

## BEHAVIOR ASPECTS OF GENERATION Y CONSUMERS ON THE FOOD MARKET\*

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**Abstract.** This study looks at Generation Y growing up a specific community who had an influence on values, by which they are directed now, and the expectations that they have towards reality around them. Generation Y consumers exert increasing pressure on the market environment and trigger evolution of many economic sectors, including food. The goal of this article is to identify how the behavior of Generation Y influences the food market. The authors used an analysis of the subject literature and results of questionnaire surveys conducted among 364 respondents. The conducted questionnaire surveys indicate criteria for selecting the place of buying of food product, which are fresh, quality and price, or in the case of purchase place – range offered. Additionally, the survey looked at whether these attitudes were related to sex, professional activity, place of residence and assessment of the respondents level of income. Statistical analysis of relations between the pairs of variables was performed using Pearson's chi-square test of independence. Additionally, the research showed, that Generation Y consumers tend to accept innovations on the food market.

**Keywords:** consumer behavior, survey, Generation Y consumers, food product, independence test, correspondence analysis

### INTRODUCTION

Environment changes, including intensifying demographic changes (reduction in the size of households resulting from the transformation of the family model, and a decline in the fertility rate of women), as well as economic and social changes, such as the increasing scope of free choice, greater decision-making autonomy, especially for the younger part of the society, and the tendency to extend the working time, all contribute to changes in various aspects of life and in the functioning of consumers on the food market. As a consequence, Generation Y, which comprises one fifth of the population, becomes a distinct market segment. It has grown to be a significant market nowadays, and its role will continue to grow in the future. Food producers should sustain interest in their products, gain trust and loyalty of consumers and reach out to young people since engraving their presence in the minds of today's youth is a way to convert them into loyal consumers in the future (Michałowska, 2010).

Representatives of this generation tend to be viewed as optimist, tolerant, open-minded, selfish, keeping up with modern technologies, environmentally-oriented individualists who spend more money than previous generations,

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value their independence and have confidence in their capabilities. As noted by the consumer behavior researcher M. Solomon (2014), they demonstrate maturity of choice and low loyalty. Generation Y consumers exert increasing pressure on the market environment and trigger the evolution of many economic sectors, including the food sector. However, in the Polish relevant literature, this segment is not yet well understood in the context of its behavior on the food market, which is the reason for examining this research problem. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to identify the behavior of Generation Y on the food market. The authors relied on an analysis of the relevant literature and on the results of their own surveys conducted with 364 respondents. In addition to bringing significant cognitive advantages with respect to a more profound understanding of market behavior of the individual, this study has important practical implications. The applicative objective is to indicate how to use the research results for the development of strategies and tactics. Findings from the research could be leveraged by manufacturers and distributors of food products in the process of developing marketing strategies focused on Generation Y consumers.

## CONSUMER BEHAVIOR ON THE FOOD MARKET: THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Currently, the importance of information and knowledge about consumers is on the rise, as manifested by the development of new approaches to marketing research on the consumers' market behavior. The consumer is considered to be an individual becoming increasingly aware of his/her sophisticated tastes and preferences, whose behavior should be examined using a variety of methodological perspectives, according to the triangulation concept (Mazurek-Łopacińska and Sobocińska, 2014). Consumer behavior on the market is an issue of particular significance from the standpoint of marketing as it helps understand and forecast the demand for products or preferences regarding purchasing locations. Learning the criteria that guide the consumers in their decision-making process allows for better customization of offers. Knowing the consumers and their behavior on the market is necessary for devising a marketing program or for the effective use of marketing instruments (Garbarski et al., 2001). Also, it enables focusing on emotions and appealing to the imagination of customers (Krzakiewicz and Cyfert, 2013). Consumer choices greatly influence the

strategy of food-producing companies and a health-oriented public policy (Wojciechowska-Solis and Soroka, 2016). As far as science is concerned, the study of consumer behavior may enable the verification of various (often complex) economic, cognitive, psycho-economic, cultural and socio-psychological theories (Antonides and Van Raaij, 2003). Consumer behavior stems from personal needs and covers the entire scope of objectively and subjectively defined rational and emotional, conscious and unconscious steps taken when preparing to make a decision on the consumer goods market and during consumption (Patrzalek, 2002). Food-related needs form a part of basic needs subjected to biological requirements of the human body, and are considered to be high-priority objective needs. Factors that determine the way of satisfying these needs include economic, social, psychological and marketing aspects (Szwacka-Mokrzycka, 2013). Factors related to food product itself, such as chemical composition, nutritional value, sensory attributes, functional features (ease of use, functionality, packaging, durability) (Babicz-Zielińska and Jeżewska-Zychowicz, 2015) or country of origin also prove to be very important (Figiel, 2004). Making the decision on purchasing food products is a routine process to a significant extent. Thus, an important role is played by consumers' customs and habits, as determined by their social environment alongside the natural and psychological factors. Last but not least, there are socioeconomic transformations that have contributed to changes in the quantity and quality of food products consumed in Poland. To a large extent, consumer behavior is determined by income—with the increasing scope of free choice, the consumers spend their financial resources on addressing numerous needs (Mruk, 2011), and diversify the existing ways of addressing those needs. When choosing food products, consumers take increased account of the principles of rational nutrition. Also, they demonstrate growing expectations towards foodstuffs: their behavior reflects their desire to preserve or recover their health, improve their life quality, and maintain or reduce weight (Cyranski and Dybka, 2014; Gracia, 2013; Gutkowska and Ozimek, 2005; Kicińska, 2009).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research relied both on secondary and primary sources of information. The first stage of the proceedings required a review of the available research on consumer

behavior on the food market (Barska, 2014; Gutkowska, 2011; Gutkowska and Ozimek, 2005; Kicińska, 2009; Kowalczyk, 2011; Sojkin et al., 2009). The identification of Generation Y consumer behavior on the food market involved asking many questions enabling the assessment of the circumstances of product purchase. A survey was conducted for that purpose. Preparing the questionnaire survey called for carrying out extensive preliminary tests based on the focus method. This approach allowed the authors to develop a full scope of answers. Prior to commencing the proper research, pilot studies were conducted, which allowed for the verification of the measuring tool and the elimination of any irregularities. Cronbach's coefficient values were chosen to examine the consistency of scale items. Hinton et al. (2014) have suggested four different ranges of reliability, i.e. excellent range (0.90 and above), high range (0.70–0.90), high-moderate range (0.50–0.70) and low range (0.50 and below). In this research, the Cronbach's coefficient values fell into the second interval. Thus, it can be concluded that the scale demonstrates internal consistency and reliability. The population covered was composed of Generation Y representatives living in regions at the southern and eastern borderland of Poland. The very term *generation* should be understood as a group of people born in the same period, who experienced similar events, and grew up in similar times and circumstances (Reisenwitz and Iber, 2009). In the case of Poland, this generation is most commonly made up of skilled people born at the end of the socialist era. Unlike their parents, they grew up in a period of economic growth, in a world of globalization, tolerance and acceptance of individuality. Their core values are: optimism, idealization, diversity, ambition, creativity, initiative, innovation, education and training (Bartosik-Purgat, 2011; Woszczyk and Czernecka, 2013). Koperłyńska (2012) indicates that the most notable feature of Generation Y representatives, as compared to *baby boomers* and Generation X, is their value system that impacts the adoption of specific attitudes toward work, needs and expectations, including those regarding food products.

Once collected, raw data was verified in terms of readability and accuracy. From the retrieved questionnaires, 364 were classified as complete and suitable for further analysis. Examined were the consumer attitudes and behaviors of Generation Y representatives concerning food products. It was also verified whether these

attitudes and behaviors were associated with gender, professional activity, income from their own work, subjective assessment of their financial situation and place of residence of the respondents. Statistical analysis of relations between pairs of variables was performed using the Pearson's chi-square independence test. In cases where the test assumptions were not met, the *p*-value was determined using the Monte Carlo method. Statistical significance was set at 0.05. The strength of the relationship between pairs of variables was determined with the Pearson's corrected contingency coefficient, also referred to as the Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient ( $C_{kor}$ ). In order to examine the co-occurrence of the categories of three variables, correspondence analysis and the Ward's method of hierarchical classification were employed. The analysis of correspondence was performed using the Burt table with transformed eigenvalues. Statistical analyses were performed with R software (Walesiak and Gatnar, 2009).

## GENERATION Y CONSUMER ON THE FOOD MARKET, IN THE LIGHT OF OWN RESEARCH

The group covered by this research was mostly made up of women (55.7% of the respondents). Every fourth respondent was a resident of rural areas, while the others resided in cities. When analyzing the professional activity of the respondents, it should be noted that two out of three were economically inactive, often studying or being officially unemployed, and thus deprived of regular income from their own work. Meanwhile, every third respondent was economically active. Half of the respondents declared to live with their parents and sharing a household.

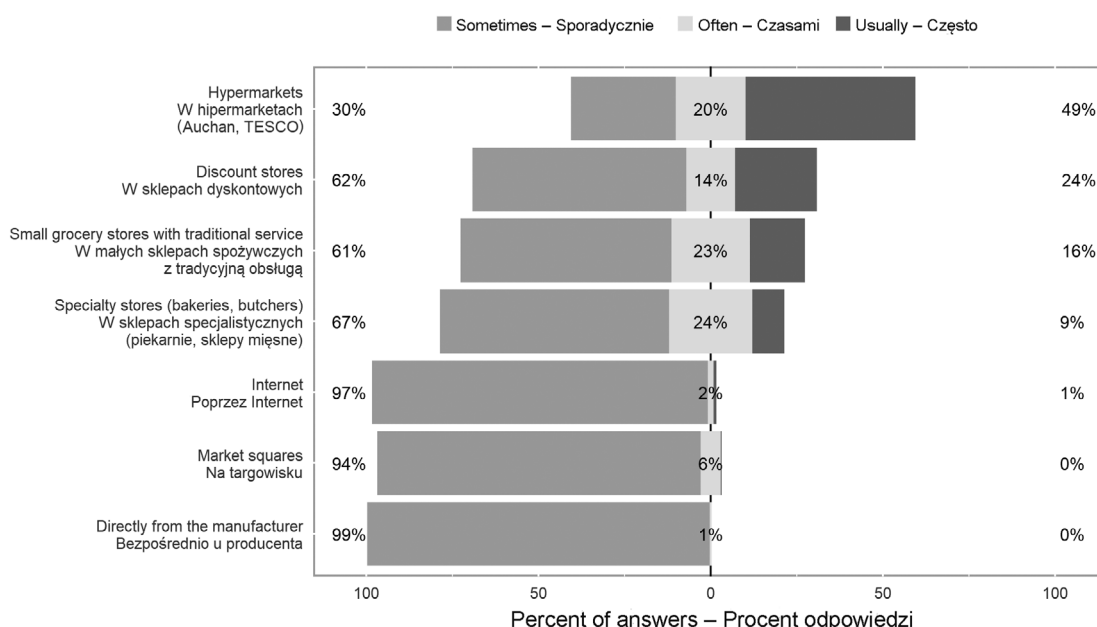
The purpose of one of the questions was to identify the persons making, or contributing to, the decisions on purchasing foodstuffs. Most respondents (56.9%) declared making these decisions independently, while every fourth respondent admitted making purchase decisions with their partner (27.8%). Note also that, based on the chi-square independence test at  $p = 0.05$ , statistical correlation was identified, and its strength was determined with the Pearson's corrected contingency coefficient ( $C_{kor}$ ). Statistical correlation was found between the family situation ( $\chi^2 = 120.988$ ,  $p = 0.0005$ ,  $C_{kor} = 0.561$ ), incomes from own work ( $\chi^2 = 28.65622$ ,  $p = 0.0019$ ,  $C_{kor} = 0.410$ ) and professional activity of the

respondents ( $\chi^2 = 18.802$ ,  $p = 0.0004$ ,  $C_{kor} = 0.279$ ). The share of people involved in making purchase decisions reflected their family situation: people living on their own would usually make their decisions independently. The respondents living in relationships or with their parents were more likely to declare third-party involvement in their decision-making process. Their roles, however, varied strongly: almost every third respondent acted as an adviser and buyer in their household. Every fifth respondent described their role as a decision-maker, and almost one in six declared to be the initiator. Another observation is that the division of roles by gender demonstrated the highest diversification as regards the role of the initiator. In this case, women were three times more willing to identify themselves as such, compared to men. In turn, the role of the buyer was more often assumed by men than women. Among those making decisions with the participation of parents, economically inactive people prevailed (83.3%).

Young consumers usually make purchases in hypermarkets and discount stores (see Fig. 1). Note that as regards the group of small grocery store buyers, the percentage of frequent shoppers at stores with traditional

service was greater among the economically inactive people than among the economically active ones. This may be because active people spend much less time on planning daily shopping, and prefer one-stop shopping. This was a statistically significant variable that differentiates the behavior of the respondents ( $\chi^2 = 7.273526$ ,  $p = 0.0263$ ,  $C_{kor} = 0.185$ ).

The respondents were asked to express their opinion on the main criteria for choosing the place to buy foodstuffs. The largest percentage of the respondents considered the following criteria to be important or medium important: price level, product range and product quality (see Fig. 2). The significance of these criteria is also pointed out by Sojkin (2016) who performed a research with city residents. He noted that for the vast majority of the population, food prices undoubtedly encourage consumers to visit a store and are an important component of retail chains' competition strategy. In the case of chain stores, the role and importance of price should also be linked to promotional tools in place (mainly including various forms of sales promotion) that primarily focus on emphasizing price solutions advantageous to the customer. Sojkin also notes that according to the

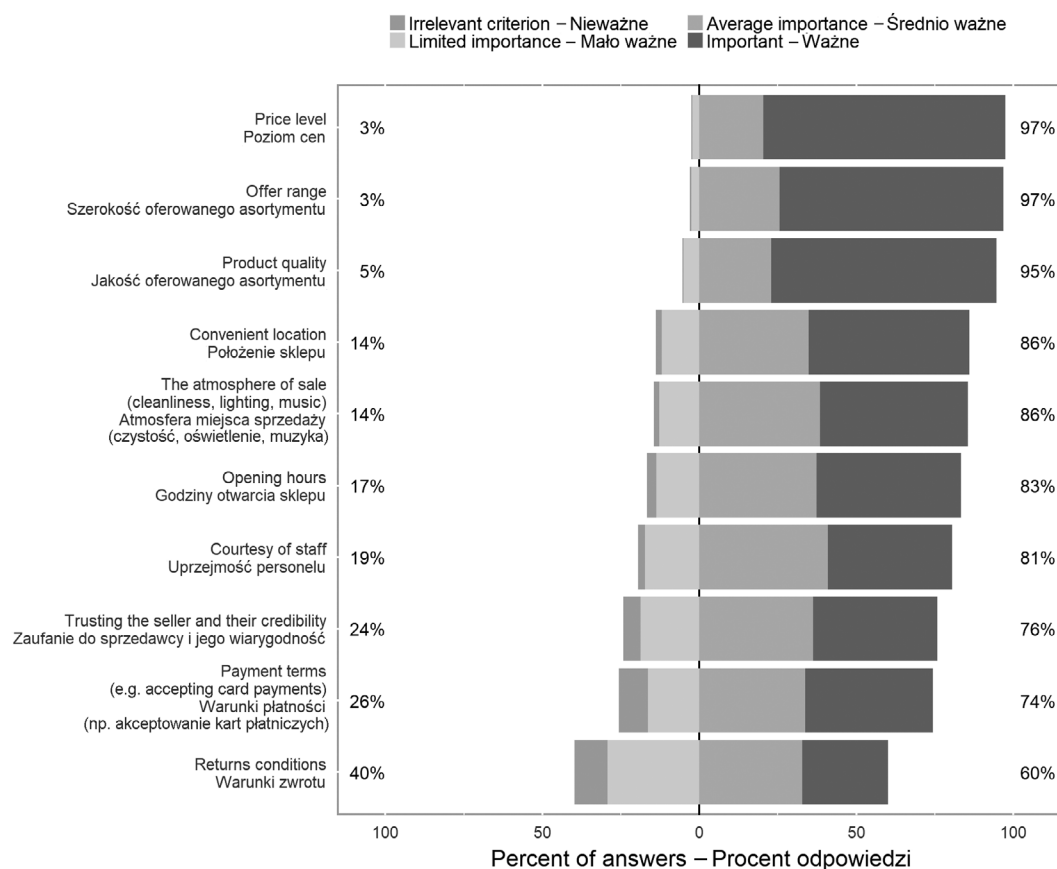


**Fig. 1.** Place of buying food products

Source: own elaboration based on a survey.

**Rys. 1.** Miejsce dokonywania zakupu produktów żywnościowych

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badań ankietowych.



**Fig. 2.** Criteria for choosing the place to buy food products

Source: own elaboration based on a survey.

**Rys. 2.** Kryteria wyboru miejsca dokonywania zakupu produktów żywnościowych

Źródło: opracowanie własne na podstawie badań.

youngest residents (up to 29 years old), price is important, but so is product quality and shopping experience in terms of store location and product range.

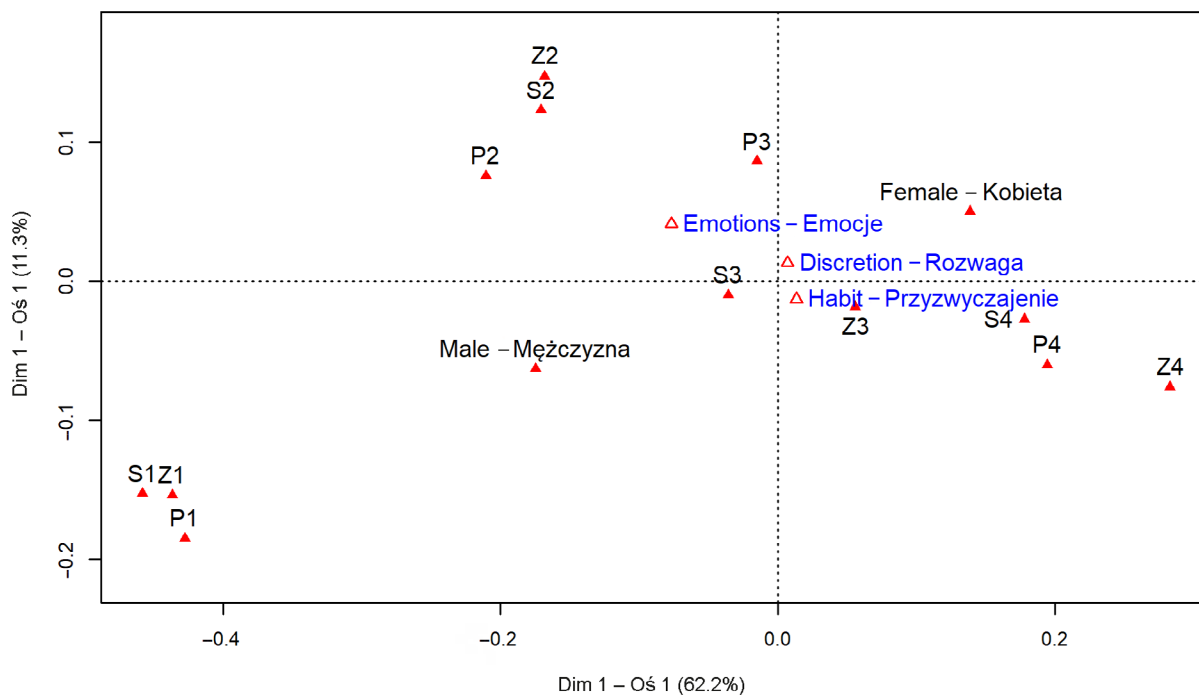
Statistically significant associations were discovered between consumer gender and selection criteria such as the place of purchase, payment terms (e.g. accepting card payments –  $C_{kor} = 0.202$ ,  $\chi^2 = 9.352766$ ,  $p = 0.0250$ ), trust to and reliability of the seller ( $C_{kor} = 0.252$ ,  $\chi^2 = 14.69299$ ,  $p = 0.0025$ ), as well as return conditions ( $C_{kor} = 0.200$ ,  $\chi^2 = 9.0368$ ,  $p = 0.0288$ ). In the group who consider payment terms to be not important, there were more men (69.7%), whereas in the group considering it to be important, women prevailed (62.3%). Among those who believe that trusting the seller is irrelevant, the majority were men (75.0%), while among those who believed this criterion to be relevant, women accounted

for the vast majority (60.6%). Return conditions proved to be especially important for women (61.2%). As far as store location is concerned, it was deemed to be a criterion of minor importance mostly among residents of cities with a population over 100,000; it was recognized to be significant by residents of small towns with a population of up to 50,000 ( $C_{kor} = 0.180$ ,  $\chi^2 = 27.97983$ ,  $p = 0.0020$ ). The greatest correlation was observed between the family situation of the group under consideration and the store location ( $C_{kor} = 0.288$ ,  $\chi^2 = 24.69966$ ,  $p = 0.0250$ ). The group who considered this factor to be important was composed of people living with parents and sharing a household (66.0%). Also identified was a static relationship between the subjective assessment of the financial situation and the store's opening hours ( $C_{kor} = 0.249$ ,  $\chi^2 = 17.63301$ ,  $p = 0.0340$ ).

The respondents also shared their views on the significance of individual food selection criteria. The five criteria considered to be the most important were: product freshness, quality, price, taste and eating habits. As shown by the analysis of statistical dependence between the ranking of the main criteria for food selection and demographic variables, a statistical relationship exists only between product freshness and gender ( $C_{kor} = 0.255$ ,  $\chi^2 = 14.9971$ ,  $p = 0.0005$ ). It can be noticed that the group who recognizes quality as an important criterion was mostly made up of women, who accounted for 66.7%.

In order to establish the links between gender of the group under consideration and the categories of selected variables describing the choice of the purchasing place of food products, a correspondence analysis was performed. As regards variables defining the criteria for choosing the place of purchase, the following

designations of response options were adopted: S – trusting the seller, P – payment terms, Z – returns conditions, with indexes being respectively: 1 – irrelevant criterion, 2 – limited importance, 3 – average importance, 4 – important. In order to expand the interpretation of results of the correspondence analysis with the consumers' behavior profiles, as shown during the foodstuffs purchasing process, the following categories were introduced to the analysis (passive points): emotions – respondents who make impulse-driven purchasing decisions; discretion – consumers who take their time when planning purchasing decisions; habit – the attitude of people who purchase food products out of habit. Relations between the categories of these variables were mapped in two-dimensional space, recovering 73.5% of the original links (see Fig. 3). It is noticeable that the horizontal axis divides consumers by gender while being an important differentiator of expectations as to the chosen place of



**Fig. 3.** Graphical presentation of the results of correspondence analysis for simultaneous occurrences of the following categories of variables: gender, trust in the seller, payment terms, return conditions

Source: own calculations based on a survey.

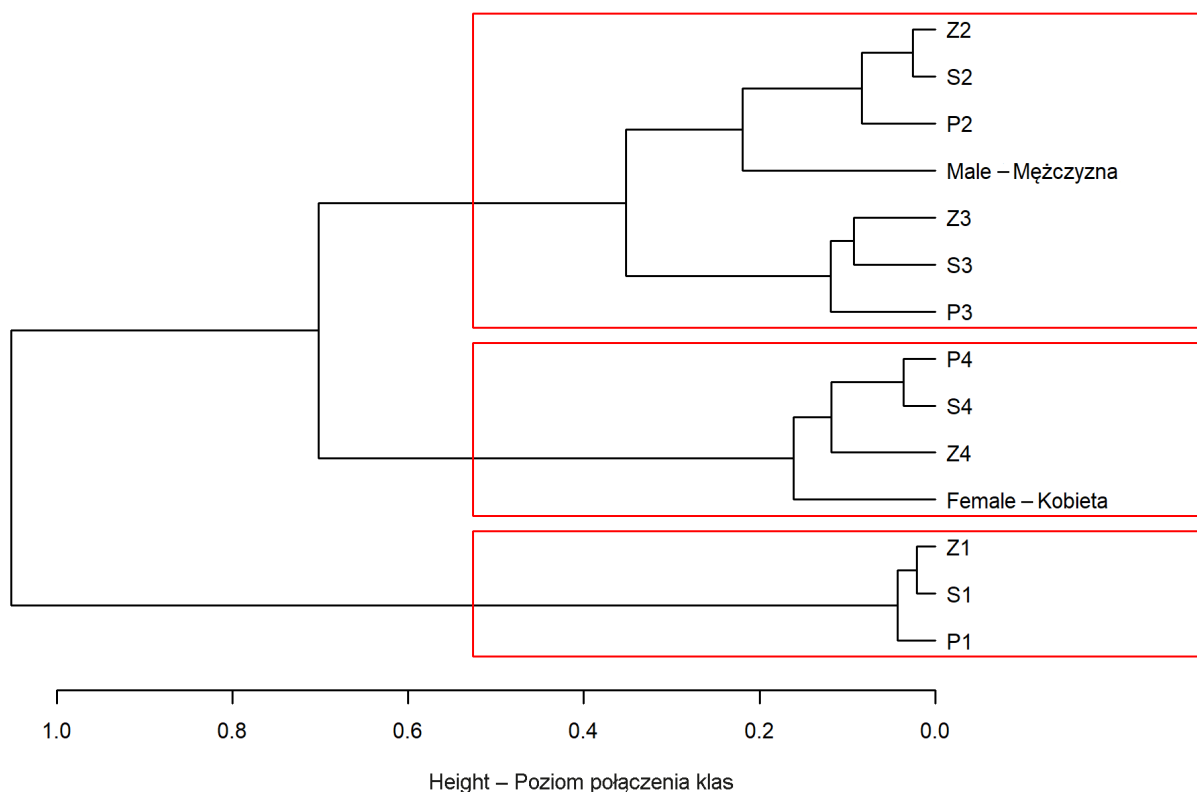
**Rys. 3.** Graficzna prezentacja wyników analizy korespondencji dla jednoczesnych wystąpień kategorii zmiennych: płeć, zaufanie do sprzedawcy, warunki płatności, warunki zwrotu  
Źródło: obliczenia własne na podstawie badań ankietowych.

purchase. Female representatives of Generation Y have medium and high expectations as to payment terms, returns and trust to the seller when purchasing food products. Additionally, when making such purchases, they are guided by prudence and habits. Male consumers, on the other hand, have rather moderate expectations in respect to these criteria, and are more impulsive in their food-related decision-making. As shown by the perceptions map, those who believe these three criteria to be irrelevant are separated from the rest of the group. This may be because such attitudes were expressed by a relatively small percentage of the respondents (see Fig. 3).

Also analyzed was the grouping of options of variables with the use of hierarchical classification. This

confirms the conclusions arising out of the correspondence analysis and enables the identification of three groups of consumers. Two of them are determined by gender, whereas no gender dominates in the third one. The female segment can be primarily differentiated by higher expectations as to the seller, payment terms and product returns (see Fig. 4).

Another finding from the research is that the respondents tend to embrace innovations on the food market although, on this market, purchasing conservatism often occurs. This age group demonstrates low levels of neophobia, as also confirmed by other studies (Babicz-Zielińska et al., 2013; Barska and Wojciech, 2014; Gutkowska, 2011; Sojkin et al., 2009).



**Fig. 4.** Dendrogram based on Ward's clustering of the categories of features: gender and selection criteria for the place of purchase of foodstuffs. The silhouette index with 3 clusters is 0.56

Source: own calculations based on a survey.

**Rys. 4.** Dendrogram grupowania metodą Warda kategorii cech: płeć i kryteria wyboru miejsca zakupu. Wartość indeksu sylwetkowego przy 3 skupieniach wynosiła 0,56

Źródło: obliczenia własne na podstawie badań ankietowych.

## CONCLUSION

The study of consumer behavior on the food market is justified by cognitive and applicative reasons due to extensiveness and market importance of this group. The findings may be used by food producers and distributors in developing their marketing strategies targeted at this market segment.

The research helped identify the selection criteria for food products (freshness, quality and price) and places of purchase (product range). It was also established that Generation Y demonstrates openness to innovation, despite conservative purchasing attitudes manifested on the food market. Their attitudes and behavior usually vary by gender and (less frequently) by place of residence or family situation. For producers, this means their marketing strategies should focus on product strategy, including implementation of innovative solutions. It may also prove helpful to set out the right pricing strategy associated with various forms of sales promotions.

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## WYBRANE ASPEKTY ZACHOWAŃ KONSUMENTÓW Z POKOLENIA Y NA RYNKU ŻYWNOCI

**Streszczenie.** Pokolenie Y jest traktowane jako unikalna i wpływowa grupa konsumentów, których postawy nabywcze są kształtowane głównie pod wpływem zmian zachodzących w makrootoczeniu. Przedstawiciele pokolenia Y wywierają coraz większą presję na otoczenie rynkowe, inicjując ewolucję wielu sektorów gospodarki, w tym również żywnościowego. Celem artykułu jest omówienie zachowań nabywczych pokolenia Y na rynku żywności. W postępowaniu badawczym wykorzystano analizę literatury oraz wybrane wyniki własnych badań empirycznych, zrealizowanych metodą ankietową w grupie 364 konsumentów. Do oceny rzetelności skal wykorzystano test Alfa Cronbacha. W wyniku przeprowadzonych badań zidentyfikowano kryteria wyboru produktów żywnościowych oraz miejsca ich zakupu. Dodatkowo zweryfikowano, czy postawy i zachowania konsumentów z pokolenia Y były związane z płcią, aktywnością zawodową, dochodami z pracy własnej, subiektywną oceną sytuacji finansowej oraz miejscem zamieszkania respondentów. Ustalono również, że pokolenie to charakteryzuje otwartość na innowacje.

**Słowa kluczowe:** zachowania konsumentów, konsumenci pokolenia Y, produkt żywnościowy, badania ankietowe, test niezależności, analiza korespondencji

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