

# New Approaches to Assessing Consumer Preferences

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The theory of postmodern society considers consumer preferences in the context of a broader social field that goes beyond economic interests. This study proposes an expansion of existing approaches to the study these consumer practices through an interdisciplinary approach that takes into account all emerging aspects of consumer behaviour in the new social reality. The aim of this research is to first to determine the characteristics of consumer preferences in a postmodern society, and to then identify new opportunities that open sociological methods in the understanding, description and interpretation of new consumer practices. Of particular scientific interest in this regard is the problematic emergence of imitation models of consumerism, which are symbolic representations of a form of self-expression, self-identification and self-knowledge rather than a type of economic activity. Within the formation of a new social reality, these aspects of the current study are of interest not only for consumer sociology, but also for marketing and advertising ventures. The research methodology is based on the works of J. Baudriar, J. Deleuze and F. Guattari, T. Veblen, D. Graaf and other theorists of postmodern society. Theoretical propositions and empirical results were obtained during the pilot study of consumer preferences using qualitative and quantitative methods. These results and their subsequent analysis confirmed the necessity to consider new social practices and to find new and valid methods for their explanation which arise from the postmodern theory.

**Key words:** *Consumer Preferences, Interdisciplinary Approach, Postmodern Society, New Consumer Practices, Consumer Society, Satisfaction of Desires, Joint Consumption, Foxumerism.*

## Introduction

The study of consumer preferences is an important subject of marketing research and a reliable tool for studying the demand and choice of goods by the target audience, as well as other features of consumer behaviour.

Various models were employed in the analysis of consumer preferences, including the Rosenberg model regarding “product-market,” “ideal point,” and “construction of consumer profiles.” The assessment of consumer demand and preferences is based on various theoretical assumptions, including the theory of motivation (A. Maslow), the theory of marginal utility (U. Dzhevanue, L. Walras, etc.) and the theory of rational consumption (V. Mayer, V. Nemchinov, et al.; Aleshina, 2006; Smorkalova, 2011).

The term “consumer preferences” is primarily used and accepted in applied marketing research, though from the point of view of scientific knowledge this term is lacking in both meaning and clarity. Its features, structure, types, forms, mechanisms of formation and manifestation are not yet clearly defined and yet remain rooted in existing scientific paradigms of knowledge. Within the study of consumer preferences, significant research has been conducted by marketers such as Alan R. Andreasen, Carolyn L. Costley and Merrie Brucks, Lori Simon-Rusinowitz and Kevin J. Mahoney. Sociologists and economists have also contributed to this literature, including T. L. Kastens, B. Goodwin and Andrew Lyon. An important contribution to the study of consumer preferences was made by psychologists who attempted to identify stable patterns of development within consumer preferences and detect such patterns through examinations of the subconscious individual. Among these specialists were Samuel Cameron; Susan Powell Manteland; Frank R. Kardes; S. Kemp; F. Bolle; George Loewensteyn; Slovic Paul; G. Baxter; I. R. Elliot; R. Mason; W. Haines; Marina Bianchi, and T. Ogaard.

The study of consumer preferences is an interdisciplinary matter with far-reaching effects, and is thus widely researched by marketers, economists, psychologists and sociologists using both quantitative and qualitative analysis methods. Such experts revealed many interesting and important features of the formation and manifestation of consumer preferences, allowing for qualitative and comprehensive approaches to various studies. Such studies also developed a reliable theoretical apparatus, a system of operational terms and definitions, indicators of consumer preferences, and the identification and evaluation of causal factors. Consumer preferences are considered within the framework of these approaches mainly in relation to the terms and concepts of the “rational consumer,” the “product,” an “elasticity of supply and demand,” a “hierarchy of needs,” a “matrix of needs,” proposed “marginal utility,” and other categories of classical economic theory of the “competitive market.” Even within the study of psychological factors, which are both rational and irrational in nature, existing studies on

consumer behaviours are largely limited to the boundaries of economic relations. Psychological factors, which are of particular interest in the subject of consumer behaviour, do not extend much to the wider social context and rather cover factors like “awareness of needs,” “determination of the list of goods to meet certain needs,” “comparative characteristics of goods,” “conscious choice and purchase of goods,” and “assessment of the degree of satisfaction of needs.” These methods of assessing consumer preferences are considered in the framework of a pre-established production business and are primarily aimed at reducing uncertainty and risks of entrepreneurial activity to meet demands. Identification of the structure of the solution, based on the norms of consumer behaviour by many divisions of the “numerical utility” of the goods, allows for the reduction of risks associated with its supply. These models have limited fields of application, however, and struggle to explain many aspects of modern consumer behaviour in which consumption is transforming into a more symbolic and iconic social value. Postmodern society involves closely intertwined features of traditional and modern society but is subject to very different laws and norms of consumption and social behaviour. Consumer preferences are no longer considered in terms of likes or dislikes when choosing specific consumable goods, and an ever-widening gap exists between the act of consumption and material goods. Consumer choice is no longer guided by the attainment of benefits from available opportunities, as interpreted by the economic model of consumer behaviour that functions within a modern society. This model of explanation is characteristic of the traditional approach which focuses on needs and measures satisfaction in terms of utility. Individual preferences here are associated with budget constraints, which has already ceased to satisfy the analysis of consumer behaviour in the new social reality of postmodern society.

### ***Importance of the problem***

The specific research problem is the lack of a clear conceptual, operational and empirical approach to the study of consumer preferences in the context of a new theoretical view of a postmodern economy and society. In the new conditions of social transit from the “society of mass consumption” to the “society of individualised consumption,” the study of consumer preferences are of particular relevance. Within the framework of postmodern theory, special attention is paid to consumption as a driving force for economic development and legitimisation of the existing order. Nevertheless, this crucial aspect of the rapidly developing postmodern and emerging post-postmodern world has not yet generated sufficient understanding or empirical interpretation.

Issues in the study of consumer preferences are also due to “consumer society” being closely intertwined with problems of socialisation and identification. For this reason, it is also a key problem in the formation of personality and identity for individuals in the postmodern world. The purpose of this study is to therefore determine the possibilities of a new approach to the

study of consumer preferences in terms of postmodern theory and the “consumer society” in the formation of a new type of consumer. Consumer preferences in classical theory were contextualised by their orientation to meet consumption needs and considered resource constraints and rational usefulness of goods and services; the theory of postmodern consumer preferences, however, must acquire a different nature, meaning and content to clearly explain the changing mechanisms and features of consumer preferences in the new social reality.

### ***Description of the development and study of the problem***

Issues of consumption and consumer preferences in postmodern society have undergone significant changes. One of the first researchers to pay attention to this trend and to conceptually interpret these changes was J. Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 2007; Baudrillard, 2006; Baudrillard and Seduction, 2000). Baudrillard takes the previous era’s type of consumption, which was associated with the satisfaction of society members’ needs and requirements, beyond this framework into what he exclusively considers a symbolic consumption. This symbolic, or sign, consumption becomes a kind of communicative code between individuals and applies not only to things, goods and services, but also to the larger environment, images, events and phenomena created by mass communications and society’s social relations. The core of Baudrillard's concept is the theory of symbolic exchange, which he sees as a fundamental concept of postmodern consumer society.

Symbolic exchange differs fundamentally from economic exchange in that needs are no longer linked to commodities. In a postmodern society, people don’t simply buy what they need. The process of consumption is increasingly acting as an form of coercion, with the satisfaction of material needs being the main productive forces of society. Products begin to lose their utility function and use value transforms into symbolic value, which becomes a marker of belonging to a certain group. The product does not serve to satisfy a customer’s needs, but rather performs the function of their symbolisation and representation. This symbolic and iconic nature of consumption leads to the attainment of prestige, status and self-esteem. Once detached from specific objects, the phenomena that signs or images originally represented and symbolised become simulacra, acquiring autonomous meaning and ceasing to correspond to the original signifier to reality. Simulacra are widely used in the communicative processes of modern society and are an important basis for the formation of consumer preferences. Mass media, as Baudriard emphasised, are the main space in which simulacra functions, the main features of which are temptation, ecstasy, the redundancy of the aesthetic, and “transposition” (Baudrillard and Seduction, 2000). In general, “transposition” refers the abolition of oppositions, such as male to female, beautiful to ugly, good to evil or human to inhuman. This concept is an important feature of postmodern society and heavily influences the nature of consumer preferences. J. Baudriard refers to the current situation dominated by simulacra as h”yperreality,” which is extremely difficult to describe with

traditionally accepted and rational scientific tools. Gilles Deleuze's works played an important role in studying the features of simulacra as a concept that satisfies the needs of the subject in the postmodern society (Deleuze and Guattari, 2010; Golestani and Fallah, 2019; Kalogeropoulos et al., 2019; Sepehri and Sheikhalizadeh, 2019). Two new types of consumption is described by de Graaf (2003) and Veblen (2006). The first considers such consumption in terms of consumerism, which refers to the unrestrained acquisition of goods that are unnecessary and unrelated to human needs. The second explores this phenomenon as "consumption for show," and is focused on the leisure class, which becomes a welcome social layer in the search for identity. The concept of "glamour" as a phenomenon that determines many aspects of consumption in modern society has been studied through the works of M. Rousseau, L. Rudova and D. Rudneva (Russo, n.d; Rudova, 2009; Rudneva, 2010). The symbolic nature of consumer preferences was also interpreted by Klein (2003). The increasing value of consumption of intellectual property as a capital of attention in the modern information society is posited by the works of E. Dyson (Dyson, 1997; Ahmadi and Movahed, 2019), in which many aspects of modern consumer preferences are presented and formulated via his theory of intellectual property.

In his theory of "society of the spectacle," Deborue (2000) noted that in the postmodern era, the artificial world of images that forms the mass media separates the individual from reality. Deborue suggests that "the more he [the individual] contemplates, the less he lives, the more he agrees to recognise himself in the dominant images of needs, and the less he understands his own existence and desire."

Many problems of consumption transformation from material practice into social and cultural activity in the postmodern era are reflected in the works of Z. Bauman, P. Sloterdake, E. Giddens and W. Hanners (Giddens, 1990; Hannerz, 1996; Bauman, 2002; Sloterdijk, 2009; Sloterdijk Spheres, 2007). Consumerism acquires a dominant status in the new reality and, along with the philosophy of postmodernism, significantly affects society members' values and behaviours. This is a key influencing factor on the processes of socialisation and identification of the individual, as well as on the legitimisation of the existing order. The shift from "material values" to "post-material values" is noted in the works of R. Inglehart, who notes that self-expression and quality of life begin to take precedence over material consumption (Inglehart, 1997). Inglehart justifies the position that post-modernisation is a shift in survival strategies by changing lifestyles, the importance of which is no longer given to the satisfaction of primary basic needs but rather to the minimisation of ever-increasing psychological stress. This has a significant impact on consumer behaviour in the post-industrial period of economic development.

Postmodern society connects culture with commerce and consumption and can liberate an individual's drives and desires. An important goal of consumption is the attainment of

pleasure and the satisfaction of desire. F. Jameson considers postmodernism as a new logic of culture generated by late capitalism which is based on fragmentation of the social environment and of the individual as he or she loses integrity. In place of deep feelings comes constant excitement, which is expressed in the pursuit of pleasure and entertainment, in the constant desire for something new, and in the search of fresh information (Jamison, n.d). The main factor of this kind of consumption is desire as an element of postmodern life. The model of consumption is reduced to the realisation of two basic desires: the desire of reality and the desire of uniqueness. Such desires are constructed by the personality and exist in the personal space in the form of dreams, fantasies, illusions and other psychological manifestations. In contrast to functional needs which can be satisfied and completed, this realisation of desire can last for a long period of time.

A number of contemporary authors, including D. Brooks, S. Rice, R. Botsam and B. Rogers, note the symbiosis of the prevailing modern model of consumption and the new symbolic nature of consumer behaviour as “foxumerism.” This term refers to an individual’s craving for shopping and his or her enjoyment in browsing, choosing and discussing products, though without making an actual purchase. In the development of factionalism there is a clear predominance in the importance of the spiritual over the material, referring to the symbolic nature of consumption and the importance of knowledge, including self-knowledge. “Joint consumption” is a result of changes in consciousness and personal values, which leads to the development of digital technologies and models of joint behaviour based on trust and development of public communications. In this model, R. Botsam and B. Rogers propose an innovative system that allows society to abandon the outdated model of hyper-consumption (Botsam and Rogers, 2011). Among Russian scientists, an important place is given to the consideration and critical analysis of existing scientific discourses related to the conceptualisation of consumer behaviour in the postmodern and digital economy, as well as to the study of consumption ideology in modern society (Aleshina, 2006; Afanasievsky and Krasnov, 1995; Lipsits, 2012; Smorkalova, 2011; Kopackova and Libalova, 2019).

### ***Hypotheses and their compliance with the study design***

This study aims to empirically test the hypotheses arising from the above conceptual approach to the study of consumer preferences in postmodern conditions. The main hypothesis concerns changes in the structure of preferences in the new postmodern social reality. The current research hypotheses are connected with the idea that in modern Russian society, the model of consumer preferences is less concerned with the theory of rational consumer choice. Components of this theory include the totality of consumer goods, the desire to maximise benefits when buying a product and to minimise risks when purchasing and using it. Such consumer preferences are diminishing in the current era in place of the aforementioned symbolic and desire-driven consumption ideals. The importance of factors

like pleasure, realisation of desires, feeling a new reality, self-realisation, self-identity and self-determination is thereby increasing and forming a new version of consumer behaviour. This transformation of consumer preference models is resultant of cultural shifts occurring in society, as well as the formation of new consumer practices associated with shopping, joint consumption and consumerism.

Testing of these hypotheses determined the design of the study, which employed quantitative and qualitative methods of sociological research. These methods involved data collection formats of mass surveys, focus groups, expert assessments and in-depth interviews. Quantitative methods allowed the research to identify the prevalence of relevant practices of consumer behaviour and the different elements of consumer preferences. Qualitative methods revealed the existing mechanisms of manifestation and actualisation of emotions, moods, ideas and desires in consumer preferences that appeared in various consumer practices.

## **Methods**

To confirm the hypotheses, a conceptual and operational interpretation of the main variables was conducted that aimed to capture key features of consumer preferences in postmodern society. The new reality, representing the field of realisation of consumer preferences, was considered in the broadest semantic context. This context can be characterised by transcending the purely economic sphere of human activity and affecting all social and socio-cultural aspects of society as well as encompassing all of cyberspace and virtual reality. In addition to the objective reality, which stands in opposition to man, this new reality of consumer behaviour includes all subjective human aspects of life: values, meanings, sensory images, desires, fantasies, dreams, representations and mental characteristics. The classification of the elements of the new postmodern reality was determined according to the feelings and emotional states of man, self-awareness of status, group membership and individual place in the world. Consumer preferences in the new reality were defined through such concepts as “desire for reality” and “desire for uniqueness,” which are the central factors that determine a consumer’s final choice. The signs and variables of the “desire for reality” were those positive feelings that a person experiences in the process of consumer practice, including joy, delight, satisfaction, self-esteem, success, respect and recognition from the reference group. The “desire for uniqueness” refer to individuals striving to find their style and be different from the “other.” This encompasses an individual’s need to stand out from the mass, to determine identity and destiny and to choose the necessary strategy for success in life. The key indicators of postmodern consumer preferences were therefore defined as a person’s semantic symbolic values and were contained in different models of consumer behaviour.

The empirical aspects of this study was based on quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The study was conducted from 2018-2019 as part of the work on an internal research project implemented under the grant of the RGSU, which related to the study of consumer preferences of the population. A sociological survey was conducted among students, staff and teachers of Moscow Universities in May of 2018. The selection of respondents was performed by sending an e-mail invitation to all employees and students of the RSSU to participate in the survey, which included a link to the online questionnaire as well as a message to encourage friends to participate. The sample was therefore largely spontaneous and the survey was conducted by self-completion of the online questionnaire. A total of 443 respondents were interviewed through the survey, among whom were individuals with fairly high levels of education and respondents under the age of 45 years. Despite the sample's insufficient representation of the urban population as a whole, the surveyed target group was of no less interest for the purposes of this study as it was predominantly characterised by modern trends and phenomena associated with new consumer practices. The study was generally aerobic and exploratory in nature, and touched upon a range of issues of consumer behaviour, psychographic self-portrait and social portrait factors of respondents. Throughout the survey concerning different aspects of consumer behaviour and related consumer preferences, there were questions related to the identification of symbolic meanings and subjective meanings that are generally seen in the social practice of consumption. Great importance was also given to identifying the features of the respondents' subjective world, their self-identification and socialisation, which directly correspond to consumer practices in the consumer society.

Qualitative aspects of consumer preferences were identified through focus groups and in-depth interviews. The analysis and interpretation of these results revealed features of consumer preferences which were symbolic in nature and associated with the concepts of self-assertion and self-realisation.

Since the research project was largely pilot in nature, there were four focus groups and five informal interviews on the issues discussed. The interviewees were young Muscovites currently studying at the University. A certain set of codes constructed by researchers was used as the categorical apparatus for the discussion interpretation, fixing the significance for respondents of symbolic consumption. A number of projective questions were also intended to identify priorities in the elemental structure of symbolic or material consumption, pleasure and self-affirmation over elements of beneficial or real consumer goods. Analytical transcript techniques and narrative and discursive analysis were used to interpret the results of focus groups and non-formalised interviews. The novelty of the qualitative research was determined by the subject and purpose of this analysis to detect elements of symbolic consumption in the formation of consumer preferences, as well as to better understand the mechanism of its functioning in postmodern society.

## Results

The sociological survey data revealed that the 36% of respondents found the symbolic value of goods reflected in the brand and company reputation was a more significant choice factor than price, functional benefits or use associated with consumer preferences. Further, consumer preferences were found to be based on the importance of symbolic life values associated with the socialisation of the individual and its self-determination. An average of 5-14% of respondents reported that desires for self-worth and affirmation were expressed in their self-image, thus casting a symbolic value onto their purchases. These symbolic values therefore impact respondents' behaviour and function as determinants in forming their life meaning. Symbolic values of self-respect and love were prioritised by 46% and 45% of respondents respectively, which were followed in prevalence by self-development (42%) and friendship (43%). The desire for self-realisation was prioritised by 38% of the group and respect by 37%, followed by recognition with 21% and status with 18%. A smaller percentage of respondents reported that adventure (16%) and change (10%) were the most important life aspirations and behavioural determinants. These results indicate that within the focus group existed a strong manifestation of high symbolic values which could explicitly or implicitly affect their consumer preferences and behaviours. These values form a structure of sorts that guide people in their social practice and way of life. It is these values that most affect people's feelings and thoughts, that fill their inner world and act as the key drivers of their life preferences.

In this semantic context, consumer behaviour is aimed at finding and acquiring the necessary and desirable symbolic meanings for a person's consumption tendencies. When implementing a consumer behaviour strategy, an individual's self-image, aspirations and desired appearance (both physically and morally) are factors of great importance to him. The survey data revealed a wide range of social characteristics with which respondents identified themselves and which were determining elements in their personal image and chosen model of behaviour. The desire for presentation and self-expression of these qualities appeared to largely determine the consumer preferences of respondents. Appearing as an educated and as a cultured person was of fundamental importance for 42% and 41% of respondents respectively. 34% of respondents identified themselves as lucky and happy people who behaved according to these traits. Further, 33% reported that self-esteem provided a sense of strength in how respondents wanted to appear to themselves and to others. 29% classified themselves as physically active or "sporty". 27% chose confidence as their dominant characteristic, and finally, 27% reported fashion and modern trends to be of high significance.

During the focus groups and informal interviews, high importance was attached to the interpretation of respondents' answers, which contained signs of status and prestige as key consumption behaviour elements. The manifestation of new consumer practices was seen in

their reported behaviours, which were based on the satisfaction of desires and the search for new ways of self-assertion and self-expression. Many participants therefore indicated characteristic consumer practices, typical psychological states and prevailing images relating to desires, fantasies, emerging fears and subjective ideas about themselves and their world. All these background characteristics of consumer behaviour, which appeared during the discussion of problems in this paper, are important constructs of a new essence of consumer preferences.

A number of judgments were made during the interviews which testified to the importance of searching for pleasure satisfying one's desires:

- "I would like to experience more pleasure from the purchase."
- "I like the process of choosing and viewing the goods."
- "I like to choose and try on different outfits that I am unlikely to buy."
- "It's always nice to discuss shopping trips ."
- "I get pleasure from shopping, but if you do not go [to shopping centres] for a long time, it is depressing."
- "I like to walk aimlessly through the major shopping centres, now everything is so elegant and cool."
- "When I consider an expensive brand, I love to feel how my attitude changes immediately."

A mature-aged man working in the field of physical education and sports with a relatively low-income level presented the following narrative of his model of consumer behaviour: "If you want something, and I do not know what, I sign up for a test drive of a cool car. I like to come to the salon and represent a buyer who wants, in addition to his Porsche, to buy something more utilitarian and everyday...the reception is always pretty girls...look[ing] at you with attention and lingering...Feelings are inexpressible...feel like a real man...However, it is important not to match. This cannot be compared with those when you are immersed in the atmosphere of a real purchase and a trip by car..." This response reflects many key features of consumer behaviour in postmodern society in the fauxmerism model ("fauxmerism" meaning literally false consumption).

The features of this model as joint consumption were also revealed in respondents' various reported consumer practices. These were recorded when raising the question of using different Internet platforms to purchase goods and services or to familiarise oneself with the terms of a purchase. Among these were the following consumer practices according to the focus group interviews:

- Engaging in short-term rental housing while traveling through the Airbnb platform.
- Temporarily using bicycles in dedicated urban areas.

- Renting a car to travel on the car sharing system.
- Using travel exchange networks or joint rental houses or apartments for long period of time.
- Donating unused or unnecessary items to people in need.
- Searching for fellow travelers with whom to rideshare with the help of online services.
- Selling or purchasing goods through free platforms like Avito and Yula .

According to respondents, reputation and trust played critical roles when using these direct forms of interaction.

The results presented in this section of the paper arose from further conceptual rethinking, elaboration, interpretation and analysis of empirical data obtained during the pilot project on the internal grant of the Russian State Social University. This study was aimed at probing new trends in consumer behaviour and studying different aspects of consumer preferences.

## **Discussion**

An important theoretical and practical result of the study was the confirmation of the hypothetical proposition that in postmodern conditions, new consumer practices are emerging which carry significant symbolic meanings associated with images of self-identification and self-worth. As evidenced by the results of the study, consumer preferences are ceasing to be associated with functional use or benefits of goods and services, and are rather dictated by brand reputations and company trademark. Despite the fact that the quantitative study is not representative of the entire population of consumers and examines a limited section of society, the data clearly indicates this emergence of new and symbolically driven consumer behaviour models. It is possible that in the target group surveyed, these trends are more pronounced than among older consumers, those with lower education levels or those living in non-Metropolitan regions. However, consumer preferences reported in this study show close connections with socialisation, identification, status and symbolic consumption of intangible goods, even to the detriment of material or necessary goods. These results suggest the need for a new conceptual approach to measure and interpret postmodern consumer behaviours and preferences. Such new approaches based on the reduction of rationality, utility, and the ability to calculate consumer preferences should not negate the importance and necessity of traditional economic models. Further studies through marketing research using proven economic and mathematical formulas can still effectively calculate different parameters and probabilistic scenarios of consumer behaviour.

Despite the emergence new approaches to the study of consumer preferences within the traditional sphere of economic and market research, these studies have not yet developed

valid categorical apparatus or methodological research tools. It is therefore proposed to implement sociological research with a wide application of projective psychological techniques as well as methods based on the theory of postmodernism to continue evaluating these new and evolving trends.

Limitations of this research involve the impossibility for broad generalisation or external validity of the findings. Further, this project was introductory in nature and therefore lacked extensive examination of the problem. Nevertheless, the identified features of consumer preferences were found to support the proposed theory of consumption in postmodern society. This allows the current study to form a strong starting point for future research.

An important conclusion from the study is the identification of trends that reflect a noticeable change in consumer preferences from material to non-material consumption. This first becomes noticeable in the shift of emphasis from the satisfaction of needs to the satisfaction of desires. Results show a clear transition in consumer behaviours from the purchase of products aimed at meeting primary human needs to those made for spiritual and intellectual development, for expanded communication capabilities or for restorative or entertainment purposes. The results of surveys and focus groups further show that consumer behaviour in the new reality is becoming largely intangible. In postmodern theory, this shift of emphasis from material goods (such as machinery, electronics, clothing and accessories) to means of entertainment and leisure is referred to as entertainment consumption. There is also a clear shift of the consumption vector of entertainment; consumable entertainment is now less hedonistic and rather functions a tool for learning and self-development, to which they aforementioned desires for identification and self-assertion are directly linked.

Attention is also drawn to the identified opposition in consumer practices, which undoubtedly affects the consumer preferences of the individual, between the process and result of consumption. The process itself largely begins to break away from the result and therefore ceases to be directly related to it. This appears consumer practices such as shopping and factionalism, as is supported by D. Brooks (Brooks, 2013; Dyachuk, 2016).

Consumption for many people in postmodern conditions has ceased to be a means to an end, but rather functions as an enjoyable pastime and form of entertainment (Brooks, 2013). This practice leads to a clear distinction between the two concepts that define consumer behaviour: shopping and buying. If the second concept reflects the behavioural and economic action as the purchase of goods, then the social action of shopping represents entertainment and leisure (free from economic precedence) through the process of viewing, studying and discussing the characteristics of goods. Shopping in many respects thus changes all culture of consumption; its main characteristics and parameters transition from the traditional consumerism model to

the postmodern fauxumerism model, that is from consumerism to false consumption (Brooks, 2013).

Another new model of consumer behaviour described in the literature and revealed in the course of this study is a collective form of consumer activity based on the joint consumption theory. According to Raice, this form of consumption is a modification of the old idea of exchange (Raice, 2011). Botsam and Rogers attribute the idea of joint consumption to an innovative role in changing the consumer society, designed to localise and minimise the system of hyper-consumption that has become characteristic of postmodern society (R. Botsam and R. Rogers, 2011). Joint consumption is sometimes seen as the result of changes in an individual's thinking, which leads to a shift in the dominant trends of social development observed in modern Western society, namely the movement from modern to postmodern. It is believed that personality and individuality are again beginning to be replaced by social and collective beginnings of activity, marking a gradual return to the new modern, which thus restores the social norm that was destroyed by postmodern society. In the researchers' opinions, the growth of joint consumption is a more suitable framework which does not result in increased socialisation, economy of cooperation or economy of mutual aid. The motives of joint consumption as expressed in this study focus on economic interest and individual need while considering the convenience and frequent absence of other opportunities. With the emergence and interaction of the two consumer behaviours of foxumerism and joint consumption, consumer behaviour in postmodern society is more difficult to explore and study through traditional market research, which is limited to economic parameters. This further emphasises the need for new interdisciplinary approaches to the study of consumer preferences, primarily through sociological methods that can be used both at the macro and micro levels. Such approaches can more comprehensively examine the many important emerging social aspects of consumption that were touched on in this study.

## **Conclusion**

This study demonstrates the significant transition from primarily economic and marketing-based approaches to the study of consumer preferences to postmodern interdisciplinary approaches that feature sociological methods of analysis. This conclusion can be drawn from the major changes in patterns of consumer behaviour that have evidentially taken place in recent decades. Consumption is becoming increasingly irrational and difficult to clearly define or measure as it transitions from the preference for benefits and material goods to the preference for intangible symbolic values to assert identity and self-realisation. Due to these trends, consumer behaviour is transcending the boundaries of the economic sphere and is becoming a symbolic form of socialisation and self-identification for the individual. These trends, described in the theory of postmodernism, were confirmed in the course of this pilot



study of consumer preferences of the Moscow University sample groups. Although the presented findings and analysis cannot be extrapolated to such comprehensive questions as new consumer practices, this study nevertheless allowed sufficient hypothesis testing and subsequent confirmation.

Both hypotheses presented in this study were confirmed from the results of the collected data. Firstly, the relationship of new consumer practices with the values and meanings of symbolic consumption was supported from the participants' interview responses. This correlation can be seen as a simulacrum of satisfaction of material needs and is aimed at obtaining pleasure and fulfilment of desires. Secondly, the impossibility of the model of a consumer's rational choice was supported, and focused on receiving material benefit to explain many aspects of modern consumer preferences and practices.

Despite the confirmation of these hypotheses, problems associated with the study of consumer preferences in postmodern society remain unresolved. This is due to the underdevelopment of existing research, the lack of a clear categorical apparatus and the lack of empirical methods of testing hypotheses. The implementation of new approaches therefore requires further investigation into finding adequate and valid methods to display all the key parameters and characteristics of consumer behaviour in the field of social relations and symbolic values.



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