

BRAND MEANING FOR CONSUMERS FROM DISSIMILAR GENERATIONS

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Abstract: *There are many generations of consumers on the market, who are still faced with more offerings of these companies. These generations of consumers are different with different perceptions of brands. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to investigate the consumers' degree of identification with the brands in the relation with selected demographic factors. The selected demographic factors were tested among consumers from different generations. The questionnaire as the primary research technique was used. The analysis was based on the number of 840 respondents. The respondents were from generation Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. The brands do not mean for the Baby Boomers consumers or Generation X as much as they mean for the consumers belonging to the Generation Y. These consumers have different perceptions of the brands, what is caused by different opportunities to get the products and present themselves by them. The members of the cohorts Baby Boomers and Generation X do not need to build relationships with the brands or to present themselves by brands as much as the members of the cohort Generation Y. The members of Generation Y like building the relationships, presenting themselves by brands.*

Keywords: *Attitudes, Branding, Brand Equity, Degree of Identification, Generation*

JEL Classification: *M31.*

Introduction

For decades, brands have been crucial for building relationships with consumers assuring long-term business success. (Tuškej, Golob and Podnar, 2011) A brand is a tool to build a customer-company relationship. Brands are important tools leading customers to develop a favourable image of a company, which helps organizations to differentiate from their rivals. (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004; Gözükarar and Çolakoğlu, 2016) Brands are gearing up to provide a complete package of functional sensory and emotional experiences. Brands are at the very heart of business and advertising and play an important role in every business successes and are the major assets of consumer business. (Ponduri and Sailaja, 2014) Consumers are likely to find brand's identity more attractive when the brand matches their own sense of who they are because such identities enable them to maintain and express their sense of self more fully and authentically (Bhattacharya and Sen, 2003; Tuškej, Golob and Podnar, 2011).

Trends of the market change with each generation and it is important to understand the consumer behaviours of the respective generational cohort. According to the generational theory, cohorts develop similar beliefs and attitudes because of the life experiences they share (Meriac et al., 2010). Generational cohort marketing has become a useful tool in segmenting markets since cohort members share similar values and generational cohorts have different experiences, which influence their values, preferences and shopping behaviour (Parment, 2013; Ordun, 2015). It is very important to investigate the factors, which have the significant influence on perceptions of brands, because according to these findings the company can fit presentation of itself to the consumers with appropriate age, gender, educational

attainment. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to investigate the consumers' degree of identification with the brands in the relation with these selected demographic factors.

An initial and partial version of this text has been presented in the form of working paper in the Interdisciplinary Economics and Business Research No. 55, University in Opava, School of Business Administration in Karvina.

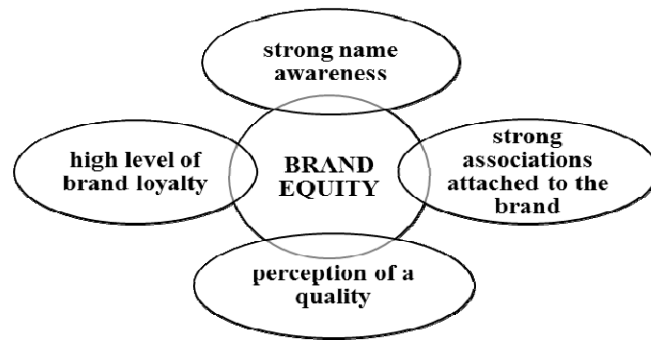
1 Statement of a problem

1.1 Branding and brand equity

Brands which create strong, positive and lasting impressions, deliver something of value to those who consume the brand. Brands are perceived by their customers to be of value to them personally. People perceive brands without having to purchase or have direct experience of them. (Fill, 2011) Brands are valuable because consumers seek them out, recognise them and buy them instead of alternative. Brands communicate values, attitudes, identity positioning and discernment, and hence they constitute a shared symbolic cultural vocabulary. (Hackley and Hackley, 2018) According to Kotler and Keller (2016) a brand is a promise between the firm and the consumer. It is a mean to set consumers' expectations and reduce their risk. According to Blythe (2003) branding is a process of adding value to the product by use of its packaging, brand name, promotion and position in the minds of the consumers. Branding (brand positioning) aims to create a unique representation of the brand in customer's minds. Based on the T-C-B model of positioning, this representation should signal the type of customer the brand is targeted towards (T), link the brand to the customer-need category (C), and link the brand to its key benefit (B). (Rossiter, Percy and Bergkvist, 2018) Branding is the process of endowing products and services with the power of a brand. For branding strategies to be successful and brand value to be created, consumers must be convinced there are meaningful differences among brands in the product or service category. (Kotler and Keller, 2016) Marketers should treat the word "branding" as a verb and not a noun, as branding is a continual process. Brand building and brand maintenance are, in fact, a core competency. In the process of new brand creation or maintaining an existing brand, there are the four main steps: brief, concept generation, concept development and roll out/delivery. (Smith and Zook, 2011)

The overall aim of branding decisions is to create an identity for the product or service that is distinctive and also in line with the targeting and positioning decisions already taken. Blakeman (2015) presents brand equity as company's or product's reputation in the marketplace. From consumer's perspective, brand equity means that they are familiar with the brand and know from experience that it brings positive result and unique brand associations. Then he adds that brand equity is made up of two kinds of brand knowledge: brand awareness and brand image.

Fig. 1: The constituents of brand equity



Source: (Aaker, 1995)

Ang (2015) states that brand equity means the value that attaches to a brand, and it often forms the basis of the firm's financial health. There are many perspectives on brand equity, but broadly, it can be examined from the perspective of finance, price elasticity, revenue premium, consumers and brand strength and stature. According to Pelsmacker, Geuens and Bergh (2018) brand equity is developed and supported by means of consistent, long-term integrated marketing communications. It is important to build deep and broad awareness first before creating a positive image. Taking a long-term perspective of brand management in the field of marketing communication, managerial efforts can be classified in two types of activities: Brand-building (activities in CSR) and brand-harming activities.

1.2 Different types of generations according to the date of birth and branding

A generation can be characterized as an identifiable group that shares common age groupings and has experienced similar historical events at critical stages of development (Kupperschmidt 2000). Accordingly, individuals in the same generational cohort may have similar values, beliefs, and behaviours due to a common location in history and shared sense of membership within a particular generation (Real, Mitnick and Maloney, 2010).

The buying power of the Baby Boomer generation has been an energy for the economy but this group is aging. Although it is still an important market segment, there is another even larger segment that spends a significant amount on consumer goods. (Ordun, 2015)

Generation X buyers pride themselves as being independent and self-aware from an early age. They did not have buying power to use products to define themselves in their formative years. When younger, Generation X was seen as rebellious and non-conformist. This generation still does not place emphasis on what others think and isn't concerned with using products to display status or similarity with others. Members of Generation X have been said to feel alienated and ignored by marketers and as such are unlikely to feel that most companies or brands have an understanding of their needs or personalities. Generation X is very motivated to search for purchase-related information. Generation X tends to use information not as a point of pride but as assurance that they get the best possible deal. Generation X is most likely to look for the lowest cost item or discount rather than thinking of the investment value of purchases. From watching their parents become the first generation not to give or be given lifelong loyalty by their employers, this generation grew up with no desire to be

loyal to corporations or brands; scepticism and rebellion against their parent's brands prevailed. (Ordun, 2015)

Generation Y (Millennials) has become a major force in the marketplace. Buyers of generation Y select and consume products that helps them to define who they are, what is important to them. They use their considerable knowledge about the latest trends, images, and reputations of retailers, products, and brand names to be considered as experts or leaders among peers. They have the desire to make the best decision in good investments for the future. Millennials have found great confidence and trust in the brand names of their choice. (Ordun, 2015) In this sense, Generation Y possess a unique nature due to their upbringing surrounded by brands. It has driven this generation to exhibit different reactions to brands compared to previous generations. (Bilgihan, 2016; Gözükar and Çolakoğlu, 2016)

The foreign professional literature says that the perceptions of the brands throughout the cohorts are different. But the consumers living in distinguished parts of world have the different habits, opinions and mind-set. That is why it is needed to investigate accurately the cohorts and their perceptions within the conditions of the Czech Republic. It means that on the literature basis there is necessity to answer the following stated research question: **RQ1: How does the age (being under the cohort) influence the perceptions of consumers about the brands? RQ2: How does the educational attainment influence the perceptions of consumers about the brands? RQ3: How does the gender influence the perceptions of consumers about the brands?**

1.3 Defining the research problem and hypotheses

There is no chance for the company to serve the entire market or to meet the needs of all the consumers. That is why it is necessary to segment the consumers according to selected criteria in order to be able to offer the products and services in the best way. The demographic criteria are used the most.

The following hypotheses were defined for the purpose of marketing research. The hypotheses are based on the research questions. The first research question is about the relation between the age of the consumers and their perceptions about the brands.

Thus, the first hypothesis is: **The younger generation has more positive relationships with the brands than the older generation.**

Another research question is about trying to find the relation between the educational attainment and the perceptions about the brands. In general way consumers with higher educational attainment also earn more money, because they have mostly the well-paid jobs. So, when the consumers have more money, they can afford to buy more products. And also they start to focus on more expensive offerings and therefore it is easier for them to feel the relation between them and brands.

Therefore, the second hypothesis is: **Educational attainment of consumers influences positively the perceptions about the brands.**

The last research question is about the perceptions about the brands by different genders. Women like shopping and are also more emotional than the men. It means that for them it is even easier to build relationships with their favourite brands.

That is why the last hypothesis is: **Women have more positive perceptions about the brands than men.**

The following marketing research was realized in order to answer the research questions. The statistical methods were used in order to accept or reject the hypotheses. All of the stated hypotheses are unilateral.

2 Methods

As the technique for collecting primary data, the questionnaire was chosen. The survey was realized in 2017. For the purpose of the paper the primary data were obtained in the Czech Republic through IPSOS research agency. This agency guarantees several mechanisms for controlling the quality of data and the panel is certified by SIMAR authority. The respondents were questioned about their brands perceptions, the degree of identification with the brands, statements about the importance of the brands.

The data were tested by SPSS software for accepting or rejecting the hypotheses. The chi-square test was used to investigate relations between age, educational attainment and perceptions about the brands. The chi-square test aims on comparing the actual frequencies within each category of a nominal variable against its expected frequency. In other words, the chi-square test is used when we want to compare whether the ratio of the number of occurrences of one value and the number of occurrences of the second value is random or not. The statistical calculation is based on the differences between the expected frequencies and the frequencies actually detected. Given that it is a frequency, it is quite obvious that chi-square is primarily used for nominal and serial variables. (Chromý, 2014) That is why we used for investigating relations between age, educational attainment and the perceptions of consumers about the brands within generations. ANOVA test was used for investigating the relation between gender and perceptions of consumers about the brands.

Overall 840 respondents were participated in marketing research. The respondents were in the age of 18 – 65 years old. This range of years comprises the consumers from three generations – generation Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y. There was no limitation regarding marital status, the level of incomes and education, gender, place of living and other demographic characteristics. The respondents were heavy social network users. The structure of the sample according to their gender was 48 % of male and 52 % of female respondents. The structure of the respondents according to their age, accordingly being under some cohorts is shown in Fig. 2. The structure was 40 % members of Generation Y (in 2017 in the age of 18 - 37), 33 % member of Generation X (in 2017 in the age of 38 - 52) and 27 % members of Baby Boomers (in 2017 in the age of 53 - 65). The census is realized by Czech Statistical Office every ten years in Czech Republic, the last one was realized in 2011. According to this fact, it is not possible to determine basic file, from this point of view the basic file is unknown. But the most accurate approach to determining the sample from the population is the statistical approach. The level of significance is set at 95 %, which means that the significance factor of the estimate (z) is 1.96 and the permissible margin of error of the estimate, commonly used, is ± 5 %. Unless the number of knowledgeable respondents is clear (p-inclined to one option, q-inclined to the other option), it is necessary to create the product $p \times q$ maximum, 50 % \times 50 %. This is resulted in a formula for calculating the minimum sample size. (Kozel, Mynářová and Svobodová, 2011)

$$n \geq (z^2 \times p \times q) / \Delta^2$$

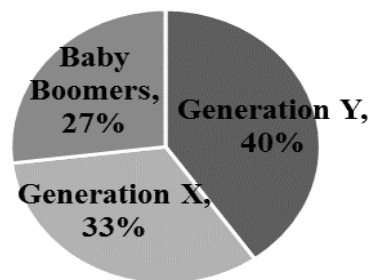
$$n \geq (1,96^2 \times 50 \times 50) / 5^2$$

$$n \geq 384$$
(1)

Source: (Kozel, Mynářová and Svobodová, 2011, p. 199)

From this simple formula is obvious that the minimum size of sample for the research is 384 respondents in the case of unknown population. The research sample of this paper does not match the adequate structure and subsequently this number, what caused that the sample is unrepresentative. However, for the purpose of this study just to adumbrate the differences among these three generations, located on the market, is adequate. The structure of the respondents according to their age, accordingly being under some cohorts is shown in Fig. 2.

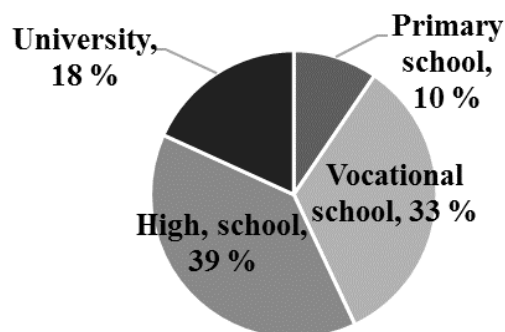
Fig. 2: The composition of generations



Source: own research

The structure of respondents according to their educational attainment is shown on Fig. 3. As we can see the biggest group, 39 % of respondents represent the consumers with high school degree, the second group with 33 % of representation are consumers with vocational school, 18 % of respondents achieved university degree and 10 % of respondents are with the primary school degree.

Fig. 3: The composition of respondents according to educational attainment



Source: own research

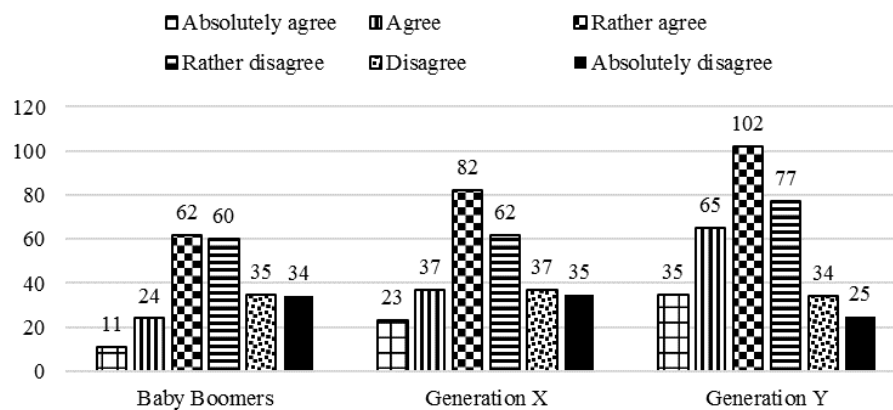
3 Problem solving

For the answering of the RQ1 some statements about the brand were tested. The respondents answered in a scale from 1 (absolutely agree) to 6 (absolutely disagree).

At the beginning the respondents were questioned about their opinions to statement No. 1: **Part of me is defined by brands, which are important in my life.** And afterwards the answers were tested among the different cohorts. We found out that df for factor age is 10. There was found the relation of agreements with this statement

and being the member of some cohort (see Fig. 4), because P-value is 5,5300E-07. It means that we reject the null hypothesis and accept alternative hypothesis: **Being in different cohort has significant influence on the agreement with the importance of the brands in our lives.**

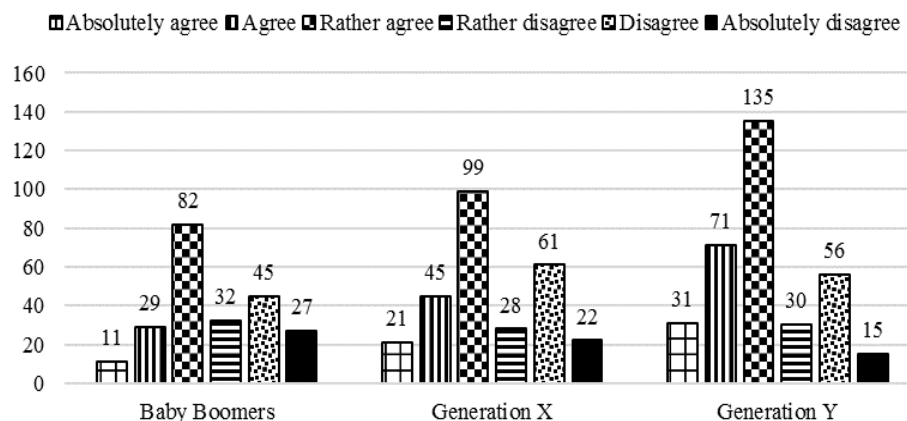
Fig. 4: Statement - Part of me is defined by brands, which are important in my life versus age



Source: own research

Afterwards the respondents were asked about the statement No. 2: **I identify myself with what my favourite brands do.** There was found the relation also (Fig. 5), because P-value is 3,6948E-07, what means that we reject the null hypothesis and accept alternative hypothesis: **Being in different cohort has significant influence on the agreement with the identification with the favourite brands' acts.**

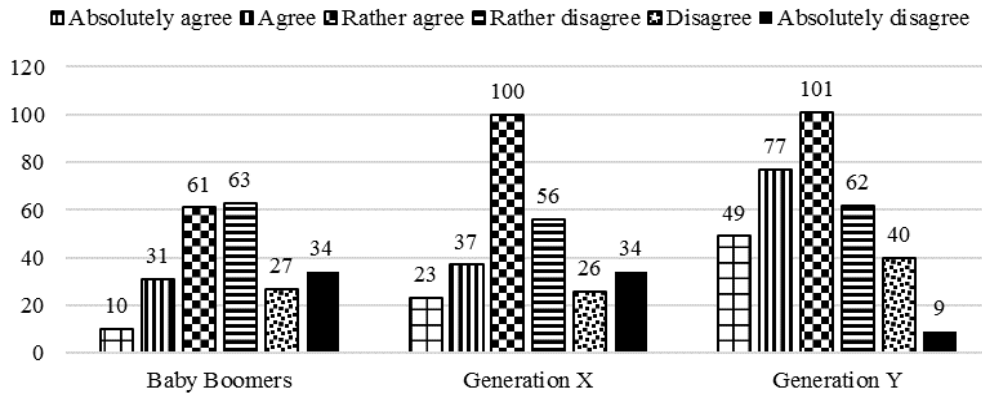
Fig. 5: Statement - I identify myself with what my favourite brands do versus age



Source: own research

Finally, the following statement No. 3 was tested: **My favourite brands are an image of who I am.** Also in this case the relation was found (Fig. 6). The P-value is 2,32442E-15. It means that we reject again the null hypothesis and accept alternative hypothesis: **Being in different cohort has significant influence on the agreement with the opinion, that brands are the image of who we are.**

Fig. 6: Statement - My favourite brands are an image of who I am versus age

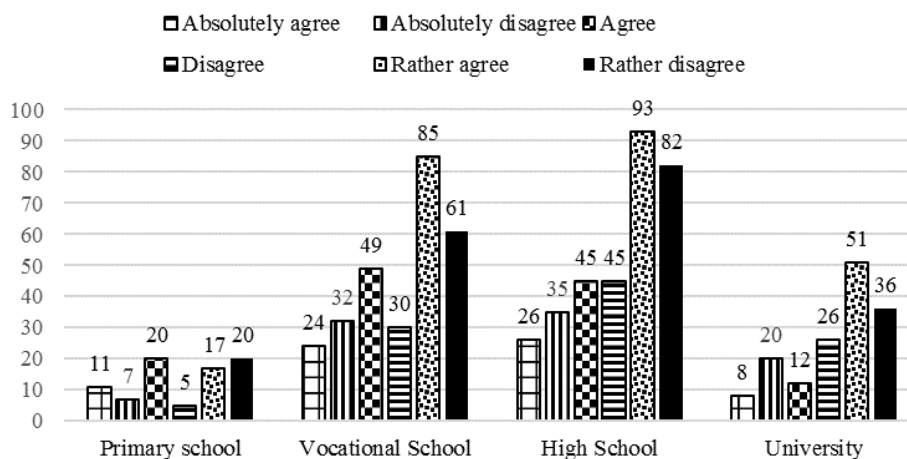


Source: own research

The relation was found in all of the three statements, what means that the opinions about the identification with the brands throughout the members of the cohorts are different. Additionally, we can accept the first hypothesis – **The younger generation has more positive relationships with the brands than the older generation.**

In order to answer the RQ2 respondents were questioned about their opinions to statement No. 1: Part of me is defined by brands, which are important in my life. The answers were tested across the categories of reached degree of education. We found out that df is 15 for factor educational attainment. There was found the relation of agreements with this statements and the educational attainment (see Fig. 7), because P-value is 1,6946E-07. It means that we reject the null hypothesis and accept alternative hypothesis: Different degree of educational attainment has significant influence on the agreement with the importance of the brands in our lives.

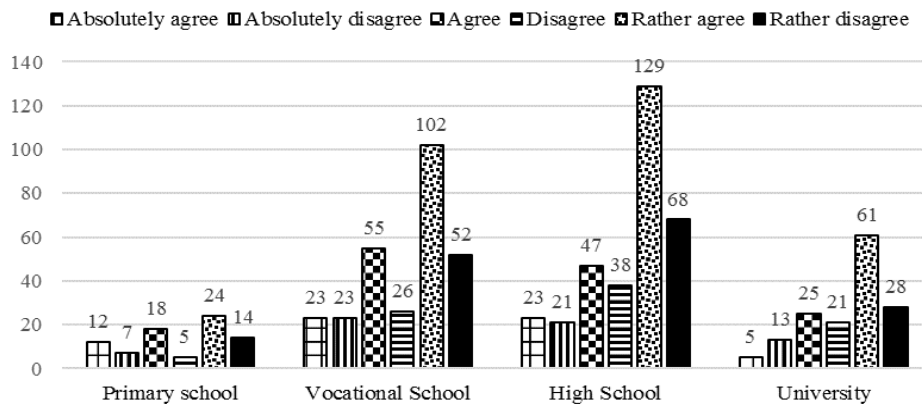
Fig. 7: Statement - Part of me is defined by brands, which are important in my life versus an educational attainment



Source: own research

Afterwards the respondents were asked about the statement No. 2: I identify myself with what my favourite brands do. There was found the relation too (Fig. 8), because P-value is 4,8627E-06, what means that we reject the null hypothesis and accept alternative hypothesis: **Different degree of educational attainment has significant influence on the agreement with the identification with the favourite brands' acts.**

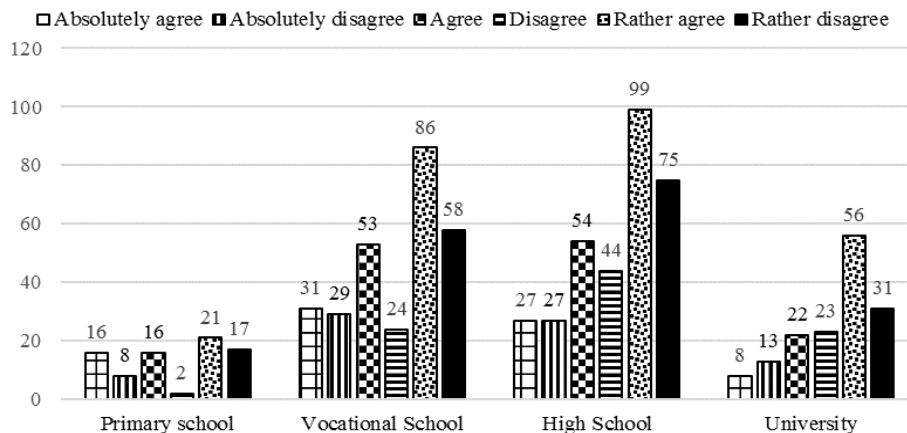
Fig. 8: Statement - I identify with what my favourite brands do versus an educational attainment



Source: own research

The last following statement No. 3 was also tested: My favourite brands are an image of who I am. In this case the relation was found too (Fig. 9). P-value is 7,3558E-08. It means that we again reject the null hypothesis and accept alternative hypothesis: **Different degree of educational attainment has significant influence on the agreement with the opinion, that brands are the image of who we are.**

Fig. 9: Statement - My favourite brands are an image of who I am versus an educational attainment



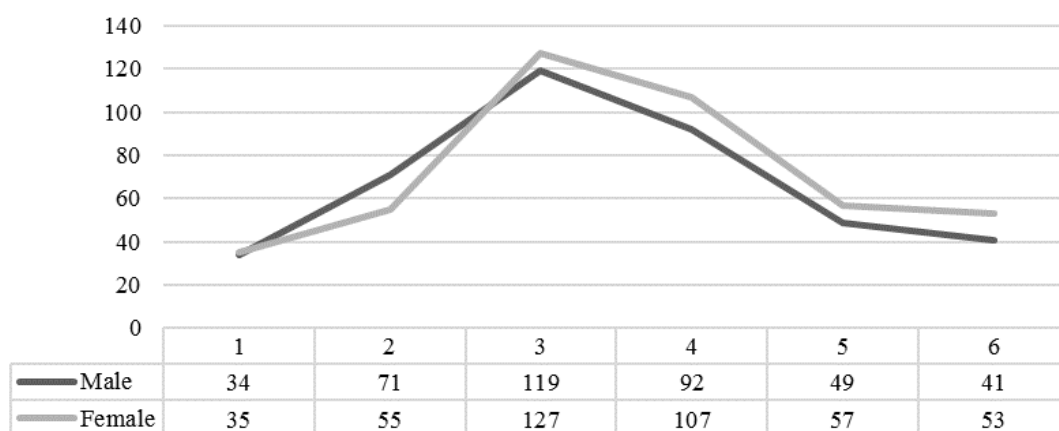
Source: own research

There is an obvious relation between an educational attainment and the perceptions of consumers about the brands as the part of them, as their identification or their image. As we can see from findings, there are differences in perceptions of brands across consumers with different educational attainment. However, the results showed that we have to reject second hypothesis – Educational attainment of consumers influences positively the perceptions about the brands. In this case the right acknowledgement is that **the consumers with high school degree has more positive perceptions about the brands than consumers with other degrees of education.**

For answering RQ3 Anova test was chosen. We found out that the total df is 839. In the case of first statement we did not find the relation. P-value is 0,10082 and this value demonstrates that gender has no influence on perceptions about the brands in better way (Fig. 10). It means that we have to accept null hypothesis: The gender has no significant influence on the perceptions about the brands. From this point of view,

we have to reject the alternative hypothesis: **The gender has significant influence on the perceptions about the brands.**

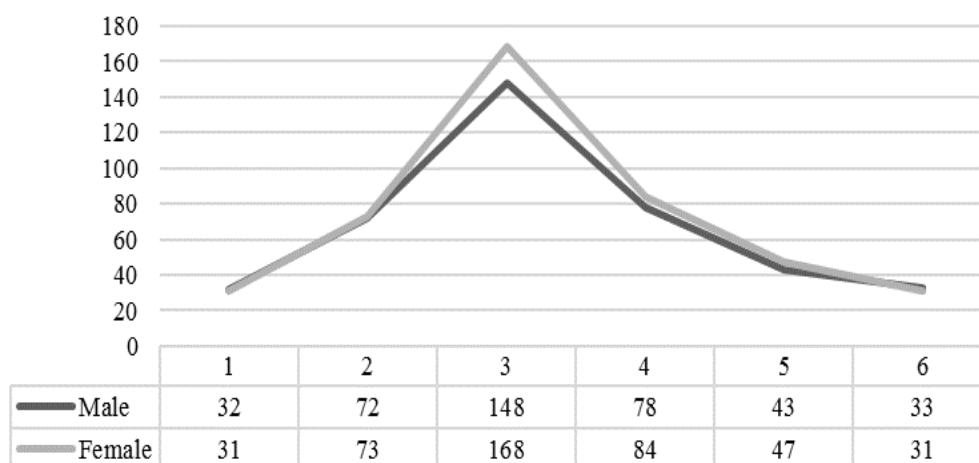
Fig. 10: Statement - Part of me is defined by brands, which are important in my life versus a gender (scale from 1 - absolutely agree to 6 - absolutely disagree)



Source: own research

There was not also found any relation in the second statement. P-value is 0,99505. Based on this value we can argue that gender has no influence on perceptions about the brands in better way (Fig. 11). It means that we have to accept null hypothesis: **The gender has no significant influence on the perceptions about the brands.** From this point of view, we have to reject the alternative hypothesis: The gender has significant influence on the perceptions about the brands.

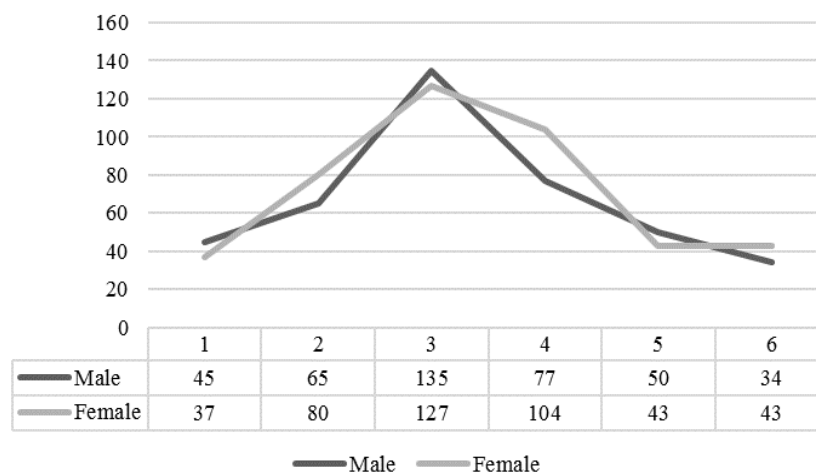
Fig. 11: Statement - I identify myself with what my favourite brands do versus a gender (scale from 1 - absolutely agree to 6 - absolutely disagree)



Source: own research

Finally, there was not found any relation in the third statement. P-value is 0,43608. According to this value, there is obvious acknowledgement, that gender has no influence on perceptions about the brands in better way. As we can see from the Fig. 12, the perceptions of women and men are in balance within the context of all statements. We have to accept null hypothesis: **The gender has no significant influence on the perceptions about the brands** and reject alternative hypothesis: The gender has significant influence on the perceptions about the brands.

Fig. 12: Statement - My favourite brands are an image of who I am versus a gender (scale from 1 - absolutely agree to 6 - absolutely disagree)



Source: own research

Due to outputs of ANOVA testing we can argue that there is not any obvious relation between gender and perceptions about the brands. It means that we have to reject the third hypothesis - Women has more positive perceptions about the brands than men. As we can see from figures 10 - 12 the answers of women and men were very equal. The right acknowledgement in this case is **Gender has no influence on perceptions of consumers about brands.**

4 Discussion

The brands are the means, which the companies use to distinguish from the others. That is why the companies should be focusing on the strong brand building, because it collaterally leads consumers to connect products with the quality, emotions, functions, and the design. Hankinson (2004) announced that the brand performance is closely linked to brand personality, it is the concept which allows the brand to form a relationship with the consumer. Aaker (1997) assigned that brand personality is a result of human characteristics endowment to the brand. This brand personality can lead the customers to have relationship with a brand similar to a person (Aaker, Fornier and Brakel, 2004). The perception of consumer about the personality of the brand can be shaped by direct or indirect experience dealing with the brand (Aaker, 2010 in Seimiene and Kamarauskaite, 2014). Swaminathan, Page and Gurhan-Canli (2007) said that this perception can influence how consumers evaluate and consume the brand. Consumer-brand relationship in the last decade has gained much attention from both practitioners and academics. Understanding the relationships between consumers and their brands has practical relevance to marketers due to the significant impact of this relationship on a company's profitability. (Ismail and Spinelli, 2012) Even though the consumer age is commonly used as a segmentation variable in several academic studies, it does not allow us to understand what actually motivates consumers, neither the reason behind their behaviour. Therefore, according to the cohort theory (Pelsmacker, Geuens and Bergh, 2005), by using generational cohorts it would be possible to gain additional understanding as each cohort involves people who were born during a specific period, who have similar experiences, values and priorities which will remain relatively the same during one's life (Meredith, Schewe and Karlovich, 2002).

The customers are the most important in the market. If the companies understand the behaviour of the consumers, they can be successful. The generations are not topic just of the practitioners, but also of the scholars. Consumer perceptions are influenced by many factors. Members of some cohort share the same historical events, it means that their opinions and habits can be similar. In this study the relation between perceptions about the brand and being the part of some cohorts was found. Generation Y or Millennials are the most discussed generation in the literature because of their buying power or different modes of behaviour against to the other previous generations. The generations are influenced also by the places, where the members are grow up or live. That's why the Millennials were tested in terms of the Czech Republic. Czech Millennials are the open topic, which is worth exploring more in details.

Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to investigate the consumers' degree of identification with the brands in the relation with selected demographic factors. The selected demographic factors were tested among 840 respondents from different generations – Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y (respondents aged 18 - 65 years). The questioning as the marketing research method was chosen. The primary tailor-made data were acquired from the database of IPSOS agency. In the process of primary data processing the statistical approach was used thanks to the SPSS software. The respondents were questioned about their attitudes to brands, their perceptions of the brands and opinions about the degree of importance of the brands in their lives. In some cases, the significant relations were found.

From the results it is obvious that the opinions about the brands as the part of the human personality are different. The opinions of the people from different cohorts distinguish. The brands do not mean for the Baby Boomers consumers or Generation X as much as they mean for the consumers belonging to the Generation Y. These consumers have different perceptions of the brands, what is caused by different opportunities to get the products and present themselves by them. The members of the cohorts Baby Boomers and Generation X do not need to build relationships with the brands or to present themselves by brands as much as the members of the Generation Y cohort. The members of Generation Y like building the relationships, presenting themselves by brands because of their buying power and desire to shop. It is important to focus on this generation in the field of research and business. In the field of educational attainment was found that consumers who have high school degree education they have also the most positive relationship with brands. The last demographic factor, which was tested, was gender. In this case we did not find the relations between gender and perceptions to the brands.

Acknowledgement

This paper was supported by the Student grant competition project SGS/7/2017: "Acceptance of technology from the perspective of marketing tools."

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Received: 24. 07. 2019, reviewed: 22. 12. 2019

Approved for publication: 29. 04. 2020