

REVIEW REGARDING FOOD PREFERENCES ACROSS DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

Andrada Alice BERES (BACIU)¹, Ruben Emilio CURTA¹, Anca Monica BRATA^{1#}

¹ Faculty of Environmental Protection, University of Oradea, 26 Gen. Magheru St, 410048 Oradea, Romania

REVIEW

Abstract

This study presents a comparison regarding the food preferences and the consumption behaviour between different generations. The consumption behaviour studies mainly the mental and emotional response and the consumers behaviour regarding the typology of products purchase. It is influenced by a series of factors such as: environmental factors, economic factors, social factors, culture, traditions, consumers preferences and prices.

The differences between generations regarding food consumption and the attitude towards organic products are significant and thus they influence the marketing strategies leading to the market being segmented into specific generational niches that satisfy the consumers preferences.

Keywords: generations, food preferences, consumption behaviour

#Corresponding author: Anca Monica BRATA, abrata@uoradea.ro

INTRODUCTION

The consumer behaviour mainly studies the mental, emotional and the consumers behaviour regarding the type of product purchase. (Cătoiș & Morariu, 2001).

The factors that influence the consumers behaviour are personal, cultural, social and psychological. The personal factors include the genre, the income and the consumers age, the cultural ones refer to tradition and religion, and the social factors refer to friends and family. These factors are very important in order to define and characterize the consumers behaviours. (Hiranandani, 2023).

The consumers behaviour - or the way in which people buy and use goods and services - is a vast field of psychological research, especially for the big companies that wish to sell products to as many clients as possible. Considering how much the lives of consumers is impacted by the „why” and „how much” products they buy, researching the consumers behaviour is tightly bound by a few key psychological issues. These include communication (How are different people responding to commercials and marketing?), identity (Do our acquisitions unravel our personality?), social status, decision making and mental and physical health. (Consumer Behavior | Psychology Today, 2024). Establishing the consumers behaviour has a

major importance in market studies because it determines the best way of promoting products and services. The decision to buy something is mainly based on desire and not on need, and they are not always rational; instead they are influenced by personality, emotion and trends (Murray, 2016).

The strategies utilised in campaigns for a product might not be valid for another product, the wishes of consumers changing continuously. Thus, in order to adapt, the marketing specialists are focusing upon focus groups, they apply psychological studies and market studies in order to obtain a better understanding of what are the decision factors that influence the consumer in buying and becoming loyal to the brands (Consumer Behavior | Psychology Today, 2024).

Implementing efficient marketing strategies leads to the understanding of consumers behaviour, enhancing thus the loyalty to brand by influencing the consumers in the process of decision making (Hiranandani, 2023).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

There are seven generation that have been studied over time, and they are as it follows:

1. *The great generation* (born between 1901-1927). This generation is known by the fact that they grew during the Great Depression and many of the respondents belonging to this generation are war veterans from the Second

World War. The Great Depression caused a series of problems that lead to the majority of the population being extremely poor (Elder, 2018; Kennedy, 2001).

2. *The silent generation* (born between 1928-1945) known as „the lucky few”, includes the veterans that participated in the wars that took place in Korea and Vietnam. Their income was lower compared to the one the previous generation earned. Because of the abject poverty, the objects that other generation consider as necessities or accessible distraction, for them it represented a luxury.

These generations grew in families where the father was the only source of income. Most of the women had no education past primary school, and most of them were taking care of the household (Howe & Strauss, 2009).

Considering the poverty that characterised these generations, most of them were modest people, that bought only what was necessary and small joys. They prefer a practical attitude regarding commercial and they are responding better to commercials that refer to traditional values. The ones that are closer to the way they grew, will obtain a better answer from these generations.

Also, both the Great Generation as well as the Silent Generation will rather choose known, classic brands, than products that belong to newer companies. Thanks to the many decades of radio and television, this behaviour was attributed to the repetitive nature of older commercials that formed the preferences of these respondents (Penington-Gray, 2001).

These generations tend to have less digital experience and they did not adopt the new technologies with ease. The younger ones might have computers and tablets, but there are very few smartphones used by the ones belonging to these generations. It remains the responsibility of younger generations to teach the older ones how to use modern technology (Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 2009).

3. *Baby boomers* (born between 1946-1964). Many of the members of this period grew up with their mothers leading the household. With this generation, came the change, women gaining access to the world of educated professionals. This was a turning moment in woman's education, leading to women becoming more than 50% from the people with a superior education from United States.

Since now there were two incomes per household, this generation became the

wealthiest. They prefer to buy in large bulks, renowned products that represent quality. Being the generation that grew with a TV in the house, their preferences were determined by the commercials that were aired. This generation is loyal to known brands but is also open to suggestions and recommendations from their children that belong to X, Y and even Z generation.

This generation has an entrepreneurial spirit that is continuously developing. They paid attention to this new trend that avoids typical workplaces with a 9-17 schedule and developed companies that incorporate these values. They believe in niche products that satisfy and responds to an actual need and so they invest in these products and services. They ask for recommendations from trained employees and only then decide if they will buy a product about which they did not have enough information previously.

When targeting the Baby boomers, the message must be conservative and traditional to lure them. A commercial that contains licentious language or inappropriate images will only estrange them. The commercials are to be distributed on TV channels, in newspapers and on the local market (Madichie, 2009; Williams & Page, 2011).

4. *Generation X* (born between 1965-1980), known as the generation with the key around their neck or the MTV generation, these are the kids whose parents have jobs, the ones that caught the highest divorce rate between their parents. This generation was seen as cynical and broken, many times questioning authority, which led to a logic regarding acquisitions, the respondents being immune to emotional messages.

The entrepreneurial spirit of this generations is well developed, working many extra hours beside the 9-17 work schedule to rise their own empire. This generation is much humbler compared with the other generations that surrounds them, preferring to let their work to speak for them instead of bragging about their success.

They easily adopted the utilisation of internet for work, research, online shopping, etc. They are connected with the environment through intense smartphone utilisation. They are well informed staying in tune with news that are read from apps. Also, they are avid volunteers, being important to spend time with the community, for they development and good mood.

This generation prefers products that are accessible and practical. They have steady jobs, leading to the possibility of buying a house, appliances, and furniture. They read reviews with attention before buying a new product and they rely on recommendation for major acquisitions. Also, they prefer streaming platforms instead of cable TV.

When targeting Generation X, the message must be rather clear and concise than emotional, to lure them. It is recommended to distribute the commercials on platforms like Hulu, Netflix, HBO Max, news sites and on the local market (Williams & Page, 2011). They stay loyal to their favourite products and refuse to test different brands. Also, they are attracted by good offers like coupons, promotional codes, loyalty programmes and many others. (Hiranandani, 2023).

5. *Generation Y* (born between 1980-1995), also known as Millennials or Generation Me, is the generation with the highest higher education rate, at least 61% of them attending college. The respondents of this generation work beside their fulltime job, part-time jobs. Due to their education, there is a serious competition when it comes to jobs.

Some millennials saw business opportunities on markets that have never been accessed before and so small businesses and start-ups appeared. Others chose a digital Nomad lifestyle, working remote while travelling the world.

This generation uses smartphones and tablets to make fast acquisitions, to manage their bank accounts and to stay informed (Bolton et al., 2013).

They prefer accessible products, environmentally friendly, the ones not being tested on animals being the most treasured ones. Emotional connections offer them a positive perception that determines them to buy from a certain company. Reviews on products and brands are searched before deciding to buy a product. Also, they are willing to share their own opinions about products and brand, online and offline.

These respondents do not cherish traditions as much as the value of the brand and its actions. They are willing to pay more for popular and unique products (Hiranandani, 2023).

Growing in a revolutionary period for the digital era, they are used to consume daily, media content, online games, videos, and movies on streaming platforms. When targeting

Millennials, there are many ways to get to them. Media content can be consumed during the day through social media, apps, YouTube and streaming, being difficult to choose a way to approach them (Fromm & Garton, 2013).

6. *Generation Z* (born between 1996-2012), also known as Founders Generation, Post-Millennials or iGeneration, favour the digital scene when talking about acquisitions. The respondents of this generation wish to always be amazed by something found on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat or Pinterest, easily accepting new, innovative products. These platforms are used like Google, always searching the next great event, through commercial being possible to actually buy products (Schiopu et al., 2023).

YouTube is also appreciated by this generation because they would rather see how a product works, not only pictures with it. This way they make informed acquisitions, while also learning how to use the product correctly (Williams & Page, 2011). They are very well informed because they do a lot of research and weigh their options before buying products or services. They always look for the best offer and are more prone to buy through social media, compared to other generations. While generation X and Y are centred on the price, this generation is aware of the price, thus is necessary for a company to change their values, quality, and ethic in practice, to sell products to a respondent of this generation. Also implementing marketing strategies through identification of known and appreciated influencers (Hiranandani, 2023).

Generation Z prefers affordable, eco-friendly, animal-free and niche products. They want to express who they are through what they buy, so they can display their status or develop common interests with strangers.

They are heavily influenced by digital celebrities such as beauty vloggers, influencers, or a show about current events, they will absorb their favourite brands from their favourite celebrities. This fact provides the opportunity to make content with paid partnerships based on the celebrity of the influencer (Seemiller & Grace, 2018)

7. *Generation Alpha* (born between 2013-2025), is growing up in an environment full of connections and developing in an era of continuous digitization, being the first generation of the 21st century. It is assumed that it will be the largest and most diverse generation, whose population will exceed 2

billion in 2025. They will shape the development of technology and the direction of research as well as the success of companies, being a crucial focal point for marketers (Ziatdinov & Cilliers, 2022).

Understanding this generation is important because even if the respondents are not old enough to make purchases themselves, they indirectly impact through parental decisions that take into account their preferences, needs and interests, as well as educational resources, entertainment options, food preferences and chosen lifestyles (McCrinkle & Fell, 2020).

More than 54% of respondents of this generation own a tablet, being deeply immersed in the digital world. They are socially conscious and vocal, with 96% of them believing that people should be treated fairly, regardless of what they look like or what their demographics are. Also, more than half (63%) say they want to work where they can have an impact on saving the planet. The vast majority of parents (80%) reported that their Alpha children influenced their actions and purchasing decisions towards a more sustainable future. These children are aware of the importance of mental health, being raised by health-conscious parents. They prefer visual content on platforms like Instagram, YouTube and TikTok (Chan, 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Over the generations, food preferences have varied, being strongly influenced by environmental factors, economic factors, culture, traditions, and consumer preferences. The generational differences are obvious, and the study of their consumption behaviour provides relevant information so that the offer corresponds to the demand of each generation.

The Baby Boomers generation grew up eating most of their meals in restaurants, schools, and corporate cafes as well as cafeterias. More than half of consumers aged 53-72 use catering services on a weekly basis. Compared to the previous generation, they have been exposed to more flavours, ingredients, and styles of cooking. They prefer healthy eating and convenience when it comes to grocery shopping. Information about the food consumed, transparency about the sources of nutrients, how the animals are slaughtered, and other aspects described on the packaging are appreciated. Their definition of healthy includes terms such as: local, fresh, clean, salad consumption increasing by 20% compared to

previous years (Drewnowski & Almiron-Roig, 2010).

Generation X is a group between the ages of 42-52. They are avid fast-food consumers, with 85% of the total demographic visiting a fast-food restaurant monthly. Those born later in this generation choose locations that offer full services, opting for those that also have menus for children or families. The products favoured by this generation are burgers, chicken, tacos or burritos, hot coffee, bottled water, smoothies, and sports drinks. They also have a more adventurous taste palette compared to the previous generation, with over 62% of respondents willing to test new flavours from time to time. Among the flavours tested are those belonging to Japanese cuisine (sushi) or Caribbean food. Only 27% of respondents of the generation prefer to limit themselves to their favourite tastes, rarely being willing to try new tastes, preferring restaurants with limited service that offer the traditional menu (Galanakis, 2024).

Millennials are a generation on the go, with 39% of respondents saying they eat takeout. Despite all the rush, however, they don't rely heavily on processed foods to save time. Half of them say they prefer fresh food and 42% say they prefer to cook their food from scratch with natural ingredients. When it comes to food choices, they strike an exploratory note with 64% saying they enjoy trying new flavours, while 44% would like more ethnic options in restaurants. Older respondents prefer options that please everyone and can be shared like Italian and Mexican cuisines, most likely influenced by family. This generation appreciates technology, with 58% of respondents using their phone to order food, and a study in Austin, Texas found that millennials prefer adding self-checkout boxes to restaurants, improving service and customer satisfaction (Suárez-Gómez & Costa, 2021).

Generation Z is the generation with the most respondents who take takeaway food, exceeding 40%, thus one of the goals of catering companies was to find packaging solutions, so that the food is as easy as possible to consume. They turned steaks into sandwiches, put meat into burger buns, put soups in a glass, etc. Today's students no longer have the necessary time to sit at the table, being often on the run with one hand occupied by a smart device, so solutions to offer them food in the most practical way are very well received (Suryaningrum et al., 2023). Also, 45% of

students consider it important to use fresh products, being interested in the traceability part (from the production of the ingredients to the serving of the food)(Cobe, 2018). They value the use of local products in favour of imported ones, easily accepting seasonal menus based on local production. They have physical and mental health concerns and are more likely to choose vegetarian/vegan options. They are a generation aware of the importance of sustainability, willing to evolve and change their eating behaviour to reduce the carbon footprint and the level of pollution, thus practices such as the introduction of insects into the diet as a source of protein, will find a greater openness to this generation compared with the previous ones.

Purchasing and consuming organic food products is one of the ways to make the transition to sustainable food consumption. A study carried out in Greece, a country strongly affected by the economic crisis for 11 consecutive years, explores the behaviour in

CONCLUSIONS

This study highlights differences in food preferences and consumption attitudes between generations. Growing up in different living environments and periods, their lifestyle and behaviour was shaped differently, thus leading to varied consumption attitudes and food preferences.

The silent generation, due to the poverty that characterized the period of this generation, is modest and buys strictly what is necessary, avoiding waste. They have strong traditional values and respond better to practical advertisements, which are broadcast on radio-tv stations or through newspapers.

The Baby-boomers generation caught the emancipation of women, which brought 2 incomes to the family, thus raising the standard of living. They prefer healthy eating and convenience, using weekly catering services. They are impressed by conservative and traditional messages distributed on TV channels, in newspapers and in the local market.

Generation X caught the highest divorce rate among parents. They work overtime to achieve their goals. They prefer to eat fast food or eat in family-friendly restaurants, being open to trying a wide range of tastes. They use the phone extensively, prefer ads with clear and concise messages, which are recommended to

terms of purchases, attitudes, and the effect of the economic crisis on the purchase of organic products, exercised by 5 generations: the Silent Generation, the Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z. One of the ways to consume sustainable food is to purchase and consume organic food products. For this work, 1562 respondents were analysed over 9 months (Theodoridou et al., 2019). The results showed that all generational cohorts demonstrated a favourable attitude towards organic food and identified that one of the factors that decreased the purchase of organic products is the economic crisis. Furthermore, the results show that in all cases, there are differences between generations. The adaptation of government policies can be done through marketing communications that will highlight the advantage of consuming organic products, the benefits of their consumption and thus strengthen the favourable attitude of the consumer towards these products, in conditions of economic crisis (Kamenidou et al., 2020).

be distributed on streaming platforms such as Netflix, HBO max or Hulu.

Generation Y is the generation with the highest rate of higher education. They are open to testing new flavours and appreciate technology, appreciating self-checkouts in cafeterias or using phones to order food. They use technology to make purchases, respond to emotional connections, and look for reviews on social media, Facebook, or Twitter before purchasing a product.

Generation Z is the generation most aware of the impact on the environment, being more attentive in their purchases to the attitude and values of the company than to the price. They are always on the run, so they prefer takeaway food (steak in a sandwich, soup in a glass, etc.), they are interested in the traceability part of food products, and they are open to accepting new food sources such as crickets as a source of protein. They are strongly influenced by social media, influencers and vloggers, their goal being to make a change through an environmentally friendly attitude.

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