

Ecological consciousness as a factor in consumer behavior of young people in the context of new industrialization: sociological research experience

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Abstract — The relevance of the research project is related to the study of an important social problem - the change in consumer markets in the new industrialization of the Russian economy. The article describes the experience of a sociological study conducted by the authors according to the original methodology in September 2018. The main purpose is to test the hypothesis about the influence of environmental awareness on the behavior of young consumers in choosing foods. The young consumers were represented by the students of two Ural universities - the Ural State Economic University and the Ural State Agrarian University. The selected study fields allowed to consider surveyed students as representatives of an expert group within the youth audience. To study this problem, we chose a comprehensive research strategy that includes quantitative and qualitative methods for collecting social information: focus groups and mass survey research.

The analysis of the data obtained in the course of the study allowed us to conclude about the contradictory environmental patterns of behavior and the ambivalence of the environmental consciousness of students, which affects their attitudes regarding the purchase of organic food. In the course of the study, we identified gaps in the cognitive, axiological, and activity levels of the environmental behavior of the interviewed students, which actualizes the problem of environmental education. We see the development of the scientific foundations of environmental education primarily in the design of a new social ideal based on a conscious ethical attitude towards the social and natural habitat (towards ourselves, surrounding people and nature as part of culture), shaping the harmonious development of man as a biosocial being that recognizes the value of the world around us and human life.

Keywords— *new industrialization, ecological consciousness, consumer behavior, young people.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The relevance of the research project is related to the study of an important social problem - the change in consumer markets in the context of new industrialization, understood by us as the process of re-industrialization and technological renewal of the Russian economy. An important factor in the development of high-tech industrial and agricultural sectors in the context of new industrialization is the new consumer standards of the creative groups of society. From our point of view, young people, as representatives of a creative social community, are involved in symbolic work on the development of innovative preferences in choosing products, testing new products and approving a special (relaxed, extreme, free) lifestyle, their own fashion trends and their own consumer standards. . In this sense, young people become the reference group of society and the main consumer of goods and services. It is not by chance that the majority of new products in the market of goods and services are targeted specifically at young people who are open to new ideas and are not afraid to experiment. The consumer ideology of youth forms not only the demand, and, consequently, the development of individual sectors of the national economy in the present, but also sets the consumer standards of the future through the socialization of the younger generation.

Is this type of goods which has a value for the younger generation and what is the degree of development environmental's awareness among young people? Is there a correlation between these variables? We have tried to answer these questions in the course of a sociological research conducted according to the original author's methodology.

II. OVERVIEW THE SOURCES.

Despite the fact that the problem of environmental awareness has been well studied in domestic and foreign literature, the consideration of this phenomenon as a regulator of consumer behavior and the basis for choosing healthy and environmentally friendly products by young people as a special socio-cultural community has not been studied deeply enough with local research predominating [1]. In our opinion, cross-cultural studies are of particular interest in modern conditions, which make it possible to see the general and the particular in the lifestyle and preferences of young consumers as the most dynamic group in different countries. Among the key recent studies that we relied on in our study, we note the following: a comparative analysis of food consumers for different age groups, implemented in three markets - in the USA, Great Britain and Germany, conducted by scientists from Texas Technical University and Heisenheim University in 2016 [2]; a study of the factors affecting the purchase of environmentally friendly products undertaken in 2014 in Lithuania by scientists from Vilnius University [3]; a description of the decision-making model for the selection of environmentally friendly products by Taiwanese scientists in 2018 [4] and several others [5]. The methodological basis of the study was the study of the noosphere V.I. Vernadsky [6], the ideas about the relationship between man and nature P. Teilhard de Chardin [7], the social-ecological theory of R. Park [8].

III. METHODS

To study this problem, we chose a comprehensive research strategy that includes quantitative and qualitative methods for collecting social information. At the first stage, in September 2018, a written (questionnaire) survey was conducted of students two Ural universities - agrarian and economic (USAU and USUE) (N = 221), preparing various specialists (bachelors and masters) for agriculture, as well as production and food processing, quality management, merchandising and examination of food and non-food products, technology and organization of catering, restaurant service, logistics. The selected specialties allow to consider the interviewed students as representatives of the expert group within the youth audience.

Selection of respondents was carried out using a multi-stage selection: university, specialty group, study groups. According to their socio-demographic characteristics, the respondents were as follows. On the whole, men constituted 70% versus 30% women. The bulk of the respondents were second and third year students (39.4%, 28.1%, respectively). 72% of respondents are residents of Yekaterinburg, 18% live in other cities of the Sverdlovsk region, 6% are villagers, 4% are foreign students.

At the final stage of the study, a focus group with undergraduates of the Ural State Agrarian University was chosen as the second method, which was carried out to clarify the motivation of the environmental behavior of young people.

The main objective of the study was to test the hypothesis about the influence of environmental awareness on the behavior of young consumers in choosing foods.

IV. RESULTS

The data obtained in the course of the written survey allowed us to conclude that the development of the environmental consciousness of the individual is a complex and contradictory process associated with the individual development and realization of man as a subject of social action, which is in close interaction with the environment, the institutions of socialization of the individual, and social adaptation. , the assimilation of norms, principles, rules, laws of society and the microenvironment, the choice of its own system of values.

The «environmental consciousness» category has many interpretations and definitions in the scientific literature [9]. From our point of view, this concept can be defined as an integrative mental state, a set of human mental processes that provide a variety of forms of social behavior in relation to the natural and social environment.

Ecological consciousness includes thinking, feelings, sensations, perceptions, imagination, memory and self-consciousness (“I-concept”), with the help of which a person gets the opportunity not only to reflect objective and subjective reality, but also to transform it.

We consider environmental consciousness as the basis of environmental behavior, as an ethical model that does not harm nature, itself, surrounding people and society, socially responsible behavior, built on the balance of human interests as a biosocial being.

Ecological behavior, from our point of view, is a model of ethical behavior of an individual who assumes responsibility for choosing his own lifestyle and behavior in relation to the natural and social environment.

Youth is a socio-demographic group of society, distinguished on the basis of a combination of age and social status characteristics, the role in social reproduction, life characteristics, culture and mentality. We regard the younger generation as an element of the natural-historical process of social continuity, designed both to preserve socio-cultural values and update them under the influence of changed conditions. The main functional dominant of this group, which makes it a creative group, is the social change of society in the historical movement from the past to the present and the future. The discontinuity and continuity of the development of society depends largely on the social actions of representatives of this group. In our opinion, young people are not only a socio-demographic, but primarily a sociocultural community associated with the implementation of two main functions: innovative transformation of society and preservation of its culture, continuity, characterized by specific characteristics, determined basic needs and interests, and socio-cultural development. the world, multi-role functions and a certain transition status [10].

One of the research tasks was to identify the hierarchy of values of the respondents, since value orientations

directly affect the motivational and behavioral structure of the personality, the way of life, and hence the social behavior in general. The obtained data correlate with the results of sociological studies conducted over several decades under the guidance of well-known sociologists Vishnevsky Y.R., Ilyinsky I.M., Lisovsky V.T., Ruchkin B.A., Semenov V.E., Chuprov V.I., Sharonov A.V. and give an idea of the main trends in the dynamics of values and orientations of modern youth [11].

Let us give in descending order the dominant values of the respondents.

Among the priority values of young people are universal vital values: family and health, which is a steady trend of modern times.

The third and fourth ranking positions are universal values of interpersonal communication (love, friendship). Being at an important stage of socialization, young people are especially sensitive to the satisfaction of these basic social needs - in love and emotional involvement.

In fifth place is the meaning of life value associated with the possibility of personal development, the realization of abilities; on the 6th place in the hierarchy of respondents' values, a pragmatic orientation is money; 7 - achieving success in professional activities; on 8 - rest, pleasure and entertainment; 9 - ecologically clean environment and food; last 10 place took study.

The value of an environmentally friendly environment and food is not recognized as significant, put by respondents in the penultimate 9th place, which allows to conclude that the formation of the ecological consciousness of young people surveyed by us is becoming. It should be noted that for students of the Agrarian University the value of an ecologically clean environment is much higher compared with students of the USUE (81.8% versus 18.2%), which can be explained by the specifics of the educational process (predominance of the earth sciences and early inclusion in research work) and greater involvement of students of the Ural State Agrarian University in environmental projects (laying an industrial fruit garden, working in their own training and experimental farm, arranging urban parks, helping homeless animals, etc.).

Daily purchases of foodstuffs, students surveyed by us, are made in regular stores and supermarkets. So answered 95.9% of respondents. At the same time, 10% make additional purchases in the markets, 3.6% buy products from farmers (among those who chose this answer, 62.5% were students of the agricultural university), and 2.7% in specialized stores selling environmentally friendly products (66, 7% positive responses from students of the Agrarian University). The last two positions are not statistically significant and indicate that respondents are not set up for systematic targeted purchases of environmentally friendly products.

At the same time, 70% of respondents buying food pay attention to the degree of their environmental friendliness and naturalness, and more than half of respondents throughout the array (56.1%) buy products with eco-label from time to time: 40% about once a week, 31, 7% - once a month, 24.1% -

several times a year, and only 4.1% make purchases of products with environmental certification every day.

The respondents explained the lack of the practice of targeted purchases of organic food as follows: 36.2% referred to the lack of time to search for eco-friendly products; 14.5% do not make a purchase due to a higher price; 5% do not trust eco-labeling (among those who give the answer, students of the Ural State Agrarian University prevail - 81.2%), 4.5% do not buy eco-products due to a lower shelf life. 76.5% answered that they are not aware of the laws regulating the production of organic products in force in Russia.

The obtained data can be interpreted as confirmation of the previously expressed ideas about the initial stage of the formation of ecological consciousness even among the most advanced and environmentally educated group of young people.

The focus group held in September 2018 with the masters of the Ural Agrarian University allowed fixing several tendencies.

Firstly, the contradiction between the proper and the existing, which reflects the gap between knowledge, awareness of the value of environmental behavior among young people and real everyday actions. All participants of the focus group (7 people) replied that they knew about the dangers of plastic bags for nature and man as a serious global problem, while all respondents noted that they use every day, buy them in stores and store food in them. Interviewees are aware of the negative effects of consuming contaminated food, but they do not hesitate to buy and eat them, focusing mainly on price and appearance, and not on the composition and conditions of production or cultivation of the product. The ambivalence of the behavior of the respondents was also recorded during their self-assessments of their own behavior regarding garbage sorting. Knowing its necessity, in practice, young people interviewed do not do this for various reasons (lack of containers marked for different types of garbage, lack of waste recycling plants in the region, weak stimulation and motivation of this activity by significant others, lack of time and commonplace laziness).

Secondly, a rather broad interpretation of the concept of «environmental behavior» was revealed by respondents who put into this definition not only such obvious aspects as pollution of nature and the environment, but also such non-surface aspects as «toxic relations» between people: at work, at home, at interpersonal, organizational, and institutional levels.

For example, focus group participants named the following behavioral styles as non-ecological: materialism, consumerism as a marker of excessive and excessive consumption; demonstrative consumption of prestigious products and goods; self-destructive consumption, including smoking, the use of strong alcoholic beverages, drugs, environmentally dirty products; delinquent (antisocial, illegal) and addictive (dependent) behavior; aggressiveness; manipulative style and other types of destructive practices that respondents have encountered in their lives.

Thirdly, despite the fact that the problem of environmental awareness is well developed in the scientific literature, there is a lack of systematic environmental education in educational institutions and other institutions of socialization of the individual (family, peer groups).

V. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the data obtained in the course of the study allowed us to conclude about the contradictory environmental patterns of behavior and the ambivalence of the environmental consciousness of students, which affects their attitudes regarding the purchase of organic food. In the course of the study, we identified gaps in the cognitive, axiological, and activity levels of the environmental behavior of the interviewed students, which actualizes the problem of environmental education.

We see the development of the scientific foundations of environmental education primarily in the design of a new social ideal based on a conscious ethical attitude towards the social and natural habitat (towards ourselves, surrounding people and nature as part of culture), shaping the harmonious development of man as a biosocial being that recognizes the value of the world around us and human life.

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