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THE DIFFERENCES OF ENVIRONMENTALLY CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION AMONG GENERATIONS

RÓŻNICE POKOLENIOWE A ŚWIADOMOŚĆ ŚRODOWISKA W KONSUMPCJI

Key words: environmentally conscious attitude, actual environmentally conscious behaviour, generation group, generation marketing

Słowa kluczowe: świadoma postawa względem środowiska, faktyczne zachowanie względem środowiska, grupa pokoleniowa, marketing ukierunkowany na pokolenie

Abstract. The study of the environment-friendly consumer behaviour has gained more and more attention in the recent years. Several researchers tried to find an answer to the question: what are the reasons behind environment-conscious behaviour, which are the factors that play an important role in the realization of this behaviour: are they psychographic, demographic or other factors. The present article examines two generation group's (boomer and X generation) environment-conscious attitude and the actual behaviour from a particular aspect among Hungarian college students. The primary research was carried out in the spring of 2010 and according to the results the environment conscious attitude of the two generation group is different because of the different personal characteristics. The members of the X generation, who are driven from the outside, do not like to differ too much from the members of their age group. Hence, due to the conform behaviour a greater ratio of this group declare themselves as environment-conscious as others. This ratio is lower among the members of the boomer generation, who are driven from the inside. However, the research results proved that the members of the boomer generation can be considered more environmental-conscious and as it is realized in their behaviour, also this positive disposition can be detected in their environment-conscious attitudes. The attitudes of course are not exclusive; however they have great influencing impact on the environment-conscious behaviour, although the strength of this is different among the generation groups. Whereas there is a significant, medium, positive correlation between the environment-conscious attitude and the actual behaviour of the X generation, there is only a weak, positive, however, significant difference between the attitude and the actual behaviour of the boomer generation.

Introduction

In recent years, one of the most important issues of marketing literature has been segmentation. Tailor-made marketing and segmenting consumers into even smaller groups has become widespread. However, in certain cases it is justifiable to think in larger units [Reinhard, Vossen 2002]. In this research, segmentation according to generation groups appears to be an effective solution. The Yankelovich Monitor [<http://thefuturescompany.com/uncategorized/us-yankelovich-monitor-download> and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daniel_Yankelovich] divides today's consumers into three large groups, i.e. the Matures, Boomers and X Generation [Töröcsik 2003].

These groups are related to each other through experience and common values [Shewe, Noble 2000]. Out of these, the Boomer and X Generation segment are the focus of this study.

The Boomers are those born between 1946 and 1964, the members of the baby boom generation. A prospering economy, comparative welfare, public spirit and cooperativeness were the characteristics of this period. Several movements – the pioneer movement, female emancipation, the hippy movement, and the first environmentalists' movement – were started around the world. The generation grew up on oxford bags, rock and roll and Hair. The individualist and rebel boomer generation was part of the research as well.

The members of the X Generation were born after 1965. They are the generation of Disney figures and latchkey children; a creative and self-catering generation. Due to the fact that both

parents were at work, they often solved their problems by themselves and freedom became part of their life. This determined their work morale. The X Generation appreciates freedom; hence this generation enjoys working on its own. The underlying factors of their existence are: insecurity, change and risk. In their lives, alongside sexual freedom, AIDS appeared. Careers and the power of money had to be combined with family life, ideals and values, as well as technical achievements and “environmental-consciousness”. That is everything had to be considered: the consequences of their deeds and the effects of their consumption.

Hereinafter, the attitude and behaviour of these two generation groups are examined.

Material and methods

Primary research studies the environmentally conscious view and behaviour of consumers and the impact of demographic features on actual environmentally conscious behaviour based on the perspective of academic literature.

1. The main aim of this research is to discover environmentally conscious considerations of the generation groups, namely to what extent the consumers of each group examined consider themselves environment-conscious.
2. The study also observes what the general environmentally conscious consumption attitude of the students interviewed, according to generation group, is.

Several pieces of research have proved the hypothesis, according to which there is either a weak or strong relation between the intention of so-called environmentally conscious behaviour and its actualisation [Nagy 2005]. However, some researchers deny this assumption as a positive environmental attitude does not necessarily represent itself in real behaviour [Majláth 2009]. In their research, Havas and Varga [1998] emphasized the relation between the extent of environmental knowledge and attitudes.

According to Hines et al. [1986/1987], even in most favourable cases, only a modest relation can be shown between knowledge and attitudes. This can be explained by several factors. Besides internal motivation, the external factor (e.g. it is cold), the mood and personal factors (low income, etc.) have their own effect on the behaviour of the individual. All these together are to be accounted for “environmentally conscious behaviour”. Due to the variable research results, the present research focused on environmentally conscious behaviour and on discovering restrictive factors.

3. The aim of the research is to observe the actual environmentally conscious behaviour according to generation groups.
4. The aim of the research is to examine the relation between attitude and actual environmentally conscious behaviour.

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

Before proving the hypothesis, normality tests were carried out. Throughout the research an independent nonparametric test was used and, for the examination of these relations, the method of correlation was used. In the case of normal partition variables, the independent T-test was used, and by way of examination of these relations, the Spearman correlation method was applied.

Results

The demographic features of the sample

The gender of 30% of the interviewed (187 persons) was male, and 70% (428 persons) was female. This disproportion is due to the fact that there were more female students in the institution. 70% (434 persons) are members of the X generation, 30% (181 persons) are Boomers. The older boomers were mainly correspondent students and participated in distance learning. That is

why their marital status is different from the full time, younger boomers. Due to the technological development the gap among the generation increased as the members were socialized in completely different social environment. Nowadays, the generation marketing distinguishes several different groups, the present research only deals with the generation of boomers and X generation. The members of the boomer generation try to adapt to the challenges of the 21st century (mobiles, computers) due to their hunger for information. The internet was not the integral part of their whole life and several members went back to study.

Oposing to this the X generation fights against their Age and what they learnt from their parents. The members of the X generation were born between 1965 and 1980, who are more adaptable due to the rapid development in their life. Their attitude, the way of gaining information and philosophy is completely different from the earlier generations. They supply the workforce market in the largest ratio, they are the members of a consuming group and that is why their environment-conscious attitude is important.

Almost half of the sample, 48% (295 persons), was single and 52% (320 persons) lived in a relationship, so there is no significant difference between the two groups in this respect. However, 72% of the interviewed (443 persons) was 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.

The partition of environment-consciousness according to generation groups

According to the results of the research, 62% of the Boomer Generation members stated that they are more environmentally conscious than others. 34% described themselves to be as environmentally conscious as others. Only 4% of them felt themselves to be less environmentally conscious than others. The statement of the latter group corresponds with the opinion of the X Generation, as 4% of the younger generation felt themselves to be less environmentally conscious than their fellow-beings. According to the results of the research, members of the X Generation seemed to be more conformist compared to the elder generation, as more of them considered themselves to be as environmentally conscious as their fellow-beings. It appeared that they would not like to differ from their fellows. This proportion amounted to 39%. Compared to the Boomers, 57% of X Generation students considered themselves to be more environmentally conscious than others.

The environmentally conscious attitude of the generation groups

When compiling the questionnaire on the attitude of the consumers, the technique of the itemised evaluation scale was used. A 5-degree Likert-scale had to be filled in concerning their environmentally conscious consumption of 12 items from the questionnaire, where each respondent gained 0-60 points.

On the environmentally conscious attitude scale, the members of the X Generation gained a lower total of 41.58 points, whereas the Boomer Generation reached 43.12 total points. This difference is significant according to the Mann Whitney nonparametric test, where ($p=0.000$).

The actual behaviour of the generation groups

The research examined the partition of the actual environmentally conscious behaviour according to the generation groups. In this respect, when compiling the questionnaire, the itemised evaluation scale technique was used. A 4-degree Likert-scale had to be filled in about their actual environmentally conscious behaviour through the 8 items of the questionnaire, where each respondent gained from 0-32 points.

The results are as follows: regarding the actual environmentally conscious behaviour, the average of the Boomers equalled 21.20, whereas the average of the X Generation amounted to 20.08 points, which greatly lags behind the maximum of 32 points. Although the difference seemed insignificant, according to the independent t-test, it was quite the contrary. This differ-

ence amounted to ($t(380) = -3.848; p = 0.00$) between the two generation groups. That meant the members of the Boomer Generation behaved in a dominantly environmentally-conscious way.

The following aim of the research was stipulated by secondary examinations, as several researchers found it inevitable to examine the relation of the environmentally conscious attitude and actual behaviour.

The study not only focused on the relation between these notions, but also on whether there was any difference between the generation groups regarding the variables mentioned. According to the findings, the answer to this was yes.

Whereas there is a significant, moderate, positive correlation between an environmentally conscious attitude and actual behaviour of the X generation, ($\rho = 0.365; p = 0.000$), it is surprising that the same notion in the Boomer Generation is weak and positive, however, significant, ($\rho = 0.257; p = 0.000$) according to the Spearman correlation.

External factors and the personal characteristics of the elder generation mentioned in the secondary research seemed to weaken this attitude. That is why it is inevitable to carry out further research into the examination of the impact of restrictive factors of actual behaviour.

Summary

As empirical research focused on answering only some aims and hypotheses, it would be worth carrying out detailed research to point out the cause and effect relations of the motivating and restricting factors of actual environmentally conscious behaviour.

Based on the findings of the present research, the following statements can be established. There is no significant difference between the two generation groups regarding self-judgement of environment-consciousness. However, according to responses, characteristic traits can be identified with the help of the David Riesman [1999] character typology. The responses revealed that the X Generation does not like to differ in attitude from contemporaries. This can also be observed when judging environment-consciousness. The respondents of the X Generation would like to adapt or be more like their fellow-students and hence, they regard themselves as environmentally conscious as others.

In contrast, the Boomer Generation can be identified with a personality guarded from inside. The attitudes they learned from teachers and respected members of the society are built deeply into their personality. Although the research did not focus on the deeper cause and effect relations, it can be felt that this character is represented by the Boomer Generation and it is also represented in the attitude examination. Attitude is a learnt behaviour, which summarizes the judgement of the individual regarding a subject matter, in our case environment-consciousness. In the presented research, the attitudes of the Boomers appeared to be stronger than that of the X Generation.

The actual environmentally conscious behaviour presupposes a more complex action process as environmentally conscious attitudes are not necessarily observed in environmentally conscious deeds. These are influenced by several factors (external, environmental factors, external social factors, shop atmosphere, personal traits, etc.).

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Streszczenie

Ze względu na coraz większe problemy związane ze środowiskiem w ostatnich latach, konsumpcja przyjazna środowisku stała się tematem badań. Badania dotyczyły postawy konsumenckiej określonych grup wiekowych. Przebadano dwie grupy pokoleniowe na Węgrzech – pokolenie X i pokolenie wyżu, pod względem ich świadomej postawy środowiskowej badana jest na Węgrzech. Badania przeprowadzono w 2011 r. Stwierdzono różnice w świadomej postawie wobec środowiska między różnymi grupami pokoleniowymi. Celem badań było zrozumienie szczegółów tego fenomenu.

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