

Trends of Evolution in Consumer Behavior in the Contemporary World

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Abstract

Purpose: Consumer behavior and decision making are changing along with civilization and cultural changes, socio-economic development, increase of quality of life and production growth. Consumers change their attitudes and habits in the evolving market conditions. The aim of the article is to present the changes in the behavior of contemporary consumers.

Design/methodology/approach: In the article, theoretical considerations are undertaken based on the related literature as well as the results of Euromonitor International reports for the years 2015–2019. Therefore, in the article, the classic method of literature analysis consisting in determining the state of research with critical reflection over it is applied (critical literature review).

Findings: In the future, we will be dealing with consumers conscious of their choices, minimizing consumption, caring for the environment and natural resources, individualists – focused on their own needs, proper diet, rest and caring for their health and safety.

Research limitations/implications: Consumer market behavior resulting from the changes occurring all around us is still undergoing transformations. It is difficult to fully predict which of the trends will continue evolving and which will disappear. Most certainly, their mutual relations and co-existence will contribute to further changes in attitudes, consumer patterns and adaptive actions.

Originality/value: In the paper, current trends observed in consumer behavior in the market are presented and an attempt is made at defining the directions in which such behavior will evolve.

Keywords: consumer, consumer behavior, consumption, trends in consumer behavior.

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Kierunki ewolucji zachowań konsumentów we współczesnym świecie

Streszczenie

Cel: wraz z rozwojem społeczno-gospodarczym, wzrostem stopy życiowej, rozwojem produkcji, pojawianiem się nowych i nieznanych dóbr i usług, przemianami cywilizacyjno-kulturowymi, zmieniają się wzorce postępowania konsumenta i podejmowane przez niego decyzje. Celem artykułu jest prezentacja zmian, jakie zachodzą w zachowaniach współczesnych konsumentów.

Metodologia: w opracowaniu podjęto rozważania teoretyczne w oparciu o literaturę przedmiotu oraz wyniki raportów Euromonitor International za lata 2015–2019.

Wyniki: dla przyszłości rysuje się konsument świadomy swoich wyborów, minimalizujący konsumpcję, dbający o środowisko i zasoby naturalne, indywidualista – skupiony na swoich potrzebach, prawidłowej diecie, odpoczynku i dbający o swoje zdrowie i bezpieczeństwo.

Ograniczenia/implikacje badawcze: zachowania konsumentów na rynku, wynikające z zachodzących wokół zmian nadal ulegają przeobrażeniom. Trudno w pełni przewidzieć, które z tendencji nadal będą ewoluować, a które zanikną. Na pewno ich wzajemne zależności i współwystępowanie przyczyniać się będą do dalszych zmian postaw, wzorców konsumpcyjnych oraz działań adaptacyjnych.

Oryginalność/wartość: w opracowaniu przedstawiono aktualne trendy widoczne w zachowaniach konsumenta na rynku oraz podjęto próbę określenia kierunków, w jakich te zachowania będą ewoluowały.

Słowa kluczowe: konsument, zachowania konsumentów, konsumpcja, trendy w zachowaniach konsumentów.

1. Introduction

Consumption and consumer behavior are constantly evolving under the influence of political, economic, technological, social, cultural and civilizational changes. In the ever transforming reality, consumers face choices and dilemmas regarding both obtaining financial means as well as their spending. In this way, they try to adapt to the surrounding external world, they formulate their needs, market behavior, or expectations concerning the market offer of products and services. In response to dynamic changes in the environment, consumption patterns are also undergoing continuous remodeling. The objective of the paper is to present transformations that occur in the behavior of contemporary consumers. In the paper, current trends observed in consumer behavior in the market are presented and an attempt is made at defining the directions in which such behavior will evolve.

In the article, theoretical considerations are undertaken based on the related literature as well as the results of Euromonitor International reports for the years: 2015–2019. Therefore, in the article, the classic method of literature analysis consisting in determining the state of research with critical reflection over it is applied (critical literature review) (Cisek, 2010; Orłowska, Mazur, & Łaguna, 2017).

2. Consumer Behavior on the Market – Theoretical Deliberations

The knowledge about consumers, their needs, decision-making methods, habits, and customs constitutes a significant factor guaranteeing companies their fundamental operation and frequently their market success as well. Consumers create potential and real demand, and thereby they determine the functioning of other market entities. When making consumer decisions, a consumer reacts to the current price level, income and tax system, supply, etc. However, it needs to be mentioned that all transformations as well as the need to adapt to them through a system of needs, a change in their hierarchy and a demand structure all affect consumers' awareness. Research and deliberations regarding consumers and their market behavior ought to provide information on the permanence of preferences and activities, define changes in the hierarchy of factors determining consumption and indicate which conditions – economic or non-economic ones – are dominant in shaping behavior.

J. Szczepański argued that a consumer is visible on the market through three prisms. Firstly, a consumer directly satisfies needs through the use of specific goods or services. Secondly, a consumer is described by the decisions they take, which enable direct or indirect satisfaction of needs. In the third context, a consumer and consumption are treated as a phase of a social reproduction process. J. Szczepański further added that consumer behavior includes all the activities, actions, and methods of conduct that commence once an individual becomes aware and recognizes a need, and consequently they result in the appearance of such an individual on the market in the role of a consumer. Finally, consumer behavior encompasses the use of goods and services and it takes into account the conditions that may fulfill the needs. It occurs in two aspects: a market level and a household level (Szczepański, 1981, pp. 132–135, 165–166).

Consumer behavior taking place on the market entails, above all: earning-related behavior that involves obtaining the money necessary for the purchase of goods and services, as well as purchase-related behavior that involves obtaining objects of consumption. In turn, behavior occurring at a household level encompasses consumer behavior that involves the consumption or use of consumer goods. Preparation for a purchase or the very fact of making a purchase may also be treated as consumer behavior. However, preparation for a purchase does not mean earning-related behavior, but it describes market observation by a consumer aimed at finding out about available objects of consumption (Smyczek, 2001, p. 18).

Each instance of consumer market behavior may be comprised of several elements, such as: feeling needs, ranking them in the hierarchy of needs, obtaining information about available objects of consumption, making a market choice between the available means of consumption and the use

of eventually selected objects of consumption (East, Wright, & Vanhuele, 2014, p. 19).

In the related literature, many definitions of consumer behavior exist (Antonides & Raaij, 2003, pp. 22–25; Murray, 2008; Solomon, 2006, pp. 24–26). Contemporary definitions of consumer behavior are of an interdisciplinary nature and they encompass various aspects of activity, for instance: economic ones (e.g. the process of purchase), social ones (e.g. an individual's behavior in a group) or psychological ones (e.g. achieving satisfaction).

One of the broadest economic definitions assumes that consumer behavior defines the entirety of the activities related to obtaining and using products and services as well as disposing of them together with the decisions preceding and determining such activities, while constituting a basis for the consumer in the process during which the intentions of purchase and consumption emerge, then during the transformation of a need into demand and in the course of its satisfaction as a result of an undertaken decision to buy (Engel, Blackwell, & Miniard, 1995, p. 4).

In sociology or psychology, when describing consumer behavior, the emphasis is put on the motivation for an activity defined as a socio-cultural factor (Baudrillard, 2006, p. 76; Baudrillard, 2017; Szczepański, 1977, pp. 17–23). According to the theories of those fields of science, the focus is further placed on cultural differences, purchase motives, obtaining information and decision-making by consumers in various regions of the globe (Mooij, 2010, p. 93). The economic and market conditions of the decision making are of secondary importance in those definitions.

Multidimensionality of the research on consumer behavior favors, the interdisciplinary understanding of the phenomenon, hence means a significant contribution of other scientific disciplines such as: history, cultural anthropology, clinical psychology, social psychology, and experimental psychology to the unceasing scientific discussions and research undertaken regarding the analyzed issues (Firat & Dholakia, 2017; O'Brien & Smith, 2018; Solomon, 2006, p. 53; Trentmann, 2016; Zalega, 2012, pp. 14–21).

An important question that has been undertaken in research on consumer behavior for years entails defining the conditions that constitute the basis for such behavior. The factors shaping the behavior of individual people may reveal various nature. Economic factors, such as: income, supply offer and prices, do not always provide the basis for such decisions, but they are often determined by psychological, social aspects related to, inter alia, belonging to a social class or group, a professional group, factors related to the place of residence, or cultural factors (Bywalec, 2010; Conner, Reardon, Miller, Salciuviene, & Auruskeviciene, 2017; Falkowski & Tyszka, 2002; Husemann & Eckhardt, 2019; Mooij, 2019; Nath, 2019; Stasiuk & Maison, 2017; Swamm, 2002; Zeugner-Roth, Zabkar, & Diamantopoulos, 2015).

3. Contemporary Trends in Consumer Behavior – Directions of Change

Consumer behavior trends and decision-making are evolving along with socio-economic development, the rise in the quality of life and production growth, the emergence of new and unknown goods and services (Aagerup & Nilsson, 2016; Abraham & Reitman, 2018; Bardhi & Eckhardt, 2017; Briley, Rudd, & Aaker, 2017; Bywalec, 2017, pp. 255–296; Chang & Taylor, 2016; Dąbrowska, Bylok, Janoś-Kresło, Kielczewski, & Ozimek, 2015, pp. 15–52; Ertz, Durif, & Arcand, 2017; Hildebrand, DeMotta, Sen, & Valenzuela, 2017; Kozinets, Patterson, & Ashman, 2017; Latour & Deighton, 2019; Mishra & Mishra, 2018; Warren & Mohr, 2019; Włodarczyk, 2013, pp. 103–114).

Studies on consumer behavior are constantly conducted by research institutions. Changes in consumer behavior trends can be observed, inter alia, in the reports published by Euromonitor International. The research about consumer behavior conducted by Euromonitor International has an international character. It is carried out with the simultaneous use of several methods: market analyses, consumer surveys and establishment of expert groups. With the used methods and tools, databases are created and it is possible to notice repeatable situations in consumer behaviors. After developing a list of characteristic consumer behaviors, further expert meetings are held at individual Euromonitor International locations around the world (currently 15). The result of the meetings in each of the locations is a ranking of characteristic consumer behaviors. These rankings are sent again between the different locations and are subject to further analysis and new rankings. As a result of these discussions, the final list of dominant consumer trends in a given year is created. On the grounds of analyses, the main directions of change become clearly evident, which can be defined as megatrends. Within the framework of individual megatrends, particular consumer sub-activities can be differentiated and described with the use of major trends distinguished by Euromonitor International for individual years.

In Table 1, megatrends are described along with major trends in consumer behavior on the basis of the research conducted by Euromonitor International in the years 2015–2019.

Megatrends in consumer behavior	Description of trends (year of trend description)
I The use of modern technologies	<p>Shopping</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. From a virtual world to the real one and vice versa – consumers seek ways that would enable them to do multi-channel shopping (2015). 2. Visualization at your home – joining the perception and reality by combining digital images with physical space; consumers visualize products before they buy them at a store as well as online (2018).
	<p>Social relations and contacts</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Constantly “connected” consumers – constant use of mobile phones, establishing social relations online (2016). 2. “Digitally together” – thanks to the modern technologies, easy communication becomes possible, along with the creation of shared experiences and knowledge, both with people close to us as well as with people we can meet online (2019).
	<p>Health care</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connected to the internet, we feel better: health online – a conviction that monitoring health online helps us to stay in shape and in good health (2015).
	<p>Giving and using opinions</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opinion-makers – ordinary people become brand ambassadors; huge impact and range of the internet led to the increase of the importance of vloggers (2015). 2. Culture of calling – consumers have the right to a say thanks to sharing opinions in the social media; they use their shared voiced to fight injustice and they call organizations to be responsible (2018). 3. Everybody is an expert, and knowledge is power – everyone tries to share their experiences, knowledge and shopping online. Consumers seek advice on which product and where to buy, whereas companies are forced to offer a good range of products in terms of quality, but also in terms of low prices, products that are aesthetically and appealingly packaged, etc. One source of information is not credible to a consumer (2019).
II Individualization of consumption	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Privacy is important – privacy became a luxury good – both to famous people and to ordinary consumers; companies (brands) offer privacy as a custom-made product (2015). 2. Extraordinary consumers – emphasizing one’s personality through the purchase of unique, personalized and exotic products and services (2017). 3. Be authentic (the charm of authenticity) – authenticity is an exceptional consumer value which stresses their uniqueness (2017). 4. Identity “in motion” – the nature of identity undergoes transformation; brands are forced to reconsider who their recipients truly are, how they interact with one another (2017).

Table cont.

Megatrends in consumer behavior	Description of trends (year of trend description)
	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. "Adapt it" – all the products can be adapted or personalized, not just the ones that are mass produced, but also high quality items (2017). 6. "Post-purchase" – buyers pay attention to their own post-purchase experience, which begins to constitute an increasingly significant part of the value of offered products or services (2017). 7. Discerning consumer – consumers are skeptical of mass produced products and companies' incentives, they are tired of empty rhetoric and they take action in order to find out more about the market offer (2018). 8. Return to the basics for status – rejection of mass produced products, choosing to buy simple and better quality products. A reversal from materialism to individuality, simplicity, authenticity (2019). 9. Joy of omission – the internet creates situations according to which people ought to have an exciting life. However, consumers are becoming more conscious of their time, they set limits, they become selective in their actions, they protect their privacy, reduce the time spent online, they are becoming less involved in the social media and they have real and individually selected experience that is no longer shared online.
<p style="text-align: center;">III Minimalism in consumption</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agnostic consumers – consumers are torn between the will to save and drawing pleasure from products that inspire them (2016). 2. Simple life – consumers adopted a simple, more minimalist style of life in which moderation and integrity are crucial (2018). 3. Saved – after the 2007 crisis, many consumers have a deeply-rooted frugal way of thinking. Many consumers are still battling with the effects of the crisis (2018).
<p style="text-align: center;">IV Saving time</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Buying convenience – purchased products and services are meant to facilitate consumers' lives and optimize the use of their time (2015). 2. Buying time – consumer perceive time as luxury and they are prepared to outsource many aspects of their lives (2016). 3. Quicker shopping – consumers are impatient, impulsive and they strive towards instant satisfaction (2017). 4. I want it now – effective lifestyle and problem-free experience – products and services delivered quickly and easily are desired by busy consumers who avoid queues and waiting. They have instant needs. Their time is devoted to professional or social life (2019).

Table cont.

Megatrends in consumer behavior	Description of trends (year of trend description)
<p style="text-align: center;">V Conscious consumption</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Consumption as a way to progress – selecting companies that support activities aimed at social welfare (2015). 2. Creators of change – striving towards changes for the better in order to protect the Earth’s natural resources (2016). 3. Ecological food – taking care of the ecological aspects of nourishment, reducing food waste, avoiding unhealthy food and overeating (2016). 4. Conscious consumer – mindful, concentrated on others, on animals, on the environment, on the observance of the law. Animal protection and welfare take on special significance. Veganism is particularly popular in this trend (2019). 5. World free of plastic – undertaking action aimed at reducing plastic waste generated as a result of excessive consumption (2019).
<p style="text-align: center;">VI Age as the main determinant of consumer behavior</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Millennials – a significant role of the consumer segment called “the Millennials” (2015). 2. The age challenge – full life of seniors (aged 55–65), who are more energetic, work more, enjoy good physical health and pay attention to mental well-being, are able to lead a life also as mature consumers (2016). 3. A change in the perception of old age – people 50 years old and older form the biggest consumer segment in the world, which has become demanding towards the market offer (2017). 4. Young consumers are learning – many children and youth do shopping independently, because their parents are at work; in this way, children and youth gain shopping experience (2017). 5. Disregarding age – elderly people live longer, take care of their appearance, well-being and health. They are interested in the same products as young people, they do not want to be perceived as “old” (2019). 6. Living alone – a new version of “living alone” involves well-off people who are over 50 and who have grown-up children. Loneliness is a choice (2019).
<p style="text-align: center;">VII Sharing</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. “Let’s share” – a generation of non-materialists – growing importance of the sharing economy (2015). 2. “Lending” – conspicuous consumption is a thing of the past, rejection of material goods in exchange for experiences and a freer lifestyle (2018). 3. Co-living – a form of living in which residents share a living space. The trend originates from hyper-urban centers which adopted the sharing economy as a choice of a lifestyle. The objective is saving money, mutual inspiration and comfortable, more acceptable living conditions (2018).

Table cont.

Megatrends in consumer behavior	Description of trends (year of trend description)
VIII Consumerism	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Buying globally – a consumer has turned shopping into an important point of holiday itinerary by choosing a place not too distant from shopping malls (2015). 2. Shopping malls in social mode – roofed large-area stores are becoming the center of social life (2015). 3. Singles' spending – people living as singles incur expenditure geared exclusively towards their own needs, frequently these are purchases of higher order (e.g. travel, purchase of luxurious, extravagant goods) (2016). 4. Liquidity of genders – the marking of a product designation for a particular gender is disappearing (2016).
IX Health care	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mental well-being – fascination in promoting one's good well-being, conviction of the need to limit stress and to increase intellectual clarity (2016). 2. Wellness as a status symbol – a wish to be fit and healthier. Healthy living is becoming a status symbol (2017). 3. "This is in my DNA – I am so special" – a growing interest in personalized health and beauty create the demand for home DNA kits (2018). 4. I can take care of myself – consumers undertake the actions on their own that they deem to be beneficial for their health, beauty, life, etc., without taking into account the opinions from the internet. They stop believing in specialists. They reject consumerism, fast fashion, and instant improvements of beauty (2019).
X Safety	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Shopping for the purpose of ensuring safety – individual attitude to personal safety, buying smart devices, goods and services (e.g. ecological food, financial services, sun protection, security measures and air purifiers (2016). 2. Privacy and security – consumers wish to maintain personal and their relatives' security. There is a greater tendency towards home-centricity and protection of mobile devices (2017).

Tab. 1. Megatrends and trends in consumer behavior in the years of 2015–2019. Source: Own elaboration on the basis of: Euromonitor International, 2015; Kasriel-Alexander, 2016; Kasriel-Alexander, 2017; Angus, 2018; Angus & Westbrook, 2019.

On the basis of the information presented in Table 1, it can be concluded that the most frequent activities undertaken by consumers are the ones that fit two trends: the use of modern technologies and emphasizing individualism. These two megatrends along with consumer market activities assigned to them can be considered as the leading ones. The trend that is less visible is the one related to ensuring safety by consumers. However, consumers' attitudes towards the issues of safety have changed. Studies conducted in 2017 seem to be out of date. At present, in the age of great

migrations and terrorist threats, people pay great attention to the issues of safety, particularly their own safety and the safety of their loved ones. This is transferred to the sphere of the market in a relatively low degree, but more so into the area preferences in political attitudes.

On the basis of the above schedule, it can be observed as well that certain megatrends have a constantly evolving nature, because the actions within their scope have not merely been undertaken but also modified by consumers since 2015. Among those activities, the following deserve to be noted in particular: expressing opinions about goods and services through the use of modern technologies, emphasizing individualism, saving time on a daily basis, conscious consumption, health care and emphasizing the role of age in making market decisions.

3. Conclusion

Consumer market behavior resulting from the changes occurring all around us is still undergoing transformations. It is difficult to fully predict which of the trends will continue evolving and which will disappear. Most certainly, their mutual relations and co-existence will contribute to further changes in attitudes, consumer patterns and adaptive actions. Currently, it can be assumed that the leading trends: the use of modern technologies and individualism will remain visible in the consumer's future behavior. The aspects related to the need of natural environment protection will contribute to the development of a megatrend in the form of conscious consumption, and they will be accompanied by the growth of minimalism in consumption. It may also be assumed that the third trend that should still be noticeable in consumers' future behavior is the megatrend related to the phenomenon of an aging society, where the attention is directed particularly to the special needs and behavior of elderly people. Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that owing to the situation that results from economic-political-cultural changes, one may expect increased activities from consumers aimed at the protection and care of their household in the future.

Recapitulating the above deliberations, it can be assumed that in the future we will be dealing with consumers conscious of their choices, minimizing consumption, caring for the environment and natural resources, individualists – focused on their own needs, proper diet, rest and caring for their health and safety.

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