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CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION – GREEN CONSUMPTION

ŚWIADOMA KONSUMPCJA – ZIELONA KONSUMPCJA

Key words: conscious consumption, environmentally conscious consumption, “green thinking”, savings, health consciousness

Słowa kluczowe: świadoma konsumpcja, proekologiczna konsumpcja, „zielone myślenie”, oszczędności, świadomość zdrowotna

Abstract. The ecological and social problems of the last century had their impact on the economy and consumer behaviour. New purchasing preferences have been formed due to the sustainable development creating new trends – followed by certain consumer segments. Shoppers tried to control their own life and the development of the environment. The hedonist consumer behaviour was replaced by more conscious purchasing decisions, however, this did not necessary mean green consumption. According to research results savings, conscious decision making, health consciousness and environmentally conscious way of thinking are the motives behind the conscious consumption, of which real manifestation and content can only be seen by examining the realized behaviour. The study introduces the differences in the realized behaviour according to the demographic features (gender and age group), in accordance with the advancement of age, the person’s consumption decisions become more matured and environmentally conscious.

Introduction

The needs of the consumers of the 20th century have been gradually increasing since the World War II until the economic downturn. The willingness to shop was influenced significantly by the relatively stable economic background and the disposable income. To satisfy the ever increasing needs led to an increasing energy use, which caused several environmental problems. The ecological problems appeared not only at global but also at micro, mezzo and macro level, realizing its consequences newer consumer groups and trend developed. Even before the economic downturn it could be felt that the environmental awareness of the consumers had been increasing. Green and ethical consumer trendgroups have appeared. These are the consumers whose purchasing decisions are influenced by ecological preferences, expecting economical, clean and green products from the companies [Zsolnai 2001]. What is even more staggering is that in certain consumer groups the need for simplicity has increased even before the recession that significantly influences consumer attitudes, and also the need for self-imposed savings increased for which even trendgroups came into being [Flatters, Willmatt 2009/2010].

The present research focuses on the characteristics of the environmentally conscious consumer behaviour, considering that there are many definitions, approaches and representations of the environmentally conscious consumption, it is even more important that this research attempts to clarify the concept.

Literature review

Several studies [Gulyás 2008, Kasser 2005, Székely 2003, Kocsis 2002] have already proved that even among the experts there is no consensus what is understood under the concept of conscious consumption. In everyday life the different expressions are used casually (e.g. conscious consumption, ethical consumption and enlightened consumption) making it even more difficult to give a clear cut view of the concept for the consumers.

Table 1. The definition of environmentally conscious consumption**Tabela 1. Definicja świadomej konsumpcji proekologicznej**

Researcher/ Badacz	The definition of environmentally conscious consumption / Definicje proekologicznej świadomej konsumpcji	Definition based on – factors influencing the consumer behaviour/ definicje bazujące na czynnikach wpływających na zachowania konsumentów
Peattie [1992]	The green consumer is the person who consistently collects information about products and companies and exercises social considerations when purchasing/ <i>Zielony konsument to osoba, która nieustannie zbiera informacje o produktach i firmach i uwzględni kwestie społeczne przy zakupie</i>	environmental and social viewpoints/ <i>spojrzenie środowiskowe i społeczne</i>
Meffert and Kirchgeorg [1993]	The environmentally conscious consumer tries to minimalise the harmful effects and the extra costs. His or her purchasing decisions are based on ecological consistency. Such a consumer follows the lifecycle of a product and ignores such products that could mean burden for the environment and causes extra costs at any stage/ <i>Proekologiczny konsument stara się zminimalizować szkodliwe skutki i dodatkowe koszty. Jego decyzje zakupowe są oparte na ekologicznej spójności. Taki konsument podąża za cyklem życia produktu i ignoruje te produkty, które mogą oznaczać duże obciążenie dla środowiska i powodować dodatkowe koszty na każdym etapie</i>	considering ecological problems/ <i>wzięto pod uwagę problem ekologiczne</i>
Banerjee and McKeage [1994]	According to the environmentally conscious consumer the mankind does not rule the environment but he or she is committed to it and tries to find solutions for the present environmental problems. The environmentally conscious consumer with its own and others environmental conscious lifestyle and by changing the economic system dramatically seeks solutions/ <i>Według konsumentów dbających o ochronę środowiska ludzkość nie wyklucza środowiska, ale on lub ona jest zaangażowana na jego rzecz i próbuje znaleźć rozwiązania obecnych problemów środowiskowych. Proekologiczny konsument z jego i innych użytkowników środowiska świadomym i zmieniając system gospodarczy stylem życia dramatycznie szuka rozwiązań</i>	beliefs related to the environment/ <i>przekonania odniesione do środowiska</i>
Shrum [1995]	The green consumer is whose consumer behaviour is influenced by environmental considerations, somehow is concerned with the physical environment (air, water and Earth)/ <i>Zielony konsument to osoba, której zachowania konsumenckie są nacechowane dbałością o środowisko naturalne, i w jakiś sposób związane są z jej fizycznym środowiskiem (powietrze, woda i ziemia)</i>	commitment to the natural environment/ <i>zaangażowanie na rzecz środowiska naturalnego</i>
Kerekes and Kindler [1997]	The environmentally conscious consumer is who is interested in using environmental friendly products and before getting them makes considerations. Does not buy such products which harms the health or its production needs great use of energy. Does not buy such products which harms the environment during its production and usage or its placement after using it. Does not buy such products of which packing or the product itself produces unnecessary waste. Does not buy such products which originate from species in extinction or endangered environment. Other countries, especially developing countries, are affected adversely/ <i>Proekologiczny konsument jest to osoba, która jest zainteresowany wykorzystaniem przyjaznych dla środowiska produktów i zanim je kupi bierze pod uwagę owa przyjazność. Nie kupuje takich produktów, które szkodzą zdrowiu lub ich produkcja wymaga wielkiego zużycia energii. Nie kupuje takich produktów, które szkodzą środowisku podczas produkcji i użytkowania lub utylizacji. Nie kupuje takich produktów, których opakowanie lub sam produkt wytwarzają niepotrzebne odpady. Nie kupuje takich produktów, które pochodzą od gatunków zagrożonych wyginięciem lub z zagrożonych obszarów. Inne kraje, zwłaszcza kraje rozwijające się, wpływają niekorzystnie</i>	environmental concerns/ <i>ochrona środowiska</i>
Hofmeister, Simon, Bódi [2006]	The environmentally conscious consumption contributes to the decreasing of imposing on the environment in such a way that in the meantime the consumer is able to satisfy his/her traditional needs/ <i>Proekologiczna konsumpcja przyczynia się do zmniejszenia oddziaływania na środowisko w taki sposób, że w międzyczasie konsument jest w stanie zaspokoić swoje potrzeby w tradycyjny sposób</i>	decreasing emission/ <i>zmniejszenie emisji</i>

Source: own study

Źródło: opracowanie własne

Factors influencing environmentally conscious consumption

Although the consumers have positive, environment conscious way of thinking, this type of thinking does not manifest in their deeds and in their consumer behaviour [Majláth 2009]. The reason for this lie in the complexity of the external and internal factors [Nagy 2005] – demographic, psychological, behavioural, situational and other features. Correlated with the environmentally conscious consumption are the followings: demographic factors – gender [Schultz and et al. 2000, Szente 2004, Ottman 1998, Dietz et al. 2002], the place of residence [Olli et al. 2001, Zimmer et al. 1994, Moon et al. 2002], the social class [Tucker 1980], children [Loureiro et al. 2002], and the size of the household [Domina, Koch 2002].

The environment consciousness is influenced by attitude to a great extent, the subject of which is health the most often. [Iversen, Rundmo 2002], selective waste collection [Biswas et al. 2000, Valle et al. 2004], attitudes of the general environment [Rauwald, Moore 2002, Schultz et al. 2000, Alwitt, Berger 1993], products packaged one by one [Alwitt, Berger 1993] and food safety [Loureiro et al. 2002].

Materials and methods

The primary research, based on the literature, observes the consumers environmentally friendly viewpoint, their environmentally conscious behaviour and the effect of the influencing factors of the environmental conscious behaviour such as – gender, age. The following objectives are in the focus.

- O1 – the main objective of the study is what is meant by 'conscious consumption' by the interviewed. Whether all conscious consumer have a 'green' way of thinking?
- O2 – the objective of the research is to what extent do the interviewed hold themselves conscious consumers compared to others?
- O3 – the objective of the research is to reveal how the definition – as an independent variable – influences the real environmentally conscious behaviour, as a dependent variable?
- O4 – the objective of the research is to reveal whether there are any relationships among the realized conscious behaviour and gender, and generation groups?

The primary research was carried out among college students in Hungary by standard interview in the spring of 2010. The questionnaire was filled in by 441 students out of which 404 were processed. The sample contained college student who were over 18 years of age, most of them are full time students, and in a smaller part they took part in corresponding and distant learning courses. In the present research the simple random sampling technique was applied.

The data processing was carried out with the help of Microsoft Excel 2007 and SPSS 17.0. Before the research and proving the hypothesis, the normality research of all metric variables was carried out.

Results and their evaluations

According to gender 33% of the interviewed (132 persons) are male, 67% (272 persons) are female, this is due to the fact that in the college the proportion of female students is much higher.

In respect of age two main groups were created from the students over 18. Based on the three segments of the generation marketing – X generation, boomers and matured – the interviewed could be divided into two groups. That is 69% (280 persons) are X generation, 31% (124 persons) are boomer. The research assumes differences in the consumption behaviour of the two generation groups that is why it is important to create and compare these two segments. The marital status of the two groups is fundamentally different, which can be an explanation for the deviations seen later.

O1: The main objective of the study is what is meant by 'conscious consumption' by the interviewed. Whether all conscious consumer have a 'green' way of thinking?

Due to the several different definitions and interpretations of the concept, one of the main aims of the research is to reveal what is meant by „conscious consumption” by the interviewed. Based on the interviewee's interpretation of the concept four groups can be formed:

- 1) the conscious consumption for the interviewed means that he or she *does not buy unnecessary products and their shopping is planned* (53%),
- 2) the conscious consumption for the interviewed means *environmentally conscious consumption* (19%),
- 3) the conscious consumption for the interviewed means *considering value for money and quality* (18%),
- 4) the conscious consumption for the interviewed means *buying /consuming healthy food products and considering their origin* (10%).

The result of the research reveals that the interviewed are not homogenous in interpreting the concept of conscious consumption. Only 19% of the interviewed understand conscious consumption as environmentally conscious consumption. At this stage of the study it is not well-marked yet, however the 10% group – consuming healthy products and considering the origin of them - forms a significant group

from the viewpoint of 'green' thinking. This 30% proportion can be seen as many or little, however, if the research opposes this to its own interpretation than it is little. So henceforward the study observes to what extent do the interviewed hold themselves conscious consumers? Does it fail the proportion seen in the definition, or does it exceed in number?

O2: The objective of the research is to what extent do the interviewed hold themselves conscious consumers compared to others?

According to result of the research 56% of the interviewed based on their own admission in respect of their purchasing habits are more conscious than others, 35% hold themselves as conscious as others, and only 9% of the students see themselves less conscious consumer as others.

As the qualitative researches have already revealed that the conscious consumption and the environmentally conscious consumption is not one and the same for every interviewed, so the main question was to what extent do the interviewed hold themselves environmentally conscious consumer on their own admission. The result is surprising. 75% of the interviewed see themselves more environmentally conscious consumers than others, 38.5% as much environmentally conscious as others, and only 4.5% see themselves less environmentally conscious consumers than others. This proportion nearly equals the proportion of the conscious consumption, which is interesting as when defining the concept of conscious consumption, the content of the two definitions did not reveal such similarity.

Based on the results it is obvious that the interviewed prefer to show themselves a bit more environmentally conscious than they actually are. This attitude, however, is not surprising, so to avoid misinterpretations and distortion, even at the beginning stage of the research not only the behaviour on its own admission, but also the realized behaviour were examined.

When compiling the questionnaire for the environmentally conscious behaviour, detailed assessment scale was applied. The interviewed marked their actual environmental deeds on a 4 point scale. When observing the realized environmentally behaviour a questionnaire of 8 items was used. The interviewed got from 1 to 4 point for each question, so the maximum point of the realized environmental behaviour was 32.

O3: The objective of the research is to reveal how the definition – as an independent variable – influences the real environmentally conscious behaviour, as a dependent variable?

The interviewed spontaneously mentioning healthy diet and the origin of food (21.53 points) or the interviewed giving the environmentally conscious concept in the definition (21.17 points) received much higher points generally at the realized behaviour scale, than those mentioning value for money and quality (19.98 points) or planned shopping (19.73 points) in the definition.

So the test – One Way ANOVA – proved, the way of thinking of the interviewed. And their understanding of the definition influences their realized behaviour ($p < 0.00$).

However, the results are not interesting because of this but because comparing the categories by the Post-hoc test. The Tukay-trial revealed that who sees conscious consumption as healthy diet their realized behaviour is significantly more conscious ($p < 0.007$), than those not buying unnecessary products, considering value for money or keeping in mind environmentally consciousness.

A further interesting result is that the environmentally conscious category does not differ significantly from the other definitions as this variable with the other definitions share one factor, so the environmentally conscious group is not at all homogenous. According to the results of the factor analysis the realized environmentally conscious behaviour is motivated by the savings and the protection of the person's health rather than their commitment to the environment. The grounds of the results are shown by the KMO indicator 0.811 and by the Bartlett test 6422 ($p < 0.0001$). So someone buying an energy saving bulb might be motivated by the motif of saving and not by environmentally consciousness.

O4: The objective of the research is to reveal whether there is any relationships among the realized conscious behaviour and gender, and generation groups?

In the followings the environmentally conscious behaviour was examined according to gender and age. According to the results females, an especially boomer female, that means females over 30, are more responsive in the field of environmentally conscious attitude, and this can also be seen in their realized behaviour. The maximum point of the realized behaviour of the females, in both generation groups are higher. Even by examining the average it can be seen that females are more environmentally conscious, so it became important to see the role of the age group and gender in the realized behaviour as well as the examination of the interaction of the independent variables

Although the impact of the gender ($p < 0.023$) and the generation ($p < 0.005$) on the dependent variable is significant, among the independent variables there is no interaction (not significant $p = 0.492$).

Unfortunately, the limited length of the present publication does not allow for introducing more data. So only the environmentally conscious approach and the closely related realized behaviour were introduced in the study, further data might be published later.

Conclusions

The results of the research have proved the hypothesis according to which the consumers understands conscious consumption in different ways, and their environmentally conscious manifestations are influenced by different factors.

The present study strengthened those approaches [Dietz et al. 2002] according to which females – because of their particular social roles (motherhood, taking care) are more altruists, and hence they are more environmentally conscious, which is intensified in their realized behaviour as age advances.

Hence it would be advantageous to integrate environmentally conscious approaches into education even at the early stages of childhood.

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Streszczenie

Problemy społeczne i ekologiczne ubiegłego wieku znacząco wpłynęły na ekonomię i zachowania konsumentów. W związku z rosnącym znaczeniem koncepcji zrównoważonego rozwoju w wybranych segmentach pojawiły się nowe trendy w preferencjach nabywczych konsumentów. Hedonistyczny typ zachowań konsumentów został zamieniony na bardziej świadomy, co jednak nie oznacza do końca bardziej "zielonego" stylu zachowań konsumpcyjnych. W artykule przedstawiono różnice pomiędzy rzeczywistymi zachowaniami konsumentów według cech demograficznych (płeć, przynależność do grupy wiekowej). Stwierdzono, że wraz z dojrzałością wiekową decyzje nabywcze stają się także bardziej dojrzałe i bardziej świadome proekologicznie.

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