

## CONSUMER POSSIBILITIES OF RUSSIA REGIONS THROUGH THE PRISM OF ENTREPRENEURIAL ASSESSMENTS (ON THE MATERIALS OF THE REPUBLIC OF TATARSTAN AND MARIY EL)

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**Abstract:** The article presents for the first time the results of the author's expert survey in terms of the level of consumer opportunities for the bulk of the population of the Republic of Tatarstan and the Republic of Mariy El. Based on the analysis of the data obtained, the authors estimate the level of consumer opportunities of citizens as generally average, in Tatarstan slightly higher than in Mariy El. Proceeding from the conclusions drawn, recommendations are offered on accelerating the growth of incomes of the population and the speedy institutionalization of a fully-fledged consumer society in Russia.

**Keywords:** consumption, consumer opportunities, consumer practices, consumer society.

### 1 Introduction

With the emergence of the consumer society in Russia, there is an urgent need to study consumer practices and purchasing opportunities for the bulk of the population, but not for the elite, which, as history shows, rarely allowed itself to limit its purchasing appetites. The consumer society is often defined as a society in which mass consumer practices are developed, where the majority of the population actively, broadly and regularly participates on the basis of the principle of individual consumption in consumer activities.

We will not describe in detail the society with the metaphorical name "consumer society", the essential characteristics and external manifestations of which are described in a variety of works, both foreign and domestic authors. And the spectrum of judgments about this society is very extensive: from outright rejection with labeling, like "simulacra" and "consumerism" (Baudrillard, 2006; Shalaev, 2016) to sufficiently weighted estimates, when along with the negative sides of mass consumer behavior, positive features are also distinguished, primarily due to the availability of objective possibilities to legally satisfy diverse natural human needs (Ritzer, 2011; Ilyin, 2007; Tahavieva & Nigmatullina, 2017)

Determining our place in the ranks of researchers of the purchasing power of the population of the regions of Russia, we note that we are more impressed by a cautious, restrained approach. With this approach, the aforementioned possibilities are considered through the "academic glasses" of rigorous and impartial scientific analysis, when the theoretical model, constructed on the basis of studying mainly the experience of Western countries, correlates with Russian everyday life (Ilyin, 2014; Ilyin, 2008a).

From our point of view, one should not rush to assess the modern Russian society as a "consumer society" in the full sense of the word, excluding, perhaps, individual islets, primarily inhabitants of megacities, as well as representatives of elite and

sub-elite social strata and groups. One way or another, the hypothesis formulated before the research and writing the article on the basis of analysis and generalization of its results was reduced to the fact that the consumer society in the surveyed republics makes only the first steps, at least in aspects that relate to the level of consumer capacity of the bulk of the population.

The basis and prerequisite for such an assumption were reasonable and logical considerations available in the scientific literature that the consumer society emerges under the conditions of mature capitalism, being one of the forms of further capitalist development (Ilyin, 2008a).

### 2 Methodology

In order to identify the prevailing type of entrepreneurial motivations and the level of consumer opportunities of the population of the Russian regions in June-July 2016 in the Republic of Tatarstan (RT) and in the Republic of Mariy El (RME), a pilot study was carried out (Martynova et al, 2017), as a preliminary stage of preparing a mass survey on the stated problem. Experts of entrepreneurship were interviewed, as were practicing businessmen and entrepreneurs (n = 210), 105 experts from each republic. The type of sampling is "snowball".

Let us explain why only entrepreneurs and experts engaged in the study of business processes were involved as respondents in the survey. From our point of view, entrepreneurs-practitioners have extensive experience in acquiring, since they directly engage in the production, promotion, sale of goods and services, most closely associated with acquisitions. Entrepreneurship theorists, when examining real business, tend not to overlook its purchasing side, since "buying" is immanently inherent in entrepreneurship as a specific type of economic activity.

The Republic of Tatarstan and the Republic of Mariy El are bordered one by other; there are close economic ties between them, which is important for exploring the consumer opportunities of the broad masses of the population of these republics. A comparison of the consumer potential of the inhabitants of Tatarstan and Mariy El acquires additional interest, connected with the fact that in both republics the urban population predominates, although the industrial potential of Tatarstan is incomparably higher than that of Mariy El.

Finally, the authors dwelled on the type of sampling "snowball", guided by the fact that the exact number of entrepreneurs and experts in the study of business is difficult to establish, since many citizens are engaged in business from time to time or in part-time mode.

It is appropriate to recall the classification of people involved in politics, by M. Weber, which, in addition to the two types mentioned, includes politicians by profession and by vocation, extrapolating it to the field of entrepreneurship (Weber, 1990; Villalobos Antunez, 2003).

### 3 Results and discussion

We will review the results of the research carried out in the part of entrepreneurs' assessments of the consumer potential of the residents of the two mentioned republics.

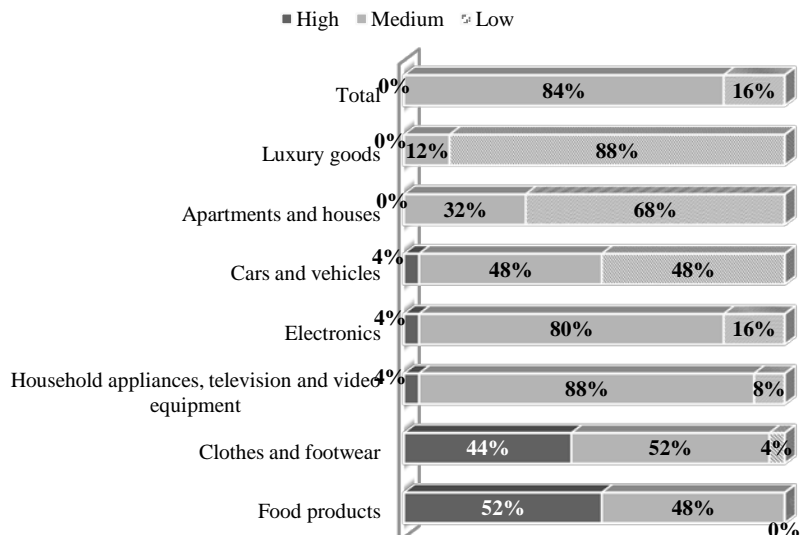


Fig 1. Estimation of consumer opportunities of the bulk of the population of Tajikistan in the acquisition of goods and services

Figure 1 shows that the absolute majority of experts estimate the overall level as average (84%). Only 16% - as low. Somewhat surprisingly, there were no high marks at all. At the same time, it is not difficult to find an explanation for this if we compare business valuations with the daily buying practices of authors who often visit stores, seeing what the bulk of buyers are acquiring. The observation of buyers does not give grounds for assessing the level of consumer opportunities of most of them as high. Quite the contrary, a significant part of visitors to shopping centers are limited to very modest purchases.

In the context of the main types of goods, entrepreneurial assessments of consumer opportunities of RT residents differ considerably from each other.

So, in the nomination "Food products" high scores (52%) with a slight advantage prevail over the average (48%). Low estimates are absent at all (0%). In the nomination "Clothes and shoes", on the contrary, a slight preponderance on the side of average ratings (52% vs. 44%). Along with the high and medium here are low scores. True, there are not so many, only 4%.

The following two nominations are characterized by overwhelming prevalence of average consumer appraisal of Tajik citizens: "Household appliances, television and video equipment" (88%) and "Electronics" (80%). High ratings in these categories are few, 4% each. Low ratings are slightly higher: 8% and 16%, respectively. We do not think that such indicators meet the standards and requirements of the techno-era with its high technologies, electronics, robotics, Internet resources.

The situation with entrepreneurial assessments of consumer opportunities of RT residents in the nomination "Cars and

vehicles" is even more sad. Although there are more than enough cars on the streets of Tatarstan cities, as evidenced by the "traffic jams" that have become a daily occurrence. So, experts' assessments of the potential of Tajik citizens connected with the acquisition of cars and vehicles were distributed equally between medium and low (48% each). With a small impregnation of high ratings (4%). Without fear of making a mistake, we will say that the consumer opportunities of the Tatarstan people in this category are much lower than the corresponding opportunities of German citizens, for example (Tyulenev & Tulenev, 2015).

Estimates by experts of the possibilities of RT residents in the acquisition of apartments and houses were distributed between low and medium figures in the proportion of approximately 2 to 1 (68% vs. 32%). This distribution of expert estimates indicates that the problem of purchasing housing for many residents of Tatarstan remains acute.

The last category of "Luxury goods" by the number of low ratings surpassed all the others (88%). Average estimates were only 12%. Strictly speaking, such a picture is not surprising at all. Luxury is an expensive pleasure.

And, when there is not enough money to buy houses, cars, electronics, household appliances, consumers are not up to diamonds, gold products, expensive paintings and sculptures.

Let us pass to the analysis of the results of the expert poll on the RMEs, comparing the assessments of the experts of Mariy El with the experts' assessments from Tatarstan.

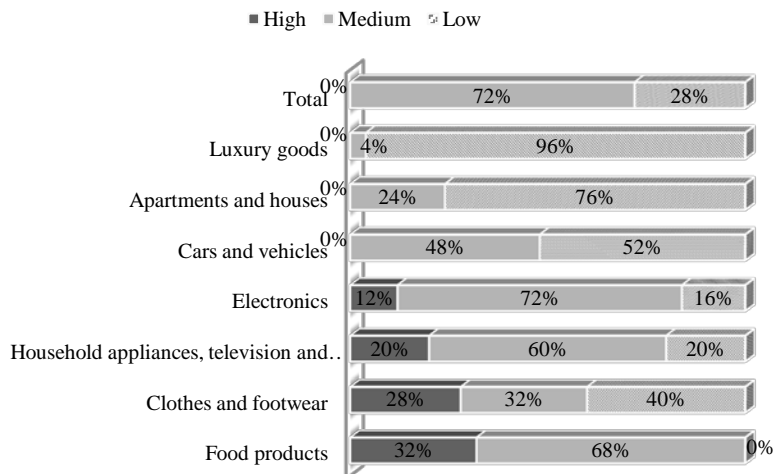


Fig 2. Estimation of consumer opportunities of the bulk of the population of the ITRs in the acquisition of goods and services

Even a cursory glance at Diagram 2 shows that the Mariy El estimates are lower than the Tatarstan ones, and in some product categories it is quite significant. Thus, the total level of consumer opportunities of the population of Mariy El defined by experts as predominantly average (72%). But the lower estimates are much higher than in Tatarstan. In the RME 28%, while in the RT 16%.

For individual product categories, the difference in estimates also reaches a significant value. In particular, in the sphere of purchasing foodstuffs, 32% of experts rated the consumer opportunities of the RME as high and 68% of respondents as average.

In the Republic of Tatarstan, we recall, there were more high marks in this nomination - 52%. Even lower consumer opportunities for citizens of the RME in the acquisition of clothing and footwear.

Particularly striking is the fact that 40% of experts of Mariy El estimated the acquisition potential of the Mariy El in this area as low. In Tatarstan there were very few low ratings, only 4%. In other words, ten times less.

At first glance, it seems that the consumer capabilities of the RME population in the nomination "household appliances, TV and video equipment" are estimated by experts on a higher scale. High estimates are 20% of the total. But, if you combine high and medium estimates, the consumer resource of the Tatarstanis will be higher (92% vs. 80%). In addition, experts of Mariy El, assessing the consumer potential of fellow citizens in this area, put out 20% of low ratings.

Electronics was the only nomination where approximate parity in estimates of the level of consumer opportunities was formed. Here, 84% of experts from each republic estimated the purchasing resource of their compatriots as medium and high. Experts from Mariy El put even higher marks than their counterparts in Tatarstan (12% versus 4%).

In the three subsequent nominations, a small advantage was on the side of the Tatarstan consumers of goods and services. In the nomination "cars and vehicles" 4% of high scores, 48% average and low in RT against, respectively, 0%, 48% and 52% in RME. In the sphere of purchasing apartments and houses: 32% of medium and 68% of low ratings (RT) versus 24% of medium and 76% of low (RME). Finally, 96% of the experts rated the consumer opportunities of the residents of Mariy El as low, whereas the low ratings in Tatarstan turned out to be 88%, plus 12% of the average ratings.

#### 4 Conclusions

Thus, the hypothesis formulated at the beginning of the article proved to be justified, having received confirmation of its validity by the results of the conducted research. Assessments by the experts of both republics of the level of consumer opportunities of the population of Tatarstan and Mariy El serve as evidence that the consumption society, in the form in which it exists in the developed countries of the West, is just beginning to form in the regions of Russia, in particular, in RT and RME.

Its institutionalization will not take place soon, given the contradictory trends in the regeneration and development of capitalism in the Russian Federation. It is known that the consumer society is formed on the basis of developed capitalism, in other words, in the conditions of transformation of the industrial society into a post-industrial society.

Data from expert surveys show that the level of consumer opportunities of citizens of the Republic of Tajikistan in total is higher than the similar level of residents of the RME. According to some indicators, in particular, on the consumer potential in the sphere of purchasing clothes and footwear, the gap reaches a significant value. In addition, only one nomination ("Household appliances, television and video equipment") has approximate equality in assessing the level of consumer opportunities in the republics.

Based on the analysis of the results of the study, examined and evaluated through the prism of scientific tools developed on the basis of studying the experience of industrial and post-industrial development of Western countries, we will state the following assumption. One of the main reasons for the lack of a full-fledged consumer society in Russia is the insufficiently profound and diversified development of capitalism, with the high levels of industrial, agrarian, urbanization, etc., inherent for the latter.

Proceeding from the above assumption, let us propose a number of recommendations addressed primarily to power structures, since the growth rates and the scale of the consumer opportunities of simple, ordinary citizens largely depend on their activities:

- in Russia it is necessary to intensively develop industry, especially those industries that are associated with the production of goods and services needed to meet everyday human needs;
- it is necessary to invest more in the agricultural sector, primarily in the development of farms;
- the development of urban trends, urban entrepreneurship and developing the infrastructure of cities should be encouraged;

- an urgent need is also to increase the size of salaries, benefits and pensions, along with a reduction in government spending for non-production purposes.

The complex implementation of the proposed measures will contribute the growth of incomes of citizens, and, at the same time, the level of consumer opportunities of the bulk of the population of the regions of Russia.

#### Acknowledgements

The is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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