

How Do You See the Environment, Young Czech Consumer and Employee?

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Abstract: For employers, product designers, marketers but also for legal representatives, it is important to know what the views of the younger generation are, how they see the current trends in marketing and society. Research conducted among the young Czech population contributes to answering these questions. Survey ascertains the opinions of people aged 19-27. Topics such as sustainability, ecology, waste sorting, work-life balance, the importance of an employer's reputation, but also opinions on the role of the state in the fight against misinformation are investigated. Research, based on quantitative analysis, brings information, for example, a prevailing positive opinion on the importance of environmental issues, but it must not be too burdensome and restrictive for individuals or disclosure that young people are supporters of equal access to job opportunities, which is not regulated by official quotas and recommended preferences.

Keywords: Generation Z, marketing research, work-life balance, sustainability

JEL Classification codes: J40; M30

INTRODUCTION

The difference in the perception of the world by different generations is a frequent topic of articles, papers and scholarly treatises. It is quite common and logical that the older generation perceives the world a little differently than the generation of their children or grandchildren. Young people are full of enthusiasm and vigor for exploring the world and promoting new ideas, while the older generations benefit from their life experiences. The behavior of Generation Z in selected areas is the focus of this paper.

The very fact that older versus emerging generations have slightly different perceptions of the world has been accelerated by the rapid development of technology in recent decades. "Due to the interest in new technology, the members of Generation Z can generally be found at locations that offer the advantage of being hooked up to the Web" (Bejtkovsky, 2016, p.109). But besides technological developments, today's world is influenced by other issues. These include globalisation, the mixing of cultures, and the fight against climate change. Of course, these societal issues are necessarily accompanied by the attitudes of the political representation, which must respond to them. "The impact of globalisation extends to various aspects of a country's development, including its economic, social, political, and technological dimensions." (Nebozhenko, Rassadnykova, Lvova, Palii & Marushchak, 2023, p.1577).

In order for members of different generations to be able to communicate, cooperate and work together, it is important that they understand, comprehend and react to their views and

attitudes. Nowadays, members of Generation X (sometimes even Generation Y) are often in top management positions. They have a relatively high degree of decision-making power, both in relation to determining the direction of the market and the running of society, and in the personnel management of companies and institutions and the recruitment of new employees. The confrontation between the views and approaches of Generations X and Z has recently received considerable attention. "Identifying and retaining valuable intellectual capital among a multigenerational workforce are critical goals for leaders who understand the tremendous amount of institutional wisdom possessed by workers of all ages and generations." (Wiedmer, 2015, p.57)

From the above, the research objective of this paper is to find out the intensity of agreement or disagreement of the members of the generation on selected questions from the thematic areas of sustainability, work-life balance, the importance of an employer's reputation, but also opinions on the misinformation.

The results of this research are intended to serve company managers and executives in setting the way of communication towards members of Generation Z as young consumers and employees; but also, for academics as input for further follow-up research focused on the value perception of the world of young people generation.

1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The differences in the perception of the world between generations X, Y and Z are described by many authors. For example, Bačinský (2023) says that: "Generation Z customers usually prefer environmentally friendly products and in such cases are willing to pay extra to buy them. The relationship between the preferences for online purchases between different product segments is also demonstrated" (p.62). Some authors suggest that corporate managers already anticipate different job capabilities and deployment in different generations. Kyrousi, Tzoumaka, and Leivadi (2022) note that "Stakeholders distinguish between 'hard' and 'soft' skills but filter their relative importance through a generational lens. An emerging finding was the link between personality traits and perceived employability skills" (p.664).

Of course, not all character traits are generational; the individuality of each individual must also be taken into account, as emphasized, for example, by (Egerová, Komárková & Kutiák, 2021) "Nevertheless, members of each generation may have particular preferences that do not correspond in some cases with the reported stereotypes of their cohort." (p.105).

"Different generations represented in the workforce today provide additional challenges and complexity for managers everywhere." (Bejtkovský, 2016,p.106). "In the age of the digital revolution, attracting and retaining the youngest generation of employees, namely Generation Z, has emerged as a critical concern for organizations (Botezat, Fotea & Fotea, 2023, p.630). For example, (Gosztonyi, 2023) describes the generational shift in an interesting way when he says: "Generation X traditionally opted not to seek advice during startup, a trend which shifted dramatically with Generation Y, who embraced widespread counsel. In contrast, Generation Z favored advice from close acquaintances."(p. 210). Another interesting observation is made by (Melarkode & Thakur, 2022) who say: "Correlational analysis showed that there was a significant and positive relationship between career aspirations and work engagement in case of generation Y, but not for generation Z." (p.427). The value of a company's ethical reputation is mentioned e.g. by Rice et al. (2023). Another interesting finding that other factors are also important when applying for a job is presented by El-Menawy & Saleh (2023) "In addition to economic and social status, other factors like reputation and work-life balance can also have an effect Generation Z intention to apply for a job." (p.7)

Generation Z, in terms of its consumption behaviour, is noticeably shifted towards green products and sustainability. "At the same time, although the young age sometimes prevents the young people of Generation Z from converting their opinions and intentions regarding the purchase of green products into actual purchases, due to financial limitations, their attitudes and knowledge can contribute to the formation of an appropriate behavior of purchasing green products both for the current generation and for future generations." (Dragolea et al., 2023, p.17). Similar findings are reported by (Sawicka & Marcinkowska, 2023) "young people (from Generation Z) declare the need to care about the environment and pay attention as consumers to pro-environmental activities implemented as part of CSR." (p.1). The perception of the place of origin of goods is interesting. In his study, Sharma (2019) concludes that there is not any significant influence of country-of-origin image on quality perceptions of Generation Z consumers.

At the same time, it is interesting to note that young people, despite being fans of buying sustainable products, are not as prone to succumb to greenwashing. "There is a positive relationship between both the sustainable behavior of Generation Z consumers and the satisfaction it conveys to them, as well as their environmental protection activities. However, there is no relationship between the sustainable behavior of Generation Z consumers and the green marketing practices of the organizations, environmental issues and their identification with the environmentally responsible consumer." Dragolea et al., 2023, p.1). Ding & Jiang (2023) bring finding that Gen Z perceived collective efficacy and self-efficacy toward food waste reduction were positively related to their food waste reduction intentions.

That sustainability is a lifestyle in the lives of young people is demonstrated by research such as (Zhao & An, 2023, p.1) "Consumers of Generation Z have stronger sustainable purchase intentions in the face of substantive environmental behaviors rather than symbolic environmental behaviors". A positive attitude towards the environment is reflected not only in the purchase but also in the life cycle of the product. "Gen Z and Millennials are more inclined to purchase second-hand clothes to extend the product lifecycle and reduce textile waste to the environment than Gen X." (Pham & Lam, 2024, p.59).

There are also differences between generations in the way they consume news and information. "The more people take modern information technologies for granted, and in particular, as an entire generation that has grown up after Google heads to college, the more important it becomes that we stop to consider how life with Google has influenced how we approach the world." (Marty, 2022, p.421). At the same time, young people are a kind of barometer for media publishers of further developments "Generation Z as active users of the various forms of the media have the potential to influence the way in which the media package and disseminate news" (Dlamini & Daniels, 2023. p. 702). "The social networking platforms which were created to increase efficiency in communication also used additional features such as photo and video sharing tools which were advertised using young people to highly target the millennials" (Tick et al., 2022, p.146). at the same time, the authors support the hypothesis that "members of generation Y and Z are aware of being exposed to fake news and misinformation when consuming content for political and entertainment purposes" (151).

2 METHODOLOGY

Questions about the behaviour and lifestyle of Generation Z and how it differs from previous generations are the subject of many studies. The research conducted for the purpose of this article is based mainly on the requirements and needs of employers and marketers. Because of the rapid development of technology and the globalization of the world, the differences in intergenerational behaviour are much more vivid than in previous generations. This study is based on periodic survey data. Primary data collected in autumn 2023 are used. The sample

size is 260 respondents. The themes and questions selected from the research for this paper deal with HR issues and young consumers' attitudes towards sustainability and the efforts they themselves are willing to make to fulfil their ideas. It is these themes that emerge from the literature search as some of the key ones.

To meet the research objective, two research questions were formulated.

RQ1: What role does a company's reputation play for young people when choosing a job and how do they perceive the ideal work-life balance?

RQ2: How do young people perceive sustainability and waste separation in their consumption and purchasing behaviour?

The analysis is based on primary data collected between September 29, and November 19, 2023. This is a representative sample of the Czech population aged 19-27 years. Other quota variables were gender and region of residence. In terms of age, the data collection was divided into three bands, namely 19-21 years, 22-24 years, 25-27 years. Details on the ample structure are in Table 1. The survey was conducted using a combination of CAWI and CAPI techniques.

Tab. 1 Sample structure

Category	Variable	Value in number	Value in %
Gender	Male	130	50 %
	Female	130	50 %
Age category	19-21	81	31 %
	22-24	83	32 %
	25-27	96	37 %
Region of residence	Prague	32	12 %
	Bohemia region	132	51 %
	Moravia & Silesian	96	37 %

Source: authors

The specificity of the research is the construction of the questions. Respondents answered each question on a five-point scale. In addition, each topic was accompanied by an open-ended question where respondents could express any related opinions and attitudes. This enriches the research results and gives the opportunity to gradually modify the wording of the questions in the questionnaire in subsequent waves of the research.

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data were collected through a questionnaire-based survey. The closed questions (except demographic and identification questions) are in the form of a five-point scale. They are constructed as a semantic differential. The value on the left side of the scale expresses that the respondent completely disagrees with the given statement, while the value on the right-side expresses that the respondent completely agrees with the given statement.

In the context of RQ1, the theme of the importance of the contribution of the company the respondent works for is analysed. (See table 2.) The answers of the respondents to the

question "How important to you is the contribution of the company/institution you want to work for to the society? Where 1 = Not at all important; 5 = Very important

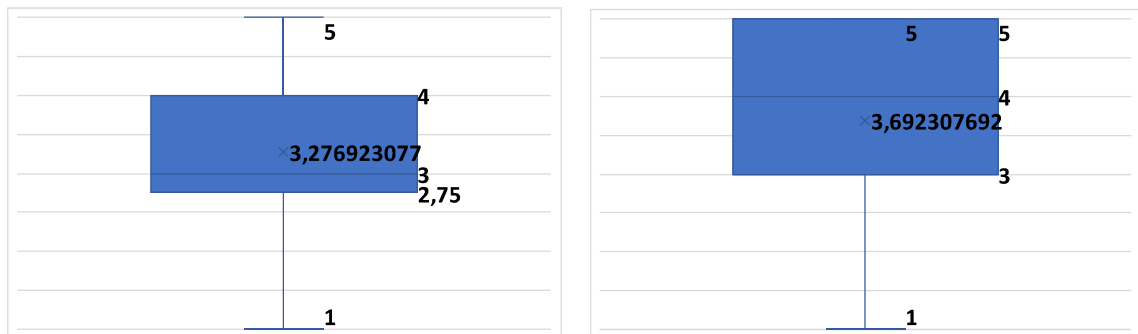
Tab. 2 Importance of the contribution of the company/institution you want to work for to the society

Response on scale	Percentage of responses	Frequency	Cumulative frequency	Average value
1	6 %	15	15	3,5
2	15 %	39	54	
3	27 %	70	124	
4	29 %	77	201	
5	23 %	59	260	

Source: authors

Interestingly, the answers to this question vary according to the gender of the respondents. (See Chart 1.) Women attach more importance to the benefits of the company where they work or apply for a job compared to men.

Chart 1 Importance of the contribution of the company/institution you want to work for to the society Men vs. Women



Source: authors

Not only is the average value higher for women, but also the modus has shifted from 3 to 4. The prevailing view is that the firm's contribution to society is important. "The values and contribution of the company are very important to me". It could only change the financial valuation in an extreme case." Female 25-27 years old. "I want to work somewhere where I feel like it's not only meaningful to me, but it's a benefit to society because I want to be a benefit to society as well." Female 22-24 years old. "I don't want to work for money, but because I want to enjoy it and be an asset." Male 19-21 years old. A smaller number of respondents mention that this is not essential for them because it is more important what the company brings directly to them instead of the company. "The benefit to society is clear. If it

wasn't, the company would not be successful. It's more about the benefit from the company to me." Male, 22-24 years old. "Companies must be aware of their responsibility not only to their employees, but also to the environmental, social and economic spheres." Female 25-27 years old. "It's not a factor for me to choose a company." Male 25-27 years old. "If it had no benefit, I wouldn't mind, but if it did, it's a small plus." Male, 19-21 years old.

In the context of RQ1, the importance of the reputation of the company in which the young person works is further analysed. (See table 3.) The questionnaire asked: "How important is it to you what your friends and acquaintances think about the company where you work or want to work?". Regarding the semantic differential, the extreme values of the scale corresponded to the statements 1 = Company reputation is not important; 5 = Company reputation is very important.

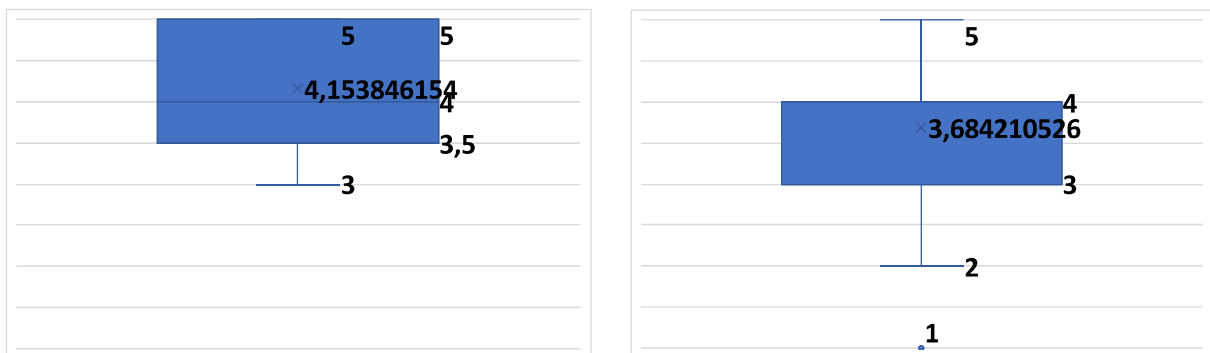
Tab. 3 Importance of the reputation of the company in which the young person works

Response on scale	Percentage of responses	Frequency	Cumulative frequency	Average value
1	3 %	7	7	3,7
2	10 %	26	33	
3	24 %	63	96	
4	39 %	101	197	
5	24 %	63	260	

Source: authors

Women and residents of Prague declare their agreement most strongly on this question. A comparison of this socio-demographic group and the rest of the young Czech population is presented in the following Chart 2. The reason for this comparison is that this is the most significant demographic difference.

Chart 2 Prague women vs. rest of the young Czech population importance of the reputation of the company in which the young person works.



Source: authors

Respondents do not consider the opinion of the environment to be crucial. Their own judgment is more important to them than the judgment of others. They are also more interested in general reputation. "It's not important to me what the people around me think of my work." Female 22-24 years old. "I don't care what other people think, but a general reputation is

important to me because it is related to the quality of the company." Male 19-21 years old. "A company's reputation is important, but the opinion of my friends and acquaintances is not that important to me." Male 19-21 years old. "Not all our decisions have to be based on the opinion of family and friends. Where would we be without our own judgment?" Female 19-21 years old. Occasionally, respondents said they would not like to be embarrassed about their work in front of friends. In this case I would distinguish between the notion of reputation (which I consider quite important) and some personal view of my surroundings (where I believe it is not so important). Female 22-24 years old.

In terms of the distribution of work-life balance, there is a balance across the socio-demographic spectrum. The average is 3.4 in favour of working from home. When the data is analysed in more detail, there is a slight tendency for women to prefer working from home.

Regarding consumption behaviour, which is the content of RQ2, the problematics of how young people perceive the currently debated issue of sustainability was analysed. The results are summarized in Table 4. The question in the questionnaire was: "What is your personal opinion on sustainable development? (i.e. a way of developing society that reconciles economic and social progress with environmental preservation)" where 1 = It is a social pose; 5 = Striving for sustainability is clearly a positive activity".

Tab. 4 Opinions on sustainable development

Response on scale	Percentage of responses	Frequency	Cumulative frequency	Average value
1	5 %	12	12	4,1
2	5 %	13	25	
3	20 %	51	76	
4	20 %	53	129	
5	50 %	131	260	

Source: authors

It is evident that the opinion on sustainable development and the related consumption pattern is positively evaluated by the respondents. Here too, a detailed analysis of the responses, according to the socio-demographic profile, shows (see Chart 3) that women are more supportive of sustainability than men.

Chart 3 Opinions on sustainable development Men vs. Women.



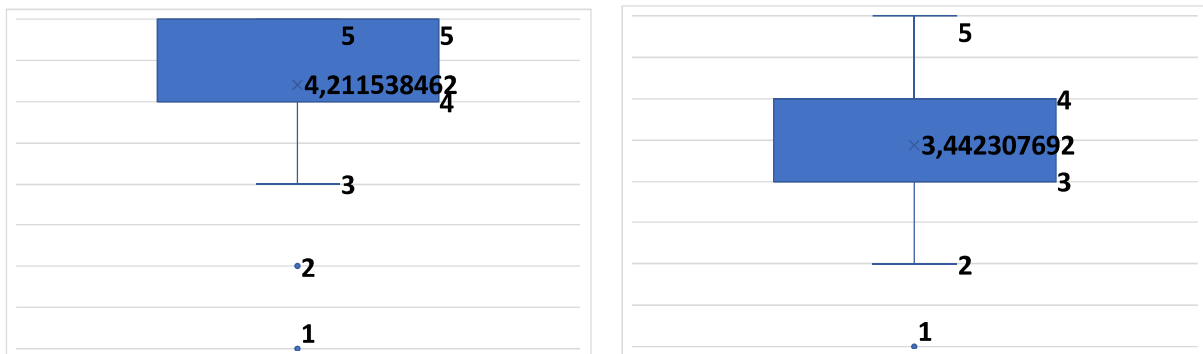
Source: authors

When it comes to respondents' verbal statements on sustainability, respondents clearly state that they sort garbage, do not waste, try to recycle clothes and use a lot of second-hand clothes. "I try not to waste, use public transport, don't eat meat, sort waste and buy clothes second hand." Female 19-21 years old. Young people often mention the enlightenment they do among their friends and family. "I sort my waste, try to buy things from sustainable sources, own bags and straws, try to pass on knowledge in this area to family and friends". Male 25-27 years old.

Related to the issue of consumption and purchasing behaviour is the issue of waste sorting. This issue has been spontaneously mentioned by respondents in previous parts of the research as well. The issue of waste sorting is represented in the research by two questions. First, we ask "What is your opinion on waste sorting?" and then follow up with a follow-up question "How willing are you to sacrifice your own convenience for the cost of sorting?"

An interesting finding here is that although young people's views on waste sorting are very positive and supportive, when it comes to limiting their own convenience or going the extra mile, the responses are far less positive. See Chart 4 that corresponds to the whole sample.

Chart 4 Views on sorting in general vs. willingness to limit own convenience



Source: authors

Waste sorting is perceived as rather useful. Young people are skeptical about the percentage of recycling from separated waste. "Sorting does not mean recycling. The whole nation sorts, but the recycling share of the sorted waste is low," said a male, 22-24 years old. "It depends on the actual ability of the city and state to handle the sorted materials," said a female, 25-27 years old. Respondents see only a small contribution to global ecology from waste sorting.

CONCLUSION

Members of Generation Z are typically influenced by digital technologies and the internet. This influence extends beyond their communication habits to encompass their lifestyle, attitudes toward employment, and consumption habits. Unlike previous generations, young people from Generation Z seek employment that not only provides a living but also holds significance in terms of the work they do and the social contribution of the companies they work for.

In their answers, respondents stress that the reputation of the company and especially its contribution to society is important to them. They attach great importance to this when applying for a job. The level of financial compensation would only change their interest in working for the company if it was an extreme increase. Young people are individual in their decisions and actions and in their decision-making mechanisms.

The above paragraphs are therefore a summary of the response to RQ1. The company's reputation is important to young people and they take an active interest in the company's social contribution when seeking employment. In most cases, even in the open-ended questions, respondents mention that the attractiveness, prestige and social benefit of their work is more important to them than finances. When it comes to the split between working from home and commuting, views are very balanced, with a weak leaning across the socio-demographic spectrum towards working from home.

When it comes to RQ2, there is a clear inclination among Generation Z to promote environmentally responsible approaches and avoid waste. They advocate for recycling and using products until the end of their life. These attitudes are more strongly expressed by women.

In terms of consumption behaviour, Generation Z is often perceived as a consumer group with high expectations. They have high expectations of corporate ethics, sustainability and transparency. In addition to the usual mechanisms, the issue of the environmental burden of the purchased product and the subsequent recyclability of the product at the end of its life also enters into their decision-making process. Some authors (e.g. Shetu, 2023) highlight that due to high engagement in the online space, young people prefer to make purchases through e-commerce and are open to new trends and innovations. Thanks to social media and rapid information sharing, they are also able to create and influence trends in consumer behaviour.

The research conducted for the purpose of this article is based mainly on the requirements and needs of employers and marketers. The presented research analyses the attitudes of young people aged 19-27. This is the stage of life when they seek their first jobs and become consumers without depending on their parents. When applying for jobs, it is common for their supervisors or hiring decision makers to be members of generation X, people who are around the age of their parents. It is very important for them to know the attitudes of Generation Z and to be able to communicate effectively when creating and implementing recruitment campaigns and also, if people from Generation Z are in the role of consumers, to correctly set the product offer, product parameters and present product features that are important to Generation Z.

Analysis of the results revealed interesting differences in the responses of respondents by gender. On issues of corporate social responsibility, contribution to society, as well as sustainability and waste management, women have a stronger inclination towards supporting these ideas and behaviors. When it comes to sensible consumption, waste sorting, and sustainability, these ideas are supported by more residents of Prague compared to other regions of the Czech Republic.

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