

Ewelina Kitlińska, MarketingKobiet.pl
Dominika Maison, Warsaw University
Agnieszka Strzałka, MarketingKobiet.pl
Katarzyna Pawlikowska, Garden of Words

Consumer's gender in marketing – survey results

Introduction

The surveys of the Boston Consulting Group carried out in 2008 on a sample of 12 thousand people from 22 countries worldwide, indicate that by the year 2028 women's earnings in the USA will be on average higher than men's, while female buying power in 5 years will be equal to 28 trillion dollars. Many countries have undertaken studies on the needs, attitudes, and behaviours of women in order to gain a new segment of customers, which will facilitate an increase in profits.

Products addressed particularly to women has begun to appear on the Polish market mainly due to the imported foreign goods of well-known brands; also the creation of a market offer addressed to women has been increasingly venturous. Hitherto, the surveys penetrating the issues of people's attitudes towards products, brands and communication dedicated to the consumer's gender have not been carried out in Poland.

The presented paper was based on the first in Poland pilot studies concerning this issue. The survey was carried out in 2009 by the service www.MarketingWomen.pl between September 22 and November, on a sample of 986 adult Poles who used the Internet. The surveyed group comprised 501 women (50.8%) and 485 men (49.2%). Over a half of the respondents constituted people aged 25–34 years (55%).

Shopping and making decisions concerning shopping

The respondents' declarations, of both women and men indicate that the responsibility for shopping in the households rests mainly on women (61.7%). Men rarely declared that they do shopping themselves (23.9%), while their wives and partners indicated them as persons responsible for the household supply only in 14.5%.

It is also worth to point out some asymmetry in perception of the household shopping responsibility by women and men. When asked who most often does shopping in their household, the respondents more often answered that they do it themselves (59%), than they indicate their partners (41%). Therefore, most of the surveyed believe that they are more burdened with this responsibility than their partners. However, distribution of these answers among women and men is more interesting: 31% women declare themselves, while only 14% indicate their partner, which suggests over twice higher shopping responsibility of women than men. In comparison, if we look at men's answers, 24% of them indicate themselves, while 27% point at their partner. The result suggests that perception of shopping responsibility is different among women and men. Men believe that their participation in shopping is comparable to women's participation, whereas women claim that participation of their male counterparts is decidedly lower. A question arises here (which cannot be answered on the basis of the survey data): whether as a matter of fact men overrate their input in shopping for their households, or it is rather true that women do not appreciate men's involvement?

The survey results regarding making shopping decisions by women and men in respect to various categories of products show evident differences between the categories of products which purchase is rather decided by women and those that men decide to buy. The picture of these results agrees with the stereotype of gender roles in the Polish society (women clean and cook, while men are responsible for technical matters). Interesting is the fact that such a picture of gender roles has been constantly sustained by advertising. The analysis on commercials in respect to their product context carried out in 2008, showed that in case of commercials of detergents a man appears as the main character in 25%, while in 75% the main character is a woman ("Marketing and Market" 2009, No. 11).

A reverse trend is observed in case of durable goods and services: in 73% of such commercials appear men, while in 27% – women. There is an interesting difference in the commercials of food products. Such base products like margarine, gravy, etc. are associated with women – they appear in 75% of these commercials. In case of food products of a “pleasurable” character (chocolate bars, beer) the proportion reverses: 59% characters are men, while 41% – women. Therefore, women are associated with chores, while men – with pleasure.

Female consumer versus male consumer

The next part of the survey concerned the respondents’ opinions about women and men consumer behaviours. The questions were aimed at finding the respondents’ opinions and the degree of awareness regarding the impact of gender differences on functioning of a human as a consumer. Thus, 81.1% state that gender differences influence consumer behaviours. This opinion is shared by both women (41.4%), and men (39.7%). Only 5.6% of the surveyed believe that gender differences do not influence consumer behaviours of women and men.

In the respondents’ opinion, more demanding consumers are women – it was indicated by 42.0% of women and 31.5% of men. Most women are aware of their high expectations and they consider themselves as more demanding. It is related to the women’s search for a product ideally matching their visions and expectations, therefore – making a purchase decision after checking many different market options.

As many as 60% of the surveyed who claimed that women make more demanding consumers comprise persons with tertiary education. Only 20% of the surveyed (including people with tertiary education) declared that men are more demanding. It confirms the connection between the level of education and the awareness of one’s needs – the higher is education level, the higher are requirements.

Almost 6 per 10 of the surveyed (59%) believe that male customers are more loyal to a brand. Women slightly less often (27.4%) than men (31.6%) indicate that men’s loyalty to brand is stronger. The results are somehow surprising considering the fact that according to the world’s researchers women tend to show higher loyalty to a product and brand, as well as to people that they buy this product or brand from.

Faith Popcorn and Lys Marigold in the book *EVEolution. Understanding Women – Eight Essential Truths that Work in Your Business and Your Life* have come to the following conclusions: „Working up to ‘her truth’ is like an introduction to another king of loyalty. A female consumer feels more

comfortable and depends more on her personal relation with the service provider. It is not a logo, nor a commercial; what really matters is a brand”. Martha Barletta confirms this in the book *Marketing to women*, saying that women are more driven by personal loyalty when they have already reached good rapport with a vendor. Their decision is partially influenced by a guilty feeling that they would have if they made their purchase somewhere else, after establishing a relationship with the sales representative who provided good service. Therefore, even if the competition has a slightly better product or service, due to this contact a woman will not leave, unless the competition’s advantage is overwhelming. Comparing to men who usually consider a product as more important and personal contact as less significant, women are more loyal and less often leave for the competition.

Most respondents (61.9%) claim that men gather more information about a product before they make a purchase decision. Men much more often than women declare gathering such information (36.9%). Women did not determine univocally which gender representatives gather more information before they make a purchase; their indications were equally frequent in respect to women (25.9%), as in respect to men (25.0%).

It should be underlined, though, that the respondents’ answers were based on the first spontaneous associations with a product. When answering this question, one could recall any kind of a product, of a different level of complexity influencing the scope of the gathered information (there is a different attitude to buying, e.g. a yoghurt than to purchasing a car). Thus, it was possible to recognize a general regularity concerning gathering information before making purchase decisions.

A decided majority of the respondents declare that gender differences influence consumer behaviours. On the one hand, it is not surprising, as the issue of gender differences has been analysed and discussed for a long time now, including the general accessible media. On the other hand, though, the obtained answers show that people are aware of the base of consumer behaviours, which comprise biological and cultural determinants.

The surveyed persons claim that women make consumers that are more demanding. This result is in accordance with the results of the worldwide surveys. Such a situation may be caused by women’s pursuit of the ideal product, i.e. the one that meets all of their requirements. It is worth to mention here, that in a shopping process for some products significant are the opinions of other people, e.g. the personnel of service or shopping facility. Women show stronger loyalty to people, they pay much more attention to direct

relations – “face to face”, service quality, professional behaviour of a given company’s representatives. They are also easier to be put off with unfriendly environment of the place where they make purchase of products or services – the things that matter are interior decoration, ergonomic solutions, and tidiness. Women are greater aesthetes.

There are interesting results concerning the fact that men are more loyal to brands and gather more information about a product before they decide on buying. These results are in opposition to the results of the American surveys mentioned by Martha Barletta. However, the results of the BTL Monitor survey (2007) confirm that men comprise a more loyal group of consumers. Usually they buy products that they know and like and which they are convinced about. Whereas women declare higher susceptibility to promotion than men, they trace promotional offers and follow their recommendation when making decision. This situation may be the effect of a stereotypical classification of products into the ones bought mainly by women – perishable, not requiring much consideration and preparation for a shopping process and cheaper (e.g. detergents), and into male products – durable and more expensive (e.g. cars). Therefore, it would be worth to examine the issue of brand loyalty among women and men in the surveys reaching beyond consumers’ declarations.

Gender marketing and female marketing

One of the essential objectives of the conducted survey was obtaining the opinions concerning the perspectives of developing actions targeted at better adjustment of products and communication about products to women in Poland, i.e. female marketing.

Most respondents (62.4%) claim that it is irrelevant whether the brand of a product is dedicated to their gender, but at the same time over 80% of the surveyed answer that gender differences have an impact on consumer behaviours. Considering that a male/female respondent believes that the consumer’s gender influences shopping decisions, he/she should expect from brands and products better compatibility with gender determined requirements, and also that they are created and designed specifically for a given sex.

Only slightly over ¼ of the respondents (26.4%) expects brands addressed to their gender and men dominate in this group (14.7%) over women (11.7%). Women slightly more often (6.3%) than men (4.9%) declare that it is insignificant whether the product brand is dedicated to them or not.

The highest number of respondents (45.2%) claims that it is irrelevant whether marketing is dedicated

to the consumer’s gender. Men are more convinced that gender-neutral marketing actions, i.e. not targeted at a particular sex, should not have a dominant position on the market. Such answer was indicated by 16.3% of men, while women chose this answer only in 13.4%. It is worth to observe that in case of the opinion that gender-neutral marketing, the ladies almost twice as often (16.1%) as the gentlemen (8.9%) answered positively.

The important conclusion derived from the survey is the fact that marketing for women is not associated with feminism, which is often negatively perceived in Poland – as the struggle of sexes. Almost ¾ of the surveyed do not perceive marketing addressed to women as a domain connected with feminism. Such opinion is equally often expressed by women (36.7%) and men (37.5%), although it could be expected to be more frequent among women than among men.

According to 61.8% of the respondents, there is future for marketing to women in Poland. This opinion expressed both women and men. Only 6.1% of the surveyed believe that this domain developing worldwide will not find a good base for development in Poland.

Puzzling is the fact, that despite the respondents’ belief that marketing to women has the future in Poland, at the same time they do not feel the need for brands and products dedicated specifically to their gender. The fact evidently derives from the lack of knowledge about marketing to women (among both consumers, and – unfortunately – marketers). There is little reliable information concerning this subject; there are no reprints of foreign publications devoted to the issue of differences in decision-making and shopping process of women and men. There is also an insufficient number of good examples of marketing communication addressed to women; even when they appear, few people consciously associate them with gender marketing, as it is most often mistakenly understood as communicating “in pink” applying to gender stereotypes. Whereas, effective communication to women often includes actions that we would not describe as feminine. In fact, there should be implemented the mechanisms targeted at making a brand (or a product) more attractive and friendly for women, instead of those that are realized in a feminine “stylistics”. The core of marketing to women is finding communication channels that are decoded by women and place them as equal partners in the process of market exchange.

When viewing the report results one must remember that the receivers of well implemented actions within the scope of female marketing rarely are aware of the fact that these actions were planned with a woman in mind and with the use of female commu-

nicative codes. The consumers' answers should be also analysed with regard to this context. Symptomatic is also the fact that twice as many women as men realize the need for gender-neutral marketing. Taking into account the andocentric character of traditional marketing, it may be assumed that these answers indicate that in spite of everything, female consumers feel that men are favoured, that many messages follow communicative codes that are foreign to most female communicative patterns.

There is a paradox in the fact that although consumers declare that they do not set great store to gender-specific marketing, they still assess such action as a tendency that might develop in Poland. It indirectly indicates that in spite of all, Polish consumers feel the need for a change; they subconsciously register some gap, even though they cannot define it clearly, as they lack knowledge concerning the professional gender marketing and its principles. This is a message to the marketers that there is a place for innovative actions. Therefore, it is worth to use this potential and seek ways to utilize this free space.

Conclusion

The survey results confirm the fact that women do most shopping. However, there is a visible division in making decisions concerning a purchase of the particular categories of products. Among male decisive domains belong categories of high degree of technological complexity (automotive, RTV and durable goods). Women are still associated with household chores and making decisions concerning food products and detergents. Finances are the field where disproportion between women and men in making decisions concerning choosing the product are not great. In the financial branch, you may feel the breaths of fresh trends, as there are created products and marketing messages targeted at women. Firms in this branch are the fastest to notice women's needs and the market segment that is gaining power.

The results of the survey part dedicated to behaviours of women and men as consumers, univocally point out the awareness of a gender gap influence on consumer behaviours. According to the surveyed, women are much more demanding customers. In this context, frequent declarations that women gather less information about a product/service than men before they make a purchase decision are confusing. These opinions may relate to an unaware but more

frequent contact of women with a product or a chosen brand already on the stage of gathering information. Maybe this is why they are believed not to be involved in recognition of the market to such a high degree as men.

Surprising is also the finding that women are perceived as consumers less loyal to a brand. Such declarations may derive from the respondents' beliefs, instead of actual consumer behaviours.

A part of the survey concerning gender directed marketing and female marketing leads to conclusion that consumers in Poland are not yet aware of the fact that products may better suit their gender related needs. It seems strange, that this is happening on the market developed in respect to the product offer, variety of brands marketing communication.

It is worth to notice, that women most often declare their indifference to the fact that a brand or a product is dedicated to their gender, despite being more demanding customers. They are aware of their high expectations, but with the insufficient offer targeted at them, they do not realize that they could get something much better if the market comprehended their needs. This may be in connection with the long history of marketing targeted at a male customer. Many years of experiencing that kind of marketing by men resulted in the male higher than in case of women awareness regarding fulfilment of their expectations by the market.

However, consumers are becoming to anticipate a development of marketing actions dedicated to women. Female marketing has great chances of development in Poland, providing that the signals sent by female consumers will not be depreciated. This opens a large room for manoeuvre to marketers, providing that they are willing to penetrate the true needs, expectations and values of women. The factor facilitating development of this marketing area is also the fact that it is not associated with feminism, which is still perceived pejoratively in Poland.

Literature

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