

# Non-functional demand model vs functional demand model: prospects for competitiveness in a transforming world

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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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**Abstract.** The purpose of the article is to analyse the problem of changing the relationship between non-functional and functional demand. The main task of the presented research is to define the most competitive model (based on functional or non-functional demand) of consumer behaviour in the conditions of the economy of the 20s of the XXI century. To solve this problem, we studied the structure of consumer demand: functional and non-functional ones. We identified the features of non-functional demand, and considered the reasons for its expansion in modern society. Moreover, paper highlights fixing changes in consumer orientations, which resulted in the search for satisfaction not only of material needs, but also aesthetic, emotional, and social ones. It allowed us to formulate a conclusion on the existence of objective reasons for the spread of non-functional demand. Within the framework of non-functional demand, we perform an analysis of origin and expansion of the downshifting phenomenon through the transformation of the basis of functional demand. The authors believe that qualitative changes in global socio-economic development have revolutionized the theoretical concepts of rationality, which are the basis of the functional demand model. Nevertheless, authors criticise the interpretation of downshifting as a model of irrational consumer behaviour, and put forward a hypothesis on the legitimacy of this new phenomenon to be analysed within the framework of functional demand. The authors consider the assumption of the possibility of changing the objectives of society to be a condition for the realization of this hypothesis. it can cause the transformation of «efficiency» concept over the past 300 years. Paper forecasts increasing of non-economic goals rationality, cooperation, mutual benefits, and the coupling of knowledge and technology to moral, cultural, and ethical principles and norms. As a result, in the contrary to the widespread assessment of downshifting as a deviant form of consumer behavior, there was put forward hypothesis considering downshifting as a part of classical consumer choice matrix, taking into account the transformation of this matrix itself.

**Keywords:** functional demand; non-functional demand; social demand; speculative demand; irrational and nonrational demand; bandwagon effect; snob effect; Veblen effect; downshifting

**JEL codes:** B10, B50, D11, E21, E71

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## Introduction

Nowadays, the consumption of goods and services plays an important role in the economy and people's lives. It is interpreted by a significant part of theorists as a transition in practice from the "primacy of production" to the "primacy of consumption". However, both "primaces" occurred on the basis of classical political economy [1; 2]. The world became a "consumer society". At first, in the 60-70s of the XXth century, it was formed in the USA, then spread to the East, covering Western Europe, and reaching Russia by the beginning of the XXI century [3; 4]. Development of technology and rising living standards provide consumers access to a wide range of products and services. Moreover, the mass consumption society noted material goods as major ones, adapting the value system of society to this type of consumption.

However, later, as consumers' self-awareness increased, the functional aspects of goods and services lost their status as the only criterion of choice. An increasing number of people began to focus on environmental,

emotional, social, status, and other factors when choosing a product or service [5]. It caused non-functional demand. There is an issue of phenomenon defining in terms of displacement of functional demand and parallel existence with it on the principles of coexistence. Also this research dwells on the issue of the evolution of modern consumer behaviour rationality. In terms of it, person chooses goods, focusing more on other factors than price and individual consumer pleasure, but considers more significant markers.

This paper concerns with the spread of non-functional demand. It is interpreted by the most modern researchers as a sign of irrationality of modern consumer behaviour. This perspective allows us to raise the issue of the competitiveness of both models of consumer behaviour in the modern economy. On the one hand, functional demand, based on the classical idea of consumer choice rationality; on the other, non-functional demand, which denies this rationality. The authors do not adhere to any of these points of view; they hypothesizing the transformation of "rationality" concept. Consequently, non-functional demand involves into the matrix of classical consumer choice (taking into account the modification of this matrix itself). It neutralises the dilemma.

### Main Part

#### *Comparison of "functional demand" and "non-functional demand" concepts*

Classical economic models focus on the functional consumers behaviour According to these models, consumers choose of goods and services based on their quality and usefulness; correlates with their budgets [6]. However, non-functional demand takes into account aesthetic preferences, social influence, emotional aspects, etc. It transcends the scope of classical (and neoclassical) economic theory. To better understand the meaning of both terms, we consider the common one.

One of the most important and fundamental concepts of economics is "demand" category. Marshall's definition of demand can be considered superclassical. However, there are several different interpretations of this term in the economic literature.

For instance, demand is defined as a desire supported by purchasing power; it is a market requirement provided with money [7]. The difference between desire and requirement is insignificant, but nevertheless it exists. We believe, desire can be characterized as a meaningful sense of requirement. It is determined by the creation of conditions for human life.

Demand is determined simultaneously by consumer preferences and the level of prices on the market. It is determined both for the product and its substitute, as well as the consumer's internal expectation of a possible change in product prices.

The demand for a particular product shows the consumer's desire to purchase a certain amount of this product. This "desire to buy" distinguishes demand from the usual "desire" to get a particular product, caused by the urgent need to satisfy vital requirements, the desire to look better than other people, or surpass them.

Therefore, "demand" is the requirement for certain goods or services, provided with money and presented on the market.

We also consider the terms "function" and "demand function".

The Ozhegov's Glossary defines "function" as a phenomenon depending on another and changes as those other phenomena changes; as a law according to which each value of a variable quantity (argument) corresponds to a certain definite quantity, and also to this quantity itself; as a role, value of something<sup>1</sup>.

The demand function is a function connecting a dependent variable (the quantity of demand Qd) with various independent variables that determine demand, such as the price of a product (P), income (Y), the price of substitute products (Ps), advertising (A), etc. [8]:

$$Q_d = f(P, Y, P_s, A, \dots) \quad (1)$$

Indeed, functional demand is the need for certain goods or services, which depends on independent variables determining a demand.

Functional demand is the demand for goods, which is determined by the consumer characteristics inherent to an economic good (product or service) [9]. Functional demand depends on the utility function

<sup>1</sup> Ozhegov, S. I. and Shvedova, N. Yu. *Glossary of the Russian language* (1997). 4th ed. Moscow: Azbukovnik. 874 p. (in Russian)

of the consumer, on its maximum value. It decreases or increases depending on the qualities of this good, consumer's point of view, or other qualities affecting its utility.

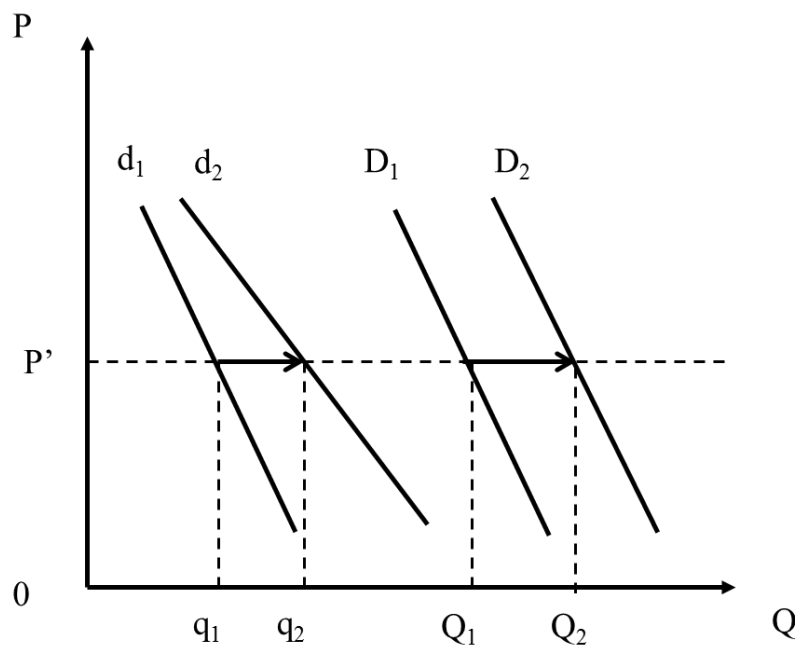
The opposite of functional demand is non-functional demand. It is a demand occurring not due to the consumer characteristics of the product, but due to some other factors. The main and decisive ones are the psychological laws of human behavior (emotions, prestige, social status, individual preferences, etc.).

*Types of non-functional demand: current trends*

One of the current trends is an increase in the number of allocated types of non-functional demand. It can be interpreted as its expansion. Previously irrational and rational demand were combined into one type, today everyone is developing their own niche. Therefore, we pay special attention to this issue.

The first type of non-functional demand is social demand. Nevertheless, it cannot be independent of certain social attitudes. Social demand includes three types: bandwagon effect, the snob effect, and the Veblen effect [10].

Bandwagon effect is caused by people's desire to follow fashion and conform to consumer stereotypes. This phenomenon implies an increase in demand for goods popular in society. Consider this effect demand graph (Fig.1). On the one hand, when the market industry demand curve (D) shifts to the right (from position D 1 to position D 2), the individual demand curve (d) also shifts to the right (from d 1 to d 2). The stronger the shift of d under the influence of D, the greater the effect. On the other hand, individual demand becomes more elastic: the d curve becomes more flat.



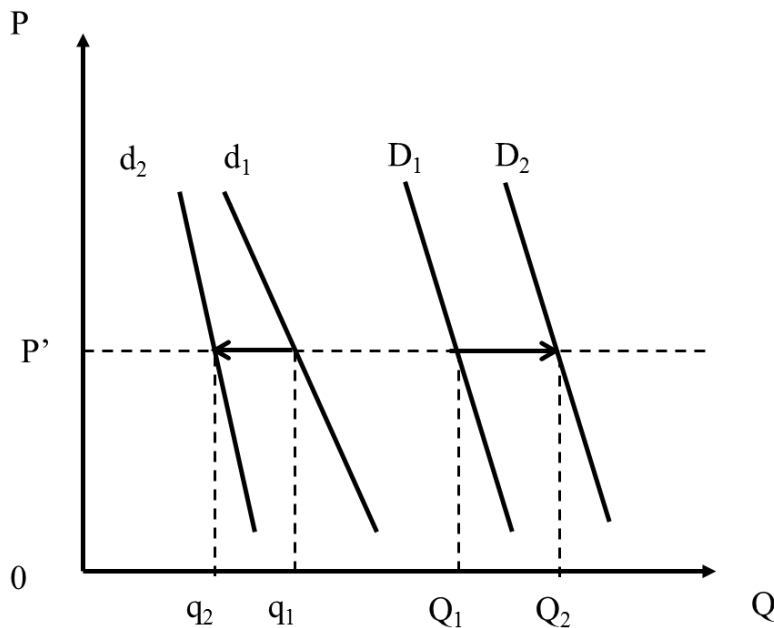
**Figure 1.** The demand curve with the bandwagon effect

*Source: composed by the authors*

The snob effect affects the buyer in the opposite way, compared to the bandwagon effect. Desire to differentiate themselves from society and demonstrate their individuality, people refrain from purchasing goods available to the majority (Fig.2). In graphical interpretation, on the one hand, the individual demand curve (d) shift to the left, and the market demand curve (D) shifts to the right. On the other hand, individual demand becomes less elastic: the d curve becomes steeper.

A quantitative assessment of the snob and bandwagon effects can be shown using the elasticity coefficient Eq. It shows the degree of change in individual demand (d) when market demand (D) changes by 1%:

$$Eq = (\Delta q_i / q_i) : (\Delta Q_i / Q_i) = (\Delta q_i / \Delta Q_i) * (Q_i / q_i) \quad (2)$$



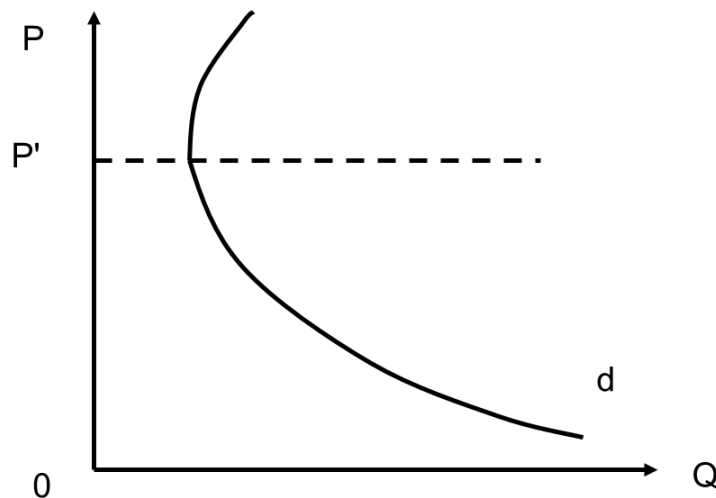
**Figure 2.** The demand curve for the snob effect

Source: composed by the authors

Here  $q_i$  and  $Q_i$  are the size of individual and market demand for product  $i$ , respectively. If the coefficient of elasticity has a positive value, then the bandwagon effect is observed. If it is negative, then there is a snob effect.

The Veblen effect is a phenomenon of increasing demand for expensive goods. In this case, the consumer identifies a high price with prestige. Such demonstrative consumption is illustrated in the work "The Theory of the Leisure Class: An Economic Study of Institutions" by T. Veblen [11]. According to T. Veblen, person determines his or her social position by comparing the consumption style with other people.

The demand curve for the Veblen effect above a certain price ( $P'$ ); it changes its slope to a positive one, whereas below this price the demand curve looks traditionally in the form of a curve with a negative slope, since at low prices a product or service loses its prestigious status, and passes into the category of ordinary consumer goods (Fig.3).



**Figure 3.** The demand curve for the Veblen effect

Source: composed by the authors

However, some enterprises develop their business on the Veblen effect. They produce expensive branded goods, but they also strive to focus on product quality in order to have a good reputation. Such companies

are Apple, Rolex, Chanel, etc. [12].

The Veblen effect is calculated through the price elasticity of demand:

$$Eq = Q'(P) \frac{P}{Q(P)} \quad (3)$$

The higher the value of the price elasticity coefficient, the stronger the Veblen effect.

The second type of non-functional demand is speculative demand. It is caused by the active purchase of goods in fear of price increase, force majeure, etc. Therefore, the demand curve increases dramatically in a short period of time. An example is the high demand for essential products in crisis. For instance, some hypermarkets place so-called "apocalypse kits" at the entrance. Those kits include buckwheat, flour, pasta, sugar, salt, stew, etc.

The third type of non-functional demand is irrational demand. It includes purchases under the influence of mood changes. Often, a person subsequently cannot explain what prompted him to make a rash purchase.

The fourth type of non-functional demand is irrational demand. This is the demand of one group of consumers for a product that is denied and condemned by another group (alcohol, tobacco, drugs). Moreover, irrational demand fraught with the formation of addiction. Perhaps, this type of non-functional demand is currently subject to the most active modification. On the one hand, it has emerged as an independent type of non-functional demand relatively recently. On the other hand, there are concomitant reasons for its spread. For instance, a campaign to legalize light drugs, or a decrease in the legally established "age of consent", or increasing involvement and, consequently, Internet addiction disorders. Nowadays, the initially declared goal of the Internet – to save time – is drastically changed. The result is a behavioural addiction causing harm to people mental and emotional health.

However, there is also a third party associated with the emergence and spread of an unusual model of consumer behavior – it is downshifting.

Since the Medieval Reformation (XVI – early XVII centuries), success confirmed by high income is one of the main components of a persons' self-actualisation. It is extremely relevant in modern society. A progressive society relies on a culture of consumption; in terms of it everyone strives to achieve success. The image of a successful person, with personal and civil liberties and pursuit of the ideal, has been formed in Western popular culture for centuries and has turned out to be inextricably linked with the market foundations of the economy. The basic concept in this type of culture is success interpreted in terms of capital; it concerns with the basic value orientations of consumer culture, allows a person to climb the social ladder, gives an incentive to accumulate material benefits, expands access to information, etc.

Later, with the formation of monopolies and the industrial model of civilization (XVII-XIX centuries), the individual model of success was transformed into a corporate model of success. It had many advantages: stable income, high social status, full social guarantees. Also there are disadvantages: a shortage of time for personal life, communication with family, etc. As a result, a person lives in a constant stress, neutralising the benefits of a high income, and generating a crisis of personal identity.

This contradiction started the phenomenon of downshifting, designed to realize a persons' desire to live in harmony.

Downshifting is originally a slang term meaning the process of slowing down the pace of life and decreasing income caused by the transformation of value priorities. For instance, an analogy with the concept of "speed reduction" is appropriate: according to automotive terminology, the English term downshift literally means "slow down, go into low gear"<sup>2</sup>.

Many downshifter refuse to strive for the generally accepted benefits promoted, the accumulation of material goods, etc. They choose life "the way they want and can in accordance with their individual values and concepts". The attitude of the society towards such a choice is skeptical one.

Downshifting is analyzed in a wide variety of fields of science, but mainly by social psychology and social economics. Hence, downshifting can be considered as a form of alternative behaviour, as a phenomenon

<sup>2</sup> Ilyin, V. I. (2022). *Downshifting*. *The Great Russian Encyclopedia*. Available at: <https://bigenc.ru/c/downshifting-98403> (Accessed 10.01.2024).

of decreasing social mobility [13, p. 95].

Moreover, downshifting can be characterized as a tendency towards self-actualisation. In term of it, everyone strives to find ones' own way of life and feel the unity of reality with personal preferences. This approach is based on the idea of "living for oneself" and the rejection of goals imposed by society [14-16]. Furthermore, the issues whether certain specific goals are imposed by society or not is decided subjectively, and based on the individual's personal conclusions. In a sense, this consumer behaviour is similar to the snob effect: if everyone consumes "it", then I will not, thereby highlighting my individuality.

The term "downshifting" gained popularity and came into use after Sarah Bon Breatnach's article "Life in Low Gear: Downshifting and a New Look at Success in the 90s", Washington Post [17, p. 115]. This article analysed a special social movement. Its occurrence correlates with the publication of the book "Downshifting: Reinventing Success on a Slower Track", published by Amy Saltsman in the USA in 1990 [12; 14].

Originally, the roots of downshifting should be sought in ancient times, starting with Diogenes of Sinope (V-IV centuries BC). He realized the prophecy of the pythia "to overestimate values". It provided his asceticism and life in an amphora. Later, Epicurus (IV-III centuries BC) introduced the idea of an "inconspicuous life"; Diocletian, who refused to rule the Roman Empire in order to grow flowers and cabbage on his estate (III-IV centuries AD). The search for freedom and self-expression at the cost of voluntary renunciation of the well-being and pleasures of the royal court was known not only in Europe, but also in Asia. For instance, legendary Indian Prince Siddhartha Gautama, the founder of Buddhism, known worldwide as the Buddha (VI-V centuries BC).

In medieval Europe, Francis of Assisi renounced a debauched life and chose voluntary poverty (XII-XIII centuries), can be considered a downshifter. Moreover, Paul Gauguin, Leo Tolstoy (XIX-XX centuries) also can be considered downshifters.

Synonyms of the concept of "downshifting" are "slow living", "voluntary simplicity", and "simple living". The first mention of the term "voluntary simplicity" occurred in 1981 in a book by Dwayne Elgin. The author describes "voluntary simplicity" as a rejection of material abundance in favour of inner sacred wealth and a change in priorities for family well-being, leisure, and self-actualisation. This allows a person to gain inner freedom; it is contrasted with forced poverty restricting the person itself [17, p. 115].

Nevertheless, authors criticise the interpretation of downshifting as a model of irrational consumer behaviour and put forward a hypothesis on the legitimacy of this new phenomenon to be analysed within the framework of functional demand. Nevertheless, the consumer's rejection of the goals of society is a serious argument in favour of recognizing the irrationality of such a refusal. However, the assumption of the possibility of transforming the goals of society can change the society mind [18]. Thus, in the XVIII-XIX centuries, the emergence and formation of the industrial economic system (classical economic school) occurred. It also needed a theoretical understanding of the principle of optimization. The criterion of efficiency was declared to be a purely market equilibrium. It oriented the consumer to maximize the overall utility.

In the XXth century, the mixing of neoclassical and Keynesian economic schools cause understanding of efficiency criterion as pseudo-market (social) equilibrium. According to this concept, individual rationality may not coincide with social one, but the orientation towards maximizing utility remained.

In the 21st century, globalization caused an awareness of the vulnerability of the Earth global ecosystem (a new institutional school). As a result, the principle of full optimization has been replaced by the principle of partial optimization (satisfaction); sustainability has become considered the criterion of effectiveness.

Therefore, the evolution of "functional demand" concept has transformed its meaning: from complete rationality to limited, from purely economic to socio-economic-ecological one.

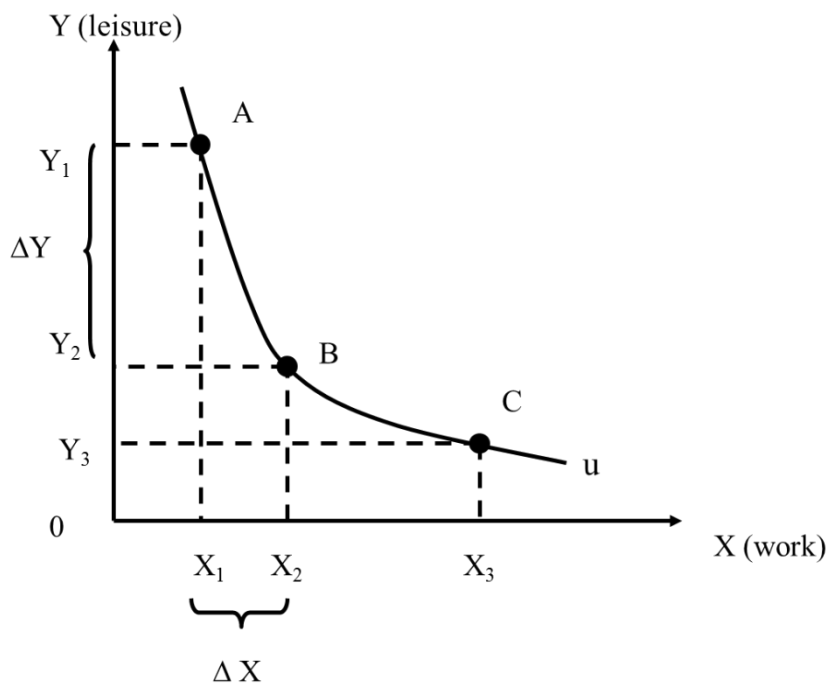
Hence, the phenomenon of downshifting involves perfectly into the study of functional consumer behaviour. We will prove it by using the indifference curve model.

As a benefit X, we propose to consider a job providing an individual with a certain income and social status. Hence, the consumer choosing this benefit is guided by the slogan: "Work to live". This choice is fraught with an increase in anxiety and stress, a decrease in free time for hobbies, family, friends, travel, etc.; it will restrict each person individuality development. Indeed, the standardization is a marker of the mass

consumption society. It causes increasing in labour productivity and makes life much more comfortable compared to the living conditions of previous generations.

As a benefit  $Y$  we propose to consider leisure, personal life, self-realization, etc. It provides an individual with the search and acquisition of a new meaning of life. In the contrary, the motivational slogan "Live to work" occurs. The new values are as follows: reasonable time management, family, recreation, personal development and charity. It requires a certain regularity and slowing down the pace of life. In this context, time begins to play a key role; its rational use helps to achieve harmony [19]. Moreover, a person seeks to abandon following the ideas of consumption and finds (or at least seeks to find) ways to achieve a work and personal life balance. Hence, person tries to get rid of the endless and senseless pursuit of financial success. This choice will require compromising income and consumption levels, including expensive travel, higher social status, other pleasures as a consequence of a new interpretation of life's meaning. Moreover, this new concept is now out of work.

This example can be described by the indifference curve "u" (Fig. 4); it shows the same satisfaction of a consumer. The consumer increases (or reduces) consumption of one of the two goods in order to compensate the reduction (or increase) of the other good consumption by one item.



**Figure 4.** The indifference curve of replacing work with leisure

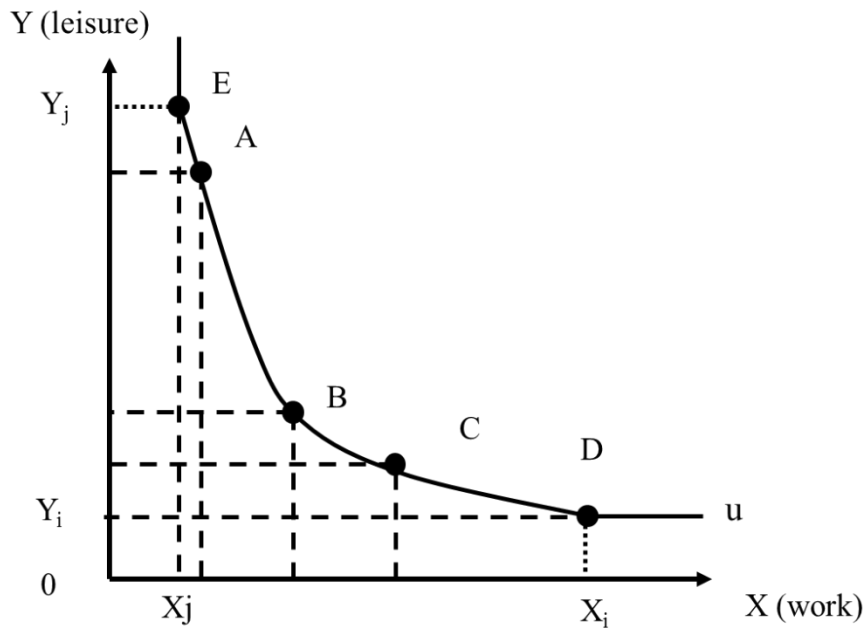
Source: composed by the authors

Since, on the one hand, no one can increase work without compromising their health by reducing leisure time. On the other hand, increase of leisure time by reducing work as a source of quality of personal life is not reasonable, too. Therefore, Figure 4 requires adjustment in terms of the presence of irreducible amounts of both goods ( $X_j$  and  $Y_i$ ) (Fig. 5). At the same time, the shape of the indifference curve "u", after reaching these irreducible amounts, turns into straight lines, limiting the substitution zone to the segment DE.

*At  $X_i$  the consumer chooses the workaholic model;  $Y_j$  – downshifter's one.*

Features of the downshifting model of consumer behavior

One of the features of the downshifting model of consumer behavior is related to the fact that it can be interpreted both as an example of non-functional demand (if you stay in the paradigm of the classical understanding of rationality), and as an example of functional demand (if you recognize the transformation of the concept of "efficiency" over the past 300 years). As we have explained above, we adhere to the second point of view.



**Figure 5.** The indifference curve of replacing work with leisure with the allocation of a DE substitution zone  
*Source: composed by the authors*

Another feature of downshifting is related to its structure; it is a two-level one phenomenon. These levels characterize a different degree of immersion in the process of "slowing down life": moderate (light) and deep ones. Moderate downshifting does not require radical changes in lifestyle and environment; deep downshifting implies radical changes – in employment, lifestyle, inhabitation, etc.

The first level of downshifting: dismissal from work and possible change of inhabitation. Downshifter prefer rent out their apartments and live on this money in other place with the lower living standards.

The second level of downshifting: revolutionary changes in employment and type of activity, complemented with change of inhabitation. Some downshifter become freelancers, and work in their free time, only. Other downshifter run their own small businesses, which are mostly hobbies. The desire to live easier life without stress encourages downshifter to change their type of activity, inhabitation, move from large cities to the smaller ones, to other countries, etc. The development of the Internet, remote access information, etc. allows downshifter to get an education, work, and keep up to date without staying in the megacities.

The specificity of downshifting in Russia is the choice of its second level. It involves relocation [20]. As a rule, they prefer Russian villages (the most famous example is the millionaire G.L. Sterligov, co-founder of the first Russian Commodity Exchange; he moved to Mozhaisk district, Moscow region, Russia, and engaged in farming). Moreover, often the decision to move from the city to the countryside is accompanied by a transition to vegetarianism. Therefore, deprivation of habitual material values encourages domestic downshifter to start a household with cattle and a garden.

Finally, the third feature of downshifting is its transient nature: its adherents rarely permanently abandon their former (normal, in the eyes of society) life. Most often, downshifting is considered as a long vacation, a kind of "time-out". Usually, after a year or two, active (in the recent past) people become bored without a dynamic life, a busy work, friends, and relatives they left. But definitely, having returned to their usual society, downshifter try not to turn into workaholics, obsessed with work, which they may have been before. Indeed, it reminds the hippie movement of the 60s and 70s of the last century (the same search for self-exploration, a challenge to social values and apoliticality). However, when the "flower children" grew up, they had to return to the real world to ordinary work.

## Conclusion

Hence, our study revealed a competitiveness dilemma of two models of consumer behaviour – functional



and non-functional ones. Scientists have not yet concluded on the predominant kind of demand. As a confirmation we can consider the Nobel Prize for Economics in 2002 awarded to two researchers with the opposite points of view. They are Vernon Lomax Smith, the founder of experimental economics, recognizes the traditional model as more competitive one; and Daniel Kahneman, the founder of behavioural economics relies on an irrational human attitude to risk in decision-making and in managing the consumer behaviour.

Therefore, there is no answer to the paper issue. It all depends on the context in which it is considered. Therefore, we believe that functional demand retains its leadership in the modern world, but only if the transformation of the concepts of "rationality" and "efficiency" although there has been a significant increase in non-functional demand due to the growing importance of satisfying aesthetic, emotional, and social needs.

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#### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

#### AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

Galina A. Rodina – conceptualization, project administration, writing – original draft.

Vladimir O. Rodin – visualization, writing – review & editing.

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