

Buying Behaviors of Polish Consumers During the Pandemic Lockdown – Research Results

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the article is identification and evaluation of the most important changes that have occurred in the behavior of Polish consumers as a result of the pandemic lockdown introduced in 2020. The article presents the results of studies conducted during the epidemic restrictions from March 15 to May 4, 2020.

Design/methodology/approach: The main aim of the research was to determine how these restrictions influenced the purchasing behavior and decisions made by consumers. In the polls, the technique of an internet survey was used, which was justified by the accepted form of remote communication imposed on the society in various spheres of activity. The subject of the research was the organization of free time, the organization of shopping in households, the frequency of purchases and the methods of shopping in stationary and online stores.

Findings: The most important phenomena that have been observed include the growing importance of e-commerce and technologies supporting distance communication and online exchange. The share of FMCG in online purchases increased when compared with the pre-pandemic online purchases. Polish consumers reduced the frequency of purchases and limited their overall spending on everyday purchases. During the first wave of the pandemic, the crucial issue for consumers was time management as a result of increased professional and family responsibilities, or (a similar percentage of responses) of excess free time. Poles used information technologies – for communication, shopping, learning and

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entertainment, to cope with the imposed social isolation. This trend, as indicated by the results of subsequent studies, will continue.

Research limitations/implications: The research was conducted at a particular moment of time, during the last 2 weeks of the first pandemic lockdown; therefore, the study cannot provide the measurement of observable effects of behavior changes during a longer time since the pandemic situation has been volatile. In the research, the snowball method of sampling, which has its own limitations, was adopted.

Originality/value: The value of the article results from the outcomes of the survey conducted with the use of a research questionnaire originally designed for the purposes of this study and empirical research results obtained during the lockdown period, which allowed for observing changes in consumer behavior in real time.

Keywords: consumer behavior, pandemic, lockdown, e-commerce, marketing research.

JEL: D12, D91, E21, M31

Zachowania zakupowe Polaków podczas pandemii – wyniki badań

Streszczenie

Cel: identyfikacja i ocena najważniejszych zmian, jakie zaszły w zachowaniach polskich konsumentów w wyniku lockdownu wprowadzonego w 2020 roku. Artykuł przedstawia wyniki badań przeprowadzonych w trakcie trwania ograniczeń epidemicznych od 15 marca do 4 maja 2020 roku.

Metodologia: głównym celem badań było określenie, jak ograniczenia te wpłynęły na zachowania zakupowe i decyzje podejmowane przez konsumentów. W badaniach sondażowych wykorzystano technikę ankiety internetowej, co było uzasadnione narzuconą społeczństwu w różnych sferach aktywności i akceptowaną formą komunikacji zdalnej. Przedmiotem badań objęto organizację czasu wolnego, organizację zakupów w gospodarstwach domowych, częstotliwość dokonywanych zakupów oraz sposoby dokonywania zakupów w sklepach stacjonarnych oraz internetowych.

Wyniki: do najważniejszych zjawisk, jakie zaobserwowano należy wzrost znaczenia handlu elektronicznego oraz technologii wspomagających komunikację zdalną i wymianę online. Wśród zakupów w Internecie zwiększył się udział produktów spożywczych i środków ochrony i higieny osobistej, których odsetek w zakupach internetowych przed pandemią był niewielki. Polscy konsumenci ograniczyli częstotliwość zakupów i ograniczyli ogólnie wydatki na codzienne zakupy. Podczas I fali pandemii najbardziej uciążliwa dla konsumentów była kwestia organizacji czasu na skutek zwiększonych obowiązków zawodowych i rodzinnych lub (podobny odsetek wskazań) nadmiaru wolnego czasu i konieczności jego zagospodarowania.

Ograniczenia/implikacje badawcze: badanie zostało przeprowadzone w określonym momencie, w ciągu ostatnich 2 tygodni pierwszego lockdownu pandemicznego, dlatego badanie nie może dostarczyć obserwowalnych efektów zmian zachowań w długim okresie, sytuacja pandemiczna jest bowiem niestabilna. W badaniach przyjęto metodę „kuli śniegowej” dla doboru próby, która ma swoje ograniczenia.

Oryginalność/wartość: wartość artykułu wynika z rezultatów badań przeprowadzonych z wykorzystaniem kwestionariusza badań oryginalnie zaprojektowanego na potrzeby niniejszego badania oraz samych rezultatów badania pozyskanych w trakcie trwania lockdownu, co pozwoliło zaobserwować zmiany zachowań konsumentów w czasie rzeczywistym.

Słowa kluczowe: zachowania konsumentów, pandemia, lockdown, e-commerce, badania marketingowe.

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world as we know it. It influenced the organization of social life, interpersonal relations, and the functioning of many enterprises. Every day, we observe consumers who recognize their needs differently, work and buy differently, perceive products and brands from a completely new perspective.

In a relatively short time, the virus transformed the consumer goods market and caused the emergence of new habits which – consolidated by the next wave of the pandemic – will probably characterize consumer behavior also after the crisis (McKinsey & Company, 2020).

Changes in the global marketing environment influenced the buying behavior of Poles, particularly affected by the lockdown in the period March–May 2020. Hence, the survey conducted by our team at that time shows the first reactions and emotions of Polish consumers to unexpected and previously unexperienced limitations on trade, consumption, and freedom of movement.

2. Socio-Economic Background

The socio-economic background is necessary to illustrate the environment in which Polish consumers found themselves through suddenly introduced pandemic restrictions. As a result of the growing number of deceases caused by coronavirus infection, the government decided to close schools, kindergartens, universities and other educational institutions (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Poland, 2020a). From March 15, public gatherings of over 50 people were banned, including state and religious assemblies (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Poland, 2020b). The borders of Poland were closed to air and rail traffic, and only employees and Polish citizens were allowed to enter the country. The introduced restrictions, especially those related to border closure, did not apply to the flow of goods, which continued freely.

People who were infected with the coronavirus and those who had direct contact with an infected person, as well as people who crossed the Polish border, were in a 14-day quarantine. Those who violated the quarantine conditions were fined up to PLN 5,000; after April 1st, the fine was increased to PLN 30,000.

Gradually, further restrictions were introduced, especially concerning consumers:

- a) from March 15th (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Poland, 2020b):
 - limiting the functioning of shopping malls (except for pharmacies, grocery stores and drugstores located therein),
 - restricting the consumption of meals in restaurants, cafes or bars; only take-out or door-to-door orders were allowed,

- closing gyms and fitness clubs, swimming pools, museums, libraries, cinemas and cultural institutions,
- b) from March 24th (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Poland, 2020c):
 - prohibition of social mobility (with some exceptions) and restrictions concerning public transport,
 - prohibition of gathering of more than 2 people,
 - limited participation in religious ceremonies up to 5 people.
- c) from April 1st (Ministry of Health of the Republic of Poland, 2020d):
 - restriction of movement for people under the age of 18 without an adult guardian,
 - closing parks, boulevards and playgrounds,
 - suspending activities of hairdressing, beauty and tattoo salons,
 - closing hotels and accommodation places,
 - restrictions concerning the number of customers served in shops and service outlets,
 - introduction of “hours for seniors” in retail outlets (from 10 am to 12 noon, only people over 65 could be served).

After April 20th, the government started to reduce restrictions. The limits of people in stores and the number of people participating in religious assemblies were increased. After 4th May, the operation of shopping centers (in compliance with the so-called sanitary regime), libraries, museums, art galleries, hotels and rehabilitation centers were restored. Nurseries and kindergartens could be re-opened with strict sanitary standards. Other educational institutions remained closed until the end of the school year.

It is worth mentioning that during the global pandemic crisis, many national governments attempted to protect their citizens from infection through closing borders, suspending travel services, closing schools and universities, limiting social gatherings and proclaiming quarantine (Hammami, Harrabi, Mohr, & Krusturp, 2020; Marinković & Lazarević, 2021). Some countries (e.g., Italy) adopted total lockdown strategies while others reduced the numbers and operations of businesses and services, e.g. the UK (Pantano, Pizzi, Scarpi, & Dennis, 2020).

In Poland, the first wave of large economic downturn was visible from April to June 2020. The effects of the economic crisis affected all sectors, but to a different extent. In 2020, the greatest deterioration of the economic situation took place in the services sector, in retail trade and industry (Rokicki, 2020). Whereas in the past, one of the major causes of the economic crisis was overconsumption, largely financed by credit (Utzig, 2010), in 2020 the most important drivers of the “pandemic slump” were: restrictions on internal movement, restrictions on international travel, workplace closures, and other “stay-at-home” requirements (Alfonso, Boar, Frost, Gambacorta, & Liu, 2021). The crisis affected small businesses and the most vulnerable sectors of the economy: travel agencies, restaurants,

passenger transport, hotels, cinemas, and small consumer services, such as hairdressing or cosmetic services (Gorynia, 2020).

The pandemic lockdown significantly worsened consumer sentiment. For example, the current consumer confidence index in April 2020 reached 36.4%, and was 43.6% lower than the corresponding study in April 2019. The low level of the index resulted mainly from the assessments of the current ability to make important purchases and the future economic situation of the country (decreases of 58.8 pp and 54.4 pp respectively), as well as a decrease of 32.2 pp. in the case of the assessment of the future financial situation of the household. (Statistics Poland, 2020a).

In the light of the Mindshare study in June 2020, the reduced sense of financial security had a significant impact on the daily purchasing decisions of Poles: 52% of respondents declared that they purchased less often, while 47% of respondents bought more products during a single visit to the store. The reduction in visits to stores was to some extent offset by the increased value of purchases. An increased demand for food for self-preparation of meals was also observed, e.g., rice, flour, groats, etc. At the same time, consumers bought ready-made meals less frequently, which reflects the change in the lifestyle of Poles caused by the pandemic and a greater amount of time spent at home (Mindshare, 2020).

The economic downturn resulted in excessive pricing of daily products; therefore, some authorities undertook special investigations to reduce fraud and ensure fair pricing (Alfonso et al., 2021).

3. New Consumer Behaviors Caused by the Pandemic Lockdown

In the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown, consumers displayed behaviors that significantly differed from their usual shopping procedures. Concerns and fears over the perceived threat of the COVID-19 virus sparked different consumer responses. Some felt very anxious, which increased the panic when shopping for basic food and hygiene products. Such “panic buying” was observed in Poland, Slovakia, Italy, the UK, India, and many other countries (Chaudhary, 2020; Chauhan & Shah, 2020; Čvirik, 2020; Loxton et al., 2020; Pantano et al., 2020). Other consumers remained indifferent to the pandemic threat, treating media reports with disbelief and reserve. Therefore, they tried to maintain the existing ways of organizing everyday life, despite the increasing limitations and difficulties (Accenture, 2020; Deloitte, 2020). A certain group of consumers showed behavior called “revenge spending” wherein consumers were purchasing goods and services in excess as compensation for the deprivation they suffered during the quarantine (Kaur & Malik, 2020; Phang, Balakrishnan, & Ting, 2021).

During the first “wave” of the pandemic, consumer priorities focused on meeting the most basic needs, which resulted in a sharp increase in demand for cleaning and disinfection supplies and basic food products, with a simultaneous decrease in demand for other categories of goods (Bedgood, 2020; Chauhan & Shah, 2020; Ćirić, 2020; Goswami & Chouhan, 2021; Marinković & Lazarević, 2021). Among the priority life needs, consumers considered as the most important personal health, followed by the well-being of the family and friends. Food and medical supplies, personal and financial security were among the main drivers of purchasing behavior (Mehta, Saxena, & Purohit, 2020; Mindshare, 2020; Pantano et al., 2020).

Simultaneously, consumers began to be more focused on rational purchases. It is noticeable that customers made purchases more consciously, paying more attention to: cost reduction, environmental and health factors, and preferences towards local products and local stores (Wnukowski & Waśniński, 2020; Phang et al., 2021).

Buyers had to adapt to new circumstances caused by changes in disposable income and the amount of free time (Statistics Poland, 2020b). For example, 33% of consumers found themselves in “financial distress” with less disposable income compared to the pre-crisis situation, while 26% increased both disposable income and leisure time. These changes resulted in new buying habits: customers started paying more attention to what they bought than ever before, e.g., most consumers (75%) reduced food waste – and this attitude is likely to persist (Mindshare, 2020). Demand for local goods also increased as consumers searched for products which they believed they could trust (Deloitte, 2020; Phang et al., 2021). Purchasing decisions were also associated with efficiency gains: consumers made fewer, but more valuable, purchases.

The first phase of epidemic restrictions slowed down the pace and the daily life of many consumers; it also influenced the perception of the importance of health, sustainable consumption, and forms of involvement in family and social life (Karasek, 2020; Łysik, 2018; Stasiuk & Maison, 2017). A high level of social acceptance for the implemented safety procedures and social isolation was observed. This phenomenon was reinforced by fear of leaving home (Chauhan & Shah, 2020; Eger, Komárková, Egerová, & Mičík, 2021). More than ever, people used and continue to use the available communication and trade-enhancing technologies in order not to violate the conditions of isolation.

With the lockdown and the closure of many stores, electronic commerce grew rapidly. Buyers, including those who had not been using online shopping before, had to quickly adapt to new trade solutions (El Junusi, 2020; Pantano et al., 2020). Interestingly, the growing importance of the internet exchange was observed in categories not very active in e-commerce before, such as grocery shopping (Chaudhary, 2020; Ćirić, 2020; Marinković & Lazarević, 2021). Consumers also used services supporting traditional

trade to a greater extent, such as contactless payments, virtual consultancy, online/telephone orders and picking up goods with own transport (Chamber of Electronic Economy, 2020; Mehta et al., 2020; Alfonso et al., 2021).

This tendency has also been reflected in a variety of mobile apps downloaded by consumers for entertainment, news, healthcare and education. High-level needs such as social networks, entertainment, learning, and access to information remained unchanged, but technology changed the way in which these needs were met (Drozdowski et al., 2020; Gorynia, 2020; Wiederhold, 2020).

People had to face the necessity of distance learning and remote working; many companies “closed the door” and encouraged employees to “stay at home” (Diaz, 2020). Interestingly, many employees who had not worked remotely before – or not very often – intended to continue with such work routine in the future, even though some of them experienced a lack of traditional social contacts. Most employees claimed that employers were taking appropriate steps to protect the health of their subordinates and manage remote work (Diaz, 2020; Dubey & Tripathi, 2020).

4. Survey of Purchasing Behavior During the Pandemic Lockdown

The COVID-19 pandemic restrictions introduced by the government resulted in changes in the purchasing behavior of Poles and influenced their decisions regarding involvement in social and economic life. This situation was quite unique for academics because the pandemic experience had been described in behavioral economic literature in a limited way beforehand (Loxton et al., 2020).

The designed research was carried out while the lockdown was in progress. This enabled the real-time description of attitudes and opinions of consumers about the nuisance of constraints, not alleviated by the passage of time or overlapping experiences from successive waves of the pandemic. Simultaneously, there was a small number of published scientific papers which showed research results concerning consumer behavior during the first lockdown (Čvirik, 2020; Marinković & Lazarević, 2021).

4.1. Research Methodology

The present study was descriptive in nature. The main objective of the study was to determine the impact of pandemic restrictions on purchasing behavior and decisions made by Polish consumers. The subject of the research was the organization of household purchases, the arrangement of additional free time, the frequency of purchases and the methods of making purchases in traditional and online stores. A part of the study also involved the assessment of consumers' susceptibility to promotional shopping offers which were addressed to customers during forced social isolation.

In the research, we used the method of measuring secondary information sources, including internet publications, CSO reports and selected research agencies, available during the first wave of the pandemic. To verify the information obtained, at the end of the 1st phase of restrictions, i.e., from 2nd to 15th May 2020, primary data was collected. The research technique was an internet survey, which was justified by the remote communication imposed on the society in various spheres of social activity (Mazurek-Łopacińska & Sobocińska, 2021). The measurement tool was a questionnaire originally developed for this study. The questionnaire consisted of four sections: demographic details, work-related changes, changes in purchases perceived by consumers, organization of household purchases during the first coronavirus lockdown. The survey form was created and distributed through the software available on the Google forms platform.

The invitation to participate in the study was distributed via mailing and private and organizational channels on the FB portal. Due to the specific epidemic situation, the snowball method was used to search for new respondents (Maison, 2020). In this study, the “pandemic period” was defined as the time from the introduction of the lockdown restrictions in Poland, i.e., from March 15th to May 4th, 2020.

4.2. Sample Structure

301 respondents took part in the survey. The research sample was dominated by women (72.1%), which is justified by the fact that they are most often involved in purchasing products in Polish households (Borowska, Miłucha, Raczkowska, & Utzig, 2020; Nielsen, 2019). In addition, according to simultaneous research (Čvirik, 2020), gender was a significant factor when assessing the pandemic influence over consumer purchases.

The most numerous groups in the research sample were people up to 26 years of age (45.5%) and people aged 40–59 (26.2%). Inhabitants of big cities over 100000 inhabitants (49.8%) constituted the most numerous group in the sample, followed by inhabitants of rural areas (23.6%).

The pandemic restrictions concerned mainly the freedom of movement and availability of selected retailers and service enterprises. Therefore, it was important to compare the nature of work performed by respondents before the lockdown with the job situation during the pandemic. In the research sample, before the lockdown, 124 people (41.2%) performed in-site work outside their home / place of residence, 36 people (11.9%) worked in a hybrid mode – combining stationary work with the remote one, and 13 people (4.3%) performed work that required frequent travel. The majority of the respondents were people who continued working professionally (39.9%) and studying (32.2%) during the pandemic.

4.3. Research Results

The situation of social isolation forced consumers to change their daily habits and routine activities. The respondents had to undertake additional duties (19.9% of responses) or to devote more time to work-related duties (16.9%). Interestingly, a group of 47 respondents claimed that they had less free time when compared with pre-pandemic period, and another 47-people group stated that they had more free time. The respondents used this extra time mainly for catching up and learning (15%), developing their own interests (13.3%) or helping other people (4.3%). According to 18 people (6%), their time organization had not changed (see Figure 1).

Many respondents were convinced that the restrictions influenced their purchasing behavior. This finding especially concerned the purchases of daily food and cleaning products. According to 61.8% of the respondents, their daily shopping had changed significantly, although 23.3% of the respondents said that such a change had not taken place. When compared with other research results, numerous changes in daily life were associated with the pandemic situation (Marinković & Lazarević, 2021). For example, the percentage of consumers who claimed that the pandemic had influenced their purchasing procedures was very high: according to Chaudhary (2020), 90% customers changed their traditional shopping habits.

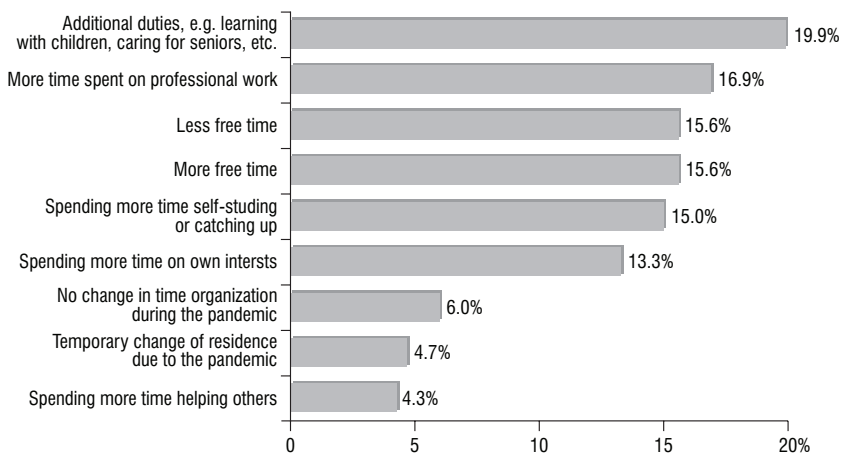


Fig. 1. The impact of the pandemic on the organization of respondents' time. Source: Own study.

As recommended by the sanitary services, fewer people participated in the daily purchasing. According to most respondents, the person who had the possibility to leave the house was responsible for shopping (56.1%),

it was usually one person in the household (35.5%). Only 3 respondents claimed that the person responsible for purchases was other than the one who previously had shopped in the household (see Figure 2).

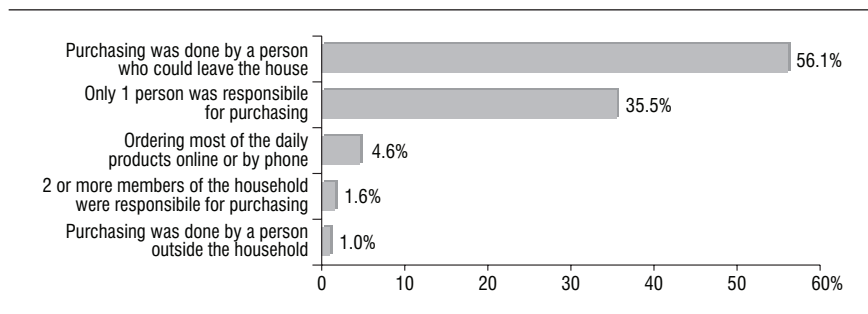


Fig. 2. The impact of the pandemic on the organization of purchases in households. Source: Own study.

This outcome may indicate a significant, but temporary change in the behavior of Polish consumers who have been accustomed to treating weekend shopping as a form of family entertainment (Mooij de, 2019; Borowska et al., 2020; Stasiuk & Maison, 2017).

Consumers noticed many changes in their buying behavior caused by the lockdown. (Figure 3). First of all, consumers repeatedly made purchases online (67.8%). They made more purchases in terms of the amount of purchased goods (58.5%) and the value of purchases (47.8%) but, in general, they spent less money (43.5%). The respondents preferred electronic payments (47.5%) and reduced time spent in the store (43.5%).



Fig. 3. The impact of the pandemic on consumer purchasing decisions. Source: Own study.

A comparison of the survey findings with research on experiences of foreign consumers shows some similarities:

- perceived scarcity of products significantly affected consumer choices (Pantano et al., 2020),
- fear of coronavirus infection kept consumers from leaving the house (Chaudhary, 2020; Chauhan & Shah, 2020),
- a considerable increase in online exchange was noted in various consumer segments, regardless of cultural or age-related characteristics of buyers (El Junusi, 2020; Veeragandham et al., 2020; Alfonso et al., 2021; Eger et al., 2021),
- consumers delayed purchases of non-essential goods/services and significantly reduced their number of in-store visits (Chauhan & Shah, 2020),
- buyers preferred to stay shorter in stores when shopping for food; they bought food in as few stores as possible (Marinković & Lazarević, 2021),
- customers spent less money on shopping for goods (clothing, footwear, etc.) (Gorynia, 2020),
- home-cooking became more popular, and individuals ate more during the pandemic (Marinković & Lazarević, 2021).

The research of Loxton et al. (2020), in the context of purchasing behavior during the crisis, identified behavior that was not confirmed in our study. Consumers were more likely to pay attention to the purchasing behaviors of their peers than what was recommended by the authorities. On the contrary, during the first lockdown, Polish citizens seemed to follow pandemic procedures with great diligence.

Limited access to many retail outlets increased the importance of online shopping (Figure 4). The products that the respondents purchased through e-stores were mainly: clothing and footwear (48.3% of responses), books, e-books and audiobooks (39.9%), cosmetics (35.4%).

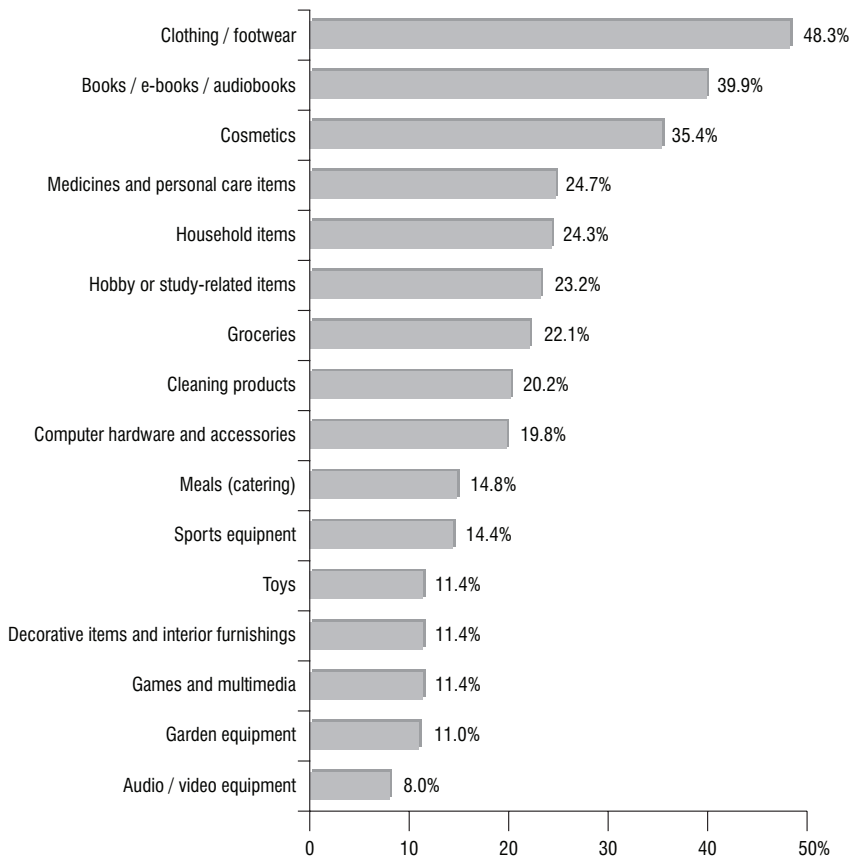


Fig. 4. Products purchased by respondents over the Internet during a pandemic lockdown. Source: Own study.

Social isolation and campaigns encouraging to “stay at home” have clearly limited the use of stationary retail outlets by consumers. Most often, the respondents chose a small grocery store (75.4%), a pharmacy (67.8%), a supermarket – if available (62.1%), and a gas station (47.5%), i.e. retailers offering basic, daily products (Figure 5). Other research confirms these findings: consumers turned to small, local neighborhood stores for fresh products and necessities (Phang et al., 2021).

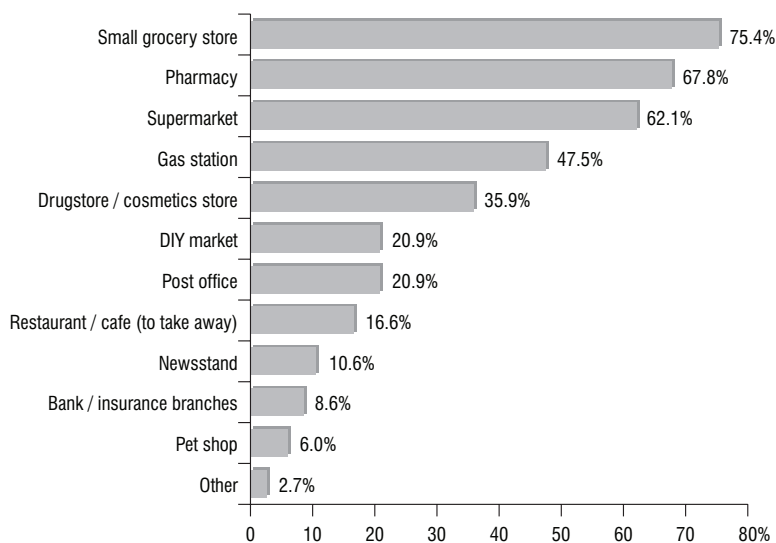


Fig. 5. Retail outlets visited by respondents during the pandemic lockdown. Source: Own study.

The pandemic restrictions resulted in the lack of access to many services and other intangible goods. For the respondents, the most inconvenient factor was the necessity to resign from hairdresser and cosmetic services and to limit access to restaurants, cultural and sports facilities (Figure 6).

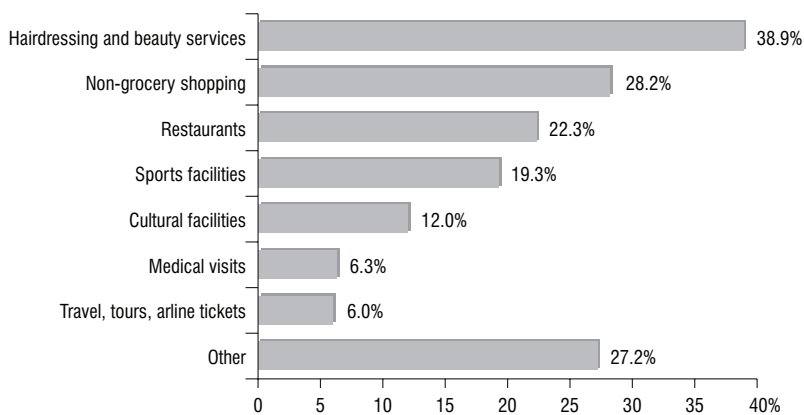


Fig. 6. The most frequently indicated goods and services that the respondents resigned from. Source: Own study.

In the non-commercial sphere, the respondents mentioned in particular: the lack of social meetings, limited activities outdoor, limited access to churches and religious buildings, narrowed freedom of travelling and the obligation of wearing masks. All these factors were answers to an open-ended question.

Compensation for customers who could not take full advantage of the free market were various additional and promotional offerings that were aimed at persuading Poles to stay at home. Among the most frequently mentioned offers were: free delivery when shopping online (44.9% of responses) and free shipping of goods (35%), i.e. activities supporting e-commerce. Other promotional offers that referred directly to the pandemic restrictions did not arouse such interest among consumers (Figure 7). Almost 30% of the respondents stated that they did not take advantage of any promotional offers. Advertising and other marketing messages carried out during the lockdown very often referred to the pandemic restrictions or to a specific situation of social isolation. However, as our finding shows, these messages did not evoke the expected sales effect and had little impact on consumers' decisions.

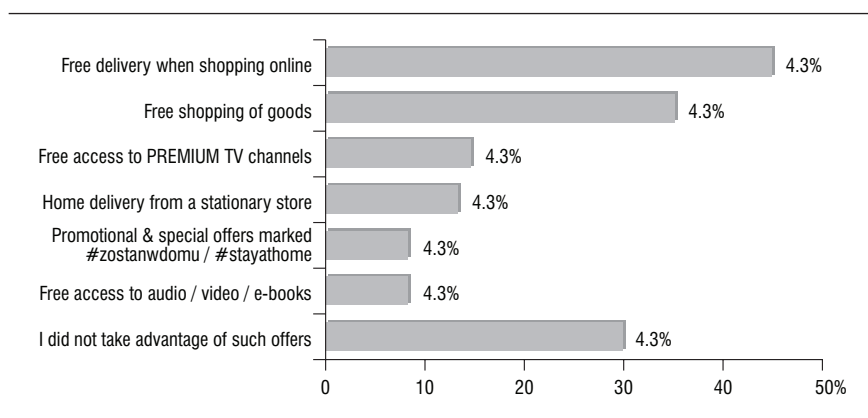


Fig. 7. Pandemic-relates promotional offers selected by the respondents. Source: Own study.

The survey was focused on activities and attitudes of Polish consumers, resulting from government-imposed restrictions which varied from one country to another. However, the findings are convergent with general outcomes of international research.

4.4. Limitations of the Study

Some limitations of the survey must be considered. First, the research was conducted at a particular moment of time, during the last 2 weeks of the first pandemic lockdown; therefore, the research questionnaire design

was inspired by secondary sources (mainly statistical) available at the end of the first COVID-19 pandemic wave. Second, the snowball method of sampling, which has its own limitations, was adopted in this study. Third, the study cannot provide the measurement of observable effects during a longer time since the pandemic situation has been volatile.

4.5. Managerial Implications

The effects of the economic crisis resulted from the pandemic restrictions may lead to major transformations throughout society. During the lockdown, the growth of “stay-at-home” economy was observed. One of its manifestations has been the development of numerous e-commerce innovations forced by limited access to retail outlets and logistics and transportation disruptions. Automated technologies, providing “contactless” customer service and safe deliveries, are likely to remain. Moreover, online or virtual shopping, perceived as easy and satisfactory by many consumers (Veeragandham et al., 2020; Alfonso et al., 2021), may increase.

It is assumed that the escalation in demand for alternative distribution channels especially in education or health services (“telemedicine”), which was significant during the lockdown, may be temporary, due to unsatisfactory customer care and weak communication with service providers (Eger et al., 2021; Guthrie, Fosso-Wamba, & Arnaud, 2021).

The pandemic lockdown triggered the development of a new consumer: more conscious of their own needs, more health- and well-being oriented, more frugal and rational while purchasing (Čvirik, 2020; Ćirić, 2020; Goswami & Chouhan, 2021; Łysik, 2018). Marketing managers should acknowledge such consumer attitudes.

5. Conclusions

The conducted exploratory research made it possible to discover the most important changes that have occurred in the behavior of Polish consumers as a result of the lockdown introduced in 2020. The survey was carried out during the pandemic restrictions and allowed for observing the changes taking place in real time.

The most important phenomena that were observed included the growing importance of e-commerce and technologies supporting remote communication and online exchange (e.g. electronic payments). The high degree of acceptance of these IT solutions, also among people who had previously used the internet to a limited extent, was forced and accelerated by a specific market experiment related to lockdown. It was also noticed that the percentage of groceries and hygienic products in online shopping increased when compared with online purchases before the pandemic restrictions.

The pandemic restrictions were particularly inconvenient for consumers due to difficulties in accessing services, offers and facilities that had been previously common and unlimited, e.g., education, hairdressing and beauty services, green areas, religious buildings.

It was also found that Polish consumers had reduced the frequency of purchases and – although the value and quantity of goods purchased at one time was greater – they had reduced their overall spending on daily purchases.

During the pandemic lockdown, the most noticeable issue for consumers was time management – some struggled with its shortage due to increased professional and family responsibilities, others (and in a similar percentage of responses) struggled with the excess of free time and limited interpersonal relations.

Consumer attitudes, behaviors, and buying habits have changed – and many of these new phenomena will remain in the post-pandemic period (Melvin, 2020; McKinsey & Company, 2020; Alfonso et al., 2021). It is highly unlikely that, in the long term, consumers would limit their needs only to basic, daily products (Zalega, 2013). However, consumers nowadays buy more consciously, choose local and small retailers more frequently, and more often choose e-commerce when shopping for goods such as clothing, footwear or cosmetics. In addition, Polish consumers limit their expenses, which is also influenced by the reduced purchasing power of many households due to the economic crisis in many industries (Polish Agency for Enterprise Development, 2020).

During the lockdown, social and religious life, education and professional duties of most Poles moved to the virtual sphere. To cope with the imposed social isolation, consumers used information technology – for communicating, shopping, learning and entertainment. This tendency, as indicated by the results of subsequent studies, will continue.

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Young Consumers' Concerns About Meeting Their Food Needs During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to identify young consumers' concerns about the increase in food prices and its consequences for young consumers' eating habits and meeting food needs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Design/methodology/approach: An online survey of 702 young consumers – students – was carried out in October and November 2020. The questionnaire was available to respondents as a Google form. The obtained data was processed using a standard qualitative analysis and selected quantitative methods, including descriptive statistics, Spearman's correlation coefficient and Pearson's chi-square test.

Findings: Nearly 63% of respondents agreed or rather agreed that the food needs of their household are fully met. Almost 44% of respondents stated that they are afraid of the lack of money to meet their food needs during the pandemic, and quite a similar share of respondents (47.3%) stated that they have no concerns in this regard. Although as many as 72% of the surveyed young consumers are concerned about rising food prices, only 22% are concerned that they will have to change their eating habits during the pandemic. The vast majority of respondents (92%) pay attention to the price when buying food and 83% agree that food is wasted in households.

Research limitations/implications: Due to the limited possibilities during COVID-19, the research was conducted among 702 respondents, who were mainly students of the Warsaw University of Life Sciences (SGGW). Such a number of respondents and the sample selection do not fully authorize the generalization of the results. Consequently, the conclusions should not be treated as representative for the whole population of Polish young consumers. Moreover, the questionnaire survey is related to the subjective

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