

# MAXIMIZERS AND SATISFICERS IN CONSUMER CULTURE CHANGES

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## ABSTRACT:

Consumer culture in the era of late modernity undergoes dynamic changes of global significance. One of the key attributes of these changes constitutes an increasing supply of opportunities and quantitative volumes of different product options. However, this trait of so-called “consumer society” is largely ambivalent. On the one hand, expansion of opportunities constitutes a desirable source of realisation and emancipation of personal freedoms and independence; on the other hand, demands on the ability to individually manage the consequences of one’s own decisions (and to take responsibility for these decisions) increase. We can see this ambivalence well with respect to an example of two different adaptive strategies of consumer choice – maximizers and satisficers. Maximizers are likely to achieve better objective outcomes of their selections than satisficers, but their subjective perception of these results is, according to empirical evidence, more affected by negative emotions. These and other findings should be used more extensively in the marketing practice associated with business strategies.

## KEY WORDS:

choice, consumer culture, decision-making, maximizers, satisficers

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## Introduction

The discourse on consumer culture in social sciences offers a very rich and often ambiguous set of conceptions and opinions based on different research traditions and contemporary knowledge, especially with regard to historical-philosophical, economic, anthropological, and sociological thinking. Therefore, in a more general perspective, we will draw attention to various research approaches to knowledge on functions and manifestations of consumer culture. Besides drawing from classical works of Simmel<sup>1</sup> or Veblen,<sup>2</sup> we find a solid support for studying the social contexts of consumer culture and consumerism in the still current

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1 See: SIMMEL, G.: *Peníze v moderní kultuře a jiné eseje*. Praha: SLON, 1997.  
2 See: VEBLEN, T.: *Teorie zahálčivé třídy*. Praha: SLON, 1999.



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sociologically oriented monographs of Lury,<sup>3</sup> Slater,<sup>4</sup> Schor,<sup>5</sup> Tilley et al.,<sup>6</sup> Bauman,<sup>7</sup> Ewen,<sup>8</sup> Molesworth and Denegri-Knott,<sup>9</sup> Stillerman,<sup>10</sup> but also in the philosophical and anthropological concepts proposed by Appadurai,<sup>11</sup> Douglas and Isherwood<sup>12</sup> or Goodman, Lovejoy and Sherratt,<sup>13</sup> as well as in the psychological-economic monographs of Brocas and Carrillo,<sup>14</sup> Hirsch and Silverstone<sup>15</sup> or De Mooij.<sup>16</sup> One can also find a very useful multidisciplinary approach to consumer culture and consumer issues in the work of Miller and his colleagues.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the discourse on consumer culture does not lead to a single, unifying theory or perspective; it is rather a plurality of interdisciplinary approaches, generally focused on the dynamics of consumer actions, markets, and cultural frameworks.<sup>18</sup>

However, different issues and topics of consumer culture are not only subject to basic theoretical considerations of scientific character; we are also interested in their practical understanding and possible use on basis of applied scientific disciplines. Consumption culture and various aspects of its functioning are logically reflected in the area of marketing communication, as well. Marketing communication constitutes an important aspect of the processes of consumer culture's formation and transformation, representing an active element of dynamic forces acting in different degrees, to various extents and at many levels of intensity, shaping specific relations between consumers, markets and symbolic meanings of production and consumption. Moreover, the interaction between marketing communication and consumer culture is not only one-way active. Similarly, the patterns of consumer culture and its functions re-initiate different spheres of marketing communication, trigger actions and reactions, affect changes in business strategies or contribute to transformation of the communication environment. According to Lipovetsky, what happens here, in this context, is an expansion of emotional marketing and related "hyper-segmentation" in the form of personalised business strategies reflecting major transformations of the social and cultural life of late modern societies – typical pluralisation of lifestyles and hypertrophy of individualism, accompanied by the needs of sensual satisfaction, emotionality and intimacy of experiencing everyday life.<sup>19</sup> These and similar phenomena have been elaborated in a number of professional and scholarly periodicals, especially in foreign journals such as *European Journal of Marketing*, *Culture, Markets and Consumption*; *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Journal of Consumer Culture*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Material Culture* or *Research in Consumer Behavior*. It is necessary to note that the Slovak interdisciplinary scientific journal *Communication Today* is becoming more and more relevant to the profile of the mentioned foreign journals. Being one of the few periodicals in the Czech-Slovak research area that provide multidisciplinary scholarly discussions on media and culture, the journal significantly contributes, by its conception, to the discourse

on consumer culture<sup>20</sup> and reflects on related aspects of its functioning and manifestations.<sup>21</sup> In recent years, one of the distinctive features of contemporary consumer culture has been intensively discussed in various sociological, behavioural, and psychological perspectives – it is the issue of enormous growth in the possibilities and opportunities to select from types, variations, models or kinds of different products. In other words, consumer culture in material welfare societies becomes an environment providing ever freer and more independent movement of consumers, offering us permanent options to make consumer choices and decisions at the expansion of various goods and services. In sociological theory, this situation is stressed in the concept of "a world of too many opportunities";<sup>22</sup> in psychological perspective, it is studied continuously by Schwartz;<sup>23</sup> experimental works of the behavioural economists Kahneman and Tversky are also significant.<sup>24</sup> Practically and very specifically, this issue is addressed by the British magazine *The Economist*, which illustrates the current situation in US and British supermarkets. An average US supermarket currently offers about 48,750 items, i.e. approximately five times more products than in 1975. In Britain today, customers of the Tesco Stores are able to select from 91 types of shampoo, 93 kinds of toothpaste or 115 variations of detergents.<sup>25</sup> Schwartz introduces this phenomenon in more detail, in light of his own daily shopping experience at a nearby supermarket that offers several dozens of different biscuits, 13 kinds of energy drinks for athletes, 65 variants of children's drinks, 85 brands of juices, 75 flavours of ice tea or 95 different packages of chips.<sup>26</sup>

It is remarkable how little attention has been paid so far to this remarkable topic by both marketing theory and practice. It is not only a problem impossible to overlook but also so significant in consumer lives that it gains relevance in a number of marketing areas (especially in the fields of preparation, creation and implementation of business strategies). The purpose of the study is not only to draw attention to this phenomenon but also to introduce in more detail some of its aspects relevant in relation to present changes in the stereotypical ideas of marketing activities.

## Specifying the Problem and the Goals of the Study

In societies of material abundance, the notion that maximizing well-being and increasing living standards presuppose maximization of individual freedoms of social actors is clearly promoted. According to Schwartz, in consumption-based types of societies, strengthening – and thus further enforcing – personal freedoms and independence results in having more choices in various areas of life (education, health care, travelling, shopping, etc.).<sup>27</sup> It is true that the bigger the number of choices (and situations that offer choices) in plurality of alternatives, the greater amount of individual freedoms people achieve. And the more freedom, the more well-being.

There is no doubt that an unrestrained supply of products may 'free' consumers and emancipate them in their free and authentic decisions. More options in choosing and selecting are to benefit all people who face decision-making situations and choice implementation.<sup>28</sup> In spirit of the rational choice theory, each particular decision results from a working hierarchy of priorities and preferences of an individual that s/he rationally and purposefully applies; irrespective of the number of variants, which s/he considers while deciding. In such a perspective, a social actor is able to get enough relevant information to compare and evaluate the available variants to choose from, and then makes a decision that will result in maximum optimisation of their own

3 For more information, see: LURY, C.: *Consumer Culture*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Cambridge, Malden : Polity Press, 2011.  
4 See: SLATER, D.: *Consumer Culture*. Cambridge : Polity Press, 1997.  
5 See: SCHOR, J. B.: *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need*. New York : Basic Books, 1998.  
6 See: TILLEY, CH. et al. (eds.): *Handbook of Material Culture*. London : Sage, 2006.  
7 For more information, see: BAUMAN, Z.: *Consuming Life*. Cambridge : Polity Press, 2007.  
8 See: EWEN, S.: *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of the Consumer Culture*. New York : Basic Books, 2008.  
9 See: MOLESWORTH, M., DENEGRİ-KNOTT, J. (eds.): *Digital Virtual Consumption*. New York, London : Routledge, 2012.  
10 See: STILLERMAN, J.: *The Sociology of Consumption: A Global Approach*. Cambridge : Polity Press, 2015.  
11 For more information, see: APPADURAI, A.: *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. UK : Cambridge University Press, 1986.  
12 See: DOUGLAS, M., ISHERWOOD, B.: *The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption*. London, New York : Routledge, 1996.  
13 See: GOODMAN, J., LOVEJOY, P. E., SHERRATT, A.: *Consuming Habits. Global and Historical Perspectives on How Cultures Define Drugs*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. London, New York : Routledge, 2007.  
14 See: BROCAS, I., CARRILLO, J. D. (eds.): *The Psychology of Economic Decisions. Rationality and Well-Being*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2003.  
15 See: HIRSCH, E., SILVERSTONE, R. (eds.): *Consuming Technologies: Media and Information in Domestic Spaces*. New York, London : Routledge, 1994.  
16 For more information, see: DE MOOIJ, M.: *Consumer Behavior and Culture: Consequences for Global Marketing and Advertising*. London : Sage, 2010.  
17 See: MILLER, D. (ed.): *Acknowledging Consumption*. New York, London : Routledge, 2005.  
18 ARNOULD, E. J., THOMPSON, C. J.: Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research. In *Journal of Consumer Research*, 2005, Vol. 31, No. 4, p. 868.  
19 LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Paradoxiční šestiť. Praha : Prostor, 2007, p. 44-46.*

20 ROUBAL, O.: Sociology of Branding – "Just Do It" in the "No Limits" World. In *Communication Today*; 2017, Vol. 8, No. 1, p. 40-52.  
21 PRAVDOVÁ, H.: Fenomén zábavy a úloha stereotypov v produkcii a recepcii mediálnej kultúry. In *Communication Today*, 2011, Vol. 2, No. 1, p. 6-26.  
22 GROSS, P.: Společnost mnoha příležitostí. In PONGS, A. (ed.): *V jaké společnosti vlastně žijeme?*. Praha : ISV, 2000, p. 97-117.  
23 For more information, see: SCHWARTZ, B.: *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less*. New York : ECCO, 2004.  
24 See: KAHNEMAN, D., TVERSKY, A. (eds.): *Choices, Values and Frames*. Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 2000.  
25 *The Tyranny of Choice*. [online]. [2018-04-10]. Available at: <<https://www.economist.com/christmas-specials/2010/12/16/you-choose>>.  
26 SCHWARTZ, B.: *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*. New York : ECCO, 2004, p. 9.  
27 SCHWARTZ, B.: *The Paradox of Choice: Why More Is Less*. New York : ECCO, 2004, p. 10-11.  
28 SCHWARTZ, B. et al.: Maximizing Versus Satisficing: Happiness Is a Matter of Choice. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2002, Vol. 83, No. 5, p. 1178.

choice. In the rational choice theory, the results of each particular choice and each specific decision correspond with the principles of maximizing individual benefit and achieving preferred values.<sup>29</sup> In this perspective, the growth in volumes of choice and freer decision-making do not pose any complications for people's behaviour and everyday experience.

"Market, business environment and entrepreneurship as such are now changing faster and less predictably due to a number of factors (globalisation, digitalisation, changes in shopping and communication habits of customers, etc.)."<sup>30</sup> The complex of marketing communication contributes to the character of consumer culture as an environment for expansion of consumer opportunities. This situation is perceived in the market environment dominantly as a positive process that is not complicated by anything and that directly contributes to attractiveness and growing emancipation of consumer life. Only a minimum amount of attention is paid to the fact that what is generally perceived as a blessing<sup>31</sup> can at the same time act as a curse that complicates life; not only in case of consumers but also producers and sellers of goods and services.<sup>32</sup> This assumption is illustrated by several studies on consumer society issues that monitor paradoxically declining feelings of satisfaction and increasing levels of disappointment, disillusionment and regret with respect to the groups of consumers exposed to difficult decisions and choices in an environment of growing product offerings.<sup>33</sup> At the same time, it turns out that in these situations, there are also negative economic impacts on the part of producers and retailers who, by offering larger and larger assortment of product types, paradoxically cause the decline in consumer activity and the postponement of consumption acts. A series of empirical studies confirming these findings was carried out by Iyengar and Lepper,<sup>34</sup> identifying some negative effects of selection in conditions of expanding the opportunity to make choices and thus fundamentally challenging the underlying assumptions of the rational choice theory. These negative consequences include the fact that consumers cannot obtain enough information in an environment offering enormous quantity of product variants; the consumers thus do not have enough information to perceive their final decision as the best or the most advantageous. Eventually, this can lead consumers to a choice or a decision made arbitrarily and randomly, i.e. to a resigned, indifferent attitude towards the time-consuming and extremely demanding and exhausting process of searching, collecting, evaluating and comparing product information. This is also linked to further empirical evidence of the growing level of consumer disappointment and self-blame.<sup>35</sup> Even consumers do realise that the greater the possibility of choice, the greater the potential danger of making less optimal decisions.

In this context, consumer culture of 'a lot of opportunities' is rather a source of conflict, disappointment and anxiety than an attractive terrain of enjoyment and emancipation of consumer freedoms. Some authors, however, empirically affirm the hypothesis that the negative effects of making choices in terms of their expansion do not extend to all consumers with equal intensity.<sup>36</sup> This is due to different goals and expectations of actors related to the decision-making situations and acts of choice.

Members of the first group, referred to as "maximizers", follow selection patterns and make their own choices to acquire or achieve only the best of all available opportunities. Maximizers are not satisfied with what is 'only' satisfactory, good, sufficiently functional, fulfilling its purpose, always and in every situation

29 POWERS, CH. H.: *Making Sense of Social Theory: A Practical Introduction*. Lanham : Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010, p. 21.

30 PETRŮ, N., HAVLÍČEK, K.: Family Entrepreneurship in the Czech Republic on the Verge of the First Generation Handover. In *Journal of International Studies*, 2017, Vol. 10, No. 4, p. 120.

31 MISHRA, J. S.: *Happiness Is a Choice*. New Delhi : Excel Books, 2007, p. 131-139.

32 SCHWARTZ, B. et al.: Maximizing versus Satisficing: Happiness Is a Matter of Choice. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2002, Vol. 83, No. 5, p. 1179.

33 ROYO, M. G.: Well-Being and Consumption: Towards a Theoretical Approach Based on Human Needs Satisfaction. In BRUNI, L., PORTA, P. L. (eds.): *Handbook on the Economics of Happiness*. Cheltenham, Northampton : Edward Elgar Publishing, 2007, p. 151-170.

34 IENGAR, S., LEPPER, M.: Rethinking the Value of Choice: A Cultural Perspective on Intrinsic Motivation. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1999, Vol. 76, No. 3, p. 349-366.

35 IENGAR, S., LEPPER, M.: When Choice Is Demotivating: Can One Desire Too Much of a Good Thing? In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2000, Vol. 79, No. 6, p. 995-1006.

36 SCHWARTZ, B. et al.: Maximizing versus Satisficing: Happiness Is a Matter of Choice. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2002, Vol. 83, No. 5, p. 1193.

seeking only the best, maximizing demands towards what they want and what they are willing to finally choose. It is this group of people who strongly experience the negative effects of making choices in an accelerating environment.<sup>37</sup>

The second group consists of "satisficers", whose aspirations and motivations, unlike those of maximizers, are not marked by the urge to find and acquire the best of all alternatives they are offered, but rather by achieving what is 'good enough'. A satisficer's strategy is more resilient to emotionally damaging effects of making choices and brings more subjective satisfaction from the results of such a modelling decision.<sup>38</sup>

The aim of the study is to contribute to the discourse on consumer culture as a hypertrophic environment of possibilities and abundance of opportunities, so far insufficiently theoretically developed in domestic scholarly literature and only minimally applied in professional marketing practice. We illustrate the nature of consumer culture of 'many opportunities' and draw attention to its ambivalent expressions. We also strive to argue against the stereotypical idea that increasing the number of possibilities and opportunities contributes to greater independence and freedom of consumers, and to the attractiveness and diversity of life. On the contrary, we see this situation as a process that significantly complicates decision-making, leading to passivity and postponement of acts of choice on the one hand and, on the other hand, in case of active choice, to negative psychological effects (increasing dissatisfaction, disappointment and anxiety). In this context, we will focus on the representatives of two possible adaptive strategies applied in decision-making processes and the choices made by maximizers and satisficers. Comparing these two groups of consumers, we can observe different degrees of resilience and sensitivity to the potentially negative effects related to subjective experience bound to the acts of choice. We will try to summarise four basic factors that reduce, especially in case of maximizers, their subjective feelings of satisfaction resulting from their own decision-making.

## Changes of Consumer Culture in Late Modernity

What do consumption and culture have in common? We believe that consumption is dependent on culture that confers a symbolic meaning to consumption, transforming its significance and purpose in the context of social and psychological dimensions of life. Culture thus contributes to the non-material meaning of consumption reflected in different manifestations of human life and its experience. The symbolic nature of consumption guides the meanings and sense of different lifestyles or subcultures, becoming a source of identity and self-reflection. It is involved in shaping and confirming social roles. Similarly, culture is dependent on consumption of products and services, through which it reproduces and acquires its specific expressions. The cultural environment is a dynamic phenomenon of transformations and movements, in which consumption practices are applied in the form of forces influencing cultural life and its specific manifestations expressed by different communities. For example, the hypertrophic lifestyle of welfare societies and the global promotion of a consumerist approach to life can induce (and already has) a number of cultural changes (e.g., the increased interest in the environment, the search for alternative forms of a more economic and modest lifestyle, alternative hedonism, minimalism, ethical consumption, the promotion of related forms of cultural or economic creativity).<sup>39</sup>

Consumption and culture are not mutually exclusive; it is quite the contrary. We understand consumer culture as a special type of material culture where qualitatively different human relationships to things are formed, generating symbolic meanings that people attribute to these things. The ways people approach and understand things are also important for the internal dynamics of consumer culture; its directions and intensity are significantly associated with globally functioning markets. It is clear that the dynamic

37 IYENGAR, S. S., WELLS, R. E., SCHWARTZ, B.: Doing Better but Feeling Worse. In *Psychological Science*, 2006, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 148.

38 SPARKS, E. A., EHRLINGER, J., EIBACH, R. P.: Failing to Commit: Maximizers Avoid Commitment in a Way that Contributes to Reduced Satisfaction. In *Personality and Individual Differences*, 2012, Vol. 52, No. 1, p. 72-77.

39 KAŠPAROVÁ, I.: Domáci vzdělávání jako výraz kulturního kreativismu. In *Sociologický časopis*, 2017, Vol. 53, No. 1, p. 80-85.

transformations and trends of consumer culture, initiated by the marketing strategies of producers and distributors of goods and services, are gaining even more distinctive features and ambivalent expressions. These issues reach far beyond the common boundaries of sociological inquiry. Lipovetsky believes that in the contemporary era, in the hypermodern world, every reality is permeated by dualities. All life situations are marked by the permanent presence of ambivalent moments: “*Hypermodern time creates, by its influence, through technological normalization and the development of social relations, at the same time confusion and order, independence and subjective dependence, moderation and obsession.*”<sup>40</sup>

The constitutive elements of contemporary late modern consumer culture are closely related to the development of Western modernity.<sup>41</sup> Consumption culture came into existence at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, along with massive economic and social changes. Developments in the fields of industrial production, transport and communications enabled mass production of goods and effective coordination of production and distribution of those products across the forming and strengthening national and international markets. Abandoning traditional economic attitudes based on higher product prices and lower sales volumes, i.e. adopting new consumer economy strategies of reducing prices and maximizing sales volumes, was a major breakthrough leading to the onset of mass consumption.<sup>42</sup> In the post-war period of the 1950s and 1960s, consumer culture became further intertwined with the concepts of abundance, increasing labour productivity, increasing purchasing power, material well-being and democratisation of consumption in relation to the middle (and partly the lower) classes.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, the progress of consumer culture, accompanied by the exponential growth of the quantity of products and services, further accelerated at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>44</sup> At present, consumer culture may be attractive in terms of consumers’ emancipation, strengthening their freedom, independence and autonomy, but it is still in many ways ambiguous and contradictory, demanding in terms of possibilities and abilities to take responsibility for one’s individual decisions or to put up with the fact that there always will be ‘sacrificed’ opportunities (i.e. unrealised and untested possibilities that the environment of contemporary consumer culture offers).

The ambivalent character of consumer culture is consistently reflected in consumer lifestyles, which are typically characterised by volatile individualism and uncertainty, complicating the creation and realisation of life strategies and stable, easily comprehensible individual identities. The identities, the forms and contents of which are closely intertwined with the acts of consumption and consumer lifestyles.<sup>45</sup> In the era of late modernity, attention is increasingly drawn to the roles of consumer culture and shopping as important formative contexts of a “postmodern personality” represented by a high degree of individualism, narcissism and, at the same time, a belief in the ‘authorship’ of their personal character.<sup>46</sup> According to Lipovetsky, there are new emotional links between individuals and goods. Due to these bonds, the subjectivity and intimacy of experience are increasingly firmly anchored, which contributes to the growing importance of the consumer sphere in the context of extreme individualism.<sup>47</sup>

The “postmodern personality” also refers to a specific type of a consumer with a hedonistic lifestyle,<sup>48</sup> as well as to new interpretative shopping and consumption acts seen as attractive and meaningful ways of spending leisure time.<sup>49</sup> New dimensions and meanings of consumption are revealed as functions constituting a number of elements of the individual and social dimensions of life,<sup>50</sup> which can be understood also in the sense of creating one’s life project; in Bauman’s words, one’s life project is an artwork that acquires specific

contours, shapes, colours and shades on the basis of buying and consuming acts.<sup>51</sup> ‘Genuine’ and ‘courageous’ are also topical considerations about the role of consumption as a cultural attribute of the “hypermodern era”, surpassing not only the era of “postmodern personality” but also the existing notions of the role of consumption as a source of individual pleasure. However, it seems that pleasure associated with acts of consumption may easily transform into various forms of anxiety and fear.<sup>52</sup> Such theoretical considerations about the character of “postmodern personality”, which is exposed to the increasingly intense ambivalent situations generated in the consumer culture environment, also find support in a number of empirical studies.<sup>53</sup> It is by no means an accident that these empirical studies reflect on the ambiguous psychological effects of the growth of ‘opportunities and options’ in the increasingly diverse and not-so-well-arranged fields of shopping.

Some of the rather optimistic scenarios attribute an important function, in particular, to technological innovations associated with the creation of abundance (in the sense of increasingly voluminous production, both material and non-material, originating from a small number of sources), but also to the abundance itself, represented by a more robust selection and wide variety of options in areas of conventional consumption, education or health.<sup>54</sup> However, decision-making and choice in the colourful mosaic of products is by no means a banal practical action taken to acquire goods; it constitutes an important symbolic act that corresponds with consumers’ lifestyle preferences and the creation of their identities, which are typically constructed and confirmed in situations of constant choice and selection; the decision-making processes cannot be easily dispensed because they become the immediate task every individual has to fulfil, the essence of their lifestyle.<sup>55</sup> The consumer is constantly exposed to complex situations, forced to handle complex decision-making procedures (i.e., what to choose from the growing spectrum of products, what to prefer, what to focus on, how to connect subjective desires, needs and wishes as closely as possible). Contemporary consumer culture shapes and strengthens the seductive character of the ‘many opportunities’ environment,<sup>56</sup> which at the same time becomes its key attribute and defining feature.

Another question remains – how deeply the ethos of “too many opportunities” contributes to generating and strengthening consumer expectations and consumer aspirations. It is far more likely that, in the conditions of a growing amount of consumer choices, consumer aspirations will rather grow than decrease. The principle of ‘the more, the better’ is a challenge and at the same time a hope of achieving more and more new consumer goals, which should bring more life opportunities and sources of personal satisfaction. However, the outlined attractiveness of such concepts is somewhat fading into the reality of ordinary life situations, in which the extent of life aspirations rarely corresponds with the degree of their fulfilment.<sup>57</sup>

In behavioural economics, Kahneman developed the concept of “hedonic and satisfaction treadmill effect” that aims to capture irrational aspects of the economic behaviour of actors.<sup>58</sup> Kahneman psychologised the paradigm of rationality related to *homo economicus*, and at the same time pointed out the critical constraints of consumption of goods. The concepts of “hedonic treadmill” and “treadmill satisfaction” represent, according to Kahneman, a pair of ‘driving wheels’ reminiscent of the archaic device used to acquire mechanical energy, which also symbolises an endlessly strenuous and devastating slave job. It is through these ‘driving wheels’ that we can explain the situation of current consumers, whose consumer demands and requirements rise hand in hand with increasing income; they aspire to fulfil more expensive consumer goals, starting with pleasure but soon vanishing in the grey and uninteresting routine of comfort. When reaching a certain level of consumer satisfaction, the ‘hedonic treadmill’ progressively re-emerges, awakening the need

40 LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Hypermoderní doba. Od požitku k úzkosti*. Praha: Prostor, 2013, p. 60.

41 KALENDA, J.: Historie spotřební kultury. In ZAHŘÁDKA, P. (ed.): *Spotřební kultura: Historie, teorie a výzkum*. Praha: Academia, 2014, p. 21.

42 LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Paradozní štěstí*. Praha: Prostor, 2007, p. 30-32.

43 LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Paradozní štěstí*. Praha: Prostor, 2007, p. 36.

44 STILLERMAN, J.: *The Sociology of Consumption: A Global Approach*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015, p. 175.

45 ROUBAL, O., ZICH, F.: *Marketingová sociologie. Marketingové komunikace a moderní společnost*. Praha: Vysoká škola finanční a správní, o.p.s. (Edice Eupress), 2014, p. 9.

46 SENNET, R.: *The Fall of Public Man*. UK: Penguin Book, 2002, p. 323-337.

47 LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Paradozní štěstí*. Praha: Prostor, 2007, p. 51.

48 LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Éra prázdnoty. Úvahy o současném individualismu*. Praha: Prostor, 2003, p. 73.

49 ROBERTS, K.: *Leisure in Contemporary Society*. Wallingford: CABI Publishing, 2006, p. 191-192.

50 SASSATELLI, R.: Sociologie spotřeby: Jednání, distinkce a identita. In ZAHŘÁDKA, P. (ed.): *Spotřební kultura: Historie, teorie a výzkum*. Praha: Academia, 2014, p. 88.

51 BAUMAN, Z.: *Umění života*. Praha: Academia, 2010, p. 62.

52 LIPOVETSKY, G.: *Hypermoderní doba. Od požitku k úzkosti*. Praha: Prostor, 2013, p. 21-30, 35-40.

53 PARKER, A. M., DE BRUIN, B. W., FISCHOFF, B.: Maximizers versus Satisficers: Decision-Making Styles, Competence, and Outcomes. In *Judgement and Decision Making*, 2007, Vol. 2, No. 6, p. 342-350.

54 BRYNJOLFSSON, E., McAFFEE, A.: *Druhý věk strojů: Práce, pokrok a prosperita v éře špičkových technologií*. Brno: Jan Melvil Publishing, 2015, p. 162.

55 BAUMAN, Z.: *Individuální společnost*. Praha: Mladá fronta, 2004, p. 171.

56 GROSS, P.: Společnost mnoha příležitostí. In PONGS, A. (ed.): *V jaké společnosti vlastně žijeme?* Praha: ISV, 2000, p. 97-117.

57 A critical approach to the ‘more is better’ principle was interestingly elaborated on the example of Czech media development by Lenka Waschková Čisářová (for more information, see: WASCHKOVÁ ČISÁŘOVÁ, L.: Czech Local Press Content: When More is Actually Less. In *Communication Today*, 2016, Vol. 7, No. 1, p. 111-115).

58 KAHNEMAN, D.: Objective Happiness. In SCHWARZ, N., KAHNEMAN, D. (eds.): *Well-Being: The Foundations of Hedonic Psychology*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1999, p. 3-25.

to look for and achieve other (usually more expensive) levels of satisfaction ('treadmill') to reach the same (or even higher) level of satisfaction again. In other words, to repeatedly achieve the same level of subjective pleasure, an increasingly fast and more demanding 'treading' of the 'driving wheels' is required. There is a paradox worth noting – where the objective indicators of consumption are growing and living standards are rising, the subjective happiness stagnates or even decreases. This phenomenon is tackled in sociological contexts by Schor<sup>59</sup> who analyses the causes of dissatisfaction of American consumers reaching a relatively high standard of living that allows them to lead costly consumer lifestyle filled with a plenty of material and non-material sources of sensual indulgence and enjoyment. Similarly hedonistic approach to life should be a viable life strategy for a happier life and a more comfortable lifestyle.<sup>60</sup> A number of studies have empirically demonstrated ambiguous relationships between the rising standards of living, i.e. the growing possibilities of satisfying one's individual desires or wishes and the surprisingly stagnant or even declining levels of subjective feelings of happiness, satisfaction or joy of life followed by emerging disappointment and disillusionment.<sup>61</sup> At the same time, partial conclusions are drawn that hedonistic consumerism and its diligent practice in achieving states of bliss and personal happiness lead rather to feelings of isolation and loneliness.<sup>62</sup> Thus, numerous contradictions and paradoxes are identified, analysed and interpreted in the relationship between the expectations of ambitious consumers (those actively oriented towards the values and challenges anchored in the hedonistic ethos of modern consumption culture) and the actual consequences of fulfilling these ambitions that shape their mental experience. Various ambivalences, social risks and threats of the consumer or rather hedonistic lifestyle have been identified; especially socio-cultural, environmental and ethical.<sup>63</sup> Last but not least, the hedonistic practices of uncontrolled and hypertrophic consumerism are linked to the principles of competitive and prestigious consumption, reminiscent of arms factories, which ultimately lead to the self-destructive effects of all consumers involved.<sup>64</sup> In these contexts, hedonistic orientation should be subject to constant self-reflection and certain corrections, and thus in the best interest of the actors themselves.

The main reasons for the dissatisfaction expressed by hedonistically oriented consumers are their own work overload, fatigue and stress, which ensue from different types of financially lucrative, but time-consuming and energy-demanding professions reducing the quality of interpersonal relationships, family ties and personal life. Similar views are being developed by other authors who believe that consumers themselves begin to perceive the cycle of 'labour – consumption – labour' as self-destructive and harmful in terms of their physical and mental health, as a disruptive attitude decreasing the level of subjectively perceived well-being and happiness.<sup>65</sup> Many consumers are therefore looking for individual 'starting points' and ways of achieving inner peace in alternative forms of consumption and highly individualised lifestyles.

There is no doubt that the manifestations of the hedonistic ethos of consumer culture include the presence of an increasingly diverse and easily accessible range of consumer opportunities. While Schor or Soper see the reasons why US consumers feel dissatisfied with their lives in work overload, i.e. in the exhaustion accompanying their way to earnings that is later compensated by increased consumption and spending, other authors are seeking the reasons of such dissatisfaction in decision-making situations, i.e. in the exhaustive consumer choices and internal conflicts felt when consumers subsequently experience the (typically dissatisfying) results of their own purchasing decisions.

59 See: SCHOR, J. B.: *The Overspent American: Why We Want What We Don't Need*. New York : Basic Books, 1998.

60 FELDMAN, F.: The Good Life: A Defence of Attitudinal Hedonism. In *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 2002, Vol. 65, No. 3, p. 604-605.

61 PRYOR, F.: After Unification: Conversations with East Germans. In *Orbis*, 2005, Vol. 49, No. 3, p. 491-502.

62 MAUSS, I. B. et al.: The Pursuit of Happiness Can Be Lonely. In *Emotion*, 2012, Vol. 12, No. 5, p. 908-912.

63 For more information, see: BAUMAN, Z.: Exit Homo Politicus, Enter Homo Consumens. In SOPER, K., TRENTMANN, F. (eds.): *Citizenship and Consumption*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 139-153; See also: CLOKE, P. et al.: Faith in Ethical Consumption. In THOMAS, L. (ed.): *Religion, Consumerism and Sustainability: Paradise Lost?*. London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 93-114.

64 HEATH, J.: Kritika konzumerizmu. In ZAHŘÁDKA, P. (ed.): *Spotřební kultura: Historie, teorie a výzkum*. Praha : Academia, 2014, p. 325.

65 SOPER, K., SASSATELLI, R.: Representing Consumers: Contesting Claims and Agendas. In SOPER, K., RYLE, M., THOMAS, L., TRENTMANN, F. (eds.): *The Politics and Pleasures of Consuming Differently: Better than Shopping*. UK : Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, p. 24-42.

## The More We Choose, the More We Regret

Some psychologically oriented studies empirically demonstrate in detail how the growing offer of products is fundamentally problematic; it complicates the consumer choice acts and, as a result, leads to the feelings of disappointment, regret and utter dissatisfaction.<sup>66</sup> In the era of late modernity, the necessity to make decisions and specific choices appears in practically all life situations. This statement goes far beyond the boundaries of regular shopping, purchase of goods and use of services. There are much more significant decisions to make – educational organisations, financial institutions, medical care providers or health insurance services are also a matter of choice. The flexible and progressive market mechanisms only underline the fact that even the most ordinary situations are now marked by constant choices to make. The terrain they take place in is quite clear and very complex. This also applies to user choices related to digital entertainment and online social media. As Višňovský and Radošinská state, online social media platforms like *Facebook*, *Twitter* or *Snapchat* have established entirely new consumption patterns. These new ventures compete to attract other media producers, advertisers and, most importantly, media audiences deciding where to find information and entertainment they seek.<sup>67</sup> Attractiveness and seductiveness of the marketplace filled with explosive product offerings provide dynamic marketing actions and effects, colourful and loud appeals aiming to engage the attention of potential customers and clients.<sup>68</sup>

It should be emphasised that a purchasing decision is not simply a matter of making a single choice from a number of options present in different market segments; any particular option existing within a particular segment of products or services (washing machines, cars, travel agencies, universities, etc.) is differentiated, available in many variants, types and models. For example, choosing from 40 different models of washing machines means that if we wanted to consider 20 parameters for each washing machine (e.g., price, noise, water and energy consumption, functions, programmes, size, colour, etc.), our decision-making would be influenced by a complex combination of 800 different pieces of information to be organised and mutually compared. If only 2 washing machine attributes – such as price and water consumption – were decisive, around 80 indicators would still remain. Making a purchase decision then hits on an unexpected finding that making a choice is a complex act of confusion.<sup>69</sup> According to Graves, due to similarly complex decision-making processes, cognitive dissonance happens when rational expectations of smooth and seamless shopping in a wide range of goods assortment alternate with a response of one's unconsciousness, linking the complexity of such decision-making and hesitation with inherent inefficiencies and failures.<sup>70</sup> The paradox is that while rational customer attitudes are positively tuned to maximize the number of possible choices, the irrationality of the unconsciousness responds to the psychological discomfort experienced. In other words, customers require what they will later perceive as an unpleasant complication.

One of the main factors that weaken the benefits more options should logically bring is 'remorse'. The consumer has to constantly cope with it; both prior to the choice and after the decision has been made. In other words, the unpleasant doubts and feelings of discomfort stem from uncertainty as to whether the comparison and measurement of potential choice targets were sufficiently rigorous and careful, i.e. whether the necessary amount of information and data was gathered and evaluated. At the same time, remorse may strengthen even after the decision itself has been implemented because the conscious idea of unused choices generates potential concerns that any other choice could be more advantageous, more attractive, more appropriate or more effective, etc.

There is an interesting question to ask here – whether a possibility of changing the decision later is more attractive for social actors than a situation, in which their decision is irreversible, final and binding. It is

66 GRAVES, P.: *Consumerology: The Truth about Consumers and the Psychology of Shopping*. London : Nicholas Brealey Publishing, 2013, p. 78-80.

67 VIŠŇOVSKÝ, J., RADOŠINSKÁ, J.: Online Journalism: Current Trends and Challenges. In PENA ACUNA, B. (ed.): *The Evolution of Media Communication*. Rijeka : InTech, 2017, p. 15.

68 For more details, see: SVĚTLÍK, S. et al.: *Reklama. Teorie, modely, koncepcie*. Rzeszow : WSIZ, 2017, p. 191-192, 232-233.

69 SVĚTLÍK, S. et al.: *Reklama. Teorie, modely, koncepcie*. Rzeszow : WSIZ, 2017, p. 16-17.

70 SVĚTLÍK, S. et al.: *Reklama. Teorie, modely, koncepcie*. Rzeszow : WSIZ, 2017, p. 20-22.

a question of the ability to anticipate future satisfaction with one's own choice, depending on these situations. Theoretically, a long-existing hypothesis presumes that actors prefer situations, in which there will be a possibility of changing their minds later, and vice versa, they tend to avoid situations where any revision of the choice, i.e. an additional change of decision will not be possible. These preferences should also reflect the expectations and future satisfaction of the actors, offering them a more favourable position.

In an empirical perspective, however, similar theoretical assumptions have not been confirmed. Gilbert and Ebert conducted a research to find out how much of a pity the actors attribute to their own decisions and what this rate of regret relates to. The researchers therefore organised a Harvard's photography course, during which students took pictures. At the end of the course they were supposed to decide which two photographs to choose as the most popular and thus to be framed. Later, students were asked to choose only one of the two originally selected photographs. The first group of students faced a situation, in which no later reconsideration was allowed. Their choice should have taken place immediately, with the second photograph being sent to another country and thus no longer available. The second group of students was instructed in such a manner that the selection of a photograph could be changed as the second photograph should have been available for one more week and could be replaced at that time. The experiment then measured the satisfaction rate with selected photographs in parallel in both groups of students. The conclusion of the study confirms that the students who were able to change their decision within a week were considerably less satisfied with the selected photographs than those students whose decisions were final immediately. This experiment builds on the ability of actors to predict their own future satisfaction. Gilbert and Ebert modelled the situation by opening two different photography courses at the university in the next academic year – the first course was offered as one where the participants would at the end summon two best photographs and choose only one of them, without the possibility of changing their minds later; the second course was represented by the possibility of a later change (exchange) of the selected photograph. As expected, the authors of the study verified the students' increased interest in the photography course that made it possible to change their decision.<sup>71</sup>

In the light of both experiments, it is possible to state that the actors tend to voluntarily decide for a less effective scenario, at the end of which they will be less satisfied. The students rationally project their promising expectations of achieving a higher level of satisfaction in the model situation, which gives them less pleasure, avoiding the situation where their manoeuvring options to freely change the original decisions would *de facto* be limited.

## Maximizers and Satisficers

In economic and sociological theories of consumption, two types of customers are distinguished – maximizers and satisficers.<sup>72</sup> Various hypotheses are theoretically discussed and empirically tested here. These empirical inquiries are often focused on testing correlations between 'maximizing' attitudes (and their behavioural manifestations in making decisions) with feelings of satisfaction and degrees of happiness.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, interested researchers strive to design and develop various psychometric tools to identify and quantify the tendencies towards maximalist behaviour or action to the contrary.<sup>74</sup> This possible consumer classification is particularly relevant in terms of the 'many opportunities' consumer culture, where decision-making processes and acts of choice are key attributes for customer orientation and behaviour. Different decision-making strategies used by maximizers and satisficers make stereotypical notions on the fact that all customers should approach the decision-making processes equally actively, deciding in the spirit of rational

71 GILBERT, D., EBERT, J. E. J.: Decisions and Revisions: The Affective Forecasting of Changeable Outcomes. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2002, Vol. 82, No. 4, p. 503-514.

72 PARKER, A. M., DE BRUIN, B. W., FISCHOFF, B.: Maximizers versus Satisficers: Decision-Making Styles, Competence, and Outcomes. In *Judgement and Decision Making*, 2007, Vol. 2, No. 6, p. 342-343.

73 POLMAN, E.: Why Are Maximizers Less Happy than Satisficers? Because They Maximize Positive and Negative Outcomes. In *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*, 2010, Vol. 23, No. 2, p. 179-190.

74 DIAB, D. L., GILLESPIE, M. A., HIGHHOUSE, S.: Are Maximizers Really Unhappy? The Measurement of Maximizing Tendency. In *Judgment and Decision Making*, 2008, Vol. 3, No. 5, p. 364-370.

choice, always and only in the light of their own stable, functioning hierarchy of preferences, always to optimise the consequences and benefits of each choice made. On the contrary, in case of maximizers, whose decision-making patterns and choices aim to achieve 'only the best' of the available choices they are offered, abundance of occasions and product variations is something that causes a number of negative reactions experienced by such a group of customers. As we will see below, there are several empirically identified factors that arise in the processes of decision-making as experienced by maximizers – unpleasant emotions such as a glimpse of conscience, uncertainty or regret.<sup>75</sup>

It is therefore reasonable to presume that groups of similarly oriented customers would search for alternative purchasing strategies and apply other adaptive decision-making mechanisms. It is remarkable how such knowledge has so far been used only minimally in business and marketing strategies. In many segments of production and sales, rigid models of offering goods are still prevalent, blindly duplicating 'the more, the better' principle. Considering the perspective of maximizers, it is precisely the 'increased offer' principle based on the ever-escalating volumes of types and kinds of assortment that forces the negative effects of passivity and tendency to postpone decisions to purchase, even despite its original intention of increasing the interest of customers by giving them more products and models to choose from. To make this statement clearer, let us mention one of the many possible examples – the real situation with the HEAD Company's e-store and its 'basic' offer of skiing boots (type Razor). We can clearly see why the decision-making process may be complicated here, why some of the potential customers would not be willing to make the choice itself and purchase any of the offered products.

Table 1: Skiing boots – basic products offered by Head

HEADSPORTSHOP.CZ – SKIING BOOTS HEAD (BASIC PRODUCT OFFER)	
<b>Inside boots Pro</b>	The Pro Series features slim and very useful inside boots developed to ensure maximum fitting and extremely high performance. They are supplied with elastic upper material, heat-mouldable ankle inserts and rear sliding liner.
<b>Inside boots SuperHeat (SH)</b>	High-performance inside boot fitted with an automatically adjustable padding in the ankle, heel and tongue. The multi-component design allows the inside boot to fit your leg and ensures maximum power transfer.
<b>Inside boots HeatFit (HF)</b>	Inside boots with multiple components and mouldable padding in the inside boot and tongue. 5 minutes of warming is enough to fit the inside boot and get perfect precision and comfort.
<b>Inside boots with quick putting on</b>	Inside boots with a unique design for easy pushing in front of the foot. Inside boots with a quick launch that have been developed for both skiing and walking. They are always extremely comfortable.
<b>Velcro Double Power</b>	These Velcro-developed boots patented by HEAD use a double roller system that provides a 100% higher closing force and reduces the effort required by 50%. The length of the Double Power Velcro fastener can be adapted to a 'wide' or 'narrow' choice between the inner or outer ring. The result is exceptional support through the boot's top (shin) part.
<b>Velcro Double Power Booster</b>	The Double Power Booster acts as a twin pulley for better closure and tight squeeze of the cuff. The elastic Booster strap allows a better dynamic response of the shoe. The result is more accurate power transfer and faster ski response.
<b>Buckle Spineflex</b>	Revolutionary buckle concept with a flexible element and a permanent closing point. The flexible element makes it possible to adapt to the profile of the outer shell of the boot. The closing point increases the overlap between the flaps of the outer shell of the boot and reduces the occurrence of pressure points. Greater comfort and precision leads to better performance.
<b>Buckle Spine-Tech</b>	The Spine-Tech buckle provides a permanent closing point. This leads to a reduction of pressure points, a greater overlap between the flaps of the outer shell of the shoe, higher comfort and greater accuracy.

75 SCHWARTZ, B. et al.: Maximizing versus Satisficing: Happiness Is a Matter of Choice. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2002, Vol. 83, No. 5, p. 1193.

<b>Lever Double Power</b>	The Double Power lever reduces the effort required to close the buckle by 50%. Developed and patented by HEAD.
<b>Buckle Double Power Spineflex</b>	Spineflex buckle with Double Power lever
<b>Buckle Double Power Spine-Tech</b>	Spine-Tech buckle fitted with the Double Power lever
<b>Ratchet Supermacro</b>	Adjustable rack equipped with ratchet to adjust the calf part of the boot in the 28 mm range.
<b>Harder/softer bend set-up</b>	An adjusting mechanism located on the spine of a cuff, which chooses a stiffer or softer bend depending on the snow conditions and the level of skiing.
<b>Adjustable back spoiler</b>	By lifting the height-adjustable spoiler, support increases backwards.
<b>Double adjustable profile</b>	A double mechanism in the upper back of the boot that adapts to the circumference of the cuff by up to 1 cm to suit individual anatomical needs. This mechanism, which is located on each side of the spine of the cuff, allows the cuff to be adjusted by up to 1 cm to better suit the anatomical needs of the skier.
<b>Integrated system AutoSkiWalk (ASW)</b>	Integrated device patented by HEAD, which automatically switches between the skiing and walking position when entering the binding or exit.
<b>Pata SoftWalk + system Grip</b>	The patented HEAD pads placed in the heel for shock absorption and a smoother heel striker without affecting performance. The Grip system is a rubber insert that provides grip on slippery surfaces.
<b>Technology Adaptive Fit</b>	The HEAD-patented sole mechanism, which allows the user to change the boot width from 104 to 102 mm with a single turn of the bolt.
<b>Shock absorber</b>	Rubberized pad in the shoe allowing for smoother passage through different terrains and unmolested landing.
<b>Special support heel for women</b>	Heel raising designed for women to put into the boot for optimised heel support and maximum comfort.

Source: *Lyžařská obuv Head – vybava. [online]. [2018-09-14]. Available at: <<http://www.headsportshop.cz/uploads/assets/lyzarska-obuv-head-vybava-2013.pdf>>.*

Let us recall that maximizers generally look for what they consider to be ‘the best’ within the existing offer. However, such an approach requires extremely time-consuming and comprehensive exhaustive collection, evaluation and comparison of information on the products sought. While the possibilities of getting all the available information and comparing it (for example, in the segment of brands and types of skiing boots) are already quite limited, in case of a larger number of products belonging to other related segments (skiing boots, skis, helmets, gloves, sleeping bags, etc.) it is virtually impossible to gather all available information, let alone to organise, compare and evaluate it. Imagine how much information maximizers would have to gather, evaluate and compare when only one brand’s basic offer of skiing boots represents 20 different sub-parameters and there are also dozens of different models offered by other manufacturers. Is it even possible to arrange and compare hundreds and perhaps thousands of information sets including different qualitative parameters and features in such a wide range of product offerings? This, of course, is sensitively perceived by the maximizers as they can anticipate their own internal restlessness and uncertainty accompanying the moments of final choice as the very last stage of the decision-making process. This anticipation of internal tension due to the lack of possibilities and means to thoroughly evaluate all available information on retailers and products is based on their realisation that every final choice made also involves the decision not to pursue any alternative choices (both real and imaginative) that may be more advantageous and better. When a maximizer decides for the best possible choice, the decision is accompanied by her/his persistent uncertainty and doubt, which at the same time reduces the subjective feelings of satisfaction and joy related to the product one has just acquired.

The second factor that reduces the maximisers’ positive emotions associated with the choices made on many different occasions is what we have described above as ‘hedonistic adaptation’. In general, it is a universal psychological mechanism, a progressive adaptation that affects initially intense experience of external stimuli,

either in a positive or a negative sense. In case of consumption, the hedonistic adaptation is what subsequently weakens the intensity of the initial pleasure and joy resulting from owning the recently purchased goods. Schwartz et al. think that the effect of hedonistic adaptation will generally manifest itself more strongly in case of maximizers, not satisficers.<sup>76</sup> Maximizers are more likely to possess a weaker ability to predict the future effects of damping adaptation effects due to the higher expectations based on their own belief that their choice is always ‘the best’ choice. This outlines their hope that the choice will bring them long-term feelings of satisfaction instead of disappointment. However, given these aspirations, the effects of hedonistic adaptation are even stronger for maximizers. At the same time, the maximizers (unlike the satisficers), in their exhaustive and systematic search for relevant product information, tend to put much more emphasis on (the most advantageous) price of the purchased goods. Given the fact that over time, as a result of hedonistic adaptation, the value of the most cost-effective products they purchased quickly decreases, their ‘losses’ appear to be more significant than in case of satisficers.

The third reason that probably reduces the level of maximizers’ overall satisfaction is, according to Schwartz et al., the fact that the decision-making patterns of maximizers, unlike in case of satisficers, are far more dependent on the acts of social comparison.<sup>77</sup> The reason for their stronger ties to socio-comparative behaviour is that it is precisely social comparison, through which maximizers can at least ‘verify’ whether their choices and decisions really represent ‘the best’ there is. In other words, maximizers are more driven by competitive consumption and perceive the acquisition of products in the context of strengthening their own social status. They achieve and confirm the desired social status by purchasing goods they believe are tied to the social position they strive to possess. This refers to the assumption that consumer patterns determined by mechanisms of social comparison negatively affect subjective feelings of satisfaction and generate more regret and disappointment.<sup>78</sup>

Fourthly, maximizers are exposed to far greater risks of blaming themselves for unsatisfying decisions than satisficers. In a hypothetical world of limited opportunities, every decision and every choice would depend on the possibilities to make a choice offered by an impersonal system of opportunities. In such a world, at least part of responsibility for the choices made would be transmitted towards the given anonymous system. On the contrary, in the world marked by hypertrophy of opportunities, this kind of responsibility is strictly tied to individuals who have to deal with the consequences of their own decision-making independently. Having a greater degree of freedom is, thus, accompanied by a higher level of accountability. We may understand the proliferation of opportunities as a potential trigger of self-blaming that stems from assuming too much individual responsibility and one’s inability to internally process the results of the choices made. Maximizers are, in this context, more endangered than satisficers, as the proliferation of opportunities is primarily a problem for those who, in their endless effort to find and make ‘the best choice possible’, lose themselves in the rising number of opportunities, and bother with all the real and imaginary options that would not be available anymore if a particular choice was made. ‘The best choice’ is quickly changing into terrible uncertainty – whether there really is no better choice to make.

To sum up, maximizers are probably the category of people who are most vulnerable – their joy of shopping fades away quickly, they are likely to dynamically shift their attention from the original items of interest to other products while shopping, and their focus on experiences becomes a habitual hunger they are unable to suppress or satisfy. At each moment of fulfilling their desires and wishes, there are other possible situations, other sources of experiences. In case of maximizers, there is no satisfaction in fulfilling individual aspirations, in achieving ever more intense emotional experiences; their desire to satisfy them has become a routine. Maximizers will probably never be satisfied because they obsessively look for the best solution in every situation, refusing to settle for anything but the best. Accomplished experience moves maximizers forward

76 SCHWARTZ, B. et al.: Maximizing versus Satisficing: Happiness Is a Matter of Choice. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2002, Vol. 83, No. 5, p. 1193-1194.

77 SCHWARTZ, B. et al.: Maximizing versus Satisficing: Happiness Is a Matter of Choice. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 2002, Vol. 83, No. 5, p. 1194-1195.

78 LYUBOMIRSKI, S., ROSS, L.: Hedonic Consequences of Social Comparison: A Contrast of Happy and Unhappy People. In *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 1997, Vol. 73, No. 6, p. 1141-1151.

and forces them to look for more and more new alternatives to try, to seek more authenticity, originality and intensity. It is a constant search and a volatile shifting 'from experience to experience', driven by the desire to always achieve the best that can be achieved. Satisficers, unlike maximizers, do not look for the best in every situation; they will simply be satisfied with what is available and what offers a 'reasonable' set of appropriate features. Their aspirations are not related to pursuing the ambition to maximize the benefits of many other available opportunities (precisely those opportunities and benefits maximizers would definitely pursue). They thus do not experience so much anxiety to get 'the best' out of every situation, at all costs. In other words, while maximizers try to find out *how to handle the task in the best possible way*, satisficers stick to the crucial question – *how to handle the essential things that are truly important?*

## Conclusions

Consumption culture in the era of late modernity is overflowing with 'too many opportunities' in various areas of life. It seems that having more alternatives to choose from is an obvious, logical feature of welfare society and an accompanying trait of accelerated individualisation. At the same time, however, the stereotypical concepts still claim that increasing volumes of opportunities and abundance in various life situations are sources of better living standards, comfort and satisfaction. And here we are, trying to challenge 'the more, the better' premise; despite having so many options to choose from, one does not have to be able to meet own expectations of leading a more attractive and satisfactory consumer life, experiencing subjective feelings of anxiety, disappointment and unhappiness instead. For this purpose, we have referred to selected empirical knowledge in order to identify and explain some consumer choice issues, focusing on two different strategies of making a choice. In particular, we have been interested in two different groups of consumers called maximizers and satisficers. Marketing practice should better understand these categories of customers to be able to respond more flexibly to different adaptive decision-making mechanisms maximizers and satisficers employ; for instance, it is not always relevant to increase the quantity or variety of offered assortment. In specific cases offering fewer opportunities to some customer groups may reduce their passivity or the unpleasant feelings they experience while shopping and after they have made their purchase choices. In this context, we believe it is important to further explore the given issues and ask some of the following questions:

*How to empirically identify groups of maximizers and satisficers?*

*What are the best ways of empirically measuring and explaining their different decision-making strategies?*

*Is it possible that maximizers and satisficers do not want to remain in their respective decision-making positions universally, i.e. in all possible situations involving choice?*

*Who, when, how and why assumes the position of a maximizer or a satisficer?*

*Is the decision-making strategy applied by maximizers always worse? Does this strategy of making choices objectively lead to better decision-making results, even at the expense of the subjectively worse emotional experience maximizers have to deal with?*

*Is it even possible to identify what product segments attract maximizers and which appeal to satisficers?*

*Acknowledgement: This article benefited from the financial assistance provided by the project Consumer Culture and Forms of Hedonistic Lifestyles No. 7429/2017/06 (University of Finance and Administration – Internal Grant Agency; Institutional Support for the Development of Research Organisations).*

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