

Recent Changes in Consumer Behaviour and Marketing Activities

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Abstract: This study aimed to analyse the relationship between consumer behaviour and new trends in the market environment. The author presents here various approaches to defining consumer behaviour in the context of the dynamic changes in the market environment and makes an attempt to answer the question to what extent new phenomena in consumer behaviour, such as New Balance and Normcore, influence the present-day consumer behaviour. The study makes use of research focusing on secondary sources performed using the desk research method and participatory observations. Among other materials used were secondary sources, results of quantitative studies performed with the use of the CAWI method, individual in-depth interviews and focus group interviews. The research focused on new trends in consumer behaviour and its major motivators.

Keywords: consumer, consumer behavior, marketing

Introduction

The consumer, viewed as an active participant in market processes, can be defined in various ways. From the economic perspective, the consumer is described as "the end link of the economic process from the producer's manufacturing of a product to its purchase by the person who is going to use the product, consume it or use it repeatedly, without regarding it as a good suitable for further trading but a good which is to benefit the said person or their economy" (Łętowska, 2001, p. 83). In the literature on the subject, the notion of the consumer is also interpreted as "an economic entity declaring

demand for goods that meet its needs" (Bekasik, 2001, p. 44). This article aims to analyse the relationship between consumer behaviour and new trends in the market environment. Various approaches to defining consumer behaviour were presented in the context of dynamic changes in the market environment and an attempt is made to answer the question to what extent new phenomena in consumer behaviour, such as New Balance and Normcore, influence the present consumer behaviour. The study makes use of research based on secondary sources carried out with the application of the desk research method (results of quantitative studies performed with the use of the CAWI method, individual in-depth interviews and focus group interviews). Own participatory observations were also used. The research focussed on new trends in consumer behaviour and their determinants.

Materials and methods

The notion of the consumer comes from the Latin word *consumens* and means "the purchaser of good for own use, the user of goods" (Opaliński, 2002). The notion of the consumer, even when narrowed down to the socio-economic aspect, is an extremely broad term and is in the range of interests of numerous scientific disciplines, including management, economics, psychology and sociology. Each of them presents several approaches to the definition of the consumer, which contributes to the lack of uniformity of the terminology used. The Civil Code defines the consumer as "any natural person who performs acts in law which are not directly connected to his or her economic or professional activity" (the Act of 23 April 1964 – the Civil Code, Journal of Laws of 2014, item 121, Article 22, as amended on 25.12.2014). Another interpretation of the term in question can be found in the Act on consumer rights (the Act of 30 May 2014 on consumer rights (Journal of Laws of 2014, item 827, as amended). The Act defines consumer sales as "the sales of movable property carried out within an enterprise's activities to a natural person who purchases the property for a purpose unrelated to their professional or economic activities (consumer goods)". The adopted statutory provisions make it possible to define the consumer as a natural person purchasing goods for their own private use. It should be pointed out that services are not mentioned in the Act (only "objects", "consumer goods"), and the same applies to natural consumption (self-produced goods) and social

consumption (good received free of charge in the form of benefits (Gašior and Skowron, 2013, p. 11).

The subject matter of consumer behaviour is being investigated both in the Polish and foreign literature. Publications on consumer behaviour pertaining to the consumer goods and services market which broadly discuss the subject matter include those by K. Mazurek-Łopacińska (Mazurek-Łopacińska, 2002, p. 112, Mazurek-Łopacińska, 1997, p. 23), J. Kramer (Kramer, 2006, p. 45), E. Kieźel (Kieźel, 2010, p. 29), L. Garbarski (Garbarski, 2001, p. 89), L. Rudnicki (Rudnicki, 2011, p. 203-213, Rudnicki, 2000, p. 36) and G. Światowy (Światowy, 2006, p. 57).

The analysis of consumer choices helps businesses interpret their perceptions and all possible interactions between consumers. In the literature there are numerous definitions of “consumer behavior”, which can be understood as (Falkowski, and Tyszka, 2006, p. 12):

- “All activities associated with the obtaining, using and disposing of products and services, including decisions preceding and conditioning these activities” (according to R.D. Blackwell, P.W. Miniard and J.F. Engel).
- “A way of prioritising consumer needs, a way of selecting goods and services to satisfy the needs and a way of consuming goods” (according to M. Pohorille).
- “All activities and perceptions of consumers contributing to product selection decisions as well as actual product selection and consumption” (after F. Hansen).
- “All objectively and subjectively defined, rational and emotional, conscious and unconscious actions during the preparation for making a decision on the consumer goods market and at the time of consumption” (according to H. Fabiunke, H. Fisker, J. Jager, W. Kopert).
- “...everything that happens before, during and after a consumer purchases goods and services” (after A. Falkowski, T. Tyszka).

A broader approach to consumer behaviour is presented by G. Antonides and W.F. Van Raaij, defining consumer behaviour as: “mental and physical activities (of individuals and small groups), including their motives and causes, related to obtaining information about products as well as product purchase, use and disposal from the market or the public sector and the household, enabling consumers to achieve their goals and make their values a reality (taking into

consideration individual and social effects and consequences) in order to achieve satisfaction and well-being” (Antonides and others, 2003, p. 24).

Conclusions

Contemporary models aimed at explaining consumer behaviour process are the result of research in the field of psychology, economics, sociology and marketing. Initially consumer behaviour theories postulated that decisions were fully rational and motivated solely by economic factors. The utility theory developed by W.S. Jevons (Jevons, 1871), C. Meneger (Meneger, 1874) and L. Walras (Walras, 1874) assumed that an individual aimed at achieving maximum profit with minimum expenditures and sacrifice. The concept was modified by H. J. Davenport, P.H. Wicksteed, F.A. Fetter and F.H. Knight (Gašior and Skowron, 2013, p. 15). The pioneering theory by G. Katona included rational behaviour, but pointed out that it applied only to some purchases (Gašior and Skowron, 2013, p. 16). G. Katona assumed that consumers acted with limited rationality and were not able to maximise satisfaction because they did not know all the choice variants (Gašior and Skowron, 2013, p. 16).

However, current changes in consumer behaviour in developed countries are profound. They are so clearly visible that the notion of new consumption has been coined (Bywalec, 2007, p. 137). These changes refer not only to the hierarchy of needs and the level and ways of fulfilling them but to a greater susceptibility to external influence. These phenomena have manifested themselves in increased consumption as the main purpose of social life, a form of integration between individuals, a source of pleasure, self-satisfaction and distinction. In developing and transforming countries, there are clearly visible tendencies to follow the described consumption patterns, which are often adopted in an uncritical way. A factor conducive to these processes is the intensification of international relations and contacts, for instance through social media, which allow the new consumption to spread freely.

The New Balance generation is balancing on the verge of the commonness and ordinariness of exceptional brands which are recognised by few. The balance in this case is very difficult to find.

Normcore is a group of people with a fashion awareness, which is the main reason for them to intentionally impose certain restrictions on themselves. This does not mean that Normcores negate the familiar symbols

or brands, but that they intentionally choose those brands which are very discretely labelled and non-ostentatious. For instance, the described group of people wears brand jeans which look old-fashioned. The group also includes people who actually wear old and used items of clothing, but in combination with a very expensive bag which also looks old. The stylisation of Normcores is based on a reflection of what they wear, where they buy their clothes and what materials these clothes are made of. They do not focus on brand symbols but on the content of the overall package – where it comes from, who made it and in what conditions, etc. For Normcores the ethical choice is important. They require products to offer top quality, comfort and durability – they need to last for years. The Normcore movement seems to show great sentiment for normality and truth (Bierca and Wysoka-Świtala, 2015).

Normcore is a carefully considered attitude, and is most clearly visible in the fashion and accessories industry and also on the interior design market. For Normcore groups, quality and durability are essential. People representing the Normcore trend are tired of constant activity on Facebook. The point of reference for Polish Normcore people are western countries. Like in those countries, they shop online. The favourite brands of Normcore people are Gapa, Uniqlo, COS, American Apparel and Urban Outfitters, among others. In western countries, the Normcore trend is much more prominent. In societies with saturated consumption levels (where both earnings and living standards are much higher than in Poland) people more often present the described attitudes. In Poland it is possible to notice strong aspirations. Affluent customers often expose their status by buying an expensive watch or a bag. Only a small group of people has sufficient awareness to keep their style discrete and choose quality brands.

At the 16th Congress of Market and Opinion Researchers the following research questions were posed (Report from the 16th Congress of Market and Opinion Researchers, 2015):

- Why do consumers from the New Balance generation need to be “ordinary”?
- Is Normcore a temporary trend or a reflection of deeper needs and a greater awareness?
- What does “ordinariness” say about consumers?
- Are there brands supporting this "ordinariness" and what is their potential?

In order to verify the research questions, a quantitative study was performed using the CAWI method among residents of five large Polish cities aged 20-35 years (n=628, August 2015), along with individual in-depth interviews with exponents of the Normcore trend. The starting point in the analysis and characterisation of the New Balance generation were the values appreciated by them, such as balance, comfort and truth (Bierca and Wysoka-Świtala, 2015).

The need for balance presented by consumers arises from an excess of stimuli, and treating normality as luxury. New Balance people, whereas, are looking for tranquility and respite from the everyday. They prefer simple forms, are considerate and appreciate the classics.

As many as 65% of New Balance people chose their clothing based on the criterion of comfort and 59% did not like to be judged by their looks, style or clothing. The need for comfort of the New Balance generation results from their being tired of the multitude of trends and the dominance of branded products, as well as the pressure for looking perfect. This need is fulfilled by seeking comfort instead of style, choosing quality products and minimalism, and having a slightly blasé and nonchalant attitude. Almost 80% of the Normcore group believed that the product itself was more important than the brand (quality, performance, comfort). More than half of the respondents were tired of people parading in popular branded clothes and considered it a sign of snobbism and a forced attempt to emphasise one's social status. The New Balance consumers' need for truth originates from their opposition to the triumph of form over substance and their demand for honesty. It is manifested in behaviour focusing on authenticity, naturalness and anti-snobbism, without exposing brand symbols, and respect for materials and the making process.

Conclusion

Changes in consumer behaviour directly influence the marketing activities of enterprises. The fact that Normcore rejects clearly visible brand symbols and chooses brands which do not flaunt their symbols; or do so in a discrete way, is a sign for entrepreneurs to modify both their products and their promotional strategy. Normcore consumers choose seemingly used, simple and comfortable items.. In this way the Normocre group creates an impression of apparent ordinariness.. It can be stated that Normcore “winks” at those acquainted with the idea and stimulates a trend originating from the need for

anti-creation, naturalness, etc. This fact determines changes in the remaining tools used in the marketing mix as well as in the choice of promotional measures and forms.

To recap, consumer behaviour is one of the major factors determining the activities of each market enterprise. The precise recognition of consumer behaviour may bring lucrative profits to enterprises, as well as a competitive edge over other market players resulting from a better adjustment of their range to customer expectations. The knowledge about consumers, their needs, market decision mechanisms and patterns of behavior, continues to be the basis for business operations in a dynamic market economy. These are consumers who determine the success or failure of an enterprise. From the perspective of an enterprise, consumers are the main source of uncertainty, which is why their behaviour requires ongoing research.