

THE DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOURS IN THE FURNITURE MARKET

Patryk Zwierzyński
Białystok University of Technology, Poland

INTRODUCTION

The purchase of every good involves the decision to acquire it. In each case, the process depends on the type of goods to be bought. There are numerous criteria in the literature. The most general classification of the economy divides it into products and services. Furniture, the subject of interest of this article, covers a large range of products.

There are also different goods classified in the literature based on the following criteria: product lifespan, type of consumption, the lifespan and length of use of the product, user type, consumers' purchasing habits and the degree of accessibility to a given product [Przybyłowski et al. 1998, Kotler et al. 2002, Klimczak 2006, Zalega 2007].

AIM AND METHOD

The main reason the present research on the determinants of consumer behaviours in the furniture market was undertaken is that there is a paucity of studies conducted on the furniture sector in Poland, despite the growing importance of the sector in Polish industry. The need to systematise the knowledge base, as well as author's interest in the furniture sector in Poland led to this publication.

The main purpose of the article is to answer the question: what features do purchasers take into consideration when choosing products? To this end, the literature on consumer behaviours was reviewed, studies of the furniture market from previous years were analysed and the determinants of consumer behaviours were evaluated. Chosen factors influencing behaviours of furniture acquirers are presented.

CHARACTERISTICS OF FURNITURE

Table 1 presents a classification of furniture on the basis of a number of criteria. It breaks down the classification of purchase determinants in the furniture market.

TABLE 1. Furniture location in the classification of goods

Criteria	Type of goods	Furniture
Product lifespan	durable	X
	unsustainable	–
	services	–
Type of consumption	individual consumption	X
	group consumption	X
Duration of use	duration of use	–
	multiple use	X
	short-term use	X (seldom)
	mid-term use	X
	long-term use	X
Type of user	consumer	X
	industrial	–
Consumers' purchasing habits	frequent purchase	–
	selectable	X
	special	X
	imperceptible	–
Availability level	unique	X
	mass	X

Source: the author, based on Przybyłowski et al. 1998, Kotler et al. 2002, Klimczak 2006, Zalega 2007.

Furniture may be classified as a durable good because it is characterised by a relatively long life cycle. Though furniture is the subject of individual and collective consumption, it is mainly classified as a consumer goods purchased by the final customer, a household. There is no doubt that furniture is a selectable good, because it is purchased relatively infrequently and consumers spend more time acquiring it than they do frequently purchased goods. However, luxury furniture can be classified as a special good possessing unique features such as a high price or its not being widely available.

FURNITURE MARKET IN POLAND

An important part of the economy, the furniture sector in Poland is considered one of the most competitive industrial manufacturing sectors. In 2014, furniture production accounted for 2.10% of GDP [GUS 2015], which was higher than in the previous year. The furniture industry has been developing rapidly for several years, and according to Central Statistical Office of Poland data (GUS in Polish, hereinafter CSO), the growth is to be sustained. The majority of indicators support the CSO data, and all reports likewise predict it.

Poland is a leading furniture-manufacturing country, and is still asserting its position in the sector. In 2014, it was the sixth largest furniture producer in the world, following only China, the US, Germany, Italy and India. Table 2 presents the volume of furniture production among Polish enterprises, employment conditions and the value of Polish furniture exports and imports in 2010–2014.

TABLE 2. Production level, value of export and import, level of employment in the furniture industry in 2010–2014

Specification	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014
Quantity of furniture produced (thous. units)	23 522	23 688	24 794	24 267	28 172
Value of furniture exported (bn PLN.)	22.8	26.4	27.3	29.4	33.2
Value of furniture imported (bn PLN.)	3.5	3.9	4.0	4.3	5.3
Number of people employed (thous.)	161.8	159.4	154.0	157.3	169.8

Source: the author, based on CSO data [GUS 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016].

The leading factor stimulating sales growth of furniture products is exports, which grew across the periods analysed in Table 1. In 2014, exports totaled 33.2 billion, again good enough to make Poland one of the top 10 furniture exporters in the world. The main consumer of Polish furniture is Germany, which bought 13.3 billion PLN worth in 2014. Of course, Poland also imports furniture, though at 5.3 billion PLN, the 2014 total was much less. While the number of people employed in the furniture sector was relatively stable for several years, in 2014 there was a significant rise (to 169,800). This was accompanied by substantial growth in furniture production in 2014 over the previous year.

DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOURS

In the economics literature numerous ways of examining consumer behaviours are employed, but there is no one dominant approach. There is, however, a clear division of the determinants of consumer behaviour into two main groups: direct and indirect ones [Kłeczek et al. 1992, Gajewski 1994, Kieźel 2000, Rudnicki 2004, Świątowy 2006].

TABLE 3. The determinants of consumers' behaviours in the furniture market

Indirect determinants		Direct determinants	
economic	demographic	marketing	psychological
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – supply – incomes – expenses and savings – possibility of taking credit – possessed durable goods resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – consumer's age – consumer's sex – household size – household location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – product features – product price – kind of product distribution – advertising related to a given product 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – needs – viewpoint – motifs – attitudes – preferences – personality – learning – risk related to an acquisition

Source: the author, based on Gajewski 1994, Rudnicki 2009, Rudnicki 2012, Włodarczyk 2013, Rembisz and Sielska 2015.

Economic, social, psychological and marketing are among the most important factors. Their importance is linked to the character of the products satisfying consumer needs [Szwacka-Mokrzycka 2012].

The main determinants of consumer behaviours in the furniture market to be considered include three indirect factors (economy, demography, and marketing) and one direct factor (psychology) [Gajewski 1994, Rudnicki 2009, Rudnicki 2012, Włodarczyk 2013, Rembisz and Sielska 2015]. Table 3 shows those factors which bear the most strongly on consumers to purchase furniture.

ECONOMIC FACTORS

The economic factors behind consumer behaviours are relevant especially in the durable goods market, where products tend to command high prices. They can be divided into two main areas: the macroeconomic and microeconomic. The economic environment beyond those two areas does not have a significant impact on consumer choices because it is formed by legislative and executive power, which is not directly influenced by consumers. The microeconomic environment directly influences purchasers' behaviours. It is just this environment that covers incomes, expenses, savings, the ability to use loans and own durable resources (apartments and houses, for example) that defines consumers' material status.

The main macroeconomic factor that determines purchasers' behaviours in the market is the supply of products and services [Żelazna et al. 2002, Smyczek and Sowa 2003]. Access to a product or range of products and the possibility of choosing from among them is one of the most important tools used in creating consumption. A shortage of goods or services in the market prevents consumers from having freedom of choice, which directly reduces the size and structure of purchases. When there is a surplus of goods, the possibilities in the furniture market which satisfy the same or similar needs allow the consumer to make a more rational choice [Bywalec 2010].

A basic microeconomic factor is consumer incomes [Bywalec and Rudnicki 1999, Rudnicki 2000, Żelazna et al. 2002, Smyczek and Sowa 2003, Rudnicki 2004, Jaroś-Kresło and Mróz 2006, Bywalec 2007, Woś et al. 2011], which enable consumers to meet their needs. Income discourages consumers from or encourages them to satisfy their needs. Based on the literature, it may be concluded that income is the foremost microeconomic determinant of consumer behaviour.

Consumer incomes significantly influence the expenses they take on, their savings, their ability to take credit or use loans to purchase durable goods [Smyczek and Sowa 2003, Kusińska 2005, Kieźel 2010]. The ability to take credit or a cash loan has a significant impact on consumption today. Credit enables consumers to quickly meet their needs. It is especially crucial in the durable goods market, where the goods are correlated with each other: Those who buy flats must, after all, also furnish them. Additionally, the possession of other durable goods – television set, radios and domestic electrical appliances, to name three – is what determines whether one's furniture needs are satisfied.

Economic factors determine consumer behaviours to such a great extent because each household has a strictly defined amount of financial resources and items. Economic factors are also the basic determinants of consumers' behaviors in the furniture market. It is

determinants such as furniture supply, purchasers' income and savings and the ability to take credit and housing conditions that influence how consumers behave on the furniture market.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Demographic factors differentiate consumer needs, stimulate or stop certain market driven behaviours, and determine the conditions in which these behaviors take place [Kieźel 2010]. The main demographic determinants influencing consumer behaviours in the furniture market are age, gender, location and composition of the household. These determinants may be divided into two groups: those describing the consumer and those describing the household.

As needs change with age, consumers' age plays a larger role than their sex in the furniture market. The process of making shopping choices also changes. The supply of different goods, especially durable ones, varies across the particular stages of life. As consumers age, they earn higher incomes and build savings, so older consumers have more money than younger ones do [Nowak 1995].

The number of individuals living in a household is an important demographic determinant. The number of people influences the consumption growth in the range of goods such as clothes or cleaning supplies, but the consumption of durable goods does not change dramatically [Bywalec and Rudnicki 1999, Żelazna et al. 2002]. Factors including the stage of one's family life cycle education, labour market activity, lifestyle and membership in a social group also determine consumer behaviour. The stage of one's family life cycle is of particular importance [Rudnicki 2000, Żelazna et al. 2002, Woś et al. 2011]. Families go through different stages of development. Along with this process, it is not only their composition that changes, but also economic opportunities available to them, their needs and financial resources. These too determine the household's behaviours.

The location of the household is relevant mainly because it is one of the factors that determine whether household members will be able to satisfy their needs. Accessibility, closeness of certain retail outlets and producers of specific products condition their supply [Rudnicki 2000]. A comparison of incomes spent on particular goods and services by families who live in cities and those that live in the country shows that city families pay more for housing. According to the CSO, the cost of furnishing apartment and running a household in 2011 was 55 PLN monthly per person per city household and 40 PLN per person per country household.

MARKETING FACTORS

All indirect factors influencing the consumer's decision process are closely linked to each other and describe not only the consumer, but also the environment in which he or she lives. The marketing determinants describe the businesses that offer the products. The main elements of the marketing determinants of consumer behaviours are product features, product price, product distribution type and product advertising.

The most relevant element for consumers making a choice between products is the features of those products: these determine consumer needs satisfaction and expectations of the given product. Almost every product in the market has basic functions and additional functions. Basic functions are expressed by technical and physical parameters. The basic function of furniture is to store clothes, dishes, books etc. Additional functions, on the other hand, mainly concern the user's comfort and the product's aesthetic appeal. In case of the furniture, the additional functions significantly influence whether the consumer decides to purchase it [Woś et al. 2011, Rudnicki 2012].

DIRECT FACTORS

In addition to external determinants of consumer behaviours, there is also a second group of determinants: internal factors. These are characterised in the literature as being individual for every consumer. They concern the purchaser's personality as well as his or her views on life. However, internal factors are derived from external ones, since it is real life that influences consumer tastes, preferences, mindset and other elements that make up the individual's personality. Several determinants of consumer behaviour can be distinguished: their needs, viewpoints, motives, attitudes, preferences, personality, learning and the risk an acquisition presents.

Every household has its own hierarchy of consumption needs, on the basis of which it makes decisions and makes purchases. Even in households with a few people, each creates his or her own hierarchy of needs separately. The need to own furniture may be qualified as a secondary need, though it is certainly a housing need. Furniture not only improves the comfort of life, but also enables one to sleep better and spend time at home more comfortably, and, in providing the ability to store clothes, kitchen appliances, and other valuable items, helps one to feel a sense of calm and security. That is why, based on Maslow's pyramid of needs, furniture may be qualified as a secondary need, or, in other words, as a security need. As a need related to purchasing durable goods, the purchase of furniture can also be qualified as an individual need (furniture for one person) and collective needs (furniture used by all members of the household).

One's viewpoint – perception, in other words – makes consumers realise that there are certain products and there is a difference between brands and the places where they may be purchased [Kieźel 2010]. Consumer perception is conditioned by various consumer behaviours. There are many factors that influence the way one perceives a given product. The determinants to be considered are [Jachnis and Trelak 1998, Kieźel 2010]:

- those that stimulate (product size, the shape of the packaging, colours, advertisements);
- circumstances of a signal appearance;
- psycho-physical abilities (memory, vision, hearing);
- personality and the consumer's motives.

Consumers' needs and perceptions are related to factors that invigorate and direct the purchaser's behaviour in order to fulfill these needs. The motives which guide consumers in their actions may be classified according to criteria including: the source of the mo-

tives, their character, the degree of distinctive motives, consumer-caused effects and the urgency of the motives, the level of the consumer's realisation of their existence [Gajewski 1994, Rudnicki 2004, Janoś-Kresło and Mróz 2006]. The relationships between motive and consumer behaviour are not always simple and the same. Sometimes a specific behaviour of the purchaser results from different motives (e.g. for one consumer a given piece and brand of furniture may be desirable because of its functionality whereas for another it is the need to make a good impression on different people). The same motives could invoke the distinct behaviours of various consumers (e.g. a lack of furniture may cause an urge to buy a piece for one consumer while another would rather postpone the purchase).

The next inner factor conditioning consumer behaviours is the personality of the furniture buyer. The personality is a set of individual features and the manner of behaviour characteristic for each consumer that enables one to predict his or her further behaviours and decisions [Rudnicki 2012]. The features diversifying a consumer's personality to be considered here include temperament, risk recognition, risk tendency and degree of self-confidence. On the one hand, the fact that consumers have unique personalities causes them to react differently to the same marketing stimulants. On the other hand, the fact that personality is a set of certain features enables one to identify similarities between the purchasers of furniture [Kieźel 2010].

Learning plays an important role in consumer decision-making. The purchasers' education may be considered a process thanks to which experience related to the product is acquired, and which consequently results in permanent changes of behaviour or paves the way for these changes to occur in the future [Falkowski and Tyszka 2009, Kieźel 2010]. Learning also concerns the consumer's experience related to the purchase as well as furniture usage. The acquirer satisfied with a given brand is likely to purchase it in the future. Unsatisfied consumers, however, do not buy the same brand again.

Among the psychological determinants of consumers' behaviours, a specific feature is purchase-related risk. This risk occurs when the acquirer recognises the danger of making a bad decision, and fears its consequences may be significant. The range of perceived risk is a derivative of factors related to the consumer such as his or her personality, financial resources and knowledge of the product. This makes the consumer's perception of the product's risk subjective. This is especially important in the case of durable goods, including furniture, particularly its value, which is generally a significant amount of the household budget. Purchasers of durable goods, including furniture, may take a variety of risks [Kieźel 2004, Rudnicki 2004]:

- functional risk – a piece of furniture may turn out to be uncomfortable;
- physical risk – a piece of furniture may be dangerous when used;
- economic risk – the price of the furniture and expenses related to transporting it may be too high;
- social risk – a chosen brand of furniture may be evaluated as inadequate because the brand is not prestigious;
- psychological risk – using a particular piece of furniture worsens one's personal image;
- risk of wasting time – a tremendous amount of time can be sacrificed comparing and choosing different offers.

CONSUMER BEHAVIOURS IN THE FURNITURE MARKET

Despite continuous progress as well as the growing importance of the furniture sector in Poland, the range of publications that have addressed qualitative aspects of supply formation in this market, especially consumer behaviours, is disappointing.

The time it takes one to decide to make a purchase and the duration of the stages of the decision-making process differ significantly from one good to the next. As regards infrequently purchased goods, of which furniture is one, consumers have a rather specific image of precisely what they want. They are prepared to dedicate time to making the decision about what to purchase, make an effort to acquire more specific information about the product, and, finally, visit more places where these goods are sold. The decision-making process is notably longer and more complicated than it is with frequently purchased goods [Mazurek-Łopacińska 2003].

According to research conducted on the furniture market in Poland [Wiśniewska and Paginowska 2006], the decision to purchase consists of four stages. As Figure 1 shows, the first two stages last the longest, which is a sign that furniture is not acquired spontaneously, and its purchase is well-thought out because of the significant financial burden on the household budget. The four stages are the following [Wiśniewska and Paginowska 2006]:

- stage I – the moment when it is clear that there is a motive; begin thinking about the purchase; it is clear that a purchase will be made, but not much besides it;
- stage II – time is dedicated to looking at what's on offer, looking for information about visits to shops, reading catalogues and trade press;
- stage III – the search is narrowed, interest in specific furniture, ascertaining the offer;
- stage IV – the decision is taken to reserve or purchase the furniture.

According to Wiśniewska and Paginowska, the main factors in the decision to purchase furniture were a change in one's family situation (24%) or financial situation (23%). Others, however, have indicated the most common reasons furniture is purchased include the desire to decorate or to renovate the interior of a current flat/house (33%), or the ageing and disrepair of one's old furniture (31%), and a desire to decorate or change the interior design in one of the rooms in a current flat/house (27%) [Wiśniewska and Paginowska 2006] – Figure 2.

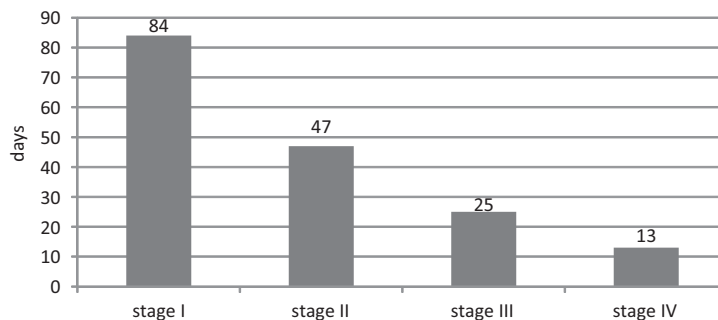
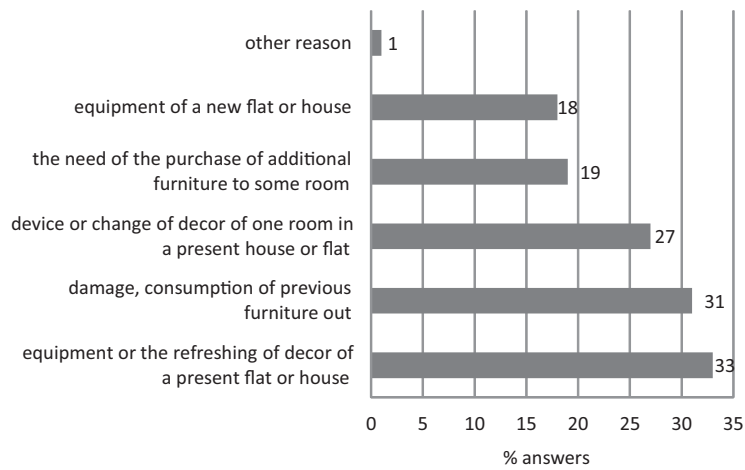


FIG. 1. The duration of the decision-making process stages

Source: Wiśniewska and Paginowska 2006.



answers do not add up to 100 because respondents could give more than one answer

FIG. 2. Reason for purchasing new furniture

Source: Wiśniewska and Paginowska 2006.

According to recent market research: 17% of respondents purchased furniture in 2014, while another 3% were planning to [Wiktorski 2015]. The percentage of respondents, who stated they purchased furniture in 2012–2014, remained constant (Fig. 3).

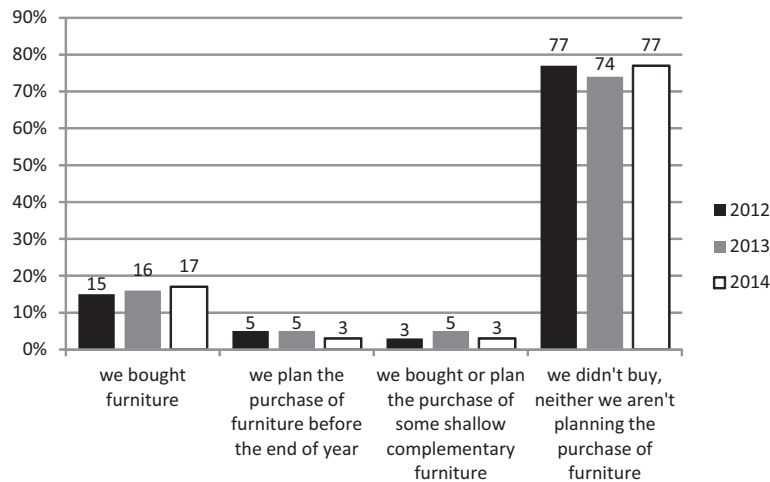


FIG. 3. The percentage of respondents who stated they purchased furniture in 2012–2014

Source: Wiktorski 2015.

Analysis of research conducted in 2012–2014 [Wiktorski 2015] shows that residents of cities with above 200,000 and 50,000–200,000 inhabitants made purchases more often than their counterparts in medium-size towns and villages (Fig. 4).

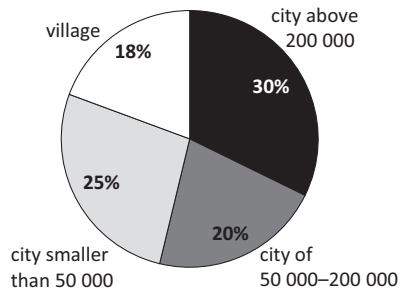


FIG. 4. The percentage of furniture purchasers by city type

Source: Wiktorski 2015.

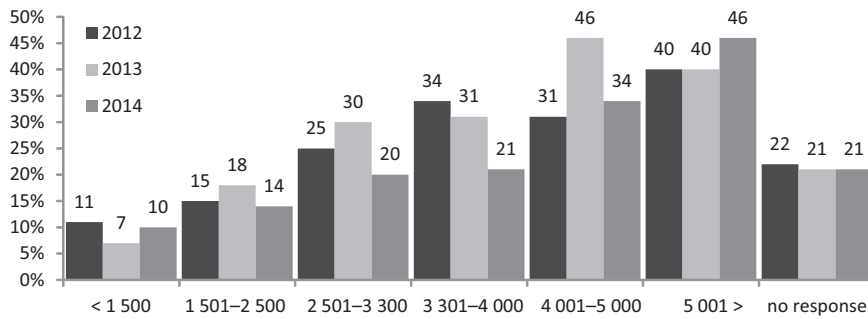


FIG. 5. Furniture purchases and combined household income in 2012–2014

Source: Wiktorski 2015.

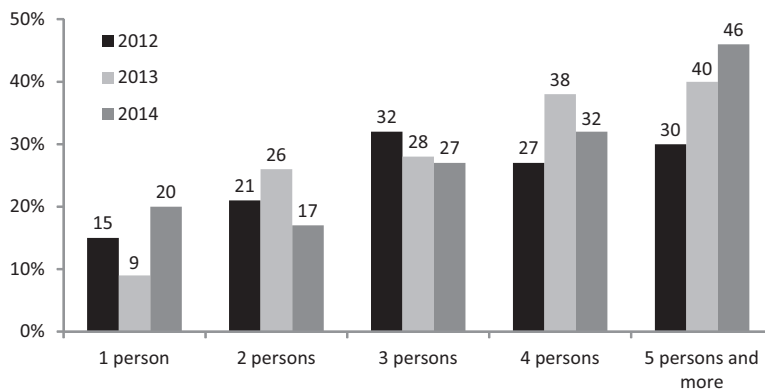


FIG. 6. Household size and furniture purchase in 2012–2014

Source: Wiktorski 2015.

Household income has a significant influence on the decision to purchase furniture. According to the literature and empirical research, disposable income is in fact the main determinant of furniture purchases. This thesis is confirmed by research conducted in 2012–2014 [Wiktorski 2015]. As combined household income grew, so too did the percentage of respondents who purchased furniture (Fig. 5).

According to Wiktorski [2015], the greatest number of declarations of an intention to purchase furniture came from households with five or more people (in 2014 – 46%) and four people (in 2014 – 32%). By contrast, one- or two-person households made up the lowest percentage [Wiktorski 2015] – Figure 6.

CONCLUSIONS

Consumers are influenced by a variety of factors exerting varying degrees of power over the decision to purchase furniture. Many of these factors are dependent on and influence each other. The differences in consumer behaviours in the durable goods market are the result of both external and internal determinants. This complexity further diversifies consumer behaviours. It is clear that the factors differ in terms of the strength of their influence on consumer behaviours in the durable and unsustainable goods market as well as in the trade market. While one may consider the most important factors in the decision to purchase those related to economic aspects, another may think that the most important factor may be the purchaser's age, which also influences the decision to make a purchase.

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Summary. The article presents analysis of the determinants of consumer behaviours in the furniture market. Given the numerous factors that influence consumer behaviours, the author has decided to focus on the most important determinants affecting furniture purchasers' attitudes in the Polish furniture market. The determinants are divided into indirect factors (economic, demographic and marketing) and direct ones. The he characteristics of furniture are also described. The publication is based on the literature and research conducted in the furniture market in previous years.

Key words: furniture sector, determinants of consumers' behaviours

JEL: D11, Q14

Corresponding author: Patryk Zwierzyński, Białystok University of Technology, Faculty of Management, Ojca Tarasiuka 2, 16-001 Kleosin, Poland, e-mail: p.zwierzynski@pb.edu.pl