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Aleksandra Burgiel, Izabela Sowa
Katedra Badań Konsumpcji
Uniwersytet Ekonomiczny w Katowicach

New consumer trends adoption by generations X and Y – comparative analysis

Introduction

Age is widely known as an important factor determining consumer behavior. However, marketing literature suggests that using generational cohorts is even better way to capture specific character and habits of certain consumer groups [Lissitsa and Kol 2016]. This results from the fact that cohort based analysis allows for deeper insight into consumer motivations stemming from common values and beliefs shared by generation members [Schewe and Noble 2000]. This is one of the reasons for recent increased interest in studies examining specific experiences, attributes, values, and preferences of separate generations and their influence over purchasing patterns and shopping behavior.

Two generations, i.e. Generation X (GEN X) and Generation Y (GEN Y, also referred to as 'Millennials'), are especially interesting to marketers since both of them have significant purchasing power and together they represent the majority of working force. At the same time they reveal different attitudes towards family, religion or work, and exhibit different market behaviors and shopping habits. Despite these facts the comparative studies referring to Polish consumers from GEN X and Y are still relatively scarce.

Thus, the goals of the paper are twofold. The main one is to characterize frequency of specific behaviors representing some new consumer trends among the members of generations X and Y. On this basis we aim to compare the degree of these trends adoption and identify the possible differences between younger and older consumers which makes the second goal. The source of the presented information make the results of survey conducted at the turn of 2015 and 2016 on a sample consisting of 1,295 respondents from all over Poland.

Literature review

Generation is defined as people that are grouped within a certain range of ages, and have been shaped by similar conditions, technologies and life events which they experienced at critical developmental stages [Yusoff and Kian 2013]. All these factors influence opinions, habits, and motivations of generation members, as well as their desire for certain products and buying behaviors. Accordingly, many companies want to reach out to multi-generational consumers and try to gain their attention. But to do so, they need deeper insights allowing them to understand diversified consumer behaviors of generational cohorts.

Generational differences are especially visible on the labor market [cf. Wojciechowska n.d., Fazlagić 2008]. Hence, they have become an important subject of academic research in the field of organizational behavior and HR management where studies are focused on describing generations diversity of work motivation and values [Shaw and Fairhurst 2008, Kian and Yusoff 2012, Acar 2014, Krahn and Galambos 2014]. But there is also growing body of research referring to consumer behaviors of separate cohorts [Parment 2013, 2011, Burgiel and Sowa 2016, Lissitsa and Kol 2016].

This paper aims at taking a closer look at two specific cohorts: generations X and Y. Experts use different definitions of these generations, and moreover the age boundaries describing the cohorts vary between countries. Referring to Poland, we have discovered similar lack of unanimity in setting time scopes for the above mentioned generations [cf. Wrzesień 2007, Wojciechowska n.d.][1]. Having to resolve this problem for this study, we have decided to use the following criteria: GEN X will include people born from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, while the term GEN Y will be applied to individuals born between 1984 and 1997.

Both generations are characterized by higher rates of Internet adoption, compared to the older generations. GEN X is one of the most highly educated generations in history and its representatives can be described as technologically savvy, skeptic and pragmatic. On the other hand, GEN Y is considered the first high-tech generation and is perceived as being consumption-oriented and sophisticated in terms of shopping [Lissitsa and Kol 2016].

Since our goal is to discover if and how the two generations of consumers adopted some contemporary trends as well as to estimate whether there are any differences between the cohorts, it is necessary to describe the examined consumer trends first[2].

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[1] http://mateuszgrzesiak.natemat.pl/122459,21-roznic-pokoleniowych-miedzy-baby-boomers-x-i-y [access: 12.02.2017].

[2] Limitations on the length of the text do not allow for the detailed presentation of the trends. For more thorough description see the sources cited here.

Prosumption is a trend which was prophesised as long ago as in 1980 by Alvin Toffler, who predicted that consumption would become increasingly integrated with production, distribution and exchange, so much that power over the production process would shift into the hands of everyday people [as cited in Comor 2010]. Almost four decades later we can observe this process actually going on at the market. Consumers become active and take the role of prosumers, i.e. they share their knowledge of brands, products and companies with others and want to co-create products so that they are tailored to their needs [Szul 2013, Sowa 2016]. Prosumption leads to redefining the role of producer and consumer: consumers are no longer passive recipients, instead they are becoming partners for the companies [Sowa 2015].

Collaborative consumption (CC) is defined as an economic model based on sharing, swapping, trading, borrowing or renting products and services, enabling access over ownership [Botsman and Rogers 2010]. So the core ideas behind CC include sharing (payable or free) and exchange of things representing a burden or excess to one person while being still useful and attractive to another individual. It is also about avoiding waste, efficient use of owned resources, and sustainable and environmentally friendly transportation [Burgiel 2014].

The next trend, *non-ownership consumption* (NoC), is actually one of the CC aspects, but because of its rising importance and scope, it is also frequently treated as a separate phenomenon, resulting from the evolution of so-called economy of access [cf. Denning 2014]. It reflects the fact that for many consumers (esp. more rational or experienced ones, as well as for 'transumers' and 'green' consumers [cf. Burgiel 2016] it is more important to use the product and take advantage of its utility than to possess it. As a result, modern consumers are trying to gain access to the utility provided by goods in a way that does not require them to purchase the property, i.e. they rent, lease and borrow necessary products from both professional institutions and private individuals [Moeller and Wittkowski 2010].

Creation and use of the *collective intelligence* (CI, sometimes also referred to as collective wisdom or crowdsourcing) is yet another trend which is not completely new but lately it evolves, especially in the field of consumers' behavior. Collective intelligence refers to harnessing the power of a large number of people to solve a difficult problem as a group. The concept behind CI is that a group of people can solve problems more efficiently and offer a better answer to a question than any single individual could provide[3]. Collective intelligence emerges from the collaboration, coordination and sometimes even competition among individuals and can be extracted by the analysis of mass amount of

[3]http://lexicon.ft.com/Term?term=collective-intelligence [access: 11.02.2017].

user-contributed data currently available in Web 2.0 applications. The generation of CI represents a departure from traditional methods for information sharing, since data coming from both the multimedia official content (e.g. promotion) and social sources (e.g. social media) is constantly merging and growing [Solachidis et al. 2010]. Wikipedia, Google and Facebook are perfect examples of CI. Anyone can add information to an existing page in Wikipedia or even create a new page; Google search engine is made up of millions of websites, created by people all over the world; and FB (as well as similar social media based on networking) is perhaps the most popular form of CI. People post statuses and comments which act as news feed; friends can recommend certain applications and/or pages to any person on their friend list[4].

And finally *showrooming* phenomenon refers to the situation when a shopper visits the real store only to check or try out a product, using the store more like a 'showroom'. But after personally investigating the offer she/he uses the web (sometimes even while still in the store, via mobile devices) to find better price offers. As a result, purchase of the product is realized somewhere else, most often it via online channels[5].

Research methodology

To realize study goals, we used data obtained from the online survey organized at the turn of 2015 and 2016. Considering the fact that the vast majority of GEN X and GEN Y members are active Internet users[6] such a method of data collection seemed appropriate. Quota sampling procedure was used[7] and the field study was coordinated by the Research and Knowledge Transfer Centre from the University of Economics in Katowice.

The sample used for this study consisted of 1,295 respondents of whom 576 (44.5%) individuals were aged 30 to 49 years and 719 (55.5%) persons were aged 18 to 29 years. Using the criteria presented above we have assumed that

[4]http://www.co-intelligence.org/CollectiveIntelligence2.html [access: 11.02.2017].

[5]https://www.payfirma.com/payments-101/webrooming/ [access: 12.02.2017]; http://www.businessnewsdaily.com/4647-showrooming.html [access: 12.02.2017].

[6]According to CBOS study in 2015 the share of Internet users in the following age categories amounted to 97% for Poles aged 18–24 years, 95% for those aged 25–34 years, and 86% for those aged 35-44 years respectively. The Internet access was lower only in group aged 45–54 years (60%). However, since members of this age category represented only a small part of the whole group treated as generation X in our study, we have assumed that such a lower rate of Internet access will not affect the representativeness of results.

[7]In fact, the original sample was larger and included also other age classes. Data collection was coordinated in such a way that the sample structure reflected the structure of the Polish Internet users as closely as possible. Here we present only a small part of collected data.

the first group most closely represents GEN X and the latter represents GEN Y. The structure of the sample in terms of respondents' gender, education level and economic situation is presented in Table 1.

Table 1
Sample characteristics

Demographics	Categories	GEN X (30–49 years)	GEN Y (18–29 years)	Total sample
		%		
Gender	female	45.5	59.5	53.3
	male	54.5	40.5	46.7
Education level	primary & vocational	13.9	3.8	8.3
	secondary	37.5	59.1	49.5
	higher	48.6	37.1	42.2
Household economic situation	very bad & bad	5.3	3.9	4.6
	average	44.5	38.4	41.1
	good	45.6	51.5	48.9
	very good	4.6	6.2	5.5
Household total monthly income	less than 1 500 PLN	3.3	5.7	4.6
	1 500–4 000 PLN	36.6	43.1	40.2
	4 001–7 000 PLN	40.4	27.9	33.6
	7 001–10 000 PLN	13.8	15.0	14.5
	more than 10 000 PLN	5.8	8.2	7.1
Total		100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Own calculations on the basis of survey results.

In order to characterize the adoption of the selected consumer trends among the GEN X and GEN Y representatives, we developed a questionnaire following a comprehensive review of the literature. Problems addressed here were measured directly by using multiple-item scales where respondents were asked to indicate frequency of behaviors representing the examined trends. The frequency was measured on an ordinal scale as the number of times the behaviors were performed within last year. The response options included: 'never', '1–3 times', '4–10 times', '11–20 times within last year', and 'more than 20 times within last year'.

As it was mentioned, we considered five trends, i.e. prosumption, collaborative consumption, non-ownership consumption, collective intelligence creation and use, and showrooming. Except the last one, each of the other trends was represented by four items (capturing different behavioral symptoms of the trend). Showrooming was represented by only one item as it was considered sufficient to reflect the essence of this trend.

Additional goal of the study was to estimate the differences between the two generations with regard to the trends'adoption. For this purpose, we constructed an index reflecting the trend adoption for the trends represented by four items. By cumulating the coded responses[8] we obtained one number (ranging from 4 to 20) for each respondent, reflecting overall frequency of the behaviors representing a particular trend, with higher number showing higher degree (scope) of this trend adoption.

To analyze the data we used descriptive statistics, contingency tables as well as adequate non-parametrical tests offered by the IBM SPSS software.

Results

Generally, the collected data allow for an observation that adoption of different trends among the surveyed consumers varies significantly. To estimate the overall degree of adoption of the five trends, we classified all respondents into three groups on the basis of the trend adoption index described in the methodological part. In this way, we distinguished three classes of respondents: light, medium and intensive adopters[9]. The share of these three groups is presented in Figure 1.

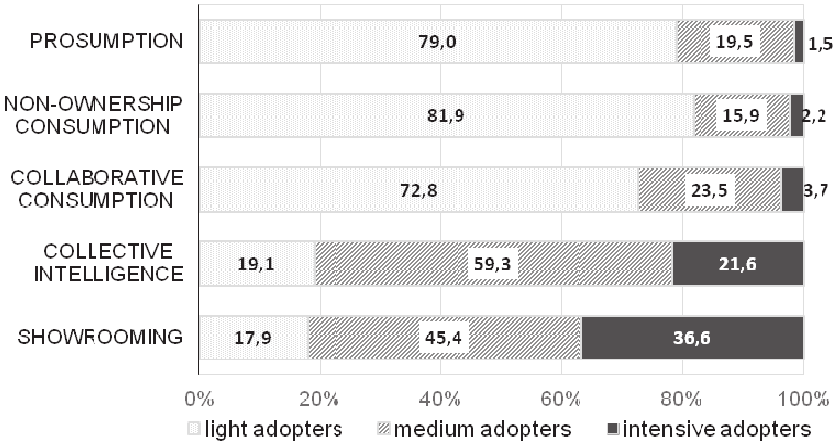

Figure 1
Classification of respondents according to trends adoption index
Source: Own calculations on the basis of survey results.

[8]We recoded the frequencies indicated by respondents using the following coding system: 'never' = = 1, '1 to 3 times' = 2, '4 to 10 times' = 3, '11 to 20 times within last year' = 4, and 'more than 20 times within last year' = 5. Then we cumulated them to obtain one number for each trend.
[9]Since the index ranged from 4 to 20 for the complex trends, we used the following criteria: light adopters obtained 4 to 9 pts, medium adopters 10 to 15 pts, and intensive adopters 16 to 20 pts.

Results of this synthetic analysis show that only showrooming and collective intelligence can be perceived as relatively widespread trends since the share of medium and intensive adopters is close to 80%. On the other hand, collaborative consumption, prosumption and especially non-ownership consumption are not popular. They are accepted by only small groups of respondents – 20% or less who can be called medium adopters and the share of intensive adopters is almost insignificant.

This general difference in trend adoption is a result of highly diversified frequency of particular behaviors representing separate trends (Figs. 2 and 3). Among the analyzed behaviors, the most frequent ones are those representing showrooming, and even to a greater extent, use of the collective intelligence. On an average, only 7.5% (between 3.7% and 10.5%) of respondents never exhibited three of the four behaviors representing CI. In fact, using online dictionaries, encyclopedias, and resources shared by other Internet users (eg. music, movies, books, etc.) as well as using knowledge, skills & advice offered via Internet to solve specific problems (eg. find out proper software) are relatively common and even quite frequent.

It is true especially for the first aforementioned activity since as many as 68.1% of GEN Y and more than a half (52.2%) of GEN X members were using online dictionaries and encyclopedias more than 10 times within last year. Only the last behaviors representing CI, i.e. giving other Internet users advice on how to solve their problem or improve their equipment, was less frequent and not as common as the other ones. Around 40% of respondents never performed such an activity within last year and only about 15% did it more than 10 times.

The adoption degree of the showrooming trend is also quite high – less than 20% of respondents representing both generations never used mobile devices while shopping in the store to check Internet and find better offers in online or real shops. At the same time, more than 1/3 of respondents did it more than 10 times within last year (Fig. 3).

The other three trends seem to be much less common. On an average within last year almost 50% of respondents did not undertake any activities representing collective consumption, 2/3 did not engage in three out of four prosumer behaviors and 70% did not perform three out of four prosumer behaviors activities connected with non-ownership consumption. In case of behaviors representing NoC and prosumption, in each set there is one behavior which is more popular. As far as the prosumption is concerned, the relatively higher frequency can be noted for posting opinions and reviews of the purchased products (eg. via forums) – almost 50% of GEN X and over 30% of GEN Y shared online their opinions about purchased products. At the same time the only commonly performed behavior representing NoC is borrowing something necessary from friends (for free) which is

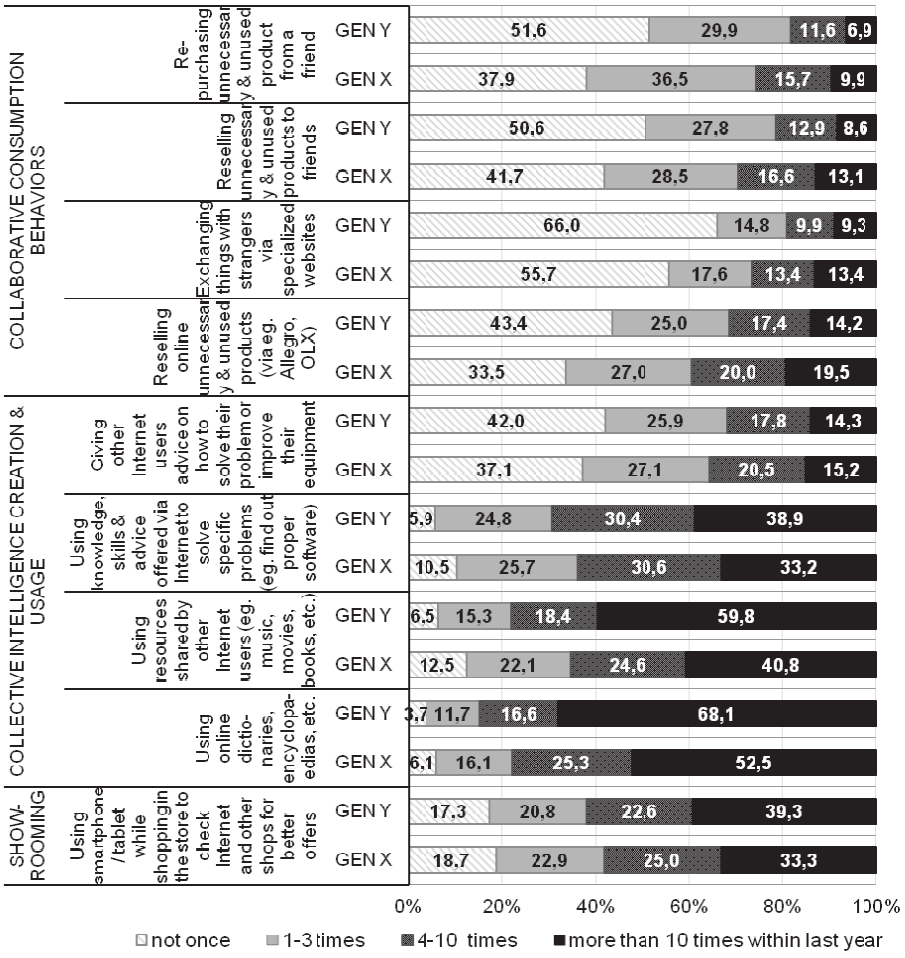

Figure 2
Frequency of behaviors representing selected consumer trends among GEN X and GEN Y
Source: Own calculations on the basis of survey results.

not a surprise. Still almost 20% of respondents declared that they did not borrow anything from a friend within last year (Fig. 3).

The second aim of the analysis was to identify and verify significance of the differences observed between younger and older consumers. To this end we calculated shares of previously identified light, medium and intensive adopters among GEN X and GEN Y, and then we performed chi-square tests of independence (see Table 2).

In case of four out of five trends, chi-square tests results showed that the shares of light, medium and intensive adopters are significantly (at $p < 0.01$)

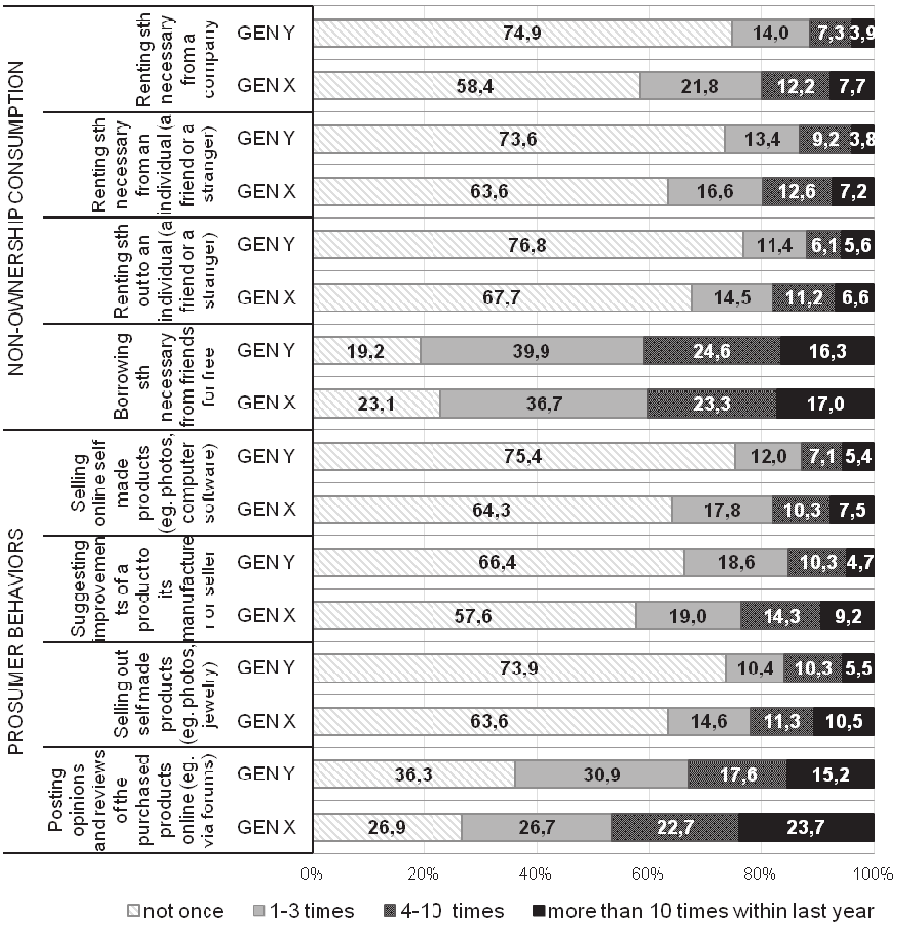

Figure 3
Frequency of behaviors representing selected consumer trends among GEN X and GEN Y
Source: Own calculations on the basis of survey results.

different between GEN X and Y representatives. The only exception refers to showrooming, in case of which there was no statistically significant difference ($p = 0.082$). This may, however, result from the fact that showrooming as the only trend was represented by sole item in the scale.

To further verify the existence of differences between GEN X and GEN Y as far as trends adoption is concerned we used Mann-Whitney non-parametrical test. We tested differences between GEN X and GEN Y indexes reflecting particular trends adoption (see Table 3 and Table 4).

Table 2
Classification of respondents representing GEN X and GEN Y according to trends adoption index

Trend	Generation	Light adopters [%]	Medium adopters [%]	Intensive adopters [%]	Sig.*
Prosumption	GEN X (30–49 years)	72.6	25.9	1.4	0.000
	GEN Y (18–29 years)	84.1	14.3	1.6	
Collaborative consumption	GEN X (30–49 years)	67.3	28.1	4.7	0.000
	GEN Y (18–29 years)	77.3	19.9	2.9	
Collective intelligence	GEN X (30–49 years)	24.0	59.5	16.5	0.000
	GEN Y (18–29 years)	15.1	59.2	25.7	
Non-ownership consumption	GEN X (30–49 years)	77.0	20.0	3.0	0.000
	GEN Y (18–29 years)	85.9	12.6	1.5	
Showrooming	GEN X (30–49 years)	18.7	48.0	33.3	0.082
	GEN Y (18–29 years)	17.3	43.4	39.3	

*Significance indicates *p*-value for chi-square tests.
Source: Own calculations on the basis of survey results.

Table 3
Mann-Whitney test statistics (grouping variable: age)

	Prosumption	Collaborative Consumption	Collective Intelligence	Non-ownership Consumption	Showrooming
Mann-Whitney U	162 084.500	164 075.000	157 722.500	186 184.000	188 822.000
Wilcoxon W	406 035.500	408 725.000	316 488.500	441 439.000	352 128.000
Z	–5.425	–4.932	–6.165	–2.348	–2.239
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.019	0.025

Source: Own calculations on the basis of survey results.

In all cases the differences proved to be statistically significant[10]. The test results allowed us not only to confirm existence of differences but also to confirm their character. Mann-Whitney test's statistics and ranks indicated that the adoption of three out of five trends, i.e. CC, NoC and prosumption, was significantly greater among GEN X than among GEN Y representatives (U_{CC} =164,075.0,

[10]Even though the medians calculated for GEN X and GEN Y reflect these differences only in some cases (for prosumption MdnX = 1.5 and MdnY = 1.25; for CC MdnX = 1.75 and Mdn Y = 1.5; for CI MdnX = 3 and MdnY = 3.25; for NoC MdnX = 1.5 and MdnY = 1.5 and for showrooming MdnX = 3.0 and MdnY = 3.0).

Table 4
Mann-Whitney test ranks

Trends	Age	N	Mean rank	Sum of ranks
Prosumption	GEN X (30–49 years)	563	692.11	389655.50
	GEN Y (18–29 years)	698	581.71	406035.50
	Total	1 261	×	×
Collaborative consumption	GEN X (30–49 years)	559	685.48	383186.00
	GEN Y (18–29 years)	699	584.73	408725.00
	Total	1 258	×	×
Collective intelligence	GEN X (30–49 years)	563	562.15	316488.50
	GEN Y (18–29 years)	701	689.00	482991.50
	Total	1 264	×	×
Non-ownership consumption	GEN X (30–49 years)	564	666.39	375842.00
	GEN Y (18–29 years)	714	618.26	441439.00
	Total	1 278	×	×
Showrooming	GEN X (30–49 years)	571	616.69	352128.00
	GEN Y (18–29 years)	712	662.30	471558.00
	Total	1 283	×	×

Source: Own calculations on the basis of survey results.

$p = 0.000$; $U_{NoC} = 186{,}184.0$, $p = 0.019$; $U_{Pros} = 162{,}084.5$, $p = 0.000$ respectively). On the other hand, the adoption of CI and showrooming was significantly greater among GEN Y than among GEN X representatives ($U_{CI} = 157{,}722.5$, $p = 0.000$; $U_{Shr} = 188{,}822.0$, $p = 0.025$ respectively).

Both, test results and analysis regarding light, medium and intensive adopters' shares, allows us to finally state that, in the case of collective consumption, non-ownership consumption and prosumption, i.e. trends involving relations, cooperation and sharing with others, it is the older generation X which seems to have adopted them more eagerly. On the other hand, GEN Y representatives are more open to accept CI and showrooming, i.e. trends which are more than the previous ones based on the use of modern technologies, mobile devices and constant connectedness which is a typical attribute of young consumers in the 21st century. However, showrooming is the trend with the greatest potential of similar adoption among GEN X and GEN Y.

Managers must be always aware of the current consumer trends and the degree to which they can shape and change behaviors of their customers. Deeper knowledge in this field allows them to create more successful marketing strategy and be better prepared for the future.

The above results, offering some additional insight into the behaviors of GEN X and GEN Y, can be used while preparing the overall marketing programs directed at these two generations representing very important target groups of customers.

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Abstract

The paper presents survey results regarding adoption of selected consumer trends (i.e. prosumption, collaborative consumption, non-ownership consumption, showrooming, and collective intelligence use and creation) by members of generations X and Y. We analyze and compare the frequency of certain behaviors representing the aforementioned trends and make an attempt to establish whether the two generations vary with reference to these trends adoption. The data collected from 576 generation X and 719 generation Y representatives via online survey confirm that there are significant dissimilarities between consumers of different age.

Key words: generational cohorts, consumer behavior, prosumption, collaborative consumption, showrooming, collective intelligence

Akceptacja nowych trendów konsumenckich w pokoleniach X i Y – analiza porównawcza

Abstrakt

W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań dotyczących akceptacji wybranych trendów konsumenckich przez przedstawicieli generacji X i Y. Prowadzone analizy dotyczyły następujących trendów: prosumpcji, konsumpcji wspólnej (ang. *collaborative consumption*), konsumowania bez posiadania (ang. *non-ownership consumption*), showrooming'u oraz zbiorowej inteligencji (ang. *collective intelligence*). Przeanalizowano i porównano częstotliwości realizacji wybranych zachowań reprezentujących wyżej wymienione trendy i podjęto próbę ustalenia, czy badane pokolenia różnią się pod względem stopnia ich akceptacji. Badania bezpośrednie, będące podstawą analiz, przeprowadzono wśród 576 reprezentantów generacji X i 719 przedstawicieli pokolenia Y, za pomocą ankiety internetowej. Ich wyniki potwierdzają istnienie istotnych różnic pomiędzy konsumentami z różnych pokoleń.

Słowa kluczowe: kohorty pokoleniowe, zachowania konsumentów, konsumpcja wspólna, prosumpcja showrooming, inteligencja zbiorowa