Social and psychological profile of the modern Russian consumer: Values and preferences

Babakaev S. [1]

[1]Interdisciplinary research laboratory, Russian Social State University, Orlovo-Davydovsky Lane, Building 3, apt. 56, Moscow, 129110, Russia Federation
Babakaev@mail.ru

Vinogradova M. [2]

[2]Scientific and Research Institute of Prospective Trends and Technologies, Russian State Social University, Wilhelm Pieck st., h. 4, bld. 1, Moscow, 129226, Russian Federation
Vinogradova@mail.ru

Kuljamina O. [3]

[3]Scientific and Research Institute of Prospective Trends and Technologies, Russian State Social University, Wilhelm Pieck st., h. 4, bld. 1, Moscow, 129226, Russian Federation
Kuljamina@mail.ru

Abstract

The goal of this work is to identify the axiological type of Russian consumer, as well as to reveal certain gaps in presentation and understanding of the social and psychological profile of Russian consumers via sociological and marketing approaches. As a result, goods are perceived as tools that help a person to achieve goals associated with a certain system of values. It is concluded that while compiling Russian consumer's social and psychological profile, it is important to consider the leading role of institutional stereotypes and archetypes of individual and mass consciousness that define the consumer values and preferences.

Keywords: consumer values, preferences, sociological, institutional.

Perfil social y psicológico del consumidor ruso moderno: valores y preferencias

Resumen

El objetivo de este trabajo es identificar el tipo axiológico del consumidor ruso, así como revelar ciertas lagunas en la presentación y comprensión del perfil social y psicológico de los consumidores rusos a través de enfoques sociológicos y de marketing. Como resultado, los bienes se perciben como herramientas que ayudan a una persona a alcanzar los objetivos asociados con un determinado sistema de valores. Se concluye que, al compilar el perfil social y psicológico del consumidor ruso, es importante considerar el papel principal de los estereotipos y arquetipos institucionales de conciencia individual y de masas que definen los valores y preferencias del consumidor.

Palabras clave: valores de consumo, preferencias, sociológicas, institucionales.

1. INTRODUCTION

The study of the social and psychological profile of the consumer is one of the key tasks of any marketing research. Omitting the solution of this problem makes impossible to segment the target audience, to understand its social and psychological characteristics, needs, values, to find the right advertising message, to determine the main approaches to product positioning, to stimulate demand, to implement the marketing strategy and advertising campaign as a whole.

Currently, there are many approaches to the compilation of social and psychological profiles, which are based on the personality

theory developed in psychology and sociology in different scientific paradigms. Among them, attention should be paid to the traits theory, theories within different areas of psychoanalysis, behavioral approach to personality, interactionist theory of personality. A dispositional theory of personality plays an important role in the understanding of the consumer social and psychological profile, role theory of personality, the theory of personality in humanistic psychology. These theories provide a key to understanding many aspects of consumer behavior, revealing its hidden mechanisms and determining internal and external factors from different sides and are therefore widely used in the marketing approach in the analysis of social and psychological traits and behavior patterns of consumers of different goods and services (CATTELL, 1990).

It should be noted that without them, it is difficult to predict sharp shifts in consumer preferences, which are quite typical for Russians. As a scientific hypothesis, we suggest the position that a consumer when identifying own behavior with certain values and preferences often associates it with the meaning different from that marketers try to decode. This meaning is largely determined by the socio-cultural code and the reflection and interpretation of the existing socio-economic situation in society. Despite the fact that with the help of focus groups and in-depth interviews it is possible to eventually understand and comprehend the real motivations and actions of people, however, they do not find their final conceptualization in the framework of compiling a social and psychological profile of a certain target audience of consumers. In this regard, as shown by our study, in

compiling the social and psychological profile it would be appropriate to rely on the data not only of quantitative but also qualitative research, complementing this profile with such characteristics as value erratives that allow making adjustments in the identified Gestalt of consumer values and preferences.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research was carried out within the framework of the implementation of the initiative research project Study of consumer preferences by the staff of the Institute of Promising Areas and Technologies. The study was carried out in two stages and was based on the use of quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis. The first stage included the use of such quantitative methods of information collection and analysis as a standardized questionnaire survey, the second stage included qualitative research through focus groups and in-depth non-formalized interviews.

A sociological survey was conducted by e-questionnaire on the online portal of Russian State Social University (RSSU), and involved students, faculty members and employees of the University. The survey was conducted in the framework of the implementation of purely scientific tasks and did not imply using its results in marketing research as the main goal. It rather had a scientific and educational value for the development of research tools, research hypotheses,

models of analysis and construction of aggregate indicators and therefore as a whole was not representative. Its main importance consisted in the development of tools, scientific verification, and correction of hypotheses to identify and select the most important parameters and indicators of consumer preferences and personal characteristics based on self-assessments and respondents' perceptions about shared values and their social qualities. A total of 443 respondents were interviewed. The study was conducted in April - May 2018 (DOKUCHAEV, 2009).

Among the major sets of questions designed to collect information, some questions reflect the structure of consumer preferences, moral values, social skills, and personality traits, defining consumer's social and psychological profile from the position of psychological and axiological types. To study consumer preferences, 25 most significant features were selected, which included a set of attributive and referential characteristics of the choice of goods. These features were selected on the basis of criteria by which the structure of consumer preferences is estimated and their main attribute properties are considered in scientific works (BETTMAN & JONES, 1972).

The second set of questions is to define values that are presented in the well-known hierarchy of needs and largely determine consumer preferences and behavior as a whole (BOURDIEU, 1984). About 20 indicators of different social benefits reflecting a wide range of basic life values were selected. Together they quite fully represent

different axiological types included in social and psychological profile of the consumer (AKERLOF & SHILLER, 2009).

The third set of questions defines social and psychological traits of consumers. The basis of criteria for the selection of traits that characterize the features of their psychological type were the principles and the proposed set of personal qualities from the personality traits theory of BLACKWELL, MINIARD & ENGEL (1999), and methodically implemented by constructing a semantic differential. Together, these qualities sufficiently represent the type of personality and can be the basis for the description of social and psychological profile. The basis for constructing a model of social axiological and psychological types of the respondents was their self-assessments, which were defined by the semantic approach, often used for diagnostics of personality traits (ADLER, 1997).

In the study of personal features of respondents there were used more than 40 pairs of polar values of social, institutional, sociocultural, civilizational qualities of the personality which cover a wide range of behavioral, mental, emotional-volitional, social and psychological characteristics of a personality and in considerable detail reflect a social and psychological profile of the surveyed audience (ALIFANOV & ALIFANOV, 2003).

By use of methods of focus groups and in-depth interviews, it was possible to test the questionnaire on the subject of uniformity and homogeneity of the understanding of different terms, in the context of

those meanings embedded in them by the respondents. In total, 2 focus groups and 5 in-depth interviews devoted to the study of this problem were conducted in the test mode. By its composition, the focus groups displayed by the key parameters the model of the surveyed population, but were homogeneous in age. The first focus group covered respondents under the age of 30 years, the second covered older people. The main goal of using qualitative methods was to find answers to questions related to the relevant understanding of the different meanings of the terms used, as well as the variation of semantic meanings of terms by which respondents can characterize their social qualities, attitudes, social views, give their psychological and axiological portrait (BESSONOVA, KIRDINA & O'SULLIVAN, 1996).

3. RESULTS

Analysis of the distribution of respondents' answers to the question: Please assess the importance of each factor affecting your choice of goods and services showed that the profile of consumer preferences, which is an important characteristic of the social and psychological profile of the Russian consumer, according to the results of our study, looks in the following way (Fig. 1):

Fig. 1. Profile of consumer preferences when choosing the goods

The results of the survey showed that reliability, guarantee, the safety of goods or services has ranked first by its importance among the attributive values of the product. This attribute property is extremely important for 63 % of respondents. Here it should be noted that we deliberately analyzed the extreme position in each polar pair of features to form groups with more precise boundaries of their consumer preferences. The second place among customer preferences was taken by such an attributive property of a product or service as quality. Its absolute importance when choosing a product was noted by 49 % of respondents.

The third, fourth and fifth places shared such qualities as price, utility, composition of goods or services that are the most significant for 43 % of respondents. In the rating of the 10 most important qualities that determine the choice of goods and services of the surveyed audience, after the characteristics listed above, the following

product attributes and functional relations follow in decreasing order by their rank value: past experience (36 %); specifications (35 %); product appearance (33 %); product material (31 %); eco-friendliness (30 %).

The survey showed that consumer preferences of the surveyed audience are both attributive and purely functional, are not only a choice of quality parameters of the product, but its functional characteristics associated with the benefits that it brings, as well as significant communication and social effects that are associated with its possession and use. To study the value component of the social and psychological profile of consumers, the authors used scale of values of BARDI (2000) Schwartz Value Scale (SVS) (BABAKAYEV, VINOGRADOVA, VISHNYAKOVA, ZANINA & ERMILOVA, 2018), modified and revised according to Russian specificity and the studied audience. It has been revised through a more complete and explicit disclosure at the operational level of basic values-goals, and instrumental values, as well (Fig. 2).
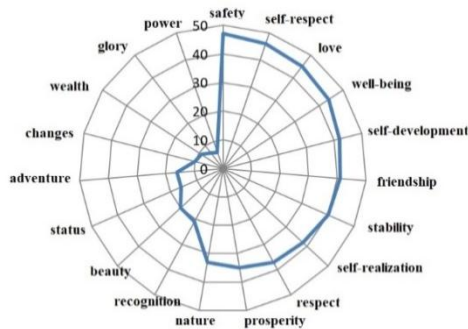

Fig. 2. Profile of values-goals

Analysis of the distribution of respondents' answers to a set of questions related to the assessment of the importance of certain life values revealed the following. Among the most significant life values for the surveyed audience, the first five places are taken by safety (for 47 % of respondents this benefit has the maximum importance), self-respect (46 %), love (45 %), well-being (44 %), self-development (42 %). The following values follow in descending order: friendship (41 %), stability (40 %), self-realization (39 %), respect (38 %), prosperity (35 %), nature (33 %), recognition (21 %), beauty (20 %). It is worthwhile to note that such values as status (16 %); adventure (16 %); changes (10 %); wealth (9 %); glory (7 %); power (6 %) are the least important for respondents.

However, despite the relatively low prevalence in the surveyed environment, these life values play a very important role in life for a fairly stable group of consumers. Given that the values-goals encourage people to certain actions, without the definition and measurement of values-means it is impossible to study consumer behavior. The results show which set of values influences consumer behavior in a certain manner. In this semantic context, goods acquire the needed and the desired value for the consumer, due to the fact that they are perceived as tools that help a person to achieve goals associated with a certain system of values. The analysis of the study results on the set of questions, that defines a wide range of social qualities, which the respondents attribute to themselves, revealed the following profile of consumers, in terms of the basic instrumental values with which they relate their behavior (Fig. 3).
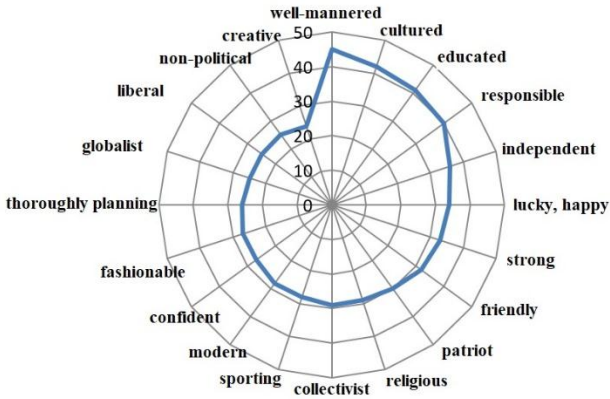
Fig. 3. Profile of instrumental values that reflect consumer model behavior

According to the results of the survey, among the most typical social qualities that respondents attribute to themselves in the process of their own self-assessment, the following traits and patterns of social self-portrait are ranked first: well-mannered (45 % of respondents indicated strong evidence of this quality); cultured (42 %); educated (41 %); responsible (40 %). Further, by the degree of prevalence of their manifestations in self-portrait, follow the qualities such as: independent (36 %); lucky, happy (34 %); strong (33 %); friendly (32 %); humanitarian (31%); patriot (30 %), religious (29 %); collectivist (29 %); sporting (29%).

For every fourth or fifth respondent, according to their self-assessment, the following qualities are characteristic and strongly evidenced: modern (28 %); confident (27 %); fashionable (27 %);

thoroughly planning (26 %); globalist (25 %); liberal (25 %); non-political (25 %); creative (24 %). Despite the fact that these traits of social self-portrait reflect the characteristics of a specific audience of faculty members and students of the RSSU, however, given the scientific, methodological and experimental nature of the study, it can be concluded that the applied modification of the assessments scale gives quite acceptable results for audience segmentation.

Moreover, the results gave a lot to think about the key values that the respondents are driven by, which led to further research to understand and clarify their meaning and significance. The result of additional research conducted by the method of focus groups and in-depth interviews was the realization of two key points. First, the understanding of all ambiguity, ambivalence, and inconsistency of meanings that respondents put in terms reflecting certain values and preferences that balance depending on the institutional context on the verge of anti-values. Secondly, the desire to overcome this ambiguity by shifting its value constant in the middle zone between the two polar poles of values and anti-values of different institutional matrices of socio-cultural development. This axiological maneuver can be seen as the desire to find a certain norm between the extremes of values, which, depending on a particular socio-cultural context and focus of society's development can be perceived in one socio-cultural code as a value and as an anti-value in the other one.

4. CONCLUSION

The social and psychological profile of the Russian consumer is determined primarily by consumer preferences and values, which play a key role in the study of its profile and the main characteristics that affect consumer behavior. The study of consumer preferences revealed that among the attributive values of the product, the first place by its importance occupied such qualities as reliability, warranty, safety, quality, price, utility of the product or service. The study of values-goals that determine the overall trajectory of human orientations and aspirations has shown that among the most important life values, safety, self-respect, love, well-being, self-development rank first five places for the surveyed audience.

Among the most typical social qualities that respondents attribute to themselves in the process of their own self-assessment, the top 5 most significant traits and attributes of social self-portrait include such social qualities as well-mannered; cultured; educated; responsible; independent. The result of additional research conducted by the method of focus groups and in-depth interviews was the realization of two key insights. First, the understanding of all ambiguity, ambivalence, and inconsistency of meanings that respondents put in terms reflecting certain values and preferences that balance depending on the institutional context on the verge of anti-values. Secondly, the desire to overcome this ambiguity by

shifting its value constant in the middle area between the two polar poles of values and anti-values of different institutional matrices of socio-cultural development.

Unfortunately, at this stage of our initial research project, we were able to conduct only the most general analysis between different semantic definitions and concepts that reflect the phenomena under study and only detect the problem rather than find the approach to its solution. The conducted empirical, research and experimental research has identified further prospects for studying the impact of personal characteristics on the formation of consumer preferences as a complex phenomenon through separation of its components and identification of their relationships. The next stage, which is planned to be implemented in the future, should deepen the knowledge of the relationship between consumer preferences, values, on the one hand, and the socio-cultural type of personality, adhered to a certain institutional matrix, on the other hand. In the future, it is expected to consider which personal characteristics and preferences each of the selected socio-cultural types have and how this can be applied when compiling a social and psychological profile of Russian consumers.

The results of this study can be recommended for use in the practice of marketing specialists who are focused on target audiences that are close in their parameters to the group of the youth we surveyed, which belongs to the middle class, works and at

the same time pursue a higher level of their education. Knowledge of the main personal characteristics of this group, the specifics of its consumer preferences, values and social qualities will help to predict their consumer behavior in the context of current social and economic changes.

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