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Socio-Anthropological Dimensions of Culture: from Traumatic Consumerism to Smart Consumption

Purpose of this study is to highlight the socio-anthropological dimensions of contemporary culture through the prism of the transformation of consumer practices – from traumatic consumerism to smart consumption, illustrating the transition from a compensatory to a conscious model of human existence in the globalized world. **Theoretical basis** draws on the works of key philosophers who have examined consumption in socio-cultural and philosophical contexts. Thorstein Veblen analyses conspicuous consumption as a means of social stratification and the affirmation of status. Jean Baudrillard interprets consumption as a system of symbols that generates needs and perceptions increasingly detached from actual necessities. Pierre Bourdieu emphasises the role of consumer habits in maintaining social hierarchies and in the symbolic struggle between social groups. Zygmunt Bauman's concept of "liquid modernity" sheds light on the growing instability and uncertainty that shape traumatic experiences in consumer society. Richard Sennett explores how the new culture of capitalism, with its focus on flexibility and short-term goals, undermines enduring values and identities. These perspectives are integrated to explain the transition from traumatic consumerism to smart consumption. **Originality.** The article introduces the concept of "traumatic consumerism", which emerges when the acquisition and use of goods and services become a compensatory mechanism in response to personal or societal trauma – a phenomenon that intensifies during global crises such as wars, economic downturns, or environmental disasters. It outlines the dynamics of the shift from traumatic consumerism to smart consumption as observed in the conditions of liquid modernity. **Conclusions.** The study examines the transformation of consumption from a trauma-driven pattern to a model of smart consumption. Drawing on the theories of Veblen, Baudrillard, Bourdieu, Bauman, and Sennett, it demonstrates that contemporary consumption functions as a cultural-symbolic tool that shapes social identities and sustains hierarchies. The analysis highlights how instability and the demands of flexibility increase consumers' traumatic experiences, while also presenting smart consumption as a conscious, ethical practice that fosters self-sufficiency and sustainable development.

Keywords: globalisation; human; culture of consumption; trauma; traumatic consumerism; traumatic consumption; smart culture; smart consumption

Introduction

Modern people find themselves in a situation where the values underlying their existence are undergoing transformation. Globalisation processes have led to the emergence of a consumer society in which people suffer traumatic experiences as cogs in a system where their consumer needs, habits and practices are determined by the production processes that have developed in capitalist society. At the same time, new dimensions of social existence are emerging for people who strive for conscious smart consumption, which is less oriented towards the profits of production agglomerations and is characterised by a change in the principles of the consumption process. The changes taking place in human consciousness and behavioural practices are determined by the complex interaction of various processes – the spiritual foundations of conscious smart consumption, environmental problems, the pursuit of self-sufficiency and general well-being. This aspect has not yet been thoroughly covered in the domestic philosophical and cultural discourse.

Purpose

To highlight the socio-anthropological dimensions of contemporary culture through the prism of the transformation of consumer practices – from traumatic consumerism to smart consumption, illustrating the transition from a compensatory to a conscious model of human existence in a globalised world. This purpose is achieved through the following tasks: 1) to analyse philosophical and cultural approaches to interpreting the phenomenon of consumption in the modern globalised world; 2) to reveal the essence and socio-cultural consequences of traumatic consumerism as a product of the capitalist economy; 3) to outline the specifics of smart consumption and its connection with the development of smart culture, focused on environmental friendliness, ethics, social responsibility, well-being and sustainable development.

Statement of basic materials

From the point of view of economic development, the first quarter of the 21st century is a period of decline in industrial production, which fuelled the development of consumerism. The phenomenon of consumption in philosophical and sociocultural contexts is crucial for understanding contemporary philosophical anthropology. Thorstein Veblen was one of the first to put forward the concept of conspicuous consumption, which is a means of social differentiation and status confirmation. In his work "The Theory of the Leisure Class" (Veblen, 1899), he noted that the acquisition and use of material goods is not only a means of satisfying needs, but also a way of publicly confirming one's wealth. For Veblen, human economic behaviour is not limited to utilitarian motives, as it is linked to symbolic forms of prestige. Jean Baudrillard views consumption not simply as the use of things, but as a system of signs. In his work "The Consumer Society", he writes: "Commodities are no longer defined by their use, but rather by what they signify. And what they signify is defined not by what they do, but by their relationship to the entire system of commodities and signs" (Baudrillard, 1998, p. 27). From his point of view, the logic of modern capitalism replaces real needs with artificially created desires, turning people into participants in an endless game of symbolic exchange. Pierre Bourdieu analyses consumption as a process of reproducing social hierarchies, emphasising that tastes, even those relating to everyday things, are the result of social conditions and a means of symbolic struggle between classes. In her work "Consumer Culture", Roberta Sassatelli traces how consumption has evolved from an economic activity into a central cultural mechanism of identity. Sassatelli develops the ideas of Veblen and Bourdieu, emphasising that consumption maintains class differences even in a "mass" society. "As we have seen, acts of consumption are not only understood through an opposition between rational and irrational action, but also through a freedom/oppression dichotomy" (Sassatelli, 2007, p. 113). At the same time, she touches on the idea of more conscious consumption as a social trend that can act as a counter-mechanism to hyper-consumption. The views of Veblen, Baudrillard, Bourdieu, and Sassatelli share a common vision of consumption not simply as an economic transaction, but as a multi-layered socio-cultural phenomenon that encodes social status and symbolic meaning. However, it should be noted that these theories were formulated during a period of relative socio-economic stability, when institutions and social norms had a longer lifespan. Instead, the beginning of the 21st century ushered in an era of different realities: globalisation, the digital revolution and new forms of capitalism have completely transformed the nature of social relations and, with them, the logic of consumption. This change is most vividly described by the Polish and English philosopher and sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who presents the concept of "liquid modernity", in which stability

becomes a rarity, and flexibility and constant adaptation become the key to survival. Accordingly, the consumerist attitudes that had prevailed since the mid-19th century did not begin to decline on their own, but they proved to be less effective in an era of growing digitalisation, where consumerism is taking on a different character. It can be observed that globalisation has led to the emergence of both "traumatic consumerism" and the beginnings of smart consumption.

So, how can we describe the current situation? There are currently a number of approaches to defining the first quarter of the 21st century. One of them was proposed by Zygmunt Bauman. He notes that there is currently an irreversible process that affects everyone, without exception. This is due to the further unfolding of globalisation. The thinker notes the following: "An integral part of the globalizing processes is progressive spatial segregation, separation and exclusion" (Bauman, 2008, p. 7). He pointed out that "liquid modernity" currently prevails. Now stability is a luxury, unlike the period of "hard modernity" that existed for almost two centuries (until the middle of the 20th century), when social institutions – the state, the church and the family – were constant and unchanging. People are faced with a choice, and only they can decide what will happen to them next. Flexibility and the ability to transform are becoming the only conditions for human existence in society. Politics has become theatrical, and many other phenomena, such as the digitalised world, are becoming increasingly important. This is a time when the ethics of responsibility must be developed, as all established institutions are losing their significance. This is a factor in traumatic experiences, which are linked to a lack of understanding of what will happen to a person next. The phenomenon of traumatisation in the context of consumption can be considered in terms of socio-psychological discourse. For the most part, traumatic events include extreme situations that threaten human life. However, researchers also identify other situations that have an impact on people, namely situations that are described as "crisis, problematic, critical, existential, terminal, emotionally complex life situations. A crisis situation is a situation that generates a deficit of meaning in a person's future life, as a situation of impossibility of fulfilling internal life needs (motives, aspirations, values, etc.)" (Turynina, 2017, p. 7). Thus, we can extrapolate the influence of the digital world, the accelerated pace of life, and the excessive demands on the human psyche in terms of living standards as factors that contribute to an increase in stressful and crisis situations. Among these factors, in our opinion, we can highlight the "constant" changeability of circumstances and the destruction of stable landmarks, which are characteristic of "liquid modernity". Bauman's concept of 'liquid modernity' emphasises the volatility and fragmentation of contemporary society, where individuals are forced to constantly adapt to dynamically changing circumstances. Here we can confidently talk about the future shock effect according to Alvin Toffler in his work "A Future Shock" (1970), where the author defines this term as a psychological state of individuals and entire societies, as well as a personal perception of "too much change in too short a period of time" ("Future Shock", 2025). According to this logic, consumption ceases to be simply a means of satisfying basic needs and becomes a tool for preserving one's identity in conditions of chaos. It is this aspect that R. Sennett examines in detail in his work "The Culture of New Capitalism" (2006), demonstrating how flexible and short-term economic structures produce a sense of disconnection from life and provoke the need for compensatory consumption.

Richard Sennett focuses on the impact of transformations that occur in connection with the abolition of such factors of the industrial economy as long-term employment and the existence of established structures. Instead, in the conditions of "new" capitalism, there are changing markets, temporary agreements and project work, which, of course, affects the conditions of human existence. Sennett views the modern economic system as one that requires people to constantly adapt:

The first concerns time: how to manage shortterm relationships, and oneself, while migrating from task to task, job to job, place to place. If institutions no longer provide a long-term frame, the individual may have to improvise his or her life-narrative, or even do without any sustained sense of self. (Sennett, 2006, p. 4)

As Sennett notes, when life breaks down into episodes, people have to invent and even improvise their life narrative. Material goods, brands, and lifestyles become symbolic "anchors" that temporarily compensate for the absence of strong social ties and stable value systems. However, such compensation is short-lived and weak, which ultimately increases the need for new acts of consumption.

Sennett points out that the corporate culture of new capitalism destroys the traditional foundations of trust, loyalty and mutual devotion. As a result, people find themselves in a state of permanent competition, which provokes consumerism, where consumer habits are aimed not at satisfying basic needs, but at demonstrating their "success" in a symbolic competition for a place in society. Buying things, visiting trendy establishments, and using the latest technologies become a way to maintain a sense of self-importance, especially when other means of self-affirmation – such as stable employment, a strong community, or a secure future – lose their relevance.

By proposing the concept of "traumatic consumerism", we seek to combine philosophical-cultural and psychological approaches, which will allow us to reach a new level of understanding of this issue. "Consumers who report previously experiencing traumatic events feel anxiety while shopping in retail environments, negatively influencing their ability to make purchase decisions" (Waites et al., 2023, p. 1). "Traumatic consumerism" occurs when the purchase and use of goods and services become a compensatory mechanism in response to personal or social trauma. This is particularly acute during global crises: wars, economic turmoil, or environmental disasters. In such conditions, consumption ceases to be merely an economic activity and becomes a psychological way of coping with anxiety or, conversely, intensifying it. As Sarkia (2025) notes, "The affective realist view is most optimistic about the predictive power of consumer sentiment data on the grounds that it captures the causal role of 'animal spirits' and willingness to spend as forces for the economy" (p. 82). Thus, the economic behaviour of modern humans is shaped not by rational needs, but by emotional states that are characteristic of cultural trauma. The ethical dimension of traumatic consumerism is well reflected in the concept of Yang and Cayla (2025), who analyse how the experience of social exclusion in the sphere of consumption takes on an emotional and political character.

Importantly, their defensiveness is not merely a rationalization of taste or an evasion of guilt – it becomes a political and affective response to exclusion, asserting the right to access, recognition, and ethical agency in the marketplace. Their stance challenges the normative assumptions em-

bedded in discourses of ethical consumption, which often fail to account for the unequal distribution of choice and inclusion. (Yang & Cayla, 2025, p. 7)

This position allows us to view traumatic consumption not only as a consequence of individual experiences, but also as a symptom of structural inequality in a globalised world, where social upheaval and instability provoke emotional and economic reactions.

Erich Fromm expressed his thoughts on the prospects for the development of human society in his work "To Have or To Be?". Fromm notes that modern people are in a crisis with many dimensions due to the power of corporate capital, the inertia of the majority of the population, the inadequacy of political leadership, the threat of nuclear war, and environmental hazards such as climate change, which could lead to famine in many countries around the world. The chances of salvation seem slim based on business logic, but when it comes to life and death, even a small probability of success should be considered a real possibility. When Life itself is threatened, all measures must be taken to ensure that the "sick society" receives comprehensive therapy. Fromm pointed out that modern people in the industrial world often seek to compensate for feelings of helplessness and alienation through "possession" as a means of self-affirmation, and traumatic consumerism emerges as the apogee of appropriation orientation, when the acquisition of material goods creates the illusion of control and security.

American economist and sociologist Jeremy Rifkin points out in his work "The Empathic Civilisation" that there has been a historical development of empathy as humanity's ability to expand the circle of moral concern – from family and tribe to the global community. "The empathic drive is the invisible hand of human history" (Rifkin, 2010, p. 16). This idea can be seen as a precursor to the concept of smart consumption, where purchasing decisions are based not on impulse or status display, but on an understanding of the consequences. Rifkin emphasises that the only way out of global crises is through the formation of a "global empathic civilisation" where consumption is not separated from environmental and ethical responsibility.

A 2014 study by contemporary authors such as Eli Somer of the University of Haifa and Ayallo Ruvio of Temple University (Pennsylvania) demonstrates that traumatic consumption has clear mechanisms of formation and manifests itself in measurable behavioural indicators. In particular, in their article, where they cited research on the consumer behaviour of Israeli residents, they concluded that attention to material things is a factor in vulnerability. Focusing on things rather than interpersonal relationships exacerbates the negative impact of trauma. "Highly materialistic individuals... were more oriented to objects rather than humans" (Somer & Ruvio, 2014, p. 435), that is, individuals with a high level of materialistic outlook tend to focus more on objects than on people. This orientation reduces the role of social support and increases the likelihood of developing compensatory consumer strategies. In the context "posttraumatic distress tended to exacerbate the effect of materialism on elevating maladaptive shopping patterns" (Somer & Ruvio, 2014, p. 436). One of the key manifestations of traumatic consumption is shopping escapism, i.e., shopping as a way to avoid experiencing unpleasant emotions. Somer and Ruvio (2014) note that escapist shopping increases with the level of traumatic exposure, but this approach does not solve the underlying problems, as the pleasure of shopping does not reduce post-traumatic distress: "The pleasures of shopping cannot attenuate posttraumatic distress" (p. 435).

Another study conducted by the same authors – Ayallo Ruvio and Eli Somer, in collaboration with Arik Rindfleisch from the University of Illinois College of Business – showed that material orientation moderates the relationship between fear of death and impulsive/compulsive purchases: "Materialism exhibits a significant moderating effect on the relationship between fear of own death and compulsive [and] impulsive buying" (Ruvio et al., 2014, p. 96). The authors also emphasise that this effect persists primarily in people with low self-esteem, while materialism makes bad events even worse. Based on these studies, a number of indicators for traumatic consumption can be singled out, including: price sensitivity and a tendency to choose the cheapest products even if this reduces satisfaction with the purchase; a high level of brand switching and experimentation with new products, motivated not by innovation but by savings; impulsive and compulsive purchases associated with emotional tension and fear of death (Ruvio et al., 2014). Thus, social support is replaced by consumer actions.

From a philosophical and anthropological perspective, traumatic consumerism leads to a distortion of cultural values: things lose their utilitarian purpose and are transformed into psychological "prostheses" for overcoming trauma. An example of this is the phenomenon of "panic buying" during the COVID-19 pandemic, when the mass purchase of scarce goods (from anti-septics to food) served primarily a symbolic rather than a practical function. Similarly, in times of war, traumatic consumerism manifests itself through the purchase of essential products and goods, as well as alternative energy sources.

Fromm's reasoning lies in the direction of stating the need to move away from old patterns, such as appropriation, emphasis on profit, etc. Only by rejecting "rigid" market relations can a new human community be established:

The realization of the new society and new Man is possible only if the old motivations of profit, power, and intellect are replaced by new ones: being, sharing, understanding; if the marketing character is replaced by the productive, loving character; if cybernetic religion is replaced by a new radical-humanistic spirit. (Fromm, 2010, p. 214)

Accordingly, new forms of consumption belonging to smart culture will also be formed. According to Ukrainian researchers V. Voronkova and O. Kyvliuk (2017), "smart culture is not an independent entity: it is an element of the information culture, media culture, which is based on them and develops them" (p. 92). A more successful description of the essential features of smart culture is formulated in another work: "smart-culture is a set of comfortable conditions of human existence and development created by modern society with the help of the latest technologies in symbiosis with scientific achievements and valuable achievements of civilization" (Levcheniuk et al., 2021, p. 190). The authors see the basis for the functioning of smart culture in values that must be cultivated and supported by the entire system of social institutions, which is impossible. New forms of consumption will consist in changing the direction of human development, for which it is not important to break away from the old, but rather to transform the direction in which the new will develop and evolve.

So what can be classified as smart consumption? In contemporary philosophical and cultural discourse, smart consumption is viewed not only as individual economic behaviour, but as a sys-

temic phenomenon integrated into broader social and institutional contexts. This is noted by T. M. Skjølvold et al. (2021), "a concept such as 'smart consumption' needs to be considered as embedded in broader systems... consumption is not performed by individuals, but as part of a broader system" (p. 8). This approach allows us to understand smart consumption as part of a collective transformation aimed at changing production and consumption patterns. An important ethical basis for this concept is the idea of sufficiency, developed by T. Princen (2005), who emphasises: "seeking enough when more is possible is both intuitive and rational... under global ecological constraint, it is ethical". The author emphasises that in an era when technological progress and economic development allow us to consume much more, a conscious choice in favour of moderate consumption, rather than maximum consumption, is not a consequence of poverty or a rejection of modern conveniences, but a well-thought-out strategy. Moderate consumption here means satisfying basic needs without excessive depletion of resources. Prinsen emphasises that this practice resonates with both emotional and rational motivations, namely: an inner sense that excess often leads to unnecessary waste and loss of value, while limited resources and growing environmental problems require strategic planning for the future. It is also clear that the influence of technology is significantly transforming consumer strategies. As noted Wang:

Consumer behavior has been mainly transformed by Artificial Intelligence advancements, altering product preferences and choices, as well as consumer perception in a digital marketplace. With the introduction of AI-enabled product-recommendation systems, targeted advertising, and customized content, the traditional way consumers make decisions is already changing. (Wang, 2025, p. 1)

Under such conditions, the process of independent decision-making becomes a pressing issue, where individual selectivity is gradually combined with socio-ethical standards of responsibility. Thus, choosing moderate consumption becomes an ethical imperative, which is no longer just a personal choice, but a manifestation of responsibility towards other people, future generations, etc. It is clear that the idea of smart consumption is radically different from the logic of traditional consumerism, which is based on the principle of "the more, the better". Prinsen proposes a philosophy that brings economic behaviour into line with ethical and environmental values, combining self-restraint as a virtue (in the Stoic tradition) with a pragmatic approach that takes global challenges into account.

Thus, smart consumption emerges as the antithesis of traumatic consumerism, offering a model of moderate, conscious use of resources as a socially and morally justified strategy. A study by the Finnish Innovation Fund Sitra, an independent state organisation founded by the Finnish Parliament in 1967, conducted in autumn 2017, aimed to analyse consumer habits. The report was originally intended for entrepreneurs and business developers who develop products and services. In it, the authors clarify that smart consumption is based on a combination of personal needs and the limitations of the planet's ecological capacity: "Smart consumption is about thinking about both our own needs and the earth's carrying capacity and the sufficiency of shared resources when we

buy goods and services" (Huumo et al., 2019, p. 6). Motivational factors behind this practice are often driven not so much by environmental considerations as by a desire for health, time savings, social belonging and bringing joy to loved ones. From a philosophical perspective, smart consumption can be defined as a cultural and ethical practice that combines the ethics of sufficiency, individual well-being, and a systemic focus on sustainable development.

Originality

The article introduces the concept of "traumatic consumerism", which emerges when the acquisition and use of goods and services become a compensatory mechanism in response to personal or societal trauma – a phenomenon that intensifies during global crises such as wars, economic downturns, or environmental disasters. It outlines the dynamics of the shift from traumatic consumerism to smart consumption as observed in the conditions of liquid modernity.

Conclusions

The analysis revealed that the phenomenon of modern consumption goes far beyond the economic sphere and is a powerful cultural and anthropological factor that determines social identities, behaviour patterns and the structure of personal values. The concepts of T. Veblen, J. Baudrillard and P. Bourdieu show that consumption is a symbolic means of maintaining social hierarchies and reproducing status differences, while replacing real needs with symbolic signs of prestige and belonging. The current situation, described by Z. Bauman through the concept of "liquid modernity", points to the instability of social institutions and increased uncertainty, which, combined with the demands for flexibility described by R. Sennett, leads to the formation of traumatic consumption experiences. In this context, people are increasingly faced with a lack of trust, a lack of long-term guidelines and the need for constant adaptation, which causes psychological exhaustion. At the same time, the search for alternatives to traumatic consumerism is leading to the development of smart consumption practices focused on awareness, self-sufficiency and environmental responsibility. Such consumption forms a new ethical foundation, where the priority is not the accumulation of material goods, but a harmonious balance between personal needs and the sustainable development of society.

We propose the Traumatic Consumption Model, which illustrates the phased dynamics of changes in an individual's consumer behaviour. Each stage of the model demonstrates the relationship between an individual's internal psycho-emotional state and the external manifestations of their economic activity. The first stage is associated with the traumatic experience of events such as war, natural disasters or violent crime, which cause psychological shock and trigger a chain of long-term changes in perception, emotions and behaviour. In the second stage, in response to existential instability, there is a growing focus on material values, which become a means of control and compensation for losses through the desire to possess things as symbols of security. In the third stage, the individual experiences emotional and psychological exhaustion, manifested through anxiety, fear, and a loss of meaning in life. These manifestations correlate with PTSD symptoms and significant emotional instability, which forms the basis for destructive forms of consumption. The fourth stage involves behavioural reactions aimed at temporarily alleviating the emotional state through spontaneous, impulsive purchases. Consumption becomes a means of psychological escape. At the final stage, the individual demonstrates the possibility of constructive transformation, with the right support and reflection, forming attitudes towards responsible consumption and reducing impulsive activity.

Thus, the transition from traumatic consumerism to smart consumption is not only an economic or social trend, but also a worldview transformation that changes the very foundations of human social existence and is a response to rapid technological progress. Understanding this process requires an interdisciplinary approach that combines philosophical, cultural and socio-psychological dimensions.

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Соціально-антропологічні виміри культури: від травматичного консьюмеризму до смарт-споживання

Мета – висвітлити соціально-антропологічні виміри сучасної культури крізь призму трансформації споживацьких практик – від травматичного консьюмеризму до смарт-споживання, що ілюструє перехід від

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компенсаторної до усвідомленої моделі людського існування у глобалізованому світі. **Теоретичний базис** статті базується на працях ключових філософів, які досліджували споживання в соціокультурному та філософському розрізах. Т. Веблен аналізує демонстративне споживання як спосіб соціального розшарування та утвердження позиції в суспільстві. Ж. Бодріяр трактує споживання як набір символів, що породжують потреби та уявлення, які віддаляються від реальних потреб. П. Бурдье акцентує на ролі споживчих звичок у підтриманні соціальних ієрархій і символічній боротьбі між соціальними групами. Концепція "рідкої модерності" З. Баумана роз'яснює посилення нестабільності та невизначеності як чинників, що формують травматичний досвід у суспільстві споживання. Р. Сеннет досліджує вплив нової культури капіталізму, що робить акцент на гнучкості та короткострокових цілях, на руйнування тривалих цінностей та ідентичності. Ці підходи поєднуються в цьому дослідженні для тлумачення переходу від травматичного консьюмеризму до смарт-споживання. **Наукова новизна.** Надано визначення явища "травматичного консьюмеризму", що виникає, коли купівля та використання речей та послуг перетворюються на компенсаторний механізм у відповідь на особисті або суспільні травми, які особливо гостро проявляються під час глобальних криз: війн, економічних негараздів, або екологічних лих. Представлено динаміку зміни травматичного консьюмеризму на смарт-споживання, яке спостерігається в умовах "рідкої модерності". **Висновки.** В статті розглядається перетворення споживання, що рухається від травмуючого консьюмеризму до смарт-споживання. Використовуючи теорії Т. Веблена, Ж. Бодріяра, П. Бурдье, З. Баумана та Р. Сеннета, демонструється, що сучасне споживання є культурно-символічним інструментом, який буде соціальні ідентичності та підтримує ієрархії. Аналізується вплив нестабільності та вимог гнучкості на збільшення травматичного досвіду споживачів, а також представлени перспективи смарт-споживання як свідомої, етичної практики, яка сприяє самодостатності та сталому розвитку.

Ключові слова: глобалізація; людина; культура споживання; травма; травматичний консьюмеризм; травматичне споживання; смарт-культура; смарт-споживання

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