

Chapter 8

Sustainable Food Consumption Macro Issues: Case Study of Latvian Consumer Behaviour

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ABSTRACT

The chapter presents an analysis of food consumption macro issues in Latvia. The authors have aggregated scientific literature on various aspects of consumption with an emphasis on sustainable consumption fundamental issues. The purpose of the chapter is to characterise the factors affecting consumer behaviour in food consumption and identify the profiles of the sustainable and unsustainable consumer in Latvia. In scope of the research, the authors have performed analysis of business cycle effects on consumption as well as effects of the state support to promote sustainable food consumption. The empirical research aims to study the present and potential behaviours of consumers, identifying their attitudes and intentions towards purchasing sustainable food products.

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, sustainable food consumption and customer behaviour are important issues both in scientific and political circles, which are never losing their topicality with changing economic conditions.

Shifting consumption patterns towards more sustainable behaviours rely on a robust under-

standing not just of what motivates consumers, but also on how behavioural change occurs, and how (if at all) it can be influenced by public sector interventions. The actions that people take and choices they make – to consume certain products and services, or to live in certain ways rather than others – all have direct and indirect impacts on the environment as well as on personal (and collective) well-being (Jackson, 2005).

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The aim of this chapter is to analyse the main factors influencing consumer behaviour and their impact on sustainable food choices in Latvia.

To attain the aim, the authors set the following tasks.

1. To study scientific literature on various aspects of consumption.
2. To analyse factors influencing consumers' food choice and identify the existing barriers for sustainable food consumption in Latvia.
3. To research political framework in sustainable consumption.
4. To study the present and potential behaviours of consumers, identifying their attitudes and intentions towards purchasing sustainable food products.
5. To identify the profiles of sustainable and unsustainable food consumers in Latvia.

BACKGROUND

Consumption Research Conception

There is a lot of psychological, sociological and anthropological literature available on consumption. Consumption has been recognised in trade and consumer and motivation studies long ago. In the scientific literature, consumption is considered in various aspects that are summarised in Table 1.

Not a single opinion on the functionality of material goods will be able to create a model that would enable us to understand consumer behaviour, as functionality is not the most important thing. Goods and services are used not only to be satiated and have a certain standard of living, but also to identify oneself with some social group, find one's place in it, differ from other social groups, as well as to make known one's faith in certain ideals, and to distinguish oneself from other ideals. To some extent, individuals consume to find the meaning of consumption (Jackson, 2005)

The author of the book "Consumption Theory," H. Kyrk (1923), admits that "a study on consumption is actually a study on human behaviour". Therefore, the paper analyses consumer behaviour theories to examine the prospects for sustainable consumption.

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION AND ITS FACTORS

Human values change alongside with the socio-economic situation. The modern society is called a consumer society, whose unsustainable consumption habits exceed the planet's capacity. Globally, governments are aware of it and have developed sustainable development strategies so that meeting today's needs does not endanger the opportunities of future generations to meet their needs. One of the most significant cornerstones of sustainable development is sustainable consumption focusing on reducing the exploitation of natural resources and pollution during the use of goods and services. Sustainable consumption is closely associated with social responsibility and ethical actions of individuals.

Consumption and consumer behaviour are interrelated concepts; that is why they are researched by various scientific disciplines, viewing the issues both from different and from similar aspects.

Economics focuses on consumer behaviour mainly from the aspects of product purchase and use of household-produced products. Consumer behaviour is defined as rational and logical, which is influenced by prices of goods and macroeconomic conditions that affect incomes of consumers and their propensity to save or spend as well as such individual factors as budget and tax relief. Economists argue that consumer behaviour can be changed through: provision of information and consultation; market transformation; internalisation of external costs; and supply and regulation of public goods.

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