

Development of pro-consumption orientation in the behaviour of Polish consumers

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Abstrakt

The main aim of this paper is to describe the impact of the pro-consumption orientation on human behaviour in the sphere of consumption. The author at hand focuses on the answer to the following question: To what extent does the pro-consumption orientation associated with the ideology of consumerism influence the direction of consumer behaviour of Polish people? The realization of the assumed goal was possible thanks to the application of the method of critical analysis of literary sources relating to consumption and quantitative analysis methods. As a result of research, the development of the most important trends in consumer behaviour associated with pro-consumption attitudes were indicated, namely spontaneous consumption connected with over-consumption, consumption for pleasure and consumption directed towards novelties. The practical implication of the research run is the indication of the direction of the development of consumption, namely over-consumption stimulated by the ideology of consumerism. However, the social implication of this paper is the emphasis on the pro-consumption orientation in consumption and its social consequences.

Key words: consumption, consumer behaviour, consumerism.

1. Introduction

The socio-economic transformation that has taken place over the past twenty years in Poland has had a significant impact on changes in the sphere of consumption. Poland has become transformed from a society with insufficient consumer goods characteristic of the 1980s into a society with an excess of consumer goods, in which there is a prevalence of pro-consumption attitudes. The effect of this transformation in the social sphere is that of change in the attitude of people towards consumption. Consumption has become an aim to strive for in the case of a multitude of people, which has an impact on the direction of their activities. It is utilized as a factor enabling the building of individual identity and sense of belonging to a group. It serves to preserve the social status and confirm the position held in the social structure, as well as having an impact on the formation of the system of values and personality of a person.

The process of growth in the significance of consumption in society and in the lives of individuals is visible in terms of the consumer attitudes and behaviour that are geared towards the excessive possession of consumer goods. Pro-consumption orientation is becoming one of the significant factors determining social behaviour. These trends are reinforced by among other things, the spread of the ideology of consumerism, the growth in significance of hedonistic values in consumption, expansion of the offer of

goods and services into new spheres of social life, changes in the function of goods satisfying basic needs and the increase of leisure time. Becoming familiarized with the factors influencing the spread of pro-consumption orientation facilitates the definition of the direction of the development of consumption in Poland.

2. Consumerism as a factor stimulating the development of pro-consumption orientation

In the deliberations on the social transformation in the 21st century, it is worth considering the significance of consumption in contemporary society. Since the mid 1990s, a significant change in the perception of the role of consumption in social life has been taking place. Bauman (2008:13) indicates that consumption has become an aim in itself for the majority of people, thus it is a phenomenon that is self-driven. Consumption is of an autotelic nature, that is turned towards itself, or in other words: "... it sustains itself and enhances, exclusively serving" (Bauman 2007:174). All these areas of the lives of individuals are subject to the syndromes of consumption, which become evident in that they influence the perception and practically all areas of activities of people. Interpersonal and social ties are shaped on the similarity of the means and objects of consumption. Z. Bauman is of the opinion that this syndrome is in its own way: "... a diverse group of approaches and strategies, cognitive dispositions, value judgements, exposed and hidden convictions about the world, as well as how to proceed along the ways through this world, visions of happiness and ways of achieving it, preferred value basis"(quoted on behalf of Jawłowska 2005: 54-55). Hence, consumption is of special significance for the identification of individuals as by comparison with the family, the social level or work, its impact is greater. While family ties, the sense of belonging to a social group or working conditions constantly change, consumption remains unchanged, in which this does not refer to the fact that an individual actually consumes but rather constantly consumes. On the one hand, consumption enables the fulfilment of needs that are essential for existence, whereas on the other hand, it has become a central institution of socialization and predominant principle organizing social life.

As an element of new culture, the so-called "*culture of consumption*" is a part of the "*ideology of consumerism*". In scientific literature, the term "*consumerism*" is perceived from the viewpoint of various perspectives. From the point of view of sociology, it is perceived to be a part of social life. A typical example of this notion is portrayed in the concept of Bauman (2009), which associates consumerism with a type of social structure, "...which coordinates the reproduction of the system, social integration, social stratification and formation of human entities, as well as playing a basic role in the processes of creating the identity of these individuals and groups and in the choice and application of the strategies of life of the said individuals"(Bauman 2009: 36).

In this perception, consumerism is of a totalitarian nature, which has an impact on all walks of social life, both in terms of society, as well as communities and indeed individuals. This does not leave any alternatives for the people themselves. In order to be a "fully accepted" member of society, it is necessary to become subject to the impact of consumerism. In turn, Miles (1998) feels that consumerism constitutes a bridge connecting an entity with the society as a whole. In these terms consumerism may be defined as follows: "...as a psycho-social expression of the intersection between the structural and the individual within the realm of consumption. The consuming experience is psycho-social in the sense that it represents a bridge that links the individual and society." (Miles 1998:1). An individual becomes a full member of society by means of consumption, in which he/she is accepted and rewarded for fulfilling the role of a consumer. However, Bockock (1993) perceives consumerism as an active ideology which suggests that life is based on first and foremost, purchasing items and feeling experiences provided in packages of consumer goods. (Bockock 1993:48). A characteristic feature of consumerism is that of the excessive consumption of goods which is not justified by the actual needs of an individual. Artificial needs are aroused under its impact, which give rise to the unfulfilled search for items on the market.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of ethics, consumerism is identified with the approach to life, which in turn is the unhindered strife towards the acquisition of consumer goods and services serving to solely satisfy personal needs and pleasures. In this perception, it fulfils a destructive function in society. In the words of (Mariani 2008:220) “*consumerism almost reduces the whole complexity of human life to an economic factor*”. A similar view is held by Slater (1997), according to whom consumerism is amoral, if not immoral. “*If there is no principle restricting who can consume what, there is also no principled constraint on what can be consumed: all social relations, activities and objects can in principle be exchanged as commodities. This is one of the most profound secularizations enacted by the modern world*” (Slater 1997:27).

The approach presented above indicates the multi-dimensional nature of the notion of consumerism. It may be both acknowledged as an ideology, as well as a way of life associated with excessive consumption. Consumerism shall be perceived in terms of the categories of ideology. Ideology is to more often than not justify the prevailing social order and control that is ensured by the ruling authorities. Hence, it is to reflect and justify the reality to which it relates to (Bell 1994:96). Consumerism plays an important function in a consumer society and provides a new vision of life for people. It indicates that the most important goal for a person should be that of consumption. In the view of S. Miles, consumerism subordinates streams of consumers all over the world. It penetrates everyday life and the structures of the everyday experiences of people. By means of the constant changes in its form, it becomes attractive, thus reinforcing its impact on people (Miles 1998:3).

(Bartholomew 1988: 6-9) in analysing consumerism, distinguishes the following features: Firstly, he indicates the culture of consumption as the basis of consumerism, in which values accrue from consumption. Secondly, consumerism is identified with the individual choice. The freedom to choose a product, lifestyle or personal identity is the prevailing principle in the contemporary consumer society. Thirdly, needs are restricted and unfulfilled in the consumer culture. Consumerism offers ways of satisfying our needs, however ironically speaking, new needs constantly emerge which leads to the feeling of unfulfilment and this in turn, forces consumers to search for increasingly new consumer goods.

The force of consumerism lies in the fact that it provides the instruments (consumer goods and patterns of consumption) serving the individual and collective identity of all entities at each time and place in the world. The advantage of this ideology is the fact that it offers new forms of social life and forms of identification that blur the social class differences. It is possible to state that it ensures the illusion of equality in inequality, or in other words, the fact that people have equal access to consumer goods, but only those who possess the appropriate financial resources may acquire them.

The impact of consumerism on the behaviour of consumers is strengthened by hedonistic values that take on the form of orientation towards pleasure and the “here and now” mantra. Orientation towards pleasure signifies the pursuit of feeling pleasure during the course of making a purchase and consumption of a given product. In turn, the orientation of “here and now” means that a consumer by buying a given product is striving towards the state of feeling satisfied immediately and in one instant. Consumer goods should bring satisfaction immediately and this feeling should conclude when the time of need for consumption passes. (Bauman 2000:97) feels that “*the reduction of time is attained with the greatest level of success if consumers can not focus their attentions or focus their desires on one item for a longer period of time*”. Temporal orientation is best reflected by the following motto “live for today”.

By way of conclusion, we may state that pro-consumption orientation is stimulated by the ideology of consumerism associated with hedonistic values and individualism, which results in over-consumption, as well as waste and destruction of consumer goods.

3. Research methods

The identification of the main orientations in consumer behaviour was one of the aims of the research on consumer competences that was realized within the framework of the research project entitled „Kompetencje konsumentów jako stymulanta innowacyjnych zachowań i zrównoważonej konsumpcji” (Competences of consumers as a stimulant of innovative behaviour and balanced consumption) no. 2011/03/b/hs4/04417. This research consisted of two stages. The first stage was that of quantitative analysis, which was carried out with the aid of the omnibus method. This method was carried out on a representative nationwide sample group of 1,000 Polish people aged between 15-74 in the period of June-July 2013. However, the second stage referred to research with the aid of a standardized questionnaire realized with the CATI technique. The CAPI technique was also applied (interview supported by a computer), during the course of face-to-face meetings in the homes of respondents. Respondents were selected for research in accordance with the quota with regard to the following features: sex type and age. The representative sample facilitated the extrapolation of results in terms of the adult population of Polish people with the margin of error at +/- 3.2%. Quantitative research provided empirical material, which enabled the analysis and evaluation of the consumer behaviour of Polish people.

4. Pro-consumption behaviour of Polish people in light of research

4.1 Spontaneous behaviour

One of the factors characterizing the pro-consumption orientation is that of the spontaneous behaviour that is displayed under the influence of emotions. Impulsive buying is characterized by the fact that the decision to purchase a given product is taken quickly without any deep thought. According to Haubl (1999), a large proportion of consumers make purchases under the influence of an impulse, while paradoxically “impulsive buying” is planned (Haubl 1999: 218) although this does not refer to planning on the part of the consumer, but the seller. Sellers in planning an increase in the sale of products offered by them search for solutions which would strengthen their impact on consumer decisions. With this aim in mind, they apply differentiated marketing techniques, e.g. gratification, gifts, discount offers or changes in the decor of the shop and playing attractive music in order to create a pleasant atmosphere that favours spontaneous purchases (Kaczorowska 2012: 83). Prisching (2009) feels that the aim of the producer and his offer is to create a state of consumption trance in terms of a potential buyer, which involves the situation whereby the world of consumer goods becomes the most important in the case of a consumer (Prisching 2009: 182). In order for consumers to carry out impulsive purchases, they should have the feeling that the act of purchasing is a pleasure for them, as well as a solution to psychological tension and fulfilment of dreams.

In Poland, consumers relatively frequently make purchases under the influence of impulse. Research on consumer behaviour indicates that 59% of Polish people declare having this type of behaviour. These are usually conscious consumers who possess knowledge in the following spheres: financial management of households, understanding information on labels/packaging of products, balanced consumption, availing of the Internet, browsers etc. (60% of conscious consumers declared that they frequently or sometimes purchase products in a spontaneous manner). Spontaneous consumers are usually women (62%), aged between 18-29 (69%), have higher level education (70%), evaluate their material situation as good (65%) and live in a city of over 100,000 inhabitants (74%). The feature of spontaneous purchases is that of irrationality in taking a decision to buy a product. This is the result of the pursuit of having goods regardless of the financial possibilities. This is characterized by the response “*If I want to have something, I buy it and I don't think about whether I can afford it or not*”. This answer is significant for 16% of the Polish people analysed. Other determinants of spontaneous behaviour are positive emotions associated with the purchasing process. These are the results of the impact of factors associated with a

product (e.g. nice packaging), as well as social factors (e.g. fashion). Nice packaging is an important determinant that influences the consumer decision in the case of 8% of the respondents under analysis, similarly to fashion which is also important in the case of 8% of Polish people. By way of conclusion, it is possible to say that spontaneous consumers are usually young women who have a relatively good material situation. They are featured by a fascination for consumption and abide by the principle “the cost doesn’t matter”, in which spending money is more important than earning it. They have the tendency to be exuberant purchasers, or in other words, they buy goods under the impact of the moment and frequently buy unnecessary items. The world of consumption and the world of dreams interpenetrate each other in their case (Bylok 2005:376).

Pro-consumption orientation is strengthened by advertising which entices a consumer to purchase and possess increasingly new consumer goods. The aim of advertising is on the one hand to arouse new desires, while on the other hand to modify those that already exist. In the opinion of (Bauman 2008:28), advertising serves to sustain the desire for items which we do not possess and feelings we have not yet experienced. Consequently, an individual is never fully satisfied with the consumption of a given product as new desires associated with new goods are constantly appearing. An advertisement, by availing of psychological techniques suggests to its target audience the possibilities of achieving happiness, beauty, good health and long life following the purchase of the advertised product. From this viewpoint, advertising functions similarly to mythology in a primitive society, namely it has all the simple answers to all the complex problems (Bylok 2013:134).

Research on the behaviour of Polish people in the sphere of consumption indicates that advertising has a significant impact on their purchasing behaviour. Analysis of responses to the following question: “*In your opinion, do Polish people buy items under the influence of advertising?*” reveals that 34% of Polish people definitely make purchases on the basis of advertising. However, 51% of Polish people rather buy under the influence of advertising. In turn, when the following question was asked: “*Do you buy products or services under the influence of advertising?*”, the responses were different. A mere 16% of those analysed indicated that they purchase consumer goods under the influence of advertising. This divergence in terms of responses results from the fact that most frequently, the Polish people analysed do not admit to the impact of advertising on their purchasing decisions. This is confirmed by other research carried out. For instance, research on the impact of advertising on purchasing behaviour reveals that only less than 1/4 of Polish people deem that an attractive advertisement is important when making a decision about purchasing a new product (OBOP 2003: 6). To conclude, it would seem that advertising has a significant impact on a purchasing decision despite the fact that people declare that its impact is slight as people gain knowledge about new products most often from advertisements. Analysis of consumption competences indicates that consumers find out about new products first and foremost from advertising (27%), while subsequently from shop shelves (during the course of making purchases - 18%), from the Internet (14%) and from acquaintances (10%).

4.2 Pleasure-seeking behaviour

Pro-consumption orientation is strictly connected with the pursuit of feeling pleasure. Motives associated with pleasure stimulate the activities of consumers. Pleasure constitutes the essence of contemporary consumerism. An attempt to clarify this was made by (Campbell 1987:338), who indicated that the feeling of pleasure is the result of tension occurring between a dream and usefulness. However, (Appaduraj 2005: pp.126-127) is of the opinion that pleasure lies in the tension between the existing nostalgia for the past and a dream where the present is illustrated as if it was the past. Orientation towards pleasure signifies the situation whereby a consumer purchases products not due to their functional value, but due to their intangible features, such as the following: taste, fragrance, aesthetic appearance etc. that have an impact on the feeling of pleasure. The intangible content of goods is becoming an important component in the subjectively felt quality of life (Weinberg 1986: 97-102).

Pleasure may be felt during the course of doing shopping, as well as consuming goods that contain the potential of pleasure.

Research on the behaviour of Polish consumers indicates that purchasing provides pleasure for 51% of respondents. Simultaneously, the act of purchasing a product is above all the source of pleasure for women aged 18-29 who live in cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants and have a positive evaluation of their knowledge in the sphere of consumption. Female consumers geared towards achieving pleasure are very well-educated (higher-level and medium-level education) and in the majority of cases belong to the middle class. These are people who are relatively wealthy and who assess their material situation as good. In the case of this group of consumers, satisfying the need for pleasure is an important motive in undertaking activities on the market of consumer goods. This is frequently the result of the impact of external factors, namely the mass means of communication, advertising, fashion, etc.

Another type of behaviour in terms of a consumer geared towards the feeling of pleasure is strolling around shops without the intention of purchasing a specific product. A consumer experiences pleasure during a stroll around shopping malls or shopping centres while viewing window displays, touching luxurious products without purchasing them. The main source of pleasure is the vision of the feeling of satisfaction from using the goods that are to be found in these malls, window displays or presented at fashion shows. The function of usefulness of these products is secondary in terms of significance as only the "dream potential" counts. Hence, it is possible to agree with the statement of (Bauman 2000:99) that "*Consumers are first and foremost collectors of impressions, they collect only secondary items as derivative experiences*". Analysis of consumer competences reveals that consumers experience pleasure during the course of shopping not only through the act of purchasing, but also thanks to touching products, trying on clothing, walking around while they can observe window displays. This type of behaviour is characteristic for 41% of the Polish people analysed. These are usually women aged between 18-29 who live in cities of less than 100,000 inhabitants, while also earning relatively low incomes and having the status of unemployed. Hence, these are people who want to experience pleasure in terms of consumption, but who can not afford to purchase the goods that have the potential of pleasure. In order to substitute for this behaviour, consumers undertake different activities that are associated with observing window displays, as well as touching and trying on clothing in shops.

4.3 Behaviour associated with new products

Experiencing pleasure in consumption is associated with the constant pursuit of possessing new products. New goods are becoming the means of attaining pleasure. The novelty of a product is the incentive for the realization of the so-called "daydreaming". Thanks to the purchase of new goods, a consumer hopes to fulfil his dream, as potential pleasure lies in secrecy. Campbell (1987) explains this process with the aid of a modified model of consumer decisions as follows: *yearning - purchase - utilization - disappointment* (Campbell 1987: 84). In this model, need is replaced by yearning (dream). Fulfilment of a dream is the indicator of attaining pleasure. With the purchase of a new product, an individual confronts "daydreaming" with reality. In the case of a discrepancy between the dream and reality, a consumer searches for another new product which would match the vision of an ideal product.

In Poland, some consumers search for new products on the market for the purpose of entertainment. The response "*I like to buy new products to try them out*" is characteristic for 24% of the respondents analysed. These are usually women aged 18-29, relatively well-educated (30%), living in cities of 100,000 inhabitants or more, while evaluating their situation as good (30%). These people have a positive opinion about their consumer competences (24%). In the process of purchasing new products, the feeling of satisfaction with the purchase of a specific product is important. In many cases, the vision of a new ideal product is not matched by the goods purchased. The state of dissatisfaction appears, which however lasts only a short time and is the incentive to create new frameworks of dreams based on new goods (Campbell 1987: 92).

Polish consumers in purchasing new products under the influence of fulfilling a whim or dream display various attitudes with regard to this type of behaviour. In the case of some respondents, feelings of guilt were displayed with regard to the purchase of a new product (42%), while also indifference accompanies the purchase of a specific product (40%). However, joy is the feeling which is expressed by 14% of Polish people in terms of purchasing a new product. The feeling of joy from possessing a new product is first and foremost expressed by women (23%) aged between 30-39 (26%), with higher level education (22%), living in rural areas (20%) and defining their consumer competences as relatively high (20%).

5. Conclusion

In Poland in the 21st century, pro-consumption orientation associated with over-consumption is becoming increasingly widespread. Regardless of the class level, people pursue the possession of new goods and experience pleasure from their purchase and consumption. Nevertheless, a lifestyle associated with over-consumption deemed to be the peak of human development in many cases turns out to be the source of a constant lack of satisfaction and lack of happiness.

Research on the consumer behaviour of Polish people has confirmed the existence of pro-consumption orientation in Poland. A detailed socio-demographic analysis facilitated the definition of the profiles of consumers geared towards over-consumption. These are usually relatively young people, holding high social positions and evaluating their standard of living as good. The preferred lifestyle associated with increased consumption among young consumers is a significant determinant in the development of the pro-consumption orientation. Getting accustomed to possessing and consuming goods to satisfy the need to experience pleasure may become a constant trend in the development of consumption in Poland.

By way of conclusion, pro-consumption orientation shall continue to dominate for a long time in Poland as people do not want a "return to nature", or in other words, renouncing the pleasures of consumption. For a long time, Polish people could not afford to possess goods that would satisfy their higher needs associated with post-material values. In a situation whereby there is excess goods on the market and the growth of the potential possibilities of their purchase, they started purchasing the desired goods previously acknowledged to be luxurious without moderation. These pro-consumption attitudes have been present since the beginning of the 1990s in Poland (Bylok 2005:360-369).

Despite the increased significance of the pro-consumption orientation in terms of the behaviour of Polish people in the sphere of consumption, there are symptoms of the development of the orientation towards restricting consumption emerging. As in the case of a multitude of highly-developed societies, an increasingly greater role shall be played by a lifestyle propagating moderation in terms of consumption and greater care for the natural environment. For instance, research carried out by Alexander and Ussher reveals that a lifestyle associated with restricting consumption is already being practiced by 20% of the population of highly-developed countries (Alexander, Ussher 2012: 82).

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