SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Consumer Society and Social Development: Modeling Statistical Relationships

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Abstract. The article attempts to empirically assess the links between the consumerization process and various indicators of social development. We consider these indicators, as well as the process of consumerization itself, at the macrosocial level, as characteristics of societies. The latter are equated with nation-states, whose sovereignty turns each of them into a kind of long-term social experiment. Based on such "experiments", we attempted to determine how the degree of expansion of the consumer society in the same countries is related to the indicators of social development. To achieve this goal, we analyze ways to measure the consumerization of societies and their social development, and then conduct a correlation analysis of the available data. It allows testing two competing hypotheses: the negative or positive impact of the consumer society on aspects such as freedom, education, equality, security and happiness. This analysis of statistical relationships suggests that a higher level of consumerization is associated with a

higher level of social development, at least on some indicators, such as the level of freedom, gender equality, and subjective well-being. The correlation with these indicators persists even after adjusting for per capita GDP. The presence of statistically significant stable links with social development and the absence of any links with social degradation allows drawing a preliminary conclusion about the refutation of the basic hypothesis of the consumerism criticism and the confirmation of its proponents' correctness. However, our analysis confirms the connection between consumer society and social development, based on data in a sense formatted by consumer society itself. Therefore, for the final verification of competing hypotheses, it is necessary to develop new, critically oriented quantitative indicators of social development.

Key words: consumerization, consumer society, social development, correlation analysis, freedom, equality, safety, education, subjective well-being, "good society".

Introduction

The concept of "consumer society" became widespread in social sciences only since the middle of the 20th century (Sassatelli, 2007, pp. 2–3), with the preparation to its sociological comprehension and the main work on the interpretation of "consumption" phenomenon taking place in the neo-Marxist environment, within the framework of "critical theory" development and, above all, criticism of capitalism ways that seemed deadlocked then (Kellner, 1983). Negative assessments of various manifestations of consumerization were made by H. Marcuse (Marcuse, 1994), E. Fromm (Fromm, 1990), M. Horkheimer and T. Adorno (Horkheimer, Adorno, 1997) and other representatives of the Frankfurt School, whose rhetoric was later taken up by left-wing postmodernists, such as Jameson (Jameson, 2000) and J. Baudrillard (Baudrillard, 2006). The basic hypothesis underlying the critique of the consumer society is that it substitutes false values for true values by means of promotional methods, closing the door to meaningful social development (Gilbert et al., 2021). Due to the great influence of critical theory and postmodernism on the social sciences, the term "consumer society" itself has acquired strong negative connotations and has almost become a pejorative, today most often read as "a society of rampant consumerism" or "a society in which

consumption is paramount". Russian sociologists (Il'in, 2005; Kozlovskii, 2011; Ovsyannikov, 2011) also largely adhere to this approach. For Russia, the justice of the critical approach is reinforced by the coincidence in time of the expansion of the ideology of consumerism and social degradation of the state in the 1980s–1990s. The collision between the consumerization of society and the growth of scarcity in the late Soviet Union is still poorly understood (Zubkova, 2020), but there is no doubt that it predetermines the traumatic perception of consumer culture throughout the post-Soviet space, including Russia (Yakovenko, 2021).

However, as is usually the case, there is also an opposing theoretical tradition in the history of social thought. Less popular, it nevertheless offers its own holistic interpretation of consumer society not as a dead end, but as a natural stage of economic and social development, associated with a saturation of basic material and cultural needs that exists for the first time in history (Katona, 1964). With its costs, such a society can obviously still be preferable to the societies of mass poverty that have existed in the past. And this preference is not limited only to relative satiety, health and amenities. Many theoretical models, such as A. Maslow's hierarchy of motivation (Maslow, 1999) or Rostow's stages of economic

development (Rostow, 1973), predict that meeting basic needs opens up new opportunities for cultural and personal growth, as well as political participation (Chessel, Dubuisson-Quellier, 2018). Consequently, a consumer society that surpasses previous stages of development in the provision of goods and services can actually be a bridge to the next – the cultural stage of social development. In any case, in historical retrospect, the formation of modern consumer culture appears to be closely tied to the ideas of the Enlightenment (Kwass, 2022).

At first glance, the contradictions between the two schools of thought on consumer society may seem intractable in principle, since they are based on different value approaches: in one case the dignity of man as a free and thinking being is prioritized, in the other – as deserving of comfortable and safe conditions of existence. But the search for a regulatory framework for evaluating societies, that is, attempts to develop models of a "good society", has long been, if not a priority, then at least a very respectable area of social research (Fedotova, 2005). Thus, the question of how "good" the consumer society is, whether it represents a step forward in social development, has every reason to be raised and is quite often raised. Unfortunately, in the literature, it is not addressed through systematic statistical comparisons, but mostly through the analysis of individual trends, such as the role of consumerism in sustainable development (Cohen, 2016), ecology (Smart, 2010), or quality of life (Nevarez, 2011). This analysis often borders on journalism in the prevalence of impressionistic, subjective judgments of the author. The reason for this is the lack of strict definitions of consumer society (Lofgren, 1994, p. 50; Fine, 2002, p. 155) and, as a consequence, the lack of operationalization of this concept itself, the lack of its translation into the language of quantitative indicators.

The article attempts to assess empirically the connections between the process of consumerization and various indicators of social development. This assessment is of theoretical interest because it allows making arguments in favor of one of the two models of consumer society discussed above. The practical interest, however, is that a reasoned choice between criticism and support for the expansion of consumerism can assist in rational planning for social development. In our research the indicators measuring it, as well as the process of consumerization itself, are considered at the macrosocial level, as characteristics of societies. In the modern world, societies can be equated somewhat conventionally, but not unreasonably, with nation-states, since the sovereignty of the latter makes each of them a kind of prolonged natural social experiment. Based on the material of such "experiments", we will try to determine whether the degree of development in those same countries correlates with indicators of social development, expressed to a different degree in different countries, with the degree of development of the consumer society. To achieve this goal, we will first discuss how to measure all of the parameters to be compared, and then conduct a correlation analysis of the available data. Thus, the subject of the study undertaken is certain correlations between the statistical data available to researchers, namely the question of which of the models of the consumer society these correlations correspond better.

Measuring the degree of consumerization

The common denominator of the numerous definitions of "consumer society" found in the literature is the primary role of certain social practices, which, for example, Z. Bauman aptly summarized as follows: "The way in which today's society "shapes" its members is dictated first and foremost by the obligation to play the role of the

consumer. The norm our society instills in its members is the ability and desire to play this role" (Bauman, 2004, p. 116). But if consumption becomes the basis for social identity, and inequality in it becomes the basis for social structure, then the process of this transformation cannot be one-sided; it must affect both individual behavior and the macrosystemic characteristics of societies, that is, the solvent demand (Goodwin et al., 2018) and the supply of goods, above all symbolically expressed (Campbell, 2021). Then some indicator of the consumerization of societies can be constructed as a combination of the average per capita consumer spending (reflecting individual demand, because purchasing decisions are always made by specific people) and the average per capita number of registered trademarks (reflecting the macro-social intensity of supply). Previous studies have shown empirically that the natural logarithm of the product of these two variables has a fairly high validity as an index of consumerization, namely, it acquires high values in the group of countries with a deliberately developed consumer society and low values in the group of countries with a deliberately undeveloped one, and also, in full accordance with theoretical predictions, positively and strongly correlates with the level of information society development, economic and cultural globalization (Babich, Batykov, 2022a) and secularization (Babich, Batykov, 2022b). Thus, we will use the index calculated according to the formula $IC = \ln(T \times S)$, where T is the number of active registered trademarks per capita, S is consumer spending per capita, IC is the consumerization index. The number of active trademarks in national states is known from the statistics of the World Intellectual Property Organization[1], and the population and average per capita consumer spending can be obtained from the World Bank database[2]. The most complete and up-to-date data on both indicators are available for 2017, so we will set the level of consumerization of societies at this point in time.

Since the formation of the consumer society is closely connected with economic development in general, we can suggest that it is the latter — expressed, for example, in the average per capita level of GDP — that is the real factor influencing the quality of social systems. For example, in economically developed countries, the quality of education may be higher not as a result of the expansion of mass consumption, but because the state can afford the higher costs of educational institutions. Then the observed correlations between the development of the consumer society and the characteristics of a "good" society would be false. To rule out this possibility, we will consider all correlations not only by themselves, but also adjusted for average per capita GDP (this indicator is also available in the World Bank database).

Measuring characteristics of a "good society"

In interpreting social development, we will not be bound by theoretical discussions of consumerism and propose to consider a "good" society as a free, enlightened society that ensures the equality, security and happiness of its constituent people. Such an interpretation has no firm theoretical foundation and takes a position close to "common sense" or, one might even say, "everyday reasoning". In this case, however, the distinction between "first- and second-order constructs" (Schütz, 2003) is not so much ignored as the direct genetic connection between them is recognized. In other words, we accept the fact that in the eyes of any researcher a "good" society is that in which they themselves would like to live, and therefore the comparison criteria used should represent a reflexive subjectivity.

[1] WIPO IP Statistics Data Center. Available at: https://www3.wipo.int/ipstats/index.htm (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[2] DataBank. Available at: https://databank.worldbank.org (accessed: May 4, 2022).

Thus, we will assess social development as a movement toward a freer, more enlightened society that ensures the equality, security and happiness of its constituent people. All indicators that represent these characteristics must also be measured at the level of nation-states. Modern cross-country studies and international statistics provide us with a sufficiently rich arsenal of indicators to cover all selected areas of social development. Let us consider them in order.

We will assess the level of freedom in different countries of the world on the basis of Freedom House's "Freedom in the World" rankings[3]. It is a consensus of expert assessments based on regional studies, current news, government and nongovernmental organization reports, etc. Aspects of freedom analyzed include the electoral process, political pluralism and participation, the functioning of government, freedom of speech, the right to assemble and organize, the rule of law, personal autonomy, and individual rights. As an expert assessment, the Freedom House's freedom ranking can undoubtedly undergo subjective distortions arising both from political events and from the way information is perceived. However, it is not only the best-known indicator of its kind, but also the one most actively used in research. Therefore, while we should not overestimate the accuracy of countries' positions in the ranking, individual possible distortions do not devalue it as an indicator of freedom as a correlate of consumerization.

The most natural indicator of the level of enlightenment in a society is the extent to which education is widespread in it. But the heterogeneity of educational systems and, more importantly, the difference in their quality, make any comparative analysis very difficult. And if the first circumstance can still be overcome, for example, by bringing the indicators of education to a single quantitative measure, such as the years spent on education, the second becomes a much more significant obstacle. It is clear that one year of education received by a person in Switzerland is not at all equivalent to the same year of education received in Afghanistan. In order to somehow eliminate these inconsistencies in cross-country comparisons, it is desirable to use an assessment of the overall quality of the education system, given by a single numerical scale. Such an assessment can be found in the World Economic Forum's Global Competitiveness Reports[4]. It is based on the results of a survey of 14,375 business leaders in 148 countries conducted from February to June 2017. All leaders answered the question, "How well does your country's educational system meet the needs of a competitive economy?" on a scale from 1 (not at all consistent) to 7 (fully consistent). Although this question has an economic rather than an educational focus, it cannot be overlooked that the most important pragmatic purpose of the education system is to meet the demand for a skilled workforce, so the opinion of employers can serve as a good indicator of the quality of education in general.

The next aspect of social development that interests us is the reduction of inequality. It can go in different directions, of which two seem to be universal and the most important: economic and gender. There are divisions between rich and poor and between men and women in all modern societies, and it is these divisions that affect most people in every country in one way or another. We will analyze economic inequality using an indicator proposed for this purpose by the United Nations Development Programme[5]. It is the ratio of the

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[3] Freedom in the World. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[4] Reports – World Economic Forum. Available at: https://reports.weforum.org (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[5] United Nations Development Programme Human Development Reports. Income inequality, quintile ratio. Available at: https://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/135106 (accessed: May 4, 2022).

income of the richest 20% of each country to the income of the poorest 20%. The Gender Inequality Index, used by the same Development Programme[6], takes into account differences in the status of men and women in terms of reproductive health, rights, and labor market.

By security of living in society we will understand first of all domestic, everyday security, the most obvious threat of which is usually criminal violence. We used the number of murders per 100,000 people as an indicator of security. It is most suitable for analysis for two reasons. First, it is probably the most reliable statistical indicator of crime, since murder is the hardest of all ordinary crimes to conceal or fabricate, hence there is the least chance for murder statistics to be understated or overstated. Second, it is the crime that directly and most strongly affects security. The homicide rate statistics were obtained from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime database[7].

Finally, the last aspect of social development under consideration — happiness — is among the most difficult to define. We propose to consider it in two dimensions: attitudes and behavior. In the behavioral dimension, the level of happiness can be judged on the contrary, considering the suicide rate given by the World Health Organization as an inverse indicator[8]. Of course, this indicator, like any other, is not ideal, because it can be influenced by cultural features (for example, attitudes toward

suicide differ significantly in different religious traditions). Nevertheless, suicide seems to be not only a fairly obvious consequence of an unhappy life, but also an action that requires the utmost effort on the part of the actor, and if it is committed, it is evidence of a very strong motivation. It is, so to speak, a behavioral indicator par excellence. In terms of measuring attitudes, self-reports from residents of different countries are important to us. One of the most extensive collections of such self-reports can be obtained from the International Happiness Index database[9]. It represents country-averaged self-assessments of life satisfaction on a "ladder" scale, with the worst possible life on the bottom rung and the best possible life on the top rung. These self-assessments were collected in the Gallup World Poll.

Data analysis

The indicators discussed in the previous two sections are summarized in *Table 1*, which allows calculating the relationships we need. It presents 59 states, for which data are available for each series — the consumerization index, GDP per capita, level of freedom, quality of education, income inequality, gender inequality, homicide rate, suicide rate, and subjective well-being. All figures are as of 2017. Certainly, the sample of countries is not complete, but it is limited by the availability of relevant information. That is, this sample represents one of the best possible slices of the processes under study today. In addition, 59 observations are sufficient to obtain statistically significant correlation coefficients. Their magnitude (modulo) can be meaningfully interpreted as follows: less than 0.1 — insignificant relationship, in the range from 0.1 to 0.3 — weak, from 0.3 to 0.5 — medium, and over 0.5 — strong relationship (Cohen, 1988, pp. 79–80).

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[6] United Nations Development Programme Human Development Reports. Gender Inequality Index (GII). Available at: https://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/68606 (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[7] United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Victims of intentional homicide, 1990–2018. Available at: https://dataunodc.un.org/content/data/homicide/homicide-rate (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[8] World Health Organization. Global Health Observatory data repository. Suicide rate estimates, age-standardized. Estimates by country. Available at: https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.MHSUICIDEASDR (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[9] Happy Planet Index. Available at: https://happyplanetindex.org/countries/ (accessed: May 4, 2022).

Table 1. Comparison of indicators of social development and consumerization

Country	Consu-meriza-tion index[1]	GDP per capita (in constant dollars, 2010)[2]	Level of freedom (Freedom House scale)[3]	Quality of education (on a scale of 1 to 7)[4]	Income inequality (ratio of income of the top 20% of the population to the bottom 20%)[5]	Gender Inequality (Gender Inequality Index)[6]	Homicide rate (per 100,000 population)[7]	Suicide rate (per 100 thousand people)[8]	Subjective well-being (on a scale of 0 to 10)[9]
Australia	6.7	56 095.19	98	5.2	6.3	0.1	0.79	11.8	7.26
Austria	5.67	49 112.73	95	4.5	4.9	0.08	0.79	10.8	7.29
Argentina	4.92	10 404.26	82	3.3	8.8	0.33	5.21	8.7	6.04
Bangladesh	-1.83	1 127.27	47	3.5	4.8	0.54	2.22	3.7	4.31
Belarus	4.05	6 375.29	20	4.7	3.6	0.13	2.54	18.5	5.55
Bulgaria	3.68	8 350.66	80	3.3	7.3	0.21	1.45	6.7	5.1
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.11	5 772.85	55	2.5	5.4	0.16	1.25	8.1	5.09
Brazil	3.55	11 021.72	79	2.6	18.1	0.43	30.83	6.2	6.33
United Kingdom	5.62	43 010.71	95	4.8	5.4	0.13	1.2	7.2	7.1
Hungary	3.82	15 809.77	76	2.9	4.9	0.24	2.49	12.6	6.07
Ghana	0.94	1 739.47	83	3.9	10.3	0.54	2.09	11.3	5.48
Guatemala	3.36	3 286.74	54	2.6	11.9	0.51	26.07	6	6.33
Germany	5.65	46 916.82	95	5.3	5.1	0.08	0.98	8.3	7.07
Denmark	6.04	62 733.02	97	5.1	4	0.04	1.24	8.3	7.59
Dominican Republic	4.16	7 273.35	68	2.7	10.5	0.46	11.57	6	5.61
Israel	5.7	34 243.01	80	4.7	8.5	0.11	1.49	5	7.33
India	0.29	1 986.63	77	4.5	5.5	0.53	3.12	12.5	4.05
Ireland	6	71 755.97	96	5.5	5	0.11	0.86	9.3	7.06
Iceland	8.47	51 045.94	97	5.3	4	0.07	0.9	11.7	7.48
Spain	5.71	32 282.9	94	3.8	7.3	0.08	0.66	5.8	6.23
Italy	5.1	35 086.48	89	3.8	7	0.08	0.61	4.8	6.2
Kazakhstan	2.52	10 867.74	22	3.7	3.8	0.19	5.06	21.2	5.88
Canada	6.15	51 170.48	99	5.2	6.2	0.1	1.8	11.7	7.41
Cyprus	6.77	30 650.24	94	4.1	5.3	0.09	0.59	3.3	6.06
China	3.45	7 346.61	15	4.3	7.1	0.17	0.56	6.9	5.1
Colombia	3.46	7 622.28	64	3.3	13.4	0.43	25.02	4.5	6.16
Costa Rica	5.58	9 775.85	91	4.6	12.3	0.31	12.18	5.8	7.23
Kyrgyzstan	0.42	1 072.49	37	3.1	3.8	0.38	4.14	9.2	5.63
Latvia	4.82	15 429.7	87	3.8	5.8	0.21	4.15	17.1	5.98
Lithuania	4.96	16 855.42	91	4	7.2	0.13	4.53	23.5	6.27
Mauritius	4.76	10 199.48	89	4.2	5.9	0.39	2.61	9.6	6.17
Malta	6.42	27 750.68	96	4.8	4.5	0.19	2.06	4.8	6.68
Morocco	1.82	3 305.42	41	2.8	7	0.46	2.14	7.3	5.31
Mexico	4.05	10 301.36	65	3	8.8	0.34	25.71	5.9	6.41
Mongolia	2.27	3 997.49	85	3	5.1	0.32	6.13	19.1	5.33

End of Table 1

Country	Consu-meriza-tion index[1]	GDP per capita (in constant dollars, 2010)[2]	Level of freedom (Freedom House scale)[3]	Quality of education (on a scale of 1 to 7)[4]	Income inequality (ratio of income of the top 20% of the population to the bottom 20%)[5]	Gender Inequality (Gender Inequality Index)[6]	Homicide rate (per 100,000 population)[7]	Suicide rate (per 100 thousand people)[8]	Subjective well-being (on a scale of 0 to 10)[9]
Norway	7.42	91 549.04	100	5.4	4.1	0.05	0.53	10.4	7.58
Pakistan	-0.45	1 155.36	43	3.7	4.8	0.54	3.96	10	5.83
Panama	5.29	11 530.07	83	3.4	15.9	0.42	9.67	3.2	6.57
Peru	3.73	6 314.29	72	2.6	10.3	0.41	7.91	2.7	5.71
Poland	4.05	15 845.25	89	3.6	4.6	0.13	0.76	11.1	6.2
Portugal	5.73	23 380.69	97	4.3	6.4	0.09	0.74	7.9	5.71
Russian Federation	3.19	11 550.53	20	3.7	6.6	0.24	9.13	24.4	5.58
El Salvador	3.69	3 441.36	70	2.3	7	0.38	61.71	6.2	6.34
Serbia	2.93	6 560.32	76	3.2	4.2	0.15	1.06	0.3	5.12
Slovakia	4.52	19 829.82	89	2.9	4.1	0.19	1.47	9.6	6.37
USA	5.52	53 382.76	89	5.1	9.4	0.23	5.32	14.4	6.99
Thailand	2.91	6 135.47	32	3.7	6	0.43	2.58	7.5	5.94
Turkey	4.65	14 874.78	38	3.2	8.5	0.33	3.09	2.3	5.61
Ukraine	2.19	2 988.5	61	4	3.5	0.27	6.18	16.9	4.31
Uruguay	5.57	14 437.38	98	3	7.8	0.29	8.26	18.5	6.34
Finland	6.15	48 086.67	100	5.7	3.9	0.06	1.25	14.4	7.79
France	5.68	43 015.21	90	4.5	5.2	0.06	1.27	10.4	6.64
Croatia	4.1	15 350.44	87	3.1	5.3	0.13	1.1	10.9	5.34
Czech Republic	4.85	22 754.75	94	3.9	3.7	0.13	0.62	11.2	6.79
Switzerland	7.06	77 684.05	96	6.2	5.2	0.04	0.53	10.4	7.47
Sweden	5.84	57 467.25	100	4.7	4.6	0.04	1.14	12.5	7.29
Estonia	6.05	19 109.31	94	4.6	5.4	0.12	2.2	15.2	5.94
South Africa	3.33	7 476.39	78	2.3	28.4	0.41	35.7	25.8	4.51
Japan	5.99	48 510.61	96	4.4	5.4	0.1	0.24	13.5	5.91

[1] Source: compiled according to WIPO IP Statistics Data Center. Available at: https://www3.wipo.int/ipstats/index.htm (accessed: May 4, 2022); DataBank. Available at: https://databank.worldbank.org (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[2] Source: DataBank. Available at: https://databank.worldbank.org (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[3] Source: Freedom in the World. Available at: https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[4] Source: Reports – World Economic Forum. Available at: https://reports.weforum.org (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[5] Source: United Nations Development Programme Human Development Reports. Income inequality, quintile ratio. Available at: https://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/135106 (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[6] Source: United Nations Development Programme Human Development Reports. Gender Inequality Index (GII). Available at: https://hdr.undp.org/en/indicators/68606 (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[7] Source: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Victims of intentional homicide, 1990–2018. Available at: https://dataunodc.un.org/content/data/homicide/homicide-rate (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[8] Source: World Health Organization. Global Health Observatory data repository. Suicide rate estimates, age-standardized Estimates by country. Available at: https://apps.who.int/gho/data/node.main.MHSUICIDEASDR (accessed: May 4, 2022).

[9] Source: Happy Planet Index. Available at: https://happyplanetindex.org/countries/ (accessed: May 4, 2022).

Since almost all scales have a metric or pseudometric (representing the average of rating scores) level of measurement, it is logical to choose the well-known Pearson correlation coefficient, which allows revealing linear relationships between variables, as the main tool for discovering the relationships of interest to us. In addition, it is easy to calculate a partial correlation for the Pearson coefficient, which allows testing the hypothesis about the falsity of the statistical relationship between consumerization and social development. *Table 2* shows the results of the Pearson correlation coefficient calculations between the variables of interest.

The data in Table 2 show that the consumerization index is quite expectedly strongly correlated with the level of GDP. However, the structure of the links of GDP and consumerization with indicators of social development is significantly different. The first indicator shows significant correlations with the level of freedom, quality of education, gender inequality, and subjective well-being, while the second correlates significantly

with all indicators of social development, except the suicide rate.

Obviously, correlation analysis does not allow establishing the direction of the relationship: it remains unknown whether better education leads to increased consumption or, on the contrary, the quality of education increases with the development of consumption. Nevertheless, it is clear that the expansion of consumer society can still be associated with positive social development rather than degradation. Societies with higher levels of consumerization have, on average, higher levels of freedom, quality of education and subjective well-being, and less gender inequality. However, the question remains: aren't these correlations simply due to the great wealth of the respective societies? To answer this question, let us consider the partial correlation coefficients *(Tab. 3, 4)*.

Table 3 shows that consumerization is not really related to the quality of education, but countries with a more developed consumer society have, on average, higher levels of freedom and subjective well-being and lower levels of gender

Table 2. Matching Pearson correlation coefficients

	Consum-erization index	GDP per capita	Freedom level	Quality of education	Income inequality	Gender inequality	Homicide rate	Suicide rate	Subjective well-being
Consumerization index	1.00	0.74**	0.65**	0.56**	-0.08	-0.74**	-0.18	-0.02	0.76**
GDP per capita	0.74**	1.00	0.59**	0.78**	-0.27*	-0.72**	-0.34**	0.02	0.76**
Freedom level	0.65**	0.59**	1.00	0.41**	-0.02	-0.47**	-0.15	-0.04	0.55**
Quality of education	0.56**	0.78**	0.41**	1.00	-0.42**	-0.61**	-0.51**	0.10	0.61**
Income inequality	-0.08	-0.27*	-0.02	-0.42**	1.00	0.47**	0.59**	0.01	-0.16
Gender inequality	-0.74**	-0.72**	-0.47**	-0.61**	0.47**	1.00	0.46**	-0.14	-0.54**
Homicide rate	-0.18	-0.34**	-0.15	-0.51**	0.59**	0.46**	1.00	0.00	-0.10
Suicide rate	-0.02	0.02	-0.04	0.10	0.01	-0.14	0.00	1.00	-0.10
Subjective well-being	0.76**	0.76**	0.55**	0.61**	-0.16	-0.54**	-0.10	-0.10	1.00

Note: Hereinafter, two asterisks denote values significant at the 0.01 level, one asterisk denotes values significant at the 0.05 level, other values are statistically insignificant.
Source: own compilation.

Table 3. Partial Pearson correlation coefficients when GDP per capita is excluded

	Consumeri- zation index	Freedom level	Quality of education	Income inequality	Gender inequality	Homicide rate	Suicide rate	Subjective well-being
Consumerization index	1.00	0.39**	-0.05	0.19	-0.45**	0.12	-0.05	0.44**
Freedom level	0.39**	1.00	-0.11	0.18	-0.07	0.07	-0.07	0.18
Quality of education	-0.05	-0.11	1.00	-0.34**	-0.11	-0.42**	0.14	0.03
Income inequality	0.19	0.18	-0.34**	1.00	0.40**	0.55**	0.02	0.08
Gender inequality	-0.45**	-0.07	-0.11	0.40**	1.00	0.34*	-0.18	0.02
Homicide rate	0.12	0.07	-0.42**	0.55**	0.34*	1.00	0.00	0.26*
Suicide rate	-0.05	-0.07	0.14	0.02	-0.18	0.00	1.00	-0.18
Subjective well-being	0.44**	0.18	0.03	0.08	0.02	0.26*	-0.18	1.00
Source: own compilation.								

Table 4. Partial Pearson correlation coefficients when the influence of the level of consumerization is excluded

	GDP per capita	Freedom level	Quality of education	Income inequality	Gender inequality	Homicide rate	Suicide rate	Subjective well-being
GDP per capita	1.00	0.22	0.66**	-0.32*	-0.38**	-0.32*	0.05	0.46**
Freedom level	0.22	1.00	0.07	0.04	0.03	-0.05	-0.04	0.11
Quality of education	0.66**	0.07	1.00	-0.45**	-0.36**	-0.50**	0.14	0.34**
Income inequality	-0.32*	0.04	-.45**	1.00	0.61**	0.59**	0.01	-0.15
Gender inequality	-0.38**	0.03	-.36**	0.61**	1.00	0.51**	-0.23	0.05
Homicide rate	-0.32*	-0.05	-0.50**	0.59**	0.51**	1.00	-0.01	0.05
Suicide rate	0.05	-0.04	0.14	0.01	-0.23	-0.01	1.00	-0.13
Subjective well-being	0.46**	0.11	0.34**	-0.15	0.05	0.05	-0.13	1.00
Source: own compilation.								

inequality, even when adjusted for average per capita GDP. This last variable turns out to be generally more significant for the selected social development indicators, as it demonstrates correlations not only with subjective well-being and gender inequality, but also with quality of education and homicide rates (see Tab. 4). On the other hand, the connection of GDP with such an important indicator as the level of freedom disappears if we adjust for the degree of consumerization.

As we can see, the development of the consumer society can indeed be associated with positive social change, but change of a special nature, connected more with culture than with material wealth. Levels of freedom, gender inequality, and subjective well-being can be classified as "ideological", "superstructural" aspects of social systems, while income inequality, murder rates, and quality of education (variables related to GDP but not to consumerization) are more like "basic" aspects.

Table 5. Profile of Russia relative to the average for the sample of countries

	Con-sume-rization index	GDP per capita (in constant 2010 dollars)	Level of freedom (Freedom House scale)	Quality of education (on a scale of 1 to 7)	Income inequal-ity (ratio of income of the top 20% of the population to the bottom 20%)	Gender inequality (Gender Inequality Index)	Homicide rate (per 100 thousand people)	Suicide rate (per 100 thousand people)	Subjective well-being (on a scale of 0 to 10)
Russian Federation	3.19	11 550.53	20	3.7	6.6	0.24	9.13	24.4	5.58
Average for a sample of countries	5.99	48 510.61	96	4.4	5.4	0.1	0.24	13.5	5.91
Source: data from Table 1, own compilation.									

The connection between consumerization and social development can also be illustrated by private examples. Thus, if we consider the profile of the Russian Federation in comparison with the average values for the sample of states analyzed *(Tab. 5)*, we see that our country is characterized by significantly less development of the consumer society and at the same time by a significantly worse situation with the level of GDP per capita, freedom, quality of education, inequality, violence, and suicide rates. Let us note that the comparison is made not with the world values, but only with 59 national states, which were included in the analysis, so the presented statistics cannot be considered pessimistic for Russia. But it clearly demonstrates the need to improve the indicators of social development of Russian society. And it would seem that the correlations revealed directly indicate the possibility of such improvement through consumption. In any case, prominent Russian economists consider consumer demand as an important factor, if not the basis, influencing economic growth (Aganbegyan, 2019; Grigor'ev et al., 2019; Ivanter, 2019). However, for example, Z. Bauman points out that increased consumption combined with inequality can be destructive to the social fabric (Bauman, Donskis, 2016, p. 43), and inequality in Russia turns out to

be relatively high. In addition, consumer society trends themselves may be subject to historical change, and new economic relations over time may simply supplant consumerism as a driver of development (Castells, Hlebik, 2017, p. 180). All of this demonstrates the need to be extremely cautious in drawing practical implications from the models of statistical relationships between developmental indicators that we have examined.

Conclusion

The analysis of the statistical relationships that can be established between the development of the consumer society and social development suggests that higher levels of consumerization are associated with higher levels of social development, at least on some indicators, such as levels of freedom, gender inequality, and subjective well-being. For none of the six social development indicators examined was there a link between the expansion of the consumer society and social degradation. Correlational analysis does not allow establishing the direction of causality, so we cannot say whether, for example, consumerization leads to greater freedom or greater freedom leads to consumerization. But the presence of statistically significant stable links with social development and the absence of any links with social degradation make it possible to draw a preliminary conclusion about the refutation of the

basic hypothesis of the criticism of consumerism and confirm the correctness of the proponents of the approach of gradual saturation of hierarchically organized needs. Moreover, the correlation of the development of the consumer society with cultural, ideological aspects such as freedom, gender equality and subjective well-being further confirms the validity of hierarchical models that predict the spiritual fulfillment of individuals and social communities after they have satisfied basic material needs.

Although the conclusions drawn are based on a fairly plausible statistical foundation, it is necessary to dwell separately on their preliminary nature. Of course, further research involves a more extensive chronological and methodological analysis, the inclusion of an extended period rather than a single year, and the identification of cause-and-effect relationships, not just correlational ones. However, this direction with a high probability will only confirm our conclusions on a more detailed material. The possibility of refuting them opens in another perspective – the perspective of rethinking and complete replacement of the indicators used. Indeed, our analysis has confirmed the connection between consumer society and social development, based on data in a sense formatted by consumer society itself. For where else but there live the experts who make up the Freedom House's freedom ranking, and where else but from consumerized mass communication do Gallup World Poll respondents draw their ideas of happiness. So it is possible that the positive correlations of consumer society with freedom and subjective well-being are simply programmed into the models of perception of both. In this case, the connection between consumerization and social development is not as straightforward as it appears at first sight, and the hypothesis of the substitution of values and the closure of social development by consumerism may still be true. But in order to test it, we need to develop new, critically oriented quantitative indicators of social development. It is this direction that seems to us most promising for further studies of consumer society.

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