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**SPECIFIC PROBLEMS OF CONSUMER SOCIETY**

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*Abstract*

The article seeks to study crisis phenomena in consumer societies, to identify effective ways of their elimination.

Despite the fact that the issue of consumer society has been long studied in different scientific areas for a long time, it is still topical. New social, economic and political theories encourage to examine this issue from different perspectives. Increasing nihilism of the society is giving rise to concern as far as nations are becoming stupid due to the ideology of overconsumption which threatens to the era of hedonism and soullessness. It will inevitably lead to the revival of animal instincts and quasi-scientific philosophy which is based on compulsion and violence.

It is necessary today to abandon the principles of unification and standardization which devaluate cultural achievements. Consumption is a class institute which assumes the lack of equal rights and opportunities. Therefore, consumption forms a new social reality with unjust governments. The realities of today determine the necessity of the emergence of a new person and a new society in which the ideas of consumerism will die out as mammoths. It is hoped that Oswald Spengler's argument that each culture produces its civilization will not become a prophesy for all peoples and countries.

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**Keywords:** Overconsumption, consumerism, urbanization, spiritual crisis, nihilism, civilization.



## 1. Introduction

The concept of consumer society has been used in different research areas (sociology, philosophy, economics, management) for a long time. Urbanization which is growth of cities and population around them played a great role in development of consumer societies. Economic development encouraging consumption came into contradiction with humanistic ideals having formed a moral vacuum in many countries of Europe, Russia and the USA.

## 2. Problem Statement

New social economic conditions contribute to transformation of economic and social systems. Today, in the era of globalization, powerful integration processes have both positive impacts on consolidation of national economies and negative effects of unification and standardization of national cultures and disregard of their peculiarities. Many people in Europe, America and Russia rely on nihilism philosophy and deny the importance of spiritual values, guided in addressing many issues naked pragmatism, they do not understand and themes of love, duty the Motherland, justice, morality, for them they are abstract, they are interested in the issues of money, shopping, entertainment, rest rather than of love, commitment, justice, ethics.

## 3. Research Questions

Development of humanity aggravated the issue of ideological concepts under new civilization conditions.

In his work “The decline of the West”, a German culture specialist and philosopher Oswald Spengler (1880–1936) predicted the imminent and inevitable outward manifestation of the historical crisis. The researcher determined the significance of different cultures and drew the conclusion that any culture which is at the end of its resources will inevitably fall into decline which is referred to as a civilization. It can become the beginning of a historical crisis. Spengler predicted the substitution of concepts: motherland will be substituted for cosmopolitanism, traditions and reverence of ancestors – for calculating mind, religious mysticism – for scientific doctrine, society – for the state, spiritual values – for money worship. Negative cultural changes were the most unpromising stage of culture development. Spengler also predicted negative effects of civilization processes (Spengler, 1993).

The consumer society often has a hedonistic basis and aims to enjoy life. Many European countries argue that people have to be an object of consumption and overconsumption. The ideology of consumer society is based on material values, money and power. Hedonistic wants are enormous. Key human values, ethics are unwanted, turn utilitarian.

Today, one can argue about a global moral crisis.

Many American political leaders and presidents (D. Eisenhower, J. Kennedy, etc.) supported the idea of development of consumer society. They created the concept of American lifestyle based on material prosperity and unlimited consumption. This lifestyle is an antipode of moral lifestyle typical of the Russian culture. It is presented as an example of freedom of speech and democracy.

The consumer society offers different categories of goods (Ilyin, 2005). This combination of comfort and utility means happiness for many people.

There is a universal and ethno-national concept well-being. To the universal concept can be attributed to the good health of the person and his family; an interesting, well-paid job or a business to generate income; a strong family, reliable friends, a good rest, a state of mental comfort, which includes not only material security, but also happiness in family life, love. But even all of the above-mentioned with a stretch is not suitable for every age group, that is, children, youth, the elderly.

The standard of living in the modern world is often defined as the provision of services and material benefits, and the well-being of people, represented in the social, psychological, emotional spheres, is not considered or ignored (Ilyin, 2000).

The concept of well-being differs dramatically from one nation to another: in Russia, for example, one "who planted a tree, built a house, gave birth to a child" is considered a prosperous person; however, this is not enough for a person now. Thus, in the opinion of youth, material wealth, leisure and entertainment, the admiration of glossy fashion magazines, even some permissiveness attract young people, or rather most of them much more than moral improvement, spiritual life, high ideals of classical culture, morality, sense of responsibility, patriotism, etc., although in the recent past, these qualities were valued in the first place.

It is gratifying to note that over the past decade, Russia has been reviving the idea of unselfish service to society in the form of volunteer youth movements. Their activities are aimed at providing gratuitous, free services to a person or a group of people who find themselves in a difficult life situation (Rudykh & Voronyuk, 2014).

Volunteers work in kindergartens, hospitals, promote a healthy lifestyle, provide assistance to old people, disabled people, orphans, the poor, refugees, homeless people and others who need material and moral support; improve the streets, provide assistance in case of natural disasters, help animals, deal seriously with environmental problems. The illustration of this is a careful attitude to lake Baikal by young people in the Irkutsk region.

Russia today criticizes the ideology of egoism, cynicism, individualism, the cult of violence and soulless at the governmental level.

Social and economic changes in different countries, including Russia, influence both traditional foundations and mentality.

Manufacturing interests changed social conditions, and total urbanization formed a new type of human – a consumer for whom standards of social ethics (politeness, respect, justice, etc.) mean civilization. As a result, individual consciousness and its priorities changed radically. Producing a great variety of goods, modern society accelerates social differentiation, which causes political instability, dissatisfaction and class contradictions. In this case, consumption is a class institute: not all people have equal opportunities and possess equal material wealth (Gurova, 2005).

Increasing consumer desires and ingratitude to people and the society that help them are typical of modern consumers. They are becoming materialist functionaries who disregard less successful colleagues (Ricci, Marinelli, & Puliti, 2016). In fact, not all people are able to cope with the fast pace of modern life (professional burnout, nervous breakdown).

Large shopping centers and supermarkets play a crucial role (Babylon, Okhotny ryad, GUM, Krokus City, Ashan in Moscow; Manhattan-mall, Queens-mall, Arundel Mills in the USA; La Vallee, Louis

Vuitton in France; in Europe: Germany – Berlin gallery, "Lafayette", Karlstadt; in England – Harrods, Selfridges, etc). A variety of shopping malls, supermarkets and outlets is impressive. Entering the world of luxury and leisure life, consumers cannot control their purchasing power following their reflexes, e.g. (Neuner, Raab & Reisch, 2005):

- oniomania - the compulsive desire to shop regardless of needs and effects;
- shopping mania – pastime without clear wish to buy something (Carrigan & Szmigin, 2004);
- thingism – addiction to material things rather than to spiritual values;
- affluenza – a painful, contagious, socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more.

The consumer lifestyle does not assume active perception of the objective world. It causes passive contemplation of services, including entertainment ones (Palihawadana, Oghazi, & Liua, 2016).

To encourage people to buy things, shopping malls create amusement parks, cinemas, hold competitions and promotional events. Mass consumer culture and mass media promote a cult of material values, luxury and status (Erz & Heeris Christensen, 2018). They form utilitarian consumer mentality which is influenced by deceptive advertising, disinformation. It disorients people, focus them on minor things. Internet offers various entertainment resources which determine fashion, tastes, attitudes to the government, state.

Consumer mentality can create problems for any society and devaluate ideals of humanism. Under consumerism, it is impossible to develop a just state.

Overconsumption typical of Western countries and some Russian people is excessive consumption which devaluates consumed things (Ianole & Cornescu, 2013). Politics, mass media, arts, education, ideolog, sports are objects of modern consumption. It is no doubt that consumer consumption forms a new social reality developing due to uniform consumer standards (e.g., a fast food system) (Gorshkova, 2016).

The concept of consumption is an element of social activity – pursuit of interests, political views, etc.

Consumer society has to implement its ideas which requires much money. It causes confrontation between wants and reality (Mărgărițoiu & Eftimie, 2015). For the USA, supremacy is an important aspect and an ideological basis for dealing with global tasks (military conflicts, economic sanctions). Russia aims to have equal partnership relations with other countries.

It is evident that any theory of just society is far from perfect. However, it is important to understand in which societies (consumer or producer ones) humans want to live.

Consumer society is degenerative since humans focus on material values and survival under hard competition. One of the issues is the lack of an ideal of just society based on specific ideology determining tasks and purposes of social development.

Arguments against consumer society are as follows:

- it turns an individual into a dependent creature, imposes political and economic patterns and stereotypes of behavior;
- it accelerates destruction of ideological and moral values of society;
- it destroys natural resources and makes people irresponsible for future generations;

Despite the above-mentioned arguments, many public figures make arguments for consumer society:

- producers of goods and services have one goal – improvement of performance in order to increase profit;
- consumption and overconsumption decrease social activity;
- consumption of goods and services supports developing countries.

Arguments for and against the existence of a consumer society make it possible to realize that these contradictions give rise to two different directions in ideology. There is a number of conflict inside the model of a consumer society such as economic, financial, commodity, political, cultural, etc. (de Jonga, Gillert & Stock, 2018).

It is also important to note the causes that create an imbalance between the production and consumption of goods and services:

- political instability;
- management mistakes;
- noncompetitive product release;
- slide in the specific sector of economy;
- sharp appreciation and decline in cost of goods and services;
- loss in value of primary materials.

Thus, the most devastating consequences of the crisis in every sphere whether economic or social are the following indicators:

- escalation of inflation;
- fall in wage incomes;
- growth of unemployment;
- growth of intergroup antagonism;
- increasing the number of persons with income lower than the minimum subsistence level.

It must be noted that nowadays the consumer society became the object of political struggle. The struggle is for the voter, consumer goods and more. The policy took the form of the original political marketing. Citizen is offered various forms of political freedom where there is a choice of sources of information and different political concepts.

Scientists from around the world share the view that in a market economy based on maximum profit interpersonal relationships will undergo a rapid decline (Golubev, 2015).

Currently in a consumer society, there has been a substitution of core values where a person feels needed, self-sufficient and respected only if it has a certain material wealth that is defined as: an expensive car, a house and high-end luxury items but personal qualities are often not taken into account (Henderson & Rank-Christman, 2016).

If the society encourages overconsumption and there is infantilism, lifestyle of 'leisure', indisposition to physical labor and the lack of critical analysis so such society leads to destruction.

The problems of society are systemic in nature and require rapid solution of the political, economic, social and spiritual spheres.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The article aims to analyze causes of an unavoidable crisis of consumer societies, particularly in the spiritual sphere.

#### **5. Research Methods**

The article uses general scientific methods: induction, deduction, movement from the abstract to the concrete, analysis, synthesis, explanation, analogy, comparison.

Hermeneutic and dialectical methods are applied to study causes of crisis phenomena in the consumer society and find solutions.

Priority was given to the establishment of cause-effect relationships. Historical comparative and systemic approaches are also used.

#### **6. Findings**

Rapid growth in prosperity of some people generated a new individuum – a consumer having specific moral qualities - and resulted in development of new social areas.

Consumption and overconsumption influenced social, cultural and political environment in many countries which is characterized by a decreasing level of mass culture, individual conscience, specific consumer egoism and egocentrism which focuses on material goods rather than on spiritual values denying a moral imperative.

The issues of survival and overconsumption are highlighted. Under these conditions, it is necessary not only to raise the level of the majority of the population, but also to abandon the unrestrained policy of overconsumption.

The research specifies the need for changes in consumer society based on classical ethical standards.

#### **7. Conclusion**

Today, it is important to understand that the future of any society depends on creation and development rather than on consumption, where money and material values are secondary, and the talent of each person will be realized for the benefit of the whole society. Human talent is used for the good of the society. The motto “From the consumer society to the society of social humanism” involves mutually profitable and equal cooperation of countries without lazy hedonists and kleptocrats.

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