

CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER TRENDS

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Purpose: This article aims to present contemporary consumer trends, which include consumer ethnocentrism, prosumption, green consumption, deconsumption, servitization and dematerialization of consumption, home-centrism and privatization of consumption, homogenization and heterogenization of consumption, as well as the virtualization of consumption.

Design/methodology/approach: The article is based on a review of the literature and internet sources. The time range of the conducted analyses covers the years 2000-2022.

Findings: The article describes selected contemporary consumer trends. Among them, the most important are ethnocentrism, prosumption, green consumption and the virtualization of consumption. These trends are the domain of the young generation of consumers. It is important for business managers to be aware of them in order to take into account the specificity and scale of these trends in the process of creating and marketing new products and services.

Practical implications: The article characterizes the evolution of consumer behaviour through exposing modern trends in consumption. This is an important issue for business managers, for whom a thorough knowledge of consumers, consumer behaviour and market trends should be the starting point when developing concepts for new products and services.

Originality/value: The findings of the analyses have cognitive value. The article discusses selected consumer trends. Contemporary enterprises are increasingly taking into account in their business models the growing interest of consumers in such issues as green consumption, offer personalization, and consumer ethnocentrism.

Keywords: Consumption, consumer trends.

Category of the paper: General review.

1. Introduction

One example of new consumer trends is in consumerism, now often understood as the pursuit of luxury goods and social prestige. Other such trends include individualism, focus on a healthy lifestyle, smart shopping, offer personalization, and many others. Managers must skilfully extrapolate these trends and use them in the process of creating and introducing new retail brands (Ciechowski, 2018, p. 62). An interesting description of new trends in

consumption that are favoured by young consumers can be found in the book *Zachowania konsumentów. Procesy unowocześniania konsumpcji* [Consumer behaviour. The processes of modernizing consumption] (Kieźel, Smyczek, 2014, p. 120). The presented trends include consumerism, prosumption, virtualization, individualization, home-centrism, ethnocentrism, green consumption and deconsumption.

In these consumer society times there is a growing drive for consumption, which does not always take the form of rational behaviour. Consumerism is developing and becoming a way of life in societies. This trend is connected with a range of phenomena that lead to the waste of material and human resources (Smyczek, 2020, p. 205). The pursuit of unlimited consumption and the constant pursuit of novelties in order to stand out from the crowd are constantly intensifying. This phenomenon cannot be ignored, if only because of its destructive impact on the use of common resources such as water, land, forests and atmospheric air as well as its generally destructive impact on the climate of the entire planet. Consumerism is usually identified with excessive consumption, in extreme cases taking the form of hedonism, the cult of possessing and distinguishing oneself from others, stimulating new needs, and deriving pleasure from possessing certain goods.

2. Consumer ethnocentrism

The term “consumer” is not uniformly defined, and the word itself comes from the Latin *consumens*, meaning a person who buys goods for their own use. In economics, this term is often used as a substitute for the word user, buyer or customer, although in fact these entities perform different functions in the market. A consumer can be regarded as an economic entity that uses or consumes products or services purchased or created in a household. At the same time, it can also be a buyer or user of products such as durable goods.

Ethnocentrism is a consumer trend defined in various ways and sometimes having a pejorative meaning. Generally, the literature on the subject emphasizes such features as a sense of belonging to an ethnic group, patriotism, national awareness, a sense of superiority in relation to other social groups, xenophobia or cultural traditionalism (Figiel, 2004, p. 34). Ethnocentric attitudes are typically strongly linked to a particular territory. Their essence is the preference for things that are one’s own and familiar, and the rejection of those that are external, different, or threatening to what is native. The range of ethnocentric attitudes is very wide: from indifference, through distrust and discrimination, to hatred.

The concept of ethnocentrism was introduced to the social sciences in 1906 by the American ethnologist and sociologist William Sumner. He described ethnocentrism as a certain social behaviour of people. He believed that members of a given group live in peaceful relationships with each other, whereas contacts with other, external communities are based on conflict, which

serves to cement the bonds that unite a given community. Among other things, he stated that “one’s own group is the centre of everything and everything around is evaluated and hierarchized in relation to it” (Szromnik, Wolanin-Jarosz, 2013, p. 83). People’s behaviours and the value of things are evaluated through the prism of affirming one’s own community and depreciating other, alien groups. A social group can be a family, a local community or a nation. Family ties, place of residence, religion or nationality are the glue that binds individuals together into a community.

Research into the country-of-origin effect was first undertaken in the 1960s in the USA. The positive country-of-origin effect occurs when, in the eyes of consumers, the image of the perceived country of origin adds to those functional and symbolic values of the product that are important to consumers (Hereźniak, 2011, p. 65). Buyers therefore assume that there are significant differences between the qualities of products produced in different countries. In such circumstances, the image of the country becomes synonymous with the brand and often determines purchasing decisions. The importance of the country-of-origin effect is manifested in the benefits achieved by owners of reputable brands, who capitalise on the market reputation and prestige enjoyed by Japanese and German cars, French wines and perfumes, or American jeans (Ciechomski, 2014, p. 105). A universal tool for studying ethnocentric attitudes is the CETSCALE (Consumer Ethnocentric Tendencies Scale).

Consumer ethnocentrism is the belief of consumers that it is right and moral to buy goods of domestic origin. For ethnocentric consumers, purchasing foreign products is inappropriate, disloyal and even immoral because it weakens the domestic economy, causing an increase in unemployment (Hat, Smyczek, 2016, p. 52). The level of ethnocentrism depends on demographic factors such as age, education, and gender; and psychosocial factors such as openness to other cultures and conservatism. The strength of this trend is also dependent on the country of origin. In developing countries, buying foreign products is perceived as damaging to their economies, as it leads to job losses. Sometimes it is figuratively explained to consumers that buying imported products also means importing unemployment.

It is worth noting that Poles are a nation that declares their desire to support Polish companies and the economy as a whole. Over 60 per cent of Poles declare their willingness to support Polish organisations, and 90 per cent declare their support through increased purchases of products of Polish origin (Roman, 2020). The most positive characteristic of Polish goods is the safety of consumption. This fact is exploited by companies producing cosmetics and food products. However, it must be said that Polish products are not always perceived favourably, as exemplified by the consumer electronics, household appliances and automotive industries.

While discussing consumer ethnocentrism, it is worth mentioning another topic, namely the rationality of purchasing decisions. In the light of behavioural economics, which combines the perspectives of economics and psychology, consumers often do not make rational decisions in accordance with the *homo economicus* model, but are guided in their decisions by various emotions. Indeed, consumer behaviour is more the result of emotions, habits and stereotype-

based thinking than the result of rational decisions. This means that the purchasing behaviour of people who deeply care about such values as consumer patriotism, protecting the environment or preventing climate change may not be fully rational from the point of view of mainstream economics (Kaczmarek, Wieja, 2021, p. 19).

3. Prosumption

Prosumption has become an increasingly important trend in consumer behaviour in recent years. The new dimension of consumption in the 21st century consists, among other things, in the fact that consumers create their own vision of the product and more or less consciously participate in the process of its production. Value is not created solely in the place where the products are made; moreover, it is the user and not the supplier who creates it through the experience of using the product (Mazur, 2021, p. 9). Many marketing theorists point out the importance of the customer being the company's partner in the creative processes (Prahalad, Ramaswamy, 2000, p. 79). It should be emphasized that modern enterprises are increasingly incorporating the growing interest of consumers in personalization and the involvement of end-users in the process of designing and manufacturing products into their business models (Ciechomski, 2016, p. 101).

Initially, a prosumer was defined as a person willing to take over the activities that were previously performed by the producer. This phenomenon is visible, for example, in DIY practice or co-designing and co-manufacturing products, and is motivated by the desire to have products that meet individual preferences, thus transforming consumers into co-creators. It is worth noting that in the literature one can find terms that are similar in meaning to prosumption or sometimes are even used as its synonyms, e.g. co-creation, co-production and co-creating value with customers (Baruk, 2017, p. 17). Determinants stimulating the development of prosumption include the desire to use more leisure time in an interesting way, the spread and progress of education, the increase in qualifications, and the change in the role that work, which can be increasingly creative, plays in people's lives.

Three main segments of prosumers can be distinguished:

- people evaluating and commenting on their satisfaction with the products they own,
- those who become involved and participate in campaigns/actions conducted by producers,
- innovators who take actions that aim to create or change the producer's offer.

Prosumers can be seen as external employees of a company who support creation and production, and their potential is a source of competitive advantage. An excellent example of this is the business success of IKEA stores, which is based on the involvement of buyers in the furniture assembly process. The approach to customers and their role in the production and

distribution process has changed with the dynamic development of modern technologies and the growing individualisation of the offer (Schmidt, 2010, p. 55 et seq.).

A variation of prosumption is customization, which allows customers to create a product using the available parts, or design a product themselves. In addition, modern ICT systems and mobile applications make it possible to exchange information between consumers and the company. It is essential to treat consumers as co-creators of goods and to draw conclusions from their opinions in order to be able to improve the products offered.

An example of customization can be personalised engravings on jewellery. It could be said that customization is not new, that it occurred in the past when products such as footwear or clothing were produced in a personalised manner by shoemakers or tailors, but this phenomenon disappeared due to mass production. Mass customization involves large-scale personalisation of a company's offering, which has been made possible by the dynamic development of production technology and in-depth knowledge of consumer needs and preferences (Ciechomski, 2015, p. 77). Its aim is to optimally meet the needs of buyers by including them, for example, in the process of creating the functionality of products or the design of branded products. Product individualisation is particularly desirable in the automotive, jewellery, clothing, footwear and wedding industries.

4. Green consumption

From the perspective of the sustainable development paradigm and the concept of sustainable consumption, the concept of green consumption can be understood as activities that are directed towards reducing the use of non-renewable environmental resources, as well as reducing the generation of harmful waste. Generally, this trend is most often identified with customers' positive attitudes towards the environment and an increasing environmental awareness in societies. The green consumption trend focuses on the following issues:

- a rational use of consumer goods,
- limiting the consumption of rare and non-renewable goods,
- consuming goods that are safe for the natural environment from the point of view of post-consumer waste generation,
- recycling post-consumer waste, the afforestation of land, fish stocking in waters, etc.,
- consuming organic food,
- choosing products from humane animal farms,
- living in harmony with nature (Szwacka-Mokrzycka, 2018, p. 40).

Customers' high environmental awareness and their high ecological competences are not the only factors behind choosing ecological products. Other factors that determine the pro-ecological awareness of consumers include the following:

- rising fuel, raw material and energy prices,
- the activity of social organizations, also on social media,
- the emergence and popularisation of new lifestyles,
- socio-cultural changes,
- marketing determinants.

Among the behaviours characterizing people who are influenced by this trend, one can also indicate appropriate lifelong environmental education, regular contact with nature, consumption of ecological products, recycling of waste, and purchasing products with a long life cycle. Most of these behaviours bear the hallmarks of deconsumption (Patrzalek, 2017, p. 15). According to one definition, deconsumption is a conscious reduction in the consumption of products and services to a level consistent with an individual's reasonable needs. The following factors stimulate deconsumption:

- the need to rationalise consumption due to being tired of it and for health-related reasons,
- the increasing dematerialisation and servitization of consumption,
- a change in the perception of consumption as a means to an end rather than as the main goal in life,
- climate and natural environment protection.

In its early stages, the deconsumption trend manifests itself only in the behaviour of a small percentage of the most affluent consumers (Soon-Hwa, 2011, p. 117). Opponents of excessive consumption support zero-waste activities. In addition, one interesting manifestation of deconsumption is the development of the idea of the sharing economy (Lipowski et al., 2020, p. 103). It involves connecting people through online platforms, enabling them to provide services or share assets, resources, time, skills or capital without transferring ownership.

5. Virtualization of consumption

Three waves in the virtualization of consumption can be distinguished. The first one occurred 30 years ago, when online stores appeared in Europe and it became possible to buy goods via the Internet. The second wave concerns participatory consumption, when the conditions for sharing information in cyberspace, for example via social media, emerged. The third, in turn, concerns purchasing digital virtual goods, where consumption takes place only in the digital world because the consumed goods do not have a physical form, for example e-books and NFT's. An interesting manifestation of virtualization is also the creation of virtual consultants who replace real people. In the mass dimension, one can also talk about a virtual society consisting of digital doubles of specific people that are visible in cyberspace, for example in the form of profiles or avatars (Zacher, 2013, p. 19).

Virtual communities are a source of information as well as providing a sense of belonging and social identity to their members (Mazurek, 2012, p. 160). Manifestations of virtualization are particularly evident in the separation of life into virtual and real; individualization in the reception of content, which means that everyone can freely choose what they want and share it with others; and fulfilling one's needs at home at one's leisure rather than in public places.

Internet-connected devices make it possible for customers to freely use the web at various stages of the purchasing process, starting from realizing a need, through discovering ways to satisfy it, and ending with purchasing the goods and evaluating them. An important premise for the virtualization of consumption is the dynamic increase in the role of mobile applications in the purchasing process, which applies in particular to generations Y and Z (Ciechomski, 2017, p. 23). It is therefore a process in which needs are met using the Internet, electronic media or TV.

It is also worth noting the virtualization of behaviour in the area of leisure services, which manifests itself in the following ways:

- seeking ideas, inspiration, information about services, as well as consumer and expert opinions on these services,
- seeking information on the availability of services and, in the case of brick-and-mortar establishments, also on the availability of places of purchase (location, opening hours),
- seeking information on the terms and conditions of the transaction,
- booking seats and making payments,
- using group buying websites and social networking sites,
- informing others about one's purchase and giving feedback on it.

Consumers' interest in modern information and technology solutions can also take the form of a trend called gamification. It is a form of leisure activity which consists in playing various games with other participants of the virtual community and devoting large amounts of time to these games (Bartosik-Purgat, 2017, p. 48).

In summary, the virtualisation of consumption is a trend that will continue to develop dynamically in the age of modern communication technologies, and it is not limited only to purchasing goods, but also involves seeking and sharing information about them. Consumers do not want to be merely the recipients of intrusive advertising; they are interested in obtaining objective information, for example about the functionality, durability and the most attractive price offers of a given product, which is largely why the virtualisation of consumption is a trend with favourable prospects.

6. Other contemporary consumer trends

One of the attributes of contemporary consumption is its servitization, which consists in an increase in the share of services in consumer spending, i.e. in the generally growing consumption of services. The development of this trend is a consequence of an increase in people's wealth; the emergence of new needs; technological progress in the area of production and sales; and civilizational progress in terms of lifestyle changes as well as a dynamic development of the Internet and mobile devices. Thus, servitization is about increasing the consumption of services, while dematerialization is about increasing the consumption of intangibles such as knowledge or improvement in well-being and health.

Home-centred consumption involves relocating consumption from the outside to the inside of the home, which means that the home becomes a place for fulfilling needs which previously used to be consumed outside, such as education, healthcare, culture or recreation. The alienation of some consumers, consisting in their withdrawal into the private sphere, is fostered not only by modern technologies, but also by security concerns, excessive competition in the workplace, and the development of a range of services, including commercial and financial ones, that can be acquired without leaving home.

Another contemporary trend is the homogenization of consumption, which consists in the unification of consumer behaviour both in the national and international dimension. The consequence of homogenization is the spread of specific patterns of purchasing behaviour around the world. Such attitudes usually originate in the USA; hence the phenomenon is often referred to as the McDonaldization or Americanization of consumption. Globalization fosters the interpenetration of consumption patterns, the creation of the so-called global consumer culture, and the emergence of global consumer segments distinguished on the basis of values, attitudes and approaches towards products and brands (Gardocka-Jałowiec, 2015, p. 161). The impact of globalization on consumption can be seen on several levels:

- the development of commercial and service infrastructure according to global models,
- consumer mobility, both socio-professional and spatial,
- unification of legal regulations connected with the international nature of transactions,
- the significant impact of external value systems and lifestyles on the level and structure of consumption and the emergence of modern trends,
- unification in terms of the methods of satisfying consumers' needs.

It is worth adding at this point that an interesting discussion concerning the 27 European countries with regard to the level and structure of consumption in the context of its globalisation and at the same time its sustainable character (as well as its deviation from the model pattern of this structure) can be found in the work *Przemiany w strukturze konsumpcji w państwach europejskich w świetle koncepcji zrównoważonego rozwoju* [Changes in the structure of consumption in European countries in the light of the sustainable development concept] (Jankiewicz, 2022, pp. 5-189).

7. Conclusions

The modern consumer is a complex being, functioning in an environment characterised by turbulent conditions. Their behaviour is very diverse and heavily influenced by demographic, psychographic and environmental determinants, including the development of modern information technologies. It is the consumer who increasingly seeks to reduce the use of non-renewable environmental resources and the generation of waste which harms the environment. As a result, the trend towards green consumption is currently particularly intense. Sometimes the modern consumer consciously seeks to reduce consumption (deconsumption) or takes over some of the producer's tasks, thus becoming a prosumer. Other relatively common trends include consumer ethnocentrism, the essence of which is a preference for products of native origin, and the virtualisation of consumption, which consists in satisfying consumers' needs via the Internet, mobile applications and other electronic media. The issues discussed in this paper are extremely and invariably important, as the knowledge of consumer behaviour and contemporary consumption trends is the basis for the success of business managers.

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