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The myth consumerist society?

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THE MYTH OF CONSUMERIST SOCIETY? MITY SPOŁECZEŃSTWA KONSUMPCYJNEGO?

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi próbę opisanego znaczenia i roli konsumpcji w życiu współczesnego człowieka. Przeprowadzone badania dotyczące potrzeb konsumpcyjnych, stylów konsumpcji, a także funkcji, które nabywcy przypisują produktom, sugerują, że konsumpcja może mieć charakter ograniczony, poprzez silne powiązania z realnymi potrzebami. Przedstawione wyniki mogą stanowić przesłankę do dyskusji poświęconej schyłkowi społeczeństwa konsumpcyjnego.

Słowa kluczowe: *potrzeby konsumentów, style konsumpcji, funkcje produktów, konsumpcja symboliczna.*

Introduction

The ordinary meaning of consumerism is understood as an attitude manifested by excessive consumption of goods that cannot be justified in the real needs of the individual or social unit. Analyzing consumers' needs, J. Szczepanski distinguishes three types of them: real, virtual and an envelope one. A real need is simply a need in its pure form – something that a man actually needs. The „envelope” need is its psychological dimension or meaning that an entity allocates to a specific need. The „envelope” needs develop on cultural ground. Culture often provokes the emergence of new needs, the implementation of which becomes necessary, not only because of the perceived need, but also to give the individual a sense of psychological comfort. The pursuit of contentment and psychological satisfaction causes that the growth of the „enveloped” needs is unlimited. The third category – the ‘virtual’ needs – are such that an individual feels but which realization does not bring any advantage. Just on the contrary, they can adversely affect the human condition. These kind of needs J. Szczepański determined as ‘anti – needs’. A virtual need does not possess any actual component. ‘Actual consumerist needs have an absolute priority, unfulfilling them causes death. But

the priority given to the enveloped and the virtual consumption's needs is the result of an adopted lifestyle and its principles'¹.

Z. Bauman notes that with the advent of postmodernism, the nature of human needs has changed:

A need, which to nineteenth-century economists was the essence of 'durability' 'a constant and determined for once and for all complete thing, was at first rejected and for some time replaced by a desire – a need for something much more 'liquid' and flexible, and that's because of the half-evident relationships with the moody, artistic dream of authenticity and about 'inner self' that is waiting for expressing itself (...) A purchase is random, unexpected and spontaneous. There is something dreamlike and at the same time fulfilling, and as all the caprices and fancies, it is equally inauthentic and childish².

Consumerist society, which is a derivative of an unfettered consumption, treats the acquisition of wealth as a priority, which is the determinant of the quality of life. A way of consumption is determined by the individual's preferred lifestyle, as well as it betrays their social affiliation. A chosen lifestyle serves regulatory functions in the consumer society, because the lifestyle of the privileged class becomes a model towards which the representatives of the lower classes aim at³. Similarly is the issue being seized by R. L. Craig who wrote that the first premise of postmodern consumption is an intrinsic link between product and the buyers' lifestyle, which are seen and recognized as one. Products „demonstrate” individual characteristics and the personality of the buyer⁴.

Consumerist culture is a consequence of the rise of a consumerist society that gave a whole new meaning to material goods. Originally, possessions served to satisfy essential human needs. M. Featherstone, referring to Leiss's observations (1978), points out that people in consumerist societies acquire material goods in order to highlight the differences in lifestyle distinguishing social relations⁵. Douglas and Isherwood (1980), quoted by Featherstone,

¹ J. Szczepański, *Introduction to anthropological theory of consumption*, Warsaw 1981.

² Z. Bauman, *Consumption – an import dimension of cultural globalization*, Warsaw 2005.

³ T. Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, Warsaw 1971.

⁴ R. L. Craig, *Advertising as Visual communication*, in: *Communication*, ed. R. L. Craig, University of Ulster at Coleraine 1992, p.175.

⁵ M. Featherstone, *Consumer's behavior in terms of culture*, in: *Consumer's behavior. Concepts and the European study*, ed. M. Lambkin, F. van Raaij, G. Foxall, B. Heilbrunn, Warsaw 2001.

add that not only the acquisition of certain goods, but also ‘the management of material possessions’ is to ‘draw a line between social relationships’. For a modern man, material goods have gained special significance; worldly possessions located in the heart of the individual’s interest have become a source of important psychic experiences – life satisfaction or a sense of displeasure. R. W. Belk also recognizes the relationships between ‘having’ and ego. Ego is built not only by experiences and psychophysical condition of an individual, but also by possessions, reputation, and above all, one’s bank account balance. A symbolic language of consumption reaches to both children and adults through media, family and school⁶. Material goods seduce, referring to desires, needs and fancies- stimulate the imagination and make the individual ‘wedged’ between morality and the seduction process, which results from the mechanisms of culture and consumption⁷.

Many authors draw attention to hedonism of nowadays’ consumers, among which Cathelat and his pioneering work on the styles of consumption (1999 quoting C. Mezrahi) should be mentioned⁸. Cathelat highlighted the importance of hedonism in his study on euro styles⁹. D. B. Holt points out hedonism, but first and foremost, the symbolic significance of contemporary consumption. He describes the following four dimensions of consumption: consumption as fun, as hedonistic experience, as an emanation of personality and social status of the buyer and as a kind of ‘social game’¹⁰. Tendency towards a hedonistic and impulsive consumption is a feature of individual-oriented societies, while, due to the pursuit of social coherence and due to the conformity and standards,

⁶ R. W. Belk, K. D. Bahn, R. N. Mayer, *Developmental Recognition of Consumption Symbolism*, „Journal of Consumer Research”, 1992, 1, p.4-17.

⁷ R. W. Belk, *Materialism, Trait Aspects of Living in a Material World*, „Journal of Consumer Research” 1985a, 12, p.265-280. Idem, *Possessions and the Extended Self*, „Journal of Consumer Research” 1985b, 8, p.139-168.

⁸ C. Mezrahi, *La strategie de marche*, in: C. Mezrahi, *Le marketing immobilier*, Paris 1991.

⁹ Ch. Pinson, A. Jolibert, *Consumer’s behavior-review of current concepts and issues*, in: *Consumer’s behavior*, op. cit..

¹⁰ D. B. Holt, *How Consumers Consume: A Typology of Consumption Practises*, „Journal of Consumer Research” 1995, 22, p. 1-16.

collectivism is associated with a more balanced consumption¹¹. The role of the desires of buyers indicate Belk, Ger, Askegaard¹².

One of the manifestations of consumerist orientation of buyers may be adding symbolic functions to material goods. Usually one distinguishes two basic roles that material goods perform. Namely, an instrumental and a symbolic function (Csikszentmihalyi, Rocheberg-Halton, 1981; Dittmar, 1992; Etzioni, 1991; Livingstone, 1992; McCracen, 1990; Prentice, 1987; Trasler, 1982)¹³. Assigning instrumental functions to the material goods consists in considering them as tools. Symbolism of material goods means that they acquire meaning in a social context, being an expression of the relationships between the unit and the other people. To sum up the previous discussion on consumption, one can conclude that the dominant view on the subject in literature indicates that a modern man has given a new quality to consumption, giving it a significant part of their time and identifying consumer's products with the sense of their own self-identity and social position¹⁴. The above remark expresses the concept and orientation of 'consumerist society' that gave psychological and metaphysical sense to material goods. However, a so-called anthropological research on 'primal welfare societies' suggests that already a primitive man dedicated approximately 4.8 times more time to consumption – getting food, its preparation and consumption¹⁵. Consumption was, and therefore still is, an essential element of human life.

Current studies on the 'primal welfare societies' describe the differences between people belonging to 'different economic systems'.

Rich and economically developed societies, realizing a market economy, are paradoxically, a subject to a 'deficiency principle'. Insufficiency of economic resources is the first principle of the richest societies in the world.

For today's consumers, the use of goods and services is a consequence of the constant sense of deficiency in providing for the needs:

¹¹ Y. Zhang, *The Influence of Self-Constraint on Impulsive Consumption*, „Journal of Consumer Affairs” 2006, 1, p. 838-850.

¹² R. W. Belk, G. Ger, S. Askegaard, *The Fire of Desire: A Multisited Inquiry into Consumer Passion*, „Journal of Consumer Research” 2003, 1, p. 326-351.

¹³ See: M. Górnik-Durese, *Psychological aspects of ownership – between instrumentality and social utility of material goods*, Katowice 2002.

¹⁴ J. Baudrillard, *Consumerist society. Its myths and structures*, Warsaw 2006.

¹⁵ M. D. Sahlins, *The Primal Welfare Society*, in: *The study on culture. Elements of anthropological theory*, ed. M. Kempny, E. Nowicka, Warsaw 2006, p.292.

‘Consumption is a double tragedy, something that begins with a feeling of scarcity, and ends with a sense of deprivation’.

Needs of people living in a postmodern world constantly grow and make a modern man spend most of his life on the acquisition of funds for ‘feeding’ the noticeable deficiencies.

Meanwhile, people living in primitive societies, in spite of an objective poverty, lived in a prosperous way:

‘In addition to food and water (important exceptions), which Nyae Naye! Kung had in sufficient quantities (...), everyone had everything they needed, because every man is able to do, and does things usually made by men, and every woman does things made by women ‘(...)They lived in a kind of material prosperity’, they did not feel any material pressure, nor did they devote all the free time to work, but instead, throughout many hours, devoted themselves to laziness. The results of a research conducted by Mc Carthy, Mc Arthur (1960), indicate that the daily routines of Arnhem Land’s inhabitants were interrupted by chit-chat, gossip and sleep- an average relaxation time among men ranged from 2 hours 15 minutes to 3 hours 15 minutes. While among the group of women from 2 hours 45 minutes to 3 hours 15 minutes a day:

‘If men were in a camp they usually slept after dinner for an hour or one and a half (...) spent their free time’, mainly on ordinary social activities: chatting gossiping, etc.

Study quoted by MD Sahlins not only illustrates the differences between people living in the primitive and postmodern community, but also show some similarities between the representatives of different civilizations and economic systems.

Alike a modern man, so did representative of the primary population devote a lot of time, or most of it, to consumption. Bushmen schedules, analyzed by R. Lee Dobe, show that on average, during 4 weeks, they used 668 man-days on consumption and 156 man-days on work, with an average group size of 30.9.

In the light of the above, one could risk a thesis that human nature does not change or changes very slowly, so slowly that it is difficult to notice the differences in the priorities of people living in the past and nowadays. People live thanks to the fact that they manage to fulfill their important needs. The most important group of needs that determine the possibility of continued existence are needs of a basic character. These are the needs to which our ancestors and us, who live nowadays, devote a lot of attention and time.

Today’s buyers tend to perceive the multi-faceted functions of material goods. J. O’Shaughnessy notes that the objects’ functions perceived by buyers

are of a complex nature. Firstly, these features can be categorized based on necessity, on the so-called 'necessary' properties – qualities that must characterize the product – and the 'additional' features that simply enhance the product and may affect its 'symbolic' interpretation. O'Shaughnessy also distinguished specific features of the product that are connected with amenities and that guarantee product safety. The remaining specific functions have been identified as: integrative – binding the purchaser with the type of consumer's environment, economic – revealing the social position of the buyer, and adaptive – understood as 'respecting' standards and canons of fashion by the purchaser. In this paper, the necessary features of the products have been interpreted as real functions, whereas the additional and detailed features as symbolic¹⁶.

The aim of the study was to confront a thesis that a modern society 'breaks out' from the principle of universal consumption. In order to verify this assumption the following research tasks have been taken; the first objective was to determine the cognitive aspect that occurs between the needs and desires of buyers, the second goal was associated with the determination of the dominant styles of consumption, according to the aforementioned concept of consumerist styles by Holt, the last objective was associated with the mark, which product features: basic or additional and specific (understood as symbolic) were more important for buyers. Because of the expected differences in the evaluation of the function of different product categories, product's features were considered in relation to two categories: inexpensive product –dishwashing liquid, and more expensive product – mobile phone). Second study phase was for the researched to designate the subjects relevant to their specific product features. The analysis of specific features of the product was also made on the example of two categories: inexpensive product –toothpaste- and more expensive – ironing machine. The selected categories met the universal access criteria of a product and were of unisex nature.

Method and the researched

The first task of the study's participants consisted in dividing their expenses on the realization of the necessary needs and felt desires. The researched were asked to apportion their budget to two categories – needs and desires, so that the value of the sum of the two categories comprised of 100%. Instruction described needs as the living necessities and desires as „growing” above the compulsory needs.

¹⁶ J. O'Shaughnessy, *Why do people buy?*, Warsaw 1994.

The second task consisted in completing a scale titled 'the styles of consumption' by the study participants. This scale originates from the theory of Holt, who describes four types of consumption: consumption defined as a pleasurable experience, consumption representing a 'reflection' of the buyer's personality traits, a consumption which is an expression of the social status of the buyer, and finally consumption as a „social and fun game” that helps establish and maintain interpersonal relations. Initially, the prepared method consisted of 100 statements that represent the distinguished four styles of consumption, there were 25 statements for each style. Qualitative analysis of the above, excluding opinions of an ambiguous or synonymous character, reduced the number of items to 35. The version of the 35 statements was considered as experimental and a numbered group of 86 people were tested according to it. The obtained results were subjected to Curtis's factor analysis. This resulted in four-beam factors, where each represented featured category of the consumption style by Holt. The strongest factors, tied in bundles, finally created a method consisting of 16 statements with four of them representing the style of consumption. This version being continually in progress, was used to perform this test.

The task of the participants, filling in the described method was to take a stand on each of the following statements on a 5-point scale, where 1 means: strongly disagree and 5:strongly agree. Last task consisted in ordering the purchase of two products, washing up liquid and a mobile phone, according to the criteria, projecting the basic functions: e.g. reliable and secondary function e.g. a pleasant smell. The researched organised the motives of potential purchase from 1 to 4, where 1 represented the least important reason and 4 was an equivalent of the most important one. The second task of the researched was associated with rearrangement of the following functions: basic, complementary, but also detailed concerning the possible purchase of toothpaste and iron. The functions of the specific features included facilities -iron has a comfortable handle, security – iron meets safety standards, integration – toothpaste recommended by the stars of the silver screen, economic -iron is used by modern women and adaptive – product by a well-known and respected brand. These above mentioned specific functions were tidied up according to a '1 to 7' hierarchy, where 1 is very important reason to purchase and 7 stands for the most important reason.

The study included 539 people, both men and women, representing the following categories of education: primary, vocational, secondary, higher, they were all aged between 18-75. The study was conducted in the Pomeranian district in Poland. The participants were also asked to mark their own financial situation as: difficult, average, good and very good, as well as to indicate the

extent to which they realize the basic needs in the process of consumption and what level of hedonism they represent¹⁷.

Prior to testing, the following assumptions have been made: research participants are diverse in terms of subjective assessment of their own financial situation, and will favor the category of consumer's needs over desires. A presumption was made that the most common style will be the style of consumption associated with hedonistic orientation and the style expressing personality. With regard to low-cost products the surveyed will favor the basic functions, and in terms of the more expensive products, the additional ones. What is more, towards both categories of the product, the researched will show favor toward the functions associated with the guarantee of safety and convenience. The surveyed will appreciate the other specific features like integrative, economic and the adaptive one, primarily according to more pricey products. A statistical package STATISTICA version 10th was used to perform a statistical analysis.

Results

The results regarding the first issue are as follows: the proportion occurring between the needs and desires of consumers indicated a significant predominance of needs. For 63% of the researched, needs were more important than desires. Only 37% of respondents pointed out the leading role of desires. Needs and desires diversified the respondents when it comes to gender. Needs have been growing faster among women and desires among men. For comparison: see Table 1.

Table 1. Average for the needs and desires of groups of women and men

Gender	Needs	Desires
Women	66,3	33,7
Men	60,1	39,9

Source: own study

The researched were not changed statistically in a significant way by the style of consumption. As it can be seen from the obtained results, the respondents most often chose the second style -personality emanation, the first style -hedonistic orientation, style no. 3 -focus on social relations and style no.4 -consumption as an expression of social status. For comparison see Table 2.

¹⁷ Reported studies included a wider range of variables, inter alia, a study on the level of hedonistic orientation.

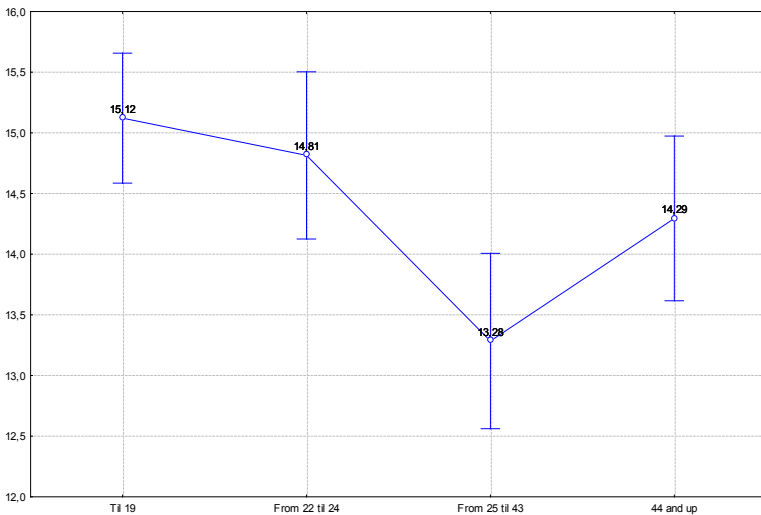
Table 2. Styles of consumption. Averages

Style of consumption	Number of the researched	An Average	A standard deviation	A standard mistake	Min.	Max.
Hedonism	539	14,5	3,85	0,2	4,0	20
Personality	539	15,0	2,84	0,3	4,0	20
Status	539	11,6	3,19	0,1	4,0	20
Social relations	539	13,1	3,62	0,2	4,0	20

Source: own study

The analysis of the results on the styles of consumption, in terms of the age of the researched, allowed to note the following: strong intensity of the hedonistic orientation was associated with young age of the respondents -18-24 years of age. A significant decrease in the severity of hedonism appeared in middle 25-43 years of age, while the re-growth was related to the period after 44 years of age. See figure 1.

Figure 1. A Hedonistic style of consumption and the age of buyers. Averages

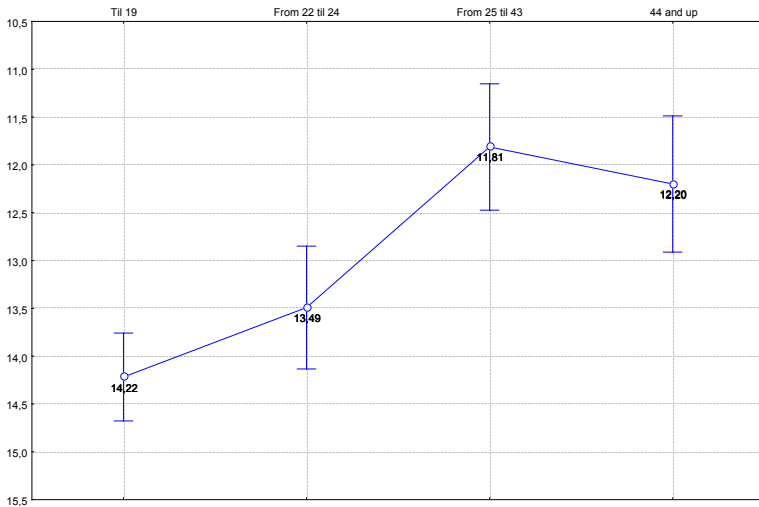


Source: own study

With regard to the second style of consumption -consumption as an emanation of personality, based on age, there were no differences among respondents.

As for the third style of consumption -consumption as an expression of social status, one could observe the process of reducing its impact on the behavior of buyers between 25 – 43 years old and an increase of the importance of that style after 44 years old (Graph 2).

Graph 2. A status-like style of consumption and the buyers' age. Averages

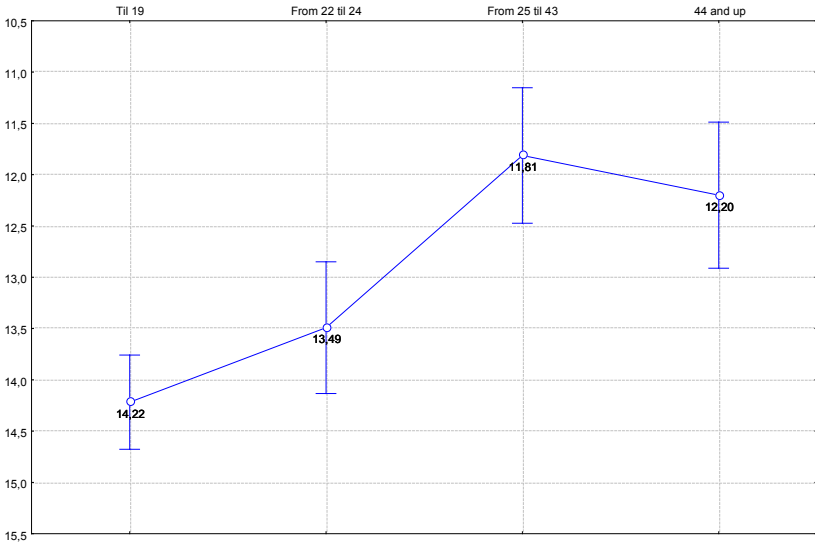


Source: own study

Consumption, understood as an opportunity to implement social relations in the process of purchasing, characterized primarily very young buyers – up to 19 years old and older – after 44 years of age. See Graph 3.

The Comparison of shopping motives, arising from the basic or additional product features, showed the advantage of meaning, for buyers, categories: basic function (basic motive), both in regard for low-cost products – a washing up liquid, and the more expensive one – a mobile phone. The two tables below set out the results, showing the importance of comparing features / themes for the selected products. Table 3 shows the average of the analyzed function / themes in the context of low-cost products, while Table 4 shows the average for the more expensive product. Despite the clear predominance of basic functions / motives, among which, there were no statistically significant differences.

Graph 3. Consumption as social relationships. Average



Source: own study

Table 3. The importance of the basic and additional function / motives of the low-cost product. Averages

Product Feature/ shopping motives	Average	Standard deviation	Cases	Difference	Standard deviation – difference	t	df
Liquid, Basic function/ motive	5,90	1,28					
Liquid, Additional function/ motive	4,11	1,28	539	1,79	2,56	16,3	538

Source: own study

Table 4. The importance of the basic and additional function / motive of the more expensive product. Averages

Function of the products / shopping motives	Average	Standard deviation	Cases	Difference	Standard deviation / difference	t	df	p
Phone Basic Function/ Motive	5,93	1,26						
Phone, additional function/ motive	4,08	1,29	539	1,85	2,50	17,1	538	0

Source: own study

An application, according to the data, of non-parametric Chi Square test of compliance (see Table 3) allowed us to formulate a presumption that when the consumer has „appreciated” the basic functions of the low-cost products – dishwashing liquid, he or she did as well appreciate the more expensive products – mobile phone. Therefore, a buyer „sensitive” to the basic functions, was guided by them in relation to each and other type of product. If, on the other hand, a consumer showed favor to additional features of the low-cost products – liquid detergent, he or she did not do the same towards a more expensive product like phone – in relation to the expensive product he or she behaved with restraint and as if guided by its basic qualities. It can be assumed that the buyers oriented towards the basic features of the products, „sees” them in each category of purchased items, while buyers who are „open” to additional functions, are willing to take risks with products regarded as rather cheap. Towards the more expensive products, they behave more cautiously. These suggestions are confirmed by the results of the compliance test : Chi-square (Table 5).

Table 5. Basic/additional functions/motives for cheap and expensive products. Chi Square test

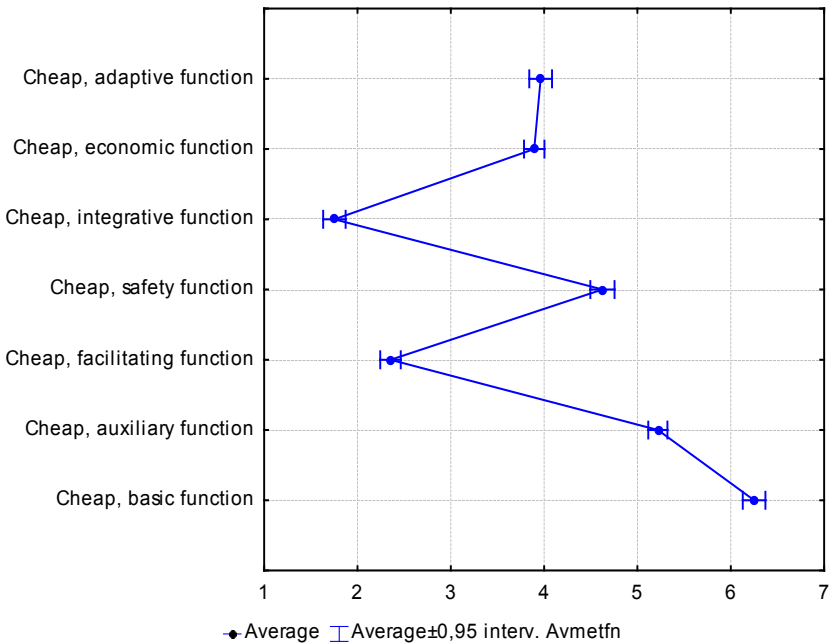
	Chi-square	df	p
Chi square Pearson	60,17076	df=1	p=,001

Source: own study

The following two graphs represent the importance of all the specific features of the product in relation to two categories, namely cheap and expensive product.

As the first chart presents, the participants in the role of consumers buying cheap products –toothpaste – formed a kind of hierarchy of actions, arising from the meaning, which they attributed to certain functions of the product. Order specific functions regarding the cheap product, were as follows: basic function, secondary, security, adaptive, economic, facilitating and integrative. See Figure 4.

Figure 4. Detailed product features for a cheap product. Averages

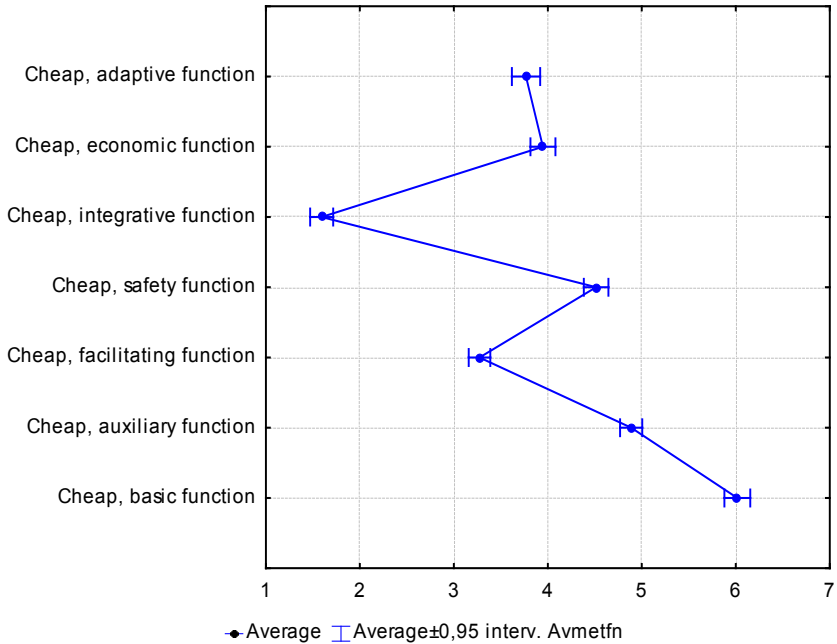


Source: own study

The above graph shows that the surveyed consumers, appreciated in the cheap product, in a special way the following functions: main, auxiliary and security, and belittled the importance of the function connected with convenience, which carries product and function integration, expressing a desire to manifest their social prestige.

In the case of a more expensive product, the order of the product function important to the buyer, obtained during the research, was as follows: basic function, secondary, security, economic, adaptative, facilitating and integrative. See Figure 5.

Figure 5. Detailed product' functions for a more expensive product. Averages



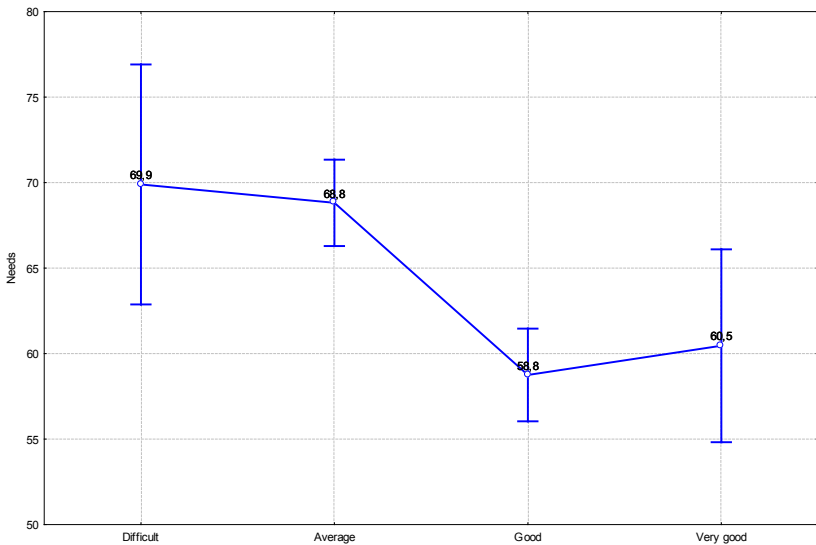
Source: own study

The graph shows an almost identical sequence, i.e. as compared to a low-priced product, of the analyzed functions of the more expensive product. The only difference is that the economic function changes places with the adaptive one; for the cheap product the adaptive function is in 4th place, and the economic function in the 5th. Thus, for the buyer of the more expensive product, it is first of all the basic advantages, secondary and safety function of the product that is of highest value, while the lowest value he assigns to the functions associated with the convenience and integrative features of the product. Such

functions as: adaptive – brand product and economic – product imitates the economic position of the buyer, reached an average assessment. With regard to a more expensive product, the researched person, appreciated the importance of the convenience associated with this products category.

It has been reported that there are relationships between one’s subjective evaluation on their own financial situation and the preferred consumer needs. Figure 6 shows the relationship between the needs of the buyers and the assessment of their financial situation.

Figure 6. The relationships between the buyer’s needs and a subjective assessment of their financial situation

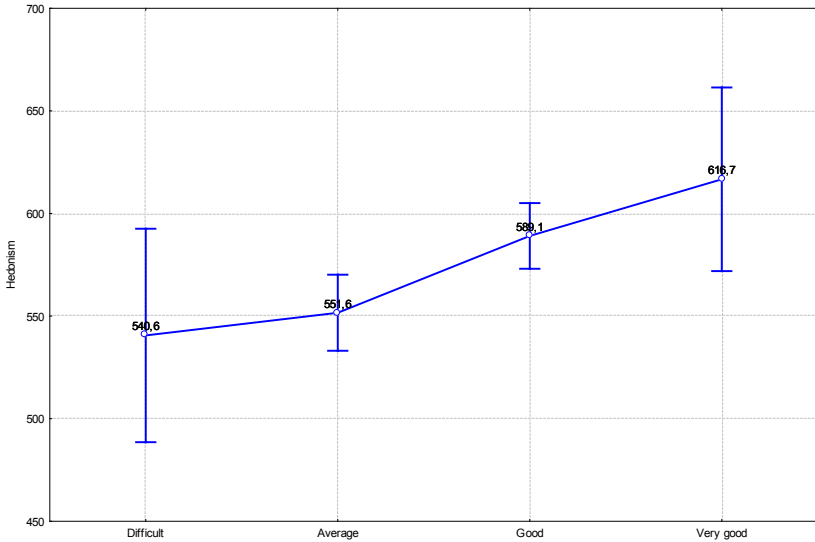


Source: own study

The graph shows that the importance of the needs decreased together with an improvement of customers’ material conditions.

Favorable financial situation also encourages the development and growth of meaning in life of hedonic value. See Figure 7.

Figure 7. The relationship between the assessment of their own financial situation and hedonistic orientation



Source: own study

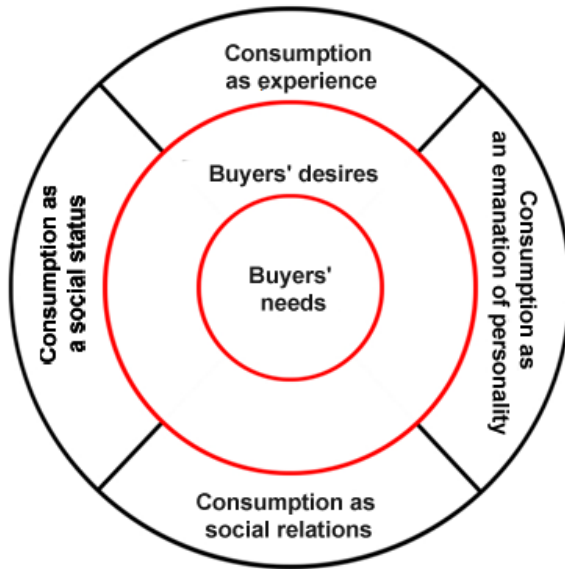
Discussion

The study showed that to respondents needs, or the necessities, were more important than the consumer's desire. Needs were more strongly 'associated' with women and desires grew faster in case of the surveyed men. That result emphasizes the rational nature of the process of consumption, which is opposing the view that the buyers' behaviors are unreal.

Participants of the study with a similar frequency realized different kinds of consumption. Hedonism, above all, described the young, as well as the mature that are likely to have reached a certain level of stability in their material life. Similar results were obtained with regard to the consumption understood as an expression of social status. This style is often characterized by consumption of young people; however, it occurred more frequently among adults and the older ones. The critical point appeared at the age ranging between 25-43 years of age, during which consumers did not evince any tendency towards hedonistic and social status consumption. However, probably because of the process of

investing in the family, they displayed a sensitivity to spending on the ‘unnecessary’. Consumption understood as the fulfillment of social relationships has proven to be important for the young, about 18 year olds, but especially for mature and older people, for which consumer activity is sometimes the only social contact. What follows, is that the process of consumerist activity occurred primarily among mature and old people, as well as young people; and the process of consumption was based primarily on realizing the needs. The above described way of thinking is illustrated on Figure 8.

Figure 8. The relationships between the buyers’ needs and desires and their styles of consumption.



Source: own study

Results showed that for the study’s participants, the most important functions of the products, both cheap and expensive ones, were associated with their basic characteristics. Among the specific functions of the products, for buyers, the most important ones were those that were related to the guarantee of safety. The researched paid least attention to integrative functions that

bind the purchaser with a specific consumerist environment. Referring to the obtained results, one could ask a question, whether there is a relationship between favoring certain product features and characteristics of consumption. In the contemporary scientific literature on conditioning of the consumers' behavior, the prevailing view is that the present consumption is 'excessive' and is a projection – seeking hedonistic experiences of 'I'. Emanation of the 'I' gains symbolic meanings through the processes of consumption. The nature of consumption defines the 'I' and 'locates' it in a particular social sphere. Consumer's behaviors are, according to Parsons, a function of the prestige and fame. Many authors emphasize the development of hedonistic tendencies in the modern consumption. Hostyński (2006) notes that pleasure is a fundamental determinant of consumption and consumerism of the world, and „treating oneself to something” is a peculiar source of ‘pleasure and is a pillar of the world’s consumption. ‘Consumers’ hedonism is a consequence of the fact that ‘we’re in a culture of an excessive material production’¹⁸. Characteristics of consumer's behavior exhaust the features of sacralization¹⁹. Bauman recognized the nature of modern consumerism as follows: ‘neither ‘possessing’ nor ‘being’ does really count in the currently existing models of happy life. It is the use that counts; ‘an immediate – ‘on the spot’ – use, which does not last longer than the joy that it causes, which can be stopped as soon as the fun starts to wear off’²⁰. Consumers in the market take almost theatrical roles. The purchased products serve as masks. Also thanks to the purchased products, buyers perceive their identity in terms of ‘theatrical effect’. The need of ‘self’- emanation has become people's need of great importance²¹.

Excessive consumerism as an indicator of contemporary culture was criticized by many authors including Rieseman, noticing existential problems of human in a society of abundance, and especially his sources of outwardness²². Excessive consumption also met with the opposition from so called Frankfurt School, especially Marcuse – a creator of the concept of one-dimensional

¹⁸ L. Hostyński, *Values in the consumerist world*, Lublin 2006.

¹⁹ T. Szlendak, K. Pietrowicz, Fashion, Freedom and Consumption's Culture, in: *Delightful plague. About the rule of fashion and the culture of consumption*, ed. T. Szlendak, Wrocław 2006.

²⁰ Z. Bauman, *Consumption – an import dimension of cultural globalization*, Warsaw 2005.

²¹ Z. Bauman, *Bauman about pop culture*, Warsaw 2008.

²² D. Rieseman, *Lonely crowd*, Warsaw 1971.

man²³. On the basis of sociological research and related sciences, theories and concepts were created in order to simplify the phenomenon of consumption to a simple/ impulsive act determined in the following words: adidasisation, dysneyisation, macdonaldisation, supermarketisation etc. In light of these observations, the obtained research results seem incomprehensible. Participants of the study – it is clear from the analysis-attach particular attention to the real, practical features of the product, ‘acknowledging’ its’ symbolic characteristics in the background. It should be noted, that the above mentioned, distinguished authors of contemporary sociological thought created their works during the times of ‘abundance’. Yet, the reported study was conducted under the specified conditions for economic development, characteristic of the transition period toward a market economy. Some identify the concept of globalization with the world market, while it is difficult not to agree with the view, according to which, in practice, there are regional worlds, also in economic terms. In spite of belonging to the European Union structures, the member countries are developing unequally. In some countries, including Poland, a paradox of the country’s economic growth not being reflected in the citizens’ standard of living, is to be observed. The processes of society’s strong stratification are visible. The growth rates of economic rate of development is accompanied by the phenomenon – negative in the social and sociological sense, as well as, consisting in the increase of the number of people excluded from civilization due to poverty. A cautious consumption can also be explained by the fact that the conditions for hedonism were not developed; socialism has always been associated with the economy of scarcity. The limited nature of consumption can also result from cultural influences of a plebeian religion that justifies the poor from their poverty, thus reducing the development in the practice of entrepreneurship. Therefore, the researched did not show an enthusiastic attitude towards their own financial situation: 43.6% rated it as good, 42% as average, 7.2% as very good and a further 7.2% as difficult. This assessment does not imply the ability to an excessive, unbridled consumption, but rather expresses a tendency to consume material goods in a cautious and limited way. In the conditions of limited opportunities for consumption, it gains a special meaning for those who see their own financial situation as difficult or just average. For such a class of purchasers realization of real needs becomes a priority. Propensity to hedonism

²³ H. Marcuse, *One-dimensional man: studies on the ideology of advanced industrial society*, Warsaw 1991.

is associated with an improved financial situation, the assessment of their status in the following categories: very good.

Perception of material goods-functions, which these goods fulfill in real – main categories, reduces the importance of the symbolic value of these goods; it may be an expression of a tendency that diminishes an idea of consumerist lifestyle in favor for the values of sustainable and rational purchasing things.

Beta Pawlik: The Myth of Consumerist Society?

This article attempts to describe the importance and role of consumption in the life of modern man. The research on consumers' needs, styles and consumption functions which buyers assign to products, suggest that consumption may be limited by strong links with real needs. The results may provide a rationale for the discussion on the decline of consumerist society.

Keywords: consumers' needs, styles of consumption, product functions, symbolic consumption.

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