

## ATTITUDES OF CZECH AND SLOVAK CONSUMERS TOWARDS BRANDS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF GENDER AFFILIATION

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### **Abstract:**

The main objective of this article is to investigate correlation between gender affiliation and consumer preferences. Our article looks at attitudes of Czech and Slovak consumers towards brands taking gender – one of the most important demographic factors – as a variable. First, positive and negative approaches to the importance of gender affiliation in contemporary market theory are presented. A brief introduction of research studies conducted in Slovakia and the Czech Republic follows. Then, selected outcomes of the primary research concerning gender affiliation and consumer preferences are shown. Finally, the outcomes of both research studies are analyzed and compared. Results suggest that gender affiliation has no influence in the Slovak Republic and only a limited impact in the Czech Republic.

### **Introduction**

This research study reflects the assumption that there is a relationship between the sex and attitudes towards the brand. Furthermore, it assumes that gender affiliation may affect the formation of positive and negative attitudes towards the brand while taking into consideration the country of origin or country of origin of the product in general (not in relation to specific countries and to the positive or negative image of the given countries). Gender as such plays a role in the process of purchasing decisions in which the fact whether the decision is made by a male or a female has an impact on the outcome of this decision in the context of different expectations, needs and demand for products that can satisfy them. Thus we stated the following research question: Does one of the main demographic characteristics – gender – influence attitudes of Czech and Slovak customers – consumers towards a brand and the country of its origin or towards the product in the studied area or towards selected product categories.

## 1. Methodology and methods

This article in the first part presents positive and negative approaches in contemporary marketing theory and partially in practice towards highlighting the impact of gender differences on marketing or even against application of the so called gender marketing. Subsequently, in terms of addressing the research questions, methodology and selected research methods concrete conclusions are formulated – these are based primarily on the results of the analysis of specific outcomes of the primary research carried out within the research project VEGA 1/1051/1 Analysis of strategic processes of brand building and brand management in the context of homogenization and individualization of consumer needs by the Marketing Department at the Faculty of Management, Comenius University in Bratislava and secondly by the selected results of the research based on the same methodology “The Czechs and brands” that was conducted at the Department of Marketing Communications at the Faculty of Multimedia Communications, Tomas Bata University in Zlín.

The group of respondents involved the population of the Slovak Republic and the Czech Republic aged 16+ and it was based on the principle of quota sampling – quotas such as age, gender, education, income and the size of place of residence reflected the distribution of socio-demographic data of the group defined by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic and by the Czech Statistical Office. Reliability of the research study was set at 95%, accuracy to 3%. The question relating to gender was answered by 1022 Slovak respondents of which 48% were men and 52% women and by 1028 Czech respondents of which 49% were men and 51% women. As the group was made up of 504 men and 518 women in Slovakia and 505 men and 523 women in the Czech Republic it is possible to consider representation of men and women to be adequate.

Data were gathered in the period of January to April 2013 in Slovakia and from October till November 2014 in the Czech Republic by means of personal interviews and an online questionnaire available on the Internet. The questionnaire was divided into three parts: it started by three introductory questions focusing on the spontaneous awareness of brands and associations with Slovak brands. Then a series of 27 Likert scales followed – they were designed to detect preferences of Slovak and Czech customers and their attitudes towards domestic and foreign brands by expressing their consent in the following range: I fully agree – I partially agree – I do not know – I partially disagree – I totally disagree – with various statements. The last part of the questionnaire focused on basic socio-demographic characteristics of respondents.

Primary data were processed in the R statistical software and Statgraphics program. Descriptive statistics were processed in the Statgraphics program, factor analysis, segmentation, correlation and comprehensive analysis of attitudes were performed in the R statistical software.

## 2. Gender affiliation and marketing

The existence of biological social differentiation on the basis of gender is a fundamental phenomenon that enables marketers to define target groups from the point of their consumer behavior and specific offers of products and services. Biological differences cause different mental preferences of looking at the world, there are differences in intellectual functions and in subconscious, automatic and instinctive reactions and thus cannot be denied. As stated in Vysekalová et al. (2011, p295), the issue of gender affiliation is tied to marketing. Several concepts have been proposed to explain gender affiliation in marketing. Sex roles serve as a sub-cultural category because every culture attributes different characteristics and roles to men and women (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004, p457). On the other hand, feminist critique emphasizes the danger of gender stereotyping. Darroch (2014) claims in his latest book “Why Marketing to Women Doesn’t Work” that gender identity neither explains nor indicates consumer behavior. However, men and women approach purchasing decisions very differently (Kraft & Weber, 2012, p248). The difference is created because men and women have different expectations, women look to satisfy their long term needs and wants while men are shorter sighted and look at satisfying their immediate or short-term needs and wants (Baker, 2012). Influence on gender identity has often been simplified to an ability to predict consumer behavior related to gender. Gender identity, however, can be seen in a wider context, for example in relation to brand loyalty, as presented by Ye and Robertson (2012, p81).

In general, it is necessary to monitor and respond to main changes in lifestyle and demographic structure of inhabitants (Juříková, 2014, p46-47). Several research studies (Mohan, 2014; Das, 2013; Avery, 2012; Kraft & Weber, 2012) have so far been dealing with examining attitudes towards brands in the context of demographic profile of customers, however, they have not demonstrated any significant dependence of the relationship. On the contrary, there are results of research projects and analytical introspection that point to the fact that gender affiliation influences attitudes towards brands. This dependence is confirmed by Rajput, Kesharwani and Khanna (2012), Stokburger-Saue and Teichmann (2013), or Mostafa (2006). Looking at research works of the above mentioned authors confirming or rejecting the discussed relationship, one has to take into consideration that they used different methodology and their results are culturally, geographically or product determined. However, they have created framework presenting diversity of research results. In the context of this study related to the relationship between gender dependency and building attitudes towards brands, no clear position is taken and thus a determined research question can be considered relevant.

Within market segmentation, gender segmentation still plays an important role. Gender affiliation is one of frequently used variables in market segmentation (Kardes, Cline & Cronley, 2011, p37) and at the same time it is often a distinguishing variable of

segmentation (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2004, p65). Nowadays, the role of gender affiliation is blurring, consumers of many product categories cannot be segmented on the basis of gender as more and more men and women are displayed in roles traditionally held by the opposite sex.

### 3. Research and results

The research study focused on the assumption of an existing relationship between gender and attitudes of Czech and Slovak customers towards brands and it is based on the results of primary research conducted at the Department of Marketing, Faculty of Management, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia and at the Department of Marketing Communications at the Faculty of Multimedia Communications, Tomas Bata University in Zlín, Czech Republic. Comprehensive results of the Slovak primary research were presented in the monograph *The Brand and the Slovak Customer* (Smolková et al., 2013), partial results were published by Olšavský (2013), Vilčeková (2013), Vilčeková and Sabo (2013), Smolková (2014), Štarchoň and Weberová (2014, 2015) and more other papers and articles. Concerning the Czech primary research the results are under the processing and will be presented in monograph ready to be published by the end of 2015.

For the purposes of the research study and in the context of this article Pearson's chi-squared test of independence is used to test the null hypothesis. The null hypothesis attempts to show that there is no relationship between the explaining and explained variable. The relationship of gender affiliation and attitudes of respondents towards selected statements was confirmed, respectively rejected, so the null hypothesis was either rejected or not rejected.

**TAB. 1: Domestic products are of high quality**

	N	$\chi^2$	DF	$\alpha$
Czech Republic	1028	24,275	4	7,035e-05
Slovakia	1012	5,269	4	0,261

Source: (own)

Analyzing the statement „Slovak products are of high quality“ (Table 1) based on the analysis it was found out that the null hypothesis in relation to gender affiliation of respondents and the statement shall not be refused. So there is no correlation between gender affiliation and the statement that Slovak products are of high quality. In contrary to this, based on the results concerning Czech research, there is a correlation between gender affiliation and the statement “Czech products are of high quality” (Table 1). There is the difference in the preferences of Slovak and Czech consumers.

**TAB. 2: I prefer domestic brands**

	N	$\chi^2$	DF	$\alpha$
Czech Republic	1028	22,3949	4	0,0001672
Slovakia	1001	2,724	4	0,605

Source: (own)

Analyzing the statement “I prefer Slovak brands” (Table 2) it was found out that the null hypothesis in relation to gender affiliation of respondents and the statement shall not be refused. So there is no correlation between gender affiliation and the statement that respondents prefer Slovak brands. Otherwise, a different situation is noticed in the answers of the Czech consumers, where the correlation between gender affiliation and the statement “I prefer Czech brands” (Table 2) is visible and there is a difference in the preferences of Slovak and Czech consumers, too.

**TAB. 3: I am willing to pay more for domestic brands**

	N	$\chi^2$	DF	$\alpha$
Czech Republic	1028	0,9814	4	0,9126
Slovakia	996	4,867	4	0,301

Source: (own)

The next statement was „I am willing to pay more for the Slovak brand“, resp. for the Czech brand (Table 3). Results based on the analysis show that also in this case the null hypothesis in relation to gender affiliation of both Slovak and Czech respondents and the statement shall not be refused. There is no correlation between gender affiliation and the statement that respondents are willing to pay more for the Slovak, resp. the Czech brand and there is no difference in Slovak and Czech consumers' preferences.

**TAB. 4: Foreign brands are of higher quality**

	N	$\chi^2$	DF	$\alpha$
Czech Republic	1028	4,7853	4	0,31
Slovakia	1009	5,931	4	0,204

Source: (own)

Results based on the analysis show that also in this case the null hypothesis in relation to gender affiliation of respondents and the statement shall not be refused. Again, concerning Slovak and Czech consumers there is no correlation between gender affiliation and the statement that foreign brands are of higher quality (Table 4).

**TAB. 5: I do not know whether I like domestic or foreign brands**

	N	$\chi^2$	DF	$\alpha$
Czech Republic	1028	1,1517	4	0,886
Slovakia	1007	3,471	4	0,782

Source: (own)

Analyzing the statement "I do not know whether I like domestic (note: Slovak, resp. Czech brand) or foreign brands" (Table 5) based on the analysis it was found out that also in this case the null hypothesis in relation to gender affiliation of respondents involved to the primary research and the statement shall not be refused. No correlation between gender affiliation and the statement was confirmed.

The last three statements focused on selected product categories and it was assumed that certain gender differences would occur within purchasing behavior. As can be seen in Table 6 and Table 7, no correlation was confirmed in any of the three statements.

**TAB. 6: Selected product categories – Slovakia**

	Average value of men's response	Average value of women's response
Choosing consumer goods I prefer foreign brands	0.23	0.25
I buy food made mainly in Slovakia	0.49	0.52
Choosing shoes and textile I prefer foreign brands	0.56	0.52

Source: (own)

Based on the average value of respondents' answers in the Slovak Republic (Table 6) it can be concluded that there is, according to gender, no significant difference in preference perception of specific product categories.

**TAB. 7: Selected product categories – Czech Republic**

	N	$\chi^2$	DF	$\alpha$
Choosing consumer goods I prefer foreign brands	1028	2,2697	4	0,6863
I buy food made mainly in the Czech Republic	1028	5,0142	4	0,2858
Choosing shoes and textile I prefer foreign brands	1028	1,669	4	0,7963

Source: (own)

Exact values  $\alpha$  could be calculated from the findings measuring the attitudes of respondents in the Czech Republic, these present the value of the chi-square test (Table 7). They say that the explaining variable of gender has no correlation to the explained variable which was the statement on the attitude towards the selected product category.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the results of the research study it can be stated that in the context of the research question – Does one of the main demographic characteristics – gender – influence the attitudes of Slovak customers – consumers towards brands and the country of origin or towards selected product categories? – this relationship was not confirmed. It can be concluded that gender affiliation has no influence on the attitudes Slovak customers have towards brands, the country of origin or product. This means that gender does not present any significant factor in shaping a customer's attitude towards brands. In contrary to this statement the results from the research conducted in the Czech Republic, it is obvious, that at least in attitudes of Czech consumers toward the high quality of Czech products and their preference of Czech brands there is dependency on gender. These findings can prove valuable in planning and implementing functional marketing strategies in both Czech and Slovak economies and in managerial decision-making processes dealing with the building and managing of specific brands. But it has to be noticed that additional researches would be needed to investigate future changes in correlation of gender affiliation and consumer preferences towards brands.

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