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Yes, we can ... consume!

The New Consumer Worlds of Homo Post-Sovieticus

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their personal success. The outlets for such behavior are found everywhere: an outfit, a table set for a special occasion, and the home, of course.

Oasis of well-being: the special moment

What is particular about today's Russia is that wealth is evident not only among the oligarchs. The middle class is also growing in affluence, acquiring purchasing power and the feeling the urge to spend. The average annual income in Russia has increased nearly fivefold in the past ten years (from 1,708 to 10,408 US dollars) and will continue to increase.

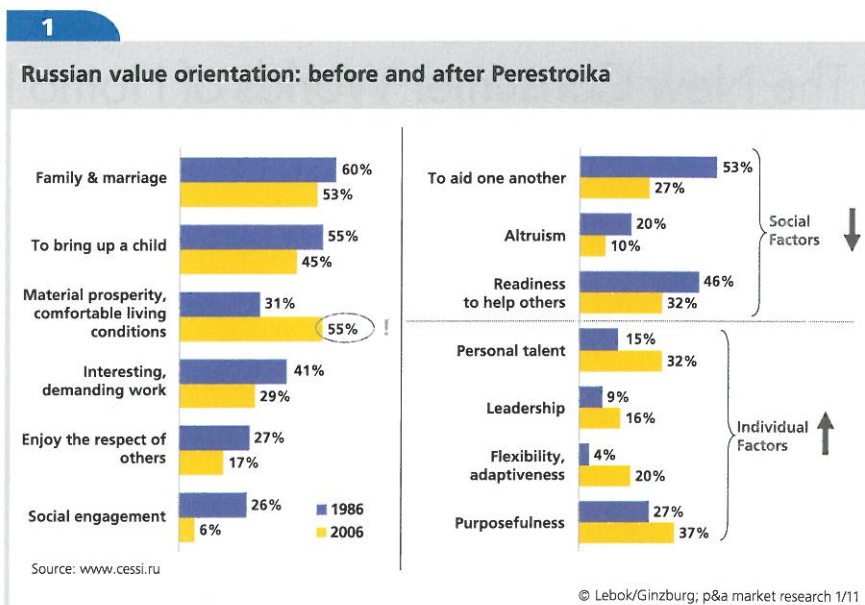
The luxury of the middle class is not found in the elite boutiques, glamorous palaces or gourmet temples. Rather, Russians are creating their own oases of well-being and prosperity in their day-to-day lives. "I don't want something ordinary. Instead, I want to and am able to achieve the extraordinary." This is a common sentiment in physiological studies in which Russians are asked about their reasons for consuming high-quality products. For the Russian consumer, a premium product is a brand-name item that satisfies the desire for a particularly fascinating achievement or a special moment on a rational, product-based level as well as an emotional level. This includes the small moments of delight that one can afford, for

In 2010 Russians celebrated the 25th anniversary of perestroika. While there is still much debate over the political consequences of this upheaval, a clear and extreme value shift can be observed from a socioeconomic perspective. Homo Sovieticus – sealed off from the outside world – has all but died out in the process. Nonetheless, part of that worldview has survived and combined with neo-capitalist influences, has resulted in a powerful consumption-driven self-image of the Russian people, Homo Post-Sovieticus.

Major value shift after Lenin, Gorbachev and Co.

Prior to perestroika, family and children held the top position in the hierarchy of Russian values. While family and children are still valued, first place in today's Russia goes to material prosperity and comfortable living conditions – a trend which continues to grow. Monetary wealth, which the Russian consumer also displays proudly, is an absolute priority for the younger generation in particular (that is those born after 1985): whoever has money, has success, and has achieved something. Values from the days of communism, such as *enjoy the respect of others or social engagement*, have become dramatically less important now 20 years after perestroika (see figure 1). Russian society has become increasingly consumption-oriented and individualistic. The newly acquired Russian individuality means that social values such as selflessness have declined in importance. At the

same time, personal success is no longer attached to societal factors, but increasingly to individual performance factors. In this way, the significance of the concept of mutual support, a product of (communitistic) need, has declined greatly. Meanwhile, egocentric values such as single-mindedness and determination, as well leadership and the realization of personal talent, have increased considerably. Russians who have gained prosperity are often very willing to display their achievements. They not only find private pleasure in premium products, but also enjoy the moments when they can openly exhibit



Selected examples of premium products in everyday life



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example premium chocolates from Western suppliers (see figure 2).

Or, it could be an exceptional cheese for special moments. *Dor Blu: I love you* states the advertising for this cheese, a product that has gained access to the Russian customer. It is neither too sharp nor too salty, but rather creamy, soft and appropriately exquisite for the growing gourmet demands of the Russian consumer.

There are also opportunities to treasure everyday occurrences in other areas of Russian daily life. If a child has earned praise, or the mother desires acknowledgement for successful parenting, the purchase prefer-

ence shifts from cheaper everyday curd cheese to branded milk desserts for special moments. These products fascinate the parents with their impression of healthiness (calcium, fruit or milk base, energy-rich nuts). For their part, the children get excited when they see a flashy container, full of contrast and decorated with cute characters. If both parties are enticed, this is the foundation for a higher price and future brand loyalty.

Sobranie cigarettes represent a *moment of delight* in adult life. Women in particular like to place the beautiful package on a table and use it as an accessory with a kind

of signal effect: "I'm an insider, and know the (night) life. I am a bon vivant, through and through."

Premium moments also take place among normal, everyday tasks. "No aggressive chemicals for me when I clean or wash. If I have to do the work, then I prefer a light, gentle detergent" – so, the consumer chooses a premium product that is seen as being worth the higher price.

The Russian of today: diverse, modern and always changing

The Soviet period is still present, deep in the mind of the consumer. Often, this results in a negative set of criteria when it comes to buying decisions. Even though the past is glorified historically now and then, the everyday life of the earlier times is associated with constraint and monotony in quality of life and consumer behavior. Modern times, in contrast, enable the greatest possible freedom of choice as far as consumption and taste are concerned, and the Russian consumer does not want to do without this guaranteed diversity under any circumstances. Contemporary life is full of variety, and the Russian consumer sees himself/herself as a part of this modern (consumer) world, seeking diversity and novelty.

The example of toilet paper alone – a seemingly low-interest product – substantiates the Russian's desire for modernity and variety. In the Soviet period, toilet paper was merely a pragmatic issue, as far as its quality or significance in everyday life was concerned. Today, however, the Russian longs for premium varieties, a toilet paper that

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The Inspiration

Вдохновение – The Inspiration



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one can display for guests – a paper that improves one’s reputation as a host – or something that is simply an attractive eye candy in bathrooms that are still quite cramped. Western brands initially promise better quality – this alone, however, does not lead to the decision to purchase.

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, the initial euphoria vis-à-vis brands from the USA or Europe has for the most part subsided. International companies active in Russia encounter local competition that has improved drastically in terms of product quality as well as in all other marketing mix elements.

On July 11, 2010, Interfax reported about a survey on Chocolate Day in which 73 percent of respondents stated that Russian chocolate is better than the imported varieties. Western products continue to be attributed a great deal of know-how and quality. From an emotional perspective, however, Western products are often associated with a greed for profit and a lower degree of authenticity. Russian suppliers can take advantage of their knowledge of Russian traditions, in particular. Apart from that, they fit the growing Russian desire for home and typical Russian.

Vдохновение (The Inspiration) is one of the best-known chocolate brands that was able to successfully survive the upheaval of the perestroika period (see figure 3). Viewed historically, the brand offers portioned premium chocolate in its famous blue packaging, illustrated with a pair of dancers in front of the facade of the Bolshoi Theater. In the current advertising, the story revolves around the Russian poet Sergei Yesenin and his love, the dancer Isadora Duncan. The commercial supports the new product (wafer chocolates with a creamy filling) under the brand Vдохновение and, in doing so, builds on the existing brand val-

ues, including creativity and affiliation with members of the artistic elite. Vдохновение chocolate is once again a refined gift idea for a loved one that inspires creativity and evokes particular feelings. Existing customers see themselves in the core design elements of the packaging, but have no need to fall back on other brands if they do not want typical Vдохновение chocolate.

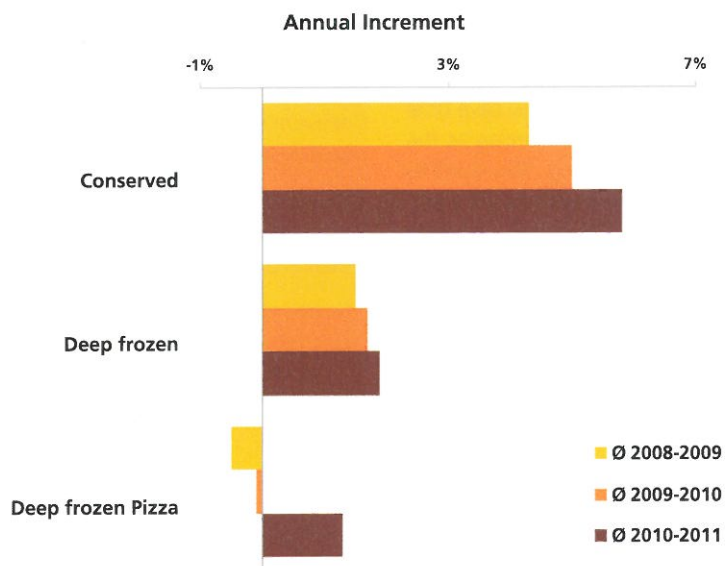
Given the increasing demand for original, traditional Russian products that follow the specifications of progress and do not remain mired in the Stalinist Middle Ages of the Russian consumer world, one can understand why Homo Sovieticus has all but died out. In the more remote regions of the Russian empire, ascetic consumer structur-

es may still exist. However, the new lifestyle and consumption patterns of the Russians are spreading throughout the metropolises of Moscow, St. Petersburg and Novosibirsk and the social classes. Homo Post-Sovieticus is striving for self-realization, luxury in everyday life and modern brand-name products. This consumer type is not oriented exclusively towards the West, however. Rather, they are rediscovering their traditional and patriotic roots, which are also reflected in the buying patterns for Russian products.

More convenience for the dynamic life

Russian life after perestroika has also become faster and aggressive, demanding more energy. Most Russians must come to terms with one or more major professional changes in their lives. Russian women in particular adopt multiple, demanding roles. It is not common – or even financially feasible, often – to be a housewife after the birth of a child. And it is not uncommon for women in their forties to have a child in elementary school or a teenager. Mothers must reconcile this parental role with their own career, as well as find time for their partner, the household and their own hobbies. Apart from that, Russian women place a great deal of value on their appearance, desiring to look as young and/or as well-groomed as possible.

Development of the market for prepared products in Russia



Source: www.readymealstoday.ru

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Abstract

A change in the Russian consumer behavior has occurred. Going from being poor but altruistic to well-situated but individualistic, people strive to maximize their quality of living. But how do they realize it in daily life? This article shows how modern Russians make brand choices seeking a sense of belonging to the Western world without losing their traditional sight.

Fast food offers one solution to counter this fast-paced life. The images of people lined up for the first McDonald's restaurant in Moscow at the beginning of the 90's are imprinted on the collective memory. In the meantime, there are Subway, Sbarro, *Kroshka-Kartoshka*, *Teremok*, *Rostik* and many other smaller providers, in addition to McDonald's. The number of consumers looking for shopping malls with extensive food courts is continuously increasing. This trend is explained by the fact that more and more employees in nearby offices do not bring a lunch from home, but rather go to the mall to purchase and eat their meal. The increased importance of prepared products can also be understood in this context (see figure 4).

The most popular of the convenience products is a Russian national dish: pelmeni, which everyone loves to eat, but not everyone loves to roll, fill and knead themselves. The product is enjoyed everywhere, crossing country and city borders. Regional consumers are distinguished by a more conservative preference: "I prefer products like pelmeni or blintzes: recipes and brands that I have known for a long time ... otherwise, I'm too uncertain ... maybe it'll be a bad buy". Inhabitants of the bigger cities, on the other hand, are much more open to diversity in the available product range. They look for particular innovations, and take quality and health aspects into account when making a purchase decision. The *Sytoedov* brand is already doing a great job of selling the fundamental advantages of deep-frozen products in their advertising slogan: Have more time for life! The opportunities offered by convenience foods have been recognized, what follows is a fight for consumer attention through better product claims.

The modern Russian's desire to save time while cooking is equally as strong as the wish to eat the right thing. The want to balance out daily stress with healthy eating is satisfied for the most part by *health and wellness* foods. The Russians believe that a healthy spirit lives in a healthy body and are fascinated with probiotic drinks, healthy bacteria and vitamin-enriched products.

The enemies of healthy but common in eating conveniently, are additives and preservatives, the uncontrolled consumption of sugar and fat, and genetically modified foods. However, healthy eating is currently more of a psychological attitude (fitness for everyday life). The convenience aspect is predominant in modern Russia and will continue to increase. Organic products and original healthy products are developing only gradually in this niche market.

One thing is absolutely certain, however: Russia has in the meantime become a fixed component of the global consumer world. Russians like to consume, but not in a streamlined manner or exclusively according to a Western pattern. The reacquired sense of pride has expanded consumer behavior with Russian competitors, who are now on an equal footing. Simply being from the West and high-quality will not suffice in the long run. Whoever misses the opportunity to become a part of Russian day-to-day life will miss the great psychological opportunity of an ever-curious, demand-driven market.

Summary

Homo Post-Sovieticus strives for comfort, prosperity and monetary success. Social values are increasingly of secondary importance. Whoever has money is successful,

can be proud and display their achievements openly.

However, Russia is not only a world of luxury products. The growing middle class is creating their own oases of well-being and pleasure in day-to-day life. These special moments are not replete with products from *the golden West*. The Russian consumer wants to be a part of the Western-modern world, but also go their own way. Russians have developed a strong sense of (national) pride and want to see their needs recognized, understood and met.

Being a part of the new, dynamic life demands a great deal from the Russian, and calls for practical strategies for managing day-to-day life. Fast foods and convenience products provide practical and modern solutions. △

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