



Consumer Behaviour in the Aspect of Sustainable Development

Małgorzata Rutkowska¹, Jerzy Tutaj¹, Jarosław
Jezierski¹, Anna Kamińska¹

¹ Department of Organization and Management,
Wrocław University of Science and Technology, Poland

CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN THE ASPECT OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Małgorzata RUTKOWSKA

malgorzata.rutkowska@pwr.edu.pl

Jerzy TUTAJ

jerzy.tutaj@pwr.edu.pl

Jarosław JEZIERSKI

jaroslaw.jezierski@pwr.edu.pl

Anna KAMIŃSKA

anna.maria.kaminska@pwr.edu.pl

Faculty of Computer Science and Management,
Wrocław University of Science and Technology, Wrocław, Poland

ABSTRACT

In the contemporary world, the care for the state of the environment becomes very important, which is reflected in the behavior of consumers on the market. The basic need of consumers is to function and achieve their own goals, as well as make their values true, which helps them to get satisfied and have a decent life. The economy of a "total consumer", whose only goal is to have more and more and to use more and more, has become widespread, therefore the whole economy seeks unlimited consumption. The solution is the idea of sustainable development, which combines economic development, environmental protection and social justice on a local, regional and global scale, at the same time opposing the pursuit of continuous economic growth, regardless of the social and environmental costs incurred.

The aim of the article is to analyze consumer behavior in the context of sustainable development. The article defines the concept of sustainable development and consumer behavior. Further, the problem of balanced consumption is approximated.

Keywords: Sustainable development, consumption, consumer behaviour

INTRODUCTION – CONCEPTUAL APPARATUS

The concept of sustainable development is variously understood in the literature on the subject. According to B. Poskrobko (1997, pp. 10-11), three ways of understanding sustainable development can be distinguished:-a socio-philosophical idea, in which attention is paid to the harmonization of the whole connection between civilizational human activity and the natural environment,-the direction of economic development which draws attention to the necessity of comprehending the economic, social and ecological problems of contemporary times, perceiving development processes in the long run (so-called intergenerational justice) and a reasonable allocation of renewable resources that will allow them to be restored (Pearce, 1987, pp. 9-17),-the direction of scientific research in which sustainable development is understood interdisciplinary, as

a consequence of which the economic, spatial, political, demographic and ethical order are treated together (Kiełczewski, 2008, p. 32)¹.

According to D. Pearce and R.K. Turner (1990, pp. 10-11) "Sustainable development consists in maximizing the net benefits of economic development, while protecting and ensuring recovery of usability and quality of natural resources over a long time horizon". Generally, sustainable development is defined as the doctrine of economics, assuming the possibility of satisfying the needs felt by the present generation at the level allowed by available civilizational development, without reducing the chances for them to be met by future generations. This definition refers to the report of the World Commission for Environment and Development, under the direction of G.H. Brundtland in which the main focus is on intergenerational justice. Whereas, for J.M. van den Berg and P. Nijkamp sustainable development is a civilization development in which the forms and dynamics of economic activity, institutions, lifestyles and population size are such that every person of current and future generations will be provided with an appropriate quality of life, and all aspects of this development are protected by the availability of natural resources, ecosystems and life support systems (van den Berg, Nijkamp, 1987, p. 11, for: Kiełczewski, 2008, p. 8). In the Agenda 21-sustainable development objectives are included in four basic categories (Keating, 1993; Borew, 1997):

-economic goals: eg. change in consumption patterns, international cooperation for sustainable development,

-social goals: eg. combating poverty, protecting cultural diversity,

-environmental goals: eg. protection of biodiversity, sustainable farming and waste management,

-institutional goals: eg. integration of environmental policy with economic and social policy, development of scientific research for sustainable development, strengthening the role of the most important social groups in decision-making processes (Zalega 2015, pp. 5-6).

In the literature on the subject there are various definitions of "consumer behavior" on the market. Many of them stress the relationship of behavior with the needs and means that serve to satisfy them. M. R. Solomon defines "consumer behavior" as a separate area in which the scope enters the study of processes occurring at the moment when a person or group chooses, buys, uses or rejects products, services, ideas and experiences to satisfy their needs and desires. A. Jachnis asserts that the term "consumer behavior" refers to those consumer behaviors that are associated with the acquisition, use, evaluation and disposal of products and/or services along with decisions preceding and conditioning these activities. Other creators of the concept of "consumer behavior" are G. Antonides and F. van Raaij who believe that consumer behavior includes mental and physical activities of individuals and small groups, regarding the orientation, buying, using and disposing of the product and household production, rare goods and services from the market, enabling the

¹ The first Report of the Roman Club from 1969 was of fundamental importance for starting the discussion on the direction in which socio-economic development should follow in order not to stop the economic growth leading to the economic and ecological crisis. In the report "Our Common Future" (1972, Stockholm) sustainable development was defined for the first time (Brundtland, 1991). On the second Earth Summit (1992, Rio de Janeiro), the idea of sustainable development was implemented. Five documents were adopted there: Agenda 21, the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development, the Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Convention on Biodiversity and the Declaration on Forests. The most important document is Agenda 21, a program of activities that should be undertaken in the 21st century in the area of the need to protect natural resources and manage them rationally (sustainable development). At the next Earth Summit (2002, Johannesburg) the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation set out 3 pillars: ecological, social and economic. For: Zalega, T., Sustainable development and sustainable consumption, in: Consumption and Development, 2015, No. 4, pp. 3 -25.

consumer to function and achieve their goals and realizing their values, and thus achieve satisfaction and prosperity, taking into account the short-term and long-term effects as well as individual and social consequences.

Fromm enriched the philosophical and sociological analysis of the industry and the mass consumption it generated by the psychological dimension. He believed that the organization of capitalist societies was completely subordinated to economics; they are "oriented maximally on the production of material goods and consumption", which results in "killing an individual by transforming them into a completely passive and powerless in the face of bureaucracy consumer". Their members lost "control over their own system". Fromm asserts that this type of social organization, reducing man to the element of the machine governed by its rhythm and requirements transforms them into homo consumens². Industrial production is not a response to spontaneous human needs³ - the system creates "artificial, false, non-developmental needs, which include the desire to have a huge number of items". Consumption - whether in the sense of physical consumption or whether it depends on appropriation - is the ultimate expression of human striving to control and dominate over reality.

"I am what I consume" has become an existential motto and in this formula Fromm⁴ sees the drama of contemporary culture. The more that being, which is an autonomous and essential value for this author, will be equated with possession, the more man will be alienated, enslaved by fetishism-what he has will be more important from how he lives, how he "is". The "to have" modus makes the man addicted to things in an absolute way—"the thing holds me, because my sense of identity, my normal mental state is based on my own things" (Fromm 1991).

Modern reality dominated by constant rush, aggressive media, large corporations, the market and thus ubiquitous advertising causes that every person is a consumer. Consumer, consumption - these terms are for most of us connoted as negative, they call to mind a passive, not very clever, deprived of their own opinions human mass, for which the greatest priority is to seek pleasure and banal entertainment. One of the first sociologists to consider the phenomenon of consumption was T. Veblen. In his work "The theory of the leisure class", he included a theory of ostentatious consumption that was very important from a sociological point of view. He stated that the motive for consuming various goods is not the need to survive, but the desire to create the possibility of creating glaring differences between people. Owning these goods means that their owners achieve a higher status. These consumption patterns created by higher classes are then taken over on the principle of imitation by middle classes to eventually penetrate the social lowlands. During this process, these patterns lose their magic, unavailability, and become more and more ordinary and less attractive. This implies the necessity of creating new consumption patterns by the "leisure class" (Veblen T., 1971)⁵.

Currently, representatives of the upper class, political and economic elites are also looking for goods and forms of consumption that would manifest their position and would not be available to the lower ranked in the hierarchy⁶.

² ie. a total consumer whose only goal is to have more and more and to use more and more.

³ ie. Our civilization began at the moment when the human race began to actively take control of nature [...]. Along with industrial progress [...] we found ourselves on the road leading to unlimited production and, consequently, unlimited consumption.

⁴ Fromm: "capitalist society produces a lot of useless things and to the same extent many useless people." (Fromm 1991).

⁵ ie. located at the top of the social ladder, in order to clearly distinguish itself from the representatives of the lower classes.

⁶ So rich people build bigger houses, buy better cars, spend holidays in more exotic places, etc. The rich have to earn and work more to satisfy their needs of showing material advantage over others and the poorer must have more money to try to equal the

Based on the above, the aim of the paper was defined as the analysis of consumer behavior in the context of sustainable development. The article defines the concept of sustainable development and consumer behavior, by using the study of the subject literature about sustainable development and the analysis of source materials. The research method used is the study of the subject literature and the analysis of source materials. The theoretical considerations were supported by the results of secondary research showing consumer behavior and attitudes towards environmentally friendly products.

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND CONSUMPTION BEHAVIOUR

At present, people have such goods that our ancestors could only dream of and yet they want to acquire even more. They buy not only goods necessary for life, but also those that they do not need at all. Consumers are convinced of the necessity of what they buy and it is hard for them to imagine that they could live without all these things. Research conducted in 1994 on a group of over 1,800 consumers by J. B. Schor confirmed that regardless of the individual's wealth, they will always want to earn more while striving to achieve maximum utility derived from the consumption of purchased goods. Respondents asked every 2-3 years a question about the level of their disposable income and the products they need to be able to fully meet their needs not only achieved higher disposable income in real terms than before, but also stressed that they would like to earn much more. In addition, all the time they felt a bit unsatisfied and expressed their desire to earn even more enabling them to fully satisfy their desires.

Currently, budget constraints are no longer an obstacle to continual consumption. The consumer can easily bypass them by, eg. consumption "on credit", which creates the illusion of unlimited consumer possibilities. The consumer can apply for a loan not only in financial institutions and in loan companies, or through installment sales. Excessive and unsustainable consumption, is the result of rapid economic growth. Among the problems arising from the excessive purchase of things the following ones can be mentioned:

Syllogomania - compulsive accumulation of things, often useless and worthless, which results from the fear of losing them. This is a problem related to excessive consumption combined with a phenomenon called collection team. In the longer term, this disease causes disorganization of social and professional life.

Ephemeralization - pursuit of what is new. The consumer feels the desire to have a newer good because of the fear of losing something important. The consumer is constantly accompanied by a sense of loss. It is associated with a continuous desire to have (*Czy to jeszcze zakupy, czy to już rozrywka*. Retrieved February 19, 2014, from <http://www.bankier.pl>).

In both cases, consumers' houses are transformed into warehouses. Such unrestrained consumption leads to both environmental degradation through excessive exploitation of natural resources, and to the waste of goods and human labor and creates significant economic disparities between people. Excessive consumption is also a huge source of waste generation. The average Pole produces 250-300 kg of garbage in a year, Americans 864 kg per person, the Japanese – 1000 kg. According to UN data, around 50 million tons of electro-waste are recycled annually in the world. In Poland, every year, 40,000 tons of equipment such as: TV sets, radios and players are trashed. It constitutes a decimal part of all Polish electro-waste. In the US this figure in 2012 amounted to 3.4 million tonnes. It is reasonable, then, to introduce the idea of sustainable consumption, which is an inseparable element of the idea of sustainable development⁷.

richer. As H. Mamzer writes: "the motive for consumption is not the need to survive, but the need to mark social differences between members of different classes." So we all, wind up this huge machine called consumerism.

⁷ It is adopted by the world community as a basic paradigm of behavior at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries and combines economic development, environmental protection and social justice on

According to Golka: "consumption is not so much about meeting the necessary needs, but satisfying desires or whims, characterized by greed in buying things and using services that are not necessary for survival⁸. It is a spectacular action for show and it serves the fight for prestige, and ultimately, the fight for the economic success of the individual"(Golka, 1993). He defines consumption as a quasi-religion because it has become a way of life and is often a goal to which one stubbornly aspires and because modern shopping centers, casinos, theme parks are considered "temples of consumption" because of their magical, sometimes even sacral character where people go to practice their "consumer religion". It is a source of pleasure and contentment, and the inability to cultivate it becomes a source of suffering. Both the poor and the rich participate in this striving to achieve material satisfaction of their needs. Living with a sense of self-independence in times of dominance of the market economy calculated for profit and efficiency is not easy. Especially when all teams of advertising and marketing specialists, try to influence our decisions regarding the choice of goods through a series of various tricks. Advertisements that are currently everywhere play a huge role in this process⁹. Advertisements¹⁰ usually do not refer to rational arguments, to our reason, but rather play on our feelings and emotions. What is more important is the context, as well as the recently fashionable reference to the often drawn out of thin air, quasi-scientific results informing us of the enormous benefits of using it. A. During says: "Creating needs is a huge global enterprise." Advertising has been one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy in the last four decades. In the U. S., spending on this goal has increased from US\$198 per person in 1950 to US\$495 in 1990. Global advertising spending increased from c. US\$39 billion in 1950 to US\$247 billion in 1988 and is growing faster than the efficiency of the economy".

According to U. Paco, modern commerce is based on three elements: the design of the premises, merchandising¹¹ and operation. These elements are closely related. Skilful control of all these elements determines the final commercial success. Going to shopping malls and other objects of collective consumption, we do not even realize that we are the object of huge manipulation mainly from the merchandising specialists. They need to make shopping pleasant and associated rather with fun than everyday necessity. In order to achieve this, they must first "take into account the determinants of the anatomical structure of a human being. Differences in behavior resulting from gender and age must also be taken into account because otherwise their offer will be directed to a sexless, age-deprived human being who does not exist in the real world." For example, visiting museums, sports facilities, etc. we enter and leave often through a store with numerous souvenirs. Goods are often sold in multipacks therefore people buy more than they intended. A lot of goods are displayed next to each other, suggesting to the client their complementarity, eg. ties are sold next to suits. Often the goods are displayed in such a way that the customer can touch and test it, which has a positive effect on sales efficiency. The interior and atmosphere are also to encourage a customer to buy, so as a rule, the first department we get in the supermarket is often a florist or a department

a local, regional and global scale, while opposing the pursuit of continuous economic growth, regardless of the social and environmental costs.

⁸ Similarly, according to H. Mamzer, consumption culture imposes on the individual the necessity of buying and using objects and ideas that are often unnecessary in the context of satisfying life's needs.

⁹ They inform us about price reductions, larger packages of products at the same price, opportunities to win valuable prizes and many other benefits resulting from the purchase of this and not another product.

¹⁰ According to Ritzer, modern advertising, designed to "help" people in deciding, was the first step on the road from the production to the consumer society.

¹¹ As Paco writes: "until now, merchandising has been a poor relative of marketing. Marketing specialists have decided how the product will be presented to the world, and less important details regarding translating it to the store level have been left to merchandising specialists - marking inside the store, the layout of the exhibition. These relations changed when it was realized that more than half of shopping in the store is unplanned.

with bread. The point is to stimulate the consumer's senses, weaken his firmness and create a positive image of the store.

The need to buy more and more new products and the desire to experience ever newer, exciting experiences caused that consumerism has become a permanent and indispensable part of our lives. Ritzer in his book "Macdonaldisation of social life" went to compare different areas of modern social life and the principles of market operation with the operation of McDonald's fast food restaurants¹². These most striking features of macdonaldisation are:

- efficiency as seeking the most optimal solutions and the best possible means,
- calculating - emphasizes the quantitative characteristics of goods and services,
- predictability and the possibility of manipulation.

All these features have major impact on our consumer behavior.

Calculation, on the other hand, means that the quantity offered is more and more influencing our purchasing decisions, in place of quality. Shopping centers and fast food outlets lure us by various types of price reductions, promotions in the form of offering more products at the same price¹³. Predictability, is to make the customer entering for example, the market or McDonald's know what may happen to them, what they can order or buy there¹⁴.

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND DEVELOPMENT

Sustainable consumption means such consumption that contributes to the quality of life of present and future generations. The increase in the quality of life is affected not only by the level of consumption, but also: health, safety, education, work and social status, the state of the natural environment and social justice. Therefore, it is important to introduce a model of sustainable consumption. This model assumes consumption of products and services in such a way as to minimize the consumption of natural resources, especially non-renewable ones, as well as limit the amount of waste generated during consumption.

Continuous and sustainable consumption is balanced in the following aspects (Kiełczewski, 2008, pp. 57-58):

- economic (establishing such proportions between current and future consumption, which do not contribute to economic imbalances),
- ecological (maximizing the usability of consumption while maintaining the usability and quality of natural resources and the natural environment),
- social (relatively equal distribution of consumption, i.e. accessibility for people regardless of time and space, and preference for forms of consumption that do not cause social problems),
- psychological (consumption contributing to the increase of the quality of life),

¹² Using the example: if we want to make purchases, withdraw money or eat, most often we want to be served quickly and efficiently. Therefore, we go to the supermarket for shopping, to McDonald's for food and we withdraw the money from the ATM to save the most valuable thing - time.

¹³ This tendency can be seen even in the use of the names: eg. multipack, XXL fries. All this leads to the feeling that quality is the same as a large amount of things.

¹⁴ Markets, fast food bars or company stores, especially those belonging to the chain, are characterized by almost identical interior design and proposed assortment regardless of the country. This makes the client eating chicken at KFC in London feel the same way as at KFC in Hamburg.

- demographic (demographic conditions do not constitute a permanent barrier to consumption growth),
- spatial (ways of satisfying needs do not violate the rules of spatial order),
- intertemporal (the above assumptions are possible to realize in an unlimited time perspective).

In order to achieve a continuous and sustainable development and improve the quality of life of all people, states should limit or eliminate production or consumption patterns that distort this development and should promote appropriate demographic policy (Gajdzik, Wycislik 2010, p. 25).

Consumption trends convergent with the idea of sustainable and continuous development:

- eco-consumption - consumption oriented towards environmental protection. The production of organic food takes place in a way that does not impact ecological balance, with the employment of natural methods, without the use of artificial fertilizers, synthetic plant protection agents, antibiotics or GMO. This method of production ensures the purity of groundwater, protects the soil from pollution and reduces the leaching of nutrients. The main purpose of organic farming is the production of high quality food, while caring for the environment.
- consumer ethnocentrism (preferring national and local products) – it is important to rationally select imported products and not completely stop trade between countries. Ethnocentric consumption encourages both the selection of regional products and the consumption of products according to their seasonal nature, thus supporting the natural environment and local food producers [Słaby 2006, pp. 16-17].

Education of the society, leading to a change in the perception of the quality of life exclusively through the prism of consumption seems necessary, as well as the awareness that constant satisfaction of material needs only provides an apparent sense of happiness and life satisfaction. When making decisions about the purchase of a specific product, the consumer influences the demand for this product, which in the long run translates into the volume of supply¹⁵. Consumer responsibility, however, does not have to be limited to adequate consumer decisions. A manifestation of such responsibility may also be expressed in the form of active participation in discussions on the activities of various companies, or using official communication channels to influence the policies of these companies (Lewicka-Strzałcka, 2006, pp. 158-159).

The practical implementation of the concept of sustainable consumption has also become the basic objective of the European Union's activities in the field of environmental protection and consumer policy aimed at striving to raise consumer awareness and strengthening their rights in accessing product and producer information and ensuring security offered products.

CONCLUSIONS:

The sustainable development is a development in which the needs of the present generation can be met without undermining the prospects of future generations to satisfy them. Based on the above analysis, it was found that:

- Consumer responsibility can shape not only the behavior of entrepreneurs, but also the product market.

¹⁵ The increase in demand may lead to an increase in supply, and the limitation or complete abandonment of the purchase of a specific product may lead to a reduction in production or complete liquidation of the production line. The consumer, bearing in mind consumer responsibility, may try to limit the amount of purchased products produced by companies whose actions he/she does not accept, for the benefit of companies whose activities are perceived as ethical.

- One of the basic factors motivating consumers to pro-ecological activities is the level of their ecological awareness. As it may be concluded from the presented research results, the state of ecological awareness of society increases, which is visible in consumer purchasing preferences.
- A high level of ecological awareness of the society contributes to reducing the negative impact on the environment resulting from excessive consumption.

The next step of the research about consumer behaviour in the aspect of sustainable development will be empirical research.

REFERENCES:

Berg J.M. van den & Nijkamp P. (1991), *Operationalizing Sustainable Development: Dynamic Ecological Economic Model*, Ecological Economics, 4, 11-33.

Borew J. (1997), *Sustainability and Environmental Economics*, , Leeds, University Press Botsman

Brundtland G.H. (Ed.) (1991), *Nasza wspólna przyszłość. Raport Światowej Komisji do spraw Rozwoju i Środowiska*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo PWN.

Czy to jeszcze zakupy, czy to już rozrywka, Retrieved February 19, 2014 from <http://www.bankier.pl>.

Fromm E. (1991), *Mieć czy być*, Poznań, Dom Wydawniczy Rebis.

Gajdzik B. & Wyciąłk A. (2010), *Wybrane aspekty ochrony środowiska i zarządzania środowiskowego*, Gliwice, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej.

Golka M. (1993), *Wchodzenie w cywilizację konsumpcyjną*, in: M. Golka (Ed), *Nowe style zachowań*, Poznań, Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora.

Keating M. (2000), Paradiplomacy and Regional Networking, Workshop on *Constituent Units in International Affairs*, Hannover, Germany, Oct. 2000, Forum of Federations: 10.

Kiełczewski D. (2008), *Konsumpcja a perspektywy zrównoważonego rozwoju*, Białystok, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymostku.

Lewicka-Strzałecka (2006), *O naturze praw konsumenckich, w szczególności o prawie konsumentów do edukacji*. In A. Lewicka-Strzałecka (Ed.) (2006), *Edukacja konsumencka: cele, instrumenty, dobre praktyki*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN.

Mamzer H. *Przestrzeń i liczba a nowe wymiary zachowań*, in: M. Golka (Ed), *Nowe style zachowań*, , Poznań, Wydawnictwo Fundacji Humaniora.

Pearce D., Turner R.K, *Foundations of an Ecological Economics*. Ecological Modelling, 38, pp. 9-17

Paco U. (2001) *Dlaczego kupujemy? Nauka o robieniu zakupów. Zachowania klienta w sklepie*. Warszawa, Wydawnictwo MT Biznes.

Poskrobko B. (1997), *Teoretyczne aspekty ekorozwoju*, *Ekonomia i Środowisko*, 1 (10), 7-20.

Ritzer G. (2001), *Magiczny świat konsumpcji*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Literackie: Muza.

Ritzer G. (1997), *Makdonaldyzacja społeczeństwa*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Literackie: Muza.

Słaby T. (2006), *Konsumpcja. Eseje statystyczne*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Difin.

Veblen T. (1971), *Teoria klasy próżniaczej*, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo PWN.

Zalega T. (2015), *New consumer trends (w:) M. Burchard-Dziubińska (Ed.) Towards a green economy – from ideas to practice*, Łódź, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego.

Zalega, T. (2015), *Zrównoważony rozwój a zrównoważona konsumpcja*, *Konsumpcja i Rozwój*, 4, (13), 3-26.