. 137-158.

Ela Veresiu, "The consumer acculturative effect of state-subsidized spaces: spatial segregation, cultural integration, and consumer contestation." *Consumption Markets & Culture* 23.4 (2020): 342-360.

be explained through several ontological and epistemological complexities. As Mirga and Mróz<sup>8</sup> highlight, studies about Roma often rely on the ontological dichotomy between the Roma and the Gadjo (the non-Roma). This is understandable given that Roma are Europe's largest minority group<sup>9</sup>, but problematic for at least two reasons. On one hand, comparisons between ethnic groups often focus on differences, thus bearing the risk to essentialise certain traits and to produce inter-group hierarchies. On the other hand, denominations of internally-diverse groups under single terms – i.e., “Roma” and “non-Roma” are reductionists in nature and do not acknowledge the increasingly plural and complex realities of peoples' lives and interactions. Indeed, Romani Studies scholars recognise this limitation. Previous studies have engaged with a variety of theoretical perspectives, including Frederik Barth's notion of “ethnic boundaries”, Homi Bhabha's concepts of “hybridity” and “in-betweenness” or Steven Vertovec's concept of “superdiversity”<sup>10</sup> to highlight how complex and dynamic the Romani ethnic identity is. These advancements echo Gheorghe and Acton<sup>11</sup> who stated that multiculturalism represents “the basic reality of the Roma people”.

However, recognising and addressing such forms of cultural diversity in the marketplace (e.g., in retail spaces or in advertising) and by the marketing discipline (in marketing journals and academic degrees) remains challenging due to the discipline's multiple inherent epistemic hierarchies<sup>12</sup>. One important hierarchy is embedded in the purpose of marketing knowledge production. Marketing scholars recognise that over the last

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Ela Veresiu, "Delegitimizing racialized brands." *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research* 8.1 (2023): 59-71.

<sup>8</sup> Andrzej Mirga, Lech Mróz. *Cyganie: odmienność i nietolerancja*. Wydawn. Nauk. PWN, 1994.

<sup>9</sup> European Commission, “Roma equality, inclusion and participation in the EU,” (2020), [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/policies/justice-and-fundamental-rights/combating-discrimination/roma-eu/roma-equality-inclusion-and-participation-eu_en), accessed on 02.06.2024.

<sup>10</sup> Anna Mirga-Kruszelnicka, "Challenging anti-gypsyism in academia: The role of Romani scholars." *Critical Romani Studies* 1.1 (2018): 8-28.

<sup>11</sup> Nicolae Gheorghe, Thomas Acton, “Citizens of the world and nowhere: Minority, ethnic and human rights for Roma”, in Will Guy (Ed.), *Between past and future: The Roma of Central and Eastern Europe*. (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2001), 55.

<sup>12</sup> Olga Kravets, Rohit Varman, "Introduction to special issue: Hierarchies of knowledge in marketing theory." *Marketing Theory* 22.2 (2022): 127-133.

hundred years the production of marketing knowledge has been centred on serving managerial elites<sup>13</sup>. These elites are often envisioned as located in Western countries and serving white urban middle-class consumers. Consequently, the marketing discipline continues to overlook and under-represent minority groups all over the world, as well as non-western geographical contexts and theoretical lenses. Nevertheless, recent critical marketing studies call for challenging these forms of epistemic colonialism and West-centrism<sup>14</sup>. To achieve this, marketing scholarship needs to (1) recognise and amplify the voice of minority groups and marginalised consumers<sup>15</sup> and (2) analyse markets and consumers within the socio-cultural, historical, political, and economic background of a given context<sup>16</sup>.

Against this background, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the value of using tools from the discipline of marketing to provide a nuanced understanding of mundane lived experiences of Roma and the market structures that delineate them. To this end, we draw on, and take a critical approach towards, ethnic marketing and analyse evidence derived from a comprehensive review of secondary data produced in Romania, the country hosting one of the largest Roma populations<sup>17</sup>. Our findings demonstrate that marketing practices and market structures contribute to the marginalisation and exoticization of Roma. Drawing on these findings, we offer managerial recommendations and areas of future research that can

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Tadajewski, "Remembering motivation research: toward an alternative genealogy of interpretive consumer research." *Marketing Theory* 6.4 (2006): 429-466.

Mark Tadajewski, Pauline Maclaran, eds. *Critical Marketing Studies: Theoretical and Empirical Perspectives in Critical Marketing Studies*. Sage, 2009.

<sup>14</sup> Martina Hutton, Benedetta Cappellini, "Epistemic in/justice: Towards 'other' ways of knowing." *Marketing theory* 22.2 (2022): 155-174.

Kravets and Varman, "Introduction to special issue: Hierarchies of knowledge in marketing theory."

Ozlem Sandikci, "The scalar politics of difference: researching consumption and marketing outside the West." *Marketing Theory* 22.2 (2022): 135-153.

<sup>15</sup> Ronald Paul Hill, Kelly D. Martin, "Broadening the paradigm of marketing as exchange: a public policy and marketing perspective." *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 33.1 (2014): 17-33.

<sup>16</sup> Aliakbar Jafari, et al. "Non-western contexts: The invisible half." *Marketing Theory* 12.1 (2012): 3-12.

<sup>17</sup> Council of Europe, "Estimates and official numbers of Roma in Europe," (2012),

<https://rm.coe.int/1680088ea9>, accessed on 06.06.2024.

inform more inclusive marketing practices for all consumers, including those who are part of Roma cultural groups.

### **The role of marketing in the everyday experience of ethnic minority groups**

Marketing practices and market structures, through the narratives they construct, the symbolic meanings they convey, and the identities they (mis- or under-) represent, play a critical role in the everyday lives and experiences of ethnic minority groups. In diverse marketplaces, marketing activities need to facilitate "the co-existence of a variety of modes of consumption"<sup>18</sup> by offering a wide array of products, services, and experiences tailored to the diverse needs and identity projects of different groups. As such, marketing activities may shape ethnic consumers' consumption choices and the ways in which they develop, express and perform their cultural identities by mobilising the market resources available to them<sup>19</sup>. Marketing activities oriented towards ethnic minorities may also impact broader societal issues, such as the degree to which individuals feel part of the social fabric and included in the broader economic and socio-cultural context<sup>20</sup>. Indeed, marketing campaigns that advance a more inclusive approach contribute to "the increased visibility (...) and normative ethic of multicultural integration"<sup>21</sup>, yielding in turn positive commercial outcomes<sup>22</sup>.

However, extant research has documented that the impact of marketing on the inclusion and integration of ethnic minorities is multifaceted. Marketing campaigns, by their

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<sup>18</sup> Ahmad Jamal, "Marketing in a multicultural world: The interplay of marketing, ethnicity and consumption." *European journal of marketing* 37.11/12 (2003): 1599-1620.

<sup>19</sup> Aliakbar Jafari, Luca M. Visconti, "New directions in researching ethnicity in marketing and consumer behaviour: A well-being agenda." *Marketing Theory* 15.2 (2015): 265-270.

<sup>20</sup> Tana Cristina Licsandru, Charles Chi Cui. "Subjective social inclusion: A conceptual critique for socially inclusive marketing." *Journal of Business Research* 82 (2018): 330-339.

<sup>21</sup> Lisa Peñaloza, "Ethnic marketing practice and research at the intersection of market and social development: A macro study of the past and present, with a look to the future." *Journal of Business Research* 82 (2018): 273-280.

<sup>22</sup> Osei Appiah, Liu Yung-I., "Reaching the model minority: Ethnic differences in responding to culturally embedded targeted-and non-targeted advertisements." *Journal of Current Issues & Research in Advertising* 31.1 (2009): 27-41.

very nature, often simplify and exoticise diverse cultural identities, reducing their complexity to commodified images exploited for mainstream consumption<sup>23</sup>. This approach often stems from the misguided belief that groups sharing the same ethnic background are homogenous and have uniform needs, which are assumed to be distinct from those of the dominant group in an overly essentializing manner<sup>24</sup>. Such misconceptions can lead to stereotypical representations of ethnic groups in marketing communications, exclusionary segmentation strategies, and overly generalised targeting attempts.

Campaigns that rely on stereotypes or fail to acknowledge the diversity within ethnic groups trigger feelings of exclusion and exoticization among ethnic consumers<sup>25</sup>. By promoting an "othering" perspective, these efforts further reinforce and consolidate differences in a way that isolates and alienates ethnic consumers from the broader societal context<sup>26</sup>. Indeed, when marketing consistently fails to include diverse voices and stories, and particularly those belonging to certain cultural groups, it implicitly renders those communities invisible in social and economic spheres<sup>27</sup>. Marketing practices and market structures, therefore, do not only influence consumption, but may also play an instrumental role in the social standing of ethnic minority groups, perpetuating cycles of inequality and discrimination<sup>28</sup>.

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<sup>23</sup> Jonathan E. Schroeder, Janet L. Borgerson. "An ethics of representation for international marketing communication." *International Marketing Review* 22.5 (2005): 578-600.

Ela Veresiu, Markus Giesler. "Beyond acculturation: Multiculturalism and the institutional shaping of an ethnic consumer subject." *Journal of Consumer Research* 45.3 (2018): 553-570.

<sup>24</sup> Dawn, Burton, "Towards a critical multicultural marketing theory." *Marketing theory* 2.2 (2002): 207-236.

Ahmad Jamal, "Marketing in a multicultural world: The interplay of marketing, ethnicity and consumption." *European journal of marketing* 37.11/12 (2003): 1599-1620.

<sup>25</sup> Schroeder and Borgerson. "An ethics of representation for international marketing communication."

<sup>26</sup> Guilherme D. Pires, John Stanton, "Ethnic marketing ethics." *Journal of Business Ethics* 36 (2002): 111-118.

<sup>27</sup> Eva Kipnis, et al. "Branding beyond prejudice: Navigating multicultural marketplaces for consumer well-being." *Journal of Business Research* 66.8 (2013): 1186-1194.

<sup>28</sup> Dawn Burton, "Ethnicity, identity and marketing: A critical review." *Journal of Marketing Management* 16.8 (2000): 853-877.

Judy Foster Davis, "Selling whiteness?—A critical review of the literature on marketing and racism." *Journal of Marketing Management* 34.1-2 (2018): 134-177.

Anne-Marie G Harris, Geraldine R. Henderson, Jerome D. Williams, "Courting customers: Assessing consumer racial profiling and other marketplace discrimination." *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 24.1 (2005): 163-171.

## **Methodology**

Academic research about the marketing practices and structures that target or that affect Roma cultural groups are missing. We have limited knowledge about whether and how they benefit Roma consumers or, on the contrary, produce and reproduce inequities. To observe this, we complement our insights from ethnic marketing literature with a comprehensive review of secondary data produced in Romania, including: (1) press articles and interviews published in professional marketing media (e.g., IQads), mainstream media (e.g., Libertatea, Digi24), and independent media (e.g., Decât o Revistă); (2) podcasts initiated by or featuring voices from within the Roma community (e.g., Obiceiul Pamantului), and (3) commercial and social marketing campaigns launched online or on mainstream television over the past twenty years featuring Roma protagonists or / and promoting social inclusion of Roma. To analyse both textual and visual data, we employed critical discourse analysis (CDA),<sup>29</sup> focusing on identifying and interpreting underlying themes and power relations. For textual data, CDA allowed us to scrutinise language choices, framing techniques, and representation patterns in press articles, interviews, and podcasts. In analysing visual content from marketing campaigns, we examined symbolic elements and composition to understand the implicit messages and societal assumptions surrounding Roma identity and social inclusion. To present our findings, we used the framework of the four elements of the marketing mix: product, promotion, place, and price. The marketing mix provides a useful tool for a structured and comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted issues that may contribute to marketplace inclusion or / and to producing market inequities; it has been used as an analytical framework by other scholars, due to its holistic nature which prevents oversight of

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<sup>29</sup> Gillian Rose. "Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials." (2022): 1-100.

any critical elements<sup>30</sup>. In the next sections, we discuss each element of the marketing mix and provide illustrations from our data and propose directions for future marketing research and practice.

## **Findings**

### ***Product and service: design, quality and branding***

The provision of products and services that meet consumer wants and needs is central to the marketing concept. Based on our analysis we observe three main limitations regarding the provision of products and services in Romania that are relevant for Roma cultural groups. First, it is important to reflect on the significance of market research. Without listening to and understanding consumer voices, organisations struggle to gauge whether ethnic minority consumers need similar or distinct offerings to those demanded by the majority population<sup>31</sup>. We were unable to identify any systematic marketing research study focused on the needs and preferences of Roma consumers in Romania. This significant shortcoming hinders companies and marketers' ability to assess whether there is a need for tailored products or services, especially in more remote communities. Second, we note the relevance of product and service accessibility. Extant literature<sup>32</sup> demonstrates that minority consumers in the United States are often exposed to systemically restricted consumer choice. We observe this phenomenon in Romania, where Roma consumers experience restricted access to health services and a downgrade in quality, compared to non-Roma consumers<sup>33</sup>. This instance of systemic service restriction and downgrade has significant implications for public health.

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<sup>30</sup> Lucie K Ozanne, et al. "Enabling and cultivating wiser consumption: The roles of marketing and public policy." *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 40.2 (2021): 226-244.

<sup>31</sup> Burton, "Ethnicity, identity and marketing: A critical review."

<sup>32</sup> Sterling A. Bone, Glenn L. Christensen, Jerome D. Williams, "Rejected, shackled, and alone: The impact of systemic restricted choice on minority consumers' construction of self." *Journal of Consumer Research* 41.2 (2014): 451-474.

Denver D'Rozario, Jerome D. Williams, "Retail redlining: Definition, theory, typology, and measurement." *Journal of Macromarketing* 25.2 (2005): 175-186.

<sup>33</sup> Sastipen, "Proiecte privind creșterea accesului la servicii de sănătate", (2009), <https://www.sastipen.ro/ro/proiecte-incheiate/cresterea-accesului/>, accessed on 04.06.2024.



Importantly, it may also erect additional perceived or actual barriers in accessing other products and services, with significant consequences for the wellbeing of Roma consumers. Lastly, we note that products and services communicate meanings through aspects as simple as their name. A recent study discusses the process through which the brand Knorr only recently replaced the racially charged product name “Gypsy Sauce” with “Paprika Sauce Hungarian Style” in Germany<sup>34</sup>. In Romania we observe the presence on the market of products that – through their names - may reinforce harmful slurs and stereotypes against the Roma, such as "Muschi Tiganesc,", the name used for a popular dry meat product, translated as “Gypsy Fillet”. We believe that such product and brand names are opposing notions of inclusion and respect, and they need to be urgently reassessed.

### ***Promotion: mis- and under-representations***

Advertising images are not just promotional tools, but also "cultural texts," that define the realities consumers encounter and perceive as normal<sup>35</sup>. Consequently, marketing representations have the potential to both empower and disempower certain minority groups, and to reinforce established oppressive structures and power dynamics<sup>36</sup>. It is crucial for advertisers to recognise the profound impact of their imagery and strive for representations that foster inclusivity, especially for disenfranchised groups. Our analysis of advertising practices reveals two main issues: the underrepresentation and misrepresentation of Roma cultural groups.

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<sup>34</sup> Veresiu, "Delegitimizing racialized brands." .

<sup>35</sup> Schroeder and Borgerson. "An ethics of representation for international marketing communication."

<sup>36</sup> Michael Saren, Elizabeth Parsons, Christina Goulding. "Dimensions of marketplace exclusion: Representations, resistances and responses." *Consumption Markets & Culture* 22.5-6 (2019): 475-485. Francesca Olivotti, "The paradox of exclusion and multiculturalism in postcolonial identity." *Consumption Markets & Culture* 19.5 (2016): 475-496.

In Romania, commercial marketing representations of Roma people are very sporadic. Important to note, this gap extends beyond the Roma community to a broader lack of diversity in marketing. Recent interviews with advertising professionals highlight concerns that Romania lags in authentically representing diverse communities<sup>37</sup>. Brands often hesitate to feature diversity, citing concerns about consumers' potential negative reactions and Romania's predominantly homogeneous demographic<sup>38</sup>. In the limited cases where Roma individuals are featured in commercial advertising, they are often depicted in an exoticized, stereotypical manner that reinforces their portrayal as "the other." A notable example is a 2008 advertisement by a Romanian electronics retailer, which is, to our knowledge, the only Romanian TV campaign featuring non-celebrity Roma. This 30-second ad centres on the stereotype of Roma as scavengers of discarded electronics, with characters named 'Mouse' and 'Floppy' to emphasise the association with electronic waste. This portrayal commodifies their perceived exoticism in order to appeal to the White, non-Roma viewer<sup>39</sup>, and perpetuates several negative stereotypes about Roma, such as poverty, illiteracy, and nomadic lifestyles, all masked by a humorous tone - a form of "liquid racism".<sup>40</sup>

In contrast, social marketing campaigns have frequently depicted Roma in an authentic and empowering manner. Examples include fundraising videos for education or recent campaigns challenging stereotypes and encouraging Roma to express their identity. The private sector could learn, therefore, from NGOs initiatives and Roma activists who possess the knowledge and experience to advise on effective engagement and representation

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<sup>37</sup> Mirela Petre, "[Întru diversitate] Semida Durigă, Heraldist & Wondermarks: Obişnuinţa de a regăsi în toate ad-urile majoritatea tipică ne-a condus ca popor în a fi şi mai intoleranţi", IQads, (2016), <https://www.iqads.ro/articol/37202/intru-diversitate-semida-duriga-heraldist-wondermarks-obisnuinta-de-a-regasi-in>, accessed on 06.06.2024.

<sup>38</sup> Galalae and Licsandru, "A Post-socialist Reading of Displaced Images from the Global South: The Case of Roma, Eastern Europe's Oriental Other."

<sup>39</sup> Sofia Ulver, "Tickling tensions: Gazing into the parallax gap of the multicultural imaginary." *Marketing Theory* 21.3 (2021): 391-413.

<sup>40</sup> Simon Weaver, "Liquid racism and the ambiguity of Ali G." *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14.3 (2011): 249-264.

of the community. Additionally, growing initiatives in Roma cultural productions, such as theatre (e.g., Giuvlipen), film (e.g., the work of Alina Serban), and other art forms (e.g., the paintings of Eugen Raportoru), offer authentic examples of representation that could inspire more accurate and respectful Roma portrayals in the commercial realm.

Prior to any commercial or social marketing initiatives, however, it is crucial to amplify Roma voices and understand their preferences for representation. The ethnic marketing literature shows conflicting findings on this topic. Distinctiveness theory suggests that individuals in a numerical minority often define themselves by their unique traits, such as ethnicity, and may favour marketing that reflects these traits i.e., ethnic marketing<sup>41</sup>. However, critics argue that ethnic marketing often oversimplifies and perpetuates stereotypes by treating ethnicity as a homogeneous construct<sup>42</sup>. Therefore, a nuanced, research-driven approach is necessary to ensure authentic representations.

### ***Place: accessibility and interactions***

Physical and virtual marketplaces play two important roles: mediating and enabling market transactions and providing opportunities for positive consumer-brand interactions. Our analysis about the place-related experience of Roma consumers reveals three very worrying patterns. First, at group level, we observe redlining and spatial exclusion. This is materialised via, for example, the absence of chain grocery stores in some low-income neighbourhoods where some Roma live. This distribution decision is problematic both for consumers – who are denied access to products available to their middle-class counterparts – but also for grocery companies – that could achieve generous profits by operating in

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<sup>41</sup> William J. McGuire, et al. "Salience of ethnicity in the spontaneous self-concept as a function of one's ethnic distinctiveness in the social environment." *Journal of personality and social psychology* 36.5 (1978): 511

<sup>42</sup> Dawn Burton, "Ethnicity, identity and marketing: A critical review." *Journal of Marketing Management* 16.8 (2000): 853-877.

neighbourhoods deprived of necessary products and services<sup>43</sup>. Second, at individual level, we observe patterns of racial profiling materialised in marketplace exclusion and ill treatment. One example is that of letting agencies<sup>44</sup> that explicitly exclude Roma tenants in their online listings. Another is that of the numerous instances of verbal and physical abuse against Roma taking place in supermarkets and in public transport, that are still seldom documented in mainstream media<sup>45</sup>. Indeed, racial profiling in consumption spaces has been extensively researched, but mainly in the context of the African American community in the United States<sup>46</sup>. Such studies highlight that racial minorities often encounter bias, both subtle and overt, along with degradation, denial of goods and services, and unjust suspicion of shoplifting, across multiple public consumption settings such as retail centres, restaurants, and hotels. To navigate these racial hierarchies while shopping for essential goods, consumers from these communities often adopt various coping strategies. However, we know little about how Roma consumers navigate the discrimination that they are faced with in retail spaces. We believe that addressing this very significant market injustice should start with understanding such lived experiences and the correct application of anti-discrimination laws.

### ***Pricing: affordability and fairness***

Pricing is a crucial component of marketing practices, as it directly influences consumer demand and company profitability. Our analysis shows that pricing strategies can

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<sup>43</sup> Robert N. Mayer, et al. "In urban areas: Many of the poor still pay more for food." *Journal of Public Policy & Marketing* 12.2 (1993): 268-270.

<sup>44</sup> Marius Boeriu, "Exclus romi și fără animale de companie," *Buna ziua Brasov* (2022), <https://bzb.ro/stire/exclus-romi-si-fara-animale-de-companie-a176016>, accessed 04.06.2024.

<sup>45</sup> Gavrilas, Calin, "Tânăra de 18 ani, de etnie romă, bătută cu bestialitate de agenții de pază ai unui hipermarket. Motivul: au bănuț-o de furt", *Adevarul.ro*, 21.12.2020.

<sup>46</sup> Cassi Pittman, "'Shopping while Black': Black consumers' management of racial stigma and racial profiling in retail settings." *Journal of Consumer Culture* 20.1 (2020): 3-22.  
David Crockett, Sonya A. Grier, Jacqueline A. Williams. "Coping with marketplace discrimination: An exploration of the experiences of black men." *Academy of Marketing Science Review* 4.7 (2003): 1-21.

inadvertently impact the marketplace experience of the Roma community in two ways. At an individual level, pricing may exclude consumers if it disregards their economic circumstances or varies across locations or communities. At a business level, pricing practices can also hinder Roma entrepreneurial initiatives.

Research (conducted primarily in Western contexts) suggests that consumers with limited financial resources, often residing in economically disadvantaged areas, frequently encounter price discrimination across a range of goods and services. This discrimination manifests in inflated prices for essential items such as housing<sup>47</sup>, groceries<sup>48</sup>, and car insurance premiums<sup>49</sup>. Moreover, these areas often face limited access to major supermarkets, exacerbating the financial burden on residents. Given the absence of systematic studies examining Roma consumers' perceptions of pricing across different communities and geographic locations, it remains challenging to identify instances of price discrimination in Romania. However, fair and equitable pricing of essential products and services could be ensured by, for example, implementing transparent pricing strategies at national level, improving accessibility in disadvantaged areas, or implementing affordability initiatives to support consumers with lower financial resources.

At a business level, we observe pricing having a significant effect on Roma craftsmanship, but this effect could also apply to other small entrepreneurial initiatives, such as emerging Roma designers (e.g., Loly by Zita Moldovan). Many Roma communities are renowned for their traditional crafts like copper smithing and silversmithing, passed down through generations. However, these handmade products tend to be costly due to the time-

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<sup>47</sup> June NP Francis, Joshua Tecumseh F. Robertson, "White spaces: How marketing actors (re) produce marketplace inequities for Black consumers." *Journal of Marketing Management* 37.1-2 (2021): 84-116.

<sup>48</sup> Chanjin Chung, Samuel L. Myers Jr., "Do the poor pay more for food? An analysis of grocery store availability and food price disparities." *Journal of consumer affairs* 33.2 (1999): 276-296.

<sup>49</sup> Citizens Advice, "Discriminatory pricing: Exploring the 'ethnicity penalty' in the insurance market," (2022), [https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Consumer%20publications/Report%20cover/Citizens%20Advice%20-%20Discriminatory%20Pricing%20report%20\(4\).pdf](https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Consumer%20publications/Report%20cover/Citizens%20Advice%20-%20Discriminatory%20Pricing%20report%20(4).pdf), accessed on 06.06.2024.

intensive processes and expensive raw materials. This pricing challenge affects the economic prospects for craftsmen and the survival of their skills across generations. This issue is further exacerbated by the tendency of consumers to negotiate and seek lower prices for ethnic products, a phenomenon discussed in marketing literature<sup>50</sup>. To address these issues, the private sector (e.g., retailers, online marketplaces) could play a pivotal role by supporting small producers and providing them with a platform for promotion and retail. Governments could boost these efforts by promoting them domestically and internationally, and by subsidising costs to help craftsmen and other emerging entrepreneurs maintain competitiveness in the market. Moreover, initiatives such as the Roma Entrepreneurship Development Initiative are instrumental in helping Roma entrepreneurs, by enabling access to funding, knowledge resources and networking opportunities.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, we have presented an overview of how past, current, and potential marketing practices might shape the experiences of Roma consumers in the Romanian marketplace. Drawing on insights from ethnic marketing studies and, where available, evidence derived from various secondary data sources, we highlight the impact of these practices on Roma marketplace access, economic participation and overall societal integration.

Most importantly, the examples discussed in this paper suggest that marketing practitioners and academics have a very limited understanding of the Roma consumer, their needs and marketplace experiences. The harmful effects of marketing practices and structures developed without any consideration towards Roma cultural groups are significant; they can produce and reproduce structural inequalities, affect the wellbeing of Roma and non-Roma

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<sup>50</sup> Feng Liu, Xin Liao, Cuiqin Ming, "Prejudice, does it exist or not? Consumer price discrimination in minority entrepreneurship." *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020): 2180.

consumers, and they may also have negative consequences on brand equity and the overall reputation and market standing of companies involved in such practices. Therefore, brands interested in engaging with Roma cultural groups should first gauge Roma consumers' perspectives through market research, including academic approaches. We offer three main directions for future research to address this need.

First, future research could explore the dynamics within Roma communities, to understand whether and how the complexity and diversity of Roma cultural identities (e.g., traditions, values, beliefs) influence consumer behaviours and preferences. This research would help organisations interested in engaging with Roma communities to avoid stereotypical and reductionist portrayals, marketplace discrimination, and alienating their audiences. Second, research is needed to evaluate the necessity for and potential effectiveness of tailored marketing approaches (e.g., product designs, advertising strategies, distribution channels) targeted at the Roma community, that would resonate positively and inclusively. Thirdly, given the growing focus on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, we encourage critical research that could assess the impact of regulatory frameworks and corporate social responsibility initiatives, including the emerging DEI efforts, on reducing marketplace discrimination and promoting equitable opportunities for all consumers in Romania, including Roma communities.

Finally, we acknowledge that marketing is just one of many disciplines that can inform the understanding of everyday lives of Roma communities. We also advocate for more marketing research to serve Roma consumers and strongly believe that such research should engage deeply with the knowledge already produced in the field of Romani Studies.

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