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Consumers' Perception of Risks to the Development of Sustainable Consumption

Summary

The article presents consumers' perception of risks caused by the adoption of the sustainable consumption model in households. The research was based on primary materials from direct personal interviews conducted as part of a questionnaire survey. The results were subjected to a substantive analysis using elements of the content analysis developed by Berelson. The research revealed that consumers observed the risk of balancing consumption in their surroundings. The respondents listed the following risks as the most important: higher costs of consumption, time consumption, the need to engage in the implementation of new rules, control of consumer behaviour, greater consumer involvement, and difficulties resulting from the adoption of this consumption model. The knowledge of the risks caused by the adoption of a sustainable consumption model can be used to develop programmes promoting sustainable consumers' attitudes and propagating these ideas. The awareness of sustainable consumption requires time to be developed. It is necessary to conduct a further research and analyses of sustainable consumption, because the knowledge and skills in affecting consumers' attitudes are necessary to develop and strengthen consumption.

Key words: sustainable consumption, balancing consumption, risks, consumption patterns, development.

JEL codes: D12, D13, D81, D83, D91, M31

Introduction

As researchers of social, medical and health sciences say, the continuous economic growth will sooner or later cause our planet's biosphere to reach the limit of its endurance. This situation poses some real dangers to the future development of consumers, enterprises, institutions and organisations in consequence of unjustified overexploitation of natural resources, large-scale food waste and degradation of the environment. Consumption is a significant area of implementation of sustainable development – an important idea formulated in Europe more than 20 years ago (Goryńska-Goldmann, Adamczyk, Gazdecki 2016, pp. 1-8). It is necessary to make global changes in the food consumption structure and model (World Business Council for Sustainable Development 2008; Wasilak 2014) to allow for the

needs of the present generations and not to limit the chance of future generations to satisfy their needs and to be fully aware how to use the goods of our planet.

From the point of view of an individual, consumption is the most important area of human life because it is the condition of people's comprehensive development, including the physiological aspect (it is the condition for staying alive), physical and mental aspect (it maintains one's physical and mental fitness and enables development of one's personality), as well as the economic aspect (it enables people to satisfy their individual needs). Consumption may directly (satisfying a particular need, e.g. pain relief) or indirectly affect consumers (e.g. better health). We can observe a wider dimension of external effects, because they evolve over a period of time and influence the social, natural, economic and ecological environment. However, individual consumers are usually short-sighted economic entities as they concentrate on apparent and capsular needs and pay less attention to real needs. At present we can observe reclassification of needs. The natural distribution of needs is disordered (Szacka 2003) by changes in consumers' lifestyles and their values, types of connections and relations in a group and community. This approach is disastrous to consumers. Short-sightedness in the assessment of one's needs as well as the needs of one's household members and the lack of a long-term vision based on trends may negatively affect consumers.

Sustainable consumption, which is interpreted as an alternative form of consumption to hyperconsumption stimulated by the ideology of consumerism, has not been thoroughly investigated yet. It is an attempt of theoretical reflection upon the phenomenon which is not very common in the Polish household culture. There have been few studies assessing the sustainable aspects of consumption and searching for barriers or driving factors to create more sustainable models of consumption based on information, knowledge and awareness (Dzene & Aija 2012). It is important to conduct interdisciplinary research on sustainable consumption (Reisch et al. 2016) and investigate its aspects and determinants. We must be aware of the fact that the growing consumption which ignores the postulates of sustainable development may cause ecological and social risks due to the rapid increase in the amount of waste and pollution, transport problems in big cities as well as giving priority to one's financial standard rather than quality of life.

The implementation of the sustainable consumption model involves improvement of food consumption, which needs to match and satisfy contemporary consumers' real needs. Products and services should be consumed in the way that allows using resources more effectively (minimise the consumption of natural resources and particularly protect non-renewable ones), reduces degradation of the environment due overexploitation, reduces waste of goods and human labour and inhibits the development of disproportions between people. In consequence, this will enable creation of friendlier conditions to the environment (lesser burden) and increase people's quality of life. This approach is based on ethical values and requires greater engagement and responsibility for making choices in the area of consumption where sustainable products are required. The development of consumption, its level and structure are affected by production of various items. As consumption plays an important role in economic development (everybody must take a particular attitude to it), it reveals consumers' needs and confirms the value of goods and services manufactured and used on

the market. The willingness to achieve a sustainable consumption model contributes to the sustainability of production and consumers' lifestyles.

If we want to implement a particular model of consumption, we need to be aware of the chances, risks and barriers to the development which a specific form of consumption involves. It is necessary to identify barriers to try to reduce them. The development of sustainable consumption is accompanied by difficulties which limit the possibilities to implement this idea in households. This issue can be considered from different perspectives. For example, it can be approached from the point of view of a household and its acceptance or rejection of the consumption model as well as readiness to adopt and develop it. It can also be approached from the point of view of an enterprise and its readiness to develop production and provide services to implement the sustainable consumption model. This issue involves the need to prepare a set of actions to be taken to achieve market goals, e.g. a strategy of releasing sustainable products/services. This element is the basis for rejection of the model or its acceptance, implementation on the market and further development. Local governments and other regional/local entities play a significant role as they provide products and services which can be used by the local/regional community as well as the whole country in reference to tools of the economic policy guaranteeing effective function of production and consumption. The authors of this study concentrated on consumers' perspective and tried to answer the question about barriers to the development of the sustainable consumption model in households. Individual consumers play a significant part in the process leading to sustainability of consumption. It is necessary to consider and reconstruct consumers' current behaviours, values and actions so that they will be aware and play an active role in the process of consumption. However, in order to achieve this goal consumers must be ready to adopt this consumption development model.

Research material and method

The article was based on primary materials from direct personal interviews conducted as part of a questionnaire survey. In 2017 Goryńska-Goldmann and Chabiniak of the Department of Economics and Economy Policy in Agribusiness, Poznan University of Life Sciences, conducted the study titled 'An Analysis of Risks to Sustainable Consumption Perceived by Consumers from the Greater Poland Region'. The research was conducted among inhabitants of Greater Poland Voivodeship. The respondents were selected by means of quota non-probability sampling. This approach enabled the research authors to form the sample corresponding to the age and sex structure of inhabitants of Greater Poland. In total 433 respondents were interviewed¹. This study was based on answers to the following ques-

¹ There was 54% of women respondents and 46% of men respondents who were at least 18 years old in all age groups. The interview was representative because it comprised similar numbers of respondents of both sexes to the current data of the Central Statistical Office, which shows that there are more women than men in Poland, i.e. 51.5% vs 48.5%, respectively. The biggest group consisted of respondents aged 35-44 years (more than 19%, including 52% of women and 48% of men). The next largest groups consisted of respondents aged 18-24 years, 25-44 years and 55-64 years. Each group had a share of about 16.4%. The share of respondents aged 65 years or more amounted to 15.9%. The first age group was the most distinct in the

tion: 'What dangers does sustainable consumption cause in your household?'. As this was an open question, the respondents were able to answer it freely. Content analysis, which is a method used for analysis of newspaper articles and opinions expressed on Internet forums, was also applied in this study. It was necessary to create a response categorisation system, i.e. the key which enabled allocation of the respondents' answers into specific categories. This procedure enabled quantitative analysis of the open question. The key was formed by means of the emergent technique, where categories were based only on empirical material collected in the research (Wimmer & Dominick 2008). The key was based on the respondents' spontaneous opinions and finally it included 17 categories. One respondent's reply to the aforementioned question was the analysis unit. The respondents were allowed to list more than one risk resulting from the adoption of sustainable consumption in their households (the question with a multiple response). The results were subjected to substantive analysis using elements of content analysis developed by Berelson (Lisowska-Magdziarz 2004).

Dangers resulting from the implementation of the sustainable consumption model – analysis of the authors' research results

Nearly 88% of the population under analysis responded to the question about dangers resulting from the adoption of the sustainable consumption model in one's household. Figure 1 shows risks involved in the implementation of this consumption model and their significance. For more detailed qualitative analysis the text in the figure was supplemented with selected quotations of answers provided by the respondents within the categories.

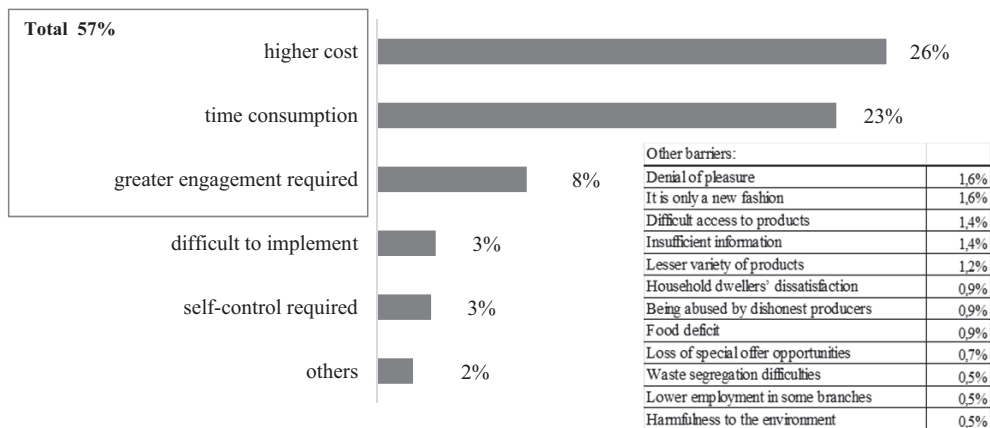
The research results showed that the average number of risks involved in the implementation of the sustainable consumption model given by one respondent was 1.27. It might mean that the respondents concentrated on the risks which they found the most significant. More than 57% of the responses concerned the economic aspect of implementation of the suggested consumption model. The most important responses concerned the costs and consumption of time related with the model (26% and 24% of the responses, respectively). The respondents indicated higher costs of consumption and said that they might be too high. These opinions may have been caused by lower income of worse educated people (more than 35% of the respondents with vocational education expressed this opinion). According to the respondents, expenses on this consumption model were a waste of money. The respondents stressed that the implementation of the sustainable consumption model involved better quality products, where higher costs of this consumption resulted from the purchasing and consumption of better quality products (opinion: 'I accept higher costs of better products'). The income or budget of households is the most important economic factor influencing the quality and quantity of food consumed. These variables easily identify consumers and their situ-

sex structure – 59% of women and 41% of men. However, these differences did not have negative influence on the research results nor did they diverge from other widely available studies. On average, both men and women were aged 44 years, with minor differences. The research was conducted in 74 towns and villages. Poznan inhabitants were the largest group (43%). Most respondents had higher education (33%). 45% of the respondents rated their living standard as average – they had enough money for a living but had to save to purchase more expensive products.

ation. They enable characterisation and explanation of differences in consumption, nutrition, description of structures and consumption models. However, there are differences in the significance of this factor between communities and individual socioeconomic groups, where a wide range of food products is available and producers compete for consumers. Consumers try to increase the quality of their consumption model. If a household is in a good financial situation, it exhibits a higher tendency to make changes. For example, there are innovative shopping behaviours, consumers' choices are based on their perception of food packages and the significance of information which can be found on them (Goryńska-Goldmann, Adamczyk & Gazdecki 2016), interest in a healthy lifestyle, high quality products, health-promoting products and organic food.

Figure 1

The respondents' opinions about barriers to the implementation of the sustainable consumption model and their hierarchy



N=483, multiple response, values do not make a total of 100%.
Source: compiled by the authors.

Time consumption is the second barrier. According to the respondents, the decision to follow the sustainable consumption model would require them to spend more free time creating this consumption. The respondents preferred to spend their free time with their families rather than concentrate on cooking (opinion: 'I prefer to spend time with my family as I like it. Cooking isn't my favourite activity'). The time barrier is another important barrier to the development of the sustainable consumption model. Following the idea of sustainable consumption involves not only the choice of particular products or their types, but it also involves the need to acquire knowledge about the origin and composition of products. It is necessary to monitor information provided by companies at their websites or on product labels, filter this information and be aware how one's decisions will affect oneself, the members of one's household and the environment. The respondents said that these activities

required more time than they had (opinions: 'It is necessary to spend more time reading information about ingredients in products' and 'It requires more time than I have'). More free time is a necessary condition to implement sustainable consumption.

The implementation of sustainable consumption requires consumers to be more engaged (8%). Each consumer tries to achieve the goals they find significant. In economic terms, it means that consumers try to achieve maximum usefulness of goods by using specific amounts of money and to maximise satisfaction from using these funds. In non-economic terms this means that they try to achieve high quality of life and to keep balance between their capacity and resources combined with their occupational activity, consumption models and attitudes. The implementation of sustainable consumption requires consumers to make rational, responsible and sensible choices, which should help them not only to achieve balance but also to implement and achieve the goals of sustainable development (Kryk 2011, Pereira, Heath & Chatzidakis 2012, Niva et al. 2014). The implementation of sustainable consumption is inhibited by the barrier of not being engaged in this model of consumption. Engagement involves the need to search for products and services which are safe to consumers and the environment. Apart from that, these products and services need to meet high environmental and ethical standards at each stage of one's life cycle and they should be made in a sustainable production process, which employs optimal and rational social and natural resources. They also need to be adequately labelled and include reliable and credible information about environmental aspects, the manner of their use and disposal. This approach requires better planning and time management (opinions: 'You must plan your day and week better', 'All household members need to be involved'). It also requires consumers to be engaged in searching for 'better products', which should be at least as good as conventional goods or even better in terms of their quality, utility attributes and innovativeness. This approach involves extra duties for consumers.

In total, 57% of all responses matched the categories listed in the survey. As far as other barriers are concerned, the respondents indicated that it was difficult to implement this model of consumption due to the need to change both one's own habits (opinion: 'It is necessary to change habits') as well as the habits of one's family members (opinion: 'It is hard to make my children cooperate'). It is necessary to stress the fact that the respondents realised that it was impossible to change one's habits overnight. Routines which generations had practised over long years resulted in the development of particular habits. Only later these habits became e.g. a set of particular food-related behaviours. The respondents expressed the opinion that in order to achieve measurable effects of implementation of the sustainable consumption model it would be necessary to engage all consumers in sustainable consumption (opinion: 'In fact, everybody would have to consume things sustainably to see measurable results'). The respondents also stressed the fact that it would be necessary to have self-control (which involved higher consumer activity) in one's shopping behaviours, choice, use, disposal and waste of goods (opinion: 'You need to pay more attention to what you buy and throw away'). Greater self-control in this consumption model also involved the need of awareness and to denial of pleasures (i.e. one should not be misguided by consumerism, overconsumption and conspicuous consumption, which are socially criticised now) (opinion: 'It is necessary to have self-control and deny oneself pleasures'). This barrier is related with one's habits and self-control.

Conclusions

The findings of the research on barriers to the development of the sustainable consumption model in households led to the following conclusions:

1. The research findings showed the complexity of problems related with threats resulting from the adoption of the sustainable food consumption model. The respondents did not have sufficient knowledge of the issue and needed to extend it. The consumers saw dangers caused by implementation of the sustainable food consumption model in their surroundings. The respondents presented different knowledge of the subject and expressed different opinions about the threats identified in the research.
2. The following risks resulting from implementation of the sustainable food consumption model were found to be the most important: higher costs of consumption, time consumption, the need to engage in the implementation of new rules as well as the need to control one's own consumer behaviour and the behaviours of one's family members. Apart from that, there were other major barriers, i.e. consumers' greater involvement and difficulties resulting from the adoption of this consumption model.
3. The knowledge about consumers' perception of risks related with the adoption of the sustainable consumption model can be used to prepare programmes promoting sustainable consumer's attitudes and propagating this idea. The awareness of sustainable consumption cannot develop in a short time. It is necessary to conduct further research and analyses concerning the implementation of sustainable consumption. In order to develop and consolidate this idea it is necessary to have adequate knowledge and skills to affect consumers' attitudes, overcome threats and barriers and provide encouragement by showing benefits.

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Zagrożenia dla rozwoju zrównoważonej konsumpcji postrzegane przez konsumentów

Streszczenie

W artykule przedstawiono zagrożenia z tytułu przyjęcia zrównoważonego modelu konsumpcji w gospodarstwie domowym (z perspektywy konsumentów). Wykorzystano materiały pierwotne pochodzące z badania ankietowego wykonanego techniką bezpośrednich wywiadów osobistych. Wyniki poddano analizie merytorycznej z wykorzystaniem elementów analizy treści rozwiniętej przez Berelsona. Stwierdzono, że konsumenci w swoim otoczeniu obserwują występowanie zagrożeń z tytułu równoważenia konsumpcji. Wśród głównych zagrożeń badani wskazują: wyższe koszty konsumpcji, czasochłonność, konieczności zaangażowania we wdrażanie nowych zasad, kontrolowanie zachowań konsumpcyjnych, większe zaangażowanie konsumentów oraz trudności związane z podjęciem takiego modelu konsumpcji. Wiedza o zagrożeniach związanych z przyjęciem modelu zrównoważonej konsumpcji może być wykorzystywana do przygotowania programów propagujących postawy zrównoważonych konsumentów, upowszechnienia idei. Świadomość równoważenia konsumpcji nie zrodzi się w krótkim czasie. Niezbędne są dalsze badania i analizy w obrębie równoważenia konsumpcji, bowiem dla jej rozbudzenia i umocnienia potrzebna jest wiedza i umiejętności konieczne do kształtowania postaw.

Słowa kluczowe: zrównoważona konsumpcja, równoważenie konsumpcji, zagrożenia, zachowania konsumenckie, rozwój.

Kody JEL: D12, D13, D81, D83, D91, M31

Риски для развития устойчивого потребления, воспринимаемые потребителями

Резюме

В статье представили риски, связанные с принятием устойчивой модели потребления в домохозяйстве (из перспективы потребителей). Использовали

первичные материалы, полученные из опроса, проведенного по методу личных интервью. Результаты подвергли анализу по существу с использованием элементов контент-анализа, развитого Берельсоном. Констатировали, что потребители в своей среде наблюдают выступление рисков, связанных с балансированием потребления. В числе основных рисков обследуемые указывают более высокие издержки потребления, времязатратность, необходимость участия во внедрении новых принципов, контроль за потребительским поведением, большую вовлеченность потребителей, а также трудности, связанные с принятием такой модели потребления. Знания насчет угроз, связанных с принятием модели устойчивого потребления, могут использоваться для подготовки программ, поощряющих отношения, характерные для устойчивых потребителей, распространения идеи и пр. Сознательность придания устойчивого характера потреблению не возникнет в краткие сроки. Необходимы дальнейшее изучение и анализы в сфере балансирования потребления, ибо для его порождения и укрепления нужны знания и умения, необходимые для формирования отношения.

Ключевые слова: устойчивое потребление, балансирование потребления, угрозы, потребительское поведение, развитие.

Коды JEL: D12, D13, D81, D83, D91, M31

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