

ON THE ISSUE OF RATIONALITY OF ECONOMIC CHOICE IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL PROCESSES OF ANOMIE

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DOI: 10.54503/2579-2903-2024.1-13

Abstract

The problem of economic choice and its rationality has now become the subject of research in social sciences. An economic choice is considered rational if it results in the person satisfying their needs to the maximum extent by making certain expenses. Limited resources force a person to use financial resources sparingly to satisfy as many needs as possible. The classical economic approach assumes that, when making economic choices, one is not influenced by others, since one's needs and preferences are generally stable. Currently, there are three main trends in economic theory: neoclassical, institutional, and evolutionary, which are based on the principles of absolute or limited rationality of economic behavior. In this article, by the term "rational economic choice" we mean the choice that best meets a person's expectations in which case the expected utility function takes on the maximum value. The rationality of economic choice in the article is considered in the context of anomic psychological processes. Currently, more and more attention is being diverted towards the characteristics of the socio-economic development of modern society. Many authors agree that modern societies are mainly characterized by the uncertainty of the conditions of socio-economic development and the anomie of people's socio-economic behavior. This trend is manifested in the increasing influence of a person's psychological characteristics on their economic decisions. The consumer often makes the choice under conditions of uncertainty, so the choice may be made not in favor of the best, but in favor of any of the profitable options.

Keywords and phrases: economic choice, consumer, decision-making, rationality, economic behavior, anomic psychological processes.

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Համառոտագիր

Տնտեսական ընտրության և դրա ռացիոնալության խնդիրն այժմ դարձել է հասարակական գիտությունների հետազոտության առարկա: Տնտեսական ընտրությունը համարվում է ռացիոնալ, եթե այն հանգեցնում է նրան, որ անձը առավելագույնս բավարարում է իր կարիքները՝ կատարելով որոշակի ծախսեր: Սահմանափակ ռեսուրսները ստիպում են մարդուն խնայողաբար օգտագործել ֆինանսական ռեսուրսները՝ հնարավորինս շատ կարիքներ բավարարելու համար: Դասական տնտեսագիտական մոտեցման համաձայն, տնտեսական ընտրություն կատարելիս անձը չի ենթարկվում այլոց ազդեցությանը, քանի որ նրա կարիքներն ու նախասիրությունները հիմնականում կայուն են: Ներկայումս դիտարկվում է տնտեսագիտական տեսության զարգացման երեք հիմնական ուղղություն՝ նեոկլասիկական, ինստիտուցիոնալ և էվոլյուցիոն, որոնք հիմնված են տնտեսական վարքագծի բացարձակ կամ սահմանափակ ռացիոնալության սկզբունքների վրա: Այս հոդվածում «ռացիոնալ տնտեսական ընտրություն» եզրույթվ մենք հասկանում ենք ընտրություն, որը լավագույնս համապատասխանում է անձի ակնկալիքներին, որի դեպքում ակնկալվող օգտակարության գործառույթը ստանում է առավելագույն արժեքը: Հոդվածում տնտեսական ընտրության ռացիոնալությունը դիտարկվում է

անումիայի հոգեբանական գործընթացների համատեքստում: Ներկայումս ավելի ու ավելի մեծ ուշադրություն է դարձվում ժամանակակից հասարակության սոցիալ-տնտեսական զարգացման առանձնահատկություններին: Մի շարք հեղինակների կարծիքով ժամանակակից հասարակությունները հիմնականում բնութագրվում են սոցիալ-տնտեսական զարգացման պայմանների անորոշությամբ և մարդկանց սոցիալ-տնտեսական վարքագծի անումիկ դրսևորումներով: Այս միտում արտահայտվում է տնտեսական որոշումների վրա անձի հոգեբանական բնութագրերի աճող ազդեցությամբ: Սպառողը հաճախ ընտրություն է կատարում անորոշության պայմաններում, ուստի ընտրությունը կարող է կատարվել ոչ թե լավագույնի, այլ շահավետ տարբերակներից որևէ մեկի օգտին:

Բանալի բառեր և բառակապակցություններ. տնտեսական ընտրություն, սպառող, որոշումների կայացում, ռացիոնալություն, տնտեսական վարքագիծ, անումիայի հոգեբանական գործընթացներ:

К ВОПРОСУ О РАЦИОНАЛЬНОСТИ ЭКОНОМИЧЕСКОГО ВЫБОРА В КОНТЕКСТЕ ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКИХ ПРОЦЕССОВ АНОМИИ

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Аннотация:

Проблема экономического выбора и его рациональности в настоящее время стала предметом исследования социальных наук. Экономический выбор считается рациональным, если он приводит к тому, что человек в максимальной степени удовлетворяет свои потребности за счет совершения определенных затрат. Ограниченность ресурсов вынуждает человека экономно использовать финансовые ресурсы, чтобы удовлетворить как можно больше потребностей. Классический экономический подход предполагает, что при принятии экономического выбора человек не находится под влиянием других, поскольку его потребности и предпочтения в целом стабильны. В настоящее время в экономической теории выделяются три основных направления: неоклассическое, институциональное и эволюционное, в основе которых лежат принципы абсолютной или ограниченной рациональности экономического поведения. В данной статье под термином «рациональный экономический выбор» мы подразумеваем выбор, который наилучшим образом соответствует ожиданиям человека, и в этом случае ожидаемая функция полезности принимает максимальное значение. Рациональность экономического выбора в статье рассматривается в контексте аномии психологических процессов. В настоящее время все больше внимания уделяется особенностям социально-экономического развития современного общества. Многие авторы сходятся во мнении, что современные

общества в основном характеризуются неопределенностью условий социально-экономического развития и аномичностью социально-экономического поведения людей. Эта тенденция проявляется в возрастающем влиянии психологических особенностей человека на его экономические решения. Потребитель часто делает выбор в условиях неопределенности, поэтому выбор может быть сделан не в пользу лучшего, а в пользу любого из выгодных вариантов.

Ключевые слова и словосочетания: экономический выбор, потребитель, принятие решений, рациональность, экономическое поведение, аномия психологических процессов.

Introduction

As is known, the economic behavior of each person is determined by the desire to obtain products aimed at satisfying physical and spiritual needs. Any person participating in economic processes as a consumer will often be forced to make a choice. Modern science studies the phenomenon of economic choice from various angles. From an economic point of view, it is a person's decision about the allocation of his/her budget. The psychological component of economic choice lies in the development of decision-making abilities. However, it should be noted that both economic and psychological disciplines identify various aspects of human behavior, the goal of which is to achieve well-being [25].

In psychology, the term “economic choice” refers to a decisive stage of a person's economic behavior, which begins with the search for information, evaluation of alternatives, and decision-making and ends with the implementation of actions aimed at implementing the decision. Economic choice is considered by psychologists not only from the point of view of behavioral action, but also as a mental process, the characteristic features of which are the rationality of choice, a feeling of satisfaction, and awareness that one has independently made a choice [21; 28].

Special attention is paid to situationally justified economic choice, which in economic science is studied from the standpoint of macro-, meso- and micro-processes that determine human economic behavior [6; 24]. However, it should be noted that modern neoclassical, institutional, and evolutionary economic theories emphasize the spontaneity of the choice process in uncertain socio-economic situations. Such situations are characterized by a large number of alternative options for economic choice, and therefore, the consequences of decisions made in uncertain, unstable, or anomic conditions cannot be assessed unambiguously and cannot be completely predicted.

Literature Review

Anomie psychological processes

The problem of anomie is one of the most discussed problems in modern scientific, socio-philosophical, and sociological disciplines. The need to study anomie is related to emerging risks that make modern society unstable and its processes chaotic. The management of social processes is determined by many factors, among which anomie occupies a special place. The hidden influence of social anomie has led to the fact that this issue often remains in the shadows [9].

The phenomenon of social anomie was first described by the prominent French sociologist Emile Durkheim. He singled out anomie as a manifestation of deviant behavior. Moreover, explaining anomie, he emphasized that social rules play an important role in regulating people's lives, so during crises or social changes, life experience ceases to correspond to the ideals embodied in the context of social norms. As a result, people feel

confused and disoriented, social norms are destroyed, and all this contributes to deviant behavior. Deviant behavior is a human activity or social phenomenon that does not correspond to the officially or de facto established norms in a given society. As a result, it may impact the rationality of the person's economic choices.

According to Durkheim, social rules play an important role in regulating people's lives because prescribed norms govern the behavior of society, as a result of which people know what to expect from others and also know what other members of society expect of them. Their life experience is more or less consistent with the expectations determined by social norms [8].

Durkheim noted that anomic states in society occur especially often in the conditions of economic crises and dynamic reforms. At the moment of social disorganization, whether it is the result of a painful crisis or an unexpected favorable situation, society is temporarily unable to exert the necessary influence on a person [7].

Durkheim characterizes the concept of anomie as a state of society where there is a systemic breakdown of the norms guaranteeing social order. Social anomie indicates that the norms of behavior are seriously violated and weakened. Anomie is a psychological condition characterized by a sense of disorientation when people are faced with the need to uphold conflicting norms [7]. Anomie occurs when the division of labor does not create sufficiently effective contacts between members of society, as a result of which the adequate regulation of social relations is neglected [8]. Moreover, anomie is the result of an incomplete transition from mechanical to organic solidarity, because the objective basis of the latter - the social division of labor - develops faster than the moral support in the collective consciousness. A necessary condition for the occurrence of anomie is the conflict of needs and interests and the lack of the possibility to satisfy them [8, pp. 301-306].

It is known that Durkheim's theory of anomie is developed in two different scientific directions. Adherents of the first scientific direction consider anomie not only as an absence of moral discipline but also emphasize distinguishing between normative tension and coalition of norms. In this case, moral values, and moral and social norms of the individual do not contribute to the achievement of the intended goals. Meanwhile, the research of the followers of the second scientific direction is based on the theoretical model of modern society, which consists of a system of different groups. These groups are in various conflicts and this almost leads to social changes in society [10; 17].

According to Merton, anomie occurs when people fail to achieve the goals imposed by society through the legal means they set. He believed that anomie arises from a gap between a society's cultural goals and the socially approved means of achieving them. In anomie, elements of common recognition of legal and moral norms that lead to defined goals are missing [18, pp. 87-96]. To achieve a goal, people use some types of means: legalized, socially approved, and any of the ways that lead to success.

According to Merton, the legality and effectiveness of the means to achieve the goal do not always coincide, so people are faced with a choice: if the goals become a priority, any means is considered justified, and vice versa: if the means is most important then the goal loses its meaning. Merton notes that when people seek financial success but are convinced that it cannot be achieved through socially approved means, they turn to illegal means and even crime to achieve the goal. An imbalance between ends and means leads to anomie [18, pp. 132-140].

In a stable society, the congruence of means and ends ensures normative behavior. When goals are exaggerated, deviant behavior occurs, and when means are exaggerated, “ritual” type behavior occurs. The simultaneous rejection or substitution of goals and means leads to the manifestation of revolutionary behavior, rebellion, and reversal. The second type of behavior, when goals play a major role and the choice of means is ignored, leads to antisocial behavior or crime. This is why Merton described five “anomic” ways in which an individual adapts to the environment:

- conformity,
- innovation,
- ritualism,
- retreat,
- rebellion.

Methodological basis

A comparison of the phenomenon of economic choice with the psychological processes of anomie is carried out on the methodological basis of the theoretical approaches of Merton and Sakaki. According to Merton’s observation, each person adapts to the state of anomie in their way, either showing submissive behavior or deviant behavior, where they reject the ideas and norms established by society.

Sakaki’s position is based on the methodological approach of studying situationally justified economic choice. This kind of choice emphasizes the spontaneity of the choice process. In uncertain socio-economic situations, the rationality of economic choice becomes limited and various options for economic choice come to the fore, determining more by individual characteristics of the individual rather than by economic efficiency.

Results and Discussion

Many socioeconomic studies have dealt with the issue of the rationality of economic behavior [13; 14; 15]. However, when considering economic behavior, individual and socio-psychological factors that can lead to irrational manifestations of human behavior were largely not taken into account. Usually, in economic research, the role of economic factors is overestimated, and psychological factors are considered indeterministic and subjective. This point of view is shared by the British economist John Keynes, who considers factors determined by external circumstances to be objective, and factors determined by a person’s character traits to be subjective [13]. This point of view was previously expressed by the American economist Siegwart Lindenberg, who believed that although a person makes decisions on their own, it is society, giving a person a social role, that controls this person’s behavior and directs him/her with various restrictions [15; 30].

In modern society, we are beginning to develop new skills for self-regulation and the realization of opportunities, associated with a person’s ideas about uncertain or anomic situations and strategies for overcoming them. At the same time, new mechanisms are observed to adapt to uncertain or anomalous conditions, such as frequent changes in the pricing of goods, unclear definitions of quality products, changes in customer needs, etc. [23; 29].

In turn, in the general process of economic choice, the risk factor has increased, as well as the tendency to emphasize a person’s readiness to adapt to the modern social environment. Increasing or decreasing a risk factor is possible through the regulation of external - socio-economic, and internal - individual psychological factors that determine economic behavior. In the absence of comprehensive social norms and rules of behavior, which is typical for modern society, the need for self-regulation of the individual, the ability to plan economic behavior, and goal-setting of

economic choice increases [14].

American marketer Philip Kotler divides the factors affecting consumer behavior and his choice into four groups [14]:

- *cultural* (culture, subculture, social position),
- *social* (relational group, family, social role, status),
- *personal* (age, family life cycles, type of occupation, economic position, lifestyle, self-perceptions),
- *psychological* (motivation, perception, understanding, beliefs, and relationships).

According to Talcott Parsons, an American sociologist, in the choice process, consumer decision-making takes place under the influence of two groups of factors [22]:

- existing social formats,
- existing situations.

In classical economic theories, man acts mainly as a biological creature, who enters into a relationship with nature and society for the sake of maximum satisfaction of his needs. Economic interpretations of consumer's rational behavior are based on the principle of the self-centeredness of a person and are considered to be the result of activities motivated by individualistic motives [16, pp. 94-95]. This provision, which is unquestionably accepted and inductively applied to all situations, has been and is still being criticized not only by social scientists but also by economists. American economist Kenneth Arrow admits that the economists themselves do not follow the principle of absolute rationality because when faced with the existing reality, they often end up with contradictions [2].

To resolve these contradictions, some economists put forward milder versions of the rationality of economic behavior ("limited rationality" (Simon, 1959) and "organic or weak rationality" [16], in which the imperfect rationality of economic behavior has different motives. According to these concepts, human behavior guided by various formal and informal rules and norms of social institutions may not be rational from the point of view of personal interest. Three types of rationality are distinguished: strong, which implies maximization, semi-strong, which is limited rationality, and weak, which means organic rationality [31, pp. 41-45].

Analyzing the structure of the decision-making process, contemporary scientists enumerate several factors due to which the rational choice of the economic person can be disturbed. Among them are the scarcity of information resources, the person's incorrect or ineffective analysis of the situation, lack of inclination to perform mental or voluntary actions, and failure to perform all necessary actions [20; 27; 29].

The limited rationality caused by the mentioned factors is the reason why a person uses such algorithms of behavior that can be considered behavioral positions, and which a person adopts not so much as a result of a rational search, but as a result of choosing codes determined by socio-cultural values. These socio-cultural codes predetermine the means of "permissible economic behavior" of a person [1; 19].

The rationality of the economic decision-making process is evaluated by the ratio of invested costs and received benefits. The certainty of the choice conditions is an important factor because with certainty the probability of taking risks decreases. There are situations when not being able to calculate one's actions accurately, a person is forced to act either subconsciously or follow the example of others [29].

The consumer's choice can be significantly influenced by indicators accepted in society, such as fashionable appearance, originality, popularity, recognition, reputation, social role, and social status, which contain elements of attitude toward values. According to some research, in the conditions of a market economy, a person is exposed to various

psychological pressures imposed by society, under the influence of which the person makes rash decisions, showing irrational economic behavior [4; 32].

The more significant the choice, the more value its efficiency acquires for the person. The more important the result the person's own choice, the more he/she tends to calculate, weigh, search, and just make a decision. Emotional decisions are often the result of actions driven by stereotypes, and, in contrast to decisions accompanied by mental actions, save a person's time and energy [5]. Therefore, instead of a decision accompanied by the calculation of probabilities of outcomes (which requires more mental operations, time, and effort), a person can make an emotional decision. Thus, the consumer's economic decision-making process, which is accompanied by the influence of both cognitive and emotional factors, is not a mechanical sum of regulated stages and actions. The stages of the selection process are so interconnected and interpenetrated that it is difficult to single out one of them as the decisive stage of the decision-making act [11; 12; 26; 29].

Conclusion

The concept of effective economic choice is relative to the extent that, being under the influence of psychological factors (stereotypes, habits, emotions, etc.), a person is not always able to calculate what their decisions may lead to. The person's actions are mostly dictated by the logic of the situation. Each person considers the choice that is beneficial to him/her in the given situation. Unstable behavior in the country, as a rule, implies an increase in negative phenomena: vagrancy, crime, alcoholism, etc. This is where the internal predisposition of the society is born, which is characterized as deviant behavior, as a result of which many spiritual and cultural values are destroyed [3]. This leads to the idea that the impact of social anomie on the management of social processes in a society depends greatly on political and state institutions, as well as the activities of state and municipal authorities since the level of social anomie is lower in a stable society. On the other hand, sustainable social development is possible only if there is an effective system of legal, moral, and other norms and social institutions that support them [9].

A person's evaluation system is based on individual preferences; therefore, there cannot be a universal algorithm and formula for evaluating the rationality of economic choices under risky or anomie conditions. The rationality of the choice should be conditioned not only by the amount of financial expenses incurred on the realization of the choice result but by the preference attributed to the sample by a person in a specific situation, which in dynamic economic processes is also conditioned by the person's experience and relationships. Under the influence of anomic socio-psychological factors, the basis of economic choice becomes the principle of operational-dynamic efficiency. A person's economic choice is often made based on the principle of situational determinism, under the predominant influence of socio-psychological factors, as a result of which a person's preferences and personal psychological characteristics may play a secondary role in his/her economic choice. Unable to accurately assess his/her economic interest, the person makes the choice based on certain stereotypes, trying to avoid the uncertainty of the situation. In uncertain situations, he/she tends to be guided by emotional rather than cognitive motives, which affects the effectiveness of the economic choices.

Acknowledgement and Research Funding

The work was supported by the Science Committee of the Republic of Armenia, within the framework of the research project № 21T-5A311.

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The article has been submitted for publication: 28.03.2024
 Հոդվածը ներկայացվել է քննադրության. 28.03.2024
 Статья представлена к публикации: 28.03.2024

The article is sent for review: 05.04.2024
 Հոդվածն ուղարկվել է գրախոսության. 05.04.2024
 Статья отправлена на рецензию: 05.04.2024

The article is accepted for publication: 22.04.2024
 Հոդվածն ընդունվել է քննադրության. 22.04.2024
 Статья принята к печати: 22.04.2024