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A STUDY OF THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE ENVIRONMENTAL CONSCIOUSNESS OF CONSUMERS

BADANIE CZYNNIKÓW MAJĄCYCH WPŁYW NA ŚWIADOMOŚĆ ŚRODOWISKOWĄ KONSUMENTÓW

Key words: consumer-awareness, demographic features, environmentally conscious attitude, environmentally conscious behaviour

Słowa kluczowe: świadomość konsumentów, cechy demograficzne, świadoma postawa wobec środowiska, faktyczne zachowanie wobec środowiska

Abstract. In recent years the intensified consumer-consciousness has clearly determined the decisions of the consumers. A primary research was carried out among students in Hungary in the spring of 2010, which focused on a special segment, the attitude of the environment-conscious consumers and the demographic features affecting them. The decisions of the environment-conscious consumers, who keep in mind the interest of others, are clearly determined by the factors such as which lifecycle they are in, social status, marital status, gender and qualifications. According to research result the female members (in relationship, with children and high qualifications) of the elder generation group are significantly more environment-conscious than those with other demographic features. The research also pointed out that from the environment-consciousness point of view not all the demographic features are influencing factors. The role of income and place of residence is not relevant from this point of view. However, the significance of the attitudes from the research point of view are very important as there is a medium, and positive correlation between the actual behaviour and attitudes.

Introduction

Research findings on consumer trends show that conscious consumption has intensified all around the world [Dudás 2011, Szakály 2008]. This consciousness can be seen in the decisions of consumers and can be divided into two large groups. These consumers keep in mind their own interests and the interests of others.

Further subgroups can be made: ethical consumption, responsible consumption, sustainable consumption, socially responsible consumption, environmentally conscious consumption and product-origin-conscious consumption [Dudás 2006]. The environmentally aware consumer possesses positive attitudes towards the environment. During the study, two underlying factors: attitudes towards the environment and attitudes of environmentally conscious behaviour are examined [Hines et al. 1986/1987]. According to international literature, a clear correlation can be found between attitudes and actual environmentally conscious behaviour. Positive attitudes have a positive impact whereas negative attitudes have negative impacts on environmentally conscious behaviour [Alwitt, Berger 1993, Berger, Corbin 1992, Corraliza, Berenguer 2000, Cottrell 2003].

The present research examines the demographic factors that influence environmentally conscious attitudes and actual environment-conscious behaviour. The reason for this is that several opposing findings can be found regarding this field [Moon et al. 2002, Ottman 1998, Olli et al. 2001, Szente 2004, Székely 2003, Schultz et al. 2000, Domina, Koch 2002].

Materials and methods

The primary research, which is based on academic literature, observes the environmentally-conscious aspect of consumers, environmentally conscious behaviour and the demographic factors influencing the effect on actual environmentally conscious behaviour.

1. The main aim of the study is to examine the extent to which students, representing the sample, judge themselves as environmentally conscious consumers.
2. The study also examines what is the general attitude of the respondent students concerning environmentally conscious consumption. It also focuses on the question: To what extent do demographic features influence the attitudes of the respondents?
3. The aim of the research is to reveal the relation between student attitudes and their actual environmentally conscious behaviour.

Primary research was carried out with the help of a standard interview among college students in Hungary. The interviews were made in the spring of 2010. 657 questionnaires were filled in, of which 615 surveys could be processed. The research sample consisted of students above the age of 18. Throughout the research, students were chosen at random.

Before proving the hypothesis, at each of the metric variable, a normality test was carried out. Throughout the research, an independent nonparametric test was used and the method of correlation was used to examine relations.

Results

The demographic features of the sample

30% of the interviewed students (187 persons) were male, and 70% (428 persons) were female. This disproportion is due to the fact that female students represent a higher number in the institution. 70% (434 persons) were members of the X Generation and 30% (181 persons) of the Boomer Generation. The older Boomers were mainly correspondent students and participated in distance learning. That is why their marital status was different to the full-time, younger Boomers. Almost half of the sample 48% (295 persons) comprised of singles, and 52% (320 persons) were found to be in a relationship, so, in this respect, there is no significant difference between the two groups. However, 72% of the interviewed students (443 persons) were childless and 28% (172 persons) had children.

The students were principally full-time students, so 91% (560 persons) had a school leaving examination and 9% (55 persons) were graduate students.

Judging environmental consciousness

The research initially studied to what extent the respondents are environmentally conscious consumers when shopping. The results were surprising.

Based on the results of the research, 58% of the respondents considered their shopping customs to be more environmentally conscious than others. 37% considered themselves to be as conscious as others, and only 5% thought of themselves as less environmentally conscious consumers compared to others.

Examination of environmentally conscious attitudes

Past research has proved that the attitude of an individual plays an important role in creating environmentally conscious behaviour. The present study also focused on this issue.

When compiling the questionnaire on consumer attitudes, the itemised evaluation scale technique was used. A 5-degree Likert-scale concerning environmentally conscious consumption had to be filled in on 12 items of the questionnaire. Each respondent could gain a possible 0-60 points. The students, participating in the sample, scored the following average total of points in the attitude scale (Tab. 1).

The environmentally conscious attitudes of respondents were influenced by gender, age, the characteristics of the household and whether there is a child in the household or not. Women in

Table 1. The attitude of respondents based on demographic features (N = 615)
 Tabela 1. Postawa respondentów uzależniona od cech demograficznych (N = 615)

Demographic features as the base of examination of relations/Cechy demograficzne jako podstawa badania zależności	Demographic features – groups created from the sample/Cechy demograficzne – grupy wyodrębnione z grupy badawczej	The average total points of consumer attitudes/Srednia liczba punktów podejścia konsumenta	The applied research method/Zastosowana metoda badawcza	Level of significance/Poziom znaczenia
Gender of the respondent/ Płeć respondenta	male/męska	40.9184	nonparametric tests/ 2 Independent Samples/ Mann Whitney/testy bez parametrow/2 niezależne próbki/Test Manna-Whitneya	p = 0.000
	female/żeńska	42.5232		
Generation group/ Grupa pokoleniowa	X Generation/Generacja X	41.806	nonparametric tests/ 2 Independent Samples/ Mann Whitney/testy bez parametrow/2 niezależne próbki/Test Manna-Whitneya	p = 0.000
	boomers/pokolenie wyżu	43.1252		
The characteristics of the household/Charakterystyka gospodarstwa domowego	single/wolny	40.8413	nonparametric tests/ 2 Independent Samples/ Mann Whitney/testy bez parametrow/2 niezależne próbki/Test Manna-Whitneya	p = 0.000
	in a relationship/w związku	43.1288		
Family status/Stan rodziny	with child/dzietna	43.8358	nonparametric tests/ 2 Independent Samples/ Mann Whitney/testy bez parametrow/ 2 niezależne próbki/ Test Manna-Whitneya	p = 0.000
	no child/bezdietna	41.3418		
Qualifications/Wykształcenie	school leaving examination (secondary or vocational school)/średnie (szkola średnia bądź zawodowa)	41.9135	nonparametric tests/ K Independent Samples/ Mann Whitney/testy bez parametrow/2 niezależne próbki/Test Manna-Whitneya	p = 0.066
	degree (college, university)/wyższe (college, uniwersytet)	43.0660		
Place of residency/ Miejsce zamieszkania	capital city/miasto stołeczne	42.8068	nonparametric tests/ K Independent Samples/ Kruskal Wallis H/ testy bez parametrow/ K niezależnych próbek/Test Kruskala Wallisa	p = 0.415
	capital of county/ stolica kraju	42.470		
	town/miasto	41.530		
Level of income/ Poziom przychodu	village/wieś	41.288	nonparametric tests/ K Independent Samples/ Kruskal Wallis H/testy bez parametrow/K niezależnych próbek/ Test Kruskala Wallisa	p = 0.891
	has difficulties/problemsy finansowe	41.187		
	average living standard/średni standard życia	41.450		
	lives well/wysoki standard życia	40.808		

Source: own study

Źródło: badania własne

relationships, having at least one child and belonging to the Boomer Generation had significantly ($p = 0.000$) more environmentally conscious attitudes than any other students.

The respondents with higher educational qualifications gained a higher average total point score on the scale measuring environmentally conscious attitudes; hence according to the research the graduate students possessed more environmentally conscious attitudes as opposed to those with only a secondary education. The difference according to the Mann Whitney independent, nonparametric test was significant ($p = 0.066$).

Based on the findings, it can be stated that factors such as the place of residency or the level of income did not influence the environmentally conscious attitudes of the students.

Examination of the relation between the environmentally conscious attitude and behaviour

The research shows [Majláth 2009] that although people possess positive environmentally conscious attitudes, they are not manifested in their actual behaviour. This study aimed to examine this phenomenon. Therefore, a questionnaire of 8 items was compiled and each respondent could gain from 0 to 32 points on the scale. According to the Spearman correlation test, it can be stated that there was a significant moderate and positive correlation between environmentally conscious attitudes and actual environmentally conscious behaviour of the students ($\rho = 0.343$; $p < 0.000$). This means that environmental consciousness was reflected in the actual behaviour of the students committed to it.

Conclusions

Based on the research findings, generally, it can be stated that demographic features were determining factors influencing environmental consciousness. Women of the Boomer Generation with a degree, a child and in relationships showed a greater environmental sensitivity and interest than those who had different demographic characteristics. This environmentally conscious sensitivity was reflected in their attitudes and actual behaviour. Therefore, the examination of demographic features, from the viewpoint of environmental consciousness, was justified.

According to the research, the place of residency as well as income were not associated with positively motivating factors of environmental consciousness.

The research also proved that environmentally conscious attitudes and actual behaviour correlate positively, though moderately. It, therefore, seems that attitudes were determining factors, however, not exclusive criteria for environmentally conscious behaviour. As a consequence, it is necessary to examine factors that have an effect on environmentally conscious behaviour.

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Streszczenie

Świadomość konsumenta w widoczny sposób określała jego decyzje zakupowe. W 2010 r. przeprowadzono badania wśród węgierskich studentów, które obejmowały zachowania konsumentów traktujących środowisko w świadomy sposób i cechy demograficzne mające na nich wpływ. Decyzje konsumentów traktujących środowisko w świadomy sposób, mających na uwadze dobro innych, były wyraźnie uwarunkowane czynnikami, takimi jak okres życia, w którym się znajdują, status społeczny, status materialny, plec i wykształcenie.

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