

Evolution of Consumption Behavior of Silver Singles¹ in Poland

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to analyze, based on the author's own research, the relationship between lifestyle and selected consumer trends reflected in specific consumption behavior of silver singles.

Design/methodology/approach: The analysis is based on a survey questionnaire administered between 1 February and 30 October 2019 in a sample of 2476 elderly people living alone in ten Polish cities of various populations and sizes. In accordance with the research assumptions, the sample included persons over 65 years of age who took independent consumption decisions in the market. This research method was chosen in view of the older age of respondents whose openness to new media often used in direct research is limited.

Findings: The research shows that among the surveyed silver singles, men more often than women act in line with the cocooning and consumer ethnocentrism trends. It also reveals a strong correlation between cocooning and consumer ethnocentrism on the one hand and the level of education and monthly disposable income of silver singles on the other. As regards sustainable consumption, the proportion of silver singles who declared that they acted in line with that idea was much higher among women than men as well as among university graduates, those earning a monthly income of more than PLN 3000.00, and actively attending UTA courses.

Research limitations/implications: Given the limited financial capacity, the study of consumer behavior matching the idea of cocooning, consumer ethnocentrism and sustainable consumption among silver singles was confined to a survey conducted in the biggest Polish cities. It was not possible to carry out research among single seniors living in rural areas. Following the conclusions made, they should not be treated as representative of the population of Polish silver singles. They only provide some insight into actual consumer behaviors of this consumer segment.

Originality/value: This article is one of first publications in Poland that seek to provide some insight into consumption behaviors of Polish silver singles that are in line with the idea of selected alternative consumer trends.

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Keywords: silver singles, cocooning, consumer ethnocentrism, sustainable consumption.

JEL: D11, D18

Ewolucja zachowań konsumpcyjnych samotnych osób starszych w Polsce

Streszczenie

Cel: przeanalizowanie, na podstawie badań własnych, zależności między stylem życia a wybranymi trendami konsumenckimi przejawiającymi się w określonych zachowaniach konsumpcyjnych srebrnych singli.

Metoda: podstawą analizy jest kwestionariusz ankiety przeprowadzony w okresie od 1 lutego do 30 października 2019 roku na próbie 2476 osób starszych żyjących w pojedynkę w dziesięciu miastach Polski o zróżnicowanej liczbie ludności oraz wielkości. Zgodnie z przyjętymi założeniami badawczymi, w próbie znalazły się osoby powyżej 65. roku życia, które podejmowały suwerenne decyzje konsumpcyjne na rynku. Wybór metody badawczej był podyktowany starszym wiekiem ankietowanych, których otwartość na nowe media, często wykorzystywane w badaniach bezpośrednich jest ograniczona.

Wyniki: z przeprowadzonego badania wynika, że wśród badanych srebrnych singli mężczyźni częściej niż kobiety ulegają domocentryzmowi i etnocentryzmowi konsumenckiemu. Badania pokazują także silną zależność między domocentryzmem i etnocentryzmem konsumenckim a poziomem wykształcenia i miesięcznymi dochodami rozporządzalnymi srebrnych singli. Z kolei w przypadku zrównoważonej konsumpcji odsetek samotnych osób starszych identyfikujących się ze zrównoważoną konsumpcją był dużo większy wśród kobiet niż mężczyzn, legitymujących się wykształceniem wyższym i dysponujących miesięcznym dochodem powyżej 3000,00 zł oraz aktywnie uczestniczących w zajęciach organizowanych przez UTW.

Ograniczenia badań i wnioskowania: z uwagi na ograniczone możliwości finansowe, uchwycenie zachowań konsumpcyjnych wpisujących się w ideę domocentryzmu, etnocentryzmu konsumenckiego i zrównoważonej konsumpcji srebrnych singli ograniczyło się wyłącznie do badań przeprowadzonych w największych miastach Polski. Natomiast nie udało się przeprowadzić badań wśród samotnych seniorów żyjących na wsi. W efekcie poczynionych wniosków nie należy traktować jako reprezentatywnych dla populacji polskich srebrnych singli. Pozwalają one jedynie przybliżyć rzeczywiste zachowania konsumpcyjne tego segmentu konsumentów.

Oryginalność/wartość: niniejszy artykuł jest jednym z pierwszych w Polsce, który próbuje uchwycić zachowania konsumpcyjne polskich seniorów żyjących w pojedynkę wpisujące się w ideę wybranych alternatywnych trendów konsumenckich.

Słowa kluczowe: srebrni single, domocentryzm, etnocentryzm konsumencki, zrównoważona konsumpcja.

1. Introduction

Singlization and population ageing are major social phenomena in the world today. Besides globalization, internationalization, innovation stimulation and dynamic development of the knowledge-based economy, they are perceived as an important socio-economic trend. It should be noted, however, that singlization and population ageing affect all global and European populations and the populations of individual countries and regions. In many European countries, including Poland, these processes have intensified in recent years, with their implications becoming stronger and stronger. Population ageing and intensified depopulation processes

have a significant impact on the lifestyle, family model and a redefinition of life priorities and, consequently, on consumption and consumer behavior of households today.

How individuals adapt to old age is reflected in seniors' lifestyle, which consists of behaviors, their motivations and outcomes. Active and passive lifestyles of the elderly are most often mentioned. The active lifestyle of silver singles, above all, satisfies the desire to be useful and needed, gives a sense of fulfillment, independence, enables the transmission of life wisdom and gained experience. Upon retiring, the elderly also find new forms of leisure pursuits allowing them to actively and successfully live at old age, making activity not only a privilege of youth. In contrast, silver singles who represent the passive lifestyle are alienated and rarely leave their homes.

Progressive singlization of societies is no longer surprising. Patterns that were still sharply criticized, rejected, disapproved of until recently are now an expression of positively evaluated freedom. The sense of self-efficacy, the pursuit of emancipation and individualism make it necessary to search for alternative life paths in the name of the axiological and normative order considered to be right. Singlization of the population is becoming increasingly common. Singlehood is a sign of independence rather than a cause for shame, it offers the opportunity to build diverse relationships and acquaintances as opposed to a sole focus on the family. There is, therefore, a chance of choice contrasting with the old, uniform pattern. Changes in mentality, distance from the institution of family, the cult of independence and the building of one's own social and professional position make up the socio-cultural landscape of the 21st century.

Silver singles' lifestyle directly affects their consumer behavior. Today, seniors living alone are increasingly searching for goods and services that would meet their subjective needs while highlighting their individuality (Ruszkiewicz, 2008, pp. 9–10). One of the consequences of changes in consumption among seniors is the fact that they follow alternative trends such as cocooning, consumer ethnocentrism and sustainable consumption. These consumption trends imply a specific structure, specific forms and methods of consumption but also the emergence of new needs and motives for their satisfaction. Contemporary consumers – single seniors are more and more willing to follow these changes. The purpose of the considerations in the article is to identify the impact of the aforementioned consumption trends on the buying behavior of Polish silver singles. Undoubtedly, they represent an important part of today's societies. They are specific market participants since – unlike family households – they feel their needs, perceive the world, understand the messages addressed to them differently, have different systems of values and exhibit different behaviors.

The modification of purchasing patterns ensuing from these changes is characteristic of silver singles. Therefore, by taking active roles in the purchasing process, they are susceptible to new consumer trends including

cocooning, consumer ethnocentrism and sustainable consumption. These consumer trends imply a new structure, new forms and methods of consumption but also the emergence of new needs and motives for their satisfaction.

The study consists of two parts: theoretical and empirical. The first one explains the notion of single, building upon a critical analysis of literature. In order to fully characterize people living alone, the most frequently mentioned definitional criteria used in the Polish and world literature are presented. Thereafter, the concept and essence of selected alternative consumer trends (cocooning, consumer ethnocentrism and sustainable consumption) are synthetically explained. The empirical section focuses on the research conceptualization and a description of the research sample and its characteristics. Subsequently, based on the conducted research, an attempt is made to identify consumption behaviors of Polish silver singles that are in line with the idea of the selected consumer trends. Finally, major conclusions end this study.

2. The Concept of “Single” and “Silver Single” – Attempts to Define the Notions

The first attempts to define people living alone were made in the 1930s in American literature (Hillis, 1936). The definition of a single takes into account legal, social and individual aspects. A single is most often differentiated from a couple on the basis of three features: the presence or absence of a long-term close and intimate partner, self-definition in one of these roles, and age limits determining the legal possibility of getting married (Hertel et al., 2007, p. 141). Those actually living alone constitute an extreme case of social singles. They are also referred to as singletons. However, these people are only a part of the singles group. The classic American definition of “single” assumes that it is a person who is not married or in an informal heterosexual or homosexual relationship (Stein, 1981). In English, “single” usually refers to all unmarried people, that is spinsters, bachelors, the divorced, widows and widowers (Stein, 1976). Due to an increased number of cohabitation relationships in the countries of Western culture, people in permanent informal relationships formerly treated only as preceding marriage have been recently excluded from the category of singles (Chambers-Schiller, 1999, p. 678). It is controversial to consider people living alone who have informal partners in LAT (living apart together) relationships as singles (Hertel et al., 2007). In addition, singlehood is defined as a specific lifestyle covering diet, the way of spending free time, and the worldview (Bauereiss & Bayer, 1995, pp. 35–60). L. Rosenmayr and F. Kolland (1997, pp. 256–287) also emphasize that the notion of single encompasses not only the physical form of living alone but also a lifestyle in which individual values and patterns of relationships materialize. It should

also be noted that the term “single” is used in English in a narrower sense, referring to people following a lifestyle devoid of any family responsibilities and resulting from a conscious choice (under this approach, singles do not include old bachelors and spinsters who unsuccessfully look for life partners) (Watters, 2003). German literature most commonly defines a single as a person who lives without a lasting, deep relationship in a single-person household, regardless of the voluntary or enforced nature of such a lifestyle (Deml, 2009). In Polish, in turn, given that the word “single” has been imported, it has acquired cultural connotations and refers only to some people living alone. Living alone is not only considered as an alternative form of married and family life but as a thought-out and ultimate life project for a growing group of women and men (Zalega, 2019, pp. 4–5).

The group of people living alone is not homogeneous. Singles can be unmarried, widowed or divorced. These are, therefore, people whom the Polish society terms unmarried or bachelors/spinsters. The diversity of singles makes researchers redefine them for their purposes in scientific research, referring to different variables (e.g. age, marital status, economic independence). However, social sciences lack a uniform conceptual framework for singlehood. The adoption of legal, economic and lifestyle-related criteria describing the category of singles should be considered necessary, yet, as previously demonstrated, insufficient. In this article, “silver singles” will mean people aged 65+, living alone by their own choice (in a single-person household or a separate flat) for reasons beyond their control (widow, widower) or those who live alone again (divorced, abandoned, forsaken). These people usually have no parental responsibilities, are economically independent, have most often completed higher or secondary education, have a large group of friends and acquaintances, are strongly focused on themselves and their needs, and lead a specific lifestyle in which they pursue individual values and relationship patterns. In addition, this study assumes that singles cannot remain in informal LAT or distant relationships and their possible romantic relationships cannot be lasting². This definition thus excludes elderly people who are in a permanent heterosexual or homosexual relationship and narrows the group of “silver singles”, allowing research uniformity.

3. Cocooning, Ethnocentrism and Sustainable Consumption as Selected Consumption Trends – Theoretical Background

A “trend” is understood as the current direction of development in some field or, more generally, as a monotonic component of the dependence of the studied feature on time. H. Vejlgaard (2008, p. 9), an expert on the subject, defines a trend as a process of change that is perceived from a psychological, economic or sociological perspective, which may be short-term or long-term and have a regional or global coverage. From this

point of view, a trend in consumer behavior is most often construed in the literature as a specific direction of change in the lifestyle of a model consumer who acts objectively, i.e. independently of will and awareness. In a broader sense, it can be said that trends in consumption arise as a result of the impact of the environment in the social, economic, legal, political, demographic and technological dimensions on the buying behavior of consumers, consequently affecting changes in consumption patterns. "Alternative" consumer trends, on the other hand, can be understood as objective and long-term directions of consumers' general choices, behaviors and preferences that are a consequence of socio-political, legal, cultural, demographic and technological changes continuously taking place in the market environment. It should also be borne in mind that both research and analysis of trends largely boil down to deductive reasoning based on a wide spectrum of observations that are difficult to generalize. Among alternative consumer trends, it is possible to distinguish cocooning, consumer ethnocentrism and sustainable consumption, which silver singles follow.

3.1. Cocooning

Cocooning of consumption is a commercially significant phenomenon that promotes the development of new technologies and increases the popularity of online shopping, remote work, and essentially responds to the requirements of contemporary existence. The beginnings of this consumer trend date back to the turn of the 1980s and 1990s. In the literature, three types of cocooning of consumption can be distinguished (Popcorn, 1991, pp. 27–28; Bywalec, 2017):

- 1) *socialized cocooning*, which involves the celebration of home life, meaning the shift of focus in everyday life to one's home, which becomes the centre of human functioning that can be entered only by the closest relatives and all those who participate in the ritual escape from chaos and everyday life;
- 2) *wandering cocooning*, which involves isolation from the outside world by means of iPods, tablets, smartphones or mobile phones, shopping with headphones on, and manifests as the use of luxury cars in which one can feel at home and avoid direct confrontation with the outside world thanks to the right equipment (GPS, CB-radio, the internet);
- 3) *armored cocooning*, which is manifested as excessively cautious use of the internet, installation of alarm systems and surveillance cameras, living in enclosed settlements, employment of security companies, etc.

Generally speaking, consumption cocooning is a consumption trend that involves a transfer of consumption from public institutions to the home, which simultaneously becomes a place that satisfies cultural, educational, leisure, health, etc. needs which were previously met outside the home (e.g. in cinemas, cafés, shopping centers) (Bywalec 2007). It should also be mentioned that the progressive individualization of lifestyles and the

simultaneous escape into privacy, together with increasingly better housing conditions and means of transport, information and cultural media in households, are conducive to consumption cocooning.

In addition, it is noted that this consumption trend is fostered by late marriages, fewer large families and more small ones, a faster adolescence process and entry into adulthood among children and the youth, consequently increasing the number of people who are able to independently decide on their consumption. Thus, material goods, such as TV sets or cars, so far considered as family goods, are becoming personal effects. According to F. van Raaij (2001, pp. 343–346), what also matters is changes in the organization of professional work, notably its greater specialization that makes human behavior more individual not only in but also outside the workplace.

Undoubtedly, cocooning is largely a consequence of: the presence of better high-end infotainment equipment (OLED, LCD and plasma TV sets, home cinema, video-on-demand, pay-per-view, etc.) in households, continuous globalization process, individualization of lifestyles and escape into privacy, increasing popularity of the internet and wireless phones, as well as increased presence of means of transport (adult members often have their own means of transport) and modern information and cultural media in households (tablets and e-readers are changing the use of cultural heritage). Consumption cocooning contributes to the focus of consumers on their own flat/house by seeking seclusion at home and celebrating domesticity. It can therefore be argued that a return to hearth and home is likely to result from rejection of the hyper-individualism concept, which naturally leads to the rehabilitation of family and restoration of its primary value. Thus, more and more consumers are fond of spending their free time with the family. In order to do so, consumers choose to shift leisure-related services to their own homes (Zalega, 2018).

Consumption cocooning, conditioned by the progressive individualization of lifestyles and improvement of housing conditions, also consists in the elderly articulating their own needs, namely defining their own taste in designing and furnishing a flat, while preserving space within a shared flat/house for their own disposal. Making a home means designing one's space to hide from the outside world but also to arrange objects in line with one's own needs. Attention should also be paid to the traditionalization of consumption and the importance of traditional furnishing patterns in cultural regions, creation of the image of a home based on souvenirs, symbols, family tradition, with the growing significance of global brands in home furnishing that emphasize usability, e.g. IKEA or smart homes controlled by technology.

Consumption cocooning is also visible in the case of tourism and is reflected, among others, as hiring houses or flats just for oneself. The COVID-19 pandemic has only reinforced such behaviors of silver singles. In this way, people try to create their private space when leaving their place. They can feel a little at home, without having to stay at a hotel or book

accommodation elsewhere. This involves personalization of consumption; people's needs in this area can be met individually rather than through mass offering (Szul, 2008, p. 134).

Given the permanent contact with the whole world, modern technologies used as part of consumption cocooning have contributed to the development of the "non-stop" trend. It involves an elimination of non-productive interruptions and downtime from life, spending time "on the road" using the wireless internet, eating on the road (on-the-go products) and logistic optimization of household activities (e.g. ordering services via text messages, using GPS technology). Examples of the "non-stop" trend include geotagging, that is the process of linking a particular location, its geographic coordinates to other related data such as web pages, RSS feeds, digital photos and videos. Geotagging facilitates the identification of where a document was produced, thus making it possible to create: maps with appropriately documented photos, document search engines (for example, including photos and videos from a certain area), and to indirectly determine the position of the person who took the photo (also in order to track his or her position) (Robbitt, 2009).

Cocooning is a consumer trend that is also part of the slow movement philosophy born in response to fast food. Initially, slow movement worked under the name of "slow food", with quality food prepared with respect for local tradition, without artificial additives, at its heart. Later, this philosophy expanded to a broader term of "slow movement" describing a lifestyle without hurry, with respect for oneself and others, where direct relationships, individual development and realization of one's own dreams prevail (Kozłowski, 2012).

3.2. Consumer Ethnocentrism

In the second half of the 1980s, Terence A. Shimp and Subhash Sharma were the first to use this term. They construed consumer ethnocentrism as people's belief that the purchase of products imported from abroad adversely affects economic development at home, results in inefficient use of available technologies and resources, including labor, which in turn leads to increased unemployment and represents unpatriotic behavior (Shimp & Sharma, 1987, pp. 280–289; Akdogan et al., 2012, p. 4). In turn, David Matsumoto defined consumer ethnocentrism as a perception of the world through a cultural filter (Matsumoto, 1996, p. 146). It can therefore be said that consumer ethnocentrism is considered as consumer behavior involving a consistent preference for home-produced products (Sharma, Shimp, & Shin, 1995, pp. 28–29). This tendency generally stems from a sense of national identity, concern for the homeland, and fear of negative consequences of imports for individuals, businesses and society at large.

Consumer ethnocentrism may be local, regional, national and continental. In line with its traditional broad understanding, consumer attitudes should

be viewed as applying to imported products. A narrow look at ethnocentric behaviors, on the other hand, involves the assessment of buying behaviors in relation to domestic and foreign brands in a local and regional scale. In the latter case, ethnocentric attitudes focus on positive consumer attitudes towards products manufactured only in small local markets. It should be noted, however, that buyers' preferences for local and domestic products are extremely hard to materialize because goods are produced and assembled in various countries, and often changing distribution channels obscure the picture of where a particular product originates. Misleading product brand names, the origin of the capital of companies producing goods as well as the multinational structure of companies' operations make it impossible to fully identify the country of origin of goods. Due to the presence of a large number of goods on the saturated market, oftentimes with a missing or wrong indication of their origin, customers are confused, distrustful and not fully open to any novelties.

Consumers who are ethnocentrically oriented make their purchase decisions based on moral considerations. Simultaneously, they must have some socio-economic knowledge to enable them to assess the market situation, develop their own opinions in this respect and make informed decisions. Where consumers associate buying local products with the situation in the country or region (for example, an increase in demand for local products may translate into more jobs), this may strengthen their ethnocentric attitude in consumption behavior and make them base their choices on duty and moral obligation rather than on rationality or emotions³ (Zhou, Yang, & Hui, 2010, pp. 204–205; Bywalec, 2010; Zalega, 2017, p. 306).

According to C. Min Han, direct influence on the level of consumer ethnocentrism is mainly exerted by psychosocial and demographic factors. Numerous studies in different countries worldwide have confirmed a statistically significant impact of these determinants on consumer buying behavior as regards the choice between domestic and imported products (Han, 1994, p. 104). On the basis of his research findings, that author showed that patriotism and conservatism have a very significant impact on the expressed intentions to purchase domestic and foreign products. Han found that younger people, who are generally less patriotic, are characterized by weaker consumer ethnocentrism than others. The same is true of conservatism, understood as the attachment to and preservation of traditions that have survived the test of time and the reluctance to make any changes. Based on the research conducted in 1972 by W. Thomas Anderson and William H. Cunningham, it was also found that both patriotism and conservatism are positively correlated with the intensity of consumer ethnocentrism (Anderson & Cunningham, 1972, pp. 28–30). Also studies carried out in the first decade of the 21st century by Delbert Hawkins, David Mothersbaugh and Avinandan Mukerjee (2010, pp. 246–247) confirmed that consumers characterized by a high degree of ethnocentrism are generally

conservatives closed to other cultures, social trends and market novelties, are reluctant to buy imported goods and prefer domestic products, assuming that by doing so, they not only protect but also support the domestic economy.

An important variable differentiating behavior as regards ethnocentrism is gender. It turns out that women display more ethnocentric attitudes than men, which is explained by the female nature: they are more caring, have a greater sense of responsibility for others and strive for harmony in society (Jain & Kaur, 2006, p. 112). Another variable affecting ethnocentric behavior is disposable income. It can interact with other variables, sometimes making them significant and sometimes insignificant.

3.3. Sustainable Consumption

Another alternative consumption trend present in the buying behavior of silver singles is sustainable consumption. The term “sustainable consumption” was derived from the concept of sustainable development. In line with the economics of sustainable development, the concept of sustainable consumption does not perceive a human being as an economic actor making purely rational decisions. On the contrary, humans are recognized as not always acting for their own good, hence the state can use its instruments to intervene in consumer sovereignty (state interventionism). In addition, the key goal of sustainable consumption is to increase the quality of life rather than treat economic growth in a fetishist manner⁴. Although the concept of sustainable consumption relies mainly on the assumptions of the economics of sustainable development, it also uses some instruments of environmental economics (based on the sensitive durability principle), new institutional economics and sharing economy (Zalega, 2020).

As a relatively new economic category, sustainable consumption has not been clearly defined yet. The related literature lacks consistency of definitions and terminology regarding sustainable consumption. This results both from the complexity of the consumption act and from the very concept of sustainable development to which consumption refers. It was initially assumed that sustainable consumption is a set of rational purchasing choices aimed not only at maximizing consumer utility but also at achieving sustainable development goals. Sustainable consumption is defined as a holistic approach focused on minimizing the impact of social consumption and production systems on the environment. It can be thus said that such consumption means that individuals deliberately seek to minimize the adverse effects of consuming consumer and investment goods and services through rationalization and utilization of production factors (resources) and a reduction of generated post-production and post-consumption waste (Zalega, 2015, pp. 82–83). It should be emphasized that sustainable consumption is based on the wish to reduce wastage as well as waste and pollution generation (best practices in the field of waste management, water and waste water management, renewable energies and development

of eco-friendly products) and to choose goods and services which comply, as far as possible, with certain ethical, social and environmental criteria (Heinzle, 2012, pp. 43–64; Paetz et al., 2012, pp. 23–41).

According to Spangenberg (2014, p. 63), the concept of sustainable consumption encompasses all free consumer choices made within the available environmental space⁵ which spans between the boundary of social sustainability and the boundary of environmental sustainability. According to J. Moisander and S. Pesonen (2002, p. 336), in turn, sustainable consumption is such where its form and volume define a set of consumers' environmental values and attitudes that lead to green awareness (or broader social awareness) and an environmentally (and socially) responsible process of making market decisions. Therefore, it can be said that sustainable consumption as a response to consumerism promotes reduction of wastage, resource consumption, environmental damage and even a decrease in the number of product components and functions. J.D. Mittelstaedt argues that the number of sustainable consumption supporters is growing year by year and as a result, consumer behavior in the market that is characteristic of this consumer trend will have an increasing impact on the economy (Mittelstaedt et al., 2014, pp. 253–264). The author of this article believes that sustainable consumption means that individuals deliberately seek to minimize the adverse effects of consuming consumer and investment goods and services through rationalization and utilization of production factors (resources) and a reduction of generated post-production and post-consumption waste, with needs being satisfied in order to improve the quality of life.

In practice, a distinction is made between the so-called weak and strong sustainable consumption (Seyfang, 2011, p. 56). Weak sustainable consumption, also known as mainstream sustainable consumption, chiefly involves a reorientation of consumption towards its rationality and efficiency (especially the use of scarce resources) at various levels, in particular environmental, yet with a general increase in consumption. Furthermore, it is assumed that sustainable consumption will be achieved through improved energy efficiency of equipment and other technological solutions. On the other hand, strong sustainable consumption is based on the postulate of consumption reduction in general, requiring consumers to give up consumption at the current level for the benefit of future generations (Seyfang, 2011, p. 59). Strong sustainable consumption assumes that in order for this to be achieved, significant changes must also occur in the levels and patterns of consumption. The concept of quality of life, good life, human non-economic activity is also of key importance (Lorek & Spangenberg, 2014, pp. 33–34; Spangenberg, 2014, pp. 63–64). In the literature, the dominant view is that instruments and conditions for weak sustainable consumption can be developed in the longer term, yet strong sustainable consumption is merely a postulate (Lorek & Fuchs 2013, pp. 37–40; Tukker et al., 2010, pp. 1–3).

4. Research Conceptualization

The tool used to conduct the research was the author's original questionnaire comprising 35 closed-ended questions regarding consumer behavior of Polish silver singles. The first of three planned stages of the survey was carried out from 1 February to 30 October 2019. The empirical material contained in this article comes from direct research conducted in the form of an interview questionnaire in a sample of 2476 elderly people living alone. In accordance with the research assumptions, the sample included persons over 65 years of age who took independent consumer decisions in the market. Since the research was non-exhaustive, it was necessary to select the sample. In this case, the targeted quota sampling procedure was used⁶. The characteristics (quotas) covered by the research were: gender, age, and place of residence. Based on the known structure of the studied population, unit quotas were selected in relation to these characteristics.

This research method was chosen in view of the older age of respondents whose openness to new media (internet, smartphone, i-Pod) often used in direct research is limited.

The survey was conducted among participants of the University of the Third Age (UTA) at state universities in: Warsaw, Cracow, Łódź, Poznań, Gdańsk, Katowice, Lublin, Białystok, Toruń and Wrocław, as well as among members of parochial clubs in parishes located in the Archdioceses of Warsaw, Cracow, Łódź, Białystok, Gdańsk, Katowice, Lublin, Poznań, Wrocław and the Dioceses of Warsaw-Praga and Toruń.

During data processing, information from respondents was eliminated if the questionnaires were incomplete or incorrect (6 instances). From among 2482 initial questionnaires, 2476 were considered eligible, representing 99.76% of the total sample. Further, they were coded, and the data set thus created was processed by a statistical package. For the statistical analysis of data, the statistical package SPSS, version 25, was employed.

The article seeks to identify silver singles' consumer attitudes and behaviors that are in line with the idea of selected consumer trends such as cocooning, consumer ethnocentrism and sustainable consumption. An attempt has been made to explain what most motivates senior singles to participate in these consumer trends. With this in mind, four research hypotheses were formulated:

- H*₁: Less educated single seniors with a low monthly disposable income most often display cocooning attitudes.
- H*₂: Among silver singles, men more often than women display ethnocentric attitudes.
- H*₃: Silver singles' preference for domestic products is closely correlated with their level of education, monthly disposable income and patriotic attitude.
- H*₄: Wealthier and better educated silver singles most frequently follow the sustainable consumption trend.

5. Selection and Characteristics of the Research Sample

“Silver singles” were chosen for the research in view of their growing importance and decision-making power in today’s societies, and because, as market participants, they respond to the changing environment, globalization and its impact on consumption, lifestyle and emerging new consumer trends with more and more intensity. Undoubtedly, understanding their reasons, behaviors and market attitudes can help enterprises not only to decide on appropriate innovative marketing strategies but also to determine the right development path, allowing companies to remain in the market and make their product (service) offer attractive to new customers, especially the elderly, despite dynamic changes in consumption and ever faster development of mobile technologies and applications.

The author of this study divided elderly singles into:

- 1) young old – people aged 65–74;
- 2) old old – people aged 75–84;
- 3) the oldest old – people aged 85 and more.

The research covered 69.2% and 30.8% of women and men, respectively. Respondents were asked about the level of education. The questionnaire included four categories of education: primary, basic vocational, secondary and higher education. Respondents with secondary education formed the largest group. Every second respondent declared this level. Almost every fifth respondent had completed higher education. In the sample surveyed, people with primary (13.8%) and basic vocational (15.1%) education formed the smallest group. The average age of respondents was 74 years.

Only every eighth respondent was economically active. Within this small group of working silver singles, over 85% were under 75 years old, almost every eighth represented the 75–84 age group, and only 2.5% of those living alone were the oldest old. It should also be noted that women accounted for almost 70% of all economically active singles. As regards the place of residence, most silver singles lived in cities of over 500 thousand inhabitants – mainly in Warsaw, Cracow and Wrocław, and the fewest lived in Białystok and Łódź.

Almost half of respondents described their economic situation as bad, while every third respondent as good. Nearly one in ten respondents described their economic status as very bad whereas every twentieth silver single assessed their material situation as very good. In this case, it can be noticed that a positive correlation exists between the size of the city where singles lived and their self-perceived material situation. The bigger the city, the greater the percentage of surveyed singles who assessed their material situation as good (Pearson’s correlation coefficient $r = -0,196$ for $p \leq 0.01$) or very good (Pearson’s correlation coefficient $r = -0.261$ for $p \leq 0.01$).

The largest group of respondents included people whose monthly disposable income ranged from PLN 2001.00 to 3000.00. For almost every

third respondent, monthly disposable income did not exceed PLN 2000.00, and for every tenth, disposable income ranged from PLN 3001.00 to PLN 4000.00 per month. The smallest group of respondents included singles whose monthly disposable income exceeded PLN 4000.00.

6. Implementation of Cocooning, Consumer Ethnocentrism and Sustainable Consumption in the Consumer Behavior of Silver Singles

6.1. Cocooning

The silver singles surveyed who follow the cocooning trend emphasize that its core value is fuller and deeper life without stress or hurry. They find joy in simple pleasures, have time to reflect and develop spiritually. Nowadays, thanks to the development of technology, contemporary flats/houses are fulfilling more and more functions, satisfying consumers' needs in the area of entertainment, culture, leisure, information and development. For nearly 65% of respondents, it is their flat/house that is the main place of recreation, entertainment, information and meetings with friends. This answer was most frequently indicated by young old (67.9%) and old old seniors (68.9%), mostly men (69.8%) with a monthly income of up to PLN 3000.00. On the other hand, every fourth senior regards their flat/house as a much less important place for meeting such needs. These are mostly young old people (27.9%), mainly men (28.1%) with secondary education (27.4%) and a monthly income of less than PLN 2000.00.

The single seniors surveyed who spend most of their free time in their flats/houses most often choose passive forms of spending time, i.e. watching TV and films, reading, passive recreation, computer and the internet, and listening to the radio. Nearly every fifth respondent chooses to go out, every tenth single does sports, 1/5 of silver singles meet with friends and acquaintances, and fewer than 5% choose out-of-home entertainment such as cinema, theatre or philharmonic.

Almost 1/3 of respondents, primarily silver singles aged 85 or more, most frequently spend their free time in front of the TV, being indoctrinated by the media that produce quite a false image of the reality among their audience. The seniors' belief about dangerous world fits well in the assumptions of cocooning, whereby the only safe haven for humans is their own flat/house, the space arranged by themselves, essentially cut off from strangers and tightly closed to them.

The research shows that almost half of the silver singles declared that they had patterns for creating their living space. Undoubtedly, the inspiration from which silver singles draw their patterns for furnishing their homes depends on their age. The tradition of the family home was most often

followed by the oldest old (53.9% of responses) and old old respondents (48.2% of responses). More than 3/5 of young old people and every third old old person draw inspiration from magazines and newspapers when furnishing their homes. In turn, television and portals dealing with interior design are used by young old seniors (31.4% of responses). Also, patterns provided by interior designers were indicated mainly by elderly people aged 65–74 (29.6% of responses).

Cocooning is also associated with the tendency towards self-realization. Almost half of silver singles produce products and services on their own. These include primarily vegetable and fruit cultivation in an allotment garden or on a balcony, home-made preserves, car repairs, home and window cleaning and home renovation, and minor repairs of household equipment. More than 3/5 of young old respondents, fewer than 4/5 of the old old, and every second oldest old respondent prepare their own meals at home. These forms of cocooning were most commonly indicated by those aged 65–74, with primary and basic vocational education, chiefly women with a monthly income of up to PLN 3000.00.

The silver singles surveyed spent little on sports, tourism and recreation. The smallest amounts were spent for this purpose by old old and the oldest old singles with primary and basic vocational education. On the other hand, tourism and active recreation attract more interest, hence involve higher expenditures, among younger singles, most often female university graduates earning a monthly income of over PLN 3000.00. More than 1/3 of respondents reported small expenditure on culture. These were mostly women who had retired a longer time before, had completed secondary and higher education and earned a monthly income not exceeding PLN 3000.00. Only one out of twenty respondents pointed to the lack of interest as the reason why they did not use broadly understood services. In addition, more than half of silver singles claimed that they had given up or seriously limited their visits to cinemas, theatres, philharmonics or operettas because they had bought a good-quality plasma or LCD TV set and had satellite and digital TV. This was reflected in reduced spending on broadly understood culture. Nearly 1/3 of silver singles admitted that they organized recreation for themselves on their own, while 1/4 chose cheaper offers of travel agencies. This does not mean that silver singles are not interested in attending various types of cultural events and active recreation. In this case, the most frequently mentioned obstacles include the earned monthly disposable income, relatively high prices of cultural events (ticket price and travel costs), insufficient knowledge of organized events and seniors' health that prevents them from attending various cultural events. Expenditure on catering services were relatively modestly reduced after seniors retired. It should be highlighted that eating out is moderately popular among Polish silver singles, especially in food outlets offering the menu adapted for the elderly and located near their place of living. Only

one in five seniors said that they did not eat out at all and one in four claimed that they ate out less frequently per month after having retired. Such answers were most commonly given by seniors with a monthly income of up to PLN 2000.00, mostly women with secondary and basic vocational education. In addition, silver singles are frequent visitors to so-called “milk bars”. Such behavior of single seniors can be explained by the fact that those bars offer tasty, fresh and relatively cheap meals. Considering the socio-demographic characteristics of seniors, it can be said that the relatively rich offer of “milk bars” was most often used by seniors with a monthly income of no more than PLN 2000.00, aged 75–84 and 85+, mostly men with primary and basic vocational education. On the other hand, restaurants, pubs and cafés were more frequently visited by young old respondents (aged 65–74), more susceptible to various manifestations of globalization, predominantly women and university graduates.

6.2. Consumer Ethnocentrism

A significant issue was whether silver singles considered themselves to be ethnocentric in their consumption decisions (Table 1).

Consumer ethnocentrism is considered as consumers' behavior involving consistent acquisition of home-produced products. Do you think that you exhibit ethnocentric attitudes in your consumption behavior?	Number of respondents (N = 2476)	Percentage share
Yes	1030	51.6
No	1263	41.0
It's hard to say	183	7.4

Tab. 1. Identification of silver singles with ethnocentric attitudes. Source: The author's research.

The survey shows that more than half of respondents identify themselves with ethnocentric attitudes. In that group of silver singles, almost 2/3 often pay attention to the country of origin of products (mainly food), every third does so very often, and every twelfth does so always or almost always. However, only one in three seniors uses the “Pola” application, which informs users about the origin of products. These are mainly respondents in the 65–74 age group (37.9%), mostly women (38.1%) who have completed higher education (33.8%) and live in cities of over 500 thousand inhabitants (24.4%).

Based on the conducted survey, the results concerning the correlations between consumer ethnocentrism and selected demographic variables (Table 2) were compiled.

Specification	Spearman's rho
Age	0.342*
Gender	0.292**
Education	-0.386*
Income	-0.371*
Place of residence (city population)	-0.269*

* The correlation is significant at 0.01; ** the correlation is significant at 0.05.

Tab. 2. Correlations between consumer ethnocentrism and selected demographic variables. Source: The author's research.

The correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant relationship between ethnocentric behavior of respondents and demographic variables. Taking into account the economic factor affecting consumer ethnocentrism, it may be stated that a lower disposable income is generally accompanied by stronger ethnocentric attitudes. Respondents with a monthly disposable income not exceeding PLN 2000.00 almost three times more often display ethnocentric tendencies than those earning more than PLN 4000.00 a month. As they more frequently travel around the world, are open to foreign cultures and more familiar with foreign products, wealthier silver singles perceive such products more positively. Hence, they show weaker ethnocentric and stronger cosmopolitan attitudes. A negative correlation between the level of disposable income and ethnocentric attitudes is confirmed by numerous research results (Caruana, 1996; Lee, Hong, & Lee, 2003; Hamelin, Ellouzi, & Cantenbury, 2011; Richardson, 2012; Wolanin-Jarosz, 2015). It should be noted, however, that with respect to disposable income levels, the research findings do not show a clear link between income and ethnocentric attitudes. Studies by George Balabanis and Adamantios Diamantopoulos (2011, pp. 109–111) reveal a positive correlation between higher disposable incomes and stronger ethnocentric attitudes among consumers (this more often applies to older consumers though).

The proportion of silver singles who declare that they act fully in line with the idea of ethnocentrism is higher among men (54.7%) than women (45.3%), those aged 75–84 as well as among people with secondary education and a monthly disposable income of up to PLN 3000.00 (51.5%), living in rural areas (51.9%) and cities of no more than 50 thousand inhabitants (46.1%).

On the other hand, silver singles aged 65–74 who have completed higher education, earn a monthly disposable income of above PLN 3000.00 and live in large urban agglomerations also display cosmopolitan attitudes in addition to ethnocentric ones. Cosmopolitan consumers like experiencing cultural diversity and are therefore more open to other cultures and their

products. This is because they frequently travel around the world and fairly well know foreign products⁷.

The described attitudes of silver singles that can, to varying degrees, be classified as consumer ethnocentrism are convergent with research conducted among seniors in Poland (Marcoux et al., 1997) and many countries around the world (Renko, Karanović, & Matić, 2012; Tsai, Yoo, & Lee, 2013; Parts & Vida, 2013; Makanyeza & du Toit, 2017; Lo, Wang, & Huang, 2017; Savitha & Dhivya, 2017).

Another issue in the research was verifying whether silver singles consider the country of origin when buying products (Table 3).

When buying a product, do you pay attention to the country that it comes from?	Number of respondents (N = 2476)	Percentage share
Very often/often	1466	59.2
Rarely/very rarely	498	20.1
It's hard to say	512	20.7

Tab. 3. Country of product origin and purchase decisions declared by silver singles. Source: The author's research.

According to the survey, 3/5 of respondents take into account the country of origin when making decisions about the purchase of goods and services. Every fifth silver single displays cosmopolitan attitudes, essentially disregarding the country of product origin in purchase decisions.

The relation between ethnocentric tendencies and the consumption behavior of silver singles as regards domestically produced goods is presented in Table 4.

Spearman's rho	I would feel guilty if I did not buy Polish products	I always buy Polish products	I buy Polish products if possible
Consumer ethnocentrism	0.147*	0.247*	0.083
	0.000	0.000	0.000

* The correlation is significant at 0.01; ** the correlation is significant at 0.05.

Tab. 4. Analysis of the correlation between ethnocentrism of silver singles and purchase intentions as regards domestically produced goods. Source: The author's research.

The analysis of the correlation revealed a statistically significant, yet weak, relationship between consumer ethnocentrism of silver singles and consumer behavior as regards domestically produced goods. The silver singles surveyed showed a certain degree of preference for the purchase of domestic products.

An important factor affecting the level of ethnocentrism among silver singles is the type of product. The survey shows that ethnocentric attitudes

are most strongly displayed by respondents towards food products (milk and milk products, bread and cereals, meat and meat products, fruit and vegetables) and most weakly towards mechanized household appliances (dishwashers, microwave ovens, vacuum cleaners), infotainment equipment (TV sets, laptops, smartphones), mobile equipment (passenger cars, motorcycles, bicycles), clothing and footwear, and chemical products.

Classical ethnocentric attitudes are most commonly exhibited in the market of food products, with their strength depending on demographic and social characteristics of consumers. The survey reveals that silver singles preferring Polish food products often follow recommendations of their friends or closest family members when choosing such products (53.1%). The consumers surveyed also admitted that they preferred Polish to imported food products because the former are not only of better quality (71.2%) and much tastier (69.6%) but also contain smaller amounts of preservatives (59.7%). Almost 3/5 of respondents claimed that they wanted to support domestic producers by buying Polish products. They emphasized that Polish food products were better known to them (61.2%), more easily available (32.4%) and generally cheaper than those imported from abroad (30.7%).

It can also be concluded from the analysis that the so-called declared ethnocentrism is common among silver singles. This means that their interest in buying domestically made products does not always go hand in hand with the declared preference for domestic goods. It relatively often remains solely in the sphere of respondents' declarations. In addition, many silver singles are unaware of what kind of product they actually buy, whether it is imported or national. This can be partly explained by the fact that in order to lessen the watchfulness of ethnocentric consumers, companies sometimes give their products names that sound "national" and place the information that they were made at home or that some ingredients are of national origin on product packaging. However, brands often sounding familiar and having been valued for generations are owned by international corporations. The survey reveals that younger respondents (aged 65–74) are not always able to identify a Polish brand correctly. For example, almost every third respondent identifies "Lajkonik" belonging to German Bahlsen and "Żywiec Zdrój" owned by the Danone corporation as Polish brands. Over half of those surveyed are convinced that "Wedel", managed by Japanese Lotte, and Krakus ham and Morliny sausages (part of the Chinese WH Group, the largest pork producer in the world) are also domestic brands. As many as half of survey participants associate "Pudliszki" (belonging to American Heinz), "Winiary" (belonging to Swiss Nestlé) and "Turek" (belonging to French Bongrain) with Polish brands.

The next two questions were case studies where respondents were presented with a specific problem. First and foremost, their task was to choose a product (fridge) whose price and country of origin was known (Table 5).

Imagine that you want to buy a fridge. You are considering a fridge made in Poland which costs PLN 2000.00 or a fridge made in China which costs around PLN 1600.00. Which one will you choose?	Number of respondents (N = 2476)	Percentage share
A Polish fridge for PLN 2000.00	235	39.8
A Chinese fridge for PLN 1600.00	302	51.3
It's hard to say	52	8.9

Tab. 5. Purchase decisions of silver singles and country of product origin. Source: The author's research.

Assuming the same quality of domestic and foreign fridges, more than half of the silver singles surveyed would decide to buy a cheaper version of the product, disregarding the country that it comes from. Only 2/5 of respondents would consider the domestic origin of the product despite its higher price. Such ethnocentric behavior was indicated more often by men (55.5%) than women (42.5%), those aged 65–74 (44.1%), holding a master's degree (45.2%), earning a monthly disposable income exceeding PLN 3000.00 (46.3%), and mostly living in cities of over 100 thousand inhabitants (42.3%).

Subsequently, silver consumers were asked to decide about the purchase of a fridge, taking into account the product quality and country of origin (Table 6).

Imagine that you want to buy a fridge. You are considering a fridge made in Poland which costs PLN 2000.00 or a fridge made in China which costs around PLN 1600.00. The fridge made in Poland is of worse quality than the Chinese one. Which one will you choose?	Number of respondents (N = 2476)	Percentage share
A Polish fridge for PLN 2000.00	263	10.6
A Chinese fridge for PLN 1600.00	1862	75.2
It's hard to say	351	14.2

Tab. 6. Purchase decisions of silver singles and product quality and country of origin. Source: The author's research.

Where the imported product is cheaper and of better quality than its national counterpart, most consumers, guided by the utility maximization principle known in economics, would behave rationally and buy a cheaper and better-quality product, disregarding the country that it comes from. This option would be chosen by more than 3/4 of respondents, who would buy a Chinese fridge. Only every tenth silver single would be inclined to buy a fridge produced in Poland, despite knowing about its inferior quality

and less attractive price compared to a fridge made in China. It can thus be concluded that silver singles who gave such an answer are driven mainly by emotional or moral reasons (as manifestations of consumer patriotism) and to a lesser extent by economic considerations when making consumer decisions. In other words, highly ethnocentric buyers tend to prefer domestic products even when they perceive foreign products as better-quality and less expensive. According to Magne Supphellen and Terri L. Rittenburgh (2001, pp. 907–92), these preferences do not necessarily have to be correlated with actual consumer choices, as evidenced by their research.

Both case-study-based questions were aimed at verifying the strength of ethnocentric attitudes among the silver singles surveyed. The choice between fridges produced in Poland and China could prove difficult to respondents since most Polish consumers usually associate products imported from China with poorer quality, high defectiveness or even junk.

The key factors affecting consumer ethnocentric behavior include the aforementioned consumer patriotism. It is understood as consumer behavior that involves conscious support for the national economy through the purchase of domestic products or products commonly associated with the home country⁸ Orsay Kucukemiroglu (1999, p. 470), citing existing research, argues that the attitude towards products and purchase intentions are determined by the patriotic emotions of consumers. In order to specify the impact of patriotism on the strength of consumer ethnocentrism, respondents were asked: “Would you choose a given product simply because it was produced in Poland?” (Table 7).

Would you choose a given product simply because it was produced in Poland?	Number of respondents (N = 2476)	Percentage share
Yes	1012	40.9
No	966	39.0
It's hard to say	498	20.1

Tab. 7. Consumer patriotism and the strength of ethnocentrism among silver singles. Source: The author's research.

2/5 of respondents responded in the affirmative. These were mostly men aged 65–74 (44.2%) who had completed secondary education (45.2%), earned a monthly disposable income not exceeding PLN 3000.00 (45.1%), and usually lived in cities of no more than 100 thousand inhabitants (42.6%). It can therefore be concluded that silver singles who are more patriotic exhibit stronger consumer ethnocentrism than others. Spearman's correlation coefficient between the variables “ethnocentrism level” and “consumer patriotism” was statistically significant but weak and had

a value of $r = 0.348$, with $p < 0.01$. This positive correlation has been confirmed in many studies (Hall & Sevim, 2015; Zeugner-Roth, Žabkar, & Diamantopoulos, 2015; Lopez & Zunjur, 2016; Kragulj et al., 2017).

The level of consumer ethnocentrism was determined by means of the CET scale (CETSCALE, Consumer Ethnocentrism Tendency Scale) specifying the tendency to buy and prefer domestic products as compared to the same products from foreign markets. Bearing in mind the response time, the CET scale was restricted to 10 questions. The questionnaire used a 5-point Likert scale (where 1 meant “strongly disagree” and 5 – “strongly agree”). Based on the responses, the means for each statement were calculated and then summed to obtain an ethnocentrism index. With the scale used, this index could range from 10 to 50; however, in the conducted study, these values ranged from 14 to 42. The survey carried out with the use of this scale confirmed its high reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.94). Among the respondents, people with low ethnocentric tendencies predominate. The distribution is right-skewed (skewness coefficient of 0.50). The ethnocentrism index in the group surveyed was 23.485 (standard deviation of 8.766531, median of 24). None of silver singles obtained the maximum score on the scale. The level of ethnocentrism was higher and more diversified in the 65–74 age group, among men, those with secondary education, a monthly disposable income not exceeding PLN 3000.00, living in rural areas and cities of up to 50 thousand inhabitants.

6.3. Sustainable Consumption

The alternative consumer trend of sustainable consumption may form a certain lifestyle, and a specifically oriented way of buying products may (though does not have to) represent a particular ideology of life for some older people. The proportion of seniors who declared that they acted fully in line with the idea of sustainable consumption was much higher among women (17.6%) than men (12.2%) as well as among university graduates (19.4%) and those earning a monthly income of more than PLN 4000.00, mostly inhabitants of Warsaw (18.5%), Poznań (17.1%) and Wrocław (16.8%), and those actively attending UTA courses (17.4%). In contrast, silver singles who considered their consumption to be unsustainable were people with primary education (64.9%), mostly men (56.4%), aged 75–84 (64.1%), with a monthly disposable income not exceeding PLN 2000.00 (65.2%), living in Łódź (56.9%) and Lublin (56.1%), and being parochial community members (53.5%).

Single seniors who follow the principles of sustainable consumption can be referred to as competent and conscious consumers. They usually shop at markets, in small corner shops, and avoid hyper- and supermarkets and shopping centers.

Silver singles’ environmental behavior as part of sustainable consumption was measured by means of twenty statements (Table 8).

No.	Statements	Whenever possible	From time to time	Never
1	I buy carefully, only as much as needed at the moment	45.6	34.9	19.5
2	Before I buy a product, I gather product information confirmed by other consumers	18.3	41.5	40.2
3	Before I buy a product, I always check its expiry date	59.2	33.2	7.6
4	Before I buy a product, I check if it is biodegradable (recyclable)	9.0	55.8	35.2
5	I use reusable bags	73.6	20.8	5.6
6	I choose products in green, minimized packaging	8.5	49.9	41.6
7	I avoid purchasing disposable items (plates, cups, cutlery, plastic bags)	41.2	22.3	36.5
8	I regularly sort waste	60.8	31.7	7.5
9	I use water sparingly	61.3	33.6	5.1
10	I throw out used batteries into special containers	25.8	50.8	23.4
11	I replace light bulbs with energy-saving ones	56.2	35.1	12.3
12	I limit gas consumption	60.2	31.6	8.2
13	I buy energy-efficient equipment	30.4	55.5	14.1
14	I use electricity sparingly	65.9	28.7	5.4
15	I throw out expired drugs into special containers	15.8	37.4	46.8
16	I collect waste separately	26.0	39.3	34.7
17	I return glass bottles to collection points	20.1	26.1	53.8
18	I buy drinks in recyclable packaging	20.8	25.0	54.2
19	I pay attention to eco-labels	13.6	35.1	51.3
20	I reduce car use for public transport or bicycle	24.9	26.9	48.2

Tab. 8. Silver singles' consumer behavior as part of sustainable consumption (% of answers). Source: The author's research.

The survey results indicate that the behaviors forming part of sustainable consumption are exhibited (albeit with varying frequencies) by the majority

of silver singles. The largest group of the singles surveyed said that they used reusable bags (94.4%), with 70.1% doing so whenever possible. A similar percentage of silver singles admitted that they used water (94.9%), electricity (94.6%) and gas (91.8%) sparingly. In the three cases, those who did so whenever possible were the dominant group (59.4%, 61.5% and 59.1%, respectively). Over 92% of silver singles sorted waste, of which 2/3 admitted doing so always. The responses show that those surveyed most commonly segregate plastic packaging, metal and paper. These actions, which are in line with the requirements of sustainable consumption, are quite often taken up by respondents mainly for financial reasons (they save water and electricity due to their low income and use their own bags to avoid additional spending on disposable bags at the point of sale, etc.). The survey results confirm that money saving is, indeed, the key motive for seniors' environmental behaviors, but the resultant environmental protection is an additional, secondary advantage.

The findings indicate changes in the attitudes of seniors, including silver singles. Before making any decision, in particular before buying products, silver singles who display consumer behaviors in line with sustainable consumption assess whether their purchase is actually necessary or whether it is solely intended to raise their own material status. Over 80% of them declare that they buy carefully – just as much as they need at a given moment, which reduces the risk of wastage. In the decision-making process, almost 3/5 of those surveyed gather product information confirmed by other consumers. Such behaviors should probably be assessed positively since they reduce the risk of buying a wrong product that is contrary to expectations.

7. Conclusion

The presented research findings outline the picture of silver singles as active consumers who strive to satisfy their needs more actively than previous generations of seniors. This clearly proves that old age and singlehood do not have to mean reduced consumption potential but only its partial modification. Moreover, this denies the currently prevailing false stereotype of a “poor and passive” single senior. Today, silver singles are increasingly creative, using technological advances in their daily lives, which consequently affects their consumer attitudes and behaviors. The conducted research has clearly confirmed that silver singles follow the cocooning and consumer ethnocentrism trends more frequently and conscious consumption to a lesser extent.

In addition to its obvious advantages and convenience, dynamic cocooning of consumer behavior also has other negative effects such as dependence on television, alienation, disruption of social communication and the weakening of various kinds of ties. Consequently, silver singles spending most of their time at home in the age of advancing virtualization of needs satisfaction are

beginning to live in two realities: real and virtual. The research shows that among the surveyed silver singles, men more often than women behave in line with the cocooning trend. In turn, taking into account the age of single senior consumers, cocooning attitudes are most frequently displayed by people aged 65–74. It also reveals a strong correlation between cocooning on the one hand and the level of education and monthly disposable income of silver singles on the other. The surveyed silver singles with secondary education and a monthly disposable income not exceeding PLN 2000.00 most often exhibit cocooning attitudes.

A preliminary analysis of the empirical material obtained in the survey indicates that consumer behaviors that can be classified as consumer ethnocentrism are determined by demographic and social characteristics such as gender, age and place of residence. More than half of senior survey participants consider themselves to be ethnocentric consumers. Ethnocentric attitudes are most evident in respondents aged 75–84, who additionally are the most patriotic among all silver singles participating in the survey. The percentage of the surveyed consumers regarding themselves as ethnocentric was also much larger among men than women, those with basic and secondary education, a monthly disposable income not exceeding PLN 3000.00, and living in rural areas and cities of up to 50 thousand inhabitants. Ethnocentric attitudes are mainly exhibited in the case of food purchases and, to a lesser extent, in the case of durable goods. On the other hand, respondents aged 65–74 display cosmopolitan buying behaviors in addition to ethnocentrism when making purchase decisions. The empirical research has also confirmed a well-established positive correlation between age and gender of respondents (especially women) and consumer ethnocentrism as well as a negative correlation between ethnocentric attitudes and the level of education and monthly disposable income.

The majority of seniors reported the discussed environmental behaviors that are consistent with the sustainable consumption idea, albeit to varying degrees and with different frequencies. These are most often household-related activities including waste sorting, economical consumption of water, electricity and gas, and the use of reusable bags. It should be noted that the proportion of silver singles who declared that they acted in line with the idea of sustainable consumption was much higher among women than men as well as among university graduates, those earning a monthly income of more than PLN 3000.00, mostly living in Warsaw, Poznań and Wrocław, and actively attending UTA courses.

To conclude, it can be unequivocally stated that all the research hypotheses adopted in the article have been positively verified.

Taking into account the presented survey results, some limitations ensuing from a small research sample should be borne in mind. Following the conclusions made, they should not be treated as representative of the population of Polish silver singles. They only provide some insight into

actual consumer behaviors of single seniors as part of cocooning, consumer ethnocentrism and sustainable consumption.

This publication should contribute to a broader discussion and exchange of views on the studied consumption trends, thereby encouraging other Polish scholars and researchers from various scientific and research centers to carry out extensive research in this area.

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Endnotes

- ¹ Throughout this article, the term „silver singles” is used interchangeably with „single seniors” or “older people living alone”.
- ² This definition of a silver single was presented to people participating in the survey before filling in the questionnaire.
- ³ J. G. Klein et al. (1998, pp. 89–100) stated that consumer ethnocentrism is negatively correlated with the assessment of and inclination to buy foreign products. G. Balabanis and A. Diamantopoulos (2004, pp. 80–95) claimed, in turn, that consumer ethnocentrism is positively correlated with consumer preference for domestic products.
- ⁴ Sustainable consumption is one of the goals of green economy, which is an attempt to implement the concept of sustainable development in economics. It means an economy that improves people’s well-being and social equality, while reducing environmental risks and the exploitation of natural resources. Green economy assumes a change in the production and consumption of goods. In line with the assumptions of this economy, the European Commission calls for an increase in efficiency with a simultaneous reduction in consumption of raw materials, lower costs and smaller environmental impact.
- ⁵ The environmental space was proposed by H. Opschoor in 2001 and then developed by J. H. Spangenberg. It defines the scope of consumer opportunities of market participants, with the upper limit imposed by the reproductive capacity of the environment and the lower limit imposed by the minimum quantity of resources needed for the proper functioning in a given society. More in: Spangenberg, 2002.
- ⁶ This method is based on the assumption that a sample is representative of the entire population if the sample structure is the same as the structure of the studied population from the point of view of key characteristics. It should also be mentioned that in the case of the targeted quota sampling method, there may, although do not have to, occur errors in the selection of units, in particular the so-called coverage error. This error occurs when, due to the failure of the interviewer, some groups of the studied population could not be included in the sample. Owing to limited funds and the nature of the research itself, no random sampling of units was carried out. In addition, the nature of the examined, predominantly qualitative, characteristics made representative sampling impossible.
- ⁷ Consumer cosmopolitanism is attracting more and more attention as a potentially important factor influencing consumer behavior as regards the preference for foreign

products. Nonetheless, empirical evidence about its impact on consumer behavior remains limited.

- ⁸ The logic behind such behaviors is connected with the so-called “new” patriotism (I am Polish, so I buy Polish milk; I am French, so I buy French wine, etc.). This is particularly true for people who have lived abroad for a long time and who buy products coming from their home countries. Undoubtedly, today’s consumers need patriotism to achieve two goals: to feel a sense of community and to build their own individual identity.

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