

SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR OF YOUNG POLISH SINGLES

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ABSTRACT

This article is a research exercise and refers to the consequences of singlehood in the context of environmental consumer behaviour. It essentially seeks to provide some insight into sustainable consumption in consumer behaviour of young singles in Poland, based on the results of the author's own research. Following that research, the focus was on verifying whether young people living alone correctly understand sustainable consumption and to what extent they therefore implement its assumptions in their consumer behaviour. In addition, the relationship between lifestyle and environmental consumer behaviour of young singles was analysed, as was their knowledge of eco-labels placed on products. The basis for conclusions is provided by the research material collected in the survey conducted in a sample of 826 young singles.

Key words: single, young people, sustainable consumption, lifestyle, Poland

JEL codes: D120, D190

INTRODUCTION

Young singles form an important part of today's societies. They are specific market participants since – unlike family households – they feel their needs, perceive the world, understand the messages addressed to them differently, have different systems of values and exhibit different behaviours.

Progressive singlisation (making singles) of societies is no longer surprising. Patterns that were still sharply criticised, rejected, disapproved of until recently are now an expression of positively evaluated freedom. The sense of self-efficacy, the pursuit of emancipation and individualism make it necessary to search for alternative life paths in the name of the axiological and normative order considered to be right. Singlehood is becoming increasingly common. It is a sign of independence rather than a cause for shame, it offers the opportunity to build diverse relation-

ships and acquaintances as opposed to a sole focus on the family [Ruszkiewicz 2008]. There is, therefore, a chance of choice contrasting with the old, uniform pattern. Changes in mentality, distance from the institution of family, cult of independence and the building of one's own social and professional position make up the socio-cultural landscape of the 21st century.

Contemporary expectations of society towards young people are in contradiction with the natural model requiring marriages and procreation. In the era of rampant consumerism, career, economic stabilisation and the comprehensive education that are the keys to success occupy prominent positions. Ideological and cultural changes manifesting independence require more and more commitment at the professional level. The reasons for the growing number of singles include progressive individualisation of society and weakened social control [Ruszkiewicz 2008]. The modification of purchasing patterns ensuing from these changes is

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characteristic of young singles. Therefore, by taking active roles in the purchasing process, they are susceptible to new consumer trends including sustainable consumption. This consumer trend implies a new structure, new forms and methods of consumption but also the emergence of new needs and motives for their satisfaction.

The study consists of two parts: theoretical and empirical. The first part explains the notion of single, building upon a critical analysis of literature. In order to fully characterise people living alone, the most frequently mentioned definitional criteria used in the Polish and world literature are presented. The empirical section focuses on the research conceptualisation and a description of the research sample and its characteristics. Subsequently, based on the conducted research, an attempt is made to identify consumer behaviours of young Polish singles that can be classified as sustainable consumption. Finally, major conclusions end this study.

SINGLES AS A SOCIAL CATEGORY – THE CONCEPT AND SELECTED CATEGORIES

The etiology of the term ‘single’ could be explained in many ways depending on a specific context adopted by a representative of a given scientific discipline. It will be rationalised in a different manner by a sociologist, psychologist, economist or teacher. Given that literature indicates the difficulty in establishing unambiguous criteria defining this form of marital and family life as well as permanent characteristics of the category of people living alone, the definitions of singles are nominal and functional [Paprzycka 2008]. The group of people living alone is not homogeneous. Singles can be unmarried, widowed or divorced.

The first attempts to define it scientifically were made in the 1930s in the American literature [Hillis 1936]. The classic American definition of ‘single’ assumes that it is a person who is not married or in an informal heterosexual or homosexual relationship [Stein 1981]. In English, ‘single’ usually refers to all unmarried people, that is spinsters, bachelors, the divorced, widows and widowers [Stein 1976]. In addition, singlehood is defined as a specific lifestyle covering diet, way of spending free time and, above all, the world-

view [Bauereiss and Bayer 1995]. German literature most commonly defines a single as a person who lives without a lasting, deep relationship in a single-person household, regardless of the voluntary or enforced nature of such a lifestyle [Deml 2009]. In Poland, in turn, given that the word ‘single’ has been imported, it has acquired cultural connotations and refers only to some people living alone. Living alone is not only considered as an alternative form of married and family life but as a thought-out and ultimate life project for a growing group of women and men. This subcategory is formed by inhabitants of large cities who are educated and earn wages guaranteeing economic independence and who are at an age enabling intense, both professional and social, activity and who most often (however, this is not a *sine qua non* condition) live in single-person households [Zalega 2019].

Polish literature contains numerous classifications of singles. Gajda [1987] distinguishes three groups: voluntary singles (old bachelors, spinsters, clerics), singles for reasons beyond their control (widows, widowers) and people who live alone again (divorced, abandoned, forsaken). According to Czernecka [2011], five groups of singles can be listed in Polish society, especially in large urban agglomerations: uncompromising, happy, accustomed, romantics and wounded. In the Anglo-Saxon literature, Austrom and Hanel [1985], following their research, proposed a basic division of singles into those satisfied with their status and enjoying life and those dissatisfied and looking for reasons for their status in personal deficits or situational disadvantages.

The diversity of singles makes researchers redefine them for their purposes in scientific research, referring to different variables (e.g.: age, marital status, economic independence). However, social sciences lack a uniform conceptual framework for singlehood. The adoption of legal, economic and lifestyle-related criteria describing the category of singles should be considered necessary, yet, as previously demonstrated, insufficient. In the paper, young singles are understood as adults aged from 18 to 34, living alone by choice (in a single-person household or a separate flat), having no parental responsibilities, being economically independent, most often having higher or secondary education, a large group of friends and acquaintances, and strongly focused on themselves. In addition, this study

assumes that singles cannot remain in informal living apart together (LAT) or distant relationships and their possible romantic relationships cannot be lasting¹. This definition thus excludes those who are in a permanent heterosexual or homosexual relationship and narrows the group of singles, allowing research uniformity.

THE CONCEPT AND ESSENCE OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION

The source materials suggest that the first working definition of sustainable consumption was coined in Norway in 1994 during the so-called Oslo Roundtable on Sustainable Production and Consumption organised by the Royal Norwegian Ministry of the Environment. According to the participants in that symposium, sustainable consumption can be defined as “the use of goods and services that respond to basic needs and bring a better quality of life, while minimizing the use of natural resources, toxic materials and emissions of waste and pollutants over the life cycle, so as not to jeopardize the needs of future generations” [Royal Norwegian Ministry of Environment 1994, 1995]. It may thus be said that sustainable consumption is defined as a holistic approach that is aimed at minimising the environmental impact of social consumption and production systems and that involves individuals deliberately seeking to minimise adverse effects of consumption of consumer and investment goods and services through rationalisation and utilisation of production factors (resources) and reduction of generated post-production and post-consumption waste [Zalega 2018].

The definition of sustainable consumption formulated in Oslo was sharply criticised by many academic researchers and some politicians. The quoted definition does not explain clearly what should be understood by the “needs of future generations”. Furthermore, no attempt was made to explain the essence of this statement at the UN Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. In

the second half of the 1990s, taking into account the shortcomings of the Oslo definition, many researchers dealing with broadly understood sustainable development began to suggest that sustainable consumption should be construed as the degree to which individual actions regarding choosing, acquiring, using and disposing of or prosuming goods support the creation or maintenance of exogenous conditions that enable all people to meet all their current and anticipated needs [Di Giulio et al. 2012, Di Giulio et al. 2014].

According to Spangenberg [2014], the concept of sustainable consumption encompasses all free consumer choices made within the available environmental space² which spans between the boundary of social sustainability and the boundary of environmental sustainability.

According to Moisander and Pesonen [2002], sustainable consumption is such where its form and volume define a set of consumers’ environmental values and attitudes that lead to green awareness (or broader social awareness) and an environmentally (and socially) responsible process of making market decisions.

In practice, a distinction is made between the so-called weak and strong sustainable consumption [Seyfang 2011]. Weak sustainable consumption, also known as mainstream sustainable consumption, chiefly involves a reorientation of consumption towards its rationality and efficiency (especially the use of scarce resources) at various levels, in particular environmental, yet with a general increase in consumption. Furthermore, it is assumed that sustainable consumption will be achieved through improved energy efficiency of equipment and other technological solutions. On the other hand, strong sustainable consumption is based on the postulate of consumption reduction in general, requiring consumers to give up consumption at the current level for the benefit of future generations [Seyfang 2011]. Moreover, strong sustainable consumption assumes that in order for this to be achieved, significant changes must also occur in the levels and

¹ This definition of a ‘young single’ was presented to people participating in the survey before filling in the questionnaire.

² The environmental space was proposed by Opschoor in 2001 and then developed by Spangenberg. It defines the scope of consumer opportunities of market participants, with the upper limit imposed by the reproductive capacity of the environment and the lower limit imposed by the minimum quantity of resources needed for the proper functioning in a given society. More in Spangenberg [2002].

patterns of consumption. The concept of quality of life, good life, human non-economic activity is also of key importance [Lorek and Spangenberg 2014, Spangenberg 2014]. In the literature, the dominant view is that instruments and conditions for weak sustainable consumption can be developed in the longer term, yet strong sustainable consumption is merely a postulate [Tukker et al. 2010, Lorek and Fuchs 2013].

RESEARCH CONCEPTUALISATION

The tool used to conduct the research was the author's original questionnaire comprising 35 closed-ended questions regarding consumer behaviour of young Polish singles. The survey was carried out from 1 May to 30 July 2018. The difficulty lay in appropriate definition of the study subject because the category of 'young single' is not clearly specified in the literature. Scholarly publications refer to various age ranges for the group of young people living alone, for example 25–34 years [Tymicki 2001], 25–35 years [Żurek 2003], 26–38 years [Tulli 1978], 18–35 years [Shostak 1987, Hradil 1995, Kuklińska 2012], 18–34 years [Rosenmayr and Kolland 1997, Wrzesień 2003], 25–40 years [Lubelska 2006]. In this article, those between 18 and 34 years of age are considered to be the population of young singles. The upper age limit, that is 34 years, is regarded as the end of youth in Polish literature. The participants were recruited via the *ankietka.pl* website and social media such as Facebook, WhatsApp, Messenger, and e-mail. In order to partake in the survey, those interested had to visit a specific website containing the questionnaire. It was also distributed across special forums, university and private school fanpages.

In accordance with the research assumptions, the sample included only persons aged 18–34, representatives of Generations Y and Z³, who lived alone by choice and took independent purchase decisions in the market. The paper assumes that the subject of research covers all young singles, not only those who are sustainable. In order to select the sample, the selective quota sampling procedure was used. The characteristics (quotas) covered by the research were: gender and age⁴. It should be noted here that the key methodological problems in the study of sustainable behaviour of young singles result from non-random sampling and the chosen research technique: an online questionnaire. During data processing, information from respondents was eliminated if the questionnaires were incomplete or incorrect (15 instances). From among 841 initial questionnaires, 826 were considered eligible, representing 98.21% of the total sample. Further, they were coded, and the data set thus created was processed by a statistical package. For the statistical analysis of the data the statistical package SPSS version 23 was used.

Young singles consumers were chosen for the research in view of their growing importance and decision-making power in today's households, and because they respond to the changing environment, globalisation and its impact on consumption, lifestyle and emerging new consumer trends more intensely than other market participants. Undoubtedly, understanding their reasons, behaviours and market attitudes can help enterprises not only to decide on appropriate innovative marketing strategies but also to determine the right development path, allowing companies to remain in the market and make their product (service) offer attractive to new customers, especially young ones, despite

³ Consumers representing Generation Y (people born between 1978 and 1994) and Generation Z (those born after 1994) primarily communicate through social media such as Facebook or Twitter, and their purchase decisions are determined by their peers' opinions posted on online forums. What is characteristic of this group is impulse buying and a large share of online transactions. Generation Y consumers excel at modern technologies and feel good in virtual communities. They expect diverse products, competitive prices, new experiences and pleasure, and products and services tailored to their individual needs and preferences. Generation Z, on the other hand, is the youngest group of consumers in the market, with such characteristics as: connected, computerised, always clicking, community-oriented, and content-centric. Compared to Generation Y, they use new technologies even more. More in: Cohen [2009] and Williams and Page [2011].

⁴ Due to the nature of the chosen research technique, it was impossible to define the composition of the sample before measurement. In order to determine the representativeness of the sample, the information from the report *E-commerce in Poland 2018* was used [Gemius Polska 2018]. As the distribution of the sample approximately corresponds to the structure of the studied population, it was assumed that the sample could be considered representative in terms of gender.

dynamic changes in consumption and ever faster development of mobile technologies and applications.

The key objective of the research was to provide some insight into sustainable consumption in consumer behaviour of the surveyed young singles in Poland. The study focused on verifying whether young people living alone correctly understand sustainable consumption and to what extent they therefore implement its assumptions in their consumer behaviour. In addition, the relationship between lifestyle and environmental consumer behaviour of young singles was analysed, as was their knowledge of eco-labels placed on products. With this in mind, four research hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: Most young singles understand sustainable consumption as its weak form.
- H2: Sustainable consumer behaviour of young singles occurs with varying frequencies and is often undertaken for financial reasons.

- H3: The lifestyle of young singles is little correlated with environmental behaviour as part of sustainable consumption.
- H4: People living alone pay little attention to labels referring to ecology, the environment and fair trade.

SELECTION AND CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESEARCH SAMPLE

Studying consumer behaviours is an extremely intricate process. This is due to the complexity of consumption and consumer purchasing behaviours in the field of consumer decision-making. Such research encompasses an important step to explain the phenomenon examined, namely adoption of specific indicators. This is essential because an indicator is used to define a certain characteristic of an object or phenomenon which is in such a relation with another

Table 1. The structure of respondents

Items	Number of respondents (<i>N</i> = 826)	Percentage share
Age		
18–23	320	38.7
24–29	245	29.7
30–34	261	31.6
Gender		
female	456	55.2
male	370	44.8
Education		
secondary	253	30.6
bachelor/engineer	337	40.8
master/doctor of philosophy	236	28.6
Monthly per capita income (PLN)		
less than 2 000.00	105	12.7
2 001.00–3 000.00	300	36.3
3 001.00–4 000.00	233	28.2
more than 4 000.00	188	22.8
Place of residence		
country	40	4.9
city of up to 20 000 inhabitants	55	6.6
city of 20 000–100 000 inhabitants	74	9.0
city of 101 000–200 000 inhabitants	100	12.1
city of 201 000–500 000 inhabitants	153	18.5
city of more than 500 000 inhabitants	404	48.9

Source: Author's research.

characteristic that indicates the occurrence of the latter when it occurs itself. An indicator is a measurable, i.e. empirically available, variable. When consumer behaviours are investigated, indicators explaining the complexity of this phenomenon include demographic (gender, age, place of residence) and socio-economic indicators (education, disposable income).

Eight hundred and twenty six people who regarded themselves as single took part in the survey, including 456 women and 370 men. All participants declared that they lived alone and were not in informal relationships such as LAT or distant relationships and all their romantic relationships were impermanent. Nearly half of respondents lived in cities of more than 500,000 inhabitants. Every third participant had completed secondary education, more than 2/5 of respondents held a bachelor's or engineering degree, and every third held a masters or doctor of philosophy degree. The average age of respondents was around 26 years. They were mostly students who combined studies with work. As regards monthly disposable income per capita, the largest group earned from 2,001.00 to 3,000.00 PLN. Every third respondent assessed their current financial situation as good, and every fifth as very good. It should be noted here that people born at the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s are well prepared to start living independently, are focused on achieving financial success and prestige, concentrate on the development of a professional career rather than family life. It is also important that representatives of the Y and Z Generations decide to get married on average between 25 and

30 years of age. In addition, the burden of anticipated financial costs is often the reason for delaying decisions about marriage or giving up the idea whatsoever.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SUSTAINABLE CONSUMPTION IN CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR OF THE YOUNG SINGLES SURVEYED

The research examined the attitudes of young singles consumers towards sustainable consumption. It essentially checked whether older people understand the concept and idea of sustainable consumption and whether their possible competences translate into practical behaviour. To this end, respondents were asked about their understanding of the term 'sustainable consumption' (Table 2).

In light of the survey results, it can be stated that over half of young singles understand sustainable consumption as its weak form. This answer was more often indicated by women (59.7%), mostly those aged 30–34 (53.1%), young singles with higher education (58.1%) and a monthly per capita income of above PLN 4,000.00 (55.4%), most frequently living in large urban agglomerations. In turn, every fourth young single surveyed understands sustainable consumption as its strong form. This answer was more often chosen by women (27.1%) than men (25.9%), by singles with secondary (27.3%) and bachelor's education (26.9%), a monthly income not exceeding PLN 4,000.00 per capita (26.8%), living in cities of 101,000–200,000 inhabitants. In light of the survey, it appeared that every fifth young single

Table 2. Sustainable consumption as understood by the young singles surveyed

Items	Number of respondents (N = 826)	Share (%)
Sustainable consumption means rational and efficient use of scarce resources at various levels, in particular environmental, yet with a general increase in consumption	444	53.8
Sustainable consumption means consumption involving its reduction in general, requiring consumers to give up consumption at the current level for the benefit of future generations	219	26.5
Sustainable consumption means making, as far as possible, sociologically and environmentally responsible consumer choices based on information on products and services, including practices used by their providers, production process and recycling possibilities	163	19.7

Source: Author's research.

misunderstands sustainable consumption, identifying it with conscious consumption also known as ethical consumption or responsible consumption in Anglo-Saxon countries. This answer was mainly indicated by men (20.1%) and the youngest respondents (21.2%), those earning a monthly disposable income of PLN 2,001.00–3,000.00 per capita, secondary education graduates (20.9%), and mostly those living in cities of up to 20,000 inhabitants (21.1%) and in rural areas (20.4%). It should be made clear that the terms sustainable consumption and conscious (ethical) consumption carry different systems of meanings. While sustainable consumption involves environmental discourse, conscious consumption refers to individualistic and moral discourses [Zalega 2018]. However, the relatively poor knowledge of the term ‘sustainable consumption’ and its identification with conscious consumption does not negatively affect respondents’ attitudes towards key assumptions and principles of sustainable consumption.

Another issue was whether young singles consumers follow the assumptions of sustainable consump-

tion in their consumer behaviour (Table 3). The survey shows that young singles implement the idea of fully sustainable consumption to a small extent. Only every fifth single acts fully in line with its postulates when making consumer decisions. On the other hand, 2/5 of respondents answered in the negative. Every tenth young single found it difficult to say whether their consumer behaviour was consistent with the assumptions of sustainable consumption. This share of indecisive respondents can be explained by their misunderstanding of sustainable consumption.

Another point was to examine to what extent sustainable behaviours of young consumers are linked with their lifestyle and environmental attitudes. In order to investigate the issues related to the lifestyle of young singles, five statements were used. The reliability of the scale (reproducibility of the measurement results) was analysed by employing a technique of measuring its homogeneity, estimating internal compatibility on the basis of the determined Cronbach’s α coefficients (Table 4). The analysis of the main components of

Table 3. Subjective perceptions of the singles surveyed on whether they put sustainable consumption into practice

Statements	Number of respondents (N = 826)	Share (%)
My consumption is fully sustainable	162	19.6
My consumption is slightly sustainable	258	31.2
I cannot say whether my consumption is sustainable	83	10.1
My consumption is not sustainable	323	39.1

Source: Author’s research.

Table 4. Main components of the lifestyle of young singles

Statements	Partial loads
I lead a healthy lifestyle	0.833
I take care of my shape	0.896
I try to be physically active	0.899
I am satisfied with my lifestyle	0.796
I try to establish and maintain contacts with closest relatives, friends and acquaintances	0.711
Cronbach’s α	0.827

Source: Author’s research.

partial loads of five variables concentrated around one factor allowed for estimating Cronbach's α coefficient at 0.827, which proves high reliability of the scale.

Young singles' environmental behaviour as part of sustainable consumption was measured by means of 21 statements (Table 5). Before making any decision, in particular before buying products, young singles respondents who display consumer behaviours in line with sustainable development assess whether their purchase is actually necessary or whether it is solely intended to raise their own material status. Over 77% of them declare that they buy carefully – just as much as they need at a given moment, which reduces

the risk of wastage. In the decision-making process, almost 66% of them gather product information confirmed by other consumers. Such behaviours should probably be assessed positively since they reduce the risk of buying a wrong product that is not in line with expectations. Less than half of young singles say that they are more likely to buy an eco-friendly product that has eco-labelling. Nonetheless, research into fair trade [Radziukiewicz 2015] clearly confirms that this outcome should be regarded as a wish to present oneself as a more modern and responsible consumer whose consumer decisions are consistent with sustainable consumption rather than actual behaviour.

Table 5. Environmental behaviour of the young singles surveyed as part of sustainable consumption (% of answers)

No	Statements	Whenever possible	From time to time	Never
1	I buy carefully, only as much as needed at the moment	43.2	34.5	22.3
2	Before I buy a product, I gather product information confirmed by other consumers	19.3	46.0	34.7
3	Before I buy a product, I always check its expiry date	70.2	22.3	7.5
4	Before I buy a product, I check if it is biodegradable (recyclable)	8.9	54.8	36.3
5	I use reusable bags	61.3	29.8	8.9
6	I choose products in green, minimised packaging	14.8	41.6	43.6
7	I avoid purchasing disposable items (plates, cups, cutlery, plastic bags)	32.6	28.0	39.4
8	I regularly sort waste	60.3	31.0	11.7
9	I use water sparingly	59.1	32.3	8.6
8	I throw out used batteries into special containers	50.4	36.3	13.3
11	I replace light bulbs with energy-saving ones	58.3	32.1	9.6
12	I limit gas consumption	54.6	35.0	10.4
13	I buy energy-efficient equipment	31.2	49.0	19.8
14	I use electricity sparingly	67.3	24.7	8.0
15	I collect waste separately	21.3	37.8	40.9
16	I return glass bottles to collection points	17.6	23.2	59.2
17	I buy drinks in recyclable packaging	20.3	29.3	50.4
18	I pay attention to eco-labels	23.2	34.9	41.9
19	I reduce car use for public transport or bicycle	37.3	22.9	39.8
20	I do not leave electronic devices in the standby mode for longer	29.1	24.4	46.5
21	I sort drugs and throw out expired drugs into special containers	17.2	21.6	61.2

Source: Author's research.

It was noted that respondents displayed ambivalent attitudes towards the principles of sustainable consumption. For example, on the one hand, they declare that they save energy (92.0%), and on the other, they often leave electronic devices in the standby mode for longer (46.5%); on the one hand, they sort waste, wishing to protect the environment (91.3%), and on the other, they hardly ever sort drugs and throw out expired drugs into special containers (38.8%).

Sustainable consumer behaviour of young singles is determined by demographic and social characteristics. In the light of the obtained results, the key sta-

tistically significant determinants of environmental behaviours include age ($\chi^2 = 29.83$ at the significance level of 0.001), education ($\chi^2 = 24.74$ at the significance level of 0.001) and monthly disposable income ($\chi^2 = 19.32$ at the significance level of 0.003).

The next stage of the research was an attempt to define the strength of relationship between environmental behaviour of young singles and their lifestyle. Table 6 shows the calculated correlation coefficients. Linear, statistically significant, relatively weak correlations were found between young singles' lifestyle and consumer behaviour that can be classified as sustainable

Table 6. Coefficients of correlations between variables regarding environmental behaviour of young singles and their lifestyle

Statements	Lifestyle of young singles
I buy carefully, only as much as needed at the moment	0.269
Before I buy a product, I gather product information confirmed by other consumers	0.197
Before I buy a product, I always check its expiry date	0.313
Before I buy a product, I check if it is biodegradable (recyclable)	0.142
I use reusable bags	0.411
I choose products in green, minimised packaging	0.398
I avoid purchasing disposable items (plates, cups, cutlery, plastic bags)	0.118
I regularly sort waste	0.397
I use water sparingly	0.265
I throw out used batteries into special containers	0.189
I replace light bulbs with energy-saving ones	0.253
I limit gas consumption	0.321
I buy energy-efficient equipment	0.267
I use electricity sparingly	0.324
I collect waste separately	0.272
I return glass bottles to collection points	0.136
I buy drinks in recyclable packaging	0.104
I pay attention to eco-labels	0.248
I reduce car use for public transport or bicycle	0.159
I do not leave electronic devices in the standby mode for longer	0.101
I sort drugs and throw out expired drugs into special containers	0.116











All values are significant at the level $p \leq 0.05$.

Source: Author's research.

consumption. The survey reveals that lifestyle influences everyday environmental behaviour of singles to various degrees. An average-strength relationship occurs between lifestyle and using reusable bags, regular waste sorting, checking the expiry date of the product before buying it, choosing products in green packaging, and saving gas and electricity. A weak relationship can be observed between lifestyle and careful shopping, economical use of water, replacement of light bulbs with energy-saving ones, selective waste collection, and paying attention to eco-labels. In other cases, the correlation coefficients showed a very weak relationship.

An eco-label on the product increased the confidence in the product in the case of more than half of the young singles surveyed. Even if not known to them, an eco-label on product packaging affects their sense of security and increases their confidence, indicates that the product has been checked and assessed, hence it may be perceived more positively than a product that does not have a label. More than 2/5 of young singles respondents claimed that when they saw various symbols and certificates placed on products, especially food, even if they did not have enough knowledge about their meaning, the mere presence of any label – including eco-labels – evoked their positive feelings.

In the context of the survey, it can be concluded that only one in three singles pays attention to labels referring to ecology, the environment and fair trade⁵. Every fifth respondent admitted that they did not pay any attention to eco-labels on packaging while shopping. Among ten labels that can be found on different

products (Recycling , Eko , Organic farming , Ozone-friendly , Blue Angel , Energy star , FSC , Daisy , Fairtrade  and MSC , respondents mostly recognise the following logos: Recycling (59.3%), Organic farming (43.1%), Energy star (39.6%), Eko (27.4%) and Fairtrade (25.2%). The least recognisable certificates are: FSC (4.9%), or Forest Stewardship Council, guaranteeing responsible management of forest resources, and MSC (3.7%), or Marine Stewardship Council,

confirming that a given fish product comes from sustainable fisheries.

Women aged 24–29 with higher education, earning a monthly per capita income of above PLN 4,000.00, living in a city of more than 500,000 inhabitants, pay more attention to eco-labels than their male counterparts. In contrast, eco-certificates on various types of packaging are least often recognised by singles aged 18–23, mostly male graduates of secondary schools, from the PLN 2,001.00–3,000.00 income group, living in a city of up to 20,000 inhabitants.

To conclude, it can be unequivocally stated that all the research hypotheses adopted in the paper have been positively verified.

Taking into account the presented survey results, some limitations resulting from a small research sample should be borne in mind. Thus, the conclusions should not be treated as representative of the population of young Polish singles. They only provide some insight into actual consumer behaviours of young people as part of sustainable consumption. Despite the indicated limitations, the obtained results allowed for partially filling the gap ensuing from the lack of primary research on sustainable behaviour of young Polish singles.

This publication should contribute to a broader discussion and exchange of views on sustainable consumption, thereby encouraging other Polish scholars and researchers from various scientific and research centres to carry out extensive research in this area.

CONCLUSIONS

The majority of young singles reported the discussed environmental behaviours that are consistent with the sustainable consumption idea, albeit to varying degrees and with varying frequencies. These are most often household-related activities including waste sorting, economical consumption of water, electricity and gas, and the use of reusable bags. Consumer behaviour that can be classified as sustainable consumption is influenced by the lifestyle of young singles, yet the impact of this variable is small.

⁵ The labels were chosen on the basis of their significance and the frequency of occurrence on the packaging of products available in the market.

The increased scope of young singles' behaviours and actions for environmental protection should be assessed positively. At the same time, it is worth noting that these behaviours often result from economic rather than environmental motives.

Subjective perception of sustainable consumption by respondents is significantly differentiated – strongly correlated factors are: gender, education, place of residence and perceived financial situation. The survey shows that the proportion of singles who declared that they acted in line with the idea of sustainable consumption was much higher among women than men as well as among university graduates and those earning a monthly per capita income of more than PLN 4,000.00, mostly inhabitants of cities of more than 500,000 inhabitants.

The results of the survey have confirmed that young consumers have poor knowledge of labels referring to ecology, the environment and fair trade, showing that the sample surveyed is characterised by low awareness of eco-labelling, that is the idea of placing green labels on products that are least harmful to the environment.

The results indicate the need to intensify the education of young people that has been provided in Poland for years, education that should foster the development of their more sustainable environmental attitudes and consumer behaviours consistent with such attitudes. This is because environmental attitudes manifest themselves as a positive affect towards ecology, knowledge and beliefs (an element of the so-called environmental awareness) and as declared and actual environmental behaviour.

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ZRÓWNOWAŻONA KONSUMPCJA W ZACHOWANIACH KONSUMENCKICH POLSKICH MŁODYCH SINGLI

STRESZCZENIE

Artykuł ma charakter badawczy i dotyczy uchwycenia konsekwencji zjawiska singlizacji społeczeństwa w kontekście proekologicznych zachowań konsumenckich. Jego podstawowym celem jest uchwycenie zrównoważonej konsumpcji w tych zachowaniach młodych singli żyjących w Polsce. Na podstawie badań własnych skoncentrowano się na sprawdzeniu, czy młode osoby żyjące w pojedynkę prawidłowo pojmują zrównoważoną konsumpcję, i w związku z tym, w jakim stopniu realizują jej założenia w swoim życiu. Przeanalizowano także zależność między stylem życia a proekologicznym postępowaniem młodych singli-konsumentów oraz zbadano ich znajomość znaków ekologicznych umieszczanych na produktach. Podstawę wnioskowania stanowi materiał badawczy pozyskany dzięki przeprowadzonym przez autora badaniom na próbie 826 młodych osób żyjących w pojedynkę.

Słowa kluczowe: singiel, osoby młode, zrównoważona konsumpcja, styl życia, Polska