

Social reception of companies' marketing strategies in the area of socially responsible consumption. An example of clothing market

Trends, fashion, brands, the youth and the sociocultural theory

Each society has different value systems that have been institutionalized in it. From the point of view of the subject of this paper, it should be noted that fashion and trend in consumer behaviour, like a habit, morality, law or aesthetics, will constitute a subsystem of an axionormative system.¹ Thus, we should not forget that various types of marketing operations aimed at selling products and services must stem from the culture of a particular society, in particular from that society's system of norms and values that create the culture.

Clothes (and fashion for certain clothes) will be here a good example of the role of consumption in the world of social values of a human being, as both literally and metaphorically consumption will mediate between us and the reality. By choosing clothes and matching them on a daily basis, an individual, first of all, self-defines himself/herself as belonging to a certain social category (class, tier, ethnic, age and professional group, gender). Second, by choosing clothes, an individual experiences not only his/her sense of style and taste, but also objectivises his/her view of the world and value systems.²

The Polish society is situated in a quite specific position: "values of privation," which are characteristic for the phase of materialism, although dominating, are accompanied by a great role of traditional values: family, religion, nation and

¹ Which is a functionally connected system of rules/norms and values concerning all manifestations of social life, characteristic of a given culture.

² J. Attfield., *Wild Things. The Material Culture of Everyday Life*, New York 2000, after M. Krawjewski, *W stronę mediacyjnej koncepcji konsumpcji*, http://www.academia.edu/1979537/W_strone_mediacyjnej_koncepcji_konsumpcji (access: 11.09.2013).

weak attachment to the authority of the state. In this respect, Poland is nearest to Catholic countries of Latin America.³

Values, unlike attitudes, are not only elements of individuals' consciousness. Moreover, they have the character of elements of culture or group ideology, which makes them often perceived as duties. The same may refer to attitudes, but then they constitute "models of attitudes" — recommended attitudes with a strong normative charge. Moreover, values are more general in nature than attitudes. A human being can have much more attitudes than values. Rokeach, who also saw such relation between values and attitudes, formulated a theory of organizing a change within a values-attitudes system based on a cognitive dissonance.⁴ It assumes that a system of values and attitudes is more or less compatible internally and a change in any part of this system will impact other parts and lead as a result to a change in behaviour. (This regularity is often mentioned by empiricists and theoreticians of life styles.)

It should thus be assumed that modern consumer behaviour manifested in an ecological attitude to consumption, social responsibility and purchasing ethics, will also result from changes in a system of values.

An increased interest in goods that occurred in Poland in the 70s and 80s of the 20th century differed from the consumerism observed in the developed capitalist countries. Poles were closer to the traditional model of wealth and comfort characteristic for the middle classes, and modified according to the possibilities and technological offers (e.g. refrigerators, TV sets). Already at that time, Western practices were characterized by the principle of frequent replacement of goods, starting from flats and ending at technological equipment. "It was not only about meeting actual needs, but about meeting them in a continuous, different form, under a constantly new slogan. An intensive mythology of external shapes, advertising associations and pseudoscientific rationalisations was growing around consumption. A moral wear and tear of a thing in this sphere took place before the thing was damaged or distanced by new goods with really better functional qualities."⁵

Looking at Western societies, which have already shifted from modernistic values to post-modernistic ones,⁶ we should reflect on the impact of a system

³ W. Wiśniewski, Pojęcie i miejsce wykształcenia w świadomości społeczeństwa polskiego, *Studia Socjologiczne* 1978, no. 3, p. 110.

⁴ M. Rokeach, *Beliefs, Attitudes and Values. A Theory of Organization and Change*, San Francisco-Washington-London 1972, p. 124.

⁵ M. Czerwiński, *Elementy stylów życia ludności miejskiej. Aspekty ogólne i znamienne zróżnicowania*, [in:] *Styl życia. Przemiany we współczesnej Polsce*, ed. A. Siciński, Warszawa 1978, p. 38.

⁶ This concept is based on two explaining theories: 1. at the individual-psychological level it refers to the concept of needs by Maslow, 2. at the macrosystem level it refers to the principle of decreasing end usefulness, where in a situation when further investment in economic sphere no longer brings clear benefits, it is worth concentrating activity and, possibly, outlays in other areas where it may bring better effects. After: M. Ziolkowski, *Przemiany wartości i interesów społeczeństwa polskiego*, Poznań 2000, p. 11.

of values on modern consumer trends and fashion among children and youth, which is becoming a vehicle of new cultural models.

The offensive assumed by the market, greater financial independence of young people as well as wider market experience make the youth more and more independent in the area of shopping. Also the areas of their influence in household purchases are growing. They are experienced customers and consumers already as young buyers, their behaviour is up-to-date, they are brave, open to innovations (young people offer advice and gain competences mainly in consumer areas such as high-tech equipment, tourism and motorisation, whereas they make independent decisions in purchasing clothes, footwear, cosmetics).⁷

The above may suggest that youth and children belong to the category of consumers that will be the first to manifest socially responsible behaviour when shopping for clothes, footwear and other "fashion" articles. Of importance, from the research perspective, will be here an analysis of awareness of the functioning of Ethical Fashion tools on the Polish fashion market as well as the forms of manifesting socially responsible behaviour when making purchases of this type.

Despite growing publicity caused by advertising campaigns and media events designed to stress companies' activities in the area of social responsibility, the level of young consumers' awareness and realization of behaviour that such companies attempt to create will probably still be quite low.

So it is worth posing a question of whether young people's consumer behaviour when purchasing clothes is starting to show characteristics of ethical behaviour, whether it is a fashion phenomenon or maybe it begins to be a trend in consumption.

For the purpose of further discussion, it is important to distinguish between fashion — which is treated here as a consumer, social or cultural phenomenon that is short-lived (seasonal) and defines and verifies what is currently "up-to-date" and what is not — and trend, which is perceived as a long-lasting, growing phenomenon (which intensifies and involves more social or consumer groups). We assume that both these manifestations result from contemporary changes in value systems and, consequently, in world societies, which care about the natural environment so that it can be responsibly preserved for future generations.

We should, however, keep in mind that raising awareness of these problems (necessity/willingness to promote ecological and non-consumerist behaviour) may be the result of people being "fed up" with consumerism in highly developed Western societies or another method for ensuring a faster, bigger and more effective sale of products and services (marketing). Looking back on the troubles of global brands, i.e. Nike, Shell or McDonalds,⁸ which have been "caught" using

⁷ A. Olejniczuk-Merta, *Młodzi konsumenci w procesach transformacji rynkowej*, Warszawa 2009, p. 217.

⁸ More on the subject of global brands' problems in the 1990s in: N. Klein, *No Logo*, Izabelin 2004, pp. 381–412. The author described there a negative impact of brand-oriented marketing stra-

unethical market and social practices, it seems that the only right way to improve one's image and increase sale is a strategy in which brand building is based on the theory of sustainable development and fair trade.

Case studies of developing a marketing strategy based on the ethics of products (here clothes) show that such approach results from the necessity to show a human being other possibilities of consumption which may bring intangible benefits, both for the manufacturer and the consumer.

Such actions are the elements of creating enclaves of life styles, which do not represent communities; they are formed only when consumption becomes free from the influence of community norms and principles and can be thus individualized.⁹

Modern trends based on consumer responsibility, with clothing market as an example

Ethical Fashion may also be an element of criticism of consumerism, manifested mainly in environmental and anti-globalist movements' battle to raise awareness of the damage inflicted on the natural environment as a result of excessive, "looting" consumption. It is claimed that modern consumption mainly depends on the production of goods consuming huge resources of such raw materials as: metallic ores, crude oil, coal, natural gas, sulphur, etc. As far as these groups of raw materials are concerned, we should strive to limit excessive consumption, so that it does not lead to depletion of natural resources, using all possible means, including by making governments aware of the problem.

B. Rok distinguishes trends, which — although not very widespread in Poland — show tiredness of excessive consumption and support conscious consumption, i.e.¹⁰ anti-consumer — anti-consumerism, organized consumer, i.e. consumer participating in consumer organizations and exercising his/her rights, eco-friendly consumer, sustainable consumer (which emerged from eco-consumer) and responsible, ethical consumer (which emerged from a sustainable consumer). For an ethical consumer, the most important thing is the issue of manufacturer's social responsibility. This leads to a growth in the percentage of the so called ethical products on the market (it does not apply to the Polish market, but the perception of threats goes in a similar direction in e.g. Great Britain). Apart from environmental issues, people are also beginning to think about growing unemployment,

ties exerted on social life of developed countries and corporations' activities in poor countries leading to their further impoverishment. A symbol of both these phenomena was the corporation Nike and its swoosh.

⁹ T.H. Eriksen, *Tyrania chwili. Szybko i wolno płynący czas w erze informacji*, trans. G. Sokół, Warszawa 2003, pp. 11–12.

¹⁰ B. Rok, *Wzorce konsumpcji*, www.eko.org.pl/kropla, Autumn 2002.

degradation of local communities, crime, genetically modified food, work performed by the underage, and many other issues outside the ecological sphere.

The response to the last of the above-mentioned trends in consumption is Ethical Fashion, which is the subject of this study, and represents an approach to the design, sourcing and manufacture of clothing which maximises benefits to people and communities, while minimising impact on the environment. For the EF, the meaning of ethical goes beyond doing no harm. It is an approach which strives to take an active role in poverty reduction, sustainable livelihood creation, minimising negative impact on the environment. The most important characteristics defining Ethical Fashion include: countering¹¹ "fast," cheap fashion and damaging patterns of fashion consumption, defending fair wages, working conditions and workers' rights, supporting sustainable livelihoods, addressing toxic pesticide and chemical use, using and/or developing eco-friendly fabrics and components, minimising water use, recycling and addressing energy efficiency and waste, developing or promoting sustainability standards for fashion, and promoting training and/or awareness raising initiatives, animal rights.

Thus, the idea of Ethical Fashion fits the concept of sustainable consumption related to the idea of sustainable development aimed at ensuring constant improvement of the quality of life of the present and future generations through establishing the right proportion between three kinds of capital: economic, human and environmental ones.¹² This idea, in turn, serves as the basis for building the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

CSR means conducting business in such a way that the goals of both the economic entity and its stakeholders are achieved. The most important thing in this concept is integrating company's business goals with the interests represented by the environment in which it operates.¹³ It should be noted that CSR will now support the building of an enterprise's position on the market and creation of its reputation.¹⁴

Thus, we should ask here about the effectiveness of such activities in the context of the sale of "socially responsible clothes." CSR in manufacture of wearing apparel includes, among other things, investing money in additional marketing and manufacturing activities (ecological bags, labels made of recycled paper, biodegradable paints for imprint, use of artificial fur and leather for manufacturing clothes and shoes, etc.).

¹¹ Own translation of content of the website: <http://www.ethicalfashionforum.com/the-issues/ethical-fashion> (access: 3.09.2013).

¹² *Konsument i konsumpcja we współczesnej gospodarce*, ed. M. Janoś-Kresło, B. Mróz, Warszawa 2006, p. 75.

¹³ B. Nogalski, A. Szpitter, *Marka jako narzędzie budowy wizerunku przedsiębiorstwa*, [in:] *Public Relations w przedsiębiorstwie*, ed. T. Soliński, D. Tworzydło, Rzeszów 2006, p. 229.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Most clothing companies registered on the websites of organisations that promote Ethical Fashion, i.e. Fear Wear Foundation or Ethical Fashion Forum,¹⁵ are very little known in Poland.

Companies that apply certain marketing tools for stressing their social responsibility in order to increase their sale are not recognized by world fair trade organisations, such as International Fair Trade Association.

Companies that want to create their brands based on ethics and social responsibility use various strategies. Fulfilling the criteria listed by Ethical Fashion Forum is essential. An example of such an enterprise is British company People Tree (hardly known in Poland), which is building its brand based on, among other things, ethics of production. In its latest promotional campaign, it hired a well-known actress of the young generation, Emma Watson (Harry Potter), whose task was to raise young people's awareness of how Fair Trade fashion works and the problems of sustainable development of the clothing industry. Clothes sold by this firm are not only made of organic cotton, but also ordered in small factories operating according to the principles of fair trade (marked with the FTO symbol awarded by IFAT).

Another example is H&M, a global brand, which in the global ranking BrandZ (Table 1) is in the 58th place among all brands examined, and in the 3rd position among clothing brands. It also¹⁶ hires a well-known pop-star — Vanesa Paradis.

Table 1. Ten most valuable clothing brands

Item	Brand	Value	
		2013 in bn USD	2012 vs. 2013 changes in %
1	Zara	20,167	60
2	Nike	15,817	-3
3	H&M	12,732	-6
4	Ralph Lauren	5,618	10
5	Adidas	4,882	26
6	Uniqlo	4,627	25
7	Next	4,121	39
8	Lululemon	3,764	New
9	Hugo Boss	3,524	8
10	Calvin Clain	1,801	52

Source: Top 10 Apparel from: MillwardBrown Optimizer http://www.millwardbrown.com/BrandZ/Top_100_Global_Brands.aspx (access: 10.09.2013).

¹⁵ <http://www.fairwear.org/36/brands/> oraz <http://www.ethicalfashionforum.com/> (access: 9.09.2013).

¹⁶ http://www.millwardbrown.com/BrandZ/Top_100_Global_Brands.aspx (access: 10.09.2013).

BrandZ report, developed by Millward Brown Optimer together with Financial Times, shows that the strongest brands in the world undertake intensive CSR activities.¹⁷ Involvement in ecological activities seems to be especially important. This could have been behind Zara's achievements, which joined the campaign Detox after Greenpeace activists discovered prohibited chemicals in fabric (more on this in further section).

The main tools designed to implement the concept of CSR are: social campaigns, cause related marketing (CRM), ethical programs for employees, corporate supervision, eco-labelling and social labelling of goods, as well as socially responsible investment (SRI). Within the latter, we can distinguish investments based on detailed ethical reviews, in accordance with the principles of overall management of corporate responsibility, investments where a policy of exclusions is used based on ethical principles (e.g. refraining from purchasing shares of companies polluting the environment), and investments by a company's involvement in various CSR programs. Marketing of the 21st century is undoubtedly going in the direction of corporate social responsibility. This means that brands also must communicate with their environment through a platform for managing relations with the public.¹⁸

Social perception of marketing strategies in own research

The quantitative research, conducted in September 2013 among youth¹⁹ living in Wrocław, is a continuation of earlier research on fashion sociology and marketing that has been carried out by the author since 2009. The issues analysed so far have been an inspiration for further addressing these problems in the empirical studies presented.

For the purpose of the hypotheses made on the functioning of ethical fashion in public awareness, the research on this subject began with a question about familiarity of the term "ethical fashion".

A significant majority of the participants (over 80%) answered, as assumed in the hypothesis, that they are not familiar with the issue of ethical fashion. The respondents claiming to be familiar with this term were asked to explain how they understood it and allowed to create their own definition. Such an approach to

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ P. Kowalewski, *Rola marki w nowoczesnym marketingu*, [in:] *Superbrands Polska. Czołowe marki na rynku polskim 2006*, vol. 2. *Superbrands Ltd.*, London 2006.

¹⁹ Research entitled: „Everyday life in a big city in the opinions of its young inhabitants” conducted by A. Perchla-Włosik, J. Wardzała at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Wrocław. Quota sampling. The research was conducted on 200 people aged 15–19. Research tools: interviewer questionnaire with medium degree of standardisation.

the issue was regarded as a kind of question to check and confirm the knowledge declared.

The most frequently occurring answers/definitions have been grouped according to two criteria: adequate to an accepted definition (knowledge) and equal ethical fashion with a certain dressing aesthetics (lack of knowledge).

One can thus say that the checking question confirmed poor awareness of the functioning of the concept of ethical fashion, because of the 36 people declaring knowledge on this subject only 10 were able to give at least a close definition.

Table 2. Respondents' individual understanding of the concept of ethical fashion

Understanding matching the definition as close to ecological and anti-consumerist concepts	Ethical fashion as an aesthetic one
Equal chances and lack of exploitation of employees, it is fashion for good products purchased knowing how they were manufactured	Fashion adjusted to: occasion, situation, place, age — the most often appearing category
It is about not buying things for "one season," but wearing well-made clothes	Dressing aesthetics
Caring about the environment, ecology, recycled raw materials	Fashion that does not offend anybody, does not hurt anybody's feelings
Fashion meeting certain moral requirements, e.g. care for the environment, working conditions	Fashion adequate to a specific social circle
Natural fabric, manufactured in the selling country, preferably hand-made	Casual, non-vulgar fashion
Fashion that does not damage the environment, ensures employees work in appropriate conditions	Style which does not make us stand out
Fashion which is not only about sale, therefore it cares about customers, ecology	Covering certain body parts that should not be exposed

Source: own research, $N = 36$, answers were partly categorized.

The assumption of low awareness of the concept of ethical fashion does not exclude the fact that the youth researched recognize this issue in their life. Thus, the following stage of the research was an attempt to deepen the research issues. Consequently, irrespective of earlier declarations, the respondents were provided with the definition of ethical fashion and asked to name clothing brands that follow the principles mentioned in the definition.

Again, most respondents (almost 90%) answered that they did not know any clothing brands that followed these principles. Thus, already these initial declarations allow us to assume that the media-promoted trend of marketing campaigns based on stressing ethical, ecological and pro-social values of certain goods does not translate into the behaviour of respondents. Moreover, 12% of respondents, when naming clothing companies that follow the practices of ethical fashion,

mentioned ones that are not included in IFAT or EFF, which confirms the thesis about a lack of awareness of this market among the youth researched. The only company (whose campaign has been referred to earlier in the paper) whose promotion of ethical behaviour has been noticed is H&M, which appeared most often in the answers to the open question about companies. Second most often mentioned company was ZARA, which in November 2012 was accused by Greenpeace of using prohibited chemicals for dyeing fabric. Third came Pull and Bear, which belongs to the same group as ZARA (INDITEX), followed by Deichmann, New Yorker, Mohito, Ecco, Reserved, Nike, United Colours of Benetton, whose association with ethical fashion is intuitively quite obvious thanks to commercials produced in the last 10 years. The latest effect of O. Toscani's cooperation with Benetton is the Unhate campaign, which, as the previous ones, has a pseudo-pro-social character.

Consumers become more and more socially conscious and prefer companies that undertake pro-social activities, according to the PYMWYMI²⁰ principle (put your money where your mouth is), which means choosing those brands that represent similar values to the values cherished by the buyer.

Representatives of sociological thought, Giddens, Bauman, Eriksen, who are concerned with consumption and consumer societies, formulate numerous theses regarding the assessment of the change of the sense of constitutive concepts for understanding what a human being is or rather was. They reached the conclusion about derogation of traditional morality and ethics in the life of a human being — consumer, especially with reference to social responsibility.

The respondents were also asked about the functioning of ethical fashion brands and companies to their awareness. Enterprises that appeared in their declarations were the same as those mentioned earlier. This time, however, the respondents were asked to specify socially responsible activities conducted by the brands they named.

Table 3. Which clothing (fashion) brands do you associate with socially responsible brands? Ranking based on the number of responses

Brand	Justification/association
H&M	"It had an advertisement about the environment" "It cares about the environment and employees" "They released a series of clothes and profits from it were donated to charity" "They allow old clothes to be returned for recycling" "They produce recycled clothes" "They have ecologically manufactured clothes from ecological cotton"

²⁰ B. Rok, *Odpowiedzialny biznes w nieodpowiedzialnym świecie*, Warszawa 2004, p. 69.

Brand	Justification/association
Zara	Respondents name the brand but are unable to specify socially responsible activities "They just come to my mind" "I don't know what activities they take but they match, etc."
United Colours of Benetton	Respondents name the brand but are unable to specify socially responsible activities; in most cases, justification is given "It is ecological"
Adidas and other sports brands	"Sponsor of equipment and sports schools for children, sponsoring sports events"
Calvin Klein	"Expensive brands do not need to exploit"
Other: Reserved, Cropp	"They have 'Eco-clothes'" "They produce ecological clothes"
Gosia Baczyńska	Polish fashion designers named mainly due to quality, promotion of the Polish brand
Maciej Zień	
Robert Kupisz	

Source: own research.

Even less people declare being familiar with advertising campaigns presenting slogans of ethical fashion. Only 6% of the respondents declared that they knew advertisements connected with ethical fashion. Respondents were also asked to specify these advertisements. Once again, the first place was occupied by H&M which, according to the respondents, offers in their campaigns: fair wages for employees in Asia, return of used clothes (also from other manufacturers). The respondents also mentioned the Clean Clothes action about respecting animal rights and PETA's advertisements.

Conclusion

The research on modern trends in consumer behaviour conducted since 2004 shows a little increase in the number of behaviours compliant with the trend of ecology and social responsibility, especially among younger people. However, we should not overestimate the functioning of these trends as intentional activities shaping the lifestyle based on responsible consumption are quite rare in Poland.²¹ It refers to specific social categories — younger people with better education, deeper cultural and social awareness and higher income. Others represent the

²¹ Cf. A. Perchla-Włosik, *System wartości i współczesne trendy oraz zachowania konsumpcyjne społeczności wielkomiejskiej na przykładzie mieszkańców Wrocławia*, Wrocław 2012.

trend of excessive consumption (consumerism) or deconsumption, mainly due to material, not ideological, reasons. The same situation applies to Ethical Fashion, the issue that Polish people are little aware of and rarely take into account when making purchases. Respondents still pay attention mainly to the price of a product, its functionality, and whether it is currently in fashion. According to the definitions provided, it is hard to classify social responsibility on the part of manufacturers or consumers in categories of fashion or trends in consumer behaviour, although in the future we will certainly be able to observe more behaviours compliant with this concept of consumption.

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Summary

The paper addresses the issues of fashion and trends in consumer behaviour that refer to building a marketing strategy based on a changing system of values in modern societies, which, in a sense, is also created by marketing activities referring to socially responsible products and services. *Ethical Fashion* will serve as an example. The paper also contains discussion on the functioning of the term fashion as a quite short-lived phenomenon versus the term trend, which is treated here as a phenomenon that is developing, growing and lasts longer in increasingly broader consumer groups.