



CROSS-CULTURAL INVESTIGATION OF CONSUMERS' GENERATIONS ATTITUDES TOWARDS PURCHASE OF ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY PRODUCTS IN APPAREL RETAIL

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Abstract:

Recent changes of the environment and in the society have altered consumers' preferences and brought new concerns among local communities regarding environmental protection and organizations responsibility, the adoption of environmentally friendly strategies, as well as offering more sustainable products. Consumers tend to select retailers based on their focus on environmental friendly products and on various "green" strategies regarding waste disposal, package recycling, etc. This study aims to highlight Romanian and Slovak consumers' attitudes towards purchasing of goods from retailers that strive a clear focus on environmental responsibility and environmental friendly practices in apparel, footwear and sportswear retail. By means of a quantitative research based on a questionnaire administered to consumers of international retail chains with operations in both countries, the authors highlight differences in their perceptions and attitudes for buying green apparel, footwear and sportswear. Whereas Millennials and Gen Xers consumers in Romania and Slovakia believe that international apparel, footwear and sportswear retailers are less concerned about environmentally responsible behavior and the need of selling green products, Baby Boomers are more sensitive to such aspects and carefully select retailers according to their green strategy. This research provides specific findings about attitudes of different consumers' generations within two emerging European countries (Romania, Slovakia).

Key words: *Green marketing, consumer purchase behavior, Consumer generations, environmental friendly products, cross-country analysis, apparel, footwear and sportswear retail*

1. Introduction

Market globalization leads to increased competition between companies, which strive to reach more consumer segments, regardless of their place of residence. Retailers use in their fight for profit, market share and success various competitive strategies, many of them based on the principles of sustainability and on the development of environmental friendly products and brands. In their market approach, retailers rely more often on green actions combined with managerial know-how, intra-company expertise and experience and on various organizational resources (Chebeň, 2009; Dabija and Pop, 2013; Dabija and Bejan, 2017). The use of „green” marketing strategies has become a means of strengthening organizational competitive and reputational advantage (Miles and Covin, 2000; Esty and Winston, 2009) as well as a possibility to differentiate from competitors and to influence consumer’s perceptions. Retailers have nowadays understood the recent developments of contemporary society and consumers’ new needs and expectations regarding healthy, functional, organic, fair trade products. To improve their image and reputation among target markets, retailers “compete” more often with each other in offering organic, natural, traditional, environmentally compliant or friendly products, with certified or controlled ingredients, packed in recyclable or reusable packages etc. Modern consumers “force” retailers to integrate sustainability in their offers, along a green thinking of corporate strategies (Polonsky, 1994; Pop and Dabija, 2013).

Mainstream business publications like Fortune, Business Week, Wall Street Journal etc. have shown in numerous articles the benefits and advantages of retailers who have implemented environmental oriented business models, the consumption patterns, attitudes, motives and perceptions of consumers of different ages in developed countries (Esty and Winston, 2009), nevertheless little is known about the situation on emerging markets, like those from Central Europe or the Balkans. The literature linking consumers’ generations to the perception and attitudes towards retailers that implement sustainable or environmental friendly practices in clothing is also merely studied. Therefore, one may ask if managers may apply similar environmental business models across European countries assuming that consumers behave the same way in developed versus emerging markets? Interest about purchasing environmentally friendly, organic and sustainable products differs depending on consumers’ traditions and mentalities, national culture and experiences, access to such products, as well as the propensity of spending more money for products that contribute to the protection of the environment or the preservations of resources (Chebeň, 2009; Dabija and Bejan, 2017). Previous research (Laroche et al., 2001) calls for a specific analysis of environmental oriented consumer behavior which requires a proper knowledge of organizational business environment.

According to Aragon-Correa and Sharma (2003) pro-active environmental strategies may not always be competitively beneficial for organizations, especially for those which act under the conditions of uncertainty. Organization`s uncertainty can be reduced by better knowledge about target segment. Providing better understanding of different target segments might be implemented by understanding how consumers` generations act and think. Yang et al. (2011) recognized four different segments of Millennials according to their food-related lifestyles. McDonald et al. (2012) have also identified three different segments towards their approaches to green lifestyles: translators, exceptors and selectors. Dou et al. (2006) found differences between Gen Xers living in a more developed cities and those living in a less developed region. Tréguer (2007) has also showed differences among different cohorts of Baby Boomers. Reisenwitz and Rajesh (2007) reported no significant differences between younger and older Baby Boomers regarding a large number of salient behavioral variables. Baring this in mind, the authors have focused in their research on three generations Millennials (Y), Generation X and Baby Boomers because each "consumer`s retail segment" experienced similar events in their history and they share similar values, attitudes and beliefs (Brosdahl and Carpenter, 2011).

We have decided to study consumers from different cultures, but from countries with comparable economies in order to generalize our findings and in none of these countries a similar research has been done yet. Results of cross-cultural research are generalizable to all types of society from a small hamlet with population in the hundreds or a few thousands to urban societies with population in the hundreds of millions. It helps researchers to make general (cross-cultural) statements about the similarities and differences of cultures (Ilesanmi, 2009: 82). When individuals from different cultures are studied, culture can be seen as an independent variable (van de Vijver and Leung, 1997: 3). The apparel, sportswear and footwear retail sector was chosen, because consumers tend to express better judgements regarding such retailers, as everyone visits every now and then such stores (Dabija et al., 2016). After a literature review on consumers` drivers regarding the purchase of environmentally friendly products, the authors discuss in section 3 about different drivers of three different generations towards green products. The next section comprises the data and the methodology, whereas section 5 summarizes the empirical results and implications, whereas section 6 concludes the paper.

2. Drivers in purchasing environmentally friendly products

The environmental concern has led to an increase in consumers` demand for environmentally-friendly products. This has created new environmental ethics, which have increased individuals` awareness and significantly changed their consumption behaviour (Jang et al., 2011). The consumption behaviour becomes more geared

towards environmentally-sensitive goods and services, and consumers change their purchasing behaviour to become greener (Kilbourne and Pickett, 2008). This is observed as consumers' understanding of the eco-labelling of green products begins to influence their decision process in all its phases (Laroche et al., 2001; Rex and Baumann, 2007; Norazah, 2013a, 2013b). Factors that have been shown to exert influence on the ecological behavior of individuals have been generally classified as external (e.g. education, media, family, or culture), internal (e.g. knowledge, attitudes, awareness, or involvement), and situational (economic rewards and legislation) (Carette et al., 2012). Consumer attitude towards green products has previously been researched by D'Souza et al. (2007), and Haytko and Matulich (2008). In earlier research by Straughan and Roberts (1999), it was found that peer opinion plays a role in influencing consumer decisions to go green. Additionally, it is known that the product price and quality are criteria used by consumers in deciding whether to purchase a green product (Bei and Simpson, 1995).

Instead of focusing mainly on environmental costs and risks or corporate social responsibility, more and more international retail chains have discovered growth and profit opportunities through by implementing sustainable strategies and selling more environmental friendly products (Esty and Winston, 2009). As many consumers strive to have an own contribution to reduction of pollution, doing "something" for nature etc., they eagerly adopt a green behavior, purchase organic food and prefer sustainable products (Chan, 2001). Consumers can lead towards environmentally friendly products and healthy lifestyle by their ethical beliefs (McDonald et al., 2012) or personal norms as a reflection of self-estimation (self-assessment) and social environment expectations (Moser, 2015).

Paco and Rapaso (2008) analyzed variables profiling green consumers and reported nine factors that lead them to buy environmentally friendly products. An environmentally friendly buying behavior that reflects a tendency for consumers to be careful when shopping, buying more energy-efficient, less polluting, sustainable, recycled and biodegradable products, as well as those whose packaging causes less harm to the environment seems to be the most relevant dimension. Also important is the economic factor that is based on the willingness to pay a higher price for green products or the propensity to pay more taxes to protect the environment and contribute to the reduction of pollution (Paco and Rapaso, 2008; Pop and Dabija, 2013).

Effective branding based on creation of environmentally friendly image and emotions can shift consumer attitudes to more sustainable consumption and pro-environmental products (Pickett-Baker and Ozaki, 2008). If the individual perceives that the environment as a valued object is threatened, environmental concern will increase. This will then enrich the likelihood of more environmentally friendly consumption behavior (Kilbourne, Pickett, 2008: 888). Many Romanians are internally motivated with pro-environmental attitudes, but only two thirds of them choose the ecological alternative when they have a choice (Crumpei et al., 2014). Are Millennials environmentally sensitive (Lu et al., 2013) or not (Hanks et al.,

2008)? Even if customers declare interest to buy organic and environmentally friendly products, they do not purchase them. Attitudes, preferences, and behaviors of consumers evolve simultaneously with globalization, market, and sector development (Chebeň, 2009: 141).

Based on a reception to a green appeal, Ginsberg and Bloom (2004) segmented consumers into four groups: greenback Greens, sprouts, grouser, and basic Browns and suggested four organizational strategies in order to use organization's resources effectively.

3. Consumers generations and their purchasing propensity of green and environmentally friendly products

With green product markets expanding at a remarkable rate companies pursue market opportunities in the production and promotion of environmentally sensitive goods and services (Menon and Menon, 1997; Polonsky and Ottman, 1998). In this context, segmentation analysis can enable companies to effectively target environmentally conscious consumers (Prendergast and Thompson, 1997). Marketers of products and services should tune their segmentation strategies to the dynamic consumer needs of different generational cohorts (generation Y, generation X and Baby Boomers). The behavioural issue of 'why consumers buy' is of great importance in designing and implementing strategies for retailing. Age has long been used as a segmentation variable but, it does not always address the 'why's' of consumption and consumer motivation. Marketing according to generational cohort delves below the descriptive surface to understand motivations associated with age (Lancaster and Stillman, 2009; Parment, 2011).

Young consumers, also known as Millennials as most of them reached adulthood on the turn of the New Millennium were born between 1980 and 1994 (Gurău, 2012; Young, 2015; Dabija et al., 2017). They represent a very attractive target segment for retailers, as they have a huge purchasing power, a great influence on their peers and parents' purchase decisions as they are very active on social media and platforms (Gurău, 2012). Their lifestyle is completely different from previous generations, as they are more quality, fashion and brand conscious, novelty seekers, hedonistic, confused by over choice, habitual and brand loyal and love to shop (Taylor and Cosenza, 2002). Millennials are very sensitive to environmental issues, often preferring social responsible retailers or those who implement environmental preserving measures (Heaney, 2007; Furlow, 2011). Millennials, have enormous purchasing power and they have serious influence on their parents' and friends' purchase decisions (Yang et al., 2011: 809).

Literature often treats Generation X and Y homogenously as a single target market segment (Cocheo 2008; Levine 2008; Sweeney 2008). In contrast, others feel that although Generation X and Y are similar in their pragmatic outlook on life,

there are differences (Hymowitz 2007). Gen Xers continue to develop their careers and their disposable income increases. Such individuals are well educated and have confidence in power of education. They are media savvy with the computer and Internet, self-reliant and pragmatic. Generation X individuals view themselves as politically independent and call themselves liberals (Mitchell, 2001, 2003). Gen Xers have a pragmatic outlook on life, are flexible, and strive to continuously develop their careers which in many cases leads to an increase in income and/or wealthy (Hernaus and Pološki Vokic, 2014). Born between 1965 and 1979, Xers are technical skilled, self-reliant and eager to fulfil their objectives. Buying organic foodstuff and preferring healthy and green products, besides contributing to recycling is a very important issue for them, as they are concerned about the health of their children and grandchildren (Young, 2015). Age and education are regarded as two important variables for predicting their environmental behaviour (Buttel and Taylor, 1992).

Baby Boomers, born between 1945 and 1964 are individualistic and have a strong interest in self-fulfilment through personal growth (Parker and Chusmir, 1990). They have lived through and actively participated in political and social transformations such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Sexual Revolution (Lehto et al., 2008). This group has demonstrated a strong work ethic and high job involvement, which has led to economic security and career success. Charter travel to new and distant countries took off during their coming-of-age years, as did internationalization of retail, food and culture. Hence, this group values mobility in one's life. Decision pattern differ between them, studies highlighting the fact that sometimes price is not the most deciding buying factor (Parment, 2013). Some 65+ consumers are socially conscious as they support organic food and select environmentally friendly companies who strive for the welfare of local communities. Their generation also prefers to a greater extend locally produced goods. Choosing environmentally friendly brands appears directly correlate with increasing age, for the sake of their grandchildren, Baby Boomers being eager to support standards and regulations regarding environmental protection (Euromonitor, 2015; Dabija et al., 2017).

The profile of a Boomer shopper is a complex one depending on the product category, price not always being a deciding factor. Over half of the Boomer population can be considered socially conscious shoppers who exhibit a range of behaviours and attitudes such as buying organics, supporting companies who give back to the community and choosing locally produced goods. With age, legacy and leaving a positive mark becomes an important consideration. For this reason, choosing environmentally safe brands appears directly correlate with increasing age (Green Boomers Report, 2007).

4. Research methodology

In order to investigate Romanian and Slovak consumers' propensity towards adopting an environmental friendly behavior and preference towards green oriented clothing stores in their countries, the authors have implemented an exploratory research. This was carried out by means of a questionnaire which, after a proper operationalization of the items according to the literature was pretested in both countries and administered based on the survey method using face-to-face questionnaires. The respondents had to assess their level of agreement on a five point Likert scale ranging between total agreement and total disagreement (Churchill, 1991; Dabija, 2013) regarding the environmental good practices of clothing retailers aimed towards *ensuring an unpolluted environment for consumers' children and grandchildren, changes in environmental legislation, the example of western countries regarding pollution reduction* (see table 1).

Table 1. Operationalization of concepts

Environmental good practice is generated by...
... the prospect of children and grandchildren living in an unpolluted environment.
... changes in legislation.
... the example of western countries in this regard (pollution reduction etc.)
Apparel, footwear and sportswear retailers...
... seem to be responsible towards the environment.
... are careful to protect the environment.
... are willing to renounce part of their profit to ensure a clean environment.

Sources: adapted from Walsh, Beatty, 2007; Niinimäki, 2011; Martin, Shouten, 2012; Dabija, Pop, 2013; Schramm-Klein, Steinmann, 2014; Dabija et al., 2014.

For the study, interviewers in both countries administered the questionnaire to consumers older than 25 years at their home or workplace, in universities and other public places, as well as near shopping precincts. Participants were selected according to quota sampling by age and gender (Churchill, 1991), according to the Slovakian and Romanian distribution of persons from the statistical yearbooks 2014 of the countries. Respondents in both countries answered the same questionnaire, but it was translated into their national language. In order to have a proper check that the items were correctly understood, the authors developed all statements in English and run translations and back-translations by different experts from Romanian and Slovakian to English (and vice-versa). In this way it was ensured that the items had the same meaning. Following the collection and systematization of answers, the data accuracy, trustworthiness and internal consistency were checked using the Cronbach α coefficient ($\alpha > 0.7$) and the "item-to-total" correlation (Churchill, 1991; Dabija, 2013). As the results were satisfactory (α : 0,895 for the Romanian sample and α : 0,833 for the Slovakian one), they were interpreted by relying on mean evaluations.

Sample structure

From more than 1,000 administered questionnaires 822 were validated in Romania (RO) and 140 in Slovakia (SK). The final sample contained respondents' assessment of clothing (494 RO and 85 SK), footwear (132 RO and 35 SK) and sportswear (196 RO and 20 in SK) retailers. The assessed international retailers in both countries were global chains such as Zara, Bershka, Stradivarius, New Yorker, C&A, H&M etc. in clothing apparel, Decathlon, Intersport, Hervis, Adidas, Nike in sportswear retail and Humanic, Ecco, Deichmann in footwear retail. Besides them respondents also mentioned in both countries some domestic retailers: Bigotti, Guara, Effect in Romanian and Slovenka, Ozeta in Slovak apparel retail as well as hypermarkets and supermarkets in both countries offering apparel and footwear articles (Auchan, Cora, Carrefour, Tesco etc.). Respondents has to declare their age, gender, education and income in both countries.

Depending on their year of birth, respondents were classified in Millennials, Gen Xers and Baby Boomers (Gurău, 2012; Dabija et al., 2017). 48.8% of RO and 45.1% in SK belong to Millennials, 33.8% in RO and 28.5% in SK to Generation X and 17.4% in RO and 26.4% in SK are Baby Boomers. Most survey participants in both countries have tertiary education (56.3% in RO and 65.1% in SK), followed by high school graduates (22.9% in RO and 25.4% in SK).

80 RO and 11 SK respondents declined to reveal their income, 3.9% RO and 2.1% SK have an income lower than the national minimum wage of their country (205 EUR in RO and 435 EUR in SK). 43.7% RO and 56.1% % SK have an income between the national minimum wage and the net national average wage (459 EUR in RO and 883 EUR in SK). Only 6% of the surveyed RO and 8% of SK earn above two national average wages. In both countries, most of the Millennials income is lower than that of Gen Xers and Baby Boomers. Most RO and SK stated that they made purchases from apparel, footwear and sportswear store several times a year, while 25.3% RO and 33.1% SK purchase from these stores on a monthly basis. 19% of RO and 22.3% SK visit stores to make purchases several times a week or a month.

5. Results and discussions

In accordance with the research objectives, the first step of the analysis was to highlight the respondents' drivers behind their adoption of environmentally responsible behavior, followed by identifying the way in which RO and SK consumers perceive the environment protection actions implemented by apparel, sportswear and footwear retailers in their countries.

As for Romanian consumers, regardless of the generation, the most important driver that determines them to adopt and highlight an environmentally responsible behavior when buying apparel, footwear or sportswear articles from both international and domestic retail chains is represented by the degree towards these

retailers adopt and implement on the target market similar best practices as in western ones (overall mean assessment of 4.21). The same situations seem to be valid for SK, where consumers think that retailers on their market have to implement similar environmental practices as in western countries (overall mean evaluation 4.33). In both countries (see table 2) the most environmental concerned consumers are Baby Boomers (mean evaluation 4.39 in RO versus 4.47 in SK), followed by Gen Xers (mean evaluation 4.27 in RO versus 4.38 in SK), whereas the less concerned ones are Millennials (4.01 in RO versus 4.22 in SK). This assessment reflects the belief of both Baby Boomers and Gen Xers who spent their childhood, youth and part of adulthood in the Communist era dreaming about the western lifestyle, that there is increased potential for learning from consumers in developed (western) countries, particularly with respect to corporate responsibility towards environmental protection. Furthermore, the assessment reveals a higher degree of agreement regarding the necessity of adopting an environmental orientation in the case of consumers SK than in RO, as SK is geographically closer to western countries and probably international clothing retailers have begun investing earlier in the development of new stores and retail chains here. In Romania international apparel retailers began their market expansion after 2000 (Dabija, Abrudan, 2015), whereas in Slovakia after 1993 (National Bank of Slovakia, 1998).

Another motivation behind the adoption of environmentally responsible behavior is the care for the future of children and grandchildren. Romanians believe that ensuring an unpolluted environment so that future generations may live a prosperous life is an important motivation for adopting environmentally responsible behavior (overall average assessment of 4.17). This assessment is similar in the case of SK consumers, whose mean evaluations for each generation are very close to their Romanian counterparts. It seems that the concern of Millennials in both countries regarding descendants (4.06 in RO versus 4.09 in SK), of Gen Xers (4.20 in RO versus 4.18 in SK) and of Baby Boomers (4.31 in RO versus 4.26 in SK) is very close. It seems that this issue is of similar importance and relevance, being equally perceived. Of course, Baby Boomers in both countries express the highest degree of concern regarding their descendants living conditions, followed by Gen Xers and Millennials (table 2). This comes as no surprise because Baby Boomers, as they are also older, carry a greater amount of emotion as most of them have children and grandchildren and are much more concerned with the environment they pass down. This is also similar in our opinion for Gen Xers, which are more concerned about their descendants than Millennials. In other words, the concern for descendants' future living conditions increase as consumers get older and wiser.

The adoption of environmentally responsible behavior as a response to changes in legislation was greeted with less agreement (overall mean evaluation of 3.74 in RO and 3.88 in SK) than the other two issues (Table 2). This result may be explained by Romanians' and probably Slovaks' distrust in the ability of authorities to enforce compliance with legal regulations, as testified by many bad examples in the past. Baby Boomers have in both countries a higher agreement towards this

aspect (mean evaluation 3.91 in RO and 3.88 in SK) with respect to the prospect of legislative changes driving a shift in people's and companies' approach to the environment. Baby Boomers are probably more concerned and aware of the importance to protect the environment, a consequence of its witnessing the effects produced by climate change during their life. Gen Xers and Millennials express less agreement (mean evaluation of 3.78 versus 3.66 in RO and 3.85 and 3.77 in SK), exhibiting a greater degree of skepticism about the capacity of the legislation to determine environmentally responsible behavior and to really impose retailers to adopt such a behavior.

Table 2. Drivers behind consumers' environmental responsible behavior

Environmental good practices are generated by ...						
Generation	...orientation towards similar practice of western countries		... the reflection on the future of descendants		...changes in legislation	
	RO	SK	RO	SK	RO	SK
Millennials	4.01	4.22	4.06	4.09	3.66	3.77
Gen Xers	4.27	4.38	4.20	4.18	3.78	3.85
Baby Boomers	4.39	4.47	4.31	4.26	3.91	3.93
Overall	4.21	4.33	4.17	4.20	3.74	3.88

RO (mean evaluation for RO); SK (mean evaluation for SK); 1 (total disagreement); 5 (total agreement)

In order to assess consumers' perception of the extent to which apparel, sportswear and footwear retailers adopt environmentally responsible behavior, the survey participants were asked to express their opinion about the retailers' apparent responsibility towards the environment, the extent to which they take care of the environment and their seeming intention to renounce a part of their profit to help protect the environment (see operationalization of concepts in Table 1).

The respondents' general overall assessment of the perception of apparel, sportswear and footwear retailers' responsibility towards the environment was found to be fairly favorable both in RO (3.11) and SK (3.35), although a little bit higher in SK. This can be again due the fact that Slovakian consumers have a longer experience with the studies retail brands and therefore their image and judgments regarding the environmental actions implemented by those retailers might be better anchored in respondents' minds. The analysis of answers given by respondents from all generations reveals that Millennials in RO (general average assessment of 3.05) and Baby Boomers in SK (general average assessment of 3.28) are the most critical. In Romania this could be perhaps due to the many pieces of online news about some retailers' reckless behavior towards the environment (for example, the Fashion Detox campaign). In Slovakia however Baby Boomers might be more critical as they have a greater life experience and have witnessed changes in retailers' strategy; they also had the possibility of travelling and therefore they have been probably able to make comparison between retailers' strategy in their country compared to other countries, like the home market. A somewhat more favorable attitude (general average assessment of 3.18) was found among Baby Boomers in RO, as these are less

exposed to social-media campaigns, many of which are run in the English language (Table 5) and between Gen Xers in SK. This could be due to the fact that even if the Gen Xers are sensitive to environmental issues they are pragmatic. They are able to accept the fact the broad availability of apparel goods sometimes comes for a price of lessened responsibility towards environment.

The analysis of retailers according to their format shows that respondents from all three generations believe that apparel retailers seem to be more responsible towards the environment (Table 3) in both emerging countries. This result is explained by the fact that apparel retailers generally conduct more campaigns to inform people about the measures they undertake to protect the environment. Moreover, some apparel retailers carry out specific actions (“eco” collections obtained from organic fibers, used clothes recycling campaigns etc.) where customers are invited to join in the protection of the environment (Dabija, Pop, Postelnicu, 2016).

As the results from table 5 show, Slovak consumers in apparel, footwear and sportswear retail are more confident regarding retailers’ responsibility towards the environment than in Romania. This could be due the fact that Slovakian respondents might know this retail chains better or for a longer period of time, than Romanian consumers, as most apparel, footwear and sportswear retail chains have entered the Romanian market after 2010 (Dabija and Abrudan, 2013), whereas the Slovakian market in 1993 (National Bank of Slovakia, 1998).

Table 3. Retailers’ responsibility towards the environment

Retailers seem to be responsible towards the environment								
	Apparel		Footwear		Sportswear		Overall	
Generation	RO	SK	RO	SK	RO	SK	RO	SK
Millennials	3.13	3.43	2.95	3.24	2.90	3.30	3.05	3.31
Gen Xers	3.05	3.39	3.15	3.45	3.06	3.40	3.12	3.43
Baby Boomers	3.19	3.38	2.93	3.29	2.96	3.25	3.18	3.28
Overall	3.10	3.41	3.03	3.31	2.98	3.28	3.11	3.35

RO (mean evaluation for RO); SK (mean evaluation for SK); 1 (total disagreement); 5 (total agreement)

These aspects seem to be confirmed by various consumers’ perception of the extent to which apparel, sportswear and footwear retailers actually care for the environment protection by adopting specific measures in this regard (Table 4). The results are generally similar to the previous ones—apparel retailers implement better environment protection measures, thus showing ongoing care for the nature: general average assessment of 3.12 in Romania and 3.28 in Slovakia. They might communicate such measures via posters in the retailer’s store and online so that customers may be aware of them. By contrast, footwear retailers (general average assessment of 2.85 in Romania and 3.11 in Slovakia) and sportswear retailers (average assessment of 2.96 in Romania and 3.04 in Slovakia) are less successful in conducting proper actions whereby they show care for the protection of nature and do not communicate such actions to consumers. It is recommended that these retailers (footwear and sportswear) pay increased attention in the future to the measures

intended to protect the environment. When effectively communicated, such actions may in time improve Romanians' and Slovaks perception of these retail chains.

Table 4. Retailers' care for environment protection

... retailers are careful to protect the environment								
Generation	Apparel		Footwear		Sportswear		Overall	
	RO	SK	RO	SK	RO	SK	RO	SK
Millennials	3.10	3.29	2.86	3.14	3.03	3.10	2.99	3.21
Gen Xers	3.25	3.31	2.97	3.12	3.17	3.08	3.12	3.24
Baby Boomers	3.16	3.22	2.77	3.09	2.89	2.97	3.05	3.16
Overall	3.12	3.28	2.85	3.11	2.96	3.04	2.97	3.22

RO (mean evaluation for RO); SK (mean evaluation for SK); 1 (total disagreement); 5 (total agreement)

Another aspect that the authors wished to assess was Romanian consumers' perception of the apparel, sportswear and footwear retailers' willingness to "renounce to a part of their profit to ensure a cleaner environment". According to the answers received, respondents are not very convinced (general average assessment of 2.98 in RO and in 3.14 SK) of retailers' willingness to adopt environmentally responsible behavior if this entails a reduction of their profit (Table 5). The analysis across generations reveals a more critical opinion on the part of the Baby Boomers (general average assessment of 2.84 in RO and 3.22 in SK), who are more skeptical due also to the fact that they lived in a time when the stated purpose of any business was profit by any means.

As can be seen in Table 5, the respondents across all generations perceive that apparel retailers are the most willing to "renounce" a part of their profit to implement proper measures and actions designed to ensure a clean environment, which demonstrates their holistic marketing orientation (average assessment of 3.06 in RO and 3.29 in SK). They are followed by footwear (average assessment of 2.95 in RO and 3.10 in SK) and sportswear (average assessment of 2.83 in RO and 3.05 in SK) retailers, respectively.

Table 5. Retailers' willingness to renounce profit to ensure a clean environment

... retailers renounce profit to ensure a clean environment								
Generation	Apparel		Footwear		Sportswear		Overall	
	RO	SK	RO	SK	RO	SK	RO	SK
Millennials	3.14	3.25	2.98	3.10	2.77	3.01	2.95	3.11
Gen Xers	3.23	3.33	2.97	3.12	2.89	3.09	2.99	3.18
Baby Boomers	2.93	3.30	2.74	3.09	2.77	3.04	2.84	3.22
Overall	3.06	3.29	2.95	3.10	2.83	3.05	2.98	3.14

RO (mean evaluation for RO); SK (mean evaluation for SK); 1 (total disagreement); 5 (total agreement)

A comparative analysis of the perceptions of the extent to which retailers "seem to be responsible towards the environment" and "are willing to renounce profit" reveals that respondents assessed less favorably the retailers' practical actions despite their belief that retailers seem environmentally responsible. This brings to mind the phenomenon of greenwashing.

6. Conclusions

The research clearly emphasizes the fact that there are significant differences across consumer generations regarding their attitudes for adopting environmentally responsible behavior and their perception of the environment protection measures taken by clothing retailers. Respondents are, to a very great extent, willing to adopt environmentally responsible behavior mainly because they want to provide the future generations, that is, their descendants with as prosperous living conditions as possible. An equally important reason is respondents' adoption of environmental practices similar with the Western practices. The research results with average assessment over 4 definitely shows that Romanians and Slovaks are increasingly concerned whether companies adopt environmentally responsible behavior, are careful to preserve resources and protect the environment, abide by the law, and offer green products and services etc. It seems that environmental consciousness is increasing with age, Baby Boomers are the most concerned generation towards environmentally best practices than their children (Gen Xers) and grandchildren (Millennials). The current trends in society make various consumer segments, especially the young ones, wish to obtain more information about topical subjects such as recycling, sustainable consumption, organic products, climate change etc., a fact that was also confirmed by the literature (Taken Smith, 2011; Parment, 2013; American Press Institute, 2015; Elite Daily 2015). Respondents obtain the information about the latest trends in society by searching on the Internet and social networks, accessing forums and blogs etc.

For the interviewees it is clear, that clothing retailers perform quite a great number of actions for adopting environmentally responsible behavior, which, nevertheless, are far from being sufficient. International retailers have to be more aware of the need to further enhance the protection of the environment and to try not to have isolated and poorly coordinated actions. For retailers' management, the adoption of a few environmental practices or a proactive environmental approach for a limited period of time will not necessarily lead to competitive advantage (Aragon-Correa and Sharma, 2003).

Managers should realize that the adoption of a few environmental practices or a proactive environmental approach for a limited period of time will not necessarily lead to competitive advantage (Aragon-Correa and Sharma, 2003: p.84). The best way to communicate with Generation Y seems to be a buzz marketing or viral marketing on social networks (Yang et al., 2011: 809) or guerilla marketing communications. Traditional marketing communication activities designed to promote and sell environmentally friendly products could also be efficient as according to Pickett-Baker and Ozaki (2008) consumers are not exposed enough to green product marketing communications.

The paper focuses on studying consumers from two emerging countries, with comparable economies and market experience towards clothing retailers. The novelty of the approach is based both on the context of comparing consumer generations

attitudes and perception over environmental friendly actions and strategies. The literature scarcely highlights similar research. Results of cross-cultural research are generalizable to other countries in the region and might also be used when designing global marketing penetration strategies, as well as specific products and/or articles addressed to different consumer segments (Millennials versus Xers versus Baby Boomers). This approach might help researchers to make general (cross-cultural) statements about the similarities and differences of cultures (Ilesanmi, 2009: 82).

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