

Sharing as an Aspect of Customer Behaviour of Digital Natives in Poland

KATARZYNA ŁAZORKO, PH.D.
ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

Email: katarzyna_lazorko@wp.pl

SUMMARY

The aim of the paper is to explore different dimensions of sharing as an element of customer behaviour of Digital Natives in Poland. In the paper the results of qualitative and quantitative survey conducted among students of the Czestochowa University of Technology (CUT). In the paper the idea of sharing is interpreted in its online as well as traditional off-line dimensions. Basing on her own research as well as other sources, the intention of the author was to explore how Digital Natives perceive the idea of sharing ideas, items, etc.

Keywords: sharing economy; Digital Natives; social media.

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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays the economic environment of businesses is a result of many changes that have taken place in societies. One of the key elements that influences the shape of modern society is technology. There is an ever growing group of customers who were born in a totally digitalised environment, the so-called "Digital Natives", and their purchasing behaviour differs from previous generations. In Poland as Digital Natives we can indicate students, as the first commercial providers of internet services appeared in the mid-1990s in Poland.

Another element that is also influencing consumerism nowadays is sustainability. Due to the growing accessibility of the internet customers have become more aware of different facts concerning the production of brands they use. This element is increasingly popular in Poland; although national research results reveal that we are still a price-orientated nation, quality also strongly determines our purchases as well as knowledge of brands as the third factor (CBOS, 2011).

The aspect of sustainable consumption that will be discussed further is related to sharing things that may be useful for others and are not used at the moment. The growing popularity of a sharing economy, based on exchanging things, the author interprets as a tendency also to exchange and share information, and that aspect of Digital Native behaviour is to be discussed in further parts of the paper.

POLISH DIGITAL NATIVES AS CUSTOMERS— LITERATURE REVIEW

'Digital Natives' was first described by Prensky in 2001 as 'the first generation of students to grow up in a technology enhanced environment. Their precious technological maturity is the product of thousands of using computers, videogames, digital music players, video camcorders, cellular mobile telephones, interactive television, personal digital assistants, the internet, and other tools of the digital age. They are savvy in the use of email, instant messaging, internet, and text messaging. They are different than any other generation because technology is an integral part of their lives. They live, breathe, work, and play with the tools and products of the digital age and they employ these tools quite uniquely' (Cabanero-Johnson & Berge 2009, p.291). The new generation is not aware of distinction between online and off line worlds. They are also described as living in 7x24 model: connection, community, communication, creation, content, control and customisation. They do not want to lose connection and want to communicate. They create and function in communities and shape reality by sharing, selecting and controlling contents that help them to create desirable images of themselves (Karolczak 2015). Generally as "Digital Natives" we indicate representatives of Generation Y, born between 1982 and 1995. 'These individuals, in general, are more technological literate than individuals from previous

generations (...). They are most interactive, informed, and independent generation. (...) best reached by word-of-mouth messages, which spread quickly through the technology they frequent' (Autry&Berge 2011, p.463).

As customers Digital Natives also have some specific expectations towards brands. First of all they want to be treated as partners, co-create offers and influence ways that providers act in the markets. They also want to be provided with internet platforms where they can meet and spend time together. They are expecting uniqueness, they hope to be surprised and want to experience things. They are not very loyal, though (Dawiec, 2015).

This characteristic of Digital Natives behaviour is interesting for marketers. They are demanding customers, educated and smart. They search for information and expect organisations to "look after" them, listen to them and their opinions, and respond quickly to their enquiries.

It should be alluded that there are some interesting studies on Digital Natives and their behaviour apart from dimensions interesting for marketers (Selwyn, 2009 for example) and these should not be ignored when more detailed analyses of that group are conducted.

SHARING AS A NEW TENDENCY IN CUSTOMER BEHAVIOUR

The sharing economy is one of the concepts that discussion has centred on recently. It is a result of societal, technological and economical changes that have also influenced customer patterns of behaviour change. One of the aspects appearing in discussions about the issue of sharing is a wider concept – *collaborative economy* – that can be defined as 'an economic model where ownership and access are shared between corporations, startups, and people. This results in market efficiencies that bear new products, services, and business growth' (Owyang 2013). The collaborative economy concept is based on a *many-to-many* approach and it may be easily spread among different groups of customers because of the intensity of new interactive media development (Łazorko 2014). People communicate and want to consume together, share and collaborate in consumption. 'The beauty of the sharing economy is that it is free, so anyone can participate and make a difference. No one has to sacrifice their individuality or comfort. Best of all, when we're actively engaged in sharing, personal connections are rekindled and we become invested in our communities again' (Buczynski, 2013, p.10).

This paper and the results of the survey consider some aspects of the sharing economy as an element of wider concept mentioned above – the collaborative economy. The study was focused on the following aspects of sharing: sharing things that there are not used at the moment, crowdfunding, consuming together, and sharing experiences.

As indicated in research conducted in the USA on the topic of sharing economy, the largest group involved in the sharing economy are consumers between 18-24 years old, so the university students would be one of the most appropriate population on which to perform research on the topic (PwC, 2015).

SHARING STUDENTS – RESEARCH RESULTS

Methodology

The research considering the idea of sharing was conducted among students of Czestochowa University of Technology in Poland in May 2015. The main objective of the research was to learn more about their behaviour in the aspect of sharing in its different dimensions. The research consisted of quantitative and qualitative parts.

Quantitative data was collected by the method of a survey based on a paper questionnaire from a group of 100 students taking master, full time courses at the Faculty of Management within CUT, with simple random sampling. The questionnaire included 17 questions of different types: dichotomous, multiple choice, with scales, structured and unstructured, and it was tested before preparation of its final version. The questionnaire was divided into three parts. First of all some questions were asked considering sharing. The second part of the questionnaire considered social media and information that is exchanged between students via social media. The third part considered exchange of experience.

The quantitative results were expanded on qualitatively in the form of in-depth interviews with 4 students, mainly on the topic of contents they publish in social media and sharing as a kind of behaviour they and their peers perform.

The questionnaire complementation was introduced by a short discussion on the study purpose and sharing as a new tendency in the market.

Things that students exchange

In the first part of the questionnaire the students were asked some questions considering sharing in their everyday lives. They were asked whether they exchange things that they do not use at the moment and about internet platforms where they can exchange things or consume together.

When asked whether they exchange things that they do not use at the moment, nearly 88% declared that they do. That result indicates their tendency not to gather things and possess them (so typical for older generations) but to exchange them if they are not needed. In the following question they were asked what is exchanged by them the most frequently. They indicated clothes and books, more rarely they listed games, cosmetics, domestic appliances and school notes as other things they exchange (Fig.1).

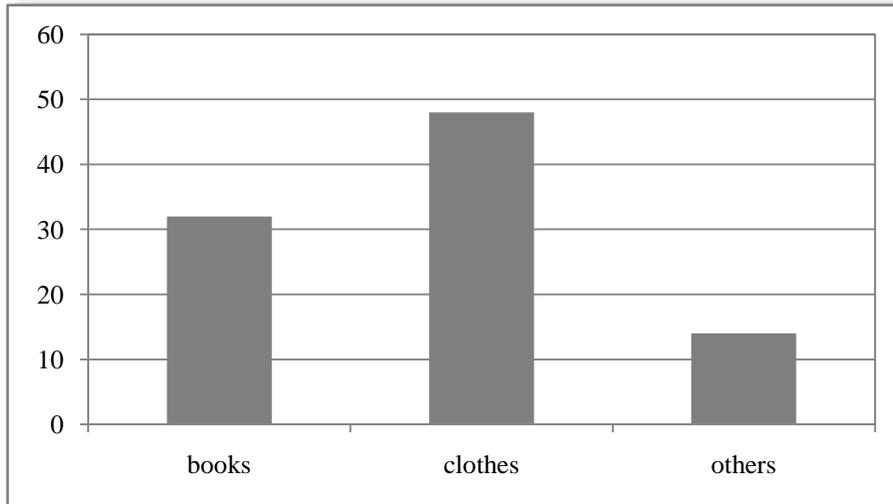


Figure 1. The things exchanged by the CUT students

Another question concerns the usage of internet platforms to exchange things. Most of students do not use them to exchange things, only 14% use platforms such as olx.pl or gumtree.pl to exchange things. One person indicated that Facebook is used for that purpose.

Students were also asked whether they know the couch-sharing movement. None of them knew the movement – during interviews some indicated that they recognised the idea but they had never used it and couldn't recall the name of the movement.

Another question asked whether students recognise any form of joint consumption. The most frequently recalled was the blablacar.pl platform (a car sharing

platform that was strongly advertised on the internet) and more than 1/5 of them had used it.

Students in social media

The second part of the questionnaire included questions considering usage of social media. As we had assumed, social media sites are popular among students – 94% use them. The rest do not because they do not want to share their private issues with others (this was the most typical answer to the question why do they not use social media). The group of students who are present in social media were asked what kind of information they publish, and their declarations are presented in Figure 2.

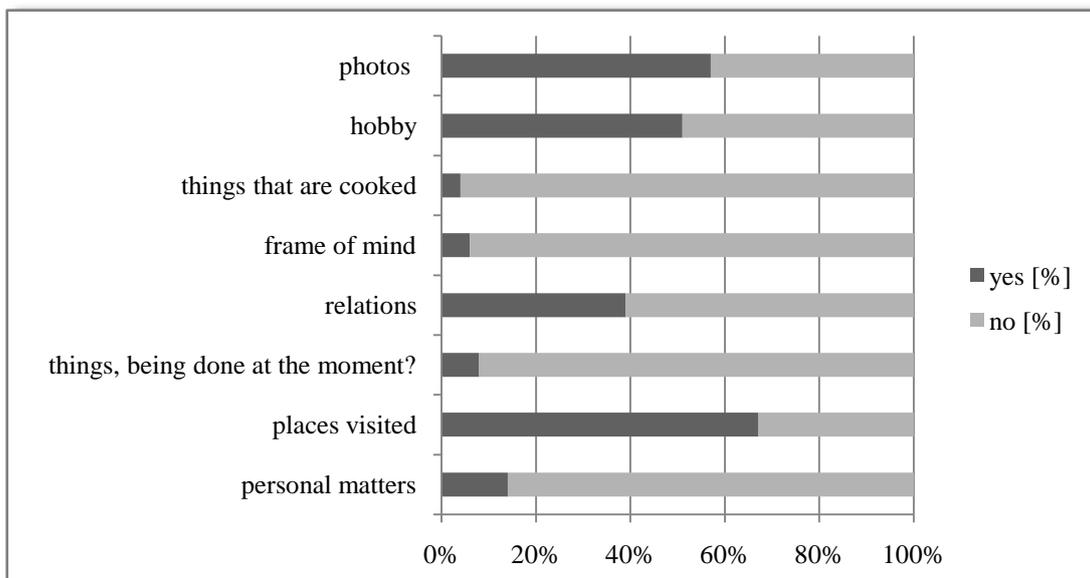


Figure 2. The information shared by CUT students in social media

In that part of the questionnaire students were also asked whether they use social media to boast and 1/5 of respondents declared that they do.

According to survey results, students are not so keen to spread films and photos published by their friends. A little more than 35% do that. It may be

assumed that students are quite passive in spreading information in social media. The interviews enabled to look into that issue more deeply. Students want to control contents and be aware of what is going on among their peers but at the same time they are not very active and keen on publishing information about themselves. It is related to one of the elements of the 7C model presented above. The content presented in social media is one of the tools to create a desirable image of themselves. They also control the text they publish – they republish if they are asked to do so or they want to send a certain message.

To research why students use social media, they were also asked whether they are searching via social media for people with whom they can go to the cinema/theatre, travel, go for a date, or do something interesting. The results obtained from that question are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Searching for friends in social media –
CUT student responses

<i>Do you search in social media for people who you could...</i>	Yes [%]	No [%]
<i>...go to the cinema/theatre with?</i>	9	91
<i>...travel with?</i>	9	91
<i>...go for a date with?</i>	9	91
<i>...do something interesting with?</i>	26	74

The results indicate that students are quite ‘traditional’ when searching for people to perform different activities with is discussed. They usually communicate by text messages or in other ways when organising some kind of activity. They usually search for collaborators among peers.

Of the researched group, 20% participate in crowdfunding, although the idea of crowdfunding is not very well known in Poland– the largest Polish crowdfunding platform managed to gain 3.6 bln zloty in 2 years to introduce 1 thousand projects (Milewski, 2014), so that form of financing and sharing is not very popular in Poland so far. In that aspect the result is quite high.

Experience sharing among cut students

The last part of questionnaire was aimed at issues concerning activities performed on the internet based on experience sharing. The researched group of students was asked whether they had ever created any event that was aimed at common experiencing. One-third indicated that

they had. When asked whether they participated in any actions aimed at sharing experiences where participants were searched for on the internet, 26% confirmed that they had. Only in one case was the event inspired by for-profit organisations; the rest were by non-profits or individuals. This indicates a large potential for marketers in Poland. The group of students is not effectively used for that type of marketing actions, especially given that they are quite eager to experience new things – when they were asked whether they get involved in experience sharing events (introduced either off- or on-line) half of them declared an interest in that type of initiatives.

To sum up the study, a question concerning motives that would enhance students’ involvement in organised actions aimed at sharing (of photos, films, etc.) was prepared. Students were asked to indicate the strongest motives that would induce them to participate in sharing experience initiative among the following: prizes, peers’ involvement, popularity of the action, novelty of experience, and others. They rated the motives using a scale from 1 to 5 where “1” was used to indicate the most important factor. The indications were very diversified; the students indicated (in order): involvement of friends (1.4), prizes (1.8), novelty of the experience they would participate in (2.05) and involvement of many people (2.16). Also 22 people indicated the answer “other” (1.83), explaining that the goal of the event is very important – they eagerly participate in charity actions that are performed that way. Apparently, as research results reveal, students connect the sharing experience initiatives with actions performed by non-profit organisations and if the goal of the action is laudable, they are more eager to get involved.

MAIN FINDINGS

The research revealed that sharing, in its different dimensions, is one of the elements of consumer behaviour of Digital Natives. Nowadays technologies enable sharing in the way that was never available before. Students of CUT who participated in the research are typical representatives of Digital Natives who are going to create the world of future consumption. It may be observed that they are averagely active in social media but the same tendency is typical for the whole population of customers of their age. When discussion about brands is considered, Polish young customers are also not extremely active – 64% of them discuss brands with their peers, 55% out of them share information through web pages and 42% in social media (Figure 3).

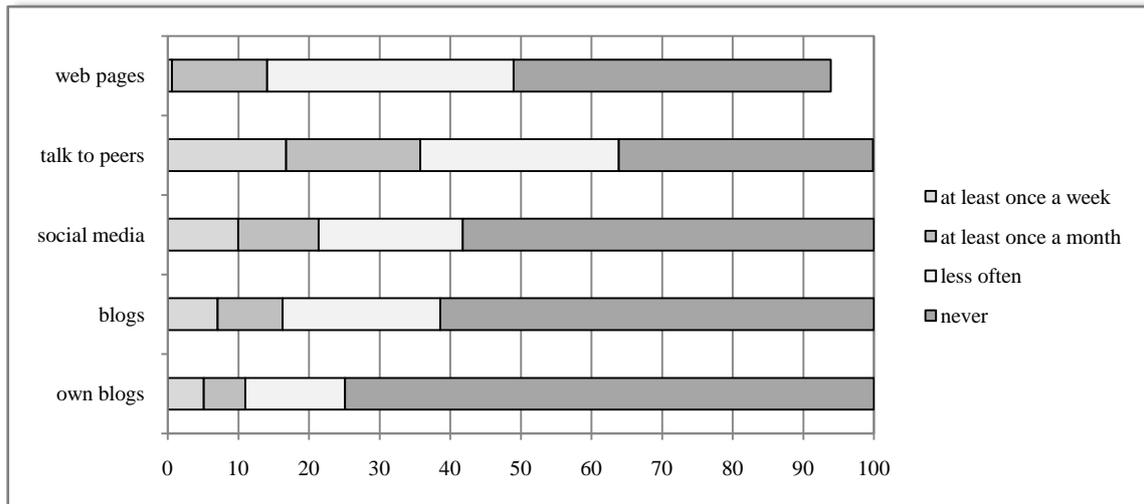


Figure 3. Places and frequency of comments of Polish young consumers on brands
Source: (www1)

53% of the group of internet users bought a certain brand for the first time because of information they found on the internet, and the tendency is more intense in the case of males (www1). For young internet users the opinion of other users in internet forums and published by their peers are the most opinion forming. They search for useful and unique contents – these types of information are the most willingly shared (www3) and, as mentioned, they select and control information they share.

Quite interesting is a connection between different experience sharing initiatives with non-profit organisations revealed in the research among the CUT students. It may be observed that in recent years the most active Polish charity organisations are trying to reach younger audiences with new ideas and initiatives, and as the study results reveal, their efforts are visible. At the same time businesses neglect that group because they tend not to be loyal and require permanent attention.

DISCUSSION

The aspect of sharing was chosen for the topic of research because it has some direct implementations for marketing. First of all, the sharing economy and its growing popularity in the USA and Western Europe indicate that this approach will probably also become

increasingly popular in the Polish market. The growing popularity of crowd funding, and different sharing initiatives indicate that we, Polish marketers, will soon have to consider that aspect in marketing strategies. For now, only some little efforts made by business to use that potential (Łazorko 2014), but sharing must be included in marketing strategies of businesses more widely and statistical information about its influence on customer behaviour should not be ignored, especially since it may be observed that the generation exchange has been taking place in traditional social media. Not only very young people use it but the group at the age 24-35 living in larger cities is becoming increasingly significant. They also base their purchases on peers' recommendations. They resign from many accounts in many services – only 8% use 5 platforms (while this figure was 18% in 2013) (www2), which makes them more “sophisticated” users of social media, as they use it as a tool to obtain own goals in a more and more efficient way.

Marketers must change their ways of perception of brands, which should not be perceived as their property any more. The customers who are competent, creative and involved in relations with organisations are open to help co-create brands and share their knowledge with business. That group of co-owners of brands is going to be recruited from Digital Natives, which is why it is important to understand their behaviour and values.

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