

THE CLAIMS OF THE 21ST CENTURY ROMANIAN CONSUMER

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Abstract

Modern times have massively changed how 21st-century consumers act, think, make decisions & even purchase services or goods. This paper examines the changes that have occurred in the claims of modern consumers, especially for generation X and generation Y, as they greatly differ from the claims they had as consumers before 1989 – when the communist regime fell in Romania. Because of that, this writing outlines the significant differences between the two generations mentioned earlier in terms of consumer claims. This study aims to analyze 21st-century consumer claims and compare the present and future expectations of generation X and generation Y consumers. Therefore, it presents the results of an online survey with 274 respondents from the North-East part of Romania: people from generation Y and generation X. Also, the research answered three questions: Which are the top 6 “labels” which claim to be important for the 21st-century consumers of X and Y generations?, Which are the differences between the claims of the X and Y generations consumers? and What are the claims which changed the most from the 20th century to the 21st century for generation X consumers? The article is divided into three parts: the first part presents the context and outlines the literature in the field, the second part explains the methodology and the interpretation of results, and the last part includes the conclusions.

Keywords: *consumer behavior; generation X; generation Y; Romanian consumer’s behavior claims; the 21st Romanian consumer.*

Introduction: Context and literature

Consumer behavior emerged when the researchers focused more on the individual customer than on the market itself. As behavioral sciences proved to be more effective in explaining the individual’s behavior and preferences than the social sciences, there was a shift towards focusing on the consumers as individuals, rather than on a mass of people. Many theories have appeared today which are trying to determine and measure

the forces influencing the consumer to choose a brand, product, or service while trying to frame the place, price, and time, but there is one single focus in the whole process: the consumer.

The 21st-century consumers have changed massively and undoubtedly their habits, lifestyle, preferences, and so on have been massively shifting over the last years. This subject regarding these new consumer claims has a significant role in the market. Its impact will continue to grow more and more, from generation to generation, as the complexity of consumer has been rising rapidly.

In order to be able to develop this topic regarding these claims, a clear definition of what is important for the consumer and how these claims could vary depending on the generation and point in time. To understand and identify the claims, various studies and publications have been explored and the most important ones to the mind of the current consumers are about: time poverty (Solomon et al, 2006), diversity (Kapoor, 2011), promotion (Sandu, 2014), the complexity of the consumer (Zinkhan and Braunsberger, 2004), social media (Duangruthai et al., 2018), innovation (Awan & Zuriat-ul-Zahra, 2014), brand status (Robbins, 2019), ecology (Brandabur, 2011) and many more. These labels and many more have been studied through the research presented below in which generation X and Y could express whether they identify with the proposed claim.

With an increasing rate of 65 million per year, city dwellers will experience a growth in size, making the urban consumer the majority of the consumers. This leads to a predicted explosion of the middle class, which will certainly affect their lifestyle, thus their consumption, which is forecasted to be characterized by an increase in convenience. Moreover, regarding technological advancement, consumers will have a more social-media-driven consumption, which will take place because of the mobile industry's development and the connectivity and ease of access to the internet. Both generation X and Y are predicted to be more motivated by various digital platforms to buy from certain brands due to their connection to the virtual world.

Moreover, the consumers are predicted to change in terms of presence in the workplace and will translate according to this research in a higher number of women in the workplace, meaning that consumption among this category will increase (Bell, 2018). Also, new patterns in terms of personal consumption will be adopted. An increase in convenience will stand out for the consumers and a more specific focus on health and wellness will emerge. Also, the consumer already started to demand more products or services closer to their needs. In the future tense, high satisfaction among buyers and users will be more complex and difficult to attain. Therefore, a study regarding all these claims is necessary and can have a great impact on marketing professionals, managers, entrepreneurs, researchers, and many more.

Methodology

This study aims to investigate which claims are considered to be relevant for generation X, regarding past, present and future times, and also, for generation Y, regarding present and future times. Another objective was to identify expected future changes in consumer behavior by both generations X and Y. Moreover, according to an article published in Emerald, there are differences between generations X and Y in many dimensions (Glass, 2007). We will analyze the "claims" presented and conclude if the two generations are

distinct in what they claim as consumers. So, the following assumption regarding the two generations addressed in this research will be tested:

H0: There are no differences between the X and Y generations regarding what they claim as consumers.

H1: There are differences among the X and Y generations regarding what they claim as consumers.

To that end, the study was based on a quantitative study, in which we applied an online survey for 46 days during the months of April, May, and June 2019 to 274 respondents from north-east Romania. The population of interest was composed of individuals over the age of 18 and over the age of 40 in order to be able to make the comparison between generation Y (who summed up 186 respondents) and generation X (who had a total of 88 respondents), in order to contrast the past and present consumers and their preferences.

The online questionnaire was divided into 3 main parts: the first one had 32 statements that described the present consumer's claims, while the second part was addressed only to generation X, who experiences the communist regime and could compare these 32 statements to the past tense. Every statement had a "label" considered a claim of the present consumer, and this was built based on literature review and studies. In the survey, in order to have accurate results, a Likert scale was used in order to quantify, analyze, and compare the data and its relevance to 21st-century consumers.

The average time to complete the online survey was 10-15 minutes for people from generation Y. The average time to complete was different for the respondents born before 1979 (generation X). The estimated was 25 minutes, as they had an additional 32 questions to fill in regarding their consumer behavior before the communist regime fell.

The online survey was made through Google Forms and shared on social media platforms groups and pages, and via other devices by text message or other instant messaging apps. Approximately 15% of the sample regarding people above 40 were completing the survey assisted, on a device, as some individuals were unfamiliar with the online environment or had low technical skills. In order to reach more people, the snowball sampling method was used to apply the questionnaire.

This is defined as a non-probability sampling technique in which the selected respondents (appointed by the researcher) are asked to identify others to be part of the sample, thus gathering more responses by sharing the survey with them, consequently expanding the sample gradually.

This method was used to reach more people and access the X generation, as it was difficult in the application phase of the survey to gather responses from them. In other words, the sample size increases and expands like a snowball which is rolling (Ahmadzadehasl & Sepehr, 2010). It had a massive advantage as it facilitated in many ways the speed of the data collection. On the other hand, one disadvantage of this survey is that individuals may have similar preferences, attitudes, and behaviors, which may not be beneficial to our research. This happened because people may sometimes recommend individuals who are in many aspects much the same.

Data was collected between the 25th of April 2019 and the 10th of June 2019; the programs used to analyze the data were Microsoft Excel 2019 and IBM SPSS Statistics 20.

Results and discussions

The analysis of the responses gathered through the online survey was used to identify the differences between the present claims of generations X and Y consumers and future expectations as a 21st-century consumer. So, to have an overview of the survey results, the table presented will highlight the claims and their importance to the 21st-century consumer. The most relevant ones have a high score, while those considered less relevant or least important have a mean average lower than 5.

Table 1. Present and past claims of generations X and Y (Author's Own Source)

Claim	Mean generations X & Y	Mean generation X (before 1989)	Mean generation X (present times)	Mean Generation Y
1	4.5	4.49	4.72	4.41
2	4.54	4.74	4.44	4.59
3	6.73	7.10	6.63	6.77
4	6.78	5.61	6.68	6.82
5	5.28	5.75	4.95	5.41
6	5.39	5.57	5.53	5.34
7	6.97	6.29	6.48	7.17
8	6.91	6.94	6.73	6.98
9	5.51	6.26	5.60	5.47
10	5.15	5.51	5.28	5.10
11	8.72	7.10	8.79	8.69
12	7.95	6.06	7.80	8.02
13	7.87	2.87	7.89	7.87
14	6.63	2.34	6.04	6.87
15	5.75	4.22	6.05	5.63
16	5.54	2.26	5.96	5.38
17	6.27	6.03	6.60	6.13
18	8.14	8.79	8.21	8.11
19	7.11	6.79	7.21	7.07
20	8.15	5.96	8.89	7.84
21	9.03	6.62	9.31	8.92
22	5.52	3.13	5.55	5.51

Claim	Mean generations X & Y	Mean generation X (before 1989)	Mean generation X (present times)	Mean Generation Y
23	7.7	5.75	8.36	7.44
24	5.79	4.00	5.13	6.06
25	5.61	6.14	6.11	5.41
26	6.33	2.05	6.45	6.28
27	7.24	8.14	7.81	7.01
28	5.85	2.74	5.8	5.88
29	6.69	4.09	7.28	6.46
30	4.07	6.65	3.99	4.10
31	5.87	7.51	7.03	5.40
32	6.5	4.62	6.60	6.46

This table presents the most important aspects of this research by presenting the overall results for present claims of the X and Y generation and highlights the significant or insignificant differences among these two categories of respondents.

Generation X in Romania has been through different political regimes that massively influenced them as consumers. Their behavior has changed dramatically from the 20th century to the 21st, reflected in the significant variation in various claims. The survey asked respondents from this generation to offer a score according to the identification "level" for the same statement: one formulated to emphasize the present behavior and another one which had the same statement, but formulated in the past tense, one regarding what took place before 1989 (before communism in Romania fell).

The statement which had the most significant difference in the level of identification in past and present terms was the one regarding the companies which guarantee the protection of personal data. Generation X claimed that this was not relevant in the communism dimension (or the 20th century) as the survey's result assigned an average of 2.87 for this statement, meaning that they strongly pointed out the fact that personal data protection was important for them back then. Nowadays, the same group of respondents assigned a higher score for the same statement in present terms, meaning that they would tend to choose companies that guarantee their personal data, thus highlighting its importance with an average of 7.89 out of 10. This highly scored statement in the present term labels this claim as important today. The striking difference underlines the fact that in the past, the same consumer, was not interested at all in whether the companies protected their data or not, while today this factor can play a detrimental role in consumers' minds. This variation emphasizes the fact that the claims of the consumers are extremely volatile and change accordingly to the environment they live in.

The statement "*It matters to me if companies address every type of consumer from the society*" was considered irrelevant to the communism scenario and for their consumers. The mean average suggested a low interest in this affirmation for past tense, which

emphasizes the fact that generation X back then did not place importance on how products or services address minorities. Moreover, the fact that the availability and variety of the product were minimal, cause consumers to be more individualistic in terms of covering their needs rather than having empathy towards other classes of people from society. Additionally, communism tried to hide any kind of minority which did not match the “frame” of a typical Romanian. Because of this, many X-ers were not aware of the needs of the various social classes. Consequently, the fact that the products were not inclusive was irrelevant to them.

Another expected change from the 20th to the 21st century in terms of consumption is the claim highlighting the frequency at which individuals need products to go or with home delivery. The statement described this: *“It happens quite often to me to need products or services to-go or with home delivery.”* Framed in the communism tense, this claim was considered to be false. Therefore, respondents substantially rejected it. The variation of this claim from past to present only highlights the fact that before 1989 delivery services did not exist on the market and people were used to picking up what they purchased by themselves. On the other hand, in the present tense, generation X claimed that what they need is on the opposite side, therefore in the 21st century, they need often to buy products or services to-go or with home delivery.

After analyzing the data, the label which came in the first place of importance to the consumers was the one regarding the level of quality. The statement *“I appreciate firms who make a constant effort to improve the level of quality from all points of view”* had a percent of 50 who totally identified with the affirmation, meaning that quality is important and significant for them. Therefore, we can say that the consumer of the 21st century prefers companies who allocate resources to improve the quality of their products or services. Consequently, quality is perceived to be important. Generally speaking, people nowadays tend to orient themselves to businesses that go “the extra mile” for their customers to address their needs through this quality axiom in a holistic, comprehensive way. The average grade given to the importance of quality improvement is 9.03 on a scale from 1 to 10, which indicates the massive importance associated with the level of quality to the consumers. By interpreting the survey results, we can conclude that generation X compared with generation Y, places a higher emphasis on this quality and effort dimension.

Both generation X and Y think about themselves as being complex human beings, thus complex consumers. From X-ers, 36 individuals identified with the statement *“I appreciate the offers which do not treat me superficially.”* by assigning a 10, while in the millennials, 43 individuals who assigned a score corresponding with the maximum level of identification. The average mean was 8.15 out of 10. Additionally, by analyzing this data, we could conclude that consumers today claim that they want products or services with a real holistic value and present “honest” information regarding benefits offering. Moreover, by running statistical tests, there was shown that there is a difference in the means of the answers given by the X generation and Y generation. Therefore, the 21st consumer claims that he has complex needs which should be addressed and covered in a real, comprehensive way.

The 21st-century consumer claims that businesses should address their needs and update their products or services accordingly in a customized manner. In contrast with the other claim mentioned, this one emphasizes more on the speed of reactions of the

businesses in terms of addressing needs. Trends, fads, and other factors influencing individuals leave a mark on the market, thus impacting people's needs and behavior. This was seen also in the survey research as most respondents identified with the statement *"For me is important that products are updated fast and according to my needs"*.

As expected, for millennials, the average level of identification with this affirmation is higher than the mean of the X-ers as instantaneity, and high speed in the reaction are associated more with the needs of the younger generations. Millennials, as mentioned in chapter 2 are advanced technology users, and this places them as being more pretentious towards the brand's speed of reaction. Additionally, they claim that it is important for them to be as quick as possible in addressing their needs. The level of identification associated with the statement mentioned is, on average, 7.95 out of 10, placing this claim in 4th place as important to 21st-century consumers. Lastly, there is no significant difference between the average level of identification among generation X and generation Y to the statement mentioned above.

Additionally, it should be mentioned that X generation suggests it is very relevant for them to test the product in the store. If we take this group of people independently, we can conclude that this is the fourth most important claim for them as most of the X-ers have identified with the statement *"I have more trust in a product I can test in a store"*. Since generation X is also called generation Why as they question everything, this claim does not come as a surprise in the research.

The next table will present the mean expected changes of characteristics in consumer behavior for both generation X and Y, which stand out in literature and theories in consumer behavior.

**Table 2. Changing characteristics of the consumer in future claims
(Author's Own Source)**

Expected changes	Mean Generation X	Mean Generation Y	Sample mean
Expectations	3.00	2.78	2.85
Attitudes	3.05	2.82	2.89
Experiences	2.73	2.26	2.41
Habits	2.75	2.56	2.62
Lifestyle	2.80	2.47	2.57
Shopping behavior	2.94	2.87	2.89
Consumption	2.70	2.62	2.65

There are significant changes in the consumer behavior lately. Technology and other factors will continue to have a strong impact on them. Many changes in demographics, trends, economic pressure, political shifts, and so on will affect the massive transformation which will take place from second to second in the next 10 years. Every generation predicts its own changes and forecasts specific adjustments and modifications according to their needs and the environment in which it will live.

According to the research, the future will strongly shape the experiences, and this is seen in how the respondents answered the question regarding prediction on future changes. The one which are considered to modify in the next 10 years totally or significantly are the experiences. More than 60% of respondents from both generation X and Y believe in this change. On the other hand, if we contrast the two categories of respondents, we can affirm after analyzing the data. that more individuals from generation X consider experiences as being less changed in the next ten years than generation Y predicts.

Secondly, the lifestyle is predicted to be modified in the 10 ten years among the sample's respondents. This claim is considered to be totally or significantly changed by 50% of the respondents.

Generation X, in predicting future changes in the survey, has given higher grades and as those were associated with a less changed behavior, we could conclude that this group of respondents are more anchored in their perception and their behavior as consumers is less predicted to change or variate in the next 10 years. The most impacted in the future is the consumption according to the individuals above the age of 40, and the slightest change in the next 10 years is associated with the attitudes.

In contrast, generation Y is more flexible and believes in a higher transformation of the characteristics such as attitudes, consumption, habits and so on in the upcoming future according to the research made. The minimal change is believed to happen in their shopping behavior, while the most significant transformation is going to target millennial's experiences.

Conclusions

Therefore, after carrying out an online survey study that aimed to understand the way generation X identifies the claims in comparison with how the generation Y identifies the claims, we may conclude that there should be highlighted that through the data collected there have been identified the claims which are relevant for generation X consumers for the past, present, and future axis. Additionally, for generation Y, there have been identified the most important claims have been identified similarly, but only for the present and future tense as these individuals have not been consumers before 1989, when the political regime in Romania has changed, significantly affecting the consumer.

In the 21st century, the most important claims of both X and Y generations are regarding quality, adaptation of products to their needs, personal data protection and lifespan of a product. Moreover, consumers want to be treated through their complexity and claim that brands should update their products or services fast, thus their speed of reaction to address the needs and the demands of the market should be extremely high. Additionally, it is expected that their data is protected, thus, the brands which consider

themselves as being responsible, should make sure that their policies comply with the law regarding this aspect. The only claim which came in top 4 for X generation, but not at all in top 6 for Y generation is the one which describes the importance of testing a product in stores.

The hypotheses mentioned in the first part regarding the differences among the X and Y generations in the 21st century claims were tested. In 8 cases out of 32, a significant difference between the two groups of responses has been found. Thus, there was enough statistical evidence to accept the alternative hypothesis in 25% of the cases. The most significant differences among the generations were in the claims regarding the level of quality, the proximity of a store to the consumer and the level of trust of store testing.

On top of that, variation among the means of the two respondents were found in the way they perceive offers which approach consumers in their complexity, in the frequency of needs regarding to-go or with home delivery products and in the preferences for online and offline shops. The optimism factor and the stability one have also been claims representing a significant difference between generation X and Y. To conclude, it's vital to understand that we are in 2022 and this means that the 21st century consumer has been present for 23 years already. It will become increasingly prevalent as the time passes. Managerial implications could suggest that retailers should keep up and be proactive with the claims and challenges of the consumers, and unless they do this, they won't be able to survive and thrive in the 21st century for a long time. Adapting the business model in order to become more compliant with the consumers claims has become a responsibility of the firms for the current market.

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