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Changes in Purchasing Behaviours of Consumers in Conditions of Acculturation – an Empirical Study

Summary

In the era of globalisation and intensifying integration processes the phenomenon of diffusion of different cultures (acculturation) is being observed. As a result, consumers – especially those who migrate – adopt elements of the consumer culture that differs from the culture observed in their country of origin. The article presents changes that have affected purchasing behaviours of Polish consumers as a result of the acculturation process. The author discusses the selected results of the empirical research conducted with the use of the interpretative methodology that is characteristic for the stream of qualitative research. The case study employed involves methods of data triangulation and methodological triangulation. The research covered three purposely selected European countries, i.e. France, Germany and Great Britain.

Key words: consumer, purchasing behaviours, acculturation, case study.

JEL codes: D11, D12

Introduction

In the era of globalisation and intensifying integration processes, a phenomenon of diffusion of particular elements of different national cultures (acculturation¹) is being observed. The phenomenon of acculturation predominantly affects consumers who establish cross-cultural contacts, especially those of direct, systematic and continuous nature (resulting, for instance, from migration). The consumers in question are influenced by those cultural settings that differ from the settings of the consumers' homelands².

In conditions of acculturation 'being a consumer and a purchaser' has gained a new dimension. A consumer as a subject of acculturation gets used to new culture realities in the context of consuming and purchasing, which may result in taking over characteristic elements of a new culture. Simultaneously, such consumers sustain their ways of thinking

¹ In general, acculturation is understood to be a process of culture related changes that are observed in groups or between groups and individuals who represent different systems of culture. Acculturation may also refer to transformations that involve adaptation of foreign contents to own culture, elimination of own contents, modification of some elements and creation of syncretic contents [see www.encyklopedia.pwn.pl].

² This results from non-symmetrical nature of acculturation according to which the culture of the dominating group (in the host country) has much greater impact on the culture represented by the group subject to acculturation (country of settlement).

and patterns of behaviours that are accepted in countries of their origin³. A consumer who is subject to acculturation buys and consumes products not only to satisfy own needs but also to build own identity. This is reflected in behaviours of a consumer who is subject to acculturation – those behaviours that are predominantly observed while making purchasing decisions.

Cognition and understanding of the very nature of changes observed in purchasing behaviours of consumers who function in conditions of acculturation may be facilitated by the research conducted by the Author. The research was carried out within the following project: '*A process of acculturation and consumers' purchasing behaviours – conditions and regularities*'. The empirical goal of the research into significance of the acculturation process in the way purchasing behaviours of consumers are shaped was, inter alia, to identify the most important changes in consumers' purchasing behaviours subject to acculturation. Moreover, dimensions of the behaviours in question were also meant to be described.

The article is a case study of changes that are observed in purchasing behaviours of Polish consumers subject to acculturation in selected countries in Europe (France, Germany and Great Britain), and it presents dimensions of consumers' market behaviours that are susceptible to the process of acculturation. Additionally, the most important changes in the way market decisions are made and in behaviours while purchasing are discussed.

Source Material and Research Methods

Taking into consideration the specifics of the research problem that referred to changes in purchasing behaviours of consumers in conditions of acculturation, the empirical research was conducted by employing some interpretative methodology that is characteristic for the stream of the qualitative research. A case study was considered to be the most suitable in the context of the assumptions made. This method also allowed for testing the theory in new circumstances. The case study employed triangulation of data acquired from primary and secondary sources and methodological triangulation (using combination of several qualitative and quantitative research techniques).

Secondary sources that were used included domestic and foreign statistical publications (inter alia those published by the Central Statistical Office of Poland and Eurostat) and research reports and publications drafted by a few research institutions (including inter alia CBOS, GfK, Nielsen, Pentor, Ipsos, GIM and Centre for Retail Research). Basic primary information was provided by individual consumers of Polish origin who had been permanently living abroad for at least one year⁴ and who left Poland after its accession to the European

³ To explain the way a consumer gets adapted to new culture realities, issues of consumer's socialisation are most frequently employed. This is explained as a process of consumer's learning. See: Peñaloza (1994, p. 33), Chytкова (2010, p. 12), Ogden et al. (2004, s. 4).

⁴ It was assumed that a consumer subject to acculturation is a consumer who had been staying abroad for longer than a year (long-term migrations) and who represented the first generation of immigrants (i.e. who was born in Poland). Such a person is under continuous influence of relatively long, continuous and direct contact with representatives of different culture and is exposed to actual impact of the new cultural settings.

Union⁵. The research was conducted in three European countries (France, Germany and Great Britain⁶).

The research conducted within the case study involved two stages. The first stage focused on the analysis of contents of domestic and foreign reports. Some ethnographic research was also carried out in the Internet. The second stage involved researching that employed basic individual techniques like in-depth interviews and direct observations performed in the place of respondents' residence. Some auxiliary research methods employed included distribution of questionnaires along with the use of projection and photography related techniques. Additional sources of information were provided by means of notes that had been drafted in the field⁷.

The research was conducted in compliance with case study assumptions⁸ based on the triangulation procedure. This allowed for obtaining wider field materials and more reliable interpretation background (Kostera 2003). Triangulation made it possible to ensure reliability and correctness of reasoning, thus providing trustworthiness of the research results (Konecki 2000, p. 128-129). Methodological tools that were employed contributed to expansion of knowledge about the effects of acculturation on the micro-economic level, particularly including changes in purchasing behaviours of Polish consumers observed as a result of the acculturation process as illustrated by selected European countries.

Results and discussion

The research into purchasing behaviours of consumers subject to acculturation confirmed that the consumers in question were susceptible to some impact of other cultures (i.e. cultures of the host countries). It was observed that the purchasing behaviours of consumers subject to acculturation tended to diversify. The process of diversifying consumers' purchasing behaviours – their acculturation – refers to a lesser extent to the emotional aspect (i.e. a sense of consumers' national identity, values they believe in) and to the cognitive one (i.e. consumers' attitudes towards elements of domestic and foreign cultures). However, changes were observed in the behavioural dimension that referred to the way consumers functioned on the market.

The empirical research conducted allowed for identifying the most important changes in market behaviours of Polish consumers subject to acculturation. Such changes were understood to be an important modification in one or a few areas of the decision making process of a consumer who did shopping⁹.

⁵ As a result of market changes in Poland that are related with the process of Polish integration with the European Union (observed since 1994) Poland was characterised by the market situation that was similar to the situation in Western European countries at the moment of the actual accession in 2004 (similar trade and service related infrastructure, similar product ranges in shops, computerisation and the Internet access, online shopping opportunities, etc.). Homogenisation of market conditions (supply-related) highlights significance of culture-related conditions that may become one of the most important factors that would largely diversify market behaviours of consumers in the process of European integration and the accompanying phenomenon of acculturation.

⁶ Countries subject to this research were purpose-selected as separate cases. Much attention was paid to cultural diversity, to a number of Polish immigrants and possibilities to carry out research procedures.

⁷ For more see: Stolecka-Makowska (2014, p. 250-256).

⁸ For more see: Stake (2009, s. 623), Silverman (2009, p.168), Konecki (2000, p. 127-128).

⁹ It is necessary to highlight that the changes in question refer to particular stages of the purchase (not necessarily all). They may be observed during all or just one stage of purchase.

Characteristics of consumers subject to research

The in-depth interviews and direct observation carried out in the place of residence involved individual consumers, both male and female, that were characterised by different length of their stay abroad. All consumers subject to this research left Poland after its accession to the European Union. They now live in cities of similar size, commercial infrastructure and access to Polish and foreign products. They are young people (aged 25-36) of Polish citizenship. They graduated from universities and they are employed. All respondents referred to their material status as good or very good¹⁰. A majority of them know at least one foreign language very well. Before they arrived in their host countries, they had had different cross-cultural experiences that resulted from contacts with representatives of different cultures (obtained e.g. while doing casual jobs, trainings, courses or studies abroad). They all left Poland voluntarily, predominantly because of professional reasons. Their departures were supposed to provide them with opportunities for gathering new experience and developing professional competences. In fewer cases they wished to improve their financial (better earnings and nicer perspectives) or personal (love, family or disliked Polish mentality). At present, the respondents maintain systematic contacts with their homeland as a result of their visits in Poland. A majority of them do not plan any return to Poland in the future.

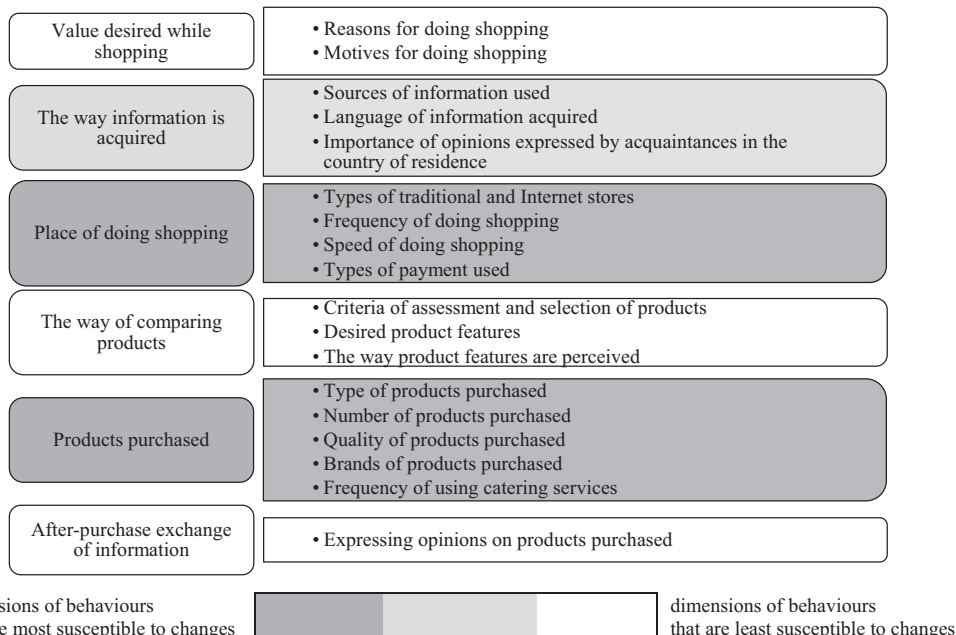
The respondents believe that family, religion and health are the most important values. They admit that they are proud of their origin and that they are not ashamed of their nationality. They still celebrate holidays in the same way they used to celebrate them in Poland. They even try to show some beauty of the holidays in question to representatives of different cultures (they are attached to Polish customs and history). However, under the influence of other culture, they changed their attitudes to people, time, environment or shopping. They are more tolerant and open to the world and to others. They do not demonstrate their success by means of buying specific products because material status is not of much importance in their opinion. They prefer to assimilate with their communities since they do not like show off. The respondents are characterised by more positive attitudes to shopping that is not associated with savings, looking for cheaper products or being concerned about satisfying their needs any more.

Dimensions of acculturation affected purchasing behaviours of consumers subject to this research

The research allowed concluding that despite of different countries of Polish consumers' immigration (France, Germany and Great Britain), changes were observed in similar aspects of the decision making process.

¹⁰ It is important to assess the material situation correctly since it is possible to assume that income is not a basic factor that differentiates purchasing behaviours of consumers. This facilitates identification of real behaviours of customers, i.e. adopting new culture-related elements or maintaining own habits.

Figure 1
Dimensions of the purchase related decision-making process in which changes were identified



Source: own preparation.

Regardless of respondents' residence, the changes referred to the following: values expected by consumers while doing shopping, the way they acquired information, places where they did shopping, the way they compared products, products purchased and after-purchase exchange of information. Detailed changes in information related activities and actual activities of consumers subject to this research undertaken before and after they made their transactions are presented by means of Figure 1.

The research shows that **the most culturally sensitive elements of consumers' purchasing behaviours include selected products and places where shopping is done, followed by the way information is acquired.** However, aspects that are least susceptible to changes – although they also undergo modifications – include values desired while shopping and informational after-purchase behaviours. It is necessary to highlight that the aspects of respondents' behaviours that did not change as a result of acculturation – despite respondents' settlement in three different countries that are characterised by different consumer culture – referred to purchasing customs and habits acquired at home¹¹.

¹¹ For instance, drafting shopping lists, grocery shopping locally, buying clothes and footwear in shopping centres, buying durable goods in the internet, habitual purchases of some groceries (e.g. kabanos sausages, 'ptasie mleczko' (choco-

One should stress that changes in purchasing behaviours of Polish consumers were not the same in all countries subject to this research. Changes that would suggest homogenisation of different aspects of consumers' behaviours, i.e. the process of getting respondents' purchasing habits similar (e.g. as a result of globalisation), were not observed. Changes referred to the same aspects of behaviours but respondents differently behaved on the each level of their decision-making processes.

Changes in purchasing behaviours of respondents subject to acculturation (as illustrated by the example of France, Germany and Great Britain)

The research results show that changes in purchasing behaviours of Polish consumers subject to acculturation were made differently. The respondents took over some forms of behaviours that were observed in their new countries of residence (i.e. France, Germany and Great Britain). However, they also brought some already established schemes of behaviours to their new market realities.

The article presents identified changes of respondents' behaviours only. Those changes result from taking over different forms of behaviours from consumers living in the new country of residence. Three dimensions of market behaviours were taken into consideration.

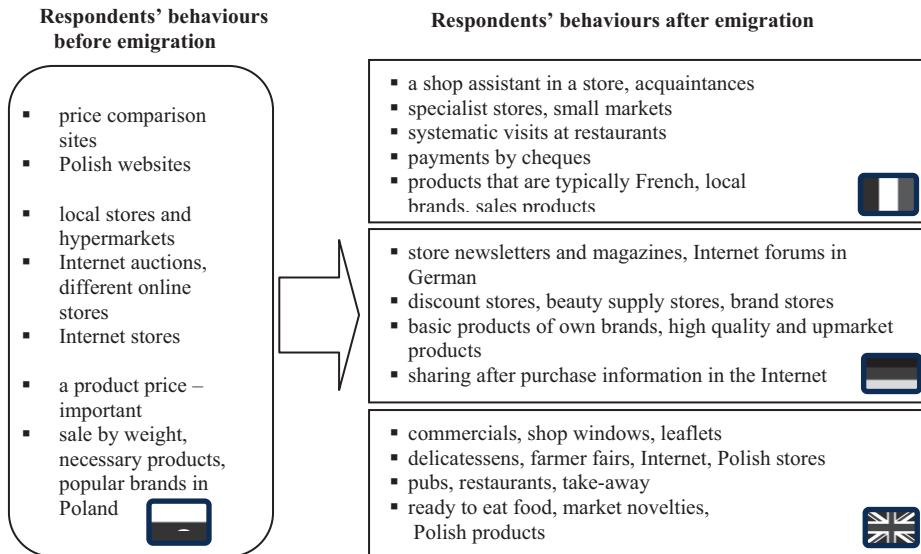
Although respondents had demonstrated similar market behaviours before they emigrated, in the condition of acculturation the same aspects of their behaviours changed. However, the changes were different. For instance, Poles living in those three countries did not start looking for information in the same sources or they did not do their shopping in the same types of retail outlets. Examples of the way respondents behaved before and after emigration, which shows changes in their market behaviours are presented by means of Figure 2.

When respondents lived in Poland, their behaviours were characterised by the fact that while looking for information about any commercial offer, they used price comparison sites (e.g. Skąpiec, Ceneo) Polish websites. Additionally, they frequently did some petty shopping in local stores. In the case of bigger shopping, they preferred hypermarkets (e.g. Real, Tesco, Carrefour, Auchan). In the Internet they bought durable goods only (e.g. white goods or audio-video equipment). Internet distribution channels predominantly included Internet auctions (i.e. Allegro) and different online stores whose names they could not remember. Clothing was bought at chain stores like e.g. Reserved. Respondents mainly took prices into consideration while doing their shopping. The most frequently bought groceries by weight. Other purchases were limited to basic needs (e.g. shoes or books) and brands that were popular in Poland (e.g. Mlekpól, Łowicz, Tyskie, Ludwig, Lukscja, Nivea, Nokia, Lenovo, Toshiba).

late covered marshmallow style dessert, pumpernikiel bread) and using professional services in Poland (e.g. of a dentist, hair stylist, a shoemaker or a watchmaker).

Figure 2

Identified changes in respondents' purchasing behaviours – an example of adopted behaviours



Source: like in Figure 1.

However, after their emigration, the respondents started to look for information in the language of their countries of residence, which involved changes in the sources of information (other websites) and using new information carriers (e.g. promotional leaflets and catalogues sent by mail in Germany, leaflets and brochures in Great Britain and shop assistants in France). It was also observed that the role of third parties in the product purchase decision-making process had increased. The respondents more frequently asked their acquaintances for opinions.

Respondents, regardless of their countries of residence, try to do their shopping faster (they do not walk in stores any more as they used to do in Poland). They do their shopping in other traditional stores: in bigger stores, in specialist stores and in brand stores (Germany), in smaller local stores, at open air fairs, in charity shops (great Britain) and in small local shops and delicatessens (France). They also use different websites (mainly Amazon and eBay) with the exception of respondents living in France who do not often do their online shopping. Selected stores also represent different brands (REWE, Alde, Netto – Germany, Sainsbury's, Waitrose – Great Britain, Lider Price, Picard – France). Respondents from Germany and Great Britain also started buying cosmetics in beauty supply stores (DM, Muller and Boots respectively). It was noticed that the respondents more and more frequently used catering services, ethnical restaurants (Germany), pubs and taka-away orders (Great Britain), restaurants and cafes (France).

Poles subject to this research, regardless of their country of residence, purchase more clothing, footwear, cosmetics and food. They buy fewer groceries of specific type (like e.g. some meat or sausages). They also started buying products that they had not been familiar with and that were characteristic for their country of residence (e.g. Schwarzwald ham, cheddar, humus, sibas, La Roustique cheese, *foie gras*, chestnuts). The respondents also buy more products that are highly processed (Germany), ready to eat food (Great Britain), and frozen and preserved food (France). Those products represent different brands and quality than the products purchased in Poland. Clothing, cosmetics and durable goods purchased abroad also represent different brands (e.g. in the case of better brands Lacoste – in Germany, in the case of chain stores H&M in Great Britain and France) and different quality (all products of better quality in Germany, better quality cosmetics and durable goods along with worse clothing in Great Britain, and a majority of poorer quality products in France).

The research allows for concluding that changes in consumers' behaviours are in some cases forced and in others spontaneous. Forced changes result from some necessity, from the situation (e.g. difficult access to previously bought products called for selection of substitutes). Spontaneous changes stem from sub-consciousness (e.g. respondents use new places and forms of purchase that are typical for consumers in a given country). Such changes were made consciously. They frequently resulted from the process of imitating or following latest fashions.

Conclusions

To conclude, it has to be emphasised that this article does not identify all purchasing behaviours of Polish consumers subject to acculturation. Only those behaviours that are most likely to be susceptible to cultural settings got identified in the course of the empirical research. Moreover, changes in consumers' behaviours observed in each country subject to this research confirm that respondents living in a particular country got similar to natives in the context of some elements of the decision making process although they managed to sustain some of their habits acquired in their homelands.

The research confirmed that as a result of acculturation the way consumers behaved was subject to changes. Those changes might lead to elaboration of different patterns of behaviours, new purchasing behaviours of consumers and emergence of different types of consumers¹². The above proves that new consumer cultures that are mixtures of habits originating from countries of origin and settlement are somehow created.

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Zmiany w zachowaniach nabywczych konsumentów w warunkach akulturacji – studium empiryczne

Streszczenie

W dobie globalizacji i pogłębiających się procesów integracyjnych obserwuje się zjawisko przenikania się różnych kultur (akulturacji), co się z tym wiąże przejmowania przez konsumentów, zwłaszcza migrujących, elementów kultury konsumpcyjnej odmiennej od kraju ich pochodzenia. W artykule zaprezentowano zmiany, które dokonały się w zachowaniach nabywczych polskich konsumentów w wyniku procesu akulturacji. Przedstawiono w nim wybrane wyniki badań empirycznych zrealizowanych przy użyciu metodologii interpretacyjnej charakterystycznej dla nurtu badań jakościowych. W wykorzystanym studium przypadku zastosowano metodę triangulacji danych i metod badawczych. Badania dotyczyły trzech celowo dobranych krajów Europy: Francji, Niemiec i Wielkiej Brytanii.

Słowa kluczowe: konsument, zachowania nabywcze, akulturacja, studium przypadku.

Kody JEL: D11, D12

Изменения в покупательском поведении потребителей в условиях аккультурации – эмпирический анализ

Резюме

В эпохе глобализации и углубляющихся интеграционных процессов наблюдается явление взаимопроникновения разных культур (аккультурации) и, что связано с этим, перенятия потребителями, особенно мигрирующими, элементов потребительской культуры, отличной от страны их происхождения. В статье представили изменения, которые произошли в покупательском поведении польских потребителей в результате процесса аккультурации. В ней представили избранные результаты эмпирических исследований, выполненных с использованием интерпретационной методологии, характерной для руслу качественных исследований. В использованном анализе конкретной проблемы применили метод триангуляции данных и исследовательских методов. Исследования касались трех целесообразно подобранных стран Европы: Великобритании, Германии и Франции.

Ключевые слова: потребитель, покупательское поведение, аккультурация, анализ конкретной проблемы.

Коды JEL: D11, D12

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