

CONTEMPORARY CONSUMER TRENDS

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Abstract: The spread of the use of the Internet in economic and social life has undeniably contributed to the development of the digital economy. Thus, it is hard to imagine that it won't affect consumer behavior. The primary purpose of this study is to identify current trends shaping consumer behavior. This goal was achieved primarily through a critical analysis of the literature on the subject and social phenomena. For at least the past several decades, consumerism has been a particularly important phenomenon in developed countries. In opposition to consumerism stands another trend that has been experiencing a worldwide renaissance since the 1960s—that is, minimalism. One of the important trends described in the study is the virtualization of consumption. However, the text also highlights groups of consumers who are much slower to adapt to the use of modern tools, namely the digitally excluded. An attempt was also made to characterize minimalism. Its philosophical origins are indicated, and some contemporary scientific findings are presented, the results of which may have strong relevance to business practice.

Keywords: consumer trends, consumerism, minimalism, virtualization of consumption, digital exclusion.

JEL Classification: D12, E21, O33.

1 Contemporary Consumer Trends

Consumer trends identify the basic assumptions of individual buyers' behavior in the existing environment. For the purposes of this study, a trend is considered to be the existing direction of development in a given area at a given time, or as a monotonic component of the dependence of the studied characteristic on time. According to Vejlgard's concept, a trend is defined as a process of change, presented from a psychological, economic, or sociological perspective (Zalega, 2016). A trend can be short- or long-term, and regional or global in scope. A trend in consumer behavior is thus seen as a specific direction of change in consumer lifestyles, affecting objectively, regardless of the will or consciousness of the subjects. Consumer trends are formed as a result of the impact of various elements of the environment in social, economic, legal, political, technological, or demographic dimensions. They influence consumer behavior, projecting changes in consumption patterns. At the same time, they shape the way businesses and other entities operate.

The basic characteristics of trends can be distinguished as follows (Zalega, 2016):

- volatility,
- mutual overlap (co-occurrence),
- simultaneous appearance of counter-trends (divergence).

The indicated features, as well as the successive emergence of trends that are new or alternative to existing ones, definitely hinder the study and analysis of consumer trends, which are very often carried out by means of deductive reasoning, related to the generalization of observations made.

A special feature of the behavior of modern consumers is a particular form of satisfying their needs, often in the form of excess, which is called consumerism. This idea is particularly close to those who adhere to the cult of possession. It signifies the professed value system, way of life, determination of position in the social structure, and expression of the identity of the modern individual (Dąbrowska, 2015). Consumerism means, according to Fromm, a state of insatiability, as a person is aware that the standard of living obtained is often disproportionately low in relation to that which is possible and noticed in people living at a higher level. Naturally, this urges one to multiply one's efforts, ambitions, and desires in order to achieve the desired state of well-being (Fromm,

1995). The development of consumerism is also occurring because of the change in economic and social conditions accompanying life in the modern world. It has been fostered by inter alia improvements in the economic situation of societies, demographic changes, a wide choice of global goods and services, the free flow of goods, or increased credit for purchases.

In postindustrial societies, writes Szahaj, the paradigm of production is being replaced by the paradigm of consumption, and there is a shift from a manufacturing economy to a service economy. A class of professional service and administrative workers and technocrats is beginning to dominate society. A new, widely accepted “social duty” is being created, which is now not so much work, but rather consumption. At the same time, according to Jean Baudrillard, the prominent French sociologist of culture, it is not so much the consumption of material goods, but above all the signs and messages produced in huge quantities by the modern media (Szachaj, 1996).

Modern consumerism can be presented on the basis of three basic elements (Jasiulewicz, 2015):

- a materialistic approach to life,
- the propensity to consume for show,
- increasing addiction to compulsive buying.

Materialism is a phenomenon associated with focusing human activity on buying. Its success is defined by the items owned. The main criterion for evaluating consumers operating in developed societies is the state of their possessions and the purchases they make (Sobocińska, 2011, p. 14). Consumerist attitudes are characterized by individualistic mercantilism and egocentric hedonism. At the same time, modern consumers relatively often succumb to mass stereotypes and socially justified imitation. In turn, consumerism itself is becoming a civilizational model of how society functions (Gruchola, 2017, p. 43). Symbolic meanings associated with the product have significant influence on this phenomenon. Consumption for show can have positive connotations, reducing, for example, the level of social exclusion, as it allows participation in social life, associated with belonging to a social group, consuming in a certain way.

Compulsive shopping, on the other hand, refers to repetitive purchases that allow the consumer to “unwind” negative events or feelings that are a source of emotions for the consumer, with which the person has problems that impede normal functioning (Jasiulewicz, 2015). Compulsive shopping helps relieve tension caused by bad thoughts or obsession. Such behavior is even considered a disease of civilization—*affluenza*—resulting from the constant search for satisfaction in objects that are unable to provide it (Kacprzak-Choińska, 2007). Symptoms of this disease include nervous tension, haste, feelings of constant weariness or dissatisfaction, as well as a sense of constant lack of something and associated obsessive buying. At the social and economic layer, this results in, inter alia: significant debt in credit institutions, workaholism, deteriorating social relations, and excessive waste production. The negative health effects of this disease, in turn, are allergies, depression, obesity, diabetes, and heart disease.

Consumer trends related to the use of digital technology are very often concerned with the specific phenomenon of the virtualization of consumption. This trend has been gaining momentum recently with the development of the information society and very dynamic technological changes (especially regarding the use of the Internet). Virtualization means the increasing participation of electronic media in meeting human needs (Zalega, 2013). It facilitates the organization of consumers’ lives, reduces constraints on buyers’ mobility, and allows direct access to goods and services. At the same time, the significant spread of virtualization of consumption is becoming a certain limitation for the digitally excluded, who are unable to use Internet access in their daily lives.

The virtualization of consumption is associated with the behavior of modern consumers regarding several specific activities listed as follows, translating into clearly formed identified trends (Zalega, 2016):

- use of social media,
- prosumption,
- the new 24/7 consumer
- crowdsourcing,
- Point & Know/Point & Buy,
- multitasking,
- avatarization of consumption,
- vollaborative consumption,

- smart shopping.

Social media is a group of applications, based on Internet solutions, that allow users to create and share the content they generate. Diverse forms of them are most commonly used, such as blogs and microblogs (Twitter), contact communities (YouTube), social networks (Facebook), virtual games, and virtual social worlds (Second Life). The extraordinary popularity of social media indicates that this trend is very much shaping consumers' lifestyles, as well as their purchasing decisions. Information technologies, used in social media, make it possible to obtain information about products, promote the emergence of new needs, also influencing the change of expectations from products. For some social media users, being present in the virtual world is a more important part of their activities than functioning in the real world, which may seem less attractive than the opportunities available on social media.

Prosumption, understood as the phenomenon of intertwining the processes of consumption and production to the point of blurring the boundaries between them, makes consumers become producers at the same time. By getting involved in the production process, the consumer is able to create a product in line with their own expectations. Prosumption, by changing the perspective of consumers, becoming prosumers, can contribute to effects, both positive and negative. First of all, it allows maximizing satisfaction with the purchased good (co-created by the prosumer) related to the adaptation of the product to individual preferences. The negative phenomenon accompanying prosumption, on the other hand, is the apparent reduction in costs associated with the purchased product. So-called rationalization prosumption generates additional costs associated with the transfer of some of the tasks of the existing producer to the consumer, by intellectual effort or self-improvement of goods.

Consumers using digital technologies increasingly remain active around the clock, using mobile devices primarily in real time. Digital consumers carry out this activity using: *online shopping* (carried out at any time), expecting *instant gratification* (immediate satisfaction of a need or outright ordering of a product), and using *social shopping* (making purchase decisions based on online community feedback).

Crowdsourcing is a form of harnessing the potential of virtual communities based on the so-called *wisdom of the crowd*. It means a method of solving problems, creating things, initiating ideas by using the Internet, communicating with people you probably can't get to know any other way. Crowdsourcing allows multiple people to work together to solicit knowledge, opinions, time, or resources in the creation of ideas related to a common goal. *The wisdom of the crowd* can be used by both consumers and other entities, such as business entities, offices, universities, or non-profit organizations. It is important, however, to ensure that crowdsourcing selects diverse groups, since such groups allow for especially exploitation of innovation potential and foster out-of-the-box thinking (Howe, 2008).

Referred to as Point & Know/Point & Buy, the trend involves consumers searching for information about products based on images and recognizing various objects or sounds. Pioneered by QR (Quick Response) and NFC (Near Field Communication) technologies, it allows processes to be simplified and the time spent on even the simplest tasks to be reduced. It is also related to the constant search for a variety of information, the constant lack of time, the spread of pictorial messages and the significant increase in the popularity of mobile devices.

Multitasking is present in the lives of a significant portion of digital consumers. It applies to a variety of work-related activities, browsing the web, using instant messaging, reading newspapers, or listening to music. These activities, which are very different from each other, can be carried out at the same time. The phenomenon of multitasking is now so widespread that users of electronic devices stop paying attention to it, treating it as a natural state of affairs. Despite the obvious time-saving benefits, however, it should be noted that multitasking contributes to less focus on the activities at hand, with negative consequences for the quality of work performed and a reduced level of assimilation of the messages received.

Avatarization of consumption involves creating a second optional entity corresponding to the real consumer. The second self allows alternative activities to be conducted in the virtual world. Avatarization al-

lows you to function in virtual reality (on online forums or topic portals) or in cyberspace (online games, activity simulators).

Collaborative consumption, also known as the sharing economy, involves borrowing, renting, barter agreements, or exchanging goods. It refers to the concept of sharing, focusing on the function of a product, and getting the most benefit from it without becoming the owner of that product. The prevalence of this trend is somewhat undermined by the pervasive phenomenon of consumerism, which affects all the activities of modern societies, not just in the digital environment. Collaborative consumption has evolved in recent years from a common phenomenon in many families and neighborhood groups of sharing possessions and helping each other out, to a communitywide idea involving, for example, goods, transportation, food, a place to live, and even money. It saves money, space, and time, expands the circle of friends, strengthens social ties, reduces environmental degradation through waste generated, and reduces overproduction and overconsumption through more efficient use of resources.

Smart shopping is understood as the consumer's search for the best deal on the market, within the parameters they specify regarding selected product attributes, for example, price, value, and company reputation. Smart shopping is related to consumers' market knowledge, their behavior related to obtaining information on price bargains, and the effects of using sales promotions. Smart shopping involves getting information about promotions, comparing product prices, snapping up bargains, and saving money. To achieve this, however, it is essential that consumers invest their own time. They can be seen as a form of rationalizing purchasing decisions, although there are times when the purchases consumers make have the hallmarks of more emotional actions, prompting them to buy lower-quality products or those they need less.

2 Consumer Trends in the Digital World

The trends presented in the previous chapter describe the behavior of today's consumers in a general way. In the relatively short term, we can expect the strengthening of existing trends and the formation

of several hitherto little-noticed ones. Admittedly, a few of them (e.g., prosumption, collaborative consumption) are not exclusively about consumer activity in the virtual world, but the vast majority of them connect directly to the use of digital technologies. It is therefore possible to refine the uses of digital technologies in the form of consumer trends identified in Ericsson's ConsumerLab report. They concern the following phenomena (Dejnaka, 2017):

- online consumers,
- video as a medium,
- use of artificial intelligence,
- consumer 4.0,
- smart and simple technology,
- personalized transportation services,
- reporting disasters and hazards,
- internal sensors,
- data protection,
- accessibility to information.

As mentioned earlier, these phenomena are primarily focused on the intensive use of digital technologies. Online consumers are becoming even more active users of *online* (Ericsson ConsumerLab, 2015) services because of them. Activities of an inclusive nature can also be observed for new groups of consumers regarding these services, although digital exclusion remains a significant problem, primarily affecting the elderly.

Among younger people, the use of video content, considered as a contemporary medium, is particularly intense. This is primarily in the passive form, related to the reception of this content, mainly using streaming platforms and social media (e.g., YouTube). However, it should be noted that a growing group of consumers are also becoming active participants in online platforms that publish video content. This is especially true of social media activity.

The use of artificial intelligence has seemed for years to be a very intriguing prospect regarding new technologies. It raises both hopes and concerns, which are likely to become more pronounced in the coming years. As the closest real, reasonably widespread consumer application seems to be the use of artificial intelligence enabling interaction with devices replacing the now extremely common smartphones.

Increasingly aware of their needs, the modern consumer 4.0, like the earlier generation of the consumer

3.0, makes very heavy use of virtual technologies in real life. However, they do so by paying particular attention to the convenience of the activities performed, including shopping, focusing on the speed of shopping, and the availability of products.

The application of smart home concepts, despite some limitations, is becoming an increasingly attractive prospect in the eyes of today's consumers. Tailored to the needs of residents, the houses are able to not only control the installations but also detect possible installation malfunctions or leakage problems.

Personalized transportation services enable smart travel. Today's consumers want to spend time in transportation actively, not passively. Of particular interest among consumers is the use of personalized services in transportation modes that are available *online*.

Very useful in the view of consumers are chat rooms and other forms of communication to keep in touch with emergency services. A particular application here can be found for applications that provide information about impending threats and disasters. In the case of Poland, the simplest form of such communication, which of course requires some improvements, is the Government Centre for Security (GCS, pol. RCB) Alert, a system for SMS notification of threats to the population.

Consumers also expect to be able to use the gains of today's digital technology to improve sensory perception and cognitive abilities (concerning, e.g., memory, orientation in space). Internal sensors used for this purpose may also make it possible in the future to measure well-being or various forms of activity.

A serious threat affecting consumers actively using the network is the exposure of computers and smartphones to the risk of personal data breaches and unauthorized access to digitally stored resources. Despite the increasingly sophisticated consumer protection tools being used, negative privacy violations continue to occur. The weakest link in this process remains the consumer, most often unaware of the risks around them.

Consumers, as hinted at earlier, are also increasingly becoming prosumers who share the information in their possession in the reasonable hope that they are

thus able to influence the behavior of other participants in the virtual world. They mostly use social media for this purpose. What is taking place here is a process of spreading activities previously reserved for journalists to other groups of Internet users.

The trends outlined previously apply to the current reality in which consumers operate, most often with digital technologies. As a kind of supplement, presenting the likely development of expectations of the next generation of consumers, living in symbiosis with modern solutions, one can present the trends identified in the latest Ericsson ConsumerLab report (Ericsson ConsumerLab, 2021). Under the slogan *Square of all spaces*, the development of trends toward the following phenomena was identified, bringing together various consumer activities into one:

- a universal arena, allowing interactive participation in activities, both as a creator and as a spectator;
- an immersive beauty salon that allows you to use technology to digitally enhance your appearance;
- customized tailoring services using augmented or virtual reality (AR/VR);
- swimming with oxygenated VR goggles to eliminate gravity;
- a hybrid gym, enabling a combination of physical and mental experiences;
- responsible shopping, related to the production and purchase of products in line with individual consumer expectations;
- virtual restaurants, allowing you to have a culinary experience with friends around the world;
- an endless store that gives you the opportunity to try out new products at home, using AR/VR technology;
- diagnosis of health status using artificial intelligence tools; and
- virtual contact with nature, allowing interaction with animals (including extinct ones).

The indicated solutions, which are part of future trends, may in some cases seem like a certain futurology. However, as humanity's past experience indicates, relatively often the expectations and desires, especially of the more innovative part of the population, are at least partially realized. Particular importance should be given here to the process, inherent

in the idea of marketing, of market players adapting to the expectations of buyers.

3 Consumer Trends and Digital Exclusion

The activity of consumers in the broader digital economy depends to a large extent on the efficiency of their use of digital technologies. A significant portion of the population may have limited access to these technologies, being effectively digitally excluded, which can noticeably affect consumer behavior regarding a significant segment of the population. Digital exclusion is treated as a specific element of social exclusion, denoting a situation of limited access of certain groups or individuals to rights, resources, and opportunities available to other groups or individuals, living in a given area (Widawska, Wysocka and Wieczorek, 2014). Digital exclusion is also defined as the phenomenon of social inequality, between individuals, households, businesses, and regions in the level of socioeconomic development, related to access to, as well as use of information and communication technologies in all spheres of economic activity.

Digital exclusion, sometimes referred to as the *digital divide* thus defines the situation of the existence of a difference between individuals or social groups with and without access to modern information technologies (Chang, al., 2004, Widawska, Wysocka and Wieczorek, 2014). The use of these technologies is one measure of social differentiation, which in itself is a natural state; however, significant levels of stratification can contribute to social exclusion. Their inaccessibility also prevents digitally excluded consumers from adapting to innovative trends. However, it should be borne in mind that the problem of digital exclusion not only concerns factors relevant to the use of modern technologies but also differences that lead to social exclusion. Of course, skills and ways of use are important, since not every way of using the Internet brings positive consequences and increases an individual's opportunities in social life (Batorski, 2009).

Barriers can be distinguished, forming four basic levels of digital exclusion related to access to new media (van Dijk, 2010):

- physical access (having a computer, access to the Internet),
- skills (strategic, information, operational),
- use (different ways of using).

A particularly important area that requires in-depth research related to the needs analysis of the use of new technologies is the first of the levels indicated, that is, motivations for using innovative technologies. The motivational level determines the taking of viable physical accessibility measures. Mental barriers such as lack of need, time, or interest are cited as the most important reasons for not using computers and the Internet, with less importance given to other factors such as lack of skills, excessive cost of equipment and access, and rejection due to the dangers of the Internet (Wolf, 2014; GUS, 2019). Among those who do not use the Internet as a reason that is not explicitly expressed, there may also be technophobia, the fear of using modern information and communication technologies, and the belief that it has at best a neutral impact on both personal and professional life. It is also important that negative motivations remain (albeit with less intensity) in the minds of those potentially excluded, despite subsequent experiences with computers and the Internet. These phenomena, primarily affect the elderly and those with lower levels of education. Digital exclusion minimally affects women more, although it should be emphasized that the digital gap between the sexes is gradually narrowing, and, moreover, the use of digital technologies can contribute to equalizing the social positions of men and women (GUS, 2019).

The second level that defines digital exclusion is the barrier associated with physical access to computers and the Internet. Attention should be paid here to access in the household and in public places and at work. From the point of view of limitations related to Internet use, safe access at the place of residence is key, especially important for those who have overcome mental barriers related to Internet use. A factor that affects physical access to the Internet is the reduction in the cost of purchasing information technology (IT) hardware, software, and Internet access that has occurred with technological changes. Also important is the variation in physical access observed both at the level of individuals and social groups by socio-

- motivations for using new technologies,

demographic characteristics, such as age, gender, education level, or occupational status. Even at this level, differences related to physical access conditioned by the level of digital skills and the actions of state institutions are also highlighted. In comparative studies determining the level of digital exclusion nationally and internationally, it is the level related to physical access to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) devices that is most often used. The physical inaccessibility of computer equipment or the Internet is the most obvious aspect of digital exclusion, which affects the ability to shape certain consumer trends that take digitization into account.

Another barrier associated with the third of the levels of digital exclusion mentioned is the ability to use modern technologies. Qualifications in this area relate to the basic operational activities involved in working with computer equipment. With increasing digital competence comes the ability to use it to search, select, and process information online. The highest level of digital skills is strategic. Their mastery is related to knowledge of how to use computer equipment combined with subject-matter knowledge of the field. Efficient use of strategic skills is an important element in reducing the scope of digital exclusion, in specific areas of economic and social life.

The last level of digital exclusion concerns usable access to websites, taking into account the variety and frequency of use. The following factors are relevant in this context:

- time and frequency of use,
- the number and variety of utility applications,
- using broadband or narrowband Internet connections,
- more or less active or creative use.

The aspects of usable access outlined are largely a consequence of breaking down barriers at the first three levels (but primarily involve the use of digital skills) and are meant to summarize various aspects of digital exclusion. Consumers with physical access to resources and the right digital skills are in the best position to shape modern trends, while becoming the people who are affected by them in their daily lives to a special degree. At the same time, it is difficult to imagine that people who are negative toward

modern technologies will participate in trends that refer to the digital economy.

In connection with the indicated levels of digital exclusion, it is possible to identify categories of resources that are essential for the use of new digital technologies. These can include physical, digital, human, and social resources (Warschauer, 2003). Physical resources are understood as basic access to computers and connections to the Internet. Digital resources refer to digital materials available on the World Wide Web. The next category, human resources, focuses on education and training, with special attention paid to the skills needed to work with computers and use the Internet. And the last category, social resources, is related to the social and institutional structures that support access to modern information and communication technologies.

In the literature, one can also encounter another view of digital exclusion as a negative social phenomenon indicating that it is conditioned by two basic groups of factors: technological (so-called *hard*) and individual (so-called *soft*) (Widawska, Wysocka and Wieczorek, 2014). Technological factors are due to the rapid development of IT, as well as the limited availability of infrastructure, computer hardware, and relevant software. The risk of impeded access to IT particularly affects residents of small towns and rural areas, for example. Owing to higher population densities in large and major cities, most IT investments are concentrated in their area, with an obvious relative underinvestment in other areas. Individual factors, on the other hand, are related to a whole group of barriers that make it difficult and sometimes even impossible to use digital technologies. They are very diverse in nature, focusing primarily on areas of awareness, mentality, competence, and motivation, as well as addressing the natural barriers and limitations to accessing digital information that are associated with disability.

A consequence of digital exclusion is lack of or unequal access to information. Thus, digital exclusion can be viewed as information exclusion, which determines the satisfaction of consumer needs in the manner most convenient for them, most often bypassing the digital environment. In modern societies, where access to information can be a key determinant of so-

cial standing, this aspect can become an important element of social exclusion. In this regard, it is also important to point out the social inequalities that contribute to unequal access to digital technologies. There are two basic groups of inequalities contributing to digital exclusion: individual and positional. The incidence of individual inequality is related to age, gender, ethnicity, intelligence, personality, health, and disability. In turn, the following are usually identified as positional social inequalities: position held, job held, level of education, role in the household, wealth of the country, and region of residence. All of the aforementioned factors result in unequal access to new media. When analyzing the factors indicated, it is also important to keep in mind the rapid pace of the successive changes regarding technological development. Thus, active users of new technologies are expected to constantly improve their competence. Without this, digitally excluded people should be treated as excluded from digital consumer trends as well. Most likely, their consumer activity will focus on the “traditional” form of it, concerning primarily: consumerism, privatization of consumption, and deconsumption (Bywalec, 2010). The phenomenon of digital exclusion in the context of contemporary consumer trends should therefore be considered as a particular constraint on the dynamic growth of digital buyer activity observed so far. Without taking inclusive measures, especially with regard to the elderly, less educated and those from smaller towns, a possible scenario will be a slowdown in the development of the processes of digitalization of social life observed so far. Another, probably more realistic scenario, however, will be the further spread of the digital economy, but with a group of consumers who are unable to take full advantage of the conveniences of a digital presence.

4 Minimalism – In Opposition to Consumerism

Parallel to the extremely strong trend of consumerism, another trend—minimalism—has been experiencing a renaissance since the second half of the 20th century. It has developed as a kind of opposition to popularized attitudes, guided by which many people do things they don’t want to do, to buy things they don’t

need, with money they don’t have, wanting to impress others they don’t even like.

The very idea of minimalism is, of course, not new. Its origins lie in antiquity, in the thoughts preached by the Stoics. They taught that happiness can be found in moderation, simplicity, getting rid of unnecessary needs, and the ability to appreciate what one has and what a person encounters. Zenon of Kition, Seneca, Epictetus, and Marcus Aurelius all encouraged people not to become attached to the things they own, to use them according to their own real needs, not to become attached to them, since the accumulation of possessions for their own sake deprives a person of happiness. One modern philosopher referred to by modern minimalists is Henry D. Thoreau. In his book most often cited by minimalists, titled *Walden*, he questions the compulsion to own material things, attach oneself to wealth, and pursue honor and career, instead showing how one can achieve peace and happiness by observing nature and oneself (Thoreau, 2017).

In the 1960s, especially in the United States, minimalism emerged as a visual art form that strongly influenced architecture, furniture design, and corporate advertising (Pracejus, Olsen and O’Guinn 2006). Today, many emerging brands such as Acne Studios, Muji, and Patagonia are actively promoting minimalist esthetics and values, offering a smaller selection of monochromatic items, and encouraging consumers to buy less (Wilson and Bellezza, 2022).

Despite the fact that minimalism is an increasingly significant consumer trend, there are few academic studies focused on the subject. One of the few is the work of Wilson and Bellezza (2022), in which the authors take an in-depth look at this topic. They identified three key dimensions of consumer minimalism (number of things, rare esthetics, and consciously controlled consumption) and created a 12-item scale (four items per dimension) to measure the extent to which consumer minimalism represents value to consumers. They show that minimalism is the very value that companies can now deliver to the customer. Minimalist consumers are becoming an important customer market, and offering products in line with this trend is becoming a competitive advantage.

Pangarkar et al. (2021) define four basic types of minimalist consumers. They include people:

- Voluntarily choosing simplicity. The basic premise of voluntary simplicity is that by focusing less attention on the accumulation and acquisition of material goods, consumers can redirect their finances, attention, and energy toward life pursuits that are more meaningful to them and provide satisfaction and happiness. Voluntary simplicity is a philosophy that many consumers have adopted over the past few years.
- Consciously reducing consumption. Reduced consumption means engaging in less consumption than before, based on economic constraints, or practicing austerity in an individual's life. Reduced consumption is characterized by consumption motivated by necessity and utility, which trigger a deliberate orientation of avoiding the acquisition of new goods.
- An anticonsumerist mindset. Such attitudes tend to have a strongly ideological basis, flowing from proenvironmental and prosocial beliefs. The normative and social norms adopted by consumers lead them to adopt an anticonsumerist attitude.
- Being "inconspicuous minimalists." Such consumers adhere just as strongly as anticonsumerists to normative standards, but the key difference is that instead of boycotting products, they desire goods on the grounds that they have minimalist characteristics. Consumers of inconspicuous minimalism usually belong to the upper classes, are well educated and have a stable job. So such consumers tend to be more ecologically focused, practice sustainability, and focus on waste reduction. These attitudes usually result from normative influences and the influence of social environments. In fact, such consumers may be willing to pay more for products that signal minimalism because of the distinctiveness and differentiation associated with such products, as well as compliance with sustainability initiatives.

This attempt to segment minimalist consumers will allow companies to differentiate their marketing offerings and develop appropriately profiled strategies. Pangarkar et al. (2021) identified four different strategies that managers can use to better influence the minimalist consumer market. These strategies address (1) the personal, (2) social, (3) organizational, and (4) global dimensions of audience engagement.

The theme of minimalism in this study, due to its limited framework, can be concluded by recalling the research conducted by Lee and Ahn (2016). These authors proceeded from the premise that it has been shown that materialism (consumerism) is negatively related to human well-being. Thus, they investigated and showed that anticonsumerism (minimalism) has a positive impact on consumer well-being. They did so by identifying four values that flow from anticonsumerism: maintaining control over consumption, focusing on macro issues (sustainability, social well-being), desiring fewer material possessions, and defining a sense of happiness using internal indicators (personal development, friendship, self-actualization) rather than external predictors (financial success, approval from others).

5 Summary

The literature studies conducted in this text on contemporary consumer trends allow us to identify the most important current trends shaping consumer behavior. It should be emphasized that the consumer of the 21st century is characterized by common features linking them to previous generations, as well as unique characteristics that clearly emphasize their distinctiveness.

The prevailing commonality is consumerism, an idea characteristic of developed capitalist (as well as developing) economies. The modern consumer functioning in the digital environment through consumption and the accompanying way of life emphasizes their social position and expresses the identity of the modern individual.

The distinguishing feature of the modern consumer, however, is the new consumer trends that have formed with the digitization of many aspects of consumer life. The largest part of this study is devoted to them. The virtualization of consumption as an overarching trend also determines other digital consumer activities focusing on, *inter alia*: social media use, prosumption, multitasking or constant access to the web. It also identified detailing phenomena, some of which are only just gaining importance among consumers, such as the use of artificial intelligence, disaster and hazard information, the hybrid powerhouse,

or virtual contact with nature. The article also highlights groups of consumers who are much slower to adapt to the use of modern tools, that is, the digitally excluded, primarily the elderly, those with lower levels of education, and those from smaller towns. Using the phenomenon of digital exclusion as an example, threats to the development of digital consumer trends to date are also presented.

A brief description of minimalism is presented, as an opposition to the prevailing trend, which is consumerism. It was noted that by recognizing the non-heterogeneous group of minimalist consumers and properly tailoring their marketing strategy to them, companies can gain a competitive advantage.

This text is an overview, and its main contribution to science may be an attempt to spread awareness of the existence of contemporary consumer trends, those referring to consumerism in the digital world and its somewhat opposite—minimalism. The relevance for business practitioners is fundamental. Although we do not give a clear indication of which trend will prevail in the future, leaving this to the judgment of the stakeholders themselves, knowledge of contemporary consumer trends is a daily necessity in the work of every manager.

Future research on market trends could be based on at least an attempt to estimate the likelihood of the development of the minimalist trend and the slow shift away from consumerism. Such an observation can be crucial for many companies, in almost every aspect of their operations.

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