

CONSUMER PERCEPTION OF PRODUCT FEATURES IN BUYING PROCESS OF WOODEN FURNITURE

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Abstract: Wood is the primary and most popular material for furniture manufacturing. As a construction material, wood is a renewable resource, promising in circular economy. The aim of our research is to identify the impact of selected criteria on consumer purchase of wooden furniture. To understand impact of various product features and identify the consumer buying process in a specific product category – a wooden coffee table, qualitative research was chosen with the format of an experiment. The results indicate the most influential factors being the appearance of the product, the material, the place of production and the price. Respondents who associate furniture design with the expression of the personal style or the expression of personality to a greater extent consider furniture design as more important as others. In the case of young couples, the price is crucial factor. In case of consumers in higher age groups, factors such as material, quality and price become decisive.

Keywords: appearance, buying process, consumer perception, product features, wooden coffee table, wooden furniture

1 Introduction

The benefits derived from wood are the key factors in the competition between wood and non-wood products. A wood product is composed of various attributes, and the consumers' choice is guided by their quality (Jošt et al., 2020). As a construction material, wood is the primary and most popular material for furniture manufacturing (Smardzewski, 2015). Wood is strong yet relatively easy to cut, carve, join, finish, and refinish. Furniture pieces made from wood are easily cared for, and if they are well constructed and carefully maintained, they may become better looking with age and last almost indefinitely.

According to Nielson and Taylor (2011) wood is a renewable resource that can be regenerated by reforestation or by planting seedlings to replace trees that have been cut down for lumber. However, the overall environmental footprint of a single piece of wooden furniture depends on many factors beyond the material itself. Due to its processes and product characteristics, the wood furniture sector undoubtedly plays an important role from an environmental point of view. The concept of circular economy, largely considered to be a promising instrument of implementing sustainable development goals, brings both opportunities and challenges to the furniture sector. The challenges that can limit companies of wood furniture sector in implementing the circular approach relate mainly to the quality of products, additional costs related to recycling or lack of support from government (Bravi et al, 2019). On the other hand, the global Forest Management certification (FSC certification) is becoming increasingly adopted. This set of global requirements for responsible forest management, aims to achieve responsible management of the forests worldwide, supporting biodiversity and shifting the global forest trend toward sustainable use, conservation and restoration. FSC certification ensures that products come from responsibly managed forests that provide environmental, social and economic benefits.

Contemporary digital way of life requires a compensation in the form of a natural, traditional environment. Natural materials, having an effect on all of our senses, provide great opportunity of creating a more natural and healthier interior through applications in the design of furniture pieces. The selection of materials is of key importance for our living environment, as natural materials are warm, elastic, pleasant to touch and able to regulate the micro-climate in the space (Lipková, 2016). Concerning psychological influences of the use of wood, it is

perceived as a material that gives people pleasure and happiness and relaxes them mentally and emotionally (Guzel, 2020).

Beside direct, material-based health benefits another important aspect that closely relates to furniture made of wood, is product's place of origin as such. In fact, the place of the actual production as one of the later discussed competitive advantages of products on the global interior design market, receives recently increasing attention. Where the product is manufactured matters to the customers not only on behalf of the environmental footprint of the item, where issues as shipping, outsourcing of labour and exploitation of natural resources are taken into account, but as well as a matter of maintaining and cocreating local identity in the built environment and in the lifestyle. The idea of wellbeing as a part of the social sustainability is closely related to the concept of local identity, understood as the awareness of one's origin, roots and one's active participation in developing this phenomenon. The tradition and the culture, as shared knowledge and preferences is a part of both the conscious and the unconscious decision process (Kotradyová et al., 2020). Regional sensitivity of brands, expressed through designs of their products, conscious material choice and local manufacturing strategies are therefore not only a successful marketing strategy, but valuable tool of sustainable identity building in the first place.

1.1 Consumer perception of furniture

According to Smardzewski (2015) furniture is an object of applied art intended for mobile and permanent furnishing of residential interiors. Furniture can be used individually, in suites, or in sets. It serves for storage, work, eating, and sitting, lying down, sleeping, and relaxing.

Guzel (2020) in his study finds out that the individuals prefer wood usually as furniture (82.5%) and then as the form of decorative objects (7.2%). It was found that respondents used in houses furniture made of wood composite materials (71.8%), such as particleboard (sometimes known as chipboard) and medium density fiber board (MDF). This preference reflects that wood is an expensive material, as indicated by more than half of the respondents (57.8%). This indicates that price is important factor for consumers during furniture purchases.

Furniture selection should not be aiming only at affecting others; rather, it should reflect the lifestyle of those using the space and must offer the features that provide the comfort, peace and tranquillity that individuals seek at home (Faulkner et al., 1986; Kalinkara, 2006). To make informed furniture choices, individual buyers must have enough knowledge about the specification of the product. From design perspective, the value of a furniture product is reflected in factors such as its functionality, durable aesthetics, usability and value of investment (Burdurlu, İlçe and Ciritcioğlu, 2004).

The socio-demographic elements of consumers (income, residence, age, and educational level) and family size have a significant influence on their willingness to buy eco-friendly furniture (Chitra 2007). Andac and Guzel (2017) studied the general perspectives of parents with various demographic backgrounds toward eco-friendly design. The material that parents trust most is wood (70%). Well-educated and high-income parents prefer furniture that is not harmful to health and environment. However, the price of eco-friendly furniture is still an important factor that limits such purchases for other individuals.

According to Paluš et al. (2012) buyers in Poland and Slovakia prefer wooden windows, doors, flooring and wall facing to the competitive non-wood products, although most of the Slovak respondents (74%) would not prefer wooden joinery products because of their weak fire resistance. On the other hand, almost

half of Polish respondents consider wooden joinery products as fire resistant. Even if most of the respondents in Poland (95%) and in Slovakia (90%) would prefer wooden windows, doors and other joinery products for their health and safety properties, significant differences occurred in case of non-wood products. In preferences for wooden and non-wooden furniture in Slovakia and Poland respondents mentioned most frequently qualities such as versatility of product use, fire resistance, durability, endurance, firmness and uniqueness of material.

Similarly, a survey conducted in Slovenia and Croatia (Oblak et al. 2017) showed another regional difference in preferences of buyer in Europe - in Slovenia the quality of the products was the most important criterion in the furniture purchasing decision process, while in Croatia it was the price of the product. According to another study focused on consumer behaviour in Slovenia, 74 % of the prospective furniture buyers identified solid wood as the most preferred material for interior furniture in 2010, with even increased value of 81 % in 2019 (Jošt et al. 2020). At the same time, majority of the respondents (97 %) listed manufacturing quality as the most influential factor for their purchase decision, with product's design as the second most important attribute. According to Oblak's study, positive attitude toward design increased in 2019 from 71 % up to 91 %. Kusa et al. (2020) found out that the Slovak consumer prefers the quality of the products and they care about the origin. The price level is very important factor, because consumers prefer products that are financially advantageous.

Taking closer look at local purchasing behaviour in Slovakia, Olšiaková et al. (2016) monitored the changes in consumer requirements for wood products in the years 2004 and 2014. The study discovered that price was no longer the most important factor for Slovak consumers in 2014 because of the remarkable decrease (35%) of the dissatisfaction of consumers with the price of wood products, while the satisfaction with wood products quality increased (80%). Parobek et al. (2015) presented same findings, that Slovak consumers disregarded importance of price as a key criterion in their buying decision.

Interesting insights come from customer behaviour studies from the much larger North American market. Lihra et al. (2012) addressed the importance given by the customers in USA to "customization" while buying furniture. Customers are usually price-oriented (50%), moreover, women give importance to customization (Torsten et al. 2012). In his survey conducted in United States, Ponder (2013) discovered that respondents who have a spouse (71.6%) consult with their significant other before making a purchase decision. More than half of them (67.8%) say that their spouse takes an active role in acquisition of home interior items. Accordingly, females stated in their responses (57.6%) that their spouses take an active role in furniture shopping. The results say that females are more likely to have an interest in home furniture (68%, compared to 32% of males), but males are still likely to be included in the decision process. Interesting insight on overlaps of gender preferences was identified by Oztop and Erkal (2008), who state that the factor with high importance for both genders was the durability of the product, since furniture is generally considered an outstanding item of expenditure, that is not easy to replace and consumers have the tendency for its long-term use. Additionally, respondents with children (37.1%) say that their children influence their furniture buying decisions. At the beginning of the furniture buying process 75% of respondents consider the needs of entire family. What again confirms the importance of self-expression, is the fact that large number of respondents (72.7%) in Ponder's study agreed with the statement "The design of my furniture reflects my personality," and 67.0% of respondents confirmed that "A lot can be said about a person from the furniture s/he owns." More than half of the respondents (60.7%) stated that they express themselves with the furniture they buy.

Taking into account the importance of local production, the statement "I try to buy furniture only if it is made in the United States" was agreed with by 57.8% of the respondents, while the

level of agreement differed mostly by the generational group and region of the country. 58.2% of respondents agreed with the statement "I am willing to pay more money if the furniture is made in the U.S.A", and agreement increased with age, as well as for Southerners and Midwesterners (Ponder, 2013). At the same time Ponder presents interesting insight into brand awareness in the furniture market segment. The survey showed that respondents are not loyal to specific furniture brands and respondents do not stick with just couple of brands. These findings are consistent with other research which found that online furniture buyers are undecided on brand, with only 8% of internet furniture buyers preferring specific brands during their purchasing process (Nickell 2013). On the other hand, strong criterion Ponder's study confirmed the importance of quality, with high willingness to pay more money for high quality furniture (80.8% of respondents). This finding is consistent with results from the 2008 furniture study (Ponder, 2013).

The appearance as the key external visual characteristic of each furniture piece always communicates a specific message. There are six different roles of product appearance - attention drawing, categorisation, function, ergonomics, aesthetics and symbolic. Troian (2011) also explained that the aesthetic and symbolic roles were mentioned most often, but the preferred shape, colour, or size were found to differ depending on the played role of the product appearance for consumer. This makes it difficult to optimize all roles. The starting point in the design of the product look should be the overall value of the item, which is most important for consumer during purchasing.

Troian's study (2011) analysed consumers' furniture choice in Italy and in different cultural environments. Making a strong point for the importance of the regional preferences, Troian claims that despite the fact of highly globalized markets, consumers based in different geographical locations express different behaviour patterns as a reaction to the local cultural contexts. This aspect is key to consider for any brand with ambitions of rapid entry in foreign markets. Furniture manufacturers therefore need to alter their product portfolio based on understanding of local cultural context and its influence on customer choices.

2 Materials and methods

The aim of our research was to identify the impact of selected criteria on consumer purchase of wooden furniture. To understand impact of various product features and identify the consumer buying process we have chosen qualitative research approach and a specific product category – a wooden coffee table.

We formulated the research questions based on a previous examination of the secondary data. Ponder (2013) concluded in his study that consumers with a spouse consult their purchase decision with him/her and more than half of them actively involve a spouse in the selection of a home interior item. Oztop and Erkal (2008) found that there are differences in purchases when there is a child in the family which influences furniture buying decisions.

A number of factors play a role in choosing furniture. Oblak et al. (2017) found that there are regional differences in purchasing preferences across Europe, with quality playing an important role. This is also confirmed by Ponder (2013), who in his study found a high willingness to pay extra for a quality product. Local production can play an important role in purchasing. It has been shown that consumers try to buy local products and are willing to pay extra for such a product (Ponder, 2013). Troian (2012) describes the appearance of a product as a key factor. Based on the findings of above mentioned studies on consumer behavior, several purchase criteria were selected for survey and further analysis of behavior of Slovak consumers when buying wooden coffee tables. We formulated following research questions:

1. What are consumer attitudes towards furniture and how do they differ with different life-situations?

2. What is the influence of selected criteria (appearance, material, storage space, variability, place of origin, brand and price) to the willingness to buy wooden coffee table?

We have decided to use the format of an experiment, mainly because of the ability to study the probability of a change in independent variable causing a change in another, dependent variable, which this form of research allows (Hakim, 2000). Experiment as a form of research owes much to the natural sciences, although it is often used in psychological and social sciences. It allows primary data collection, such as interviewing and observation. While interviewing allows us to uncover what the participants noticed and remembered during the experiment, or what impression they got through the guided conversation, observations tend to follow nonverbal reactions of the participants (Vokounová, 2019). Mertens (2005) defines the experiment as a decision about who will be influenced by the experiment, by what means and when.

For our survey we have chosen the form of the post-test experimental design. After-only design Vokounová (2019) characterised as the simplest form of experiment. It measures the effect on a dependent variable after a change in an independent variable is announced. The disadvantage is that no measurement is made before changing the independent variable, therefore the comparison of the results is not possible. The reason of choosing this method of the after-only design experiment in our research is that the results of the experiment will be further used as a basis for a follow-up survey.

During an experiment, internal and external validity is an important evaluation criterion. Internal validity represents the probability of drawing the correct conclusion about the action of an independent variable (Levine, Parkinson, 2014). External validity represents generalizations, so to which populations / groups, conditions and variables the observed effect can be generalized (Chen et al., 2011). In the classical laboratory experiment, the subjects perform some task or activity within a carefully controlled physical environment. This can help to reduce the number of extraneous variables – factors other than the independent variables being studied – that could be affecting the dependent variable (Ryals, Wilson, 2005). In the case of our experiment, the internal validity of the research was given more consideration than the external validity. One of the greatest external threats to the experimental design is the external validity such as less generalizability of the effect of the experimental variables to the population from which the subjects were selected.

Selected furniture pieces

The experiment examined four furniture pieces from the category of coffee table, as well referred to as “serving table” or in Slovakia as “conference table” category (Tab. 1). All products selected for the experiment are intended for the use in the living room setting, most often along with the lounge suite or other comfortable type of seating, used for non-formal social activities.

Tab. 1: Specification of selected furniture pieces

Feature	Table A	Table B	Table C	Table D
Distributor / Manufacturer	Merkury shop, s.r.o. (limited liability company)	Karpiš Nábytok s.r.o. (limited liability company)	JAVORINA, v.d. (production cooperative)	BRIK, a.s (stock company)
Origin	Poland	Slovakia	Slovakia	Slovakia
Brand	Merkury Market	Karpiš	Javorína	Brik
Product name	PRIMO	Nostalgia	BLOK	PUZZLE
Designer	N/A	Alojz Karpiš	Leo Čellár	Ivan Čobej
Material	laminated chipboard, laminated MDF	beech wood	oak wood, stainless steel	oak wood
FSC certified	N/A	Yes	Yes	N/A
Size (mm)	1070 x 670 x 460	900 x 725 x 510 708 x 559 x 345 430 x 380 x 330	900 x 900 x 360	1100 x 600 x 300
Weight	28 kg	N/A	78 kg	N/A
Storage	Yes	No	Yes	No
Variability	No	Yes (3 pieces)	No	Yes (4 pieces)
Price	84 €	570 €	838 €	705 €

Source: own processing

Table A is made in Poland and sold in Merkury Market, international distribution chain focused on interior furnishings and construction material (Figure 1). The table is made of chipboard with laminated surface imitating oak wood on the main body and matt white surface on the visible part of the drawer. Table A provides storage space, it offers a pull-out drawer and an open shelf. The table is made of one piece. The price of table A is 84 €

Figure 1: Image of the table A.



Source: Merkury Market, 2019

Table B is made in Slovakia and was designed by Alojz Karpiš, founder of the company Karpiš Nábytok s.r.o., located in Prievidza, and the brand Karpiš (Figure 2.). The table is made of beech wood and it does not provide any storage space. The product, in fact a small collection, consists from three independent parts (stackable tables) and it allows wide range of use by altering their placement in the interior. The price of table B is 570 €

Figure 2: Image of the table B



Source: Karpiš, 2018

Table C is made in Slovakia, designed by Leo Čellár for local and well-established furniture brand JAVORINA (Figure 3.). The product is made of solid oak wood with oiled surface and stainless-steel base, providing a large storage space accessible by sliding the top. Table C is made in one piece, weights 78 kg and does not provide the possibility to variable placement. The price of table C is 838 €

Figure 3: Image of the table C



Source: JAVORINA, 2020

Table D is produced in Slovakia and was designed by Ivan Čobej for Brik, well-known local brand and company, which the author is at the same time co-owner of (Figure 4.). The table is made of oak wood and provides no storage space. Similarly, like table B, the product consists of several independent pieces, in this case four polyhedrons, that create a monolithic rectangular shape when pieced together. The price of table D is 705 €

Figure 4: Image of the table D



Source: Brik, 2020

The Experiment

The whole experiment consisted of three parts, (1.) respondent survey, (2.) experiment, and (3.) interview. It took place in two

groups of participants on different days so that the groups could not influence each other.

1. part – survey

Survey was made in a form of a questionnaire. Respondents, the participants of the experiment, completed the questionnaire individually. They evaluated their level of agreement or disagreement with specific statements aimed to identify the respondents' general attitude to furniture. Survey focused on search for the relationship between the personality and furniture design, involving the family members and family needs into purchase decision and respondents' demographics.

2. part - experiment

In the beginning of the experiment four selected coffee tables with assigned names (table A, table B, table C, and table D) were introduced to the respondents by means of computer presentation. Respondents could see the presented tables with assigned names in front of them throughout the experiment. They just saw the tables without any additional information. We gave information to respondents gradually. Respondents first evaluated their willingness to buy coffee table based on 1. appearance, then gradually, after receiving additional information about 2. material, 3. storage space, 4. variable placement, 5. place of origin, 6. brand and finally, 7. price of the coffee table. The willingness to buy products was evaluated at the scale. This study employed a Likert-type ten-point bipolar scale. The bipolar choices on the scale were "strongly unwilling to buy" and "strongly willing to buy" to indicate their purchase intentions.

Respondents wrote down their ratings on answer sheets, unable to discuss with each other until everyone had marked the answers. Subsequently, they commented on the information provided and discussed within the group. Everything took place under the guidance of the experiment moderator.

3. part – interview

The last part was focused on shedding more light on the purchasing process of the coffee table. The interview was moderated, and respondents were free to discuss within their group. The aim was to find out when does the need for the purchase of a coffee table arise, where do the respondents look for inspiration/information, and how their purchase decision is made.

The Sample

The experiment used a convenience sample. In the experiment were two experimental groups. First group with 5 respondents, and second with 6 respondents. In the sample were 5 males and 6 females (Tab. 2). Age of respondents was from 27 years to 68 years.

Tab. 2: Respondents' characteristics

Respondent	F = Female/ M = Male, age	Family status
1	M, 30	married under 35 age with children
2	F, 30	married under 35 age with children
3	M, 58	married over 35 age with children
4	F, 51	married over 35 age with children
5	F, 59	living alone since the age of 55
6	M, 49	married over 35 age with children
7	M, 27	person under 35 years not married/without children/ living with parents or grandparents
8	F, 68	living alone since the age of 55
9	F, 45	married over 35 age with children
10	F, 48	married over 35 age with children
11	M, 54	married over 35 age with children

Source: own processing

3 Results and discussion

The first step of the experiment was the short survey in a form of a questionnaire about consumer attitudes towards home furniture, followed by the experiment outlining the most influential factors and product features of a coffee table and the interview discussing the purchase process.

3.1 Consumer attitudes towards furniture

Respondents evaluated their general attitudes towards furniture by completing the questionnaire with specific statements.

6 respondents out of 11 agreed that they "*consider the needs of the whole family before buying the furniture*" and 4 respondents strongly agree with the statement. Almost all respondents take into account family opinion and try to meet the needs of all members before buying the furniture. The results are in line with the findings of the Ponder survey (2013), which claimed that most respondents consider the needs of the whole family before furniture acquisition.

At the same time, 6 respondents out of 11 slightly disagreed and 1 respondent disagreed with the statement that "*the opinion of their family and friends was important when buying the product*". However, this does not necessarily mean that the respondents excluded family or friends from the shopping process. Based on the answers from the respondents, we know that the behaviour differs from age or marital status. A young couple with children takes more account of the family's opinion, showing a strong mother-daughter relationship. On the contrary, in the case of an older couple, the opinion of family or friends was important only as an advisory voice in situations where they cannot decide. A single respondent, in turn, decides mostly on his own.

A survey of European Values (2017) showed that the most important value for Slovaks is the family. Friends and acquaintances acquired the third place in the importance of selected areas of life. It may also reflect why more respondents consider their family's needs in the process of buying furniture, but fewer respondents take into account the views of friends.

2 respondents out of 11 agreed with the statement "*The design of my furniture reflects my personality*" and 2 respondents strongly agreed. Slight disagreement was expressed by 6 respondents. Our result differs slightly from the findings of the Ponder (2013) survey, in which 72.7% of respondents agreed with corresponding statement. Our discrepancy may be due to the current state of the furniture of the respondents who took part in the experiment and said that they would like to replace some pieces of furniture, as they already have furniture for a long time and consider it obsolete, or the furniture has worn out over time. Only 3 respondents out of 11 agreed that "*Much can be said about a person from the furniture he/she owns*". 4 respondents expressed slight disagreement with this statement and 2 disagreed. This statement again showed a deviation from the Ponder survey (2013), in which 67% of respondents agreed with the statement. The reason may be the earlier mentioned dissatisfaction with the current state of the furniture. The deviation could also occur due to the marital status of the respondents, as more respondents have children and thus the furniture is adapted to the needs of the whole family and does not reflect the taste of only one person. Respondents who agreed with the statement that "*Much can be said about a person from the furniture he/she owns*", attributed later during the experiment a higher importance to design, regardless of personality characteristics or gender.

The next statement "*Most respondents are willing to pay extra money for the product they like/find appealing*" was agreed by 7 respondents and strongly agreed by 3. Here we can see that most respondents are willing to spend a higher amount of money to buy a product they find appealing. The results also correspond to the statements of the respondents recorded during the experiment. 10 respondents out of 11 agreed to "*consider all*

available alternatives before purchasing the furniture". Based on the experiment, we found out that respondents look for inspiration not only on the Internet, but as well in the brick-and-mortar stores and showrooms before buying - they want to experience the actual physical appearance and quality of the product in before buying.

3.2 Consumer perception of selected criteria in buying process of wooden coffee table

The Appearance

As the very first step of the experiment the respondents were asked to evaluate their willingness to buy selected coffee table solely based on the appearance of the product. The highest degree of willingness to buy the coffee table based on the appearance was given to the table D. The table C achieved a slightly lower willingness to buy. The willingness to buy the table B based on appearance was low and the lowest willingness to buy was given to the table A, which can be described as a reluctance to buy table A based on its appearance (Figure 5).

The majority of respondents were most interested in the table C and the table D for various reasons. A woman, 51 years old, liked the variable placing of the table D. A man, 30 years old, and a woman, 59-year-old, said they liked the design of the table D the most. The lowest ranking of the willingness to buy was assigned to table A. One of the male respondents, 30 years old, said: *"I could imagine A as a TV table, not as a coffee table."* Female 48 years old respondent considered table A *"horribly retro"*, reminding her of the furniture production from the time when Slovakia was under Communist rule. While the table A reminds respondents of production of the communist-era Czechoslovakia, the table C and the table D impress with their design. Based on these answers we can suggest that the respondents perceive the individual tables differently, depending on their individual taste.

The Material and the Quality

The material from which the tables are made affected the willingness to buy the item in all cases. The information that the table A was made of chipboard had a negative effect, causing a visible reduction in the degree of willingness to buy. A slight decrease of the willingness to buy was recorded in case of the table B produced from beech wood. For the tables C and D, the willingness to buy increased. The biggest impact of the material and thus the biggest increase of the willingness to buy, was recorded for the table C, which is made of solid oak wood from FSC certified sources (Figure 5).

The material can tell the respondents more than just what the furniture is made of. Some respondents were able to immediately evaluate the quality of the tables or expect the price. Female participant, 59 years old, based on information about what material the tables are made of, stated: *"C is made of those sustainable materials, and I think D is of the highest quality."* Another participant, 48 years old woman, on the other hand said: *"It didn't affect me, because I knew what material it was made of, according to the picture."* 27 years old male respondent commented the price of the table based on the material, similarly, estimating the price already: *"C will be more expensive in my opinion."*

The ability of respondents to determine quality or price based on the appearance and overall aesthetics of the product is an important insight. Based on the appearance of the furniture, consumers can assess also the other properties, which can arouse interest or disinterest at the outset. This insight could motivate retailers and manufacturers to pay more attention to the design of their furniture products and subsequently to the perception of them by the consumers.

The Storage Space

The storage space is available in only two of the selected tables - table A and table C. For table A, this caused the increase of willingness to buy, but for table C the level of willingness did not change (Figure 5). Table C provides storage space by sliding

the upper part. 48 years old female respondent commented on table C and its storage space: *"I like C because it can be closed, and because the dust doesn't get there, it's ingenious."*

The test showed a significant reduction in the willingness to buy for table D after the information about the storage space was given to the respondents (Figure 5). Table D at first glance seems to offer the storage space, but in fact it does not. This factor can be the reason for this products' negative results during the test. After receiving the information about missing storage capacity of the piece, the man, 30 years old, said: *"I'm surprised that D doesn't have a storage space."*

Respondents' answers indicated that although storage space is not an essential part of a coffee table, it can provide added value, which was expressed by a 30 years old male respondent: *"Storage space is not decisive, but if it is available, it's nice."* A similar opinion was expressed by a 51 years old female participant, according to whom the storage space is not decisive, as the decision depends more on the needs or requirements that the consumer has: *"It's good to have storage space, but once I like the table as it is, I'll give up the storage space. It also depends on whether you need it or not."*

The Variability

The variability of the arrangement of tables was possible in only two cases, namely for table B and table D, which consist of several independent parts. In both cases we can see that the willingness to buy increased slightly, and at the same time, on the contrary in the case of table A and table C, which cannot be variably arranged in space, the willingness to buy decreased (Figure 5). Based on the assessment of willingness to buy, it might seem that the variability of arrangement is important for the respondents, but that was not confirmed when expressing their opinions. The woman, 30 years said: *"It definitely is interesting that you can divide the table into several pieces. But I didn't like B at all, so I don't care if it can be decomposed or not."*

According to the responses, most of the participants do not consider the variability of the arrangement of tables as an important factor when deciding to buy a coffee table. However, the variability can be an important factor when buying other pieces of furniture, such as a dining table, as expressed by 30 years old male respondent: *"I don't think it's important for the coffee table, it would be important for the dining table."*

The Place of Production

Table A was the only item in the selection, which was not made locally. Being made in Poland had a negative impact on respondents (the convenience sample was composed by residents of Slovakia). Based on receiving the information about the place of origin, their willingness to buy table A decreased. The remaining tables were made in Slovakia, and the degree of willingness to buy after this information increased for all of them (Figure 5).

The experiment showed that the place of production had a positive effect on some respondents in the case of the Slovak products, and can positively affect the willingness to make the purchase. A woman, 51 years old, said: *"I prefer the Slovak products to the Polish ones."* Respondents stated that they prefer more Slovak products, they are even willing to consider a product that has not previously interested them, or in the case of two identical products, they choose the one made in locally. As it is clear from the statement of a man, 30 years old: *"I'd rather buy Slovak than Polish table. If I had two of the same things, I would rather buy Slovak, but here I dealt with the materials and design rather than where it is made."*

The Brand

The brand of the product had only a slight effect on the respondent reactions. For the table A, the willingness to buy increased slightly - the brand of this table is Merkur Market, which at the same time might have been a sign of a lower price for respondents. There was also a slight increase in the

willingness to buy at table B, which could be due to the positive perception of the brand. On the other hand, table C and table D recorded a slight decrease in the willingness to buy (Figure 5).

If respondents know a brand and have positive experience with or even already a good relationship to it, their willingness to buy may increase. In the case of the brand Javorina, the respondents immediately imagined the notion of quality. This is also confirmed by a statement of a 27 years old male participant: "Javorina increased for me. It is quality. But when we get to the price, my interest is likely to drop" (the respondent refers to the possibility of the decrease of the willingness to buy because he was aware that products of Javorina are usually expensive).

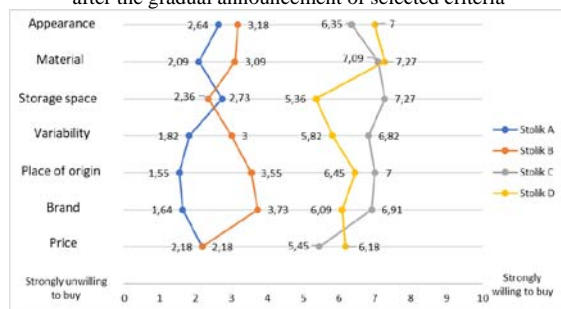
The Brik brand evoked designer pieces. The woman, 51 years, said: "I know also Javorina. Javorina makes only pure wooden furniture. Brik is more known for their designs." In the case of the Merkury Market brand, respondents recalled cheap products, as a man of 30 years commented: "If it was a table I like and from the materials they use in the Merkury Market, I don't mind at all. Mercury Market is known for having cheap stuff, so they probably won't have tables made of massive wood."

The Price

The price had a significant effect on the respondents. The willingness to buy the table A with the lowest price increased and it reached the level of the willingness to buy the table B, which significantly decreased after the price information. There was also a significant reduction in willingness for table C, which had the highest price of all tables. The price had the smallest effect on the perception and subsequent willingness to buy the table D, which was second most expensive after table C (Figure 5).

In the case of table B, for which the willingness to buy was already relatively low at the beginning, the higher price caused an even lower willingness to buy (Figure 5). However, if the respondents have to decide between two tables that they like, but the price difference is not significant, they are willing to pay extra for the product. This is mentioned by a man, 30 years old: "For me probably yes, (price is important), but that doesn't mean that I would buy A instead of C. If I had to decide only between C and D, I would pay the hundred more."

Figure 5: Development of the willingness to buy the product after the gradual announcement of selected criteria



Source: own processing

3.3 Consumer buying process in product category wooden coffee table

The buying process begins with the identification of the problem, in the case of buying a coffee table, such a need can arise when changing the family situation, furnishing a household or when replacing an old coffee table with a new one.

The respondents reported they most often look for information on the Internet, through websites that offer furniture, or directly at the point of sale. The difference in the decision-making process occurs depending on the situation - whether respondents furnish a new apartment or just exchange an old piece of the furniture for a new one. In the case of a new apartment, the respondents stated that first one must have an idea of what kind of an apartment one wants to have and adjust their search

accordingly. In the case of a product exchange, respondents already take more account of what kind of furniture they currently have in the apartment.

The search for possibilities is also different for different demographics and lifestyles. Young couples who are furnishing an apartment for the first time, are initially looking for a cheaper alternative, focusing on quality, material and price just later. Older couples or single people give higher focus on quality and material.

The evaluation of alternatives usually takes place after the respondents see the coffee table directly in the store and are therefore able to evaluate the real quality of the product. Some respondents also take into account the views of other family members when choosing a product. Older couples reported that their assessment and the final choice of the furniture is mostly made by the woman, who only verifies her decision with other family members. The young couples reported making the decision together, while consulting with other family members, taking into account also the needs of young children in the family. When it comes to choosing furniture, women tend to have a more dominant opinion.

In the case of the purchase decision making, we noticed different reactions during the experiment. If the respondents do not find a product that matches their ideas when replacing the old table with a new one, they will not buy the table at all and will stay with what they have at home, or they will have the table custom made by a carpenter. If the respondents find a suitable alternative, they buy the table directly at the point of sale.

Dissatisfaction may arise if the respondent did not find a suitable product and did not make a purchase. Dissatisfaction also occurs if the purchased table is damaged during delivery, which leads to the product return. Satisfaction occurred if the purchased product met the needs of the respondents.

4 Conclusions

In the experiment, we examined the influence of specific factors and product features on the purchasing decision in the case of a wooden coffee table to get better understanding of consumer decision making which may be a particular interest of furniture manufacturers and retailers. We could see how the individual factors gradually change the willingness to buy selected tables.

Based on our study, the most influential factors include the appearance of the product, the material, the place of production and the price. The material from which the tables are made can provide respondents with information they do not have, such as quality, price. For this reason, it is important to pay attention to the material processing and execution of the details of coffee tables.

The place of production can have a significant impact on consumers. Within the experiment, an increased willingness to buy the product in the case of local Slovak production was detected. Reactions of the respondents suggested, that in case of Slovak products, the place of production can be a decisive factor in the situation of choosing between two identical table variants. Respondents who associate furniture design with the expression of the personal style or the expression of personality to a greater extent consider furniture design as important as others.

The price is an important factor in choosing a coffee table, but it is not always a decisive factor, as we found from respondents that the willingness to pay more for a product increases if the product has already appealed to their preferences.

Additional storage space in the coffee table can provide an added value, but it is not crucial factor for the respondents, or a product brand, which if familiar to the consumers, will provide them with more trust towards the item.

The purchase process for a wooden coffee table may vary slightly depending on the family status. In the case of young couples, the price is crucial factor. In case of consumers in higher age groups, factors such as material, quality and price

become decisive. As well, the decision to buy furniture, or more specifically a coffee table, is more up to the woman, trying to take into account the needs of children (in case of families with children), younger couples turn to family members for advice on the choice.

It may happen that consumers do not find the desired piece of a coffee table that meets their expectations and needs. In this case, they may decide not to make the purchase at all, or they may opt for the option of having the coffee table custom made. This decision may pose risk to retailers, who may lose potential customers as a result – or on the other hand create a new opportunity in the form of a personalized furniture adjustments service.

Based on the results of the experiment, several recommendations for furniture manufacturers and retailers can be made. First, it is important to understand the “lifecycle situation” of the customer to provide the appropriate solution to his/her family situation providing comfort time with family or friends and reacting to the values of specific generations and lifestyles and their specific decision-making. Second, the appearance of the product is the most influential factor which should be used in product marketing communication, directly on the shop floor or in on-line display to attract consumer attention and even trigger higher price as respondents indicated they would pay more money if they find the piece appealing. Third, the statement “made locally” may become a selling point for the furniture made in Slovakia, mainly for older consumer groups who are proud of local skills and want to support local economy. Fourth, for local manufacturers and retailers it would be beneficial to educate consumers on the quality of materials, the material processing, the finishing and the origin of material to enhance perceived quality and purchase decision.

The limitation of our research lies in the low external validity of the experiment, and therefore it is not possible to generalize the results to the whole population or specific segments. However, it is important to emphasize that the experiment provided a deeper insight into the purchasing process and customers' perception of the perceived factors when buying a wooden coffee table.

In our future research we want to build on the outcomes and insights of the experiment and test their external validity in quantitative survey using query method. Our next survey will focus on identifying the significance of selected factors and identifying differences based on segmentation criteria. The results would lead to the definition of consumer clusters based on their relationship to design, which is identified as a very important factor in choosing a wooden coffee table.

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