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Philosophy of Modern Consumer Society

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Abstract: This article reveals the fundamental principles of the theory and philosophy of consumption in the modern economy. It examines their socio-economic context and characterizes the conceptual framework. Particular attention is paid to the analysis of the philosophy of consumption in contemporary Russian society. From a philosophical perspective, the article also examines the content of the law of the elevation of needs, explores the principles of anti-consumerism, and traces its further development in modern Russian society.

1 INTRODUCTION

At the turn of the third millennium, the global problem of the transformation of socio-economic systems experienced by all of humanity has become particularly evident. One of its defining characteristics is the steady growth in personal consumption of goods and services worldwide. Personal consumption refers to the use of consumer goods by the population in both material and tangible forms, as well as in the form of personal services, to satisfy needs related to food, clothing, housing, education, culture, leisure, and so on (Alpidovskaya, 2019, p. 154).

At the core of consumption lies the implementation of the law of the elevation of needs. This universal socio-economic law expresses the trend of qualitative and quantitative development of social needs (Sergodeeva & Mischenko, 2014). In the course of societal development, a constant quantitative and qualitative growth of needs occurs: needs are modified, new and more advanced ones emerge, the list of needs expands, and the structure of needs undergoes qualitative changes.

The transformation of consumption is driven by a new global trend of the 21st century: the formation of a global information environment and the rise of information and communication technologies. The information revolution has led to profound changes across all phases of the reproduction process—production, distribution, exchange, and consumption. The environment of economic activity has been significantly transformed. A comprehensive analysis of these radical changes in socio-economic development is highly relevant, as they contribute to the quantitative and qualitative transformation of consumption at various levels of economic activity and everyday life.

Issues related to the formation and development of the conceptual framework and methodology of consumer behavior have been addressed by representatives of almost all schools and directions within economic science. Scholars from the neoclassical paradigm, particularly from the ordinalist and cardinalist schools, institutional and neo-institutional economics, and post-neoclassical economic analysis, have contributed significantly.

The ideas of orthodox rational choice theory are represented in the works of J.S. Mill, F. Knight, L.

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Robbins, W. Meckling, G. Becker, J. Lesourne, W. Jevons, E. Böhm-Bawerk, J.R. Hicks, R. Allen, G. Stigler, D. McFadden, I. Fisher, L. Walras, H. Leibenstein, and others (Leibenstein, 1976). Their scientific opponents include P. Samuelson and J.M. Keynes.

The extensive study of consumption issues in economic science is also reflected in the research activities of Nobel Prize laureates in Economics: M. Friedman – developed the permanent income hypothesis (1976); F. Modigliani – created the life-cycle hypothesis (1985); M. Allais – substantiated debt policy aimed at increasing consumption and social welfare (1988); G. Becker – conducted research on human behavior and the theory of human capital (1992); A. Sen – contributed to welfare economics and poverty alleviation (1998); J. Heckman and D. McFadden – researched consumer behavior of individuals and family households (2000); D. Kahneman and V. Smith – developed theories on decision-making under uncertainty and prospect theory (2002); P. Diamond, D. Mortensen, and C. Pissarides – developed the search and matching theory and studied markets with friction models (2010).

A synthetic application of the principles from these areas of economic thought can serve the purpose of enhancing the rationality and efficiency of consumer behavior under current conditions of socio-economic development in the Russian Federation.

2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The object of this study is households in the Russian Federation, while the subject is consumer behavior.

The information sources include financial and statistical reports from the Bank of Russia, the Federal State Statistics Service, and the ROMIR Human Institute, which specializes in sociological, socio-political, marketing, and media research.

The study also utilizes data from SberAnalytics, based on the analytical panel "Monitoring of Regional Economies", which is built on aggregated and anonymized information about the needs and preferences of 109 million consumers and 6 million legal entities, as well as data from more than 70 internal and external sources. This enables a detailed analysis of various markets, taking into account their industry-specific and regional characteristics.

In addition, the research incorporates proprietary patented data processing algorithms (patent numbers: 2766156, 2766548, 2767465, 2770568, 2771000, 2795902).

To achieve the research goal, the study employed a variety of methods, including the dialectical method, historical method, analysis, synthesis, computational-analytical methods, graphical methods, and others.

3 RESULTS

At the current stage of scientific development, it is important to understand that within the structure of economic knowledge, micro-level hypotheses and concepts often play a subordinate role. The task of building theories of consumer behavior and the firm has largely turned into the search for microeconomic foundations for macroeconomic models and policies. Economists predict that in the 21st century, the theory of consumption will become the basis for shaping economic and social policy in various countries.

In the late 19th century, the theory of consumer behavior was a leading direction in economic science and was studied by both theorists and practitioners of marketing. Its development primarily followed a trajectory defined by producers' interests in analyzing specific motives and reactions of consumers. In the early 20th century, representatives of neoclassical theory maintained that the main factors influencing consumer behavior were personal income levels and the prices of consumer goods, which served as constraints in the maximization of utility functions. Within neoclassical theory, such actions were determined by consumer preferences, which changed only over time. The interest rate was considered a price parameter influencing changes in consumer preferences.

An attempt to move neoclassical theory beyond the framework of stationary equilibrium to explain the causes of cyclical development was made by J. M. Keynes, who believed that the role of consumer expectations was continuously increasing. In Keynesian theory, the consumer emerges as an independent economic agent. The development of consumer behavior theory was mainly driven by the need to explain the absence of the predicted decline in the propensity to consume as forecast by Keynes. J. Duesenberry and F. Modigliani also paid much attention to concepts such as expected income and life expectancy in their consumption theories.

The monetarist approach to explaining the cyclical dynamics of market economies largely echoes Keynesian views on the consumption function. M. Friedman's "permanent income hypothesis" is a specific formulation of the

relationship between expected levels of income and consumption.

A separate group of theories approaches consumption as a principle underlying social order. Notable proponents of such views include J. Katona, J. Galbraith, and J. Fourastié. Although they are generally considered part of the "economic" schools of sociology, each of these authors sought to explain the nuances of consumerist society not solely from a socio-economic perspective, but through a broader cultural lens. For example, J. Katona was one of the first to interpret the meaning of consumption not merely as the routine purchase of goods, but as one of the key principles of social organization—making his views a blend of economic and psychological approaches. According to this American psychologist, individual behavior in the process of consumption can be explained not only from an economic standpoint, but also through cultural and psychological reasoning. Thus, for him, consumption is not merely the purchase of goods or services but a complex behavioral act determined by a significant body of individual psychological attitudes (Deleuze, 2004).

According to T. Veblen, a fundamental principle of human life is the spirit of rivalry; through consumed goods, a person affirms their position in society. For any consumer, constant comparison of their consumption with that of others is natural. G. Simmel similarly argued that one of the key human traits is the tendency to imitate, with fashion serving as a vivid example. The nature of fashion consumption in modern society clearly illustrates the social structure of society (Veblen, 2021).

Among critics of modern society, prominent figures include H. Marcuse, G. Deleuze, and J. Baudrillard, whose works portray consumption as a form of symbolic exchange or sociocultural communication (Marcuse, 2002; Deleuze, 2004). According to H. Marcuse, consumption unites people around itself, forming a specific social space where individuals dissolve into the world of things. As a founder of the theory of consumption as a symbolic cultural form, he laid the groundwork for postmodernist theories. G. Deleuze critiques the structure of contemporary capitalist society: in his view, power seeks to control individual desires, and capitalism itself transforms into an organization that manages consumer desires, shifting them from one controlled space to another via the tools of monetary economics (Gurbanov, 2023).

In the modern economy, the household plays the role of a buffer, mitigating the mismatch between the ever-growing and multifaceted life needs of its members and the limited resources available to satisfy them. The previous shortages of goods and services have been replaced by a shortage of solvency and stability, alongside an increase in consumer expenditures by households—as evidenced by the analysis of the dynamics of their structure (Table 1).

Table 1: Structure of Household Consumer Expenditures in the Russian Federation in 2021–2023, % (Rosstat, n.d.).

Types of Consumer Expenditures	2021	2022	2023
Total consumer expenditures	100	100	100
Food and non-alcoholic beverages	32,2	32,9	31,5
Alcoholic beverages, tobacco products, and narcotics	3	3,1	2,4
Clothing and footwear	7,8	7,5	7,5
Housing services, water, electricity, gas, and other fuels	11,4	10,9	10,4
Furniture, household appliances, and routine household maintenance	5,5	5,3	5,7
Healthcare	4,2	4	4,1
Transport	14,2	14,4	15,8
Information and communication	4,6	4,3	4,2
Recreation, sports, and cultural activities	5,6	5	5,4
Education	1,5	1,5	1,6
Hotels, cafes, and restaurants	2,9	3,1	3,3
Financial and insurance services	1	1,4	1,2
Personal care, social protection, other goods and services	6,2	6,5	7

In recent years, the share of spending on furniture, household appliances, home maintenance, transportation, leisure activities, sports and cultural events, hotel, café and restaurant services, education, and personal hygiene has increased. At the same time, the relative expenditures on food, non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages, clothing and footwear, housing services, water, electricity, gas and other fuels, as well as information and communication, have decreased.

An analysis of Russian household consumption, conducted using the Unified Data Panel by Romir, made it possible to calculate the Russian Well-Being Index (Institut Cheloveka ROMIR, 2023). This index reflects the share of spending by the average Russian

family on food consumed both at home and outside the home as a proportion of total monthly household expenses. As shown in the graph, the index exhibits abrupt changes over the period from 2020 to 2023 (Figure 1). An unusually high value was recorded during the self-isolation period in 2020. Traditionally, expenditures increase in December due to New Year celebrations. Seasonal fluctuations are also observed—the index tends to decline in the summer months due to the harvest from personal household plots and summer cottages.

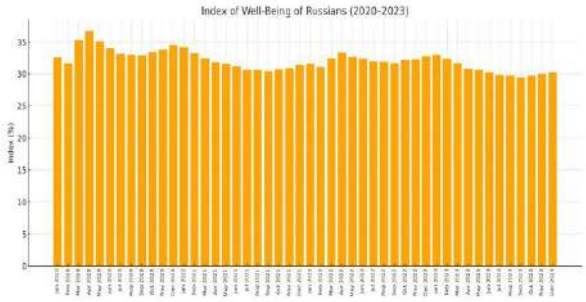

Figure 1: Index of Well-being of Russians (2020-2023), (Institut Cheloveka ROMIR, 2023).

Data on lending volumes to individuals from 2019 to 2024 indicate a significant increase in debt associated with loans granted to resident individuals, amid low growth rates in the issuance of such loans (Figure 2). This trend signals growing risks of a decline in the population's creditworthiness and confirms the presence of consumer myopia in the context of deferred payment for consumer goods.

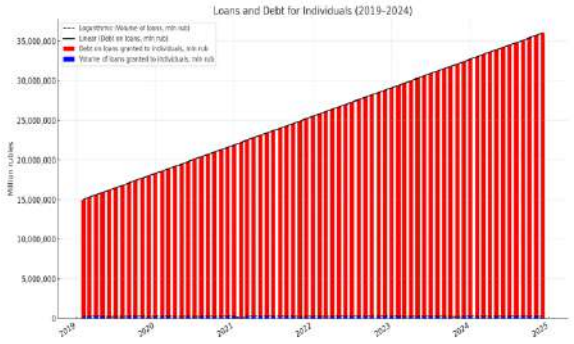

Figure 2: Dynamics of consumer lending (Bank Rossii, 2025).

4 DISCUSSION

The drivers of consumption growth in modern conditions are becoming product abundance, manifested in the expansion of product differentiation; the active development of marketing and digital technologies (consumer customization, contextual advertising, targeted social media advertising, etc.); and the development of consumer credit, which leads to shortsightedness in making consumer decisions.

Let us define the main aspects of the philosophy of consumer society. First of all, it is the pleasure the consumer derives from the process of purchasing a product — that is, not the product itself and its characteristics (functional, utilitarian), but shopping becomes an end in itself. "A commodity is, first of all, an external object, a thing which, by its properties, satisfies some human needs. The nature of these needs — whether they are produced, for example, by the stomach or by imagination — changes nothing in the matter," notes K. Marx (Marx, 1867). A person who can spend more money than others feels more confident and happier. This behavior is based on constant comparison with other people.

On the other hand, the constant renewal of wardrobes, surrounding objects, etc., gives the consumer the opportunity to feel modern, trendy, not to see old, worn-out things around, and ultimately not to think about the fact that everything ages and decays, including the person himself. This idea originates from the concept of hedonism, which boils down to obtaining pleasure and avoiding pain. Later, T. Veblen in his work The Theory of the Leisure Class defines the consumer value of a product as the sum of functional utility (the ability to satisfy a necessary need) and additional utility (the ability to bring the consumer respect and prestige) (Veblen, 2021). Furthermore, excessive consumption leads to financial debt, conflicts with family and close ones, the emergence of guilt for excessive spending, and possible replacement of human relationships with things.

According to SberAnalytics, against the background of growing purchasing power, Russians' expenditures are becoming more diverse (SberAnalitika, n.d.). The share of expenses on basic needs is decreasing, while the contribution of so-called lifestyle categories is growing: food service, services, and entertainment. Over the past two years, the population of the country has noticeably increased investments in leisure. They use the services of catering establishments and ready-food delivery, visit exhibitions, cinemas, theaters, and parks, and purchase other paid entertainment. The share of entertainment in the consumption structure has grown from 17% to 30%. Russians have increased spending on dining out, paid services, and entertainment — since 2022, the share of expenses in these categories

within the consumption structure has risen from 17% to 30% (SberAnalitika, n.d.).

The consumption level in the country remains steadily high. Over two years, Russians' spending has increased by 19%, reaching 48,000 rubles per month (based on results for 9 months of 2024). The greatest increase was in investments in health — by 34%. The average check for medical services, spa salons, and pharmacies in 2024 was 4,000 rubles versus 3,000 rubles in 2022. Moreover, not only the amount but also the number of purchases is growing — by 15%, indicating increased interest in this spending category. Second place is held by travel expenses, with average costs per trip within Russia growing by 31% since 2022. The frequency of tourist trips increased by 10% over two years. If in the first nine months of 2022 Russians made 94 million domestic trips, in the corresponding period of 2024 they made 131 million. The surge in tourist activity reflects a trend in consumer behavior: Russians travel around the country more often than before (see Fig. 3). This has become possible due to an increase in real incomes, with over 65% of travelers having raised their earnings in 2024. One-third of them earn above the Russian average — 100,000 rubles.

Figure 3: Dynamics of Russian residents' spending on domestic tourism (SberPro, 2025).

Residents of the country have also started paying more attention to the foodservice sector. The share of spending on dining out in the structure of Russians' expenses has increased from 7% to 11%. The structure of this spending growth is uneven and largely depends on age. Young people under 34 spend 17% of their income on cafes and restaurants, middle-aged people — 11%, and pensioners — only 4%.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In a consumer society, a person becomes a "slave to their possessions." An Uzbek proverb says: "Whatever you acquire, you become its slave." Personal development, constant self-improvement, hard work, and education cease to be goals in themselves and instead become means to achieve unlimited consumption.

Paradoxically, the pursuit of mass consumption and accessibility leads to the loss of individuality and stifles creativity. People who are oversaturated with an abundance of goods and easily accessible services do not create anything new—they merely reproduce what already exists.

The principle of diminishing marginal utility supports the development of mass consumption. The consumer falls into a kind of consumption trap—consuming more while deriving less satisfaction; in an effort to maximize total utility from a bundle of goods, they end up purchasing more.

Social media and mass media contribute significantly to promoting the philosophy of consumption. However, the more progressive segment of society draws attention to this issue and proposes two main solutions: through the formation of a religious worldview and through the promotion of restraint—adhering to anti-consumerist concepts and the philosophy of mindful consumption.

In the modern world, consumer behavior cannot be shaped solely within the space of social interaction. It undoubtedly depends on many factors and pressing realities, in which modern advertising plays a significant role.

Overall, an individual's consumer behavior is shaped by their needs as well as by internal and external influencing factors. The behavioral approach, which studies consumption as a mass social phenomenon, serves as a method for identifying the underlying laws of human behavior in the realm of consumption. This reflects the predictive capacity of the behavioral approach and its constructive purpose.

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