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The Social Factors of Consumer Behavior in the Higher Education Market

Abstract. *What becomes relevant in the context of increasing market-orientedness among higher education institutions is the analysis of factors affecting consumer behaviors characteristic of prospective students. The paper is focused on the social determinants of students' educational choices. These could include e.g. the influence of family or reference groups exerted through opinions or imitation. Another important motivation is the aspiration to build one's social status on the prestige attributed to a particular higher education institution or to a specific profession.*

Keywords: *consumer behavior factors, family influence, reference groups*

Introduction

The political overturn of 1989 triggered rapid growth in Poland's higher education market. In the face of a sky-rocketing unemployment rate, higher education started to be perceived in terms of opportunity for a better job and a better pay. A number of higher education institutions were established, mostly private ones [Drapińska 2011: 59-62]. Today, however, it could well be argued that the market – due to a demographic low, problems in the job market, and increasing economic migration – is undergoing a crisis. As institutions have to compete for students, they are forced to abandon their traditional roles in favor of market-orientation.

The present-day university has to understand motivations behind consumer choices as well as the needs of higher education candidates. Therefore, it becomes vital for universities to learn about consumer behaviors and use these insights to attract students and tailor course offerings to their needs.

This paper offers a discussion of the social factors affecting consumer behaviors in the higher education market. It seeks to categorize these factors drawing on consumer behavior theory while at the same time accounting for the unique features of the education service being examined.

1. Higher education services and its features

In this paper, service denotes “an activity which has some element of intangibility associated with it, which involves some interaction with customers or with property in their possession, and does not result in the transfer of ownership” [Payne 1993: 6]. This definition highlights two essential features that differentiate a service from a material product. First, it has an intangible component associated with personal interaction between the service provider and the customer. The teaching process in higher education involves personal contact with teachers and other university staff. This feature, that providing a service involves the presence of the service providers, is inseparable from the service itself. The other key feature is that no ownership title to the service is transferred as a result of service provision, although it is possible to transfer the right of ownership to tangible evidence of service performance. Thus on purchasing an education service a student does not automatically become the owner of the service. Instead, the education that he has earned becomes tangible evidence of service performance in the form of a degree award certificate. Other features of services include heterogeneity, or variability, of perception, which means that the use of a particular service will generate different levels of satisfaction in different customers. Perishability of services, on the other hand, implies that they cannot be stored in inventory for future use. In other words, absence in class cannot be really compensated or made up for [Douglas, Douglas, Barnes 2006: 252].

An educational service is unique in that management and coordination of the teaching and learning process plays a greater role than knowledge transfer itself. Apart from knowledge and skills development, an important ingredient of the service is the pedagogical-formative function that shapes an individual's personality traits. An educational service has a substantial effect both on students' personal lives and on their professional careers. As such, it can be seen as a life choice. It is difficult for a student to evaluate the service quality prior to its performance, or even during the process. The level of satisfaction cannot be actually assessed

until job market entry is made. The decision therefore carries a high level of risk. Another characteristic of an educational service is that its performance spans a long time, making it likely for student expectations toward the service to change before its completion [Drafińska 2011: 25]. Further, a higher education institution provides a service that involves a number of stakeholders including students themselves, their parents and relatives, and their prospective employers [Henning-Thurau, Langer, Hansen 2001: Vol. 3, 332].

It should be also borne in mind that the higher education market is characterized by certain limitations on the freedom of choice. On the demand side, a free market should ensure the freedom of choice, easy access, reliable information, and direct, cost-covering prices. Access to higher education services is constrained by the fact that university campuses are only found at a limited number of locations. As a result, students' decision space is confined by convenient distance and the cost of living. The freedom of choice is therefore to a large extent conditional on a specific institution's course offerings and influenced by social factors, such as aspirations for prestige. The reliability of information is specifically compromised in this market by interpretative problems and information asymmetry. Last but not least, a free market should support direct and cost-covering prices. In most countries, certain education services are free of charge. Even in the case of paid education, however, the price does cover all the costs incurred, notably it does not cover the cost of living. The higher education market hence does not meet the characteristics of a free market, by this token adding complexity to students' choices [Drafińska 2011: 52-54].

2. Models of the decision process in the higher education market

The decision making process whereby a student chooses a field of study and a higher education institution consists of three stages: the predisposition stage; the search stage – seeking information; and the choice stage – making the decision on applying for admission to a specific institution.

The predisposition stage delimits the scope of a candidate's search and delineates the decision space. Preferences for a specific field/program of study are determined, and the range of institutional options is defined that are considered plausible in terms of distance from home and in terms of cost. Then the prospective student starts searching for relevant information, including the opinions and behaviors of influencers from a social group that is seen as the most credible. Advice provided by teachers and guidance counselors is taken into account,

alongside information from official publications such as institutional communications, brochures and leaflets, open day events, etc. At stage three, the student decides to apply. The choice made at this stage is presumed to be rational, although its rationality is clearly bounded by social and cultural factors [MacAllum et al. 2007: 11].

Literature offers two basic models of the decision making process in the higher education services market: the economic model and the status attainment model. The former assumes that students are rational in making their decisions and therefore will choose the institution that offers best value. Consumers hence strive to maximize utility and minimize risk. The decision process begins on realizing the need. Then information is gathered. Next, the prospective student assesses the options on different criteria and makes the decision. The model has a number of limitations associated with doubts raised as to consumers' rationality and strengthened by the distinctive characteristics of both the educational market (constraints on the freedom of choice, information asymmetry, peculiar price-cost relationships) and the decision problem itself (high risk, volatility of expectations, difficulty in specifying the requirements).

Given these downsides, the status attainment model seems to deserve special attention. It is founded on social theory and emphasizes social ties, family bonds, societal relationships, and individual predispositions, at the same time refuting the assumption on the rationality of choice. Instead, consumers' decisions are believed to be based solely on available information that is often uncertain and comes from informal sources [Drapińska 2011: 70-71]. Under this model, it is external factors, such as educational achievements, social background or the parents' financial and social status, that are key to the decision making process.

3. Social factors affecting consumer behavior in the higher education market

Consumer behavior theory discriminates between publicly and privately consumed goods. The impact of the social environment on the first class of goods will be much more significant [Burgiel 2014: 59]. A higher education service definitely falls into the group of publicly consumed goods. It could be therefore expected that social influence will be strong, and even more so as their consumption is socially visible. The impact of the social environment is also dependent on whether a good is regarded as a luxury or a necessity good. With the former, the impact is usually stronger than with the latter. Therefore, the question needs to be raised about how higher education services should be

in fact classified. Given their increasing affordability, improved access, and the growing numbers of degree seekers, it could be concluded that higher education is no longer a luxury good. This would imply that social influence is decreasing. On the other hand, A. Burgiel contends that publicly consumed necessity goods are influenced by the social environment more strongly than privately consumed luxury goods are [Burgiel 2014: 60].

In this paper, social factors affecting the decision being investigated have been divided into four groups, as shown in Fig. 1.

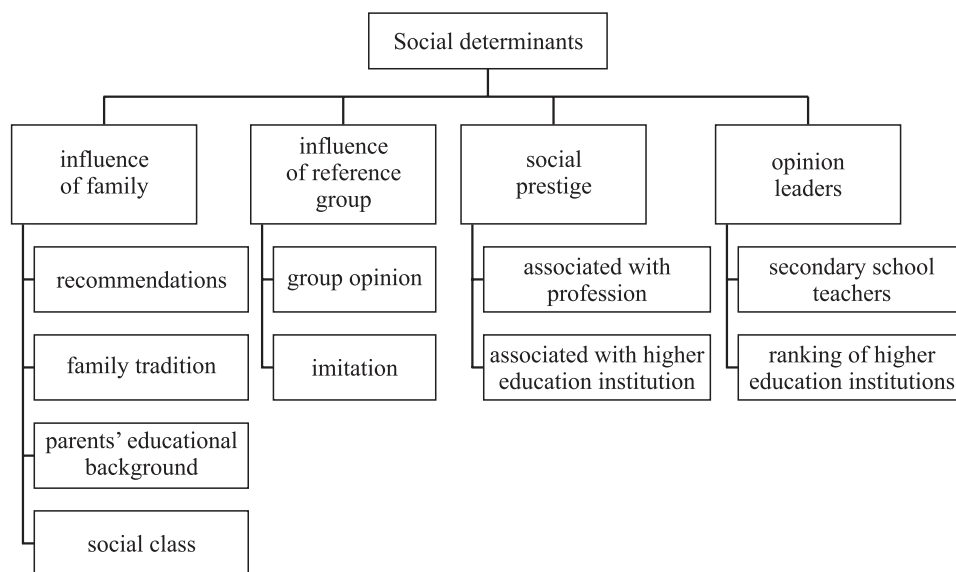


Figure 1. Classification of social factors affecting consumer behaviors in the higher education market

Source: own.

Impacts from the social environment can be broken down into normative and informative influence. Normative influence occurs when an individual imitates a person from his or her surrounding. Informative influence occurs when members of a social group convey information, such as recommendations or testimonials, to consumers, thus guiding their choices. Information from other consumers appears to be more credible because it is based on hands-on experience [Burgiel 2014: 47]. Two types of influence can be thus distinguished: through recommendations and advice, and through imitation.

3.1. The influence of family on the choice of a higher education service

Family is a primary social group governing consumer behavior. Each family member performs a different role in the decision making process. The roles include those of: initiator, influencer, decider, buyer, and user. The roles of the initiator and decider may be played either by the individual contemplating the choice of a higher education program or by his or her parents. Everyone in the family concerned with the choice usually adopts the role of the influencer, trying to have a say about the characteristics of the product or service that is to be purchased (in this case, a higher education program and institution). The person enrolling in a higher education institution is, in turn, designated as both the buyer and user. Parents applying to a higher education institution on their offspring's behalf embody a special case as they can be seen as the buyer within the process. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that the student is still to be defined as the user.

In a survey conducted by the Regional Employment Office (Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy) in Lublin only 7% of the respondents admitted to having been influenced by the pressures from their family and their environment. 9.5% of the respondents regarded the opinion of their parents and guardians as an important factor influencing their decisions [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 31].¹ It should be noted that, according to the survey, parents' or guardians' opinion was more often followed by girls (10.3%) than boys (7.7%). Further, that opinion mattered more with first-cycle program (Bachelor's) choices [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 32], which might be attributable to the deciders' lack of previous experience, poor knowledge of the educational market, and greater dependence on the parents.

In a survey run by the Jagiellonian University (Uniwersytet Jagielloński) and focused on the preferences of lyceum school students [Uniwersytet Jagielloński 2011: 5]² the respondents rated the relevance of specific factors to the choice of higher education institution in a 5-point scale. The top-rated factors were (alike in most similar surveys) personal interests and employment prospects. The average rating for counsel from family members was 2.24, and for parents' ambitions – 1.76.

Family tradition is what makes the influence of family on the choice of higher education program and institution particularly strong in the medical and law

¹ The survey was performed in 2008 in higher education institutions based in Lubelskie voivodeship (region) and involved a 600-strong non-random student sample selected on a discretionary basis using a non-probabilistic method.

² The survey was carried out in 2011 by the Jagiellonian University research staff and involved 484 students from five Kraków-based lyceums (secondary schools).

professions [Peszek 2015: 192]. Where the parents practice a specific profession, the young individual is already familiar with the job and, ostensibly, has a better access to employment. Only 5% of the respondents in an IBC Group survey conducted among university students³ indicated family traditions as a factor influencing their choice of field of study [Badanie ewaluacyjne 2015]. Likewise, the Regional Employment Office in Lublin survey showed that no more 8% of the respondents were guided by family traditions in choosing a profession [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 4]. The Jagiellonian University research findings ranked family traditions among factors least affecting the choice of higher education path [Uniwersytet Jagielloński 2011: 5].

It has already been mentioned that parents' opinion is most influential among prospective students in medical programs. In a survey carried out among students of the Medical University of Białystok (Uniwersytet Medyczny w Białymstoku) [Kropiwnicka et al. 2011: 72]⁴ links with the medical profession were reported by around 53.8% of the students in the Medicine and the Nursing programs. In the Medicine program, 21.9% of the links were through the parents, 8.1% through siblings, 31.9% through other relatives, and 10.6% – through friends and acquaintances.

What prospective students find important alongside the profession that runs in the family is family members' professional connections. Most respondents in nearly all research reports on factors determining the choice of higher education program or institution are concerned with their employability. If this is the case, family members who have the right connections can be valuable assets increasing the chances of a successful job search. However, this factor is usually omitted in surveys. One of the research reports that did capture its significance is that by the Regional Employment Office in Lublin, indicating that the factor influenced choices made by 23% of the respondents [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 24].

Another way, besides recommendations and imitation, that parents can influence their children's choice of higher education program and institution is the fact alone that they do hold a degree. This factor counts at the initial phase of the decision making process, as an individual is making a choice concerning one's life trajectory, contemplating university education versus job market entry. A CBOS research shows that high educational aspirations are characteristic of young individuals whose parents hold a university degree (88% of secondary

³ The survey was conducted at the end of 2008 and at the beginning of 2009 by the IBC Group using the CAWI method and involved 600 students in mathematics, technology and natural sciences programs.

⁴ The research was carried out in the area of Białystok among 320 students of the Medical University of Białystok (Uniwersytet Medyczny w Białymstoku) using the diagnostic survey method.

school students whose mother holds a degree and 91% of those whose father does). A half of the youth whose parents only have primary or post-primary vocational education do not aspire for higher education [CBOS 2009]. Similar conclusions can be derived from the research done by M. Herbst and A. Sobotka,⁵ where 70% of those whose mother or father held a university degree pursued higher education while no more than 40% of the respondents whose mother did not take the secondary school leaving examination (*matura*) enrolled in a higher education institution [Herbst, Sobotka 2014]. Similar correlations are revealed by the findings of a GUS research.⁶ The level of education accomplished by the father most often resulted in a similar or higher level of education attained by the children (40% of those whose father had no education whatsoever did not go any further than post-primary vocational education). A similar effect was observed with the mother's education [GUS 2013: 29].

Family, being the primary social group, is part of a certain social class, where social class is defined as a "relatively permanent and homogeneous (monogamous) stratum in the society that stands out in terms of wealth as well as in terms of ability to attain socially valued goods" [GUS 2013: 39]. It is also characterized by a distinct ideology of values, lifestyle and living standard.

Overall, society can be stratified into upper, middle and lower classes, each with a distinct style of consumption. Upper class individuals will usually value quality and prestige, while price will be less relevant for them. Such individuals will tend to use the services of private institutions, as long as these services are higher quality and the institution is well reputed. Because upper class people seek esteem and prestige associated with study at a particular higher education institution, they will place more emphasis on brand recognition. Further, their approach will be more individualistic. They will be hence more willing to choose less popular study programs, ignoring general trends and fashions in that respect. Middle class people are characterized by a greater inclination for conformist behaviors. Middle class individuals will be therefore more susceptible to fads, often choosing fashionable programs and institutions. They will also be more concerned with the relations between quality, functionality and price. Therefore, they will more often look to state-owned institutions and place much stress on academic excellence. Individuals belonging to lower social classes will generally purchase fewer products relating to recreation and culture, and will travel less [Jachnis 2007: 325-327]. As far as higher education is concerned, they will be rather interested in training for a specific career. It should be added, however, that modern societies

⁵ The research was done in 2013 in the area of Poland, using the CAPI method and involving a sample of 500 individuals aged 25-30.

⁶ The survey was run in 2010-2011 by the Central Statistical Office of Poland (Główny Urząd Statystyczny), using a face-to-face interview and involving a sample of 3858 households.

are characterized by unprecedented social mobility. This means that class membership is not attributed to an individual for a lifetime but can be altered through movement between social strata as a result of income increase or change of residence.

L. Rudnicki insists that, in all societies, pressure on consumption is generated by the wealthiest. Less well-to-do individuals aspire to achieving the living and consumption standards of those more affluent. This is manifest in conspicuous consumption where some consumers manage their spending on publicly consumed goods in such a way as to demonstrate a consumption pattern similar to that of the more affluent ones [Rudnicki 2012: 117]. It is for this reason that people seeking social acceptance are likely to choose a private university, provided that it is in high esteem and popular with upper social classes.

3.2. The influence of reference groups

Another determinant of consumer behavior in the higher education market is reference groups. A reference group is to be construed as “any individual or collection of people whom the individual uses as a source of attitudes, beliefs, values or behavior” [Foxall, Goldsmith, Brown 1998: 214]. Reference groups will influence consumer behavior by encouraging such behaviors that will be approved by the group, thus leading to a high degree of groupthink.

Literature identifies several types of reference groups. The three major types are comparative, status, and normative reference groups. A comparative group serves a sort of benchmark, allowing individuals to evaluate their behaviors against those of the group. Its influence on consumer behavior is hence based on imitation. A status group is a collection of people whose acceptance an individual seeks and is ready to act on their advice and opinion. Approval is also often manufactured through conformist behaviors. A normative group is one that performs an advisory role and is used by an individual as a source of knowledge on values and norms that should be adhered to [Światowy 2006: 110-111].

A reference group can influence consumer behavior on several levels. First, it provides testimonials that inform purchase decisions. This is how, in the first place, a normative group functions. Admittedly, an advisory role is also performed by status groups. Consumers often purchase products or services because there is positive feedback on their features from the environment. The less information is available to an individual, the greater the role of the reference group. Consumers will obviously want to minimize their subjective perception of risk and uncertainty by confronting the opinion of their social environment. It could be therefore expected that the influence of the social environment will be substantial in the

higher education market where consumers are exposed to information asymmetry and have to make high-risk decisions. However, this hypothesis is not supported by survey findings.

Imitation is another form that the influence of reference groups on buying behaviors can take, clearly distinct from providing opinion. The term refers to copying the behavior of others and conforming to patterns prevalent in a group. It should be noted, however, that individuals will not conform to a group beyond a certain point. Total conformity is actually rare in social settings. Imitation is gradable – from merely being inspired by other people’s ideas, to imitating behaviors, to buying similar products and copying others’ decisions as closely as possible [Burgiel 2014: 122-125]. The ultimate form of imitation is known as the bandwagon effect (or lemming-like rush, or herd instinct) that signifies the practice of copying other people’s behaviors in an automatic, unthinking manner [Burgiel 2014: 127].

With higher education decisions, this stands for choosing a university or a study program just because older friends are already enrolled in it or because a number of peers have chosen to apply to it.

A research carried out by M. Pawlak and K. Grzesiuk⁷ shows that youth do not make much of their friends’ and acquaintances’ opinions. The factor was ranked among the least relevant to the choices made [Pawlak, Grzesiuk 2014: 103]. Similarly, the survey conducted by the Jagiellonian University staff revealed that friends’ and acquaintances’ opinions did not matter a lot (2.28 points on average in a 5-point scale) [Uniwersytet Jagielloński 2011: 5]. Friends’ recommendations were rated relatively high in a study carried out by A. Wroczyńska, where 21% of the respondents took them into consideration [Wroczyńska 2013: 255]. In Lublin’s Regional Employment Office report, 11.17% of the persons surveyed prized the opinions of friends who also chose to continue to higher education. More importance was attached to opinions given by those who recommended a study program or an institution that is known to them from their own experience (14.17%). Research findings thus indicate that young people more often rely on opinions voiced by those who are already studying at a particular institution than to opinions stated by all other friends [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 31]. This observation is consistent with the findings of D. Vrontis, A. Thrassou, Y. Melanthiou who concluded that, in the world of today, peer beliefs are becoming increasingly influential among students while the influence of family, religion and national culture is declining [Vrontis, Thrassou, Melanthiou 2007: 979-989].

⁷ A questionnaire survey given in 2013 to 1024 senior-year secondary school students from Lubelskie voivodeship (region).

Overall, both the influence of family and of reference groups is by ranked by students and candidates as not very significant. This makes one think whether their responses might be questionable. Trying to explain the rather small percentage of responses indicating young people's susceptibility to the opinion of others, M. Pawlak and K. Grzesiuk point out the fact that "young people entering into adulthood find it important to assert their independence and self-reliance. That is why they may be largely understating the extent to which their decisions are influenced by others" [Pawlak, Grzesiuk 2014: 103].

3.3. Social prestige and opinion leaders

Another factor affecting consumer behaviors in a market is social prestige, a property that is indicative of a person's authority and esteem. Prestige stems primarily from education, as well as from wealth, power, knowledge, qualifications, and from certain personality traits [Światowy 2006: 112]. An individual can seek social prestige in a number of different ways. One of the ways is to demonstrate a certain level of consumption.

In making their decisions about continuing to higher education, prospective students may be lured by two kinds of social prestige: that associated with a university, and that associated with a specific field of study. Institutional prestige is what causes students in a lot of countries to choose an institution prior to the choice of study program. It will be understandable once we realize that graduation from a reputable higher education institution ensures a privileged position in the job market. For an employer, institutional esteem stands for quality assurance on human capital [Drapińska 2011: 76].

Research findings point to an institution's prestige as a major factor affecting consumer decisions. Among factors of social nature, it is rated the highest by students in most surveys. In the IBC Group study, 58% of the respondents acknowledged that their choice had been influenced by a university's prestige. A similar survey by A. Drapińska⁸ showed that almost a half of the respondent group (49.81%) made their choice of university based on its prestige. The Regional Employment Office in Lublin study reported a considerably lower percentage, with only 26.83% of the students surveyed indicating the institution's prestige and reputation as an important factor for their choice [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 31]. Interestingly enough, not all surveys represent university prestige as highly relevant to choices made by prospective students. For example,

⁸ The survey was conducted in the area of the Tricity of Poland (composed of the adjoining cities of Gdańsk, Gdynia, and Sopot), involved 518 first-year students and 520 final-year students and used the diagnostic questionnaire method.

in M. Pawlak and K. Grzesiuk's research prestige and international acclaim were one of the factors considered the least relevant to the choice of higher education institution, with an average rate of 3.96 in a 6-point scale and ranking 22nd among all factors encompassed by the survey [Pawlak, Grzesiuk 2014: 101].

Professional stature is instrumental to achieving high income as well as social prestige. The professions that the society holds in highest esteem include medical doctors, judges, and university professors [Bylok 2005: 138-139]. Professional status is therefore a factor that is taken into account by many prospective students in planning their careers. In Lublin's Regional Employment Office survey, 45% of the respondents stated that professional prestige was relevant to them [Wojewódzki Urząd Pracy w Lublinie 2009: 4]. Similar research performed by the Jagiellonian University indicated that prestige associated with a specific profession is a rather significant factor, as the students rated it at 3.60 on average in a 5-point scale. Overall, it should be concluded that social prestige ranks rather high relative to other social factors affecting consumer behaviors in the higher education market.

The society will always look up to some individuals as opinion leaders. The term refers to "people who, consciously or not, influence other people's behaviors by virtue of their rank, status, prestige, authority, etc., and whose conduct happens to be imitated by others" [Rudnicki 2012: 120]. This type of influence is passive in nature – there is usually no personal interaction between opinion leaders and recipients of their opinions. Advice is treated as an expert opinion. In the higher education market, it is principally secondary school teachers or publishers of university rankings that may be seen as opinion leaders. However, research findings demonstrate that opinions provided by secondary school teachers do not affect students' decisions as strongly as could be expected. A likely reason is that they are not perceived as very reliable. In the survey of Krakow's lyceum schools students the factor was rated at 2.21 in a 5-point scale. It may well be added, nevertheless, that teacher opinions were still more relevant to prospective students' choices than suggestions offered by friends and relatives. A. Drapińska research produced similar results, with the role of secondary school teachers recognized by 6.18% of the respondents only. On the other hand, it should be noted that nearly 20% admitted to having consulted their teachers about tertiary education programs [Drańska 2011: 76].

Indubitably, university rankings merit an important place in the decision making process being investigated, since they represent a source of easily available and digestible information on the quality of services provided by an institution and are indicative of its social prestige. It should be all the same underscored that rankings are difficult to pinpoint in terms of their (social, marketing, economic, etc.) intent and character. University rankings are published by newspapers and magazines (*Perspektywy*, *Gazeta Wyborcza*) and channeled through television, hence

reaching a very broad audience. Although their methodology raises a number of controversies, an average citizen does not reflect upon the criteria used to rank the institutions, taking the information at face value. These doubts notwithstanding, rankings do influence higher education candidates' decisions and build the image of specific institutions in the eyes of their parents, friends and teachers. They can be also used by employers as a source of information on the quality of instruction delivered by a given institution [Szczepańska-Woszczyna 2012: 228-229].

In a research report by W. Urbaniak⁹ a university's prestige, as indicated by its performance in rankings, turned out to be among the top three factors affecting the choice of institution by the respondent group [Urbanik 2010]. The survey carried out among Krakow's lyceum school students [Uniwersytet Jagielloński 2011: 5] placed rankings among factors of moderate relevance with a rate of 3.62 in a 5-point scale, slightly below university prestige. In the Pawlak and Grzesiuk study, an institution's performance in rankings was rated at 3.87 in a 6-point scale, which made it one of the least important factors of all [Pawlak, Grzesiuk 2014: 101]. The findings thus suggest that rankings of higher education institutions are treated as more relevant by individuals who are already enrolled in, or applying to, a higher education institution, whereas they are not considered so by secondary school students.

Conclusion

The findings of research presented in the paper show that social factors are not among the key determinants of decision making processes in the higher education market. University students and secondary school leavers are reluctant to admit to the influence of friends or family on their choices, probably trying to assert their independence instead. What students most often point to as the decisive factor in choosing a specific higher education institution is their interests and employment prospects. If that is the case, an inquiry into how the job market prospects of a particular university's graduate are assessed is fundamental to investigating the social underpinnings of decision making processes in a given market. This seems to be an extremely important strand of research that could follow up and complement the discussion initiated in this paper. If the primary role of public opinion and university prestige in prognosticating job market prospects could be substantiated, then these factors would appear more relevant to building an institution's competitive position than opinions provided by family and friends

⁹ The survey was conducted in 2010 using the structured interview method and involved 949 senior-year secondary school students from Zachodniopomorskie voivodeship (region).

that, according to known research, are not crucial influencers on young people's choices. Social prestige associated with a specific institution of higher learning or with a particular profession is slightly more relevant.

In the light of published research findings, the impact of social factors on consumer behaviors in the higher education market should be estimated as fairly modest. It would be therefore interesting to gain a scientific insight into indirect influences that have not yet been subject to empirical research.

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Spoleczne uwarunkowania zachowań konsumentów na rynku szkolnictwa wyższego

Streszczenie. W kontekście rynkowej orientacji uniwersytetu istotną staje się analiza uwarunkowań zachowań konsumenckich przyszłych studentów. Przedmiotem zainteresowania artykułu są determinanty społeczne zachowań studentów w sferze edukacji. Można do nich zaliczyć wpływ rodziny oraz grupy odniesienia, który może przybierać formę wyrażania opinii oraz naśladownictwa. Poza tym istotną funkcję pełni chęć uzyskania prestiżu społecznego, związanego z uczelnią oraz z zawodem.

Słowa kluczowe: uwarunkowania zachowań nabywców, wpływ rodziny, grupy odniesienia