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# The perception of apparel quality in the aspect of young women' buying behaviors. Part 2

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**Key words:** perceived quality, apparel, quality determinants, consumer preferences.

**Słowa kluczowe:** postrzeganie jakości, odzież, czynniki determinujące jakość, preferencje konsumenckie.

## 1. Introduction

Quality is abstract and multidimensional in nature. It can be defined as the degree of approaching the ideal state, or the degree to which it meets expectations or requirements. It is impossible to define quality itself, while it can be assessed in relation to particular purposes [1]. From commodity science point of view the product quality is most often perceived in two perspectives, namely the product quality and requirements posed on these features. The perception of apparel product quality by young female consumers through the prism of product properties and expectations of this consumer group is presented in Part I of this paper. It has been shown that consumers expect at first place quality products, i.e. products made from good materials and of durable usability. For a part of the

young consumers the brand is also an important qualitative differentiator, but not deciding of apparel product selection. When selecting a product young consumers are governed, besides quality, by such differentiators as price and size availability [2].

Perceived product quality is an important but not the only aspect deciding on purchasing a given product by consumers. Consumer buying preferences are shaped by various factors that can determine the selection of an apparel product among a wide variety of similar goods. Knowledge about these factors is a very important element of competition and an operating base for business entities. Consumer attitudes can be conditioned with their own experience and their environment. They reflect the three basic elements, namely cognitive component (conviction about product quality), emotional component (expressing consumer fancies, preferences and the strength of emotional approach to a product), readiness to undertake a specified action. The resultant of emotional approach is a degree of knowledge and conviction gained from previous experience and overheard opinions. Also the place where shopping takes place has an important effect on consumer behaviors and perceived quality of apparel products being offered [3].

Continuing out consideration on perceived quality and preferences of young women, in this part the attention was focused on understanding factors indirectly related to a product, yet being considered by consumers as determinants of product

quality. However, individual product quality assessment refers not only to physical characteristics of a product. Differentiators deciding on purchasing include also the value added by properly planned and consistent Visual Merchandising (VM).

The main purchase of VM on apparel market is to induce visual impression on consumers by invoking to emotions and positive connotations. As a result a consumer becomes interested about a current trade offer, pays attention to a specified product, and product value and attractiveness is emphasized that in practice is translated into a positive product quality assessment and sales increase [4]. One of components enabling these goals to be achieved is the use of colors exclusively characteristic of a given brand, thus helping its identification by customers, while attracting their attention. The primary goal of Visual Merchandising is to arrange store window displays and entrance zones appropriately to attract the general consumers and to prompt them to enter and see trade offers. Correctly selected elements of store window displays including: style, product lighting, additional requisites, price communication create a consistent message by enhancing consumer buying experience, arousing curiosity, strengthening brand awareness and generating positive opinions. Intimately arranged interiors of apparel stores combine a number of factors creating sensory inputs. Appropriately chosen colors and lighting allow an effective product exposition. By presenting a trade offer by specified stylizations using full-scale mannequins, music, smell, proper lighting of a product and decoration elements, appropriately selected interior colors are all factors considered in building brand strategy and winning consumer loyalty by apparel networks [5].

The aim of this paper is to establish a set of key factors affecting apparel buying preferences and to understand a relationship between perceived quality of an apparel product and other factors that can determine buying preferences for young consumers.

## **2. Materials and methods**

The assessment of factors deciding on the perception of apparel quality by consumers was made by an analysis of the data gathered from the survey researches carried out. Random sample selection revealed discrepancies in perceived quality among young women. The survey was carried out between October 2014 and December 2015. The first part consisted of distinctive questions, i.e. respondent's particulars and questions allowing respondents to be classified according to their skills and frequency of buying decision related to apparel products. The second part of the survey research contained questions aimed at understanding issues determining the purchase and perception of apparel quality by young consumers.

To achieve this goal the factors not directly related to a product in the context of building trade brand and winning consumer loyalty by apparel networks were analyzed. The survey research was carried out directly or with a questionnaire placed on a dedicated website. The obtained results were processed by using the Microsoft Excel and Statistica software package. The analysis of gathered data was based on such statistics as: standard deviation, means, correlation, and cluster analysis. These allowed interrelations between various quality differentiators taking into account when shopping were established.

## **3. Results and discussion**

The survey consisted of 198 women in four age groups: 15÷18, 19÷25, 26÷34, 35+. For further analysis the respondents were divided into the two main age groups, namely 15÷25 (young consumers) and 26+.

In the context of branding strategy and winning customer loyalty by apparel networks it is insufficient to know only factors directly related to a product and having an effect on its selection. It is also important to select determinants deciding on selection of a particular

apparel store. The results showing the importance of elements characteristic of sales space are presented in Table 1.

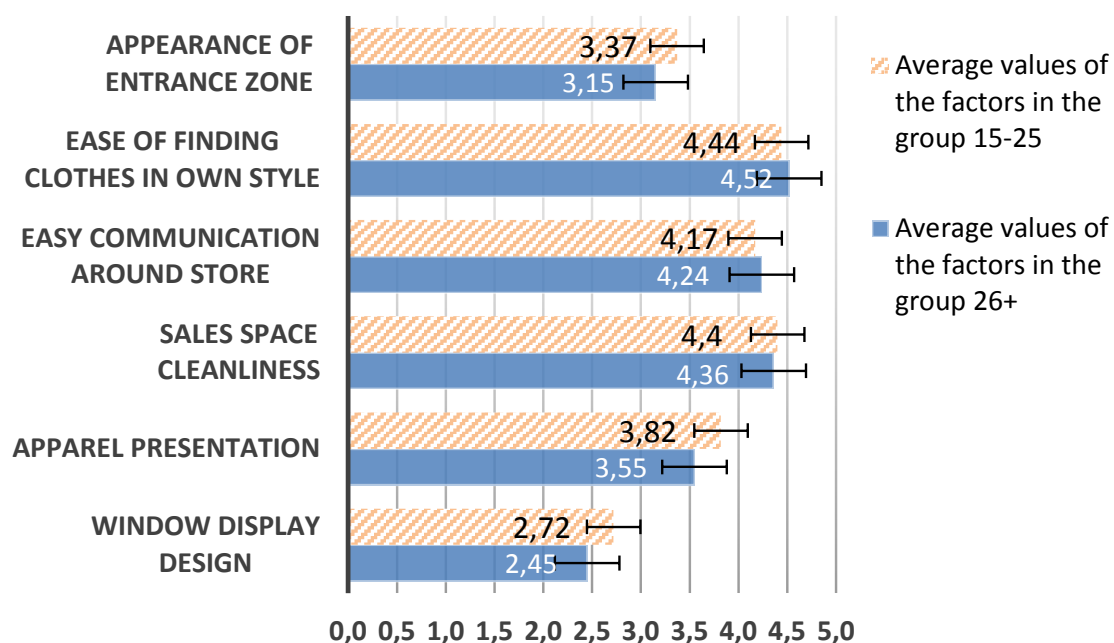
**Table 1. The importance of elements considered when choosing an apparel store where purchases are made, while taking into account the respondent percent share**

Tabela 1. Ważność czynników rozpatrywanych przy wyborze sklepu odzieżowego, w którym dokonywane są zakupy z uwzględnieniem procentu odpowiedzi respondentów

Factors affecting the apparel purchases	Average importance	0	1	2	3	4	5
		Percent of the answers					
window display design	2.59	1	24	22	28	18	7
apparel presentation	3.69	0	6	10	24	28	32
sales space cleanliness	4.37	0	1	6	9	24	60
easy communication around store	4.20	1	2	2	18	31	47
ease of finding clothes in own style	4.48	1	0	3	6	26	64
appearance of store entrance zone	3.28	1	9	17	26	30	17

Source: own research / Źródło: badania własne.

The synthesis of the collected data enabled establishing factors deciding on selection an apparel store where purchases are most often made. From consumer's point of view the most important are: ease finding clothing in own style ( $\bar{x} = 4.48$ ) that was assessed in a higher amount than store cleanliness ( $\bar{x} = 4.37$ ). Window display design that for trade networks reflect its own individuality and originality, in the light of present study, are not a significant factor for young consumers ( $\bar{x} = 2.59$ ). The vast majority of respondents, i.e. 75% of questioned place this factor at the significance level  $\leq 3$ . This factor is the most significant for 7% of respondents only, and important for 18%. Thus one may conclude that consumer attitudes differ from strategies adopted by trade networks, for which Visual Merchandising is of utmost importance as an element of consistent branding [4, 6].



**Fig. 1. Average values for factors taken into account when selecting an apparel store for two age categories, while considering error bars**

Source: own research.

Rys. 1. Średnie wartości czynników rozpatrywanych przy wyborze sklepu odzieżowego z uwzględnieniem słupków błędów w ujęciu dwóch kategorii wiekowych

Źródło: badania własne.

Consumers much more often perceive VM and related inspiring method of exposition by building ready sets of clothes, stylization ( $\bar{x} = 3.69$ ), while leaving a general impression of store window display design in the foreground. A trend visible in changing design of apparel stores towards simplicity and minimizing, leaving more space between shelves and furnishing [7] is a response to consumer needs related to ease moving inside the store ( $\bar{x} = 4.20$ ). This is supported by a sophisticated lighting that creates an inviting atmosphere, while a simple and modest decoration may suggest affordable prices [8].

An analysis of gathered data showed no statistically significant differences between opinions expressed in both age groups (Fig. 1). Respondents assess sales space similarly in the context of apparel store selection. According to the obtained results, average ranks for the factors under investigation were in the range of  $2.59 \div 4.48$  for the entire group. Average values for the 26+ age group were in the range of  $2.45 \div 4.52$ , while for the 15 ÷ 25 age category between  $2.72 \div 4.44$ .

Also the results of the Mann-Whitney U test presented in Table 2 show no differences among analyzed differentiators in two main age groups, and their distributions are close to each other. Based on the assumed  $\alpha = 0.05$  and the Mann-Whitney test statistic one can assume that there are no statistically significant differences between the perceived importance of factors deciding on the selection of an apparel store where purchases are made.

**Table 2. Significance of factors considered when choosing an apparel store where purchases are made broken down into age groups**

Tabela 2. Ważność czynników rozpatrywanych przy wyborze sklepu odzieżowego, w którym dokonywane są zakupy w podziale na grupy wiekowe

	$\bar{x}$ 26+	$\bar{x}$ 15-25	$\sigma$ 26+	$\sigma$ 15-25	p – MW
window display design	2.45	2.72	1.25	1.24	0.091
apparel presentation	3.55	3.82	1.27	1.11	0.159
sales space cleanliness	4.36	4.40	0.93	0.92	0.694
easy communication around store	4.24	4.17	0.97	0.93	0.497
ease of finding clothes in own style	4.52	4.44	0.81	0.92	0.803
appearance of entrance zone	3.15	3.37	1.28	1.19	0.173

Source: own research.

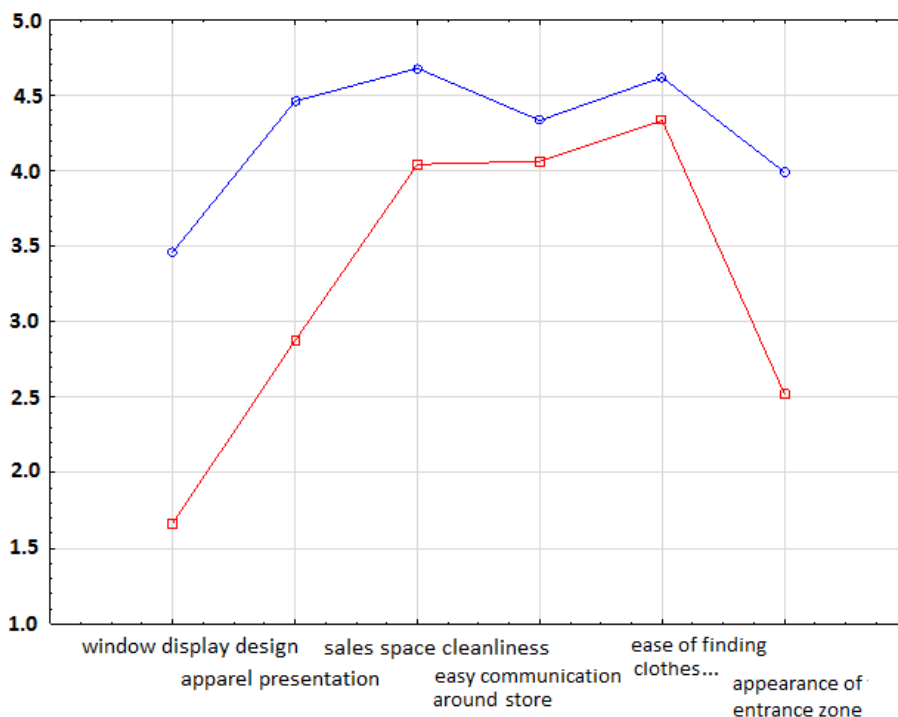
Źródło: badania własne.

The k-means cluster analysis used to identify homogeneity of respondents has indicated that in general the women participating in the survey form a homogenous group (Fig. 2).

An attempt to select two clusters brought information about similar average response profile in both groups. For two factors under investigation, namely easy communication around the store and ease of finding clothes in own style, a similar trend and a slight difference in average responses were observed. A similar trend is found also for such factors as apparel presentation, cleanliness and appearance of entrance zone, but in this case the differences in average responses in individual groups are significantly larger. Only for the VM area, i.e. window display design, apparel presentation and appearance of entrance zone one can assume that its dimension is slightly different in both groups.

Based on average values of ranks assigned to individual factors, including both those directly related to a product (analyzed in Part I of this paper), and not directly related to a product, and a way of its presentation in the context of trade branding and winning consumer loyalty by apparel network, the factors affecting the quality of apparel product perceived by young women were hierarchized. Average values of ranks assigned to individual factors were in the range of  $1.78 \div 4.48$ . The span of results allowed 3 categories of factors directly

affecting perceived quality of products and buying preferences of young female consumers to be identified, as shown in Figure 3.

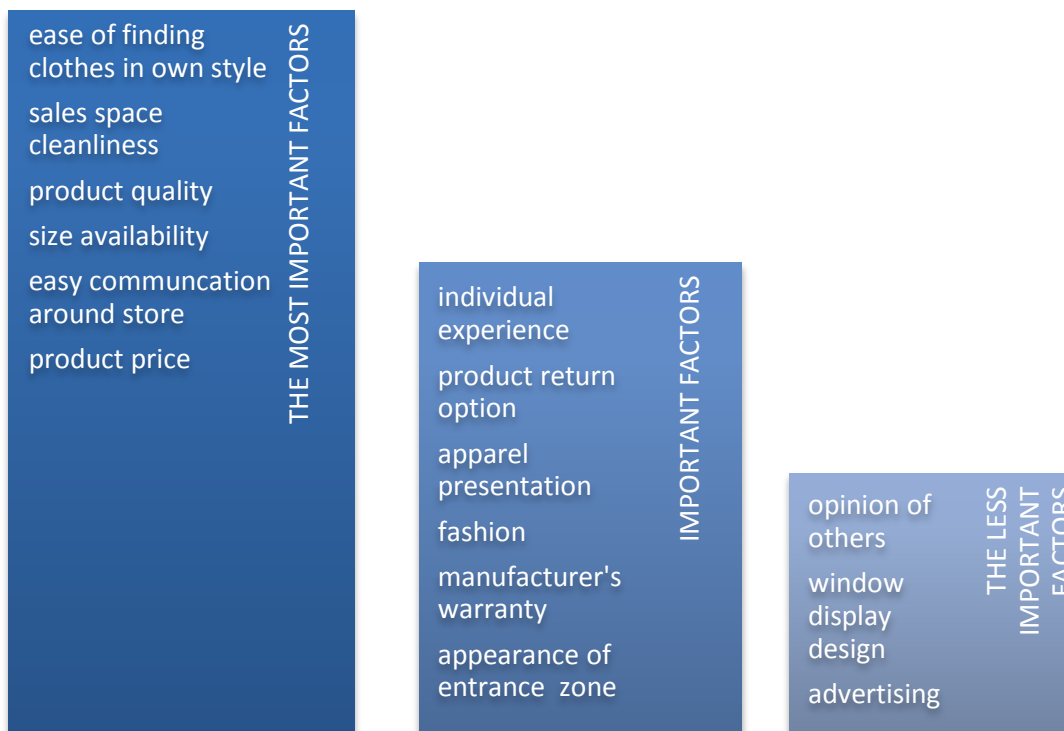


**Fig. 2. Homogeneity of respondents identified by cluster analysis with the k-means method**

Source: own research.

Rys. 2. Analiza jednorodności respondentów za pomocą analizy skupień metodą k-średnich

Źródło: badanie własne.



**Fig. 3. Hierarchical structure of factors affecting buying preferences of young women**

Source: own research.

Rys. 3. Hierarchia czynników wpływających na preferencje zakupowe młodych konsumentek

Źródło: badania własne.

The most important buying factors include those related to comfortable buying conditions, i.e. ease of finding clothes in own style ( $\bar{x} = 4.48$ ) and sales space cleanliness ( $\bar{x} = 4.37$ ). This category comprises also product quality ( $\bar{x} = 4.36$ ), availability of a specified size ( $\bar{x} = 4.32$ ), easy communication around the store ( $\bar{x} = 4.20$ ), and product price ( $\bar{x} = 4.17$ ). In the buying process young women are directed to large extent by their own experience ( $\bar{x} = 3.96$ ) and attach relatively large importance to product return option ( $\bar{x} = 3.71$ ), apparel presentation ( $\bar{x} = 3.69$ ), fashion ( $\bar{x} = 3.37$ ), manufacturer's warranty ( $\bar{x} = 3.36$ ) as well as appearance of entrance zone ( $\bar{x} = 3.28$ ). The least important effect on purchasing decision is assigned to advertisement ( $\bar{x} = 1.78$ ). This factor is placed on the end of the less important category. Also window display design ( $\bar{x} = 2.59$ ), as mentioned above, has a minute effect on selecting a store where young women make purchases; this is not good news to companies paying much attention to these factors in the context of marketing strategy. It can be also assumed that such low significance of these factors is an effect of unaware reactions of young consumers to such stimuli. This doubt arises in the context of results published by other authors. According to A. Binsztok and T. Zuzanski [9] 23% of purchases are motivated by window displays, while 80% of respondents decide to enter the store under the influence of attractive window display. According to these authors, window displays, especially its arrangement clearly show a consumer the latest fashion trends, while presenting a small part of the current fashion collection. Also E. Jachowska [5] points out that window display is the first stimulus encouraging a potential customer to enter, and it is an announcement of whole offer. Therefore, despite of low rating of this factor compared to other factors analyzed in this study, the effect of window display design on buying preferences should not be underestimated.

To verify whether there are interrelations between factors deciding on buying preferences among young consumers a correlation analysis was made. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

Based on the obtained results one can conclude that the coefficients of correlation between analyzed differentiators are rather small. Only quite strong correlation is visible between product return option and manufacturer's warranty as well as between apparel presentation and window display design that is VM in its broad sense. Other correlated pairs include also advertisement/fashion, opinion of others/advertisement, window display design/appearance of store entrance zone, cleanliness/apparel presentation, easy communication around the store/ease of finding clothes in own style.

It is worth noting that none of analyzed factors indirectly related to product, but of importance to consumers in the context of apparel purchasing preferences, is sufficiently correlated with product quality. This observation allows us to conclude that external factors related to product presentation or display location have no effect on perceived product quality. In opinion of young women, product quality is also uncorrelated both with its price and recent fashion trends.

From a theoretical point of view correlations between some factors should show stronger interrelations. Small correlation coefficients can be explained with a number of variables directly affecting impression of buying in young women, thus it is justified to perform further studies to understand these questions in more details.

**Table 3. Correlations between factors affecting consumer buying decisions**  
 Tabela 3. Współzależności występujące między czynnikami wpływającymi na decyzje zakupowe konsumentów

	price	quality	style	advertisement	opinion of others	own experience	size availability	manufacturer's warranty	product return option	window display design	apparel presentation	sales space cleanliness	easy communication around store	ease of finding clothes in own style	appearance of entrance zone
price		0.07	0.14	0.14	0.14	0.07	0.14	0.02	0.24	0.02	0.06	0.00	0.02	0.14	0.00
quality	0.07		0.01	-0.07	-0.02	0.11	0.09	0.27	0.10	0.01	0.18	0.23	0.22	0.19	0.08
fashion	0.14	0.01		0.41	0.27	0.12	0.18	0.24	0.20	0.29	0.25	0.03	-0.03	0.06	0.32
advertisement	0.14	-0.07	0.41		0.41	0.11	0.13	0.21	0.17	0.33	0.22	-0.01	0.01	-0.01	0.27
opinion of others	0.14	-0.02	0.27	0.41		0.30	0.23	0.24	0.18	0.20	0.20	0.09	0.09	0.10	0.14
own experience	0.07	0.11	0.12	0.11	0.30		0.22	0.26	0.19	0.08	0.18	0.18	0.09	0.15	-0.03
size availability	0.14	0.09	0.18	0.13	0.23	0.22		0.30	0.23	0.02	0.05	0.11	0.10	0.25	0.00
manufacturer's warranty	0.02	0.27	0.24	0.21	0.24	0.26	0.30		0.63	0.08	0.15	0.27	0.29	0.15	0.26
product return option	0.24	0.10	0.20	0.17	0.18	0.19	0.30	0.63		0.05	0.05	0.23	0.27	0.13	0.10
window display design	0.02	0.01	0.29	0.33	0.20	0.08	0.02	0.08	0.05		0.52	0.30	0.07	0.12	0.42
apparel presentation	0.06	0.18	0.25	0.22	0.20	0.18	0.05	0.08	0.05	0.52		0.40	0.24	0.20	0.36
sales space cleanliness	0.00	0.23	0.03	-0.01	0.09	0.18	0.11	0.15	0.23	0.30	0.40		0.45	0.19	0.18
easy communication around store	0.02	0.22	-0.03	0.01	0.09	0.09	0.10	0.29	0.27	0.07	0.24	0.45		0.40	0.19
ease of finding clothes in own style	0.14	0.19	0.06	-0.01	0.10	0.15	0.25	0.15	0.13	0.12	0.20	0.40	0.40		0.17
appearance of entrance zone	0.00	0.08	0.32	0.27	0.14	-0.03	0.00	0.26	0.10	0.42	0.36	0.19	0.19	0.17	

Source: own research.  
 Źródło: badania własne.



#### 4. Conclusions

The apparel industry belong to blooming economy sectors, open to the needs of consumers who represent various attitudes to perceived quality of products they select as well as other factors determining apparel purchasing. The results of this study enabled the determination of key factors that direct young consumers who making buying decisions. The study indicated that buying decisions made by young women, contrary to quite popular opinion, do not result from watching advertising or following the latest fashion trends. When selecting a product that meets expectations, consumers are directed by different factors, both directly related to a product and those linked to the place of purchasing.

Product quality, identified with durability and use of appropriate materials is a key factor directly related to a product deciding on purchasing apparel by young women.

Among a set of factors affecting consumer buying decisions, attention should be also paid on those connected with the selection of a store where purchases are made, especially visual decoration of sales area. Consumers pay very much attention to comfort of shopping, mainly to cleanliness, ease of finding clothes in own style, size availability and easy communication around the store.

High dynamics of changes in the apparel product market entails the necessity to monitoring consumer needs and behaviors and to adjust correspondingly actions targeted at maintaining positive perceived quality of offered products.

#### 5. Acknowledgments

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### Summary

This article attempts to answer the question on the role of the apparel quality in the process of making purchase decisions by young consumers. Among the discriminants, which determine the purchase, added values that are obtained through a scheduled properly and consistent Visual Merchandising are the most important. The influence of factors not directly related to the product has been analyzed and considered as indicators of quality by young consumers. The focus is on the presentation of the product range offered in the context of brand building and gaining the loyalty of consumers by clothing chains.

Research has shown that consumers prefer the products with specific utility values and good quality that meet their requirements. Buyer assess the quality of the product, guided by a series of examined discriminants, which are those directly related to the sales room, as well as factors directly related to the product. Purchasing decisions are closely related to the comfort of shopping, i.e. easiness of finding clothes in his style and purity of the area of sale. The project of shop window in a retail chain plays a secondary importance for young consumers, which is an interesting observation in the context of its role in the marketing strategy of companies, as a part creating and amplifying the brand image. The study made it possible to create a hierarchy of factors that influence the purchase decisions of consumers. There are no statistically important differences between the two main age groups, i.e. young female consumers (15-25) and female consumers 26+, in the context of the perception of the importance of the factors determining the choice of clothing store where purchases are made.

**Anna Xymena MAJKRZAK, Renata SALERNO-KOCHAN**

Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Krakowie, Wydział Towaroznawstwa,  
Katedra Towaroznawstwa Przemysłowego

## POSTRZEGANIE JAKOŚCI WYROBÓW ODZIEŻOWYCH W ASPEKCIE ZACHOWAŃ ZAKUPOWYCH MŁODYCH KONSUMENTEK. CZ. 2

### Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł stanowi próbę odpowiedzi na pytanie dotyczące roli jakości wyrobu odzieżowego w procesach podejmowania decyzji zakupowych przez młodych konsumentów. Wśród wyróżników decydujących o zakupie istotne są wartości dodane, uzyskiwane dzięki odpowiednio zaplanowanemu, spójnemu Visual Merchandisingowi. Analizie poddany został wpływ czynników niezwiązanych bezpośrednio z produktem, a rozpatrywanych przez młodych konsumentów jako wyznaczników jego jakości. Skoncentrowano się na sposobie prezentacji oferowanego asortymentu w kontekście strategii budowania marki handlowej i pozyskania lojalności konsumentów przez sieci odzieżowe.

Przeprowadzone badania wykazały, że konsumenci oczekują przede wszystkim produktów o określonych wartościach użytkowych i dobrej jakości, takich które spełnią ich wymagania. Nabywcy oceniając jakość produktu, kierują się szeregiem rozpatrywanych przez siebie wyróżników, do których należą te związane bezpośrednio z salą sprzedaży, jak i czynniki bezpośrednio powiązane z produktem. Decyzje zakupowe ściśle wiążą z komfortem zakupów, tj. łatwością znajdowania ubrań w swoim stylu i czystością przestrzeni sprzedaży. Projekt witryn sieci handlowej odgrywa drugorzędne znaczenie dla młodych konsumentów, co jest ciekawym spostrzeżeniem w kontekście jego roli w strategii marketingowej firm, jako elementu kreują-

cego i wzmacniającego wizerunek marki. Przeprowadzone badania umożliwiły stworzenie hierarchii czynników wpływających na podejmowane decyzje zakupowe konsumentów. Nie istnieją ważne statystycznie różnice pomiędzy dwoma głównymi grupami wiekowymi tj. młodych konsumentek (15–25) oraz konsumentek 26+, w kontekście postrzegania wagi czynników decydujących o wyborze sklepu odzieżowego, w którym dokonywane są zakupy.

**Anna Xymena MAJKRZAK**

**dr hab. inż. Renata SALERNO-KOCHAN, prof. UEK**

Cracow University of Economics

Faculty of Commodity Science

Department of Industrial Products

Rakowicka 27, 31-510 Cracow, Poland

e-mail: salernor@uek.krakow.pl