

ZN WSH Zarządzanie 2020 (numer specjalny), s. 173-184

Artykuł przeglądowy
Review Article

Data wpływu/Received: 25.08.2020

Data recenzji/Accepted: 15.10.2020/30.11.2020

Data publikacji/Published: 31.12.2020

Źródła finansowania publikacji: potencjał badawczy prof. Beaty Reformat 2020 w ramach badań statutowych UE w Katowicach

DOI: 10.5604/01.3001.0014.8079

Authors' Contribution:

(A) Study Design (projekt badania)

(B) Data Collection (zbieranie danych)

(C) Statistical Analysis (analiza statystyczna)

(D) Data Interpretation (interpretacja danych)

(E) Manuscript Preparation (redagowanie opracowania)

(F) Literature Search (badania literaturowe)

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**IMPACT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC
ON THE CHANGE IN BEHAVIOR OF POLISH CONSUMERS**

**WPŁYW PANDEMII KORONAWIRUSA NA ZMIANĘ
ZACHOWAŃ POLSKICH KONSUMENTÓW**

Abstract: The paper is a part of the discussion related to the development and effects of the global coronavirus pandemic on various social and economic phenomena. It analyses changes in the behaviour of Polish consumers that have emerged as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. The thesis that the pandemic has a significant impact on changing of current

consumer behaviour in Poland has been verified. The main results of the analysis enabled identifying changes occurring in the behaviour of Polish consumers in conditions of the pandemic and indicating the directions of these changes. Formulated conclusions are based on such research methods as: critical analysis of the literature and observation method. The considerations presented in the paper should be treated as an introduction to a wider discussion on the impact of the pandemic on various aspects of social life.

Keywords: consumer, behaviour, pandemic, coronavirus

Streszczenie: Artykuł wpisuje się w dyskusję związaną z rozwojem i skutkami globalnej pandemii koronawirusa na obecne zachowania konsumentów. Stąd też przeprowadzono w nim analizę zmian zachowań polskich konsumentów, które powstały w wyniku rozwoju pandemii koronawirusa. Zweryfikowano przy tym tezę, zakładającą przypuszczenie, że pandemia ma znaczący wpływ na zmianę obecnych zachowań konsumentów w Polsce. Główne wyniki analiz umożliwiły identyfikację najważniejszych zmian zachodzących w zachowaniach konsumentów w warunkach pandemii oraz wskazanie kierunku tych zmian. Sformułowane wnioski oparto na takich metodach badawczych, jak: krytyczna analiza literatury, metoda analizy porównawczo-logicznej i metoda obserwacji. Zaprezentowane w artykule rozważania należy traktować jako wprowadzenie do szerszej dyskusji na temat wpływu pandemii na różne aspekty życia społecznego polskich konsumentów w warunkach pandemii.

Słowa kluczowe: konsument, zachowania, pandemia, koronawirus

Introduction

The issues discussed in the paper result from the global impact of the coronavirus pandemic on changes in existing consumer behaviours around the world, including Poland. In this specific situation, activities aimed at identifying the most important changes observed in the area of these behaviours seem to be extremely important.

Therefore, the need to study this problem results primarily from the pragmatic premise, which is the consumers' desire to increase the safety of their purchasing behaviours, including the search for purchasing solutions that are more adapted to the changes in the environment, caused by the global pandemic. In this situation, it is extremely important to recognise significant changes occurring in the behaviours of Polish consumers that reflect the ability to cope with the difficult conditions of pandemic.

In view of the above, the purpose of the paper is to identify the most noticeable changes taking place in the behaviours of Polish consumers. Through its implementation, the Author wants to join the discussion on better recognition of the effects of the pandemic and its impact on the behaviours of Polish consumers, as well as draw attention to the research challenges related to the analysed issues.

1. Consumer behaviour as a research concept – theoretical approach

At the beginning, it should be emphasized that the concept of consumer behaviour has been for many years the subject of research and deliberations of many Authors, representing various sciences and fields of knowledge (e.g. economics, sociology, marketing, management, psychology, etc.)¹. On this basis, it can be assumed that the studied concept is distinguished by an interdisciplinary character, which allows for its broad use. Admittedly, there is already considerable scientific output in this area of analyses, but in conditions of uncertainty and risk caused by the coronavirus pandemic, the importance of consumer behaviours gains a different dimension than before, especially due to their significant impact on the country's economy. Table 1 presents an overview of selected definitions of the concept of consumer behaviour.

Table 1. The concept of consumer behaviour according to selected literature approaches

Tabela 1. Pojęcie zachowań konsumentów według wybranych ujęć literaturowych

Author of the definition	Year of definition	Definition of consumer behaviour	Source of definition
G. Antonides and W.F. van Raaij	2003	“Mental and physical activities, together with their motives and causes, performed by individuals and groups in the consumption cycle for the purpose of attainment of their goals and values, as a result of achieving satisfaction and well-being, while taking into account the individual and social effects of these behaviours”	G. Antonides , W.J. van Raaij, <i>Zachowania konsumenta. Podręcznik akademicki [Consumer behaviours. University textbook]</i> , PWN, Warszawa 2003, p. 24
Rudnicki	2004	“All actions and perceptions that form the preparation of the decision to choose a product, making that choice and the product purchase”	L. Rudnicki, <i>Zachowania rynkowe nabywców. Mechanizmy i uwarunkowania [Market behaviours of buyers. Mechanisms and determinants]</i> , Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej w Krakowie, Kraków 2004, p. 21

¹ G. Sobczyk, *Zachowania konsumentów wobec nowych trendów konsumpcji – wyniki badań [Consumer behaviours towards new consumption trends – research results]*, „Annales H – Oeconomia” 2018, Vol. LII, 1 SECTION H, p. 171.

M.R. Solomon	2006	“The process of selecting, buying, using, accepting, or rejecting products, ideas or experiences for the purpose of meeting the needs or desires of an individual or group”	M.R. Solomon, <i>Zachowania i zwyczaje konsumentów</i> [Consumer behaviours and customs], One Press, Gliwice 2006, p. 25
E. Kieźel	2010	“A coherent whole of activities, operations, and procedures related to making choices in the process of satisfying consumer needs in certain social, cultural and economic conditions”	E. Kieźel (ed.), <i>Konsument i jego zachowania na rynku europejskim</i> [Consumers and their behaviours on European market], PWE, Warszawa 2010, s. 42
U. Grzega, E. Kieźel	2017	“Consumer behaviours are determined by many factors depending on the consumer and variables in the environment”	U. Grzega, E. Kieźel, <i>Trendy w zachowaniach konsumentów</i> [Trends in consumer behaviours], [in:] M. Bartosik-Purgat (ed.), <i>Zachowania konsumentów. Globalizacja, nowe technologie, aktualne trendy, otoczenie społeczno-kulturowe</i> [Consumer behaviours. Globalisation, new technologies, current trends, socio-cultural environment], PWN, Warszawa 2017, pp. 31-37
R. Baran, B. Marciniak, T. Taranko	2017	“Consumer behaviour is a way in which consumers act. It is included in all phases of satisfying physiological and mental (emotional) needs”	R. Baran, B. Marciniak, T. Taranko, <i>Postawy konsumentów wobec marek pochodzenia polskiego i zagranicznego</i> [Consumer attitudes towards Polish and foreign brands], Oficyna Wydawnicza SGH, Warszawa 2017, p. 24

Source: case study based on the listed literature sources.

The definitions presented in Table 1 show that the concept of consumer behaviour is interpreted differently depending on the aspect of the analysis that their authors pay attention to.

Summing up, it is worth emphasizing that the confrontation of the current behaviours of Polish consumers with changes in the environment caused by the coronavirus pandemic contributes to the development of new trends in consumption. The concept should be understood as: “a specific trend of changes in consumer preferences, which is a consequence of changes permanently occurring in the market environment”². New needs, as well as “new” consumer categories develop on their basis.

This process is significantly related to the shaping of consumer behaviours in the aspect of coronavirus pandemic that is spreading globally. Specific features of this situation cause changes in consumer behaviours that are primarily driven by the needs and preferences related to safe shopping. Their satisfaction depends on many issues, including the level of social awareness (e.g. in the sphere of new forms and ways of shopping), but also access to the Internet, and computer skills³.

2. Analysis of changes observed in consumer behaviours in the period of the pandemic development

2.1. Six stages of consumer behaviour in the situation of growing risk of COVID-19 infection

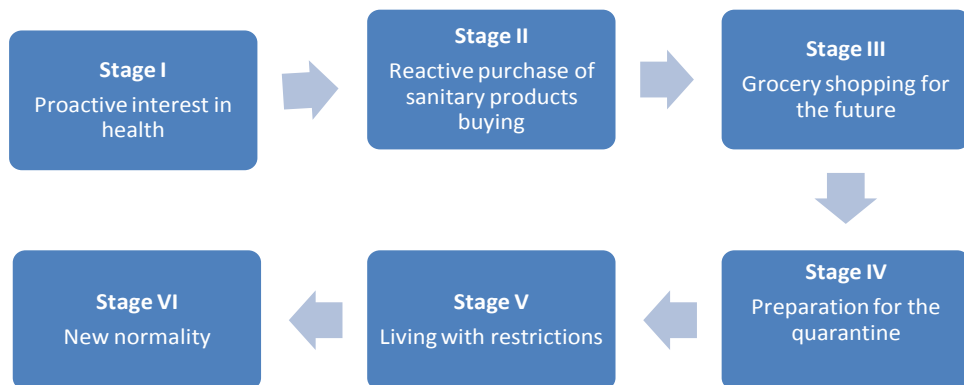
According to Nielsen, a global company dealing with measurement analytics and data analysis that provide customers and markets around the world with the most comprehensive and trusted approach, 6 stages of different consumer behaviours can be distinguished depending on the stage of the pandemic development in a given country⁴. Their list is shown in Fig. 1.

² P. Danielak, A. Kudlińska-Chylak, M. Czeczotko, H. Górską-Warsewicz, *Percepcja nowych trendów w konsumpcji a sytuacja ekonomiczna nabywców* [Perception of new trends in consumption and economic situation of buyers], “Handel Wewnętrzny” 2018, No 6, Vol. 1, pp. 163-171; P. Trębska, *Samozaopatrzenie żywnościowe w nowych trendach konsumenckich* [Food self-supply in new consumer trends], „Scientific Journal of Warsaw University of Life Sciences” 2020, No 23/72, SGGW, pp. 247- 256.

³ L. Roggeveen, R. Sethuraman, *How the COVID Pandemic May Change the World of Retailing*, „Journal of Retailing”, Vol. 96, Iss. 2, June 2020, pp. 169-171.

⁴ *Zakupy zapobiegawcze Polaków wobec koronawirusa* [Pantry shopping among Poles in the period of coronavirus], FMCG & Retail, 20.03.2020, <https://www.nielsen.com/pl/pl/insights/article/2020/zakupy-zapobiegawcze-polakow-wobec-koronawirusa/> [accessed: 6.07.2020].

Figure 1. Stages of consumer behaviour depending on the stage of pandemic development
 Rysunek 1. Etapy zachowań konsumentów w zależności od stadium rozwoju pandemii



Source: case study based on <https://www.nielsen.com/eu/en/insights/article/2020/while-still-in-lockdown-many-europeans-expect-the-impact-of-covid-19-to-last-another-year/> [accessed: 6.07.2020].

On the basis of the presented figure, it can be seen that the stage of the pandemic development is clearly related to a given stage of changes occurring in consumer behaviour. It should be emphasized that the specified stages take the form of a sequential process of actions, the features of which have a significant impact on the type of consumer behaviours. Stage I highlights the proactive interest in health that was triggered by the first incidents of confirmed COVID-19 cases. These behaviours were accompanied by increased interest in products that have impact on health and well-being.

On the other hand, in the second stage of the pandemic, consumer behaviours were characterized by reactive purchase of sanitary products, caused by the first incidents of local infections and deaths of patients. These facts influenced the purchase of sanitary products (including antibacterial gels and protective masks). In the third stage of the pandemic development, further changes in consumer behaviours can be observed. They consist in increased purchase of grocery products for the future, mainly of food and hygiene. This change was caused by an increase in the number of COVID-19 incidents, and deaths caused by COVID-19.

The next of the analysed stages (4), referred to as preparation for quarantine, was brought by two factors. Firstly, a significant increase in the number of cases, and secondly, initiation of emergency actions by the authorities at the national level. These facts forced a change in consumer behaviours consisting in more frequent choice and purchase made online. The fifth stage of consumer behaviour is described as "living with restrictions". It was accompanied by mass infections and quarantine of local communities, which brought a significant decrease in consumer interest in shopping in brick-and-mortar stores, and thus the limited availability of online shopping, and increased consumer anxiety related to the possibility of increase in prices.

The last of the discussed stages (6) consists in adopting the so-called “new normality” in consumer behaviours. This state means lifting the quarantine and returning to related everyday reality (school, work, additional activities, etc.). Consumer behaviours at this stage of the analysis are distinguished by greater awareness of implemented actions, which is accompanied by special caution and care about health issues, greater interest in e-commerce sale and personal hygiene.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that consumers began to change their purchasing behaviours with the first observed cases of COVID-19. Greater interest in their own health was their first symptom, which was proved by the increased purchase of sanitary products and grocery products for the future. Then, when the number of cases significantly increased, as a result of which the relevant state institutions implemented the necessary emergency measures at the national level, consumers began to prepare for quarantine. After it was over, they got used to the new online purchase conditions and they visited brick-and-mortar stores less frequently.

2.2. Key changes in consumer behaviours in Poland

The first of the key changes in consumer behaviour in the pandemic period concerns the way and form of doing shopping, i.e. the choice of sales channels. In this aspect of the analyses, a growing importance of online sales channels can be noticed, which translates into an increase in the popularity of online shopping. This trend is confirmed among others, by the research and report prepared by the Mobile Institute and Izba Gospodarki Elektronicznej [*the Chamber of E-Economy*], and entitled “E-commerce in the crisis of 2020”⁵. It is a summary of the changes taking place in the sphere of e-commerce during the pandemic.

The analysis of the research results presented in the abovementioned report indicates a number of changes observed in consumer behaviours during the coronavirus pandemic. The situation forced the change in behaviours of 35% of respondents, whereas 38% of the surveyed population declared that they had prepared some food stocks using online shopping⁶. The prospect of a temporary lockdown prompted many Poles to buy more, which resulted in a lack of basic products in the stores. This fact motivated consumers to do shopping online. Another argument justifying the increased interest of consumers in on-line shopping is the risk related to direct contact that accompanies doing shopping in brick-and-mortar stores. This situation

⁵ Report: *E-Commerce w czasie kryzysu 2020* [E-commerce in the period of crisis of 2020], Izba Gospodarki Elektronicznej [Chamber of Digital Economy], <https://eizba.pl/raport-e-izby-e-commerce-w-czasie-kryzysu-2020/> [accessed: 6.07.2020].

⁶ 1779 Internet users participated in the survey. The structure of the sample was adjusted with the use of analytical weight and corresponds to the structure of Polish internet users aged 15 and more with respect to gender, age, and size of the place of residence. Only complete questionnaires were included in the analysis.

was confirmed by as many as 45% of respondents who admitted that due to the risk of coronavirus infection, they decided to do shopping less frequently in traditional stores in order to reduce, in this way, the risk of infection.

To complete the description, it should be added that the abovementioned changes in behaviours concern consumers aged 35-44 to the greatest extent (approx. 50%)⁷. This fact should be perceived as a significant change in the purchasing habits of Polish consumers, that supports further development of e-commerce.

On the other hand, the report "E-Commerce in Poland. Gemius for e-Commerce Polska", which was developed on the basis of a survey conducted in March 2020 on a group of 1,544 internet users aged 15 and older, shows that a completely new group of online shoppers is one of the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic⁸. They are people who have not used the possibility of online shopping before. Such actions were forced by a quarantine and a change in the reality in which Polish consumers had functioned before. For e-commerce, it is an opportunity to attract a new, wide group of customers who prefer the ease and convenience of shopping and the payment process.

Pandemic-related changes in consumer behaviours also concern payment methods. The data of the report mentioned above shows that more and more customers in this particularly difficult period attach great importance to the fact that various forms of payment are available in a given store. As many as 57% of respondents indicated this factor as motivating to do online shopping⁹. At the same time, a vast majority of online transactions are fast online transfers. Also, there is an emerging trend of mobile payments, which are particularly popular among the group of younger respondents (15-24 years old). Together with the data concerning devices used for online shopping (nearly 70% of all buyers use a smartphone for this purpose)¹⁰, this confirms how important the mobile channel is for online sales.

Another change concerns consumer behaviours related to the growing recognition of e-network services in march – during the pandemic. This is shown in Fig. 2.

⁷ Report: *E-Commerce w czasie kryzysu 2020...* [E-commerce in the period of crisis of 2020...].

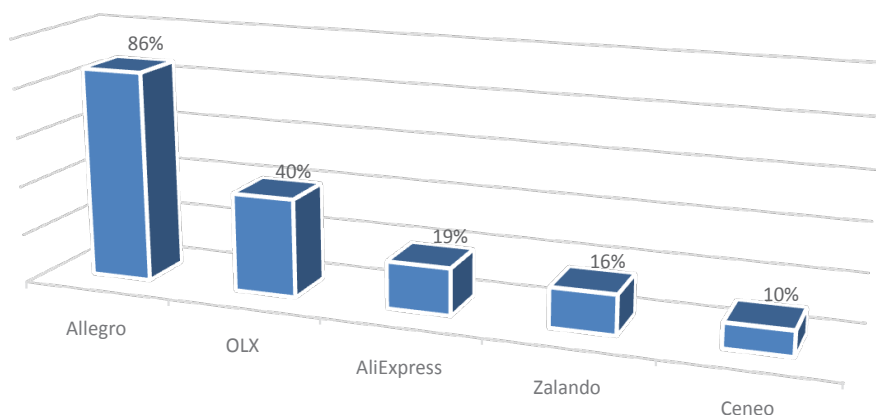
⁸ Raport „E-Commerce w Polsce. Gemius dla e-Commerce Polska [E-Commerce in Poland. Gemius for E-Commerce Poland], Izba Gospodarki Elektronicznej [Chamber of Digital Economy], Gemius, Warszawa 2020, p. 9

⁹ As above p. 9.

¹⁰ As above, p. 15.

Figure 2. Consumers' knowledge about Internet e-services in march 2020 (in%)

Rysunek 2. Znajomość przez konsumentów e-serwisów internetowych w marcu 2020 (w%)



Source: Report „E-Commerce w Polsce. Gemius dla e-Commerce Polska” [E-Commerce in Poland. Gemius for E-Commerce Poland], Izba Gospodarki Elektronicznej [Chamber of Digital Economy], Gemius, Warszawa 2020, p. 22.

The above data shows that during the pandemic, the recognition of e-services increased. At the same time, the Polish e-service Allegro enjoys the greatest recognition among consumers, thanks to which it strengthens its competitive position every month. On the other hand, in the case of foreign e-service a growing recognition of the AliExpress e-service can be noticed (50% of indications among consumers who made purchases on foreign websites in the last 6 months).

In addition, interesting results of the report entitled “The Global State of the Consumer Tracker” have also been published by the consulting company Deloitte¹¹. The report shows that concerns about family health are the most important determinants of consumers' purchasing decisions. As many as three-quarters of Poles are still worried about the safety of their relatives. This is the highest rate in Europe. Greater concern in this respect is observed only in India (80%), Mexico (81%) and China (86%)¹².

More than a quarter of Poles do not feel safe while shopping, and more than a half have no fear about that. Interestingly, research shows that the current hygiene

¹¹ This was a global study, and its purpose was to show consumer behaviour during the pandemic. A thousand people from each of 17 countries around the world, i.e. Australia, Belgium, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the Netherlands, South Korea, Spain, Great Britain, the United States and Poland took part in the study. This is the fourth edition of the survey and the first in which Poland was included.

¹² *Zmiany zachowań konsumentów w czasach epidemii Covid-19* [Changes in consumer behaviours during Covid-19 pandemic], Deloitte, Poradnik Handlowca, 19.06.2020, <https://poradnikhandlowca.com.pl/artykuly/deloitte-zmiany-zachowan-konsumentow-w-czasach-epidemii-covid-19/> [accessed: 7.07.2020].

regimes are becoming an important and permanent element of consumer experience. A large proportion of consumers put greater emphasis on “safety” and proximity to the store rather than on prices. This supports the growing popularity of smaller, local store formats. Consumers have also begun to plan their shopping better in order to reduce the number of visits to the store and shorten the time spent on shopping. Replacement of impulsive shopping with making shopping lists should be indicated as a new pandemic-induced consumer behaviour¹³.

The report conducted by “ARC Rynek i Opinia” [*ARC Market and Opinion*] research Institute presents yet another especially important change in consumer behaviour during the coronavirus¹⁴. It shows that consumers in Poland pay much more attention to the origin of the purchased products than before the pandemic, while preferring domestic products. This behaviour distinguishes mostly consumers aged over 45, among whom the percentage of indications was as high as 60%¹⁵. The people declare that they consciously buy Polish products, because they want to help Polish companies and support Polish economy in this way. This tendency also results from the consumers’ conviction of a greater safety of domestic products and services. These behaviours undoubtedly result in an increase in the number of conscious and mature consumers in Poland, whose shopping patriotism has never the same scale as is observed during the ongoing pandemic.

The changes in consumer behaviour in Poland described in this part should be perceived as key, i.e. the most important when it comes to satisfying the first-rank (basic) needs. This is because we also observe a number of changes in relation to satisfying higher needs, which concern the purchase of various services (e.g. tourism, catering, recreation, entertainment, etc.). However, due to the wide scope of these research issues, they constitute a subject for a separate discussion, and they are only indicated in this part of the paper.

Summary

Summing up, it should be emphasized that the subject area discussed in the paper expresses the opinion of its Author in the discussion on better recognition of the effects of the pandemic and its impact on the behaviour of Polish consumers, as well as drawing attention to research challenges related to the analysed issues. The conducted observations and research analyses show that the coronavirus pandemic has had a significant impact on changing consumer behaviours in Poland. It should also

¹³ As above.

¹⁴ The research was performed in April 2020 at the request of the Polish ice cream producer, PPL Koral.

¹⁵ *Ponad połowa Polaków zwraca uwagę na kraj pochodzenia produktu* [Over half of Poles pay attention to the country of product origin], *Wiadomości Handlowe*, 21.04.2020, <https://www.wiadomoscihandlowe.pl/artykuly/ponad-polowa-polakow-zwraca-uwage-na-kraj-pochodze,63049> [accessed: 6.07.2020].

be emphasized that the dynamic character and direction of these changes largely depend on the level of consumer awareness and the ability to use modern online sales channels, as well as on the access to the Internet.

The analysis of the results of research presented in the paper and conducted during the pandemic by leading research and consulting companies on the Polish market indicates a clear change in the needs and expectations of consumers in the present situation. They are reflected in the change in buying behaviours. The paper attempts to show that the ability to identify the most important changes occurring in the area of consumer behaviour in Poland is crucial in the situation of pandemic, as it provides the basis for development of the assortment offers, as well as related forms and methods of sale adjusted to the current needs and preferences of consumers.

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