

Perception of global environmental problems by Generation C and its marketing communication preferences

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Abstract. With the technological progress of human society, the digital lifestyle of consumers is also growing. The growth of digital lifestyle contributes to the emergence of a new perspective on consumer segmentation, which increasingly appears to be necessary. It is mainly the Internet connection, sharing of various topics, creation of contents or communities that is forming a new subsegment of consumers – so-called Generation C. Its name is derived from the English word „connected“ in the meaning of connection of these consumers to the Internet. This consumer segment has fresh information at its disposal and reacts faster on various social topics. It consists of consumers of different ages who have been derived from psychographic criteria, but mostly consist of young people. Several researches has shown that the young are not neglectful to environmental issues and have a rather positive attitude to environmental topics. Innovative communication of environmental topics may enhance awareness of all global issues and therefore, the main goal of our research was to obtain information on consumer behaviour of Generation C in the area of their relation to environmental topics and their requirements for marketing communication of environmentally friendly products, mainly in trading companies. Our main objective was to explore the perception of environmental issues by Generation C and their preference for marketing communications. Statistical methods of one-dimensional and multidimensional data analysis were used to evaluate research results.

1 Introduction

Digital technologies have changed contemporary society beyond recognition and thanks to their dynamic development continue to participate in constant change of life around us. Our society practically cannot imagine life without internet anymore. Through internet we receive information, communicate, are able to arrange official administrative acts, operate intelligent households, and, of course, shop. Globalization and technology innovation is progressing at a fast pace, but if we take a critical look at it, we can notice a significant

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problem [1]. Besides positive changes that we notice more clearly, this technological progress has unfortunately also brought considerable negative impacts, which we are only starting to realize. One of the negatives of technological progress is an increasing pace of production that stimulates faster movement of goods on the market, thus forming current consumer society with a fast pace of product consumption. If we look at internet shopping as an example, we see that consumers have started to do their shopping from the comfort of their homes and it has become a free-time “hobby”. Many times, they purchase products that they do not really need, but the consumer lifestyle appeals are currently stronger than rational thinking. Very few consumers realize the negative impact of their “hobby shopping” on the planet, whether from the view of natural or human resources. Contemporary society has, however, reached a point, when it is no longer possible to ignore the negative impact of human behaviour on the environment and the problems connected to this topic are much more discussed. Consumers have, thanks to recent media campaigns communicating healthy lifestyle, become more oriented on the quality of products [2]. We could say that this phenomenon has come to a stage, when the consumers are no longer only concerned about the quality, but also the origins of the product, its environmental impact, etc. Present state of society is characterized by the destructive waste of natural resources, unstable economic growth, and, most importantly, climate change [3]. Nowadays, concepts like green, sustainable, or organic marketing are becoming widely used, reflecting the society’s concern about the area of the growing consumption impacts on the environment [4]. Marketing has adapted to the increasing trend of sustainability discourse relatively quickly [5]. Businesses are carefully reassessing their marketing strategies based on the practice and are trying to react flexibly to the changes in the society [6]. Shops are starting to eliminate plastic bags, display environment-friendly products, and create communication campaigns proclaiming sustainability. For the society to undergo a change in perception of environmentally responsible behaviour, it is necessary to find and address the right consumers with an educational impact. The consumers are the key element of the market. If they are environmentally conscious, do not buy products burdening the environment and planet, they eliminate the demand for these products and this would lead to a decrease or cessation of the production of such products. Ideally, these positive behaviour patterns would spread among different consumer segments until reaching the societal consensus on socially responsible and sustainable behaviour. A growing public pressure caused by the deterioration of environment inspires societies to look for determinants of consumer behaviour in the area of purchasing environmentally conforming products [7]. For this purpose, it is, however, necessary to find and analyse the right segment of consumers that could potentially be the distributors of such behaviour patterns. The subsegment of Generation C that we address below appears to be such a fitting segment.

2 Objective and methodology

The main objective of this article is to clarify the topic of the consumer subsegment of Generation C and, on the basis of the conducted research, interpret its perception of environmental problems of the society, together with its preferences in the area of marketing communication.

The paper has a character of a research study. To obtain relevant knowledge, we have used various methods and sources of information. Standard methods of logical reasoning including deduction, induction, analysis, comparison, and synthesis have been used throughout the whole paper. For the purpose of theoretical concept development, we have added data from the primary source of information to the data obtained from secondary sources of information. Academic articles, electronic publications, statistical data, and

reports of already conducted research in the area of consumer behaviour represented the secondary sources. The primary source of information was our marketing research. This research was aimed at consumer behaviour of the sample of respondents fulfilling the characteristics of Generation C subsegment. The research was conducted by the method of questioning through electronic questionnaire. Respondents were selected randomly and the respondents not meeting the criteria of Generation C were excluded from the researched sample. The number of respondents was dependent on the duration of the questionnaire distribution. It had been distributed from 1st January 2018 to 1st March 2018. We have set the minimum number of respondents to 500. This limit had been reached and exceeded, as, after the end of questionnaire distribution, the sample contained 705 respondents. The obtained data have been evaluated by a one-dimensional and multidimensional statistical analysis and consequently interpreted through charts and diagrams.

3 Generation C

Segmentation of consumers on the basis of generational cohorts in modern marketing is practically a general knowledge. The emergence of the theory of generational cohorts has been an important milestone in the departure from a one-dimensional demographic segmentation of consumers based on their age. Its grounds can be found in sociology, as, according to this theory, we can assume that individuals going through the same historical, cultural, social, political, and economic events during their adolescence – to be more exact, at the ages from 17 to 23, share common basic values and behaviour throughout their lives [8]. However, this approach requires a more complex reaction to what these, let us call them “classic generations” actually contain [9]. Nowadays, due to the aforementioned technological progress, consumers also change significantly. Internet globalizes the consumers and their behaviour is determined and formed not only by the historical, political, and cultural events that personally affect them, but also by those that they only perceive through internet, but take interest in. This mere fact shows that segmentation of consumers based on their year of birth might not seem to be the best way in contemporary world. Johana Blakley has aptly described the problem of generational segmentation by stating that it is almost crazy that media companies believe that if you fall within a certain demographic category, then you are somewhat predictable, you have a certain taste and like certain things. She points out the ways people aggregate on the internet, where the consumers do not aggregate around their age, income, or gender. They aggregate around things they love and like [10]. This is one of the reasons for being able to note a significant growth of psychographic consumer segmentation in modern marketing. By applying this modern look at consumer segmentation, we are getting to the aforementioned Generation C. At the first sight, it could appear that we are talking about a completely new term, but the genesis of this subsegment can be observed from the beginning of the new millennium. Back then, the researchers already started to point out the formation of some intersecting generational cohort consisting of digitally and technologically savvy consumers, who had, at that time, started to generate their own digital content building the web [11]. A full definition of this subsegment only came in 2012, when Brian Solis described this subsegment, or the connected consumer, as a result of how the consumers have grasped digital technologies, while considering Generation C a synonym of digital lifestyle [12]. Generation C could be understood as a certain intersecting segment going across all well-known generational cohorts. Generation C is formed from these cohorts on the basis of certain behaviour patterns, fittingly starting with the letter “c”, but definition of these behaviour patterns is not definite. The author of the term himself defines the “c” as connectedness; in the sense of their connection not only to the internet but to everything they like and are interested in. In 2018, he even described these consumers as

hyperconnected. He characterizes Generation C by five patterns of behaviour – create, connect, consume, communicate, contribute [13]. A Google platform called Think with Google also addresses Generation C and brings apt characteristics of this subsegment based on four patterns of behaviour – connection, community, creation, curation. The behaviour pattern “connection” represents their constant connection to internet through several devices. “Community” represents the building of communities of consumers in both the online environment and the real world, both communities being of an equal value to them. “Creation” represents the action of creating their own contents that they subsequently share on the internet. Under the “curation” we can understand the fact that this subsegment not only creates and shares their own content, but also shares the already existing contents created by someone else. Therefore, it is an intersecting subsegment, which consists of consumers of various age categories (or generational cohorts); they only need to meet the expected patterns of behaviour [14].

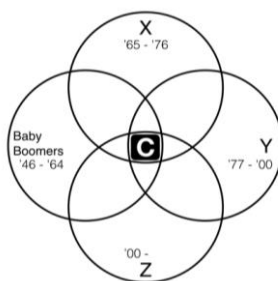


Fig. 1. Caption Scheme of intersecting subsegment of Generation C

Based on the aforementioned, we can state that Generation C appears to be a perspective segment due to several facts. Firstly, it is their constant connection to the internet, which makes this subsegment an easily reachable target audience. Its members can also be considered creators of current trends, as thanks to their connectedness they obtain information immediately and anywhere. At the same time, due to the other three abovementioned patterns of behaviour, they also become trend propagators. They not only create contents, they also share the existing ones. They project themselves as certain opinion leaders within their community and act as a medium. This medium’s advantage is that the information flows not only among peers, but extends beyond intergenerational boundaries.

4 Results and discussion

We have conducted a quantitative research in order to analyse the potential perspectivity of Generation C in the area of promoting positive patterns of pro-environmental behaviour. Besides the identification questions, we could divide its composition into two main dimensions. The first one is the consumer behaviour in the environmental area and the perception of environmental issues in the society. Next, we will present the key findings of the conducted research.

Based on the research results in the environmental area, we can state that Generation C shows a really positive attitude towards environment protection and towards the issue of environment protection in general. In the beginning of this part of research, we wanted to ascertain the mental setup of this subsegment in connection to the issue of the state of environment and we have found out that more than 65% of Generation C members are definitely concerned about general problems connected to the condition of the environment

and almost 33% are only concerned about certain problems. When assessing environmental problems of the society, 47.5% of the respondents stated that they regard them as very important. In evaluating other statements, the respondents were strongly inclined towards statements that these questions are publicly under-discussed, ignored by the sellers, the supply of environmental-friendly products is low and labelling of these products is also insufficient.

Table 1. Generation C attitudes towards environmental problems of the society (in %)

	1	2	3	4	5	
Unimportant	0,7	3,7	11,7	36,6	47,9	Important
Little discussed	9,6	35,6	30,7	18,6	5,5	Highly discussed
Ignored by sellers	8,5	36,1	35,7	17,0	2,7	Promoted by sellers
Offer of envr. friendly products is low	9,7	34,9	44,7	8,7	2,0	Offer of envr. friendly products is appropriate
Labelling of envr. friendly products is insufficient	10,2	31,7	45,2	11,5	1,6	Labelling of envr. friendly products is sufficient

Despite appearing very environmentally conscious, Generation C's consumer behaviour related to purchasing eco-friendly products is considerably different. Only 6.3% of the respondents always take into account whether the purchased product is environmentally sound. More than 36% of Generation C considers this factor often and more than 40% takes this aspect into account only sometimes. However, there is some space for positive influencing of this generation's behaviour in the area of preference of the environmentally friendly products when shopping. Our research has shown that almost 45% members of this subsegment are highly likely to prefer an eco-friendly product to a usual one under the influence of certain factors. 13% of the respondents would certainly prefer a pro-environmental product and 33% of them have not decided yet. It follows from the above that Generation C perceives and is positively inclined towards the issue of influencing environmental problems. We can, therefore, state that the perspective of them adopting positive patterns of behaviour in this area and potentially promoting these patterns across other consumer segments is good. As we have already mentioned, there is space for positive influencing of this group. One option could be to implement suitable marketing communication and that is why it is necessary to ascertain the behaviour and preferences of this segment in this area. For this purpose, we have devoted a part of our research to the area of marketing communication.

In the part of the research aimed at marketing communication, we have found out that for 35% of the respondents, the online media have the highest potential to influence purchasing decisions of Generation C in favour of environmentally conforming products. In comparison, the same rate of potential of offline media was chosen by 19% of the respondents. In determining the specific online media or communication channels with the highest potential influence, we have found out that it is the social networks. According to the results of our research, Generation C spends as much as 40% of their daily time on the internet on the social network Facebook. Approximately 28% of time is devoted to Instagram and 22% to the video sharing social network YouTube. Furthermore, we wanted to determine what activities they spend time doing on social networks. Almost half of their time spent on Facebook is devoted to communicating through the Messenger platform, more than 30% to browsing the posts and almost 13% to viewing a temporary content, i.e. Facebook stories. They use Instagram differently. They only spend 11% of their time on Instagram to communicate and the remaining time is divided into viewing the content (Feed) and temporary content (Instagram Stories) in an approximately equal proportion. These results provide an important realization that, although Generation C spends more of their time on Facebook, this social network serves primarily as a communication

instrument. The function of content viewing is fully assumed by Instagram. In this part of the research, we also wanted to determine what style of communicating the environmentally friendly products can have the greatest chance of attracting them and catching their interest. The results show that Generation C is strongly inclined towards a combination of two styles. By a larger proportion, it is the educative style that has been selected by almost 36% of the respondents. The next most popular would be the interactive style preferred by approximately 18% and the least selected style is the informational style with the share of almost 12%.

5 Conclusion

On the basis of information obtained from theoretical resources and the conducted research, we can describe the subsegment of Generation C as promising for its potential to adopt pro-environmental consumer behaviour, as well as for its potential to promote environmentally friendly values across various other consumer segments. The consumers belonging to the subsegment of Generation C are concerned about environmental problems and find issues around this topic important. They think that the issue is inadequately presented and socially under-discussed. They also think that the sellers ignore this topic, which allows a presumption that Generation C wants brands and businesses to actively address this topic. Generation C demands a wider range of environmental-friendly products, which they expect to be properly labelled and visible at the place of sale. Generation C represents a segment that is easily reachable by communication. They trust online media and spend a significant part of internet time on social networks. In current technological progress, social media and networks play an important part for both the consumers and businesses [15]. Respondents belonging to Generation C approach social networks in the following way. They use Facebook mostly for communication and Instagram represents a platform where they view contents. All findings thus support the idea that Generation C is a perspective subsegment, which could play an important part in social change in the area of sustainable development and promotion of pro-environmental values across various groups of consumers. The concept of sustainability has been encountered in the mainstream since the 1980s, but only nowadays we can see more frequent discussion around this topic [16-18]. As the issue of sustainability is a very topical and global problem, we could say that it would be very appropriate to, on the one hand, analyse this subsegment in more depth, and, on the other hand, work on building its pro-environmental behaviour that they could further promote to other consumer segments.

This contribution is a partial result of the project VEGA 1/0078/18 *Aspects of marketing communication in the management processes of the circular economy*.

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