

EULALIA SKAWIŃSKA

Anetta Barska:
KONSUMENCI POKOLENIA MILENIUM
NA RYNKU INNOWACYJNYCH PRODUKTÓW
ŻYWNOŚCIOWYCH NA OBSZARACH PRZYGRANICZNYCH
POLSKI, NIEMIEC, CZECH I SŁOWACJI
(MILLENNIAL CONSUMERS IN THE MARKET OF INNOVATIVE
FOOD PRODUCTS IN THE BORDER AREAS OF POLAND,
GERMANY, THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND SLOVAKIA)

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In search of the new factors for increasing management rationality, more and more attention is paid to the consumer behaviours in the market in the world literature. In this context, we present a monograph by Anetta Barska entitled *Konsumenci pokolenia milennium na rynku innowacyjnych produktów żywnościowych na obszarach przygranicznych Polski, Niemiec, Czech i Słowacji (Millennial Consumers in the Market of Innovative Food Products in the Border Areas of Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic and Slovakia)* published by Oficyna Wydawnicza Uniwersytetu Zielonogórskiego in 2019. The studies on this paper form a basis for acknowledging its high value in recognising the existing reality of the subject of studies and encourage the readers to a positive and multi-faceted reflection. The reason for presenting this paper in the leading scientific journal *Zagadnienia Ekonomiki Rolnej / Problems of Agricultural Economics* is a need to disseminate the interesting results obtained by the author during her pioneering empirical studies of an international nature. The reviewer would also like to point to the high quality of the publication in substantive and editorial terms.

First of all, the research problem undertaken by A. Barska is original, important, up-to-date and it will remain valid in the future in the micro-, meso- and macrosphere. In fact, the author addressed the challenges related to assessing the existing consumer behaviours in the globalised market in relation to the innovativeness of products, in the context of the principles of the economics of moderation. Secondly, the presented paper constitutes an excellent model of a habilitation thesis in the field of economics as well as a great example of statutory and multiannual own studies conducted by the author with high perseverance and involvement at the Faculty of Economics and Management of the University of Zielona Góra, without external financing, only with support from the IAFE-NRI in Warsaw. The empirical studies presented in the paper included the border areas of four countries, in four languages. The author's effort and organisation level must have been very extensive. Thirdly, the monograph is characterised by the perfect use of quantitative and qualitative methods in compiling primary data, as well as a critical analysis of the world literature. Discussing the problem and meeting the objective in this paper fills in several research gaps in the world literature, which have been aptly identified by the author. The gaps refer to the following aspects: 1) studies on the consumer behaviours, the segment of the millennial generation, also known as Generation Y, 2) in the border regions of the post-socialist countries and 3) the behaviours of the Generation Y consumers towards innovative food products in the market.

The paper consists of four substantive chapters, the introduction, conclusions as well as the annex which includes an extensive, logically structured, three-part survey questionnaire, designed according to the author's concept. Attention should be paid to the very introduction to the paper, where the author formulated the question as a research problem in the following manner: what are the differences and similarities in the purchasing behaviours in the market of food products of Generation Y representatives living in the border areas of Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic and Slovakia? Posing the question as a research problem results not only from the author's in-depth insight into the literature of the analysed subject, but also from multiannual analyses of economic phenomena, discussions on results during scientific conferences under the international and inter-academic cooperation as well as from practical experiences involving participation in projects concerning the Lubuskie region. In solving this problem, it was useful to put forward a major hypothesis stating that "the behaviours of the Generation Y consumers, living in the border areas of Poland, Germany, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, is heterogeneous" as well as six auxiliary hypotheses. Subsequently, the main objective of the studies was determined, and namely "the identification and exploration of the behaviours of millennial consumers in markets of innovative food products in the border areas and the identification of the types of consumers". This objective was supported by other cognitive objectives and the methodological objective. Further on, the application objective was established, i.e. "the indication of marketing instruments for shaping the pro-innovative consumer behaviours adequate to their type". The basic role in meeting the objectives and verifying the hypotheses was played by the qualitative analysis, although the author did not avoid analyses using quantitative methods and mathematical modelling. The methodology is a strong point of this monograph. The time range of the empirical studies, determined in the introduction to the paper, had two stages and covered the years 2013-2016. The pattern of research conduct and lo-

gical matrix of the monograph were also included here. On their basis, from the very beginning of the book, the reader may follow the author's course of conduct in the context of expected results which gives a sense of transparent intentions of the author and proves that the sources used and chapters in which she demonstrates the objectives and auxiliary hypotheses as well as the methods applied are reliable.

According to the rules of academic writing, the structure of the paper followed a logical sequence of contents, from the general contents (theory) to the detailed contents (empirical results), and the paper was divided into two parts: theoretical (chapters 1 and 2) and empirical (chapters 3 and 4). The first chapter entitled *Theories and models of the market consumer behaviour* contains a synthetic presentation (tables and figures) of various definitions and economic theories as well as models of the consumer behaviours in the market, including the behaviours of the Generation Y consumers. Much attention was devoted here to the determinants of the consumer decision-making process in the market in general terms, with particular focus on marketing conditions but primarily in the food market. In this part of the paper, the first additional objective specified by the author, i.e. "the identification of major economic theories, whose object of interest is the consumer behaviours in the market and its conditions" was met.

The subsequent chapter, entitled *Studies on innovation in the context of the consumer behaviours in the market*, includes the results of a critical analysis of literature concerning the conceptualisation of innovation categories, innovation in the market of food products, as well as innovation diffusion and adoption models. The author fulfilled here two additional cognitive objectives laid down in the introduction:

- 1) the exploration of leading theories explaining the essence of innovation in the context of the consumer behaviours in the market, the process of its diffusion and adoption,
- 2) the presentation and assessment of existing results of studies on the consumer behaviours towards food products and their innovation.

An interesting part of this paper is the presentation of basic approaches to the conceptualisation of consumer innovativeness and the types of buyers in the literature, as well as factors affecting the attitudes of consumers in the market of innovative food products. In the context of her considerations, the author noticed that it was impossible to carry out a comparative analysis on this subject due to the fact that different countries use different research tools and measurement scales for the consumer behaviours. Therefore, she applied a single model of the survey questionnaire in four languages. At the end of the chapter, the author demonstrated the factors shaping the behaviours of the 21st century consumers and their characteristics, trends in the consumer behaviours and innovativeness in the market of food products.

Chapter three, entitled *Conditions of the behaviour of Generation Y consumers in the food market in the light of own studies*, is of methodological and research nature and is a great asset to the discussed monograph. In the two first subchapters, the author demonstrates a detailed description of the primary research methodology. First of all, the author verified the methodological objective, i.e. "the development of an original concept of studies and necessary research tools". Thus, she discussed the methodological assumptions of studies (the methods of analysis and the description of respondents, the scope of the paper, sample selection method, the preparation and conduction of focus studies in the individual countries, survey questionnaire and method of its verification).

Secondly, she presented the methods to analyse primary data (the analysis of correspondence, the method of a hierarchical classification of objects, factor analysis) and the description of respondents. The second part of this chapter (subchapters 3.2-3.5.) is a result of empirical studies conducted among 1129 respondents in the border areas of four countries. The chapter discusses the economic conditions for consumption in the analysed areas, the methods and places of purchasing food products and conditions for their choice by consumers, as well as the selection criteria of food products. In this way, the fourth additional cognitive objective was accomplished. The chapter is summarised by the profiles of the purchasing behaviours of consumers from the perspective of their country of origin, i.e. the assessment of the importance of individual selection criteria for food products and places of purchase in terms of nationality. In the first case, among the 22 criteria, the largest diversification applies to the level of food processing and health values, and the smallest – to the price. In the latter case, among the 10 criteria, the smallest diversification applies to the atmosphere of the place of sale, and the largest – to the confidence in the seller and conditions for returning a product. The conducted studies allowed for a positive verification of the first auxiliary hypothesis stating that “the country of origin of the analysed millennial consumers significantly determines their purchasing behaviours in the market of food products”.

The last part of the paper, chapter four entitled *Millennial consumers in relation to innovation in the market of food products in the light of own studies*, presents labour-intensive primary studies carried out by A. Barska. These empirical studies allowed for achieving four cognitive objectives:

- the identification of perspectives on the importance of a food product innovation and the sources of knowledge about the innovation;
- the definition of selection criteria for innovative food products and values that they provide;
- the diagnosis of endogenous and exogenous conditions for adoption and diffusion of an innovative food product by millennial consumers;
- the determination of the role of marketing instruments for influencing the Generation Y consumers in the process of purchasing an innovative food product.

To meet the above objectives, the author carried out a critical analysis of the data collected from the respondents by processing them by means of the appropriate statistical methods. It allowed for verifying the authenticity of the five auxiliary hypotheses defined in the introduction and confirming them. They are as follows:

- H2) Innovation in the market of food products is a subjective category for Generation Y consumers.
- H3) Informal sources of information on an innovative food product are the most important sources for Generation Y consumers.
- H4) The country of origin of the analysed Generation Y consumers differentiates their level of neophobia.
- H5) There is a relationship between qualifying the Generation Y consumers for a specific category adopting an innovative food product and their country of origin.
- H6) There is a positive correlation between the total value of innovative food products offered to Generation Y consumers and the level of their acceptance.

It is worth stressing the most important conclusions from the primary studies carried out by A. Barska with regard to:

- the perception of innovation by Generation Y consumers,
- the sources of information on innovative food products,
- the adoption of innovation in the market of food products from the perspective of Generation Y consumers,
- innovative food products as a value for Generation Y consumers,
- the types of behaviours of Generation Y consumers in relation to innovation in the market of food products,
- conditions for the pro-innovative behaviours of millennial consumers – practical implications.

The author made an interesting observation on the obtained results, indicating that the place of residence of the respondents does not statistically differentiate the perceptions of innovation. As an innovative food product, Generation Y consumers consider a product having additional values and a new taste as well as social attributes (organic packaging, without ingredients harmful to human health and with nutritional additives, environment-friendly). In turn, informal sources (Fig. 4.16) turned out to be the most important source of information on innovative food products. Out of the six proposals of those sources, the greatest differences apply to the internet and family, while the smallest – to foreign travels. On the other hand, the discrepancy in assessments on the importance of expert opinions (5 sources) is large among the countries, but the largest one concerns doctors and nutritionists, as well as certificates and medals of quality (Fig. 4.17). In the consumer assessment of the importance of advertising (Fig. 4.18), moderate differences among the countries are observed. It should be noted that the Czechs appreciate it the least, while the Poles – the most. In general, in the assessment of the importance of these sources of information, the author observed that the declarations by the German and Czech respondents are similar, while those of the Polish and Slovak respondents are different.

Given the respondents' attitudes towards innovation in the food market, it was concluded that they are positive yet significantly differentiated by nationalities. Moreover, the individual profiles of those adopting innovative food products within national groups also differed in terms of certain socio-demographic variables. As regards the values of innovative food products, the least differentiated were the respondents' expectations in relation to economic values. Applying the exploratory factor analysis on this subject resulted in developing a model of values of an innovative food product (Fig. 4.41). Deepening the study on the consumer behaviours, the author presented the empirical typology based on the value of consumption of innovative food. She also described four types of customers based on their attitudes towards an innovative food product.

Among the pro-innovative conditions of the behaviour of millennial consumers, the most differing variable was the country of origin of the respondents. The factor behind the differentiation turned out to be culture (tradition, customs, religion, norms and values) and consumer patterns. These differences refer to the method and place of purchase, product choice, attitude to and the perception of innovation.

Achieving the study objectives and confirming the auxiliary hypotheses allowed for accepting the main hypothesis presented at the beginning of the review. Given this,

the author assumed that in the future the markets would be heterogeneous in terms of consumer preferences. The major achievement of A. Barska is a discussion of results and the formulation of prospective conclusions on the pro-innovative behaviours of consumers in the border areas and for supply-side entities (producers, distributors). Moreover, the author pointed to the marketing instruments for shaping the consumer behaviours adequate to their types (achieving the application objective). In the presentation of the results, the visualisation method (charts, profiles, dendrograms) was used in a very good manner.

The studies conducted by A. Barska are characterised by innovation and consistency, and the results obtained are an original contribution to existing knowledge. They are part of the expected sustainable development of the European countries. As identified by the author, the diversified behaviours and attitudes of Generation Y consumers in the market of innovative food products in the analysed border regions may be useful in shaping the choice of products. This can often force changes in the behaviours of other participants in the management process, intermediaries in the food chain. They should take care of the maximum quality and safety of products, and consumers of all generations should change their habits and choose innovative, local products, avoiding food waste. On the other hand, we should expect that public and non-governmental organisations will promote such changes through formal (legal, financial) institutions. In fact, it is the deeply-rooted values and diversification in their systems, which underpin consumer preferences and behaviours in terms of meeting them, that impede the process of changes.

To sum up, it should be stressed that the monograph has great cognitive values and provides important knowledge about the behaviours of Generation Y consumers and its determinants. The paper is also of practical importance for food producers, as it allows them to adapt the offer to the preferences of the younger generation and to influence their health-oriented behaviours. The monograph can be useful in forecasting the demand and building effective marketing strategies. Therefore, I recommend this paper to the R&D and marketing staff of large food producers, managers of large distribution networks, exporters and academic researchers, especially those preparing monographs in the promotional process.

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