



Student's Scientific Conference
Environmentally responsible consumer behavior

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Introduction

Actual trend of modern society is still more and more oriented on utility maximizing. The trend to purchase more and to consume more goes alongside with health problems and still greater damage of the environment that is finally harmful for all of us. Often discussions in mass media together with appeal from many governments, national and international associations such as EU or OSN, non-governmental organization are therefore promoting healthy lifestyle and responsibility to the environment. This social change is nowadays considered to be increasingly preferable among the consumers and their product choice.

Therefore, the main aim of this research is to compare environmentally responsible purchase behavior among Slovak and Czech consumers.

The first part of the research is theoretical one. It deals with definitions and models of consumer behavior as well as environmentally responsible one. It mentions subjects involved in decision-making process, states differences between these subjects and provides characteristics of green products. It also includes factors leading to environmentally friendly consumer behavior as well as possible obstacles of being environmentally responsible. The theory is useful to better understand the practice and to investigate whether it is in compliance, or not.

The second, analytical part concentrates in details on the research itself, the interpretations of its outputs and the results obtained by conducted questioning among 148 respondents from Slovakia and Czech Republic as our available sample. It compares the results obtained in both surveyed countries. It verifies stated hypotheses and finally specifies contribution of our work to different subjects for who our research can be useful.

We dealt with the topic environmental responsible consumer behavior, because even if there are many authors dealing with consumer behavior, not many of them deliberate environmental point of view as an important factor influencing consumer behavior in modern society.

1. Theoretical background of environmentally responsible consumer behaviour

The main goal of this chapter is to provide a basic theoretical background of defining environmentally responsible consumer behavior, theories, models and motives of consumer behavior, as well as factors influencing consumer friendliness to the environment.

1.1. Defining of consumer behavior of buyer

There are many authors dealing with consumer behavior such as Antonides (1998), Kotler in plenty of his books together with G. Armstrong (1990), Loudon (2001), Cravens and Piercy (2003), and many others. It is very useful for a company to analyze and know purchase behavior of a consumer in order to find a proper way to adjust, maintain or improve marketing strategy according to the customer's satisfaction and requirements. As it is said by Horáková (1992, pg. 101) "to understand consumer's way of thinking and decision-making is an assumption to find an effective way of developing new product or improvement of existing one to prolong its maturity stage of life-cycle.

1.1.1. Participants involved in consumer behavior

To deal with consumer behavior it is firstly necessary to determine and identify who is the purchaser (buyer) and final consumer and find the differences between buyer, purchaser, user, consumer and customer. Following we can determine the participants involved in purchase behavior. These elements will be analyzed in this sub-chapter.

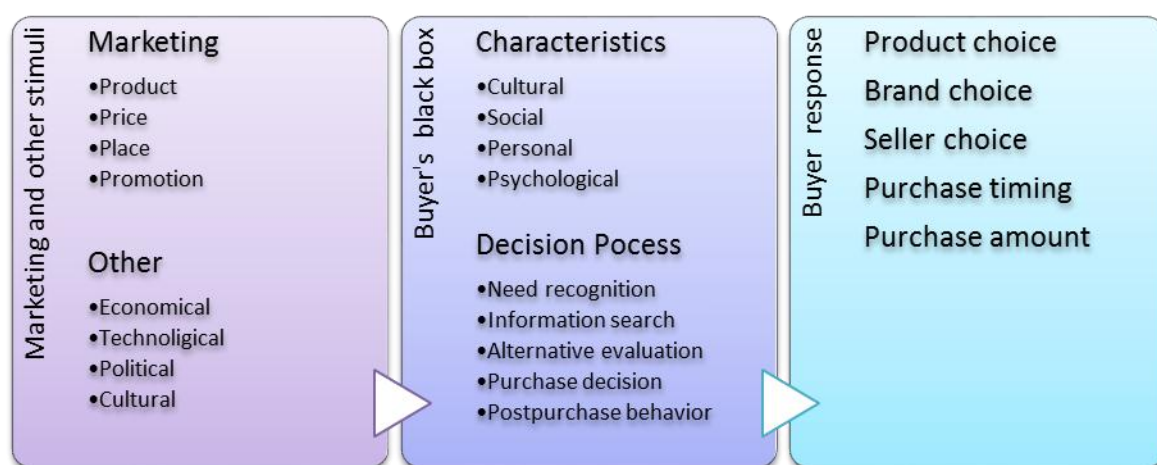
Following subjects involved in purchase decision making clearly shows the distinction between buyer and consumer:

- initiator is the person who first suggests or thinks of buying a particular product or service;
- influencer is understood as a person whose advice influences buying decision-making;
- decider is the person who ultimately makes the purchase decision, which includes whether to buy, what to buy, how to buy, and where to buy;
- buyer (purchaser) is the person who makes the concrete purchase;
- user is one who uses the product or service.

(source: "Consumer buying behavior." A Dictionary of Business and Management. 2006.)

1.1.2. Model of consumer buying behavior

When analyzing the models of consumer behavior, the key question that needs to be answered in order to make the company marketing policy efficient is “How do consumers respond to various marketing incentives the company might use?” “Only the company able to find the answer to this question can combine properly the product variant, price and other marketing tools to be ahead the competitors.” (Kotler, Amsterong, 1992. pg. 121).



Picture 1: Model of buyer behavior

Elaborated according to: P. Kotler, Marketing management, 1998, p. g. 161,

The chart above illustrates the model of consumer buying behavior according to the model of buyer response for marketing stimuli. In the first stage, there are external stimuli, marketing and other stimuli, influencing buyer purchase decision. P. Kotler, (1998, p.g. 161) says that “the most difficult for marketers is to identify how these stimuli affect buyer before the purchase is done.” Our research also investigates how big role play environmental aspect in chosen products in comparison to marketing stimuli such as product and its characteristics, price and place in sense of distribution channels and availability to the consumer.

1.1.3. Factors influencing consumer behavior

This sub-chapter is about investigation of major factors and influences whole process of consumer's purchase decision making.

Šindler (2003) divides these factors as: Cultural, Social, Economical and Psychological.

Cultural factor includes learned perceptions, attitudes and values given by the family relatives and society an individual grows in.

Nationality can be also crucial in environmental consumer behavior as there are statements on www.ekokom.org published by Eurostat (The Statistical Office of EU) about Czech Republic belonging to one of the best countries of EU in recycling of plastic waste in 2006. This determinant will be examined in the practical part of the research in contrary with Slovak consumers.

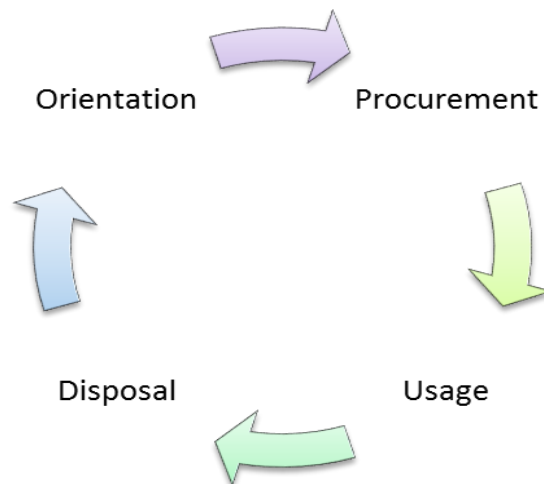
Social factor considers reference group an individual belongs to such as family, friends, colleagues at work, etc. In all these groups an individual may find a role-model that has a great influence his/her attitudes and life style, and finally product choice.

Šindler (2003) uses term “economical factors”, where is taken into account “disposable income of an individual and purchase power parity”, while Kotler and Armstrong (1992) use more general group “personal factors”, that consist of “Age and Life cycle, Profession, Life Style and Economical point of view is considered in this group as well. (<http://www.mass.gov>)

1.2. Model of environmentally responsible consumer behavior

Environmentally friendly “consumer has to trade-off the environmental benefits against the higher price” (Antonides – Raaij, 1998)

According to their book, we can implement the stages of environmentally responsible consumer behavior and his consumption cycle as follows:



Picture 3: Consumption cycle

Elaborated according to: Antodides, Raaij, 1998, own elaboration

1st stage Need (problem) recognition (orientation) – the consumer takes into account (when buying a products) product failure, moral and physical amortization, energy saving.

Decision making stage before purchase (procurement) – here the consumer takes environmental aspects of the available alternatives into account

Usage stage - including maintenance, repair, use frequency and purpose of use are of interest. E.g. For short distance consumer will use bike instead of a car.

Disposal stage – e. g. selling forward, giving away or environmental responsible consumer behavior

1.2.1. Identifying of environmentally preferable products

Environmental protection agency of United States (2010) identified environmentally preferable products that “contain fewer toxic materials, minimize waste, contain recycled materials, conserve energy and water and contain plant-based materials.”
(<http://www.epa.gov>)

Environmental considerations in purchase decision should become part of normal practice, in compliance with such factors as product safety, price, performance, and availability.
(<http://www.epa.gov>)

1.2.2. Motivations leading to environmentally responsible consumer behavior

Disclosure of motives influencing willingness to buy products environmentally responsibly is important especially for companies oriented on “green products” but also for those trying to launch new product on the market. To know how important for the customer is taking into account environmental aspect of a product may help companies to adjust their marketing strategy appropriately.

The substantial motivations of buying green products are: Perceived Consumer Effectiveness, Perceived Knowledge and Environmental Concern. “These are important factors in way of perceived consumer effectiveness dealing with strong beliefs individual has, therefore there is bigger chance to succeed in his/her efforts. Further influence is perceived knowledge, when people perceive themselves to be friendly to the environment are more likely to do so. The last point is environmental concern of the whole society.” (source:<http://www.mass.gov>)

1.2.3. Possible obstacles of being environmentally friendly

There are several obstacles leading to environmentally unfriendly purchase and post-purchase behavior of consumers. U.S. Environmental protection agency, (2010) stated main determinants of environmentally responsible purchase behavior such as:

Product life-cycle, Price and Information availability (<http://www.epa.gov>)

According to own experience, these can be understood as obstacle when the life-cycle of green products available on the market is shorter compared to the competing products. Higher price of green products, e. g. price of natural milk produced on the farms can not compete with lower price of homogenized milk with no or little nutrition value. Finally, as because the information distribution and availability is not perfect, not everyone knows about environmentally more friendly products and the place they could buy them.

2. Investigation of environmentally responsible consumer behavior

This practical part contains research methodology, process of data gathering and structure of the questionnaire. Finally, the last subchapter investigates whether the sample of respondents tends to be environmentally friendly in their consumer behavior, or not, especially in purchase and post-purchase phase. Also, the drivers for consumer behavior in both countries Slovakia and Czech Republic were examined.

2.1. Research methodology

The research methods used in the research is comparison and quantitative research through online questionnaire.

The subject of the research is environmentally friendly consumer behavior of the respondents, their attitudes towards the environment, products in which they behave environmentally responsible in their purchases as well as their after-purchase behavior in sense of friendliness towards the environment.

The object of the observation was available sample of respondents on which the research was made. The sample was presented by mainly young respondents from Slovakia and Czech Republic. Besides nationality, other characteristics such as gender, age and education was examined as possible determinants of environmentally responsible consumer behavior.

2.2. Data gathering process

The data were gathered based on questionnaire (see Enclosure 1 and 2) delivered to the respondents on 13th May 2010 via e-mails, as well as via online questionnaire placed on the internet, where the responders could answer the questions whenever they found a time. Good advantage of this way of questioning was that it saved us a lot of time that would be needed if we were used other ways, such as personal or phone questioning. The chosen ways of getting the information we evaluate as very effective, because the questionnaires were sent to about 100 respondents, who forward them further, therefore in 24 hours we received 148 responses. So, the rate of return of the responses was almost 150%, that was even higher than we expected.

2.3. The questionnaire structure

The original questionnaire can be seen in enclosure 1 and 2. The first part of the questionnaire was related to personal data about the respondents such as gender, age nationality and level of education.

Second part of the questionnaire was focused on investigation of environmentally responsible consumer behavior in purchase of three groups of products, namely food, electronics and cosmetics. The respondents were asked to choose main factors or determinants influencing product choice of above mentioned groups of products. The options were such as Price, Different product characteristics (Brand, Design, Additional services, Composition and materials, Colour, Package and Service) and also the Environmental aspect. Our aim was to find out whether the environmental aspect belongs to the factor that significantly influences consumer product choice, or not. And to find which of the above mentioned factors are influencing consumers the most.

Third question was related to the respondents' treatment with the products or packing after usage. The options were formulated how often (Always, Often, Sometimes, Never) they throw products away, that is considered to be unfriendly way of dealing with product, and behave more environmentally responsibly. More often they behave environmentally friendly in way of in way of composting, donating, reusing or recycling, more they can be considered to be environmentally responsible in post-purchase phase of buying behavior.

Fourth question is connected to the motives that would lead consumers to buy green products, such as Lower price than in ordinary products, Recommendations by relatives and friends to buy eco-products, Better availability (distribution) of green products, Advertisement, Nothing or Other factors.

Fifth question searches motives that would lead consumers to environmentally responsible treatment with products and packing after usage (consumption). We gave respondents options such as Availability of special containers for recycling close to their homes, Possibility to repurchase the products or packages, Financial benefits, Better informedness, Nothing and Other. The last 6th question was in the form of different statements (see Enclosure 1 and 2) to search environmental friendliness in purchasing with option to express the degree the respondent agrees or disagrees with the statement (Agree, Partially agree, Partially disagree, Disagree). The content of the statements were focused on finding if respondents consider themselves as environmentally friendly, environmental

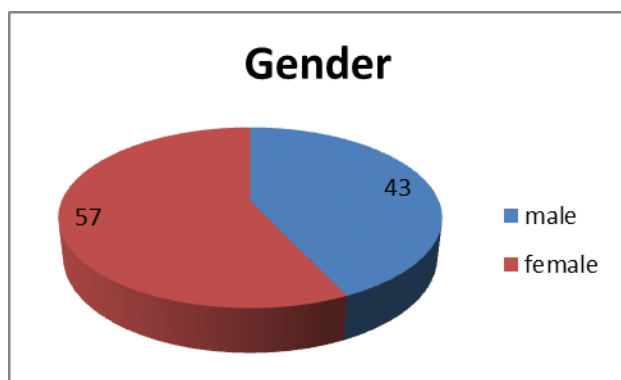
reputation is important in buying decision-making, follow eco-labels in food products, prefer cosmetics not tested on the animals, prefer energy saving electronics and are willing to buy green products even for higher price.

The questions in the questionnaire provided us needed information for evaluation of the degree of environmentally responsible purchase and post-purchase behavior.

2.4. Research itself and its results

This part shows the results and evaluation of the performed research with the graphs showing the outputs based on given criteria, comments of the graphs and brief research summary. We can divide the questions concerning to environmentally responsible consumer behavior such as factors that influence certain product choice, as well motivations of being environmentally responsible in purchase and after-purchase behavior.

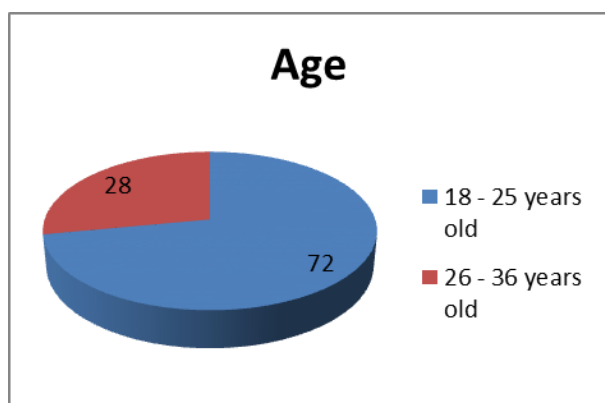
First question related to identification data of the 148 respondents provides more us information about structure of tested sample. The first graph below (Graph 1) shows us the structure of together 148 respondents according to gender. Almost 60% of the sample consists of women, and about 40% is represented by men.



Graph 1: Gender of respondents

Source: Own elaboration.

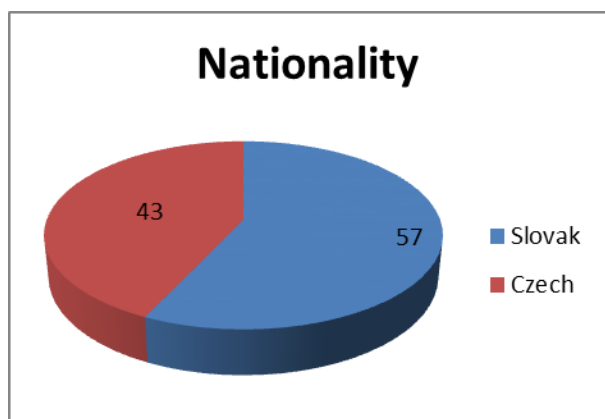
We focused primarily on young generation up to 35 years old (see Graph 2) and divided them into 2 groups. First group is represented by great majority (about 70%) of respondents from 18 – 25 years old and second one from 26 – 35 years old (about 30%).



Graph 2: Age of respondents

Source: Own elaboration.

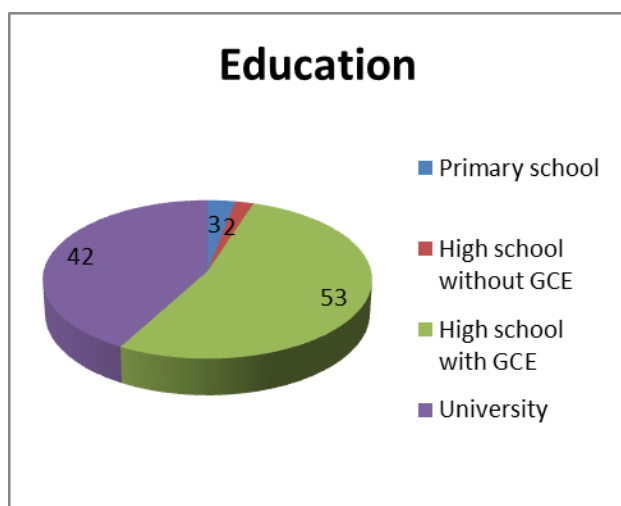
As for the nationality, this shows the Graph 3 below. Almost 60% of respondents (84) were of Slovak nationality and more than 40% were Czechs (64).



Graph 3: Nationality of respondents

Source: Own elaboration.

The last division of the respondents according to the education is shown in the Graph 4. Approximately one half of respondents have university degree of education, 42% have high school with graduate certificate and the rest 5% had lower education.



Graph 4: Education structure of respondents

Source: Own elaboration.

In the question number two, we examined by using Frequency Tables, the factors, the respondents consider as the most significant when doing their purchase decision-making in food, electronics and cosmetics. We primarily focused on the respondents who ticked environmental aspect to find out the level of importance of this factor when buying a product.

Factors	Food choice		Electronics		Cosmetics	
	Slovaks	Czechs	Slovaks	Czechs	Slovaks	Czechs
Price	92%	90%	86%	81%	81%	77%
Brand	40%	66%	76%	84%	71%	66%
Design	10%	7%	40%	44%	6%	3%
Environmental aspect	42%	26%	39%	27%	41%	44%
Additional services	4%	2%	15%	21%	1%	2%
Composition	70%	79%	15%	10%	68%	66%
Colour	7%	2%	1%	5%	4%	5%
Packaging	10%	18%	1%	0%	9%	5%
Service	9%	3%	30%	27%	1%	5%

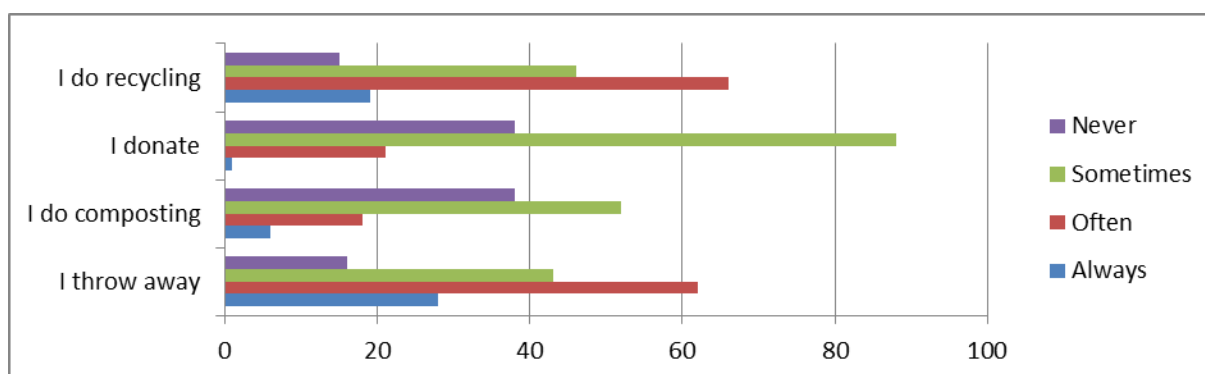
Table 1: Frequency table of factors influencing product choice

Source: Own elaboration.

Generally, we can say that the most significant factor influencing choice of all products is the price. In food choice, from 84 Slovaks 92% choose the price as important factor. The same is true for the rest of 64 Czechs (90%). Second important factor for Slovaks

is the composition of the food (70%) and third one is environmental aspect (42%) together with brand (40%). Also for the Czech respondents, after the price, the composition is second most important factor within 79%, but on the third stage is the brand (66%). Environmental aspect is on the fourth level for 26% of respondents. As for electronics, the environmental aspect among respondents was on the 4th place after price, brand, design on the 3rd place among Slovaks and composition among Czechs. The choice of cosmetics is more or less the same in both nationalities. After the price, consumers look at brand, composition and finally environmental aspect, that was ticked in 40% of the cases. The rest of the factors were not so significant.

In the question number 3 our intention was to find out whether the respondents behave environmentally responsibly and do at least one of the environmentally responsible actions after product usage, showed in Table 1. Throwing away often or always we considered as environmentally unfriendly treatment.

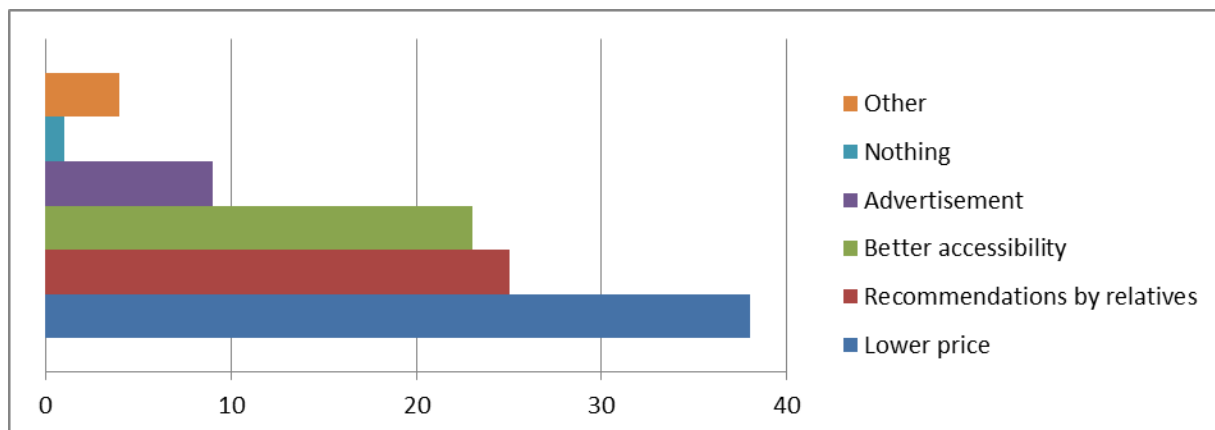


Graph 5: Post-purchase treatment with products

Source: Own elaboration.

The table above shows that about 60% of the respondents often or always throw the products or packaging away, only 15% do always or sometimes composting as well as donate further and almost 60% do recycling more often than not.

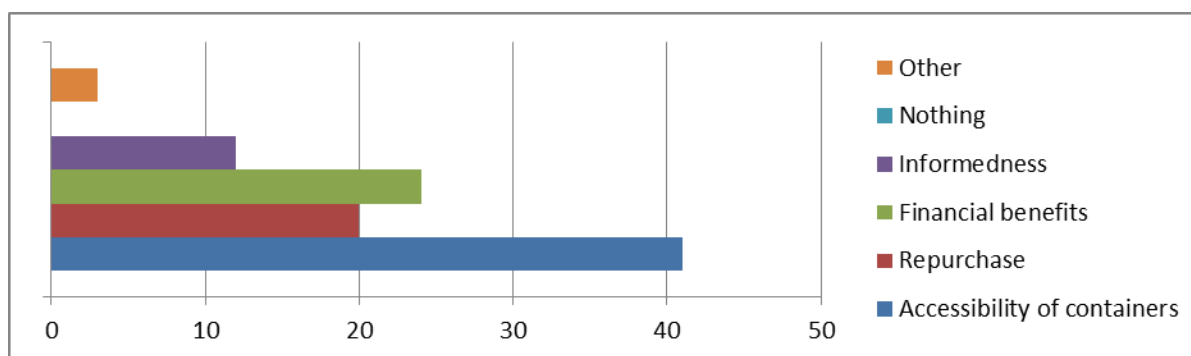
Question number four dealing with purchase motivations is represented by the graph below (Graph 6). It shows that within 37% of Slovak and Czechs together the most significant motivation for buying green products would be lower price than non-green ones, secondly it would be recommendations by relatives and friends (23%), on the third place would be better accessibility, e. i. distribution (23%) of green products and on fourth place advertisement (9%). Other factors such as better quality of green products and conviction that green products are really green, was represented by 4% of all respondents.



Graph 6: Motivations leading to environmentally responsible purchase

Source: Own elaboration.

The fifth question investigates motives that would lead to environmentally responsible post-purchase behavior shows the graph below (Graph 7).



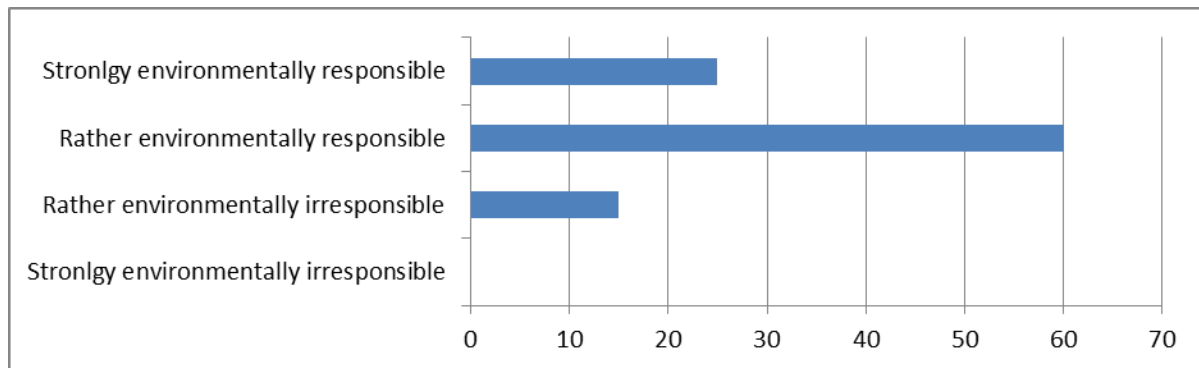
Graph 7: Motivations leading to environmentally responsible post-purchase behavior

Source: Own elaboration.

As shows the Graph 7, about 40% of the respondents would behave in environmentally responsible way if there is better availability of the containers in their place. 65% would be motivated by financial benefits such as lowering the costs for the waste, if doing recycling. About 20% would be motivated if there were a possibility to repurchase products or packaging. Better informedness about consequences of environmentally non-responsible post-purchase behavior considered only 12% of respondents. Other motives such conviction about the effectiveness of responsible post-purchase behavior was represented by 5% of whole respondents.

The evaluation of the last 6th question connected to degree of environmentally friendly purchase behavior shows the table below (Table 2). It was examined by Kruskal-Wallis Test. The respondents were ranked into 4 groups according to level of environmental

friendliness or responsibility in purchase behavior. We found out that 25% of Slovak and Czech customers are strongly environmentally responsible, 64% are rather environmentally responsible and the rest 11% behave rather environmentally irresponsible in their purchase. We did not find anyone that would belong to the group of strongly environmentally irresponsible.



Graph 8: Degree of environmentally responsible purchase behavior

Source: Own elaboration.

2.5. The contribution of the research and proposals

From the practical point of view the main contribution of the research is the evaluation of the research performed on the sample of Slovak and Czech consumers, investigation of factors that would motivate them to be environmentally friendly in their consumer behavior as well as factors that derive them into a certain product choice.

These data can be useful for governmental and non-governmental organizations to know how big effort they should concentrate on transmission of the message about importance of environmentally responsible consumer behavior. It is also helpful for the domestic and international companies, operating or trying to enter into Slovak or Czech market.

The information about examined markets help them to get know their opportunities or threats depending upon Slovak and Czech consumer behavior and product choice in buying green products. what are the opportunities or threads and to find a way how to change marketing strategies in order to improve their situation and environmental reputation, that is very important for researched consumers.

According to examined factors influencing consumers' product choice we can propose, that even if the most important is the price, environmental aspect and the composition especially in food and cosmetics plays the role in decision making process.

Therefore, the eco-friendly companies providing green products should take advantage from this and aim at the campaign enhancing their environmental reputation among environmentally friendly consumers by using the same strategy as there is no significant difference within environmental friendliness between Slovak and Czech market. These can be done by marked eco-labels on packaging and advertisement pointing out eco-friendly aspect of their products and educate those rather environmentally irresponsible consumers. The transmission of this message should be concentrated not only on target group of customers, but to broader publics as most of the respondents would buy green products if they were advised by their relatives and friends. Moreover, the firms should also improve their distribution channels of their eco-friendly products as it was even more significant factor than the advertisement that would motivate consumers to buy these products.

The evaluation of strong or rather strong degree of environmental responsibility might be profitable for companies to know into which extent consumers behave friendly to the environment to find a way they may improve their marketing strategies and product characteristics taking into account importance of environmental aspect for consumers.

It is more important for consumers to buy products friendly to the environment, however their treatment after usage is less responsible. This may be caused by weak availability of the special containers for recyclable materials, as showed the evaluation of question number five (Graph 7). The graph shows that they would be motivated mainly by financial benefits, e. g. to pay only for the waste they did not recycle. This is on the shoulders of municipal government together with companies dealing with waste disposal. Not only to educate consumers, but also provide them containers and places close to their homes to treat with products after consumption in eco-friendly way.

Another possibility consumers would welcome would be to repurchase products or their packaging. This is one of the opportunity company could take advantage from to offer this option to consumers and improve environmentally friendly perception by the consumers.

Finally, according to investigated hypotheses, we can propose that, companies may consider Slovakia and Czech republic as one market and use the same marketing strategies to enhance.

3. Conclusion

In a conclusion, we can say that the main goal of our research to research the environmentally responsible consumer behavior was fulfilled by the performed research investigated according to theoretical knowledge.

In general we proved that young generation of Czech and Slovak consumers is environmentally responsible in their buying behavior, but there are still some consumers who tend to be rather environmentally irresponsible. Therefore, there is still space for the companies using environmental policy in their marketing strategy to transmit the message and appeal about importance of being “green” consumer by using appropriate communication strategy. Besides high price, one of the obstacle consumers perceive as substantial is the way of distribution to the consumer. If consumer does not have an option to buy the environmentally friendly product, he simply will buy an alternative product with higher negative influences on the environment.

The same is true with waste separation. If there are no containers close by, most of the people will simply throw away all the rubbish no matter if recyclable or not.

Thus, we can say that the topic is really actual and could be enlarged by further research enlarged by more specified or concrete products and environmentally friendly consumer behavior. Likewise, the research might be of the more complex marketing mix as a tool that should be used among consumers that are not always responsible in their buying behavior or are rather irresponsible. This aspects we could investigate in our diploma work to extent the knowledge about consumers and their behavior to propose more concrete ways how improve marketing strategies used to influence consumers and their environmental responsibility in consumer behavior.

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Enclosures

Enclosure 1: Questionnaire

Dear respondent,

I would like to ask you to fill this form for the purpose of the research for my research aimed at research on “Environmentally responsible consumer behavior” in Slovakia and Czech Republic

Please, fill all the questions truly and according to the instructions in order to evaluate the answers correctly.

The form is anonymous and its elaboration will be used just for the purpose of the research useful for governmental as well as non governmental organizations and private companies for improvement their marketing strategies from the environmental point of view.

Thank you for your collaboration.

Petra Miháľková, 3rd year

Economic faculty of UMB in Banská Bystrica

* Required

1. Personal details - 1.) Gender *

- ☐ Male
- ☐ Female

2.) Age *

- ☐ 18 - 25 years old
- ☐ 26 - 35 years old

3.) Nationality *

- ☐ Slovak
- ☐ Czech

4.) Education *

- ☐ Primary School
- ☐ High School without diploma
- ☐ High School with diploma
- ☐ University

2. Product choice - 1.) Which of the below determinants greatly influence your purchase decision when buying the food?

* Please, choose arbitrary number of options!

- ☐ Price
- ☐ Brand
- ☐ Design
- ☐ Environmental aspect (energy saving, impact on health)
- ☐ Additional services
- ☐ Composition, material
- ☐ Colour
- ☐ Packing
- ☐ Service

2.) Which of the bellow determinants greatly influence your purchase decision when buying the cosmetics?

* Please, choose arbitrary number of options!

- ☐ Price
- ☐ Brand
- ☐ Design
- ☐ Environmental aspect (energy saving, impact on health)
- ☐ Additional services
- ☐ Composition, material
- ☐ Colour
- ☐ Packing
- ☐ Service

3.) Which of the bellow determinants greatly influence your purchase decision when buying the cosmetics?

* Please, choose arbitrary number of options!

- ☐ Price
- ☐ Brand
- ☐ Design
- ☐ Environmental aspect (energy saving, impact on health)
- ☐ Additional services
- ☐ Composition, material
- ☐ Colour
- ☐ Packaging
- ☐ Service

3. How do you dispose with the products or materials after purchasing or more precise usage?

* Please, choose 1 option for each statement!

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
I throw away.	☐	☐	☐	☐

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Never
I do composting.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I donate.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I reuse packaging.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I do recycling (e.i. hand over in set place or special containers)	☐	☐	☐	☐

4.) Which of the following options would lead you to buy environmentally friendly products?

* Please, choose at least 1 option.

- ☐ Lower price than ordinary products of the same type.
- ☐ Recommendations by relatives and friends.
- ☐ Better availability of the products near my place.
- ☐ Advertisement in mass media (TV, news, magazines, radio...).
- ☐ Nothing would motivate me.
- ☐ Other:

5.) Which of the following options would lead you to treat with used products and their packaging in environmentally friendly way?

* Please, choose at least 1 option.

- ☐ Availability of special containers near my place.
- ☐ Possibility to repurchase packaging or used products in stores or in the set places.
- ☐ Financial benefits when recycling (financial awards, lower payments for waste)
- ☐ Better informedness about causes of wrong treatment of waste
- ☐ Nothing would motivate me.
- ☐ Other:

6.) Additional information

* Please, choose 1 option for each statement according to degree in to which you agree or disagree.

	I agree	I rather agree	I rather disagree	I disagree
I consider myself to be friendly to the environment.	☐	☐	☐	☐
Environmental reputation of a firm is important in my buying decision making.	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am willing to buy green products even for higher price than ordinary ones.	☐	☐	☐	☐
When buying the food I pay attention to eco labels and prefer natural products.	☐	☐	☐	☐
When buying cosmetics, I prefer that one not tested on animals.	☐	☐	☐	☐
When buying electronics I prefer that one friendlier to the environment. (energy saving).	☐	☐	☐	☐
I do my purchase decision-making mainly according to the price.	☐	☐	☐	☐