

CONSUMPTION OF CULTURAL GOODS AND SERVICES

Izabela Ścibiorska-Kowalczyk, PhD

izabela.scibiorska@ue.wroc.pl

Wroclaw University of Economics, Poland

Abstract

The article presents research of consumer participation in selected areas of culture and the validity of the use of various cultural goods and services provided to consumers. There were also presented opinions on the impact of individual institutions (family, school, media) to education to participate in culture. Some barriers to participation in culture were pointed out as well as the scale of importance for consumers in participation in the “traditional” (opera, theater, ballet, etc.) and the “new” (Internet, movies, DVDs, etc.) culture areas.

Key words: consumption, consumer behavior, culture

Introduction

Studies on consumption levels are one of the most important issues in contemporary economics. They demonstrate the development capacity of both the national economies and the standard of living in different countries. The goal of this article is to present the results of pilot studies on aspects related to the consumption of cultural goods and services and to the consumer behaviours. The article begins with presentation of the theoretical issues related to needs and consumption. This is followed by the results of pilot studies conducted by the author in 2012 by means of surveys on a sample of 100 respondents.

1. Participation in culture in the context of needs and consumption

Participation in culture is defined as any personal contact with the products of culture or the culture-driven behaviours, as well as indirect or direct contact with other people. This contact may consist not only in using the

products of culture, in assimilating, processing and reproducing the values inherent in them or in being subjected to the prevailing cultural standards, but also in creating new cultural products, values and behaviours (Golka 2007: 122). Article 6.1. of the Polish Constitution of 2 April 1997 provides that ‘the Republic of Poland shall provide conditions for the people’s equal access to the products of culture which are the source of the Nation’s identity, continuity and development’. Antonina Kłosowska (1980: 40) has proposed the following definition: ‘Culture is a relatively integrated whole including both the human behaviours that follow the models common to a social community, formed and assimilated in the course of human interaction, and the products of such behaviours.’ Culture is therefore a system of behavioural models and of the actual behaviours and their outcomes which are created, acquired, applied and transformed in the process of social life (Golka 2007: 59).

People avail themselves of cultural goods and services when such needs arise along with an awareness of the desire to fulfil them. Bożena Klimczak (2003: 28) defines a need as a human condition characterised by the non-fulfilment of specific and vital requirements. In other words, it is a subjective sense of lack, of dissatisfaction or of craving for a given set of requirements or things which are essential to people if they are to survive and which enable them to develop, accomplish their social roles and so forth. However, the best-known classification of needs is Maslow’s hierarchy (1990). Starting from the needs of the lowest order, the author lists the following:

- physiological needs, e.g. the need to eat or sleep,
- safety needs, e.g. safety from death, injury, or loss of property,
- needs related to belonging and love, e.g. belonging to the family or a social group, sense of being accepted,
- needs related to respect and esteem, e.g. the need for approval, prestige, self-confidence or success,
- needs related to self-actualization (self-fulfilment), e.g. implementation of personal plans and dreams.

From the point of view of economics, the factor that most effectively stimulates human consumption are human needs. In a market economy, needs are usually catered for by means of goods and services acquired through market exchange. The way of meeting the needs is also determined by culture and society. In the process of explaining the phenomenon of consumption, analysis of the social nature of human needs plays a more and more significant role. This applies primarily to the higher-order needs which find their expression through the learning process. The changing human needs necessitate the production of new consumer goods and services, and this affects the social and economic development (Bylok 2013: 11-13).

Bywalec (2007: 16) explains that the sphere of consumption studies can be divided into four areas of analysis: human needs, means to satisfy the needs, ways to satisfy the needs, and effects of satisfying the needs.

The first area has already been discussed here, and the second one – means of satisfying human needs, that is to say, the objects of consumption – can be split into four groups (Bywalec 2007: 16-17):

- tangible objects that get used up during their consumption – these include food, clothing, footwear and other consumer durables,
- tangible objects of symbolic (e.g. cultural or religious) nature, which include paintings, sculptures, some objects of worship etc.,
- intangible social and cultural values like knowledge, sense of safety, improved health, etc., and
- activities classified as services, e.g. education, transportation, medical treatment, repair services, etc.

The third area is the study of consumer behaviours. Szczepański (1981) defines its object as any and all consumer behaviours and actions meant to acquire the means to satisfy human needs and the ways of using such means. At the same time, Żelazna et al. (2002: 80) define consumer behaviours as the actions and measures taken in order to acquire the goods and services to satisfy the consumers' needs in the order determined by the hierarchy of preferences as perceived by them, as well as all and any methods of using such goods and services (actual consumption).

Finally, the fourth area of studies are the effects (outcomes) of consumption. These can be subdivided into effects for the consumer, where the direct effects of consumption are the immediately perceptible effects of the act of consumption, for instance the elimination of hunger or pain, improved appearance or health, and the indirect effects that appear only later on (after some time), like diseases caused by cigarette smoking, high levels of education in the society due to the spread of education, or participation in culture. In contrast, the external effects of consumption are the effects of meeting the needs that are felt by the direct or indirect social environment of the consumers, including their family or neighbourhood. The effects of consumption can be labelled as either positive (including, for instance, good health, a sense of satisfaction, friendly social relationships, high cultural level of society) or negative ones (here we can have an increase in social pathology, a decline in participation in culture, social conflicts and so on) (Bywalec 2007: 17).

The increase in the importance of consumption for social life is driven by transformations of the social structure, involving the disappearance of class differences, which results in the growing democratisation of consumption (goods that used to be available only to the higher classes now become available to a variety of social classes), as well as in the transformations of

family structure and consumer ethics – the emergence of consumer awareness, increased income, and changes in the moral assessment of the use of consumer goods and services (Koschel 2008: 30).

The word ‘consumption’ originates from the Latin *consumptio* and means expenditure, use or utilization of goods. In its broad sense, consumption is interpreted as any satisfaction of human needs (Bywalec, Rudnicki 2002: 13). Bywalec and Rudnicki (2002: 15) propose a definition of consumption which emphasizes that it is ‘an act of satisfying human needs through utilization of goods and services’. According to Szczepański (1977: 17), the ‘consumer behaviours’ stand for ‘all and any behaviours and actions meant to acquire the means to satisfy human needs and the ways of using such means’.

Consumption is a process which usually begins before the consumer buys a product and continues after the product purchase. Within this process, the following steps can be distinguished (Foxall, Goldsmith 1998: 41):

- the emergence and recognition of a need,
- planning and taking a decision to purchase,
- the act of purchase,
- the post-purchase behaviours that may lead to multiple purchases and repeated sales, as well as to discarding the product when its useful life is over.

A feature of the consumption preferences and consumption models of households is their possession of durable goods. These durable goods get acquired and consumed over a long time and they demonstrate the household’s level of wealth, also ensuring a comfortable life. There is a tendency to think that the greater the extent to which a household is furnished with durable goods, the higher its level of current disposable income and its average perceived standard of living will be (Zalega 2012: 334). Consumers who, through their asset-holding status, belong to a specific socio-economic group, try to follow a behavioural pattern determined by the current fashion, their tastes, habits, social status and so on. These behaviours become a factor in changing the consumption behaviours of society, influencing the structure of consumption and the extent to which households are furnished with durable goods (Light 2009: 90).

The process of expanding the areas of consumption is a result of the following trends (Schneider 2000: 12-13):

- diversification of the supply of goods and services for various target groups,
- massive spread of low-cost substitutes for branded products of comparable value in use,
- expansion of consumer markets into areas that previously were not related to consumption,

- expansion of fashion as well as assigning symbolic cultural and emotional significance to consumer goods, which often leads to rapid exchange of old products for new ones,

Traditional economics assumes rarity of goods and resources. However, the consumption of media goods does not lead to their exhaustion, as one and the same news may have millions of consumers (recipients) and its consumption (listening to or watching) does not make it used-up. Information resources have a special feature – they gradually multiply with consumption (Kowalski 2006: 27). In the process of globalization and the growing social trend for consumerism, the following factors that influence this process are noted (König 2000: 421-431):

- more and more modern communication systems and new communication media, for example Internet and mobile telephony,
- development of transport for rapid movement of people and goods,
- development of world tourism, which facilitates both the adoption of specific foreign patterns of consumption and the acquisition of knowledge of foreign cultures and customs,
- development of satellite communication,
- globalization of the mass media.

2. The pilot study

Consumption of cultural goods and services takes place through public participation in culture. Therefore, a pilot study was conducted on a sample of 100 respondents. The study was conducted by means of a questionnaire available in the electronic form.

Participation in culture is a requirement of social nature, and the level of engagement depends on the importance ascribed to it. The present study asked the respondents how they assess the significance of educational institutions, family and new communication technologies (Internet, new media) for their cultural education.

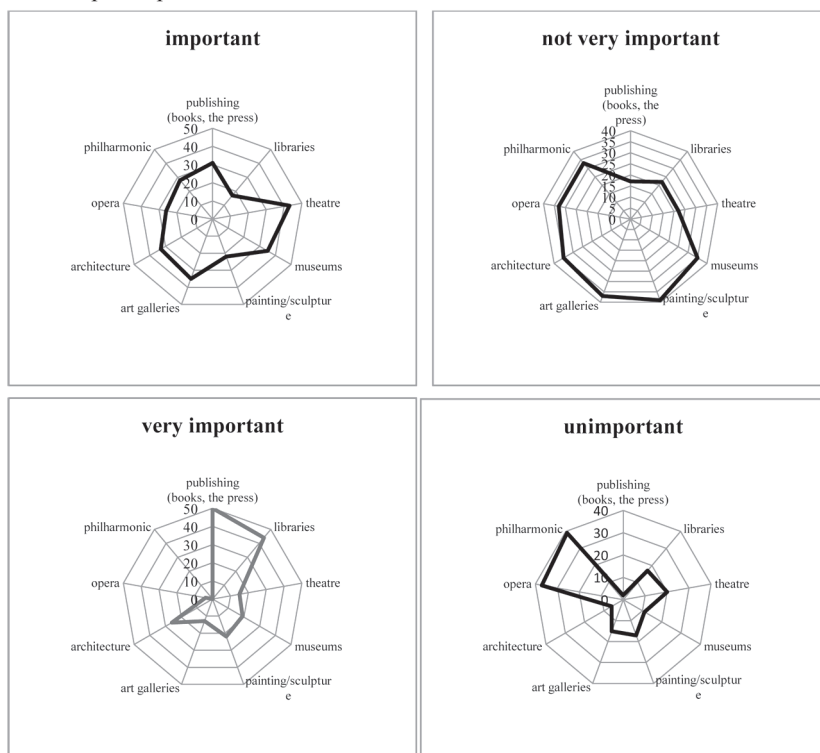
Table 1. Significance of the following 'institutions' for your cultural education (% of responses)

	Enormous impact	Major impact	Average impact	Minor impact	No impact at all
Family	33	35	17	13	2
Primary school	2	13	44	39	2
Secondary school	11	20	39	28	2
University/college	6	35	26	20	13
Friends	20	35	33	7	5
Media (TV, radio)	4	9	26	46	15
Internet	9	11	26	28	26
Peer groups	9	24	48	15	4

According to the respondents, family was the most important for their cultural education – 68% of respondents assessed their family’s impact as major or enormous; less important were primary and secondary schools, whose most common evaluation was ‘average impact’. Additionally, a major impact of universities and colleges was indicated by 35% of the respondents, while 13% of them stated that these had no impact at all; the latter applies to the respondents who declared that they are still at school or attained only secondary education. The respondents claim that the media or the Internet had only a minor impact on their cultural education.

Data provided in the reports on the cultural sector and the creative industries point to new areas of culture. Therefore, in the later part of the study, participation in culture was divided into the ‘traditional’ (Figure 1) and the ‘new’ areas of culture (Figure 2).

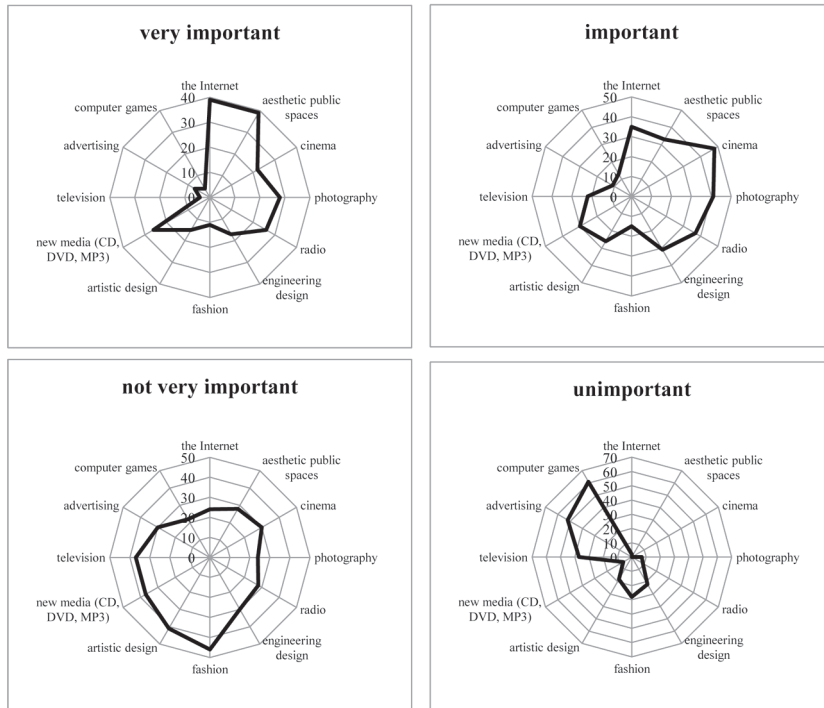
Figure 1. Importance of the following areas of culture (% of responses): ‘traditional’ areas of participation in culture



In general, the respondents consider publishing (books and periodicals) to be the most important factor – over 80% of respondents consider it important or very important while only 2% consider it unimportant. Libraries

were also highly rated, with over 60% of respondents classifying them as very important or important. The same refers to theatres (15% – very important and 43% – important) and museums (19% – very important and 35% – important). According to the respondents, the least important areas of culture are the opera, with 37% of respondents considering it unimportant, and concert halls, considered unimportant by 39% of respondents.

Figure 2. Importance of the following areas of culture (% of responses): ‘new’ areas of participation in culture



Amongst new methods of participation in culture, the participants pointed out the Internet as the most important, with 74% considering it very important or important. Aesthetic public spaces were also considered important (72%), along with cinema, photography and radio. Engineering design earned a relatively low rate in the importance ranking, with 22% of respondents considering it unimportant and 30% considering it not very important. Artistic design was also considered unimportant by 28% of respondents and not very important by 41%. The low rankings of engineering and artistic design attest to the fact that the respondents do not perceive any relation between the aesthetic public spaces, which they consider to be an important area of culture, and the engineering and artistic design activities.

The subsequent part of the study examined if the cultural areas considered important by the respondents were actually used in everyday life.

Table 2. Visits at the cultural institutions? (% of responses)

	Very often (more than 10 times a year)	Often (5 to 9 times a year)	Rarely (less than 5 times a year)	Occasionally (once a year)	Never
Libraries	37	15	18	15	15
Museums	13	20	41	22	4
Cinema	11	34	37	15	2
Exhibitions	11	22	38	22	7
Art galleries	9	22	26	32	11
Theatre	2	22	30	33	13
Concert halls	2	9	11	32	46
Opera	2	4	24	22	48

The responses verified the conformity of the significance levels assigned to individual areas of culture with the respondents' attendance of cultural institutions representing a particular area of culture. The respondents declared visiting libraries, cinemas and museums most frequently. In contrast, concert halls are never visited by 46% of the respondents. For opera, this figure stands at 48%.

Table 3. Level of participation in culture (% of responses)

	Enormous	Major	Average	Minor	None
Architectural sightseeing	15	35	26	15	9
Visiting museums	13	28	28	24	7
Reading popular books	20	22	43	6	9
Reading classical literature/poetry	11	15	37	24	13
Reading professional journals	17	24	37	15	6
Watching theatrical performances	6	24	24	37	9
Visiting art galleries /exhibitions (painting, photography)	9	13	19	37	22
Visiting concert halls	0	13	15	24	48
Watching opera/ballet performances	0	13	17	20	50

Most often the respondents read popular books and professional journals, but they are less likely to read the classics and poetry. The most common form of participation in culture is visiting the architectural monuments and

museums, with low levels of interest in watching opera or ballet, or in attending the concert halls.

Table 4. Factors determining participation in culture (% of responses)

I am generally interested in culture/arts	48%
I cannot afford it	31%
There are a lot of interesting events, so I participate in them	26%
At school I was taught/encouraged to participate in culture	24%
I work a lot and I am too tired for that	24%

Among several possible determiners of the respondents' participation in culture, they most often pointed to their personal interest in culture/arts (48%), to a large number of interesting cultural events (26%) and to the role of education and encouragement at school to participate in culture (24%). On the other hand, the negative factors affecting participation in culture included financial problems (31%) and a large amount of/exhaustion with work (24%).

Conclusions

For an act of consumption to occur, the consumer must experience a complex of behaviours and actions, where the basic process is the recognition of a need and going through the consumer decision-making process. In the hierarchy of needs, cultural goods and services are far from basics (Maslow's pyramid). The study undertaken has demonstrated how the consumers rank their needs related to the cultural goods and services. Questions posed to the respondents in order to determine the significance assigned to the individual areas of culture were in fact an attempt to test the level of consumer needs.

As far as cultural goods and services are concerned, consumer behaviours seem to be vastly affected by the education to participate in culture (Table 1). According to the respondents, the most important factors were the family and the university, with friends/acquaintances also playing a significant role. In today's world, with the development of the Internet and other modern media, we can no longer look at culture in the traditional way. Today's participation in culture is not limited to reading books, going to the opera, concert halls or museums, but assumes a much broader meaning and may take place via modern technological equipment thanks to the rapid technological developments. Therefore, the study also covered the influence of the modern media and the Internet. However, most of the respondents declared that these had only a minor impact on their cultural education (media – 46%, Internet – 28%).

It seems a positive sign that the respondents attached much importance to the publishing activities – books and the press were evaluated as very important (50% of respondents) or important (31%) and so were the libraries (very important – 44%, important – 17%). A relatively high number of respondents rated new media – CDs, DVDs and MP3s – highly (very important – 26%, important – 30%). For over a third of the respondents (namely, 37%) this area is of average importance but most of them certainly use these media (only 7% consider them unimportant). It is notable that such cultural media as television, advertising and computer games have been losing their popularity – TV is considered unimportant by 37% of respondents, advertising – by 52%, and computer games – by 61%. The respondents declared visiting libraries, cinemas and museums most frequently. A relatively high percentage of them visit architectural monuments and read popular and professional books.

The barriers to participation in culture that were most often pointed out by the respondents are financial hardship (31%) and too much time spent on paid work (24%). The increasing contribution of the culture and creative industries to the economic indicators shows the increasing importance of participation in the society's culture, in both its traditional and modern incarnations. Poland's economic growth will be dependent both on educating the public to participate in culture as frequently as possible and on the levels of household spending on the consumption of cultural goods and services (which, as demonstrated by the study, depend on both disposable income and leisure time available).

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