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Regina Resheteeva

**Consumers' perceptions: attitudes towards market players
and government (case of Moscow)**

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Academic Supervisor:
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Vadim V. Radaev

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Problem statement

Consumer grievances – rise of prices, limited choice – can be experienced as emergencies demanding immediate response on the behalf of both governments¹. Eventually restrictions in consumer choices can trigger public discontent and a political outcry². The readiness of Russians to publicly protest economic problems and lowering standards of living during the 1998 and 2008 crises, confirmed this approach.

The most recent (2014-2017) crises, however, stands out. Today's indicators of “protest potential” in relation to economic deprivation have decreased sharply, manifesting that Russians are not ready to participate in protests on account of the economic downturn, indicating civic apathy and oppression of Russian citizens. Even though this economic crisis, started in 2014, have posed serious financial challenges for Russians: during first two years after crisis prices surge by 23,5% and real disposable income fell by 12,7%³. It is possible that patriotic surge after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 discouraged Russians to protest⁴. Yet we cannot accept that one of the most severe economic turbulences in Russia for the past 20 years had no effect on consumers subjectivity, we assume that macrolevel categories of political protest and absence collective action, are unable to flash out more subtle or creative forms of resistance among consumers.

How Russian consumers behave during financial turmoil? Coping strategies allow consumers to adapt adjust their behavior in order to be a better fit for environment⁵. Social and economic adaptation can have many forms: Russians look for new job or extra work or change professional field completely, redistribute savings or other resources, migrate in more prosperous

¹ McCormack D. Governing inflation: Price and atmospheres of emergency. *Theory, Culture & Society*. 2015. Vol. 32. No. 2. P. 131-154

² Hilton M., Mazurek M. Consumerism, solidarity and communism: Consumer protection and the consumer movement in Poland. *Journal of Contemporary History*. 2007. Vol. 42. P. 315-343. Kozminski A. K. Consumers in transition from the centrally planned economy to the market economy. *Journal of Consumer Policy*. 1992. Vol. 14. P. 351–369. Jacobs M. The Politics of Plenty in the Twentieth-Century United States. In: Dauntton M., Hilton M. (eds.) *The Politics of Consumption: Material Culture and Citizenship in Europe and America*, Oxford: Berg Press, 2001; 223–239 p.

³ Naselenie Rossii v 2017 godu: dokhody, raskhody i sotsial'noe samochuvstvie. Monitoring NIU VShE. Itogi goda. [Russian Population in 2016: incomes, expenditures and well-being. HSE monitoring. Annual results]. Ed. by L.N. Ovcharova. Moscow: NIU VShE publ., 2018. 39 p. Accessed 13.10.2020. URL URL: <https://isp.hse.ru/monitoring>

⁴ Goode J. P. Love for the Motherland: or Why Cheese is More Patriotic than Crimea. *Russian Politics*. 2016. Vol. 1. No. 4. P. 418-449. Data from Levada center <https://www.levada.ru/2019/04/01/prisoedinenie-kryma/>

⁵ Kozyreva P.M. Social adaptation in Postsoviet Russia. *Sociological Studies*. 2011. Vol. 6. P. 24-35.

regions, seek informal welfare provision⁶. Besides crisis encourage Russians to mobilize their social networks⁷. All these practices help to sustain personal resilience.

Adaptation in consumer sphere manifests in forms of thrift and austerity⁸. Studies explaining consumer behavior during economic shocks point the same process of consumption simplification. Survey data show that Russians usually reduce spending in order to get by, buying less, buying lower quality products or cheaper alternatives or employ all these strategies altogether⁹. Economic hardship is accompanied with extra demand for government protection: Russians expect assistance from government¹⁰.

We see the analytical limitation in looking at adaptation solely in the logic of practice-oriented sociology. Focusing on practices, the researcher often identifies the context of practical action with the practical action itself¹¹. In order to reveal the inner meaning of adaptive behavior, it is important to understand in which the semantic categories Russian consumers perceive their place in the market. After all, the framing of a situation determines how a person reacts¹². We

⁶ Gotlib A.S., Zaporozhets O.N., Khasaev G.R. Socio-economic adaptation in Post-Soviet Russia: public and private practices. *Sotsiologicheskie issledovaniya*. 2004. No. 8. P.56–62. Shabanova M. A. Mass adaptation strategies and perspectives of institutional transformation. *Universe of Russia*. 2001. Vol. 10. No. 3. P. 78–104. Resursy i praktiki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi adaptatsii naseleniya Rossii. [Resources and practices of socio-economic adaptation in Russia.] Ed. by P.M. Kozyreva, A. Nizamova, A.I. Smirnov. Moscow: Novyi khronograf publ., 2013. 328p. Karavai A. V. Main models of socio-economic adaptation in different strata of Russian society. *Terra Economicus*. 2019. Vol. 17. No. 3. P. 128-145.

⁷ Ovcharova L., Prokofeva L. Poverty and interfamilial solidarity in Russia during the transition period. *Monitoring obshchestvennogo mneniya: ekonomicheskie i social'nye peremeny* [Monitoring public opinion: economic and social changes]. 2000. No. 4. P. 23-31. Barsukova S.Yu. Network exchanges among Russian households: empirical research. *Sociological Studies*. 2005. No. 8. P.34–45. Shevchenko O. *Crisis and the everyday in Postsocialist Moscow*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008. – 242 p. Tikhonova N., Karavay A. Resources of Russians in times of crisis: dynamics and role in adaptation to new conditions. *Sociological Studies*. 2016. No 10. P. 43-53.

⁸ Resursy i praktiki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi adaptatsii naseleniya Rossii. [Resources and practices of socio-economic adaptation in Russia.] Ed. by P.M. Kozyreva, A. Nizamova, A.I. Smirnov. Moscow: Novyi khronograf publ., 2013. 328p.

⁹ Kotelnikova Z., Radaev V. Recomposition and levelling of consumption expenditures across four economic shocks in Russia, 1994–2014. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. 2017. Vol. 41. No 4. P. 439-448. Mareeva S. V. Consumption Behavior of Middle Strata in Times of Economic Crisis. *Journal of Institutional Studies*. No. 1. P. 88-104. Kozyreva P.M., Smirnov A.I. Life in the uncertainty of a crisis society: experience and expectations. *Sociological Studies*. 2018. No. 6. P.66–78.

¹⁰ Krasilnikova M.D. What do indexes implicate? Prospects and limitations of matching dynamic public polls. *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya. Dannye. Analiz. Diskussii* [Bulletin of Public Opinion. Data. Analysis. Discussion]. 2018. Vol. 1–2. No. 126. P. 47–57. Sirotkina E. V., Semenov A.V. Economic crisis and the assessment of public effectiveness: who bears responsibility for the economic downturn in Russia? *Journal of Social Policy Studies*. 2019. Vol. 17. No. 2. P. 191–206. Resursy i praktiki sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi adaptatsii naseleniya Rossii. [Resources and practices of socio-economic adaptation in Russia.] Ed. by P.M. Kozyreva, A. Nizamova, A.I. Smirnov. Moscow: Novyi khronograf publ., 2013. 328p

¹¹Vahstein V. "Practice" vs. "Frame": Alternative Projects for the Study of the Everyday World. *Sociological Review*. Vol. 7. No 1. 2008. P. 78

¹² Wood M. L. et al. Schemas and frames // *Sociological Theory*. 2018. Vol. 36. No 3. P. 244-261.

believe that practice can be seen differently if we start with the reconstruction of the context of everyday action - the perception of the market by the consumer¹³.

In this study we shift the focus from behavioral adaptation practices to consumer perception. Consumer perception is an important constitutive element of the economic and political order¹⁴. By perception, we mean a system of subjectively meaningful experience that arises due to the reflexive attitude of the actor¹⁵. The sociological view of perception involves the analysis of cognitive schemes that the individual uses in order to make sense of the surrounding reality¹⁶. Even the "wrong" consumer perceptions from the experts' point of view are important for understanding human behavior.

In this work we shift focus from practices and coping strategies and look closely at consumer perceptions. Consumer experiences are filtered through various interpretive frameworks and we want to explore what interpretive tools consumers use to unpack the meaning of events¹⁷. We argue that in order to understand deep meaning of behavioral practices - in our case adaptation - one needs to start with individual perceptions – how consumers interpret market and all related actors and his own position in the market system. In sociological perspective perception is a culturally mediated process, set of cognitive schemes that allow to make sense of reality and shape horizon of expectations¹⁸.

While focusing on micro level meaning-making, we acknowledge that interpretive schemes employed in everyday lives appear in reaction to more general cultural meanings¹⁹. What consumers deem as just or unjust and predispositions toward market are rooted in national institutional context²⁰. Institutional context is conceptualized as a system of interconnected social factors which bring consistency and regularity to social life²¹. As for consumer identity, it bears

¹³Vahstein V. "Practice" vs. "Frame": Alternative Projects for the Study of the Everyday World. *Sociological Review*. Vol. 7. No 1. 2008.

¹⁴Swedberg R. Folk economics and its role in Trump's presidential campaign: an exploratory study. *Theory and Society*. 2018. Vol. 47. №. 1. P. 1–36.

¹⁵Schütz A. On multiple realities. *Sociological Review*. 2003. Vol. 3. No. 2. P. 3-34.

¹⁶Zerubavel E. *Social mindscapes: An invitation to cognitive sociology*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

¹⁷Schütz A. On multiple realities. *Sociological Review*. 2003. Vol. 3. No. 2. P. 3-34.

¹⁸Zerubavel E. *Social mindscapes: An invitation to cognitive sociology*. Harvard University Press, 2009.

¹⁹Zerubavel E. *Social mindscapes: An invitation to cognitive sociology*. Harvard University Press, 2009. Olick J. K. Collective memory: The two cultures. *Sociological Theory*. 1999. Vol. 17. No. 3. P. 333-348

²⁰Polanyi K. The economy as an instituted process. *Journal of Economic Sociology*. 2002. Vol. 3. No. 2. P. 62–73

²¹Greif A Institutions and the Path to the Modern Economy: Lessons from Medieval Trade. *Journal of Economic Sociology*. 2012. Vol. 13. No. 2. P. 35-58

imprint from collective past: cultural classifications can direct the manner of how consumers feel in the present²².

What meaning do people put into saving practices, which are seen as an inevitable element of the crisis? Did a positive assessment of the political course completely neutralized consumer problems? In this work we will show micro-level of everyday experience and show that it would be premature to conclude that Russian consumers remained reluctant to deal with market turbulence caused by the economic crisis. Macrolevel categories of political protest and absence collective action are unable to flash out more subtle or creative forms of resistance among Russian consumers.

Our main research question is how consumers perceive their position in the market system and how these interpretations shape their experiences. In this work we employ phenomenological perspective on the market by analyzing structures of personal meanings used by ordinary consumers²³. We seek to explore how consumers make sense of the market: how they account for behavior of market players, what practices they perceive as appropriate and unacceptable, what is expected from government in question of consumer wellbeing. In consumer lifeworld key market actors are trade representatives and official authorities.

Problem development

Economic sociology research primary exploring consumption demonstrates imperfections in the model of the individualized rationalized consumer model used in economic theory. Instead of a simplified model of consumer choice economic sociology exploring consumption as a tool for constructing individual (group) identity, the ways formation of tastes and lifestyles (P. Bourdieu, P. DiMaggio, V. Zelizer, S. Zukin and others). Another streak of research is devoted to evaluation of goods and judgments of quality produced by consumers (J. Beckert, F. Wherry, M. Callon, L. Karpik, F. Cochoy, D. Slater and others). In rare cases, the consumer's idea itself is critically assessed (D. Graeber, F. Trentmann, R. Wilk). In general consumer studies focus mainly on practice-oriented models (A. Warde).

Consumer perception is actively studied in marketing research: perception is seen as the key to understanding consumer behavior. In this area, a great deal of research has been

²²Trentmann F. Knowing consumers—histories, identities, practices: an introduction / Trentmann F. (ed) *The Making of the Consumer: Knowledge, Power and Identity in the Modern World*. Oxford: Berg, 2006

²³Radaev V. V. *What is the market: perceptive from economic sociology*. Working Papers WP4/2006/07. Moscow: GU VShE, 2006

accumulated in analyzing consumer perceptions and evaluating consumer attitudes. Many researchers within marketing are interested in how consumers feel about prices and assess their fairness (J. Alba, L. Bolton, L. Xia, K. Monroe, M. Campbell, D. Lichtenstein and others). In addition to prices, researchers focus on how consumers perceive brands and how this affects their loyalty to companies (J. Aaker, K. Alvarez, K. Grayson, K. Brunk, K. Keller, N. Kervyn, A. Kirmani, S. Fournier and others). Research has a tradition of studying consumer cynicism and skepticism that appear in response to intense marketing impact (S. Connors, S. MacKenzie, J. Moulard, P. Odou, M. Richins, A. Chernev, M. Chylinski, A. Chu, A. Helm, D. Holt, J. Avery and others). It was revealed that consumers are sensitive to insincerity on the part of market participants: they critically evaluate brands, learn to ignore intrusive advertising, do not trust projects of social responsibility of business, etc. At the same time, the repertoire of cynical reactions includes not only refusal to buy certain goods, but more radical forms of resistance - anticonsumption movements (S. Zavestocki, E. Izberk-Bilgin, J. Littler, M. Lee, R. Kozinets, H. Cherrier and others).

Typically, marketing research relies on psychological concepts to explain consumer behavior. In addition, research in marketing is focused on applied goals - to understand how to regain trust in brands, correct the response to advertising, and formulate recommendations for market professionals. And consumer studies focus on radical forms of rejection of consumerism, leaving aside everyday practices.

Consumer behavior is influenced not only by the perception of market participants, but also by the outlook of consumers in general: what people consider fair, useful, and correct. In international studies, the active consumer position is studied through the prism of political consumerism. These studies demonstrate how, in modern Western democracies, the consumer takes over from the citizen, becoming a more significant instrument of political influence. It is assumed that the consumer is aware of his privileged position in the market and actively uses it: he attacks the market system, trying to restore social justice. Supporters of the theory of political consumerism characterize this phenomenon as a new form of political participation. This phenomenon is being studied by L. Atkinson, E. Bennett, J. Johnston, L. Copeland, M. Carrington, S. Koos, M. Micheletti, L. Neilson, P. Paxton, D. Stolle, R. Sassatelli, K. Soper, M. Starr, M. Friedman, M. Hooghe, D. Shaw and others. In the Russian tradition, this topic has not received wide coverage expect studies by M. Shabanova, E. Arif, O. Gurova, D. Litvinova. But overall, the conceptual origin of the theory of political consumerism severely limits us in interpreting this phenomenon within the framework of modern Western society. The consumer experience of residents of European countries cannot be translated directly into the Russian context.

The variety of institutional conditions forms the dominant idea of the consumer and his place in the social system, which dominates at a given time and place. For our work, studies that demonstrate national and cultural characteristics of consumer identity are especially important. This topic has mainly been developed in historical research. An extensive literature is devoted to describing consumer policies and the conditions of consumer civic activism from a historical perspective: L. Glickman, M. Daunton, M. Jacobs, L. Cohen, M. Mazurek, M. Hilton. Other studies analyze the formation of national consumer protection regimes (A. Burgess, P. Maclachlan, G. Trumbull). The approach developed by F. Trentmann, who combined historical research and sociological explanations, is of the greatest significance for our work. Historical reconstruction of the Soviet consumer experience can be found in the works of domestic and foreign researchers from various disciplines: E. Bogdanova, V. Bogdan, V. Panushkina, A. Guzanova, O. Echevskaya, V. Iliin, A. Ivanova, M. Klinova, O. Gurova, A. Ledeneva, E. Osokina, P. Romanova, A. Randall, E. Tverdukova, M. Titma, I. Travin, A. Trofimov, S. Oushakine, S. Fitzpatrick, E. Iarskaia-Smirnova.

Another important analytical turn in our topic is social resilience and socio-economic adaptation of consumers in the face of economic shocks. The topic of social resilience has been actively developed in European studies since the 2000s. Resilience is seen as one of the ways to adapt to the neoliberal projects of states and a strategy for recovery from the economic crisis. Resilience refers to the ability of a system to return to its previous state after external shocks due to the collective efforts of communities (M. Meyer, A. Maurer, M. Donoghue, S. Mohaupt, E. Harrison, P. Hall, M. Lamont and others). The study of individual adaptation and collective recovery in the context of economic crises in the United States and Europe was carried out by L. Alonso, E. Lekakis, A. Lindblom, S. Koos, D. Hampson, P. McGoldrick, L. Zurawicki, N. Braidot and others.

The topic of social adaptation and social stability has received wide attention among Russian researchers. In the post-Soviet period, Russia went through a series of economic and structural crises. There is a large body of research that explains the impact of the crisis on the economic behavior of Russians: the choice of strategy in the labor market (V. Gimpelson, R. Kapelushnikov and others), how consumption model has changed (S. Mareeva, V. Radaev, Z. Kotelnikova, L. Ovcharova, S. Smirnov, D. Popova, N. Zubarevich), how has the financial behavior of the population transformed (D. Ibragimova, O. Kuzina, P. Kozyreva, M. Krasilnikova). There are also studies analyzing how consumer sentiment affects the macroeconomic situation in the country (D. Ibragimova, S. Nikolaenko, M. Krasilnikova). The drastic transformations of Russian society demanded efforts from Russians to maintain their well-

being. The mechanisms of socio-economic adaptation of Russians in the context of the crisis were studied by E. Avraamova, K. Abanokova, N. Bondarenko, E. Balabanova, E. Berdysheva, S. Gerasimova, A. Gotlib, M. Gorshkov, L. Gordon, Yu. Levada, A. Karavai, P. Kozyreva, L. Korel, M. Krasilnikova, M. Lokshin, A. Nizamova, E. Smetanin, A. Smirnov, N. Tihonova, O. Shevchenko, M. Shabanova and others. It is noteworthy that there are only few works based on the analysis of qualitative data. Typically, adaptation research focuses on behavioral practices, leaving aside issues of perception and individual interpretation. The overwhelming majority of these studies use quantitative data, so there is a lack of a description of the life world of informants and an explanation of the context of everyday life in which people are experiencing a crisis.

Research aim and objectives

Research aim: to identify how Russian consumers perceive their place in the market system and to analyze how these perceptions frame their everyday consumer experiences (using the case of Moscow residents).

Research objectives:

1. To analyze the institutional context in which consumer market perceptions were formed in a historical perspective
2. To identify and explain consumer perception of key market actors.
3. To examine semantic categories which consumers employ to describe their interaction with key market actors
4. To examine what consumers expect from government in relation to their wellbeing
5. To analyze how consumer perceptions frame everyday consumer experiences and to examine the inner meaning of thrift and austerity practices.

Objective 1 required both theoretical conceptualization and historical examinations of consumer sphere in Russia starting from Soviet times. The results of this inquiry are published in two articles:

Romanova R. (2018) What is Political about Consumption? *Journal of Economic Sociology*. Vol. 19. No 1. P. 168–187.

Resheteeva R. State and consumers: responsibility distribution in consumer perception. *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya. Dannye. Analiz. Diskussii* [Bulletin of Public Opinion. Data. Analysis. Discussion]. 2019. Vol. 1-2. No 128. P. 161-170

The results from Objective 2 and 3 presented in following works:

Berdysheva E., Romanova R. Rethinking prices during an economic crisis: Calculation as a new mode of consumer behaviour in Russia. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. 2017. Vol. 41. No 4. P. 397-403

Resheteeva R. How Consumers Perceive the Market: Cynical Reason and Individual Resistance (Based on Interviews with Residents of Moscow). *Sociological Journal*. 2020. Vol. 26. No 3. P. 90–113

Objective 4 was devoted to uncovering the consumer perception of government responsibility. The results are published in following papers:

Resheteeva R. State and consumers: responsibility distribution in consumer perception. *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya. Dannye. Analiz. Diskussii* [Bulletin of Public Opinion. Data. Analysis. Discussion]. 2019. Vol. 1-2. No 128. P. 161-170

Resheteeva R. How Consumers Perceive the Market: Cynical Reason and Individual Resistance (Based on Interviews with Residents of Moscow). *Sociological Journal*. 2020. Vol. 26. No 3. P. 90–113

Results of Objective 5 are considered in details in these two papers:

Berdysheva E., Romanova R. Rethinking prices during an economic crisis: Calculation as a new mode of consumer behaviour in Russia. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. 2017. Vol. 41. No 4. P. 397-403

Resheteeva R. How Consumers Perceive the Market: Cynical Reason and Individual Resistance (Based on Interviews with Residents of Moscow). *Sociological Journal*. 2020. Vol. 26. No 3. P. 90–113

Data and methodology

Russian studies exploring adaptation practices usually base on survey data and do not take into account individual meanings. Fixed questionnaires help to detect trends, but fail to capture seemingly trivial interpretations and meanings in everyday life. Using qualitative methods of analysis, we want to identify the interpretive schemes that ordinary consumers rely on, and the nuances of consumer perception. In the interview, one can find cultural projections of the macro level: on the basis of personal stories, we can reveal the collective meanings to which the informants appeal²⁴.

²⁴ Pugh A. J. What good are interviews for thinking about culture? Demystifying interpretive analysis. *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*. 2013. Vol. 1. No. 1. P. 42-68.

Data collection and analysis were carried out following the logics of grounded theory²⁵. The first stage of the research is the collection and analysis of in-depth interviews. After that data collection and analysis alternated with theoretical comprehension, determining the course of the final conceptualization. Categories and subcategories obtained at the first stage and data analysis were supplemented by subsequent theoretical conceptualization. Recent developments in the field of grounded theory suggest that theoretical intuitions at the empirical stage are an advantage contrary to what creators of the method believed²⁶. The main goal of a grounded theory - the formation of new theories - is possible provided that the researcher cannot integrate the results obtained into existing theories, and therefore is forced to revise them.

The research uses data from 54 in-depth interviews collected in different periods. Initially, data were collected from May to December 2014 at the beginning of the economic crisis, the second round of data collection was in the summer of 2015, final data gathering round was on October 2016 to March 2017, when the inflation rate slowed down. The data collection period at the start of the economic crisis provided us with an excellent analytical opportunity to catch the breakdown of the usual social order. The sharp rise in prices could not go unnoticed: the usual rhythm of economic life had to be rethought. But stopping only at one temporal interval - the acute and early period of the crisis - we risked getting negative assessments reflecting only this short period of instability. These data also carry analytical value, since they grasped the moment of restructuring of the mundane experiences and acute feelings of conflict in the search for someone responsible for the deterioration of the economic situation. But in order to assess the stability of the meanings found during the beginning of the crisis, we continued to collect data in more stable periods, when the crisis was no longer deemed as extraordinary event.

The first stage of the analysis was based on 17 interviews, and we developed two central analytical categories “not to be deceived” and “consumer proactive behavior” and subcategories related to the role of the state, social environment and quality of goods were identified. Next, we added to the analysis 14 more interviews, gathered in 2016. We refined the already obtained categories and paid a closer attention to how selective savings and calculation were used to maintain informants’ well-being in the market. After that, we conducted another round of data collection - 23 additional interviews in 2017. These were more focused interviews, where specific

²⁵ Charmaz K. *Constructing Grounded Theory: A Practical Guide through Qualitative Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006. – 202 p.

²⁶ Timmermans S, Tavory I. Theory construction in qualitative research: from grounded theory to abductive analysis. *Sociological Theory*. 2012. Vol. 30. No.3. P. 167–86

subjects were specifically clarified: forms and perceptions of savings, perceptions of state responsibility.

In grounded theory, sample design involves the intention to ensure representativeness not of social groups but of the social meanings that are used by individuals to interpret events in the surrounding world. For selecting respondents, the theoretically driven snowball sampling technique was used. For example, analysis of interviews showed that the consumer experience is not limited to the economic world alone. Political experiences also arise as a system of references. Through references to the state, the informants built their attitude towards market players. It became clear that the financial situation is not the only differentiating characteristic. Further, we tried to develop the category of “state (ir)responsibility”. We included people with different economic socialization in the sample, trying to identify breakpoints in consumer experience depending on the perception of state responsibility.

The informants were recruited through the study authors' social networks. Initially, the recruiting of informants was based on the snowball technique. However, using only this approach, we risked limiting ourselves only to people of similar social status. To move beyond the homogeneous group in our social circle, we used multiple entry points into the field and sought to maximize variation in the characteristics of the people whose experiences are represented in the study. Additionally, through the weak ties of the researchers, we tried to reach informants from vulnerable social groups, as well as informants with a high socio-economic status. For obtaining a saturated description and reducing the possibility of selection bias associated with snowball sampling, maximum heterogeneity was also ensured in other sociodemographic (informants' age between 21-70 years, 34 informants identified themselves as females and 20 as males).

The analysis of the interviews began with open coding (paragraph by paragraph and by line of transcript). Coding reflects emotional assessments, value statements, cause-and-effect relationships, etc²⁷. The next stage of the analysis was selective coding. Comparison of interviews and primary categories made it possible to form a continuum of categories and clarify the relationships between them (the stage of axial coding). Continuous categorization is essential for the selection and elaboration of core categories. To structure the coding results, we used situational maps²⁸, which allowed us to structure the links between categories and subcategories. In later stages of the analysis, we mapped the interpretation of customer experiences in three dimensions:

²⁷ Saldaña J. *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2015.

²⁸ Clarke A. E. Situational analyses: Grounded theory mapping after the postmodern turn // *Symbolic interaction*. 2003. Vol. 26. No 4. P. 553-576.

normative assumptions (what is happening and how to perceive it), identity (where I belong in the process), and acceptable behaviors (how to react). These dimensions are not categories; this dilution allows us to arrange heterogeneous elements of analysis into a more consistent scheme.

The findings of the qualitative research were further validated with representative survey in Moscow. In survey a respondent chooses an option that resonates with his inner orientations in the cultural space, revealing internalized attitudes²⁹. If during the interview we did not limit the respondents to one or another group of goods, during the survey we used example of food products. Street survey of Muscovites was conducted in December 2017 using a questionnaire constructed on the basis of insights from interviews and quantitative research already conducted. The sample consisted of 532 people, the sample structure represents the age and sex characteristics of the adult (18+) population of Moscow. The survey was conducted by the company Analytics-Russia.

Research hypotheses

Hypotheses in a study carried out in the logic of grounded theory appear in the process of collecting and analyzing data: as the categories become saturated and theoretical conceptualization. Below we presented the assumptions that emerged at different stages of category development, refinement of nuclear categories, and conceptualization.

First, we tried to understand how price perceptions and critical attitudes towards trade representatives, which we recorded in interviews, differentiate. We recorded how the perception of the market and attitudes towards market participants differ depending on the socio-economic situation of consumers in our study. We compared the narratives and explanations of people from different income groups. We assumed that a vulnerable financial position could provoke a more critical assessment of the actions of traders. Victimization causes a proportionate increase in the blaming³⁰. We also assumed that a sense of economic security will smooth out estimates of sellers' actions. The interpretation of the market space depends on the experience of the informant.

After that we looked for contrasts in the narratives of different income groups that underwent economic socialization in the Soviet Union and during times of market economy. We assumed that people socialized during Soviet economy could express a more critical attitude towards the trade representatives compared to those who socialized during market economy or

²⁹Vaisey S. Motivation and justification: A dual-process model of culture in action. *American Journal of Sociology*. 2009. Vol. 114. No. 6. P. 1675-1715.

³⁰Riker P. The just. [Russ. ed.: Spravedlivo. Transl. from French by B. Skuratov, P. Khitskii; Ed. by K. Golubovich. Moscow: Logos publ., 2005. 301p.]

transition period. In Soviet times, consumer was entrenched in a reactive normality, he was forced to react and adjust to the seller. A collective identity of both the consumer and the representatives of the trade has formed: the former as a victim, suffered from the arbitrariness of the system, the latter as “villains” who exploited their privileged position in the consumption system³¹. The one who has been most exposed to power (in our case from the trade representatives), most likely will be more acutely aware of its effect and look for external ways to restrain its manifestation³².

Research limitations

The results of the empirical analysis are based on interviews and surveys of Moscow residents. The consumer experience of Moscow residents may differ from the perception of residents of Russian regions due to differences in living standards. One of the objectives of qualitative research is to formulate hypotheses based on the data we have at our disposal. The hypotheses that we put forward can be refined and revised based on other data.

This research was carried out mainly on the basis of interview data. Our sample includes respondents with contrasting socio-economic characteristics. However, the qualitative methodology does not allow us to generalize our findings to the population. One of the objectives of qualitative research is to formulate hypotheses based on the data we have at our disposal. The hypotheses that we put forward can be refined and revised based on other data.

Also, our study does not allow us to identify patterns between the perception of the market and the socio-demographic characteristics of the consumer. The exceptions were those parameters that made it possible to formulate research assumptions (different experiences of economic socialization, income level). In addition, we recorded differences in the perception of people depending on their professional affiliation and gender. Thus, guided by the theory of the performativity of economic knowledge, we found differences in the experience of informants who had an economic or managerial education and experience in sales, and those who did not. In interviews, it is also possible to trace gender differences in attitudes towards saving. However, the detailed development of these themes can serve as a direction for further research.

³¹ Bogdanova E. A. Consumer rights protection: social problem construction in retrospective. *Rubezh: al'manah social'nyh issledovaniy* [Frontier: almanac for social studies]. 2003. No. 18. P. 167–177. Gurova O. Y. Ideology of consumption in Soviet society. *Sociological Journal*. 2005. No. 4. P. 126

³² Evik P., Silby S. Ordinary law: Stories from everyday life. *Pravo i pravoprimerenie v zerkale sotsial'nykh nauk: Khrestomatiya sovremennykh tekstov*. [Law and law enforcement in the mirror of social sciences: a reader of modern texts.] Ed. by E. Paneyakh. Moscow: Staut publ., 2014. P. 221–245.

We analyzed interpretation of consumer experiences in three thematic areas: normative assumptions (what is happening and how to perceive it), identity (where I belong in this process), and acceptable behavior scenarios (how to react). Since we proceed from a phenomenological perspective on market, we also accepted the idea that the market in the perception of different groups of informants may differ. There are three key actors in the life world of our informants: the consumer himself, trade representatives (shops and producers) and the state. Sales shops and the state are not monolithic entities. There are international companies, chain stores and sellers at the fair - the consumer experience is differentiated and depends on how he defines the situation. The state also has many “faces”: the official bodies in charge of consumer rights, the president and even entities that do not directly relate to the state (for example, non-profit and non-governmental organizations). People often have difficulties with the correct qualifications, they may not know the details of business processes, etc.

Based on the interviews, we cannot make distinctions in relation to different market participants: often in consumer perception there is no clear boundaries between different market actors and business parties. Moreover, the scheme of references depends on the life world of the informants: it was easy for someone to separate international companies from domestic producers, manufacturers and distributors, while others noted that the main “*problem*” is in the “*entrepreneurs*”, because they are responsible for products and prices. In some narratives both sellers and manufacturers could be merged into a monolithic group of “*entrepreneurs*”. Also, our research does not allow us to fully reveal the role of NGOs in consumer issues. Based on the few stories from interviews, we cannot offer a detailed justification of the role and place of NGOs in consumer perception.

Main research findings

1. *The institutional context that shaped consumer perception of the market*³³. The consumer is distinguished by the same variety of characteristics as the economic systems within which he operates. The dissemination and interiorization of consumption rules are closely related to the state policies, which has repeatedly contributed to the abolition of some consumer qualities

³³ Full version of the results is presented here: Romanova R. What is Political about Consumption? *Journal of Economic Sociology*. 2018. Vol. 19. No 1. P. 168–187. doi:10.17323/1726-3247-2018-1-170-189. Resheteeva R. State and consumers: responsibility distribution in consumer perception. *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya. Dannye. Analiz. Diskussii* [Bulletin of Public Opinion. Data. Analysis. Discussion]. 2019. Vol. 1-2. No 128. P. 161-170

and the creation of others. Radicalizing this statement, it can be argued that the state, and not the market, was behind the development and approval of the idea of consumption³⁴.

Soviet consumer is very different from the image of the consumer formed in the European and American market economies. The Soviet consumer does not face the problem of an abundance of commodities; he does not have access to credit funds that stimulate consumer activity. Soviet consumption had been built under conditions of chronic shortage, manifested to varying degrees throughout the entire Soviet period. The new Soviet state also needed a new idea of the consumer, which would correspond to the ideological foundations and state agenda. Responsible consumption, expressed in voluntary readiness to influence trade, became the duty of the Soviet citizen, who was interested not only in meeting his own needs, but also in the development of the state.³⁵.

With the onset of the Cold War, state rhetoric changed: instead of being an assistant to the state, the consumer is increasingly becoming the object of paternalistic concern. Consumer interests had to be protected³⁶. The discursively new formula of the Soviet policy of consumption was reflected in the attitude “everything in the name of man, everything for the good of man”³⁷. Civil laws in the 1960s made the seller responsible for checking the quality of goods, exempting the consumer from this obligation.³⁸.

Although in Soviet times consumer problems were rooted in the state production system, the negative image in the eyes of ordinary consumers was firmly entrenched in the trade as an independent group. The state managed to partially distance itself from the attacks of consumers by building a system of assistance to “*victims*” of the actions of trade workers. In examining consumer complaints, the state played the role of an arbiter protecting the interests of the consumer. The ethics of care permeated social policy, in particular with respect to the Soviet consumer³⁹. This

³⁴ Bevir M., Trentmann F. After Modernism: Local Reasoning, Consumption, and Governance. In: Bevir M., Trentmann F. (eds.) *Governance, Consumers and Citizens. Agency and Resistance in Contemporary Politics*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007; p. 165–190.

³⁵ Tverdyukova E. D. Complaints books of Soviet trade and public catering enterprises (1920s - 1980s) as a form of appeal to the authorities. *Vestnik Sant-Peterburgskogo Universiteta. Seriya Istoriya [Bulletin of St. Petersburg Universit. History Series]*. 2015. No. 1. P. 19–28. Randall A. *The Soviet Dream World of Retail Trade and Consumption in the 1930s*. Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

³⁶ Bogdanova E. A. Consumer rights protection: social problem construction in retrospective. *Rubezh: al'manah social'nyh issledovanij [Frontier: almanac for social studies]*. 2003. No. 18. P. 167–177.

³⁷ Gurova O. Y. Ideology of consumption in Soviet society. *Sociological Journal*. 2005. No. 4. P. 126.

³⁸ Tverdyukova E. D. Consumer sovereignty and state consumer policy in the USSR (problem statement). *Peterburgskij istoricheskij zhurnal [Petersburg historical journal]*. 2014. No. 1. P. 154–168.

³⁹ Bogdanova E. A. Soviet experience in regulating legal relations, or “waiting for care”. *Journal of sociology and social anthropology*. 2006. Vol. 9. No. 1. P. 77–90.

format of the socio-political contract assumed that a “*strong*” and “*competent*” state acts as a “*kind*”, “*condescending*” patron who promises to take care of its subjects, protecting them from problems with violation of consumer rights.

Until the late 1980s, the consumer rights problem was formulated as a problem of violated rights. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the emphasis shifted from consumers violated rights to consumers self-protection⁴⁰. The state is obliged to create a legal and administrative framework that will be easy to navigate for the consumer and will allow him to defend his rights on his own with minimal costs. For its part, the state expects that “discerning consumers” are able to “choose consciously” and know their rights and responsibilities⁴¹. At the same time, government documents declare the consumer's vulnerability to the market system, the consumer is an economically weak side in market relations⁴².

2. Trade representatives' perceptions: presumption of sellers' guilt⁴³.

In the perception of informants there is a generalized image of “*sellers*”, the attitude to which is formed from everyday experience. In everyday life a person most often encounters sales representatives during an ordinary trip to the store. If the representatives of the stores can be considered the entities of the first order from the informant's surrounding world, then the manufacturers of goods are somewhat distanced from everyday experience. In interviews we have identified the category “presumption of sellers' guilt”, which reflects the perception of our informants.

The logic of the accusation can be traced in the discursive descriptions of the behavior of market players: they “*wind up*”, “*pump out money*”, “*rob*”, “*cheat*”, “*weld*”, “*feed*”, “*cash in*”, etc. A vague and sometimes completely misguided about the operation of the pricing mechanism only adds confidence in the guilt of the seller, who manipulates prices at his own discretion. While recognizing the sellers' right to set the price themselves, consumers simultaneously maintain a

⁴⁰ Bogdanova E. A. Consumer rights protection: social problem construction in retrospective. *Rubezh: al'manah social'nyh issledovanij* [Frontier: almanac for social studies]. 2003. No. 18. P. 174.

⁴¹ Strategiya gosudarstvennoj politiki Rossijskoj Federacii v oblasti zashchity prav potrebitel' na period do 2030 goda [Strategies for Consumer protection policies in Russian Federation until 2030] URL: <https://rospotrebnadzor.ru/upload/iblock/543/strategiya-gosudarstvennoj-politiki-rossiyskoj-federatsii-v-oblasti-zashchity-prav-potrebitel'ev-na-period-do-2030-goda.pdf> Accessed: 13.10.2020.

⁴² Zashchita prav potrebitel'ei v Rossijskoj Federatsii v 2018 godu. Gosudarstvennyi doklad.[Consumer Rights Protection in Russia in 2018. Federal Report]. Moscow: Federal'naya sluzhba po nadzoru v sfere zashchity prav potrebitel'ei i blagopoluchiya cheloveka publ., 2019. 318 p. Accessed 13.10.2020. URL: https://rospotrebnadzor.ru/documents/details.php?ELEMENT_ID=10144

⁴³ Full version of the results is presented here: Berdysheva E., Romanova R. Rethinking prices during an economic crisis: Calculation as a new mode of consumer behaviour in Russia. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. 2017. Vol. 41. No. 4. P. 397-403; Resheteeva R. How Consumers Perceive the Market: Cynical Reason and Individual Resistance (Based on Interviews with Residents of Moscow). *Sociological Journal*. 2020. Vol. 26. No. 3. P. 90–113. DOI:10.19181/socjour.2020.26.3.7397

moral book-keeping of merit and failure – “*they saw an opportunity to make money*”. Emphasized utilitarian and market motives of the sellers discredit their position in the eyes of the consumer. Such behavior of shops and manufacturers is a violation of economic justice in the perception of the consumers.

Initially, we assumed that a more loyal attitude towards trade representatives can be expected from people who do not experience material difficulties. But an increase in material well-being does not mean an automatic easing of tension. Although the nature of situations capable of causing alienation is different. The relationship between the consumer and the market representatives was described in terms of direct conflict and confrontation, or more gently in terms of rivalry and competition. The tension in relations between consumers and sellers can be traced in the survey data: 68% of Muscovites believe that stores are guided by their benefits even if it contradicts consumer interests, and 46% are sure that stores can unreasonably raise prices. Doubt among Moscow consumers extends to food manufacturers: 42% believe that manufacturers can save money on the food quality.

According to the Levada Center, in 2018 only 30% of Russians trust small and medium-sized businesses, and in 2019 their number dropped to 26%. Russians are even more skeptical about big business. It is noteworthy that trust in small and medium-sized businesses practically does not depend on the level of education, place of residence and material security of citizens⁴⁴. We assume that the category of “presumption of sellers guilt”, formed from narratives, suggests the existence of a persistent suspicion toward trade representatives. Thus, suspicion is one of the components of consumer culture in Russia.

The nature of the confrontation between consumers and sellers, recorded at the previous stages of the project, we conceptualize as “consumer cynicism”. We believe that it is not enough to describe the opposition between consumer and trade representatives through distrust. If we stop at the generalizing concept of distrust, we will not understand how everyday experience works. If mistrust binds the action, then the cynical mode of perception forms the context of the action, determining its form. The concept of cynicism allows us to grasp the undertones and interweaving of trust and frustration in consumer perception. We use theoretical notion of cynicism suggested by P. Sloterdijk: reflexive cynicism means a state of conscious disappointment, rejecting naivety and preparing for the habitually worst scenario of the development of events. Cynicism resonates with both suspicion and disappointment⁴⁵. The conditions for the formation of a cynical attitude

⁴⁴ Kozyreva P.M., Smirnov A.I. Business and the Population: A Lack of Trust — Reasons and Consequences. *Polis. Political Studies*. 2017. No 1. P. 53–69.

⁴⁵ Sloterdijk P. Critique of Cynical Reason. [Russ. ed.: *Kritika tsinicheskogo razuma*. Transl. from Germ. by A. Pertsev]. Moscow: AST Moskva publ., 2009. 800p.

are the awareness of the asymmetry of power and the perception of one's position in the market as a subordinate - "the presumption of the seller's guilt". In the perception of the consumer, sellers and manufacturers have an overbearing advantage: they have the ability to control the price and quality of the product and, as a result, manipulate the consumer himself, limiting his freedom of choice.

A cynical view of the actions of market participants can be viewed as a defensive stance: habitualized frustration softens the perception of external uncertainty. Preparedness to be deceived - "I knew it" - gives the subject a sense of control and predictability in market transactions. Indeed, in this case, disappointment is the expected outcome, which depends largely on external circumstances. Cynicism arises in those moments of social life when the breakdown of the established order is desirable, but impossible. That is, in ideal conditions, the consumer would like to see representatives of trade on their side: to set "*fair prices*", respect and value the consumer. It is possible to obtain such solidarity relations only under experimental conditions of controllability and transparency of the actions of both parties. In reality, however, the barrier remains. Therefore, cynical attitudes cement the subordinate position. But at the same time, cynicism opens up opportunities for micro-confrontation: resistance, the goal of which is not a radical transformation, but the defense of their individual rights.

3. Perception of government: (ir)responsible state⁴⁶. About 40% of the Muscovites in survey attribute responsibility for quality control and food safety to the state. In interviews, we recorded that a request for state intervention appears where the consumer doubts manufacturers and stores and feels vulnerable – as a "*victim*". It is at the same time a recognition of the strength of state agency and an awareness of the inability to influence the situation independently. Another element that highlights the consumer's victimization in his perception: the protective state appears where the consumer has become a victim. A request for assistance from the state arises in at least two forms. One form of protection may be the expectation of "*help*" for the consumer. The minimum task for the state is to arm the consumer with the means to resist deception. For example, to release informative programs, to make objective investigations, to disseminate information about consumer rights, etc. And the maximum task is to teach the consumer to be more competent and discerning, to "*arm*" with knowledge. The second form of protection involves a greater

⁴⁶ Full version of the results is presented here: Resheteeva R. How Consumers Perceive the Market: Cynical Reason and Individual Resistance (Based on Interviews with Residents of Moscow). *Sociological Journal*. 2020. Vol. 26. No. 3. P. 90–113. DOI:10.19181/socjour.2020.26.3.7397. Resheteeva R. State and consumers: responsibility distribution in consumer perception. *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya. Dannye. Analiz. Diskussii* [Bulletin of Public Opinion. Data. Analysis. Discussion]. 2019. Vol. 1-2. No 128. P. 161-170.

demand for custody from the regulator and the need to “*rein in the sellers*”. The protective role of the state is manifested in the punishment of the “*guilty*”.

Different perceptions of the political give rise to different forms of justifying the boundaries of state responsibility. Informants experiencing material difficulties and having gone through economic socialization in the Soviet era associate punishment of the guilty with state control, while people socialized in a market economy rather expect the state to be predictable and transparent in the market. In the latter case, this goal is achieved not by “*punishment*”, but by “*checks*”. But the category of responsibility is closely related to blaming and accusation. Survey data from Muscovites indicate that uncertainty about their consumer rights results in a critical attitude towards the state as a whole. And, conversely, those who are confident that they will be able to protect their consumer rights positively assess the state's activities in this area. Almost 60% of Muscovites surveyed are not sure that they will be able to protect their consumer rights. Roughly the same number say that the state as a whole is not fulfilling consumer protection.

In modern Russia, a course towards consumer autonomy is declared: the official documents declare that the end consumer should be responsible for his own well-being. The state, on the other hand, provides a legal framework that will protect their rights. Responsibility for their well-being falls on the consumer: he must behave “*reasonably*” and “*rationally*” - learn to be competent. But as our data show, even in conditions of distancing and proclaiming a course towards independence, the state remains one of the key actors in the market from the point of view of consumers.

4. Framing of consumer experience: proactive consumer⁴⁷. Proactivity indicates the effort that a consumer makes to buy a product or service at the best price. Proactivity is mastered as a strategy to combat deception and / or as a form of self-affirmation in the market. The presence and application of strategies to optimize their spending is interpreted in the respondents' narratives as a sign of social competence, independence, material independence and high cognitive abilities. Proactivity can be considered an exercise in suspicion - to uncover deception, to be constantly on the alert. The consumer routinely escapes the influence of the seller: he uses special mobile applications to monitor expenses, prices, discounts, special promotions, knows store loyalty programs, draws up calculation cards, is ready to complain to Rospotrebnadzor, buys in reserve, adapts the purchase plan to the discount schedule, etc. From our data, we see that frugality - the

⁴⁷ Full version of the results is presented here: Berdysheva E., Romanova R. Rethinking prices during an economic crisis: Calculation as a new mode of consumer behaviour in Russia. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. 2017. Vol. 41. No. 4. P. 397-403. Resheteeva R. How Consumers Perceive the Market: Cynical Reason and Individual Resistance (Based on Interviews with Residents of Moscow). *Sociological Journal*. 2020. Vol. 26. No. 3. P. 90–113. DOI:10.19181/socjour.2020.26.3.7397

formula “smart, not poor looks at prices” - is becoming a socially approved imperative of competent consumer behavior.

European and American theories describing the proactive position of the consumer do not allow grasping the specifics of the Russian context. In Russia, the consumer is not trying to attack the market system; rather, he is trying to defend himself. The power differential is perceived differently: instead of being privileged in the market, our informants are more likely to experience insecurity. Therefore, we cannot consider consumer proactivity as a form of political activity and open confrontation. The proactivity we have described is sewn into everyday life and is a form of individual resistance. We see that individual protective actions do not develop into collective forms of social resilience - active involvement in interfamily support networks or political action.

We conceptualize consumer proactivity not as a form of adaptation, but as a form of individual resistance. Adaptation can take the form of coping and adjusting. In the first case, adaptation pertains that, having made the necessary efforts, after some time it will be possible to return to the pre-crisis state. But as we saw earlier, proactivity and economy have positive connotations: our informants see these efforts not as a forced short-term measure dictated by poverty, but as a trait of a competent consumer. That is, proactivity is seen as a necessary trait not only in a crisis, but also in everyday life. Adaptation as adjusting refers that it is impossible to simply wait out the crisis; in order to accommodate into the new environment, the actor needs to change taking into account new challenges. But we can see from our data that the crisis and the accompanying difficulties are not the first and unexpected challenge for consumers. Subordination in relations between market representatives and consumers was traced even before the economic crisis in 2014, and the crisis itself is seen as a common occurrence.

Individual resistance arises in the presence of two conditions: awareness of the advantage of the other and at the same time awareness of the possibility to challenge this advantage⁴⁸. The data show that a vulnerable financial position exacerbates the perception of conflict with the seller, which is paradoxically combined with an acceptance of defeat and seller hegemony. Complaining about the prices or the general approach of the “*entrepreneurs*”, the informants perceived such an order as inevitable – “*the prices are too high, but nothing can be done*”. We assume that the perception of the irreversibility of the market order determines the form of responses. Our conclusion is that a sense of one's own vulnerability in the market does not necessarily translate into informal practices of maintaining one's autonomy or actively mobilizing social networks. In

⁴⁸ Ewick P., Silbey S. Narrating social structure: Stories of resistance to legal authority. *American Journal of Sociology*. 2003. Vol. 108. No 6. P. 1328-1372.

interviews it is difficult to single out the arguments for “*punishing*” the seller using illegal methods or solving the problem of “*overpriced products*” using network resources. At the same time, there are often examples of micro-tactics to defend one's rights and find loopholes through economy and thrift.

5. Variation in the perception of savings and thrift⁴⁹. Based on these interviews, we were able to understand that savings are not a one-dimensional category, involving only a mechanical reduction in consumption and the redistribution of expenditures funds. Savings are described through other practices of “*disposing money correctly*”, “*save a fortune*”, “*earn*”, “*make a profit*”, “*spend differently*”. Saving - micro-tactics of confrontation, allowing consumer to come to terms with not the most advantageous position in the market, but at the same time win back at least a little in your favor. The “*don't go broke*” category describes the form of proactivity of financially vulnerable informants. In this situation, the consumer thinks of himself as a weak side in relation to the seller and seeks to somehow resist “*deception*” and minimize damage. For wealthier informants, the maxim “*don't overpay*” becomes the moral imperative of consumer behavior. “*Don't overpay*” is another mode of proactivity - an internal locus of control, composure and readiness, instead of reactivity.

Based on the interview data, we can distinguish three analytic types describing the perception of economy: economy as survival, economy as a game, and economy as calculation. Economy as survival is derived from the narratives of financially vulnerable groups or people who have experienced poverty. In this case, economy is thought of as a way of self-defense: to prevent the market system from winning over itself. In routine trips to the store there is a consistency, thoughtfulness: even everyday goods are “*procured*”. Self-discipline and prudence allow consumer to lead a familiar way of life, or at least maintain the illusion of it.

If economy as survival made it possible to reconcile and regain dignity, then economy as a game is thought of in terms of a “*challenge to the system*”. Winning a system is thought of as personal triumph and advantage, and in some cases as retribution. Saving as a calculation is based on the imperative of self-control and is expressed in the technology of effective self-management through calculation - calculating options, comparing prices and other numerical manipulations. This new ethic of thrift is consonant with the political projects of neoliberal subjectivity, which

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presupposes effective self-management⁵⁰. The neoliberal subject is charged with the duty of prudence: routine processing of information allows you to maintain its autonomy and minimize external risks⁵¹.

Conclusion

1. The position and role of the consumer evolved along with the institutional context: in Soviet times, in the official discourse, the consumer was the assistant to the state, then became an object of care and, finally, under market conditions, turned into a defensive consumer.
2. It was revealed that the power asymmetry between the seller and the consumer remains, despite the transition to a market economy. In the sphere of consumption, one can trace the routinization of inequities in the perception of the consumer. This is reflected in the recognition of their vulnerability to manipulation by the seller. The times of scarcity are gone, but the consumer still thinks of his position as a subordinate party. The ethics of vendor dependence persist, but in the current environment is expressed in the demand for transparency.
3. The starting point in consumer perception is the presumption of seller's guilt. Consumers believe that they are not in the most advantageous position compared to retailers. For less well-off informants, consumer vulnerability becomes a formula for subordination in market relations, relations with the seller are interpreted mainly in terms of conflict. However, increasing income does not relieve tension, although the nature of confrontation changes. In such situations, consumers describe the relationship with the seller in terms of rivalry: their task is to decode the seller's manipulations.
4. The state is assigned a protective function: it is responsible for the vulnerable consumer. In narratives, you can find a request for different formats of help: from educational work for the benefit of the consumer to a punishing and controlling function. The regulator can help to make an independent choice, or it can punish those responsible. But the state cannot distance itself: in the perception of the consumer, it bears direct responsibility for consumer rights and wellbeing.
5. State responsibility and the category of its guilt are closely related in consumer perception. Negative experience in relations with trade representatives translates into a critical

⁵⁰ Laval C. Homo Economicus. Genealogy of Neoliberalism. [Russ. ed.: Chelovek eko-nomicheskii. Esse o proiskhozhdenii neoliberalizma. Transl. from French by S.B. Ryndin. Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie publ., 2010. 432p.]

⁵¹ O'malley P. Uncertain subjects: risks, liberalism and contract. *Economy and society*. 2000. Vol. 29. No 4. P. 460-484

assessment of the efforts of the regulator in this field. At the same time, suspicion of government officials exists alongside with the demand for control. While state capabilities to defend consumer raises doubts, it certainly does not remove the function of establishing order - the consumer needs predictable elements within the market space.

6. We consider it plausible to assume that among informants with a vulnerable financial position who socialized during the Soviet era, we can meet a more radical request for state intervention – “*punishment of the guilty*”. Feeling most vulnerable to the market system, such informants were unhappy with the efforts of the state, but they desperately needed it. But the demand for the state appears even in interviews with those who did not socialize during the Soviet era. In this case request for the state is expressed in the expectation of inspections and control over market transparency.
7. Consumer proactivity is born in response to the expectation of deception: our informants make efforts to find the optimal and *fair* price. Economy and thrift are seen as an important and socially approved competences that allow consumer to regain control of the market. Economy as survival and the “*don't go broke*” principle can be traced back to financially vulnerable informants. Economy as a game and saving as a calculation with the principle of “*do not overpay*” appear in the narratives of financially privileged informants.
8. In theoretical terms, we conceptualize the category “*presumption of seller's guilt*” as consumer cynicism. The cynical mode of perception includes suspicion and frustration in situations of power imbalance. Cynicism reflects acceptance of one's “*defeat*” and recognition of the seller's advantage. At the same time, consumer cynicism acts as a defense mechanism: awareness of a vulnerable position provokes micro-tactics of individual resistance.
9. The consumer's awareness of his vulnerable position induces micro-tactics of individual resistance. The routine taming of market forces allows for the maintenance of relative autonomy in a subordinate environment. It is important to note that the actions of individual resistance do not develop into collective public forms of defending their rights.
10. In theoretical terms, the work shows the specificity of Russian consumer cynicism and practices of resistance. In contrast to the foreign experience of political confrontation with market instruments, in the Russian context consumers' efforts are directed rather towards self-defense by looking for ways not to be deceived.

Published articles submitted for PhD defense:

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Berdysheva E., Romanova R. Rethinking prices during an economic crisis: Calculation as a new mode of consumer behaviour in Russia. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*. 2017. Vol. 41. No. 4. P. 397-403.

Resheteeva R. State and consumers: responsibility distribution in consumer perception. *Vestnik obshchestvennogo mneniya. Dannye. Analiz. Diskussii* [Bulletin of Public Opinion. Data. Analysis. Discussion]. 2019. Vol. 1-2. No 128. P. 161-170. (In Russian)

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