

# The sustainable consumption and values for consumers

**Slawomir Smyczek**

University of Economics in Katowice, Faculty of Management

1 Maja Street 50, 40-287 Katowice, Poland

Phone: +48 32 257 75 61

E-mail: [slawomir.smyczek@ue.katowice.pl](mailto:slawomir.smyczek@ue.katowice.pl)

Phenomenon of sustainable consumption refers directly to the concept of sustainable development (Harrison et al., 2005). It is a complex category and a subject of interest to various scientific disciplines, international organizations and state institutions. According to the OECD (2008), sustainable consumption is the use of goods and services that meet basic needs and improve the quality of human life, while using natural resources, toxic materials and emissions from waste and contaminants during the life cycle, that they would not diminish the needs of future generations.

We can look at sustainable consumption from two perspectives: macro and micro. Sustainable consumption analyzed in the macroeconomic perspective takes into account mainly issues of the place of consumption in the concept of sustainable development (De Leeuw, 2005), sustainable consumption policy (Reisch & Thøgersen, 2017), as well as its' tools and indicators (Polonsky & Rosenberger, 2001). Macroeconomic approach do not refer on the other hand, to issues related to consumer behavior. The second approach is microeconomic and is part of the trend of research on consumer behavior. Initially, only the ecological consumer behavior - green, pro-ecological consumption was examined in this note (Straughan and Roberts, 1999). Then the interest of researchers was also extended to the social aspect of sustainability, which resulted in the analysis of ethical behavior and ethical consumption (Cherrier, 2007), and only in the latest publications began to use the term sustainable behavior (Szmigin et al., 2009). Research carried out in this trend focuses mainly on the assessment of consumer awareness (McDonald & Oates, 2013), on their pro-ecological and ethical attitudes (Peattie & Peattie, 2009), and on explaining the problem of non-compliance of declared attitudes with real behaviors (Newholm & Shaw, 2007).

Currently, the extremely important stream of research on sustainable consumption is related to the values that this consumption provides to the consumer. At the same time, it does not focus only on biological or utility values, but also on others, including non-material and spiritual ones. This research trend is consistent with the interpretation of the concept of sustainable development, according to which in the process of sustainable development, not only material development is important, but also intellectual and spiritual human development. The question then remains, what values sustainable consumption creates and provides for contemporary consumers?

The category of value for consumer already appeared in 1960s in the theory of consumer behavior and it referred to popular theories of consumer choice, the concept of utility (benefit) and satisfaction (Gale, 1994, Slater & Narver, 2000, Kiezel & Smyczek, 2015). The consumer value perceived as a value declared, respected or preferred by the buyer is best illustrated by the model of consumption value developed by Sheth, Newman and Gross (1991). The model relates to the theory of consumer choice and points out to five types of values contained in products offered on the market. The model by Sheth – Newman- Gross is based upon three core principles: (1) consumer choice is a function of little amount of value

for the consumer, (2) specific consumption value influences diversification of efforts put in each specific situation, (3) values which constitute the heart of the model include: functional, social, emotional, cognitive and conditional value. Consumer behavior is related to choices made under influence of some or all five consumption values (Solomon, 2010). Thus, it can be concluded that by simplified presentation of the approach to consumer value, the model shows, in a complex, way different types of value. Recognition of different values allows for better explanation of consumer buying behavior on the market. Consequently, problems highlighted in the paper revolve around the concept of consumer value provide by sustainable consumption.

The purpose of the paper was to identify the values for consumers delivered by sustainable consumption, and consequently to develop descriptive model of sustainable consumption values for consumers.

The research was conducted by means of a questionnaire distributed online among the group of 300 respondents. The main focus in questionnaire was on distinction of variables of consumer values identified in Sheth - Newman – Gross model. The obtained variables were both endogenic and egzogenic in nature. The variables were presented to respondents on Likert's scale in order to determine the performance (achievement) of sustainable consumption. After collecting data from respondents, for identification of factors describing values for consumers deliver by sustainable consumption, exploratory factor analysis was employed. This, in turn, resulted in development of descriptive model (Antonides et al., 1996).

The results of fathomed statistical analyses of variables related to sustainable consumption have led to the conclusion that value for consumers from sustainable consumption is determined by four factors i.e. functional, emotional, social and cognitive. The functional value of sustainable consumption is perceive as practical or psychological use of utilities received due to attributes of sustainable choices on market made by consumer. The emotional value play also significant role in consumer market choices, which results from the specific character of sustainable consumption to stimulate consumer positive emotions. The social value is result of specific relation between choices of consumer on market and futures generations of consumers. The cogitative value is related to discover novelty from sustainable consumption and desire of new knowledge and experience. As results of research show conditional value related to sustainable consumption is not playing important role for consumers. Consumers are not willing to engage in sustainable consumption under pressure of others parties. Thus, it can be concluded that functional, emotional, social, and cognitive values are of crucial importance for sustainable consumption.

## References

- Anderson, J. Jain, D., Chintagunta, P. 1993. *Customer Value Assessment in Business Markets: A State-of-Practice Study*, Journal of Business Marketing, Vol. 1, No 1.
- Antonides, G., Verhoef, P.C., van Aalst, M. 2002. Consumer Perception and Evaluation of Waiting Time: A Field Experiment, Journal of Consumer Psychology, Vol. 12, Issue 3, p. 193-202
- Cherrier, H. 2007. *Ethical consumption practices: co-production of self-expression and social recognition*, Journal of Consumer behavior, Vol. 6, Issue 5, p. 321-335.
- De Leeuw, B. 2005. *The world behind the product*, Journal of Industrial Ecology, Vol. 9, No 1–2, p. 7–10.
- Gale, B. 1994. *Managing Customer Value*, The Free Press, New York.
- Harrison, R., T. Newholm and Shaw (eds) 2005. *The Ethical Consumer*, London: Sage.

- Kieźel, E., Smyczek, S. (eds) 2015. *Zachowania konsumentów. procesy unowocześniania konsumpcji*, Wolters Kluwer Business: Warszawa.
- McDonald, S., Oates, C.J. 2013. *Sustainability: Consumer Perceptions and Marketing Strategies*, Business Strategy and The Environment, Vol. 15, Issue 3, p. 157-170.
- Newholm, T., Shaw, D. 2007. *Studying the ethical consumer: A review of research*, Journal of Consumer Behaviour, Vol. 6, Issue 5, p. 253-270.
- OECD 2008. *Promoting Sustainable Consumption – Good Practices in OECD Countries*, [www.oecd.org/publishing/corrigenda](http://www.oecd.org/publishing/corrigenda).
- Peattie, K., Peattie, S. 2009. *Social Marketing: A pathway to consumption reduction?*, Journal of Business Research, Vol. 62, p. 260-268.
- Polonsky, M. J., Rosenberger, P. J. 2001. Reevaluating Green marketing: a strategic approach. Business Horizons, Vol. 44, Issue 5, p. 21-30.
- Reisch, L., Thøgersen, A. 2017. *Behaviorally Informed Consumer Policy: Research and Policy for "Humans"*, In: Routledge Handbook on Consumption. ed. / Margit Keller; Bente Halkier; Terhi-Anna Wilska; Monica Truninger. Abingdon : Routledge, p. 242-257.
- Sheth, J.N., Newman, B.I., Gross, B.L., 1991. Why We Buy What We Buy: A Theory of Consumption Values, Journal of Business Research, Vol. 22, Issue 2, p. 159-170.
- Slater, S. and Narver, J. 2000. *Intelligence Generation and superior Customer Value*, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, Vol. 28, No 1.
- Solomon, M.R. 2010. *Consumer Behaviour: A European Perspective*, Pearson Education.
- Straughan, R.D., Roberts, J.A. 1999. *Environmental segmentation alternatives: a look at green consumer behavior in the new millennium*, Journal of Consumer Marketing, Vol. 16 Issue: 6, pp.558-575.
- Szmigin, I, Carrigan, M., McEachern, M. 2009. *The Conscious Consumer: Taking a Flexible Approach to Ethical Behaviour*, International Journal of Consumer Studies, Vol. 33, Issue 2, p. 224-231.