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A psychological and cultural profile of the Polish consumer

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach
dozwolonego użytku.

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A PSYCHOLOGICAL AND CULTURAL PROFILE OF THE POLISH CONSUMER (PSYCHOLOGICZNY I KULTUROWY PROFIL POLSKIEGO KONSUMENTA)

Celem niniejszej pracy było wyznaczenie czynników psychologicznych i kulturowych mogących wpływać na zachowania ludzi w procesie nabywania dóbr materialnych. Badanie zostało przeprowadzone z wykorzystaniem Kulturowej Typologii Rozwoju Gospodarczego, zaprezentowanej przez M. Gronдона, a także w oparciu o model: „Style konsumpcji”, który został opisany przez D.B. Holta. Analiza osiągniętych wyników pozwoliła na wyodrębnienie czterech „kompleksów psychologiczno-kulturowych” mogących kształtować zachowania nabywców: czynnik nawiązujący do hedonizmu epikurejskiego (umiarkowany hedonizm), hedonizmu arystyckiego (skrajny hedonizm), orientacji platońskiej (konsumpcja „godnościowa”) i orientacji arystotelesowskiej (konsumpcja zrównoważona).

***Słowa kluczowe:** różnice kulturowe, potrzeby i pragnienia nabywców, profile konsumenckie, kulturowe uwarunkowania konsumpcji.*

Introduction

Recent years have brought many changes in all areas of life in Poland. The transformations of the political and economic systems have resulted in visible shifts in the Polish attitudes. Traditional values systems have been disrupted and lifestyles have changed, including the habits and rituals of consumers. The aim of consumption is no longer to satisfy basic needs, but for many it has become a way of life, when the purpose of life turned into the acquisition and consumption of material goods. Increasing consumption is not only the result

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of the growing wealth of society, but above all a reflection of trends in the global market.

Studies of the mechanisms controlling human beings in the process of consumption point to the importance of cultural factors as factors that shape the behaviour of buyers. The majority of consumer needs are a reflection of cultural canons. The cultural determinants of consumption are often related to value systems, traditions and customs that are national, local or familial in character.

A pioneering work devoted to the cultural factors of economic development was written by Max Weber. Entitled *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1905), it pointed to the existence of links between ideas and religious values and the level and character of economic and social development¹. According to Weber, Protestantism contributed to the development of the capitalist system and entrepreneurship more than Roman Catholicism does. Protestant doctrine, particularly in its interpretation of Calvin, based on the doctrine of predestination, stresses the importance of the sovereign decision of God concerning the salvation of man. According to Calvinist theology, material success in this life is an expression of God's benevolence and the promise of salvation. According to Roman Catholic doctrine, material success and success in business are all factors that may impede or even prevent salvation. Thus the cultural personal model for Protestants may be an entrepreneur, while for Catholics it would be an ascetic monk. The second factor differentiating Protestants from Catholics is the attitude towards work. While for Roman Catholics prayer is more important than work, for Protestants work as a form of prayer has a predominant place in the hierarchy of values: "Inactive contemplation is also valueless, or even directly reprehensible if it is at the expense of one's daily work. For it is less pleasing to God than the active performance of His will in a calling. (...) Labour is, on the one hand, an approved ascetic technique, as it always has been in the Western Church"².

The views of the American sociologist Talcott Parsons have influenced the discussion about the role of culture in shaping the behaviour of the purchaser. In a sense he adapted Weber's thesis about the influence of culture on the behaviour of buyers, arguing that consumers create a culture. He was convinced that human activity and conduct on the market result from the desire

¹ M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Althea Press, Warsaw 2010.

² *Ibidem*.

to be assimilated to a social group. He held that people buy certain goods and services to gain social acceptance, recognition and prestige. Parsons believed that consumer behaviour is a function of prestige and fame, which is achieved by consuming goods and services. Parsons' ideas were echoed in the work of Thorstein Veblen entitled "*Theory of the Leisure Class*" (1971), which demonstrates that it is lifestyle that defines the boundaries between people and is one of the determinants of social order. Lifestyle and manner of consumption expose a person's nature and indicate social affiliation. It also forms a social "motivation criterion" because the lifestyle of the privileged class becomes a model that the representatives of the lower classes strive to imitate³.

The role of cultural factors in shaping consumer behaviour was also stressed by Kotler (1994), who described the impact of cultural elements, specific sub-cultures and social classes on consumer behaviour. Kotler argues that culture in the widest sense affects the group in question, its cycle of life, motivation and perception. A subculture permeates the family, is important in choosing an occupation and determines the economic situation of the individual, characterising perception of the world and mode of learning. Social class determines a person's status and the roles played and affects character, goals in life, convictions and attitudes⁴.

The creation of a consumer society has brought about the notion of consumer culture. Originally material goods were meant to satisfy basic human needs, whereas in consumer societies people acquire material goods "to emphasize the differences in lifestyles that delimit social relations" (Leiss, 1978). Douglas and Isherwood are of the opinion that it is not only the acquisition of certain assets, but also "use tangible property" is aimed at "determination line of social relationships" (Douglas & Isherwood, 1998). Featherstone (1998) presented three basic ways of looking at consumer culture, namely manifestations of the development of commercial production, problems related to changes in the social position of people in the course of meeting their needs by means of goods and services, and issues concerning experience of the mental and perceptive state of emotional and sensual pleasure associated with the consumption of dreams and desires⁵.

³ T. Veblen, *Theory of the Leisure Class*, PWN Press, Warsaw 1971.

⁴ Ph. Kotler, *Marketing, Analysis, Planning, Implementation and Control*, Gebethner Company Press, Warsaw 1994.

⁵ M. Featherstone, *Consumer behavior in terms of culture*, in: *Consumer behavior. Concepts and research in Europe*, ed. M. Lambkin, F.van Raaij, G. Foxall, B. Heilbrunn, PWN Press, Warsaw 2001.

Contemporary consumer culture is strongly focused on fulfilling the psychological needs of individuals and this is associated with a tendency towards hedonism and self-expression. Bauman (2005) has made a psychological and sociological analysis of the determinants of consumption and has formulated the nature of modern consumerism as follows: "Neither possession nor being really count in the operating models of a happy life today. What counts is use. Immediate, on-the-spot use that does not last longer than the joy, which means use that can be stopped as soon as the joy begins to wear off"⁶.

Sociological analysis of the determinants of consumption was made by Holt (1995), who distinguished four styles of consumption: consumption, defined as a positive experience in sensual terms, consumption which is an expression of the personality, consumption expressing the social status and consumption as social "play" and linked to buyer social interaction⁷.

Cultural factors shape not only individual consumer behaviour, but also have an overwhelming influence on economic behaviour defined in terms of the wider community. An example of a concept of a global nature, in an attempt to explain differences in the economic behaviour of people living in different areas of the world and different cultures, is the cultural typology of economic development presented by Grondona (2003). He lists and characterizes twenty cultural features or values that may affect economic behaviour:

religion, belief in the unit, moral imperative, dimensions of wealth, competition, justice, work ethic, heresy, education, usefulness, minor virtues, time, rationality, authority, world view, outlook on life, salvation, two utopias, optimism, vision of democracy⁸.

The study did not verify all 20 factors and included only those which can be considered from a psychological point of view: the dimensions of wealth – understood as materialist opposed to humanistic and also in relation to property, heresy – defined as openness to experience) and optimism.

The empirical objective of this work was to seek answers to the following questions:

⁶ The consumption-an important dimension of cultural globalization, ed. Z. Bauman, IFIS. Academy of Sciences Press, Warsaw 2005.

⁷ D. Holt, How Consumers Consume. A Typology of Consumption Practises, "Journal of Consumer Research" 1995, n. 22, pp. 1-16.

⁸ M. Grondona, Cultural Typology of Economic Development, in: Culture is important, ed. L.E. Harrison, S. P. Huntington, Profit & Company Press, Poznan 2003.

1. Is it possible to determine the psychological and cultural profile of the typical Polish consumer?
2. Which cultural factors influence consumer behaviour, understood as the fulfilment of needs and desires and the turning a particular style of consumption into reality?

Method

The survey was conducted between 2009 and 2011 in the different cities of the province Pomerania and 535 people took part in it. Age of respondents ranged from 18 to 75, and age groups were equivalent. The education of participants varied from basic to higher, with the secondary level most numerous represented.

Below is a description of the variables selected for the study and of the tools used for measurements. The variables occurring in the study were divided into two groups: factors related to culture and factors related to consumer behaviour.

I. Variables related to culture:

1. *Humanism-materialism*. To measure this parameter Boski's 1992 EMIC test of cultural values, also known as the Cultural Values Test, was used. The internal reliability of the unrotated humanism-materialism scale is high, with a value of 0.88 for Cronbach's, covering the value of 0.873 obtained for this coefficient for the rotated scale in four previous studies. The questionnaire consisted of 65 questions, and the response to each was provided on a 10-point scale, where 0 indicated non-correspondence and 10 correspondence.

2. *Openness to experience*. The measure of this variable subscale was the NEO-FFI test developed by Costa and McCrae in 1998. This method is based on the Polish norms and its psychometric evaluation is equivalent to the original version. The subscale of "openness to experience" consisted of 12 questions, in response to which a key was used that reflected a 5-point scale, where 1 denotes strong disagreement, and 5 strong agreement.

3. *Optimism*. Optimism levels were measured using the Life Orientation Test (LOT-R), by Michael F. Scheier, Charles S. Carver and Michael W. Bridges, adapted for Polish by Poprawa and Juczyński (2001). The internal consistency of the test is 0.78 for the original version (Cronbach's) and 0.76 for the Polish version. One of the ways of measuring the theoretical validity of the test was to correlate the results obtained from Rosenberg's self-esteem scale (0.63) and the depression scale (0.54).

4. *Values*. These were measured by means of Scheler's scale of values, which was standardised to Polish and has achieved high reliability indices (Cronbach's α), ranging from 0.81 to 0.89. Similar ratios were obtained with respect to the accuracy of the method. The scale consisted of 50 values and created the following profiles: hedonism, truth, morality, vitality, aesthetics, devotion, efficiency, endurance, secular devotion and religious devotion. The task of participants in the study was to rate each feature on a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 denotes that the feature is completely irrelevant for the respondent and 100 that it is extremely important.

5. *Style of consumption*. In order to characterise the respondents in terms of their preferred styles of consumption a scale was created containing categories of consumption as described by Douglas B. Holt (1995) and reflecting four types of consumption: consumption, understood as a pleasant experience, consumption as a reflex of the buyer's personality traits, consumption as an expression of the buyer's social status and, finally, consumption as "social play," which helps establish and maintain interpersonal relationships. Initially, the method prepared consisted of 100 statements that represented the four distinct styles of consumption (25 statements for each style). Qualitative analysis of the above statements, excluding ambiguous or synonymous opinions, reduced the number of items to 35. The 35-statement version was considered the experimental one and a group numbering 86 people was tested. The results obtained were subjected to Bray-Curtis factor analysis. In this way four bundles of factors were obtained, each representing a style of consumption category referred to by Holt (1995). The factors bound together most closely eventually formed a "buying style" mode, consisting of 16 statements (each four statements representing a particular style of consumption). This working version was used continually in conducting the study.

II. Variables related to consumer behaviour:

1. *Evaluation of personal financial situation*. Participants evaluated their own financial situation, not as an indication of per capita income in the family, but by defining their own situation as: "difficult", "average", "good" or "very good".

2. *The balance between consumers needs and desires*. The task of participants was to allocate their entire personal budget in fulfilment of their needs and desires.

3. *Hierarchy of consumer needs*. In order to characterise the hierarchy of buyers' needs reference was made to the so-called "Geneva test" method

for standard of living developed by the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development in Geneva. This listed the following groups of consumer needs: food, housing, health, education, recreation, social and physical security. The use of this method in the study involved respondents expressing the percentage share of their budget allocated to the meeting of particular needs.

The data were subjected to Principal Component Analysis, k-means clustering and stepwise analysis of regression of factors (Statistica version 6 for Windows, StatSoft. Inc.).

Results

One of the main objectives of the research was an attempt to describe the psychological and cultural profile of the consumers surveyed. By establishing certain patterns a basis may be formed for drawing conclusions about or even anticipating behaviour in the market. The variables selected for analysis, enable a psychological and cultural profile to be put forward of individuals who participated in this study. The use of factor analysis made it possible to distinguish four factors that explain the 52.5% variance. (See Table 1).

Table 1. The principal components distinguished. Factor analysis.

Main factors	Individual variance	Percentage general variance	Accumulated individual variance	Accumulated percentage general variance
Epicurean hedonism	4.91	23.4	4.9	23.4
Aristippian hedonism	2.52	12.0	7.4	35.4
Platonic factor	2.17	10.4	9.6	45.7
Aristotelian factor	1.43	6.8	11.0	52.5

Source: author's own.

As is apparent from the data in Table 1, the study variables form four independent factors that characterise all those questioned.

The following table contains the factor loadings for all the variables analysed. (See Table 2).

Table 2. Factor loadings for the variables studied.

Values	Epicurean hedonism	Aristippian hedonism	Platonic factor	Aristotelian factor
Humanism	0.125	0.140	0.280	0.704
Materialism	0.234	0.100	-0.266	0.762
Optimism	0.028	0.161	0.052	0.150
Openness	-0.004	-0.077	0.159	0.548
Hedonism	0.652	0.416	-0.048	0.102
Vital values	0.911	-0.008	0.081	0.103
Aesthetic values	0.749	0.181	0.107	0.156
Values of truth	0.723	0.056	0.181	-0.062
Moral values	0.453	0.113	0.599	-0.015
Sacred values	0.132	0.035	0.930	0.169
Vitality	0.785	0.003	0.022	0.095
Endurance	0.684	-0.052	0.134	0.090
Secularism	0.172	-0.107	0.783	0.252
Religiosity	0.030	0.202	0.758	-0.001
Rationality	0.013	0.153	0.066	0.228
Emotionality	0.259	0.633	-0.053	-0.006
Pleasure	-0.021	0.747	0.027	0.055
Personality	0.108	0.698	0.052	0.029
Status	-0.001	0.563	-0.018	0.336
Social relations	-0.048	0.540	0.162	0.014
Attitude to material goods	0.124	0.399	-0.263	0.349
Individual variance	3.844	2.577	2.765	1.849
Participation	0.183	0.123	0.132	0.088

Source: author's own.

It may be seen from the results presented in Table 1 that each factor is composed of particular parameters. The first factor is constructed from vital values (overall scale) and vitality (subscale), aesthetic values, values of truth and values associated with hedonism. The second factor consists of the first style of consumption (which treats the consumption of goods and services as a source of sensual pleasure), the second style of consumption (which emphasises the importance of personality in purchasing decisions) and the so-called emotional priorities (those of symbolism and feelings), understood as purchase motives. The third factor consists of sacred and secular values, secularism and religiosity. Lastly, the fourth factor includes the two orientations of materialism and humanism.

The factor analysis performed led to two types of hedonism being distinguished. The first, stresses the importance of the mind and values and is known as Epicurism because of its similarity to the views of the Greek philosopher. This toned down hedonism is, despite the strong influence of values that stress

the importance of human life and the effort directed to survival, associated primarily with the higher categories, namely aesthetic values and the values of truth. Epicurean hedonism reflects the belief that the source of pleasure lies in virtue: "He whose life is not wise, lovely and just cannot live pleasantly"⁹.

The second type of hedonism is emotional and sensual in character and is known as Aristippian hedonism because of the nature of the views propounded by Aristippus of Cyrene, who claimed that the highest goal towards which the man aspires is actually pleasure of the flesh, reflecting the Latin phrase *hic et nunc*, for, as other Greek philosophers wrote of Aristippus, "For him happiness lay in present pleasure; to exert oneself over future pleasure he considered a waste of effort." The second variant of hedonism is associated with two styles of consumption and priorities that are relevant to the situation of purchasing, directly manifesting emotion, sensuality and the need to express and emphasise individual personality traits. The parameters that make up this factor indicate the impulsive nature of this type of hedonism, oriented as it is to the present situation, emphasising its links to the teachings of Aristippus.

The third important factor concerns what is sacred for people and what distinguishes human spirituality. In keeping with the sequence of definitions chosen so far, which is derived from the Greek tradition, this factor is termed "Platonic," Plato being the philosopher of the ancient world who separated the idea from the thing, attributing the primary role to the idea as the pattern for the thing, so that the real world is an image of the idea of the world. One of the most important ideas for Plato was that of beauty, which in his philosophy had an ethical as well as an aesthetic dimension: "the concept of beauty is associated with what is praiseworthy, rational, profitable, fitting and harmonious, and all these notions are based on nature and in keeping with it." Ideas open humans up to values associated with the spiritual and the universal, categories to which belong secular and religious sacredness, which occur in the tests described here.

The fourth and final factor reflects the human balance between the humanist and materialist orientations in life. The two parameters for this factor had similar loading, leading to its being termed the Aristotelian factor, with respect to the virtue understood by Aristotle to be the means of maintaining moderation¹⁰

⁹ Laërtius, Diogenes, The lives and views of famous philosophers, PWN Press, Warsaw 1988.

¹⁰ W. Tatarkiewicz, The History of Philosophy, PWN Press, Warsaw 1981.

Aristotle's theory of the "golden mean" represents the principle of the balance between the humanist and materialistic orientations.

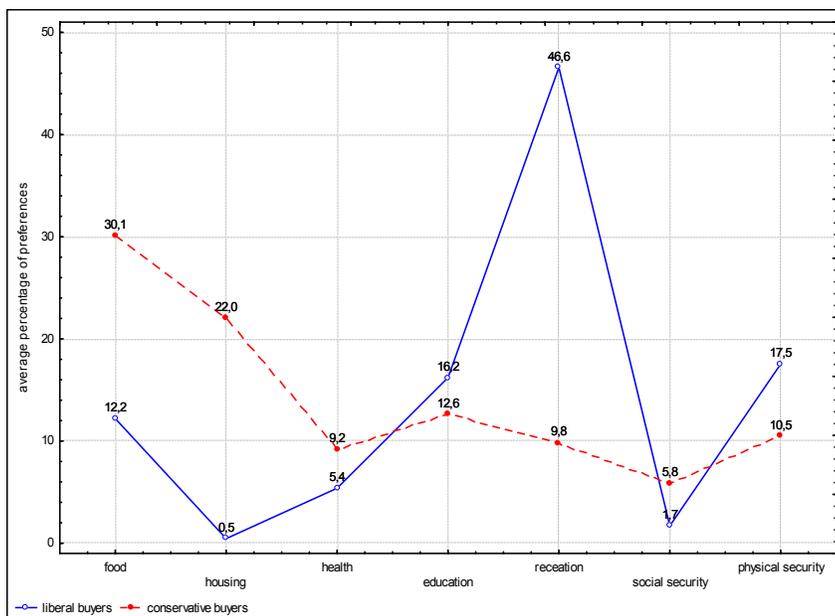
The factor analysis carried out revealed, therefore, four main components: a factor termed Epicurean hedonism, a factor described as Aristippian hedonism, a factor defined as Platonic and finally the Aristotelian balance factor. The results obtained allow each participant in the study to be characterised psychologically and culturally in a general way. It could be said that in each participant four great forces vie for supremacy: hedonism at two designated levels, striving to maintain life values and the need for balance. The factor analysis performed identified psychological and cultural factors that brought to light great complexity and something of a "personality" tragedy in those surveyed. The four factors distinguished are in opposition to one another. There is a natural confrontation between hedonism based on the senses and a hedonism that grows out of the soil of reason and mental needs of the highest order. The world of values is in obvious conflict with that of bodily desires. It may indeed favour a materialistic orientation, but this comes „under pressure" to balance out its humanist opposite. From this tangle of contradictions, then, emerges a picture of a person torn apart internally, who is still, however, strongly inclined towards the spiritual and the ideal.

The psychological and cultural profile of those questioned obtained as a result of these studies and the procedure used to analyse the data did not support the conclusion that they are „ideal consumers", people under the spell of a world of material values. Participants in this study manifest a tendency toward idealism in life. Hedonism is a „step," as it were, to the world of values, but results in the individual experiencing conflicts of an internal nature. This description of the psychological and cultural profile of participants in the study may allow them to be classified as members of a culture that is traditional and conservative and not in fact pro-consumption and pro-development in relation to economic progress. It would seem indisputable that what goes on in the world is complex and rarely takes on dual category values, making it an obvious oversimplification to consider the characteristics of culture in terms of the binary system „conservative culture" and „developmental culture." However, an attempt to determine a psychological and cultural profile involves finding a clear approach so that the essential features of the phenomenon under examination may be distinguished. It is noticeable that in light of the results obtained, the profile identified expresses and emphasises the significance of humanist values and reduces the importance of materialism among participants of the study.

The results presented so far indicate that the participants in the present research attached great importance to needs that may be met by means of specific

activity in the market. A further factor analysis in relation to the criterion of consumer needs enabled two independent groups of buyers to be identified, characterised by different preferences for perceived and fulfilled needs. The factor analysis procedure divided respondents into groups termed „conservative” and „liberal” buyers (See Figure 1).

Figure 1. Preferences in relation to needs. „Conservative” and „liberal” buyers



Source: author's own.

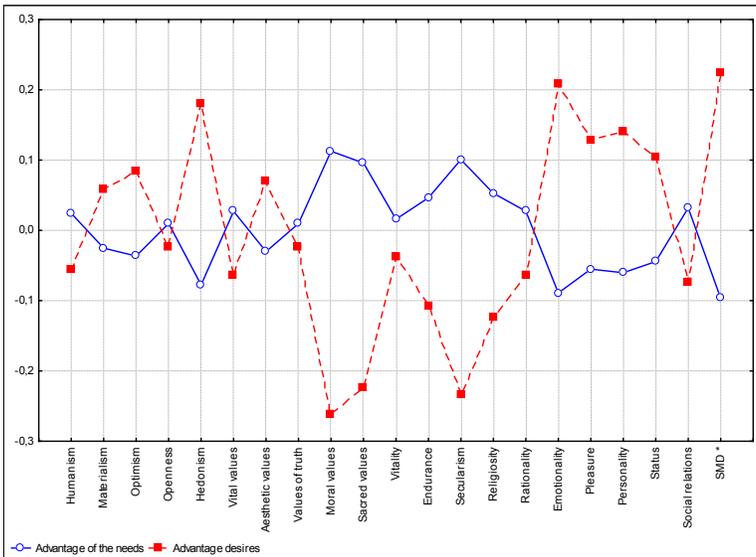
The individuals making up the groups of liberal and conservative consumers attached significance to different values. As shown by the figure above, the “liberal” consumers favoured moral values, humanism, the secular sacred, sacred values, rational priorities and openness to experience. This group was characterised by moderate materialism, the desire to emphasise their social status through the act of consumption and a relatively low level of hedonism. These results suggest that the „liberal” was marked by rationalism. For the „conservative,” the significant values were associated with hedonism and the

emotional circumstances leading to purchase. They attached importance to the fourth style of consumption, that linked to social interaction and to the values of truth, and showed enthusiasm for material goods. The „conservative” was characterised more by a certain kind of emotion. The two groups of consumers distinguished showed a preference therefore for different values.

The results concerning the needs and desires of purchasers presented here indicate that needs significantly outweighed desires among those participating in the study. However, this conclusion, which is of a general nature, does not hold true for all the variables included in the study, as further factor analysis enabled the respondents who favoured needs to be separated from those for whom desires turned out to be more important. The factor analysis procedure used also revealed that some of the variables occurring in the study proved to be more „sensitive” to the needs of buyers while others were more “sensitive” to their desires.

Figure 2 charts the particular “predominance” of needs and desires in terms of other research criteria.

Figure 2. The “predominance” of needs and desires in relation to the other variables (the variables preceded by the letters *st*, were arrived at by standardisation of “raw” values)



Source: author's own.

Generally needs predominate over desires, however, for some variables the “strength” of the needs emerged as of particular significance. This applies to the following variables: moral values, sacred devotion, secular devotion, vitality, the religious sacred and the fourth style of consumption, namely consumption as social interaction. The least pressing needs are associated with hedonistic values, the second form of consumption (consumption as an expression of personality) and a positive attitude towards material goods. Needs were important to the consumer group characterised by adherence to traditional values, conservatism and a somewhat critical attitude towards the phenomenon of consumption. For this group of buyers their current purchases form a substitute for interpersonal bonds and relationships.

Desires dominated with respect to emotional priorities in the decision to buy and also in relation to material goods. The power of desires was manifested in terms of hedonistic values but also proved extremely important in relation to the first, second and third styles of consumption (consumption as pleasure, consumption as an expression of personality and consumption as social interaction, respectively) and also to optimism and a materialistic orientation. The importance and strength of desires diminished in relation to moral values, sacred values and secular devotion. Desires were characteristic of buyers of a marked hedonistic and materialistic orientation who “downplayed” the significance of traditional values.

In conclusion we may suggest that, in the light of the results obtained, needs reveal a tendency towards seriousness, conservatism, rationality and a certain boredom, while desires were manifest as dynamic and emotional, tending towards pleasures and an emphasis on the individual’s qualities, traits and position. In simple terms it could be said that needs were, in a psychological sense “old” and desires “young.”

In summing up the relevant considerations that go to make up a psychological and cultural profile of the individuals who participated in this study, the following findings may be put forward:

1. Four distinct psychological and cultural factors influenced the participants in the study: „Epicurean” hedonism, “Aristippian” hedonism, the „Platonic” factor and the „Aristotelian” balance factor. However, the “humanist” outweighed the “materialistic”.

2. Those questioned fell into two groups with regard to the nature of their needs as consumers: the „liberal” buyers and the „conservative” buyers. The former were not tied to traditional budget divisions and strove to meet their need to express their freedom and independence, while the latter were commit-

ted to the traditional way of spending money, with basic needs given priority over others. „Liberals” and „conservatives” espouse different values. For the „liberals” the important ones turned out to be hedonism, moral values, secular devotion and openness to experience, while the „conservatives” also favoured hedonism and emotional priorities in purchasing decisions, in the sense of the social relationships involved in the process of acquiring goods and services, but also materialism. The “liberals” showed a tendency to rationality and to going beyond the demands of the mundane, whereas the „conservatives,” while allowing emotion into decisions, sought to „keep their feet upon the ground” and to secure what was indispensable.

3. The respondents clearly put meeting their needs over fulfilling their desires as far as consumption was concerned. They were not, however, unanimous in this respect and it was therefore possible to distinguish those who rated needs more highly from those who prioritised values. Both needs and desires set up their own interrelationships between the other variables that occur in the study. There is interplay between needs and moral values, sacred values and secular devotion, while desires are co-ordinated with hedonism, emotional priorities and enthusiasm for material goods.

Discussion

In embarking on the discussion it is necessary to stress that research into various aspects of consumption is usually conducted “on a different set of values, the culture of consumption, brought into being by various social categories”¹¹. „The diverse profiles of the respondents are the result of many consumer cultures, characterised by a variety of attitudes and the needs and preferences of buyers, which defined the hybridisation of the postmodern lifestyle. This diversity is the cause of the ongoing debate on the culture of consumerism. Contemporary critics of this kind of culture can be divided into two categories namely: “moralists” and “partisans.” “The moralists are thinkers, usually academics (philosophers, political scientists and sociologists), and the partisans are campaigners, journalists and others actively engaged in combating the pathology of consumption”¹².

¹¹ K. Romaniszyn, *For about work and consumption*, Nomos Press, Cracow 2007.

¹² T. Szlendak, K. Pietrowicz, *Fashion, Freedom and Culture of Consumption*, in: *Delightful blight. The Rule of Fashion and Culture of Consumption*, ed. T. Szlendak, University Press, Wroclaw 2007.

In describing the psychological and cultural profile of the consumers surveyed, reference must be made to issues related to value systems, which are the main component of the profile. Following the concept of Sorokin, fully discussed in the excellent work by Capra, entitled "The Turning Point" (1987), three value systems have come into being that appear cyclically in the course of the historical development of the West and which form the foundation of all manifestations of human culture. The first system is termed the "sensate." the second the "ideational" and the third the "idealistic." The sensate system is characterised by subsuming matter into the notion of "ultimate reality." There is only matter, and all spiritual phenomena are simply an emanation of matter. Furthermore, ethical values are relative, and the only sources of knowledge are experience and truth, which are perceived by the senses. The opposite of the sensate system is the ideational, assuming that only spiritual values actually exist, the ethical, aesthetic and universal norms, which include justice and truth. Examples of ideational concepts make up the teaching of Plato, the truth contained in the Judeo-Christian religions, the philosophical systems of the Hindu culture, Buddhism and Taoism. The idealistic is an intermediate form between the sensate and ideational systems. It synthesises the two opposing currents, resulting in the conviction that the world surrounding the individual combines aspects of the sensory and the extrasensory in a harmonious manner. Sorokin theorised that these three systems of values appear periodically in human history. Extreme ideation was transformed over time into idealistic concepts (in the fifth and fourth centuries BC in Greece, as well as in the European Renaissance), to be succeeded by a period of sensuality (such as in the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, in which systems of values were based on the Enlightenment views of Descartes, Newton and the effects of the Industrial Revolution). Sorokin described the twentieth century in terms of a decline in sensate values¹³. This concept of cyclical culture types assumes a one-dimensional culture. Meanwhile, studies have shown that the types of culture defined can occur simultaneously depending on the area and social resources. Indeed the consumer profile obtained during the studies reported can be seen to fall within all three systems: the sensate ("Aristippian" hedonism), the ideational ("Platonic" orientation) and the idealistic ("Epicurean" hedonism and "Aristotelian" orientation). The modern world spawns multiple ideas simultaneously. These lead to great diversity among people and may spark unrest but also become the driving force of scientific research.

¹³ F. Capra, *The Turning Point*, PIW Press, Warsaw 1982.

Since many of the results of this work emphasised that needs significantly outweighed the other categories, an analysis of buyers' preferences was carried out. The results of this enabled two groups of consumer to be distinguished who have been termed in this study "liberal" buyers and "conservative" buyers. The "liberals" were characterised by an uninhibited relationship with consumption (needs linked to recreation, material management, education and food dominated among them), hedonism, moderate materialism and a need for freedom. The "conservatives" were mainly focused on basic needs: expenses related to food and maintenance of housing. It may be suggested that in relation to consumer groups the "liberals" represent, in mental terms, a cultural model growing out of Cartesian philosophical ideas, because this group of buyers place a strong emphasis on individuality, authenticity, and independence. The fact that needs outweigh desires in the buyers surveyed prompts reflection concerning the living standards of Poles.

The results presented in this study may also be related to those of other authors and any convergence indicated. From reference to the original works of Inglehart (1995)¹⁴, as well as the other published writings of this author it is noticeable that the cultural and psychological profile of Poles is characterised by fairly strong traditionalism¹⁵. In these works Inglehart argues that changes in Poland may take place in two ways. On the one hand a strong attachment to traditional values (religion, family and country) and the values associated with survival (materialistic orientation) has been observed. On the other hand an ever stronger, though not dominant, trend is seen towards secular-rational values and values associated with "the free expression of the self." Poland is an example of a country that is "part of Catholic Europe" yet lies, in comparison with other countries of a similar post-war fate, on the periphery of "post-communist Europe." Spiritually, Poland is closest to India! (see the Map of Values, Princeton, 1997)¹⁶. The "spiritual" similarity of Poles and Indians, which lies in their "immersion" in religion, is also indicated by Huntington (2004), whose presentation of results for religiosity worldwide shows the most religious com-

¹⁴ R. Inglehart, *Changing Values, Economic Development and Political Change*, "Social Science Journal" 1995, n. 145, pp. 379-404.

¹⁵ R. Inglehart, *The Appearance of the Postmaterialism Values*, in: *Sociology Reading*, ed. P. Sztompka, M. Kuć, Znak Publisher, Cracow 2006.

¹⁶ Map of Values: [http:// www.worldvaluessurvey.org./statistics/some_findings.html](http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org./statistics/some_findings.html), accessed 01.01.2011.

munities to be Nigerian, Polish, Indian and American¹⁷. The results obtained have a bearing on the understanding of the concept of “humanism.” In its classical expression humanism is a philosophical, ethical and cultural current, which makes the individual the centre of interest. Contemporary humanism is associated with the influence of secular and rational values. Boski (1999) (the author of the instrument of measurement for examining the humanistic *versus* the materialistic orientation), defines humanism in the modern sense, as approval of secular and rational values¹⁸. Research procedures based on a search for factors that elicit a particular kind of behaviour among participants has caused humanism to take on theistic features, an effect of what are termed “sacred values” as in Scheler’s scale of values (2002).

To return briefly to the comments of Inglehart, as far as the location of Poles on the „value map” is concerned, it is noticeable how ambiguous the term “materialism” is. In discussing the process of transition of societies from modernity in postmodernism, the word materialism is equivalent to concepts related to abundance, excess and wealth. Post-materialistic culture is linked to the development of categories that do not represent the world of „things,” but are related to the world of ideas and universal values. The present research has suggested that the participants showed no strong materialistic orientation (in the sense of an excess of things) as their materialism was associated with values serving the interest of survival, or immediate need. The materialism of those who participated in the study resulted from the need to protect what is indispensable. It may therefore, with all caution, be concluded that there are two kinds of materialism: that which results from wealth and that which results from shortage. The scale used in this research to measure relation to material possessions “defined” materialism in terms of prosperity. Participants were “moderate” in their level of acceptance of material goods. The mutual relationships between needs and desires revealed that for the respondents needs were basic and a reflection of shortage. The research conducted by Inglehart demonstrated that Polish society is characterised by materialism but a materialism that is associated with serving the needs of survival. This materialism therefore grows out of fear of a shortage of basic goods. In recognising the similarities

¹⁷ S. Huntington, Who are we? The Challenges to America’s National Identity, Znak Press, Cracow 2004.

¹⁸ P. Boski, Humanism in the culture and mentality of Poles, in: Psychology of understanding of social phenomena, ed. B. Wojciszke, M. Jarymowicz, PWN Press, Warsaw-Lodz 1999.

between the results in the work of Inglehart and those of the research reported here, it is noticeable that the needs and desires category in the latter is, in terms of content, convergent with the dimension that emerges from the priority map of the analysis: that of values associated with survival and with a good life.

The nature of consumption of the Polish buyer can be considered in terms of the mental characteristics of Poles. Extensive comparative research on the national disposition of Poles has shown that in recent years there has been a significant increase in the importance of factors such as family and family values, hard work, community, individualism, and demonstrativeness, entrepreneurship and activity and a search for simplification and peace¹⁹. From this we can conclude that the traditional model of Polish culture and mentality is in the process of transformation. Contemporary trends are beginning to affect the general behaviour of the people, including that of buyers.

Many authors emphasise the development of a hedonistic tendency in modern consumption. Hostynski (2006)²⁰ observes that pleasure is a fundamental determinant of world consumption and consumerism and that habitual buying is a particular source of “pleasure and a pillar of world consumption”²¹. Consumer hedonism is a consequence of the fact that “we are steeped in a culture of excessive material production”²². There has also been a change in the function of money, which is no longer simply a means of payment, but as the “prototype of the commodities” attains the status of a symbol, evading its value in use. Money today has crossed another threshold: it also evades its exchange value²³. However, the results reported here do not confirm any irrational and hedonistic behaviour on the part of Polish buyers in the marketplace. Their behaviour is to a great extent shaped by utilitarian values, which are primarily a source of satisfaction of human needs and only secondarily of desires.

The results of the investigation also appear consistent with the report, published in 2008, prepared by Boni a head of the Strategic Advisory Panel of Prime Minister Donald Tusk. According to this, Poland is the poorest country

¹⁹ M. Ziolkowski, J. Koralewicz, *The mentality of Poles*, Scholar Collegium Civitas Press, Warsaw 2003.

²⁰ L. Hostynski, *The values in the world of consumption*, University of Maria Curie Skłodowska Press, Lublin 2006.

²¹ J. Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, Sic! Press, Warsaw 2007.

²² J. Baudrillard, *Consumer society. Its myths and structures*, Sic! Press, Warsaw 2006.

²³ J. Baudrillard, *Conversations before the end*, Sic! Press, Warsaw 2007.

in the region, in which long-term economic growth amounts to no more than 4.3%, significantly less than in other countries, and there is no certainty that this growth will be maintained²⁴. The level of economic development of the state makes Polish consumers concentrate closely on needs, and basic needs at that. Desires appear more in the realm of plans and the implementation of these is often subject to the creditworthiness of the buyer. As reported by the Info Monitor Office for Economic Information S.A, Poles are living on credit. The last two years have seen a doubling of the number of people defaulting on financial obligations to a total of 9.87 billion zlotys.

The research allowed to recognize the patterns of consumption specific for individuals surveyed, which reflected the following rules:

1. Consumption was significantly dominated by the needs of people, their desires were of lesser importance in the decision-making process.
2. The strong influence of humanistic orientation and conservative values was diminishing the materialistic attitude.
3. Two levels of hedonism have appeared: sensual (Aristippian) hedonism and intellectual (Epicurean) hedonism.
4. The reduced optimism and low openness to experience was noticeable.

These points define the type of consumer behaviour, demonstrating it to be somewhat cautious and modest. Thus the “pattern” of the consumption investigated would probably not be relevant to public welfare but to the public who have just acquired the habit of consumption and who are still uncertain in their attempt to utilise it, thinking not only of themselves but also of others. Perhaps the humanist orientation protects people against excessive and, in fact, debasing consumption. Sometimes “restrictions,” hindering the fulfilment of selfish needs and desires, lead to the individual saving what is most precious, his or her own humanity. In view of ongoing economic and sociological transformations in Poland, the conclusions put forward still have the character of open questions and for the author of this work will certainly be an important reason to pursue further research.

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Beata Pawlik: A psychological and cultural profile of the Polish consumer

The aim of this study was to identify factors of a psychological and cultural character, which may affect the behaviour of people in the market on the basis of the two theoretical models: the one presented in “Cultural Typology of Economic Development” by M. Grondona (2003) and the behaviour model of buyers by D.B. Holt (1995). The research allowed to depict psychological profiles which characterize Polish consumers and distinguish four distinct psychological and cultural factors which had the largest influence on the participants in the study: „Epicurean” hedonism, “Aristippian” hedonism, the „Platonic” factor and the „Aristotelian” balance factor. However, overall impact of the “humanist” attitude outweighed the “materialistic” one in making up one’s mind. Participants fell into two groups which espouse different values with regard to the nature of their needs as consumers: the „liberal” buyers and the „conservative” buyers. The respondents clearly put meeting their needs over fulfilling their desires in making decisions on consumption.

Key words: cultural differences, needs and desires of buyers, consumer profiles, cultural determinants of consumption.

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