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YOUNG BUYERS OF FURNITURE AND SOCIAL AND CULTURAL DETERMINATIONS OF THEIR BEHAVIOR

Introduction

The types of behavior of consumers (buyers) and the factors that determine them have been the subject of investigation of economics for many years. The variability of the environment in which companies are functioning results in the development of empirical research on consumer behavior on the market and in the implementation of its results in present-day business. So far, the world and Polish literature on the subject have dealt with the research on numerous industrial markets in the context of consumer behavior. However, there is a relatively insufficient knowledge concerning the determinants of consumer behavior on the market of durable goods (furniture included) and particularly the behavior of young consumers. What is more, this group is significant to the market of durables, furniture included, as young consumers represent both their own needs and the needs of their households. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that furniture in the majority of developed societies is widely considered to belong to the group of essential goods and, consequently, it is purchased by almost every consumer.

The segment of consumers in the age range of 19-34 years seems to be the most suitable group to be investigated as regards the recognition of the determinants of consumer behavior on the market of durable goods, especially of furniture. The authors decided to choose that age group as the subject of investigation since it is usually at the age over 18 years that people make independent market decisions, especially in the case of the purchase of such durable goods as furniture. This is the age when they start living on their own and have their own financial resources. Consequently, they are much more interested in the offer on the furniture market than younger people. In addition, at the age of 19 many people complete their school education and, as a result, make various life decisions and become independent. Moreover, the age of 18 is related with the acquisition of a wide range of civil rights and consequently a relatively significant independence in the purchase decision making processes. In the case of the furniture market it should be pointed out that the possession of a place (a house, flat or a room) where furniture can be put is the primary determinant of the

consumption. In Poland, like nearly everywhere in Europe, people at the age of 19 usually consider buying furniture as they either have a place to live on their own (they buy or rent a flat, etc.) or they share it. The choice of the age of 34 as the upper limit of the accepted age range is justified by the fact that in Poland that age is generally considered the end of the youth days, which is confirmed by the investigations on consumer behavior¹.

Due to the fact that the literature on consumer behavior does not define the term of *young consumer* in an explicit way even with regard to the age, and the suggested concepts vary because of the differences in particular industrial markets where the issue of age was investigated, it can be assumed that in the research of the behavior of furniture buyers, people in the age range from 19 to 34 can fall within the group of young consumers.

Another reason for the choice of that consumer segment for the analysis is the fact that this group constitutes a statistically significant consumer category in the whole world – in Poland it accounts for approx. 24%² of the population, which is similar to the average figure both in the world and Europe.

One can conclude from the above reasons that it seems interesting from a cognitive point of view to investigate the conditions of the behavior of young consumers on furniture market together with the consideration of social and cultural factors.

The aim of the article is to analyze the social and cultural factors of consumer behavior on furniture market with regard to the behavior of the group of young buyers which includes – for the sake of the article – consumers in the age range from 19-34 years.

1. Types of the determinants of consumer behavior

In the constantly changing economic environment the knowledge about buyers, their needs, market behavior and the patterns of conduct is indispensable for present-day business to develop and implement adequate marketing strategies. Such knowledge constitutes the basis for creating and verifying market decisions. The recognition of determinants of consumer behavior has become particularly important.

¹ T. Pałaszewska-Reindl (ed.), *Rynek młodzieżowy w latach 80*, Instytut Rynku Wewnętrznego i Konsumpcji, Warszawa 1985, p. 5, A. Kusińska (ed), *Rodziny ludzi młodych jako uczestnicy rynku. Diagnoza i typologia*, PWE, Warszawa 2005, p. 126.

² *Rocznik Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej 2012*, Główny Urząd Statystyczny, Zakład Wydawnictw Statystycznych, Warszawa 2012.

When studying the literature in economics, one can realize that there is no single dominating approach or a universal suggestion as how to classify the determinants of consumer behavior.

After the analysis of the hitherto research concerning the classification issues of consumer behavior determinants, the following factors were considered significant:

- exogenous i.e. economic, demographic, social, cultural and marketing factors,
- endogenous i.e. psychological factors.

It is worth noting that there are no crucial classification problems when distinguishing the majority of the above listed determinants. However, some doubts appear as regards the category of social and cultural determinants, particularly the level of education and vocational activity of consumers, which to a great extent are related to the group of demographic determinants and some authors³ treat them as the elements of demographic characteristics. In this case, however, it seems justified to agree with the authors⁴ who consider the vocational status and activity, as well as the type and level of education, as social or social and professional factors since such determinants are not directly related to the demographic features of consumers.

From among the wide range of social and cultural determinants that have been identified and discussed by researchers so far, the following ones were taken into consideration by the authors as the most suitable to reach the target of this article: the level of education of the young buyers of furniture, their professions, the influence of other people from their surrounding, the information in the media, fashion, “environmental friendliness” of the furniture, its novelty features, social prestige and imitativity. It can be assumed that all these social and cultural determinants influence consumer behavior on the market of durable goods, the market of furniture including.

³ Inter alia: L. Garbarski, *Zachowania nabywców*, PWE, Warszawa 2001, p. 24, L. Rudnicki, *Zachowania konsumentów na rynku*, PWE, Warszawa 2012, p. 102.

⁴ L. Nowak, *Pozaeconomiczne determinanty zachowań nabywców*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej w Poznaniu, Poznań 1995, p. 72, E. Kieźel (ed.), *Rynkowe zachowania konsumentów*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej w Katowicach, Katowice 2000, p. 107, C. Bywalec, *Konsumpcja w teorii i praktyce gospodarowania*, PWN, Warszawa 2007, p. 55.

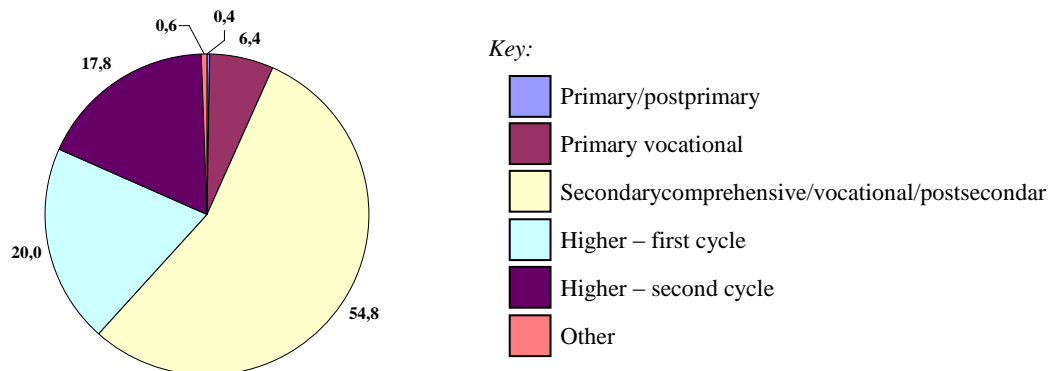
2. Social and cultural determinants of young consumer behavior on furniture market

In September and October 2011, with the aim to identify the social and cultural determinants of the behavior of young consumers on furniture market, a survey was conducted among 500 young (aged 19-34) buyers of furniture in the Małopolska region. For the sake of precision the young respondents were divided into three sub-groups: aged 19-24 (181 people), 25-29 (165 people) and 30-34 (154 people). The individuals in the primary survey were chosen by quota selection. The questionnaire form (mainly a cafeteria or scale one) consisted of 21 closed questions.

When investigating the social and cultural determinants of the behavior of young buyers of furniture, it has to be stated that the determinants derive from the demographic profile and the economic situation of consumers. Moreover, they are related to the personality of the buyer and his/her sensitivity to marketing incentives.

Education is a significant determinant that has an impact on the behavior of young customers. The research sample was dominated by respondents with secondary education (54.8%) – figure 1. It should be added that more than half of the respondents with secondary education lived in villages (58.8%), were in the age range from 20 to 24 years (79.8%) and the majority both studied and worked (67.1%).

Figure 1. Education of young furniture buyers [%]



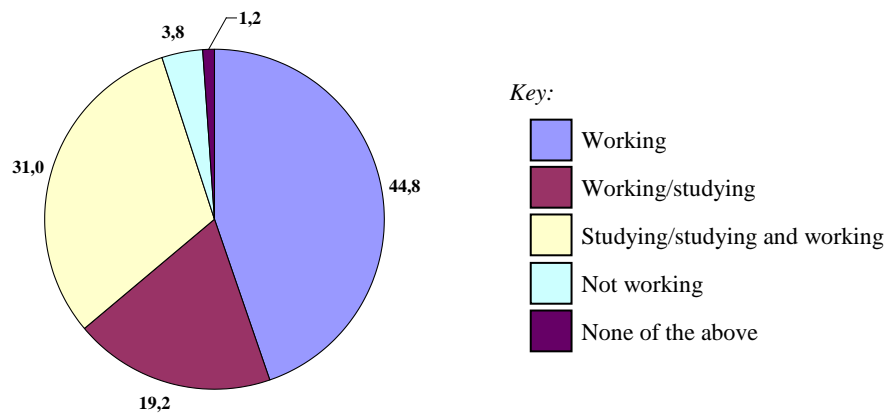
Source: Results of the Author's survey.

Every fifth respondent had a higher education (first-cycle degree) and within this group 59% were in the age range 25-29 years, the age ranges of 30-34 and 20-24 accounted for 22% and 19%, respectively. Young consumers with a second cycle degree usually had a job (88.8%) and 50.6% lived in towns. That group was dominated by the respondents in the oldest age

range, i.e. 30-34, (69.7%); the other ages ranges, 25-29 and 19-24 years, accounted for 25.8% and 4.5%, respectively. 6.4% of young consumers had a primary vocational education and lived mainly in villages (71.9%), 46.9% and 37.5% were in the age ranges of 25-29 and 30-34, respectively. A marginal percentage, only 0.4% (2 respondents) had a primary/post-primary education and were in the 25-29 age group.

Vocational activity is another important social and cultural factor that has an impact on the behavior of young buyers of furniture. According to the survey, almost every second respondent was vocationally active and did not study (and the monthly net income amounted to 1301-2200 PLN per head in nearly half of the households of such consumers), while every third respondent both worked and studied (fig.2)

Figure 2. Vocational status of young buyers of furniture [%]



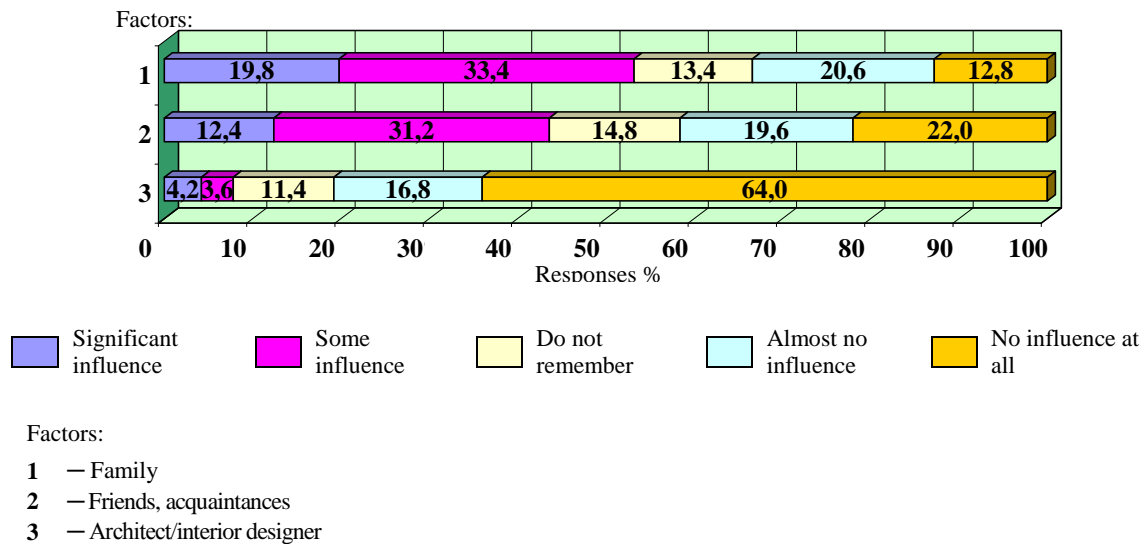
Source: Results of the Author's survey.

As it could be expected, the respondents aged 19-24 were definitely the most numerous in the group of young consumers that were studying (87.2%). There were 19.2% of young buyers of furniture who were students and did not work. It was not a surprise that in this group of respondents people aged 19-24 were prevailing (81.2%), while there were fewer respondents aged 25-29 (18.8%). It should be pointed out that in the category of consumers who only studied there were no respondents aged 30-34, which indicates that students from the upper age range were vocationally active. Only 3.8% of respondents neither worked or studied – they were mainly the oldest respondents in the group of young buyers of furniture (36.8% of them were aged 25-29 and 42.1% were aged 30-34).

The behavior of young consumer is significantly influenced by the closest surrounding, especially the members of family, but also friends and acquaintances. Young buyers take into consideration the opinion of these people. Over half of the respondents (53.2%) stated that

their family had an influence on their decision, while almost every fifth young buyer (19.8%) stated that the family had a decisive impact on the purchase (the youngest respondents, aged 19-24, are most susceptible to the opinion of the surrounding people (42.4%) – figure 3.

Figure 3. The influence of other people on the purchase decision of young buyers

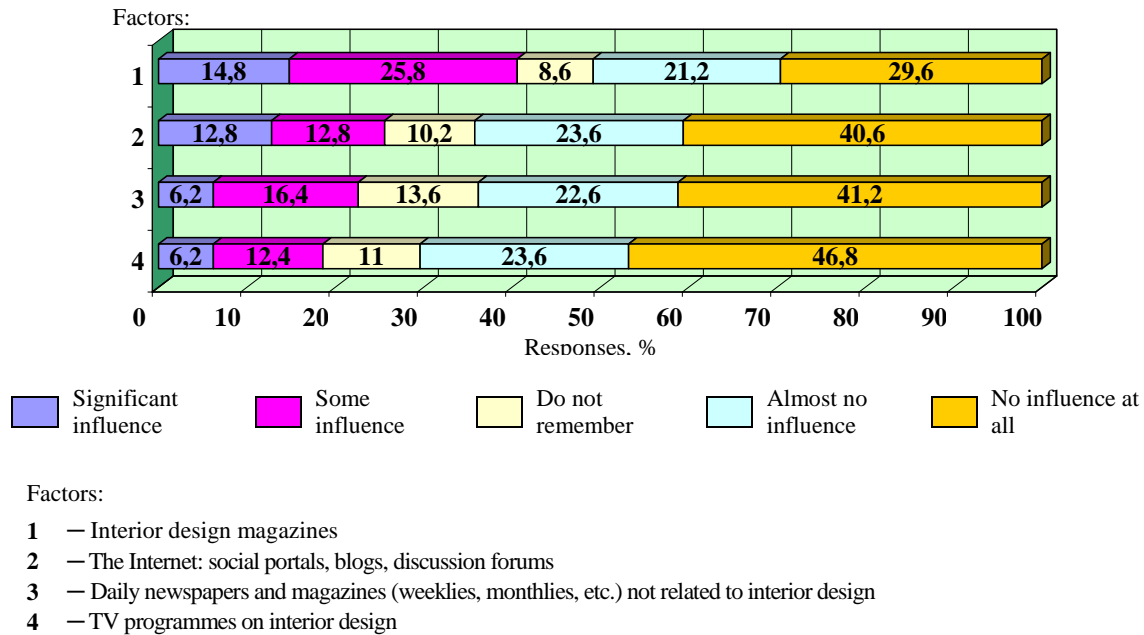


Source: Results of the Author’s survey.

A relatively high percentage of young consumers (33.4%) stated that the opinion of the members of their families was of no significance. On the other hand, 43.6% of them admitted that the decision on purchasing the furniture was influenced by the friends or people they knew (this group was dominated by consumers aged 19-24: 38.5%). However, 41.6% did not seek advice among the others. Furniture is a specific kind of a product, which is frequently used for several years and can also serve as a decorative element of a room, flat or a house and, consequently, a professional – an architect or an interior designer – can influence a purchase decision. The survey showed, however, that the opinion of an expert had a relatively insignificant impact on young consumers since as many as 64% of them did not ask the advice of specialists, while only 7.8% did. It can be assumed that one of the reasons why young buyers of furniture prefer seeking the advice among the closest circle of people is the fact that it is free of charge, which is not the case when specialists are hired.

Another significant source of knowledge about a product to be purchased - which is also a social and cultural determinant - is the mass media information. Over 40% of young buyers admitted using the information about the furniture in interior design magazines (here, the consumers aged 19-24 were the dominating group – 36.5%) – figure 4.

Figure 4. The impact of mass media on the purchase of furniture by young consumers



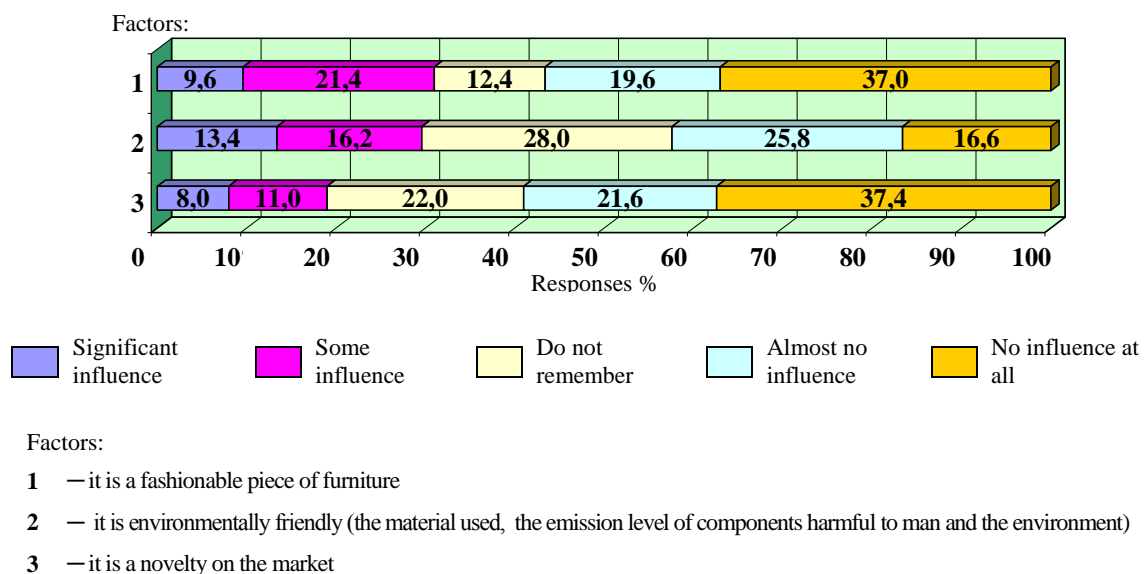
Source: Results of the Author's survey.

The survey provided some additional information on the use of modern communication technologies by young buyers of furniture. The results indicate that young people rarely use social portals on the Internet as the information source on these products – almost 65% of the respondents stated that this source of information did not have an impact on their decisions. The information provided by the Internet was used mainly by the youngest (19-24) and the oldest (30-34) age sub-group of respondents (34.4% in both cases). *Pomimo, iż we współczesnych czasach zakupy przez Internet stały się powszechną formą nabywania produktów, to jednak młodzi konsumenci w małym stopniu wykorzystują opinie innych internautów na temat mebli zawarte na platformach społecznościowych. Być może jest to spowodowane faktem, że meble są produktami raczej drogimi, co oznacza, że młode osoby wolą uzyskać informacji na ich temat od specjalistów, czy osób z branży meblarskiej. Należy dodać, że deklaracja młodych nabywców mebli na temat niekorzystania z informacji zamieszczanych w Internecie na platformach społecznościowych, nie oznacza, że osoby te nie dokonują zakupu mebli przez Internet, czy też nie kontaktują się przez Internet z producentami lub sprzedawcami tych dóbr.* More than every fifth respondent admitted looking for the information on furniture in daily newspapers and magazines that do not specialize in interior design. Here, the oldest respondents aged 30-34 and 25-29 prevailed (37.2% and 31.9%, respectively). Very few young consumers (18.6%) stated that they

watched TV programmes on interior design to find information about furniture. Among them, the group aged 19-24 watched such programmes most often (37.6%).

Fashion, which manifests itself in a kind of social imitation of consumption habits, is also a significant determinant in the decision making process as regards the purchase of furniture. After empirical research, it can be stated that fashion is important for nearly every third customer (figure 5). Consumers aged 19-24 were the dominating group (36.1%) among the respondents who followed current fashion trends when purchasing furniture.

Figure 5. Selected features of furniture as the social and cultural determinants influencing the purchase by young customers



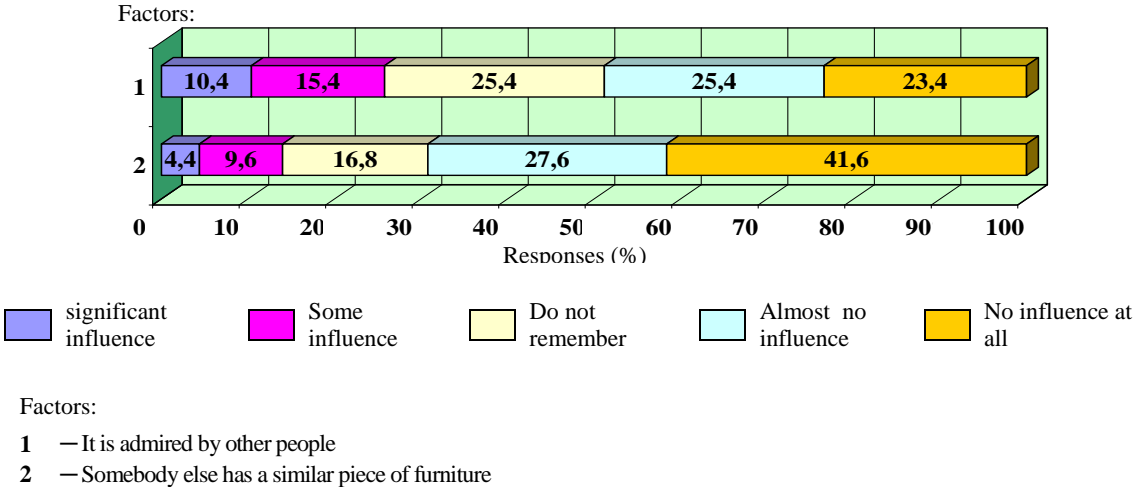
Source: Results of the Author's survey.

A relatively new phenomenon among Polish consumer in purchasing decisions and other behavior that aims at meeting one's needs is the environmental awareness, which is perceived as the necessity to avoid the deterioration of natural environment and, consequently, to protect one's own health and the health of other members of the household . However, the survey did not confirm the common conviction about pro-environmental attitude of young buyers of furniture. The respondents paid little attention to the environmental friendliness of such products as only 29.6% admitted the significance of that factor. The greatest attention to environmental friendliness of furniture was attached by the respondents aged 30- 34 (39.2%) and the least by the ones aged 19-24 (24.3%). It is worth mentioning that the significance of environmental friendliness of furniture was most frequently declared by the respondents who were considering a purchase of furniture to their child's room, especially a cot. That means that the health of the members of the household

was more important for furniture buyers than the environmental protection issues. It should be noted that young consumers found it rather difficult to comment on their attitude to notions that characterize the impact of environmental friendliness of furniture on their purchase decision – almost every third respondent had problems identifying his/her attitude to that issue. It is also interesting that young consumers did not attach any importance to the fact whether a piece of furniture they were buying was a novelty on the market. Furniture with novelty features were chosen by 19% of young consumers and the respondents aged 19-24 and 30-34 prevailed among them (36.8% in both age ranges).

The possession of furniture may testify to social prestige. The empirical research indicates that this is the case. However, the admiration aroused by the furniture is not a factor that would have an impact on the purchase decision. Only every fourth respondent admitted that admiration and acceptance of a piece of furniture by other people influenced his/her choice and decision to buy it. (figure 6)

Figure 6. Prestige and imitation as the determinants of the behavior of young furniture buyers



Source: Results of the Author’s survey.

The survey indicated that the admiration of furniture by other people was definitely most important to the youngest group of respondents (19-24) – 42.6%, while it was the least important for the group aged 25-29 (25.6%). On the other hand, it should be noted that young buyers do not usually imitate other people’s purchase behavior. The fact, that a similar piece of furniture was possessed by someone else was of some importance to only 14% of young people and the group aged 30-34 prevailed in this respect (42.9%).

The presented above identification of social and cultural factors that influence the behavior of young consumer on the furniture market is only a general analysis and assessment of the determinants which – as it was said before – constitute one of the behavior categories of the buyers of furniture. Thus, the article provides the basis for further research and investigations with clearly defined targets. Due to the space limitations of the article, it was impossible to discuss all other issues related to the social and cultural determinants of the behavior of young furniture buyers and the article includes only some of the survey results.

Conclusion

The changing conditions in the functioning of the market affect the behavior of consumers, the buyers of furniture including.

In the light of the empirical research it can be concluded that social determinants, which are related to the cultural sphere of society as well as to individual consumer, determine significantly the behavior of young buyers of furniture. It seems that young consumers take into consideration the opinion of the closest people in the purchase decision making process. However, they are usually not interested in the services of architects or interior designers. The results of the research show that among various media which are available on the furniture market, the magazines on interior design are most important to young people. The research also indicates that the environmental awareness among the furniture buyers under investigation is not well developed as the environmental friendliness of the product is not important for almost one third of them. It is worth noting, that despite the fact that the globalization of markets has a substantial impact on consumer tastes, only 60% of people aged 19-34 do not choose fashionable furniture with novelty features. Young buyers rather do not tend to imitate other people or strive to gain prestige and admiration through the possession of attractive furniture.

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Abstract

It is a typical for contemporary companies that they have to adjust their operations to continuous changes in their surrounding that have a crucial impact not only on their functioning but also on the consumption structure and behavior of customers, the buyers of furniture including. Furniture is commonly considered a first necessity product. In the light of the changes on the market that are related to the development of internationalization and globalization, it seems important to recognize the factors that influence consumer behavior. It is particularly important and interesting to identify the behavior of young consumers aged 19-34 as they constitute a statistically significant group of people in the world.

The article is an attempt to systematize the factors that influence the behavior of customers on the market of durable goods (furniture including). The emphasis was put on the significance of social and cultural determinants in the decision making process of young furniture buyers. On the basis of the author's empirical research that was conducted among 500 respondents aged 19-34, the description is given of the impact of the main social and cultural determinants on the behavior of that group of furniture buyers.