

# Does a global young consumer exist? A comparative study of South Korea and Poland

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## ABSTRACT

In this paper we analyse the phenomenon of the global young consumer. Taking the example of young people from South Korea and Poland, we show similarities and differences in their reaction to modern socio-cultural trends influencing consumption patterns. The globalization process is believed to affect most young people designated Generation Y. They were brought up in the Internet age, which ease homogenization of cultural values, attitudes and consumer behaviour. On the other hand, the impact of local culture on their behaviour as consumers must still be considered.

The results of quantitative studies conducted among 200 young Korean and Polish consumers were investigated. A research tool, in the form of six indices measuring the attitudes towards modern socio-cultural trends influencing consumer behaviour, was used (materialism, impulsive consumption, greening, virtualization, virtual tribalism, tribalism in real space). The findings suggest that there are significant differences in the level of materialism, greening and tribalism in real space between young Poles and Koreans while their attitudes to behaviour connected to Internet usage are similar. Therefore, the assumption can be made that the widespread use of new technologies is a characteristic feature that bonds Generation Y on a global scale while other aspects of consumer behaviour remain strongly influenced by local cultures. This makes a significant contribution to knowledge of marketing strategy planning in global companies targeting young consumers. It seems that the ethnocentric approach can be implemented only in the new technologies sector while for other products and services the polycentric strategy is more appropriate.

**JEL classification:** M300, M310, M390, M00

**Keywords:** globalization, young consumers, Generation Y, Korea, Poland, segmentation

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays consumers are increasingly being confronted with a global culture. Globalization in the field of the economy is followed by globalization of culture, which in turn influences consumption patterns (Guo, 2013). A growing number of people are cosmopolitans, citizens of the world, who are able to adapt to other cultures without complete abandonment of their own (Nijssen and Douglas, 2011). They are open to other norms, practices, experiences and behaviours which are a part of a global cultural code (Woodward et al., 2008; Arnett, 2002). People, who once lived in a fragmented, isolated and individualized world, are now interconnected by global means of communication such as the Internet (Bauman, 1998). Global awareness combines thinking about interdependencies that exist throughout the world and the sense of living in a global community rather than a country-specific one (Venter and Venter, 2010; Guo, 2013).

The Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) suggests that one of the promising fields of research is investigation of overlapping cultural groups existing within the frame of globalization (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). The global consumer culture manifests itself by a set of signs and symbols that are similarly understood by a large number of consumers in different countries (Archpru Akaka and Alden, 2010). Thanks to the Internet or cable TV, consumers can easily obtain information about a product or a brand from any place in the world. The emergence of global media causes the homogenization of consumers' tastes and needs world-wide. Moreover, some consumption objects like an iPhone or a cup of Starbucks coffee become signs of belonging to the segment of global cosmopolitans (Alden et al., 1999; Nijssen and Douglas, 2011; Stizhakova et al., 2008). It should be noted, however, that even though consumers understand signs and behaviour associated with global culture, they still use a local system of meanings in order to interpret them. Globalization can lead to convergence of cultures but, on the other hand, it can also cause a growth in heterogeneity due to the desire to preserve the uniqueness of local cultures (Archpru Akaka and Alden, 2010).

In the past, global consumers were identified with a segment of the wealthiest, but nowadays global segments are more numerous and diversified. One such segment consists of teenagers who listen to the same kind of music, like the same kind of entertainment and prefer the same style in clothing (Douglas and Craig, 2011). Young consumers are considered to be the most converging market segment on a global scale (Choi and La Ferla, 2004). Regardless of their culture, teenagers have to deal with similar problems of adolescence, such as uncertainty, the authority of parents and peer group pressure (Solomon, 2013: 525). Some researchers claim that the beliefs of young people are very cosmopolitan due to the fact that they receive most of their information about the world around them from sources representing a global perspective. The media such as MTV deliver the same message to different countries, resulting in the standardization of the tastes of their audience (Domzal and Kernan, 1993). Teenagers are particularly interested in global media due to the fact that, unlike children, they are already mature enough to seek both information and experience beyond their family. At the same time they are in the phase of shaping their beliefs and behaviours and, therefore, are very attracted to everything new and unusual (Arnett, 2002).

Today's young people are the first generation born in a globalized world of global dependencies. Thanks to the Internet, they feel connected to the whole world and have a global consciousness. Generation Y numbers approximately 1.5 billion. They have great influence on purchasing decisions in the family and are often described as the most powerful group of consumers in the market (Tapscott, 2008). Their characteristic feature is their ease in using modern technologies. Young people in developed countries are constantly connected to the network that they use for contacts with others through social media, to seek information and to shop on-line (AudioTech Inc., 2012). Generation Y is also described as interested in environmental issues. Young people believe that they can change the world and often boycott brands accused of damaging the natural environment (Bucic et al., 2012). In this case, however, differences resulting from the consumer's

country of origin can be observed. This is due to the fact that some of the values depend on the economic situation of a country and change with increasing prosperity (e.g. individualism, power distance and long-term orientation) (Hofstede, 1997).

As the behaviour of various groups of young people becomes more alike despite their country of origin, attempts at global segmentation are made. For example, Ford and Philips (2000) distinguished six youth segments common to several European countries (“Dreamers”, “Big Babies”, “Good Kids”, “Independents”, “Searchers” and “No Hoppers”). These categories have similar attitudes, congruent ways of using mass media and choose similar brands. Such an orientation is particularly attractive to multi-national companies that frequently treat this cohort as homogenized and globally-oriented (Askegaard, 2006).

Despite the fact that young consumers are considered to be the prototype example of a global segment, some researchers stress that global meanings are mediated by a local cultural context. An example of this approach is Robertson’s concept of *glocalization* (Robertson, 1992), who believes that what is global, localizes – and what is local, globalizes. A youth global segment therefore emerges in the dialectical process of *glocalization* (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard, 2006). Young consumers do not have an established identity and are therefore susceptible to the influence of both global and local practices and values. Global and local values can exist side by side and permeate each other to form a new *glocal* identity (Strizhakova et al., 2012).

## 2. YOUNG CONSUMERS IN KOREA

The population of South Korea exceeded 50 million in 2012; however, due to a decreasing growth rate, it is expected to drop to 35 million in 2060 (Statistics Korea 2010). In 2010 young people aged 15–29 constituted 20% of the whole population (KOSIS, 2010). They represent a very attractive consumer group due to their increasing purchasing power, trend-setting and changing tastes (Choi and La Ferle, 2004) as well as growing influence on family buying decisions (Na et al., 1998).

Korea underwent a drastic socio-economic change over a fairly short period of time. Traditional values derived from Confucianism (moderation, simplicity and frugality) have been gradually replaced by a consumerist approach. Rapid expansion of consumerism in Korea seems to be of compensatory nature and results from psychological and cultural desire to catch up with other countries (Kim, 2000: 64–65). Koreans are highly motivated to compensate materially for the perceived emptiness and previous deprivation (before and after the Korean War), Koreans aged 15–24 want to get a decent job, cars, have big apartments, expensive clothing, luxury goods and travel (Statistics Korea 2013).

A popular phenomenon in Korea is conspicuous consumption, expressed by purchasing of imported luxury brands. The dominant group of consumers practicing this kind of behaviour are 20–30-year-olds (Park, 2000:49). Young Koreans focus on material issues: they recognize money as a symbol of success and value luxury which lets them show off among their peers (Park et al., 2008; Yoon, 2003; Gluck, 2002). Another factor contributing to the phenomenon of conspicuous consumption may be derived from Confucian culture: the concept of “face” (Redding and Ng, 1983). Koreans are very concerned with maintaining their status and with other people’s perception of them. If their performance falls below a certain level, “face” can be lost. Therefore, they strongly tend to buy goods whose brands and prices match (or preferably improve) their reputation and social position.

The Korean society is characterized by a high level of virtualization, which is reflected by the fact that three out of four major consumer trends in 2011 were related to technology and the Internet (Lee, 2011). Virtualization is supported by the infrastructure: the world’s highest penetration rate for broadband Internet access (almost 40 broadband subscribers per 100 inhabitants, Internet

usage rate at 78%), numerous internet cafes and PC bangs (LAN gaming centres), one of the most dynamic communication services industries and one of the fastest growing online retail sector in Asia (Korea Communications Commission, 2012). Young Koreans are heavy users of the Internet (99.9% of people aged 10–29 use the web), social network systems (SNS) and online stores (Minton et al., 2012; Mansumittrchai et al., 2012; Oh et al., 2009). In 2011 89.7% of people in their 20s and 70.8% 30-year-olds used social network systems, mostly blogs (84%), online communities (74.6%) and mini-homepages (68.3%). They are also dominant users of online shopping and banking – the usage rate for 20-year-olds was 90.4% (Korea Communication Commission, 2011). These statistics show that young Koreans actively take advantage of the achievements of the information technology and strongly value social interactions with their peers (KOSIS, 2011). Korea is a highly collectivist country, scoring only 18 out of 100 on the Individualist dimension of Hofstede's Model of National Cultures (The Hofstede Center, 2013). This means that Koreans prefer a group-oriented way of life and are more prone to comply with social norms and influence of others (Lee and Green, 1991). This tendency is reflected in their higher usage of social media (Minton et al., 2012), and preference for human-human (not: human-message) interactivity (Ko et al., 2006; Shin, 2010).

Issues of ecology and green growth are very important for Koreans. Since 2009 the country has been adopting an ambitious Green Growth Strategy (OECD, 2012). Research (KOSIS, 2012), however, shows low involvement of young people in greening behaviour. In comparison to other age groups, Koreans aged 20–29 participate to a lesser extent in such activities as: recycling (39.2% make a real effort, against a whole population average of 50%), trying not to use disposable products (10.8%; average: 20.9%), or reducing the amount of chemical detergents (10.5%; average: 18.6%). The exception is the use of public transportation (40.7%; average: 35.3%), although that may well be a consequence of their age and financial means.

### 3. YOUNG CONSUMERS IN POLAND

The population of Poland reached 38.5 million in 2011, with people aged 15–29 constituting a 22% share of the whole. According to one forecast, in 2035 the population will drop to 36 million, and the share of young people to 16% (GUS, 2013). Despite this trend, young people in Poland are a very attractive consumer group because the drop in number does not mean a decrease of value of this segment: the turnover in the youth market is constantly growing due to frequent changes in the product structure and constant shortening of the product life-cycle (Olejniczuk-Merta, 2007).

Young people in Poland are in many ways the opposite of their parents' generation, and sometimes even older groups, which stems from the fact that they are the first generation raised in a democratic, capitalist country (Kacprzak-Chońska, 2011). Representatives of the young generation place a higher value on education than their parents (enrolment ratio is 4 times greater than in the case of their parents), value interesting work, high income and an exciting life (Szafranec, 2011a). They are considered to be hedonists, oriented towards obtaining pleasure out of consumption – people focused on themselves, their needs, and their own career (Szafranec, 2011b).

Over the past two decades, the increase of the level of materialism is clearly visible in Poland. Material success takes the first place among the general values of the society (ahead of health and family) (Sikorska, 1998). Among young people, 44% are of the opinion that possession of material goods is a measure of success in life, and 40% believe that money is the main condition for a successful and happy life (Czapiński and Panek, 2007).

It should be emphasized that young consumers' aspirations are vast and relate not only to material goods, but also to a lifestyle that gives products symbolic meaning. Products are often used to manifest the good taste and attitudes of their owner, communicate a message or simply

allow one to distinguish oneself from the crowd (Szafranec 2011a). Shopping plays an important role in adolescents' lives. Of teenagers, 63% frequent shopping malls for pure entertainment (Olejniczuk-Merta, 2007:138). Young Poles often engage in impulsive consumption – every third person acknowledges that they have a tendency to thoughtless spending, and only 20% of people plan their purchases precisely. Shopping also provides a hedonistic value, as evidenced by the fact that 40% of respondents say that they like every kind of shopping (SMG/KRC, 2007).

Computers and access to the internet are becoming increasingly available in Poland. In the first half of 2013 70.1% of households had a computer and 66.9% internet access. Most households use a broadband connection (53.7%) but the share of mobile connections is growing fast (currently 11.7%) (Czapiński and Panek, 2013: 317–319). Young Poles are a social group that uses the internet and information technology most intensively and expertly. 96.8% of 16–24-year-olds own a computer, 96.6% use the internet and 98.1% have a mobile phone (Czapiński and Panek, 2013: 330). Youngsters aged 15–19 spend on average 23 hours per week online and people aged 20–24 spend 21 hours. For both groups the internet is the most important communication medium (World Internet Project. Poland 2012). The internet satisfies tribal needs to a significant extent, which is reflected in the fact that 82% of 18–24-year-old internet users have a profile at a social networking site (CBOS, 2011a). The network enables young people to have an intensive social life, freely express themselves and co-create new cultural content. Although social contacts in the real world cease to be the point of reference and support for the youth, real life meetings with friends and acquaintances are still one of the most important ways of spending free time (The Gallup Organization, 2007; Kurzėpa, 2010).

Compared with the general population, young people are less involved in environmental efforts that can bring financial savings, but more likely than adults to engage in meetings regarding environmental issues (Czapiński and Panek, 2013: 289), which suggests that young consumers are driven by a primarily ideological motivation, not a financial one (The Gallup Organization, 2007; CBOS, 2006). According to TNS Polska (2012) the most common eco-friendly activities involve saving energy (90% of students say they do so) and water (85%), and the use of re-usable shopping bags (77%), while the least frequent are purchases of environmentally-friendly products (20%).

#### 4. RESEARCH METHODS

The research hypothesis that is going to be tested is that there is no significant difference between young people from Korea and Poland in terms of attitudes to recent consumer trends as they all belong to the global Generation Y.

The study was conducted on a sample of 100 young consumers from Poland and 100 coming from South Korea. Respondents were in the age range 19–24 and were students of business schools located in large cities (over 2 million inhabitants). The examined persons are drawn from the better-off social classes, able to meet the costs that they have to bear for such studies. The choice of such a group was dictated by the fact that young and wealthy city dwellers are the first to be subject to the new trends related to consumption and marketing. The research tool was a questionnaire developed by Kacprzak-Choińska (2011) containing 36 statements divided into six indices, measuring consumer attitudes towards such modern socio-cultural trends as: materialism, impulsive consumption, greening, virtualization, virtual tribalism, tribalism in real space (see: Table 1). For comparison of young consumers from two different cultural backgrounds, an independent sample t-test, Mann-Whitney nonparametric test as well as a cluster analysis with k-means procedure were performed.

**Table 1**

Questionnaire survey results

	Mean for Poland	Mean for Korea	P values for Pearsons chi square test*
<b>MATERIALISM</b>			
1. I like to own things that make a good impression on others	3.56	3.83	0.129
2. I pay great attention to material things owned by other people	2.89	2.93	<b>0.025</b>
3. The brand of clothes I buy is very important to me	3.02	2.74	0.387
4. I pay attention to the brands of clothing and footwear worn by others	2.94	2.71	0.167
5. Possessing large amounts of material goods is one of the most important achievements in life	2.58	2.47	0.154
6. I like luxury	3.92	2.83	<b>0.000</b>
<b>IMPULSIVE CONSUMPTION</b>			
7. I buy myself things just to feel better	2.91	3.18	<b>0.027</b>
8. I am used to buying something “as a reward” after a hard day at school	2.98	2.93	0.138
9. It sometimes happens that I buy something with money that I should have spent on something else	3.22	2.78	<b>0.000</b>
10. My parents do not realize how much I spend	2.97	2.69	<b>0.001</b>
11. My feeling is that others would be scared if they learned how much and how I shop	2.15	1.72	<b>0.027</b>
12. Going shopping gives me pleasure	3.49	3.65	<b>0.001</b>
<b>GREENING</b>			
13. It is important to me that any cosmetic I buy was not tested on animals	2.62	2.88	<b>0.050</b>
14. I pay attention to make sure the packaging of any product I buy is not harmful to the environment	2.45	3.09	<b>0.000</b>
15. I am interested in the conditions under which the goods I buy are produced	2.72	3.38	0.000
16. I avoid buying products from companies which I know exploit their employees	2.94	3.47	0.012
17. I would willingly engage in consumer movements in favour of rational and aware consumption	2.66	3.25	0.000
18. I am happy to buy things when profits from their sale support social campaigns, even if they are a bit more expensive than other similar goods	3.43	3.59	0.015
<b>VIRTUALISATION</b>			
19. I spend my free time at the computer	2.80	3.42	<b>0.002</b>
20. My parents believe that I spend too much time at the computer	2.45	2.54	0.511
21. I cannot imagine life without the Internet	3.93	3.50	<b>0.016</b>
22. When I go on vacation, I feel that I’m missing access to the Internet	2.57	2.17	0.081
23. I often forget about the passage of time when I use the Internet	3.36	2.93	0.066
24. Before I consider a major purchase, I review and compare deals on the Internet	4.01	3.93	0.209

\* The significant p-values are bolded.

<b>VIRTUAL TRIBALISM</b>				
25.	The Internet has enabled me to get to know people like me who come from different parts of my country and the world	3.24	3.66	<b>0.008</b>
26.	I have a hobby that I share with a group of friends I met online	2.53	2.51	<b>0.021</b>
27.	I feel that the people I know in real life do not understand me as well as my friends online	1.55	1.68	0.228
28.	I have my favourite online message boards	2.84	2.91	<b>0.000</b>
29.	I use the Internet more for making new friends than gaining information	1.79	1.86	0.522
30.	There are certain topics that I can only talk about with people I have met online	1.78	2.18	<b>0.027</b>
<b>TRIBALISM IN REAL SPACE</b>				
31.	When buying new clothes, the most important thing for me is my friends' opinions	1.93	2.28	<b>0.046</b>
32.	I often advise other people which product to choose	3.18	3.23	0.743
33.	I often go shopping with friends	2.90	3.43	<b>0.001</b>
34.	Belonging to a group is very important to me	3.44	3.40	0.614
35.	I try to dress like my peers	2.54	2.58	0.996
36.	The youth group I identify with can be identified from my appearance	2.86	2.83	<b>0.010</b>

N = 200, p = 0.05.

## 5. RESEARCH RESULTS

It was found that three dimensions differ in a statistically significant way: impulsive consumption, greening and tribalism in real space (see: Table 2). The virtualization index measured the degree of dependence on the new technologies and the Internet. The means of both countries were almost identical for this dimension. A significant difference emerged only in the case of the statement “I spend my free time at the computer”, where the mean was 3.42 for Korea and only 2.80 for Poland. As for the variables associated with consumerism, Polish youth presented a slightly higher level of materialism (M = 3.15 for Poland, M = 2.92 for Korea). The largest difference occurred here in the case of the statement “I like luxury”, where the Polish mean was 3.92 and the Korean 2.83. When it comes to the level of impulsive consumption, young consumers from Poland much more frequently admit having this kind of inclination (M = 2.95 for Poland, M = 2.81 for Korea). In the case of green consumer behaviour far greater commitment to this type of matters was demonstrated by the Korean youth (M = 3.27), while the Polish youth (M = 2.80) does not take this factor into consideration while shopping. As far as tribalism is concerned, a statistically significant difference occurred in real space tribalism (M = 2.85 for Korea, M = 2.69 for Poland). In the case of virtual tribalism Korean young consumers tend to agree more than young Poles with the statements that “The Internet has enabled me to get to know people like me who come from different parts of my country and the world” and “There are certain topics that I can only talk about with people I have met online” (see: Table 1).

**Table 2**

Results of independent sample t-test and Mann-Whitney U test for six dimensions

	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
						Lower	Upper
Materialism	2.509	198	0.013	0.23333	0.09298	0.04998	0.41669
Impulsive consumption*			0.393*				
Greening*			0.000*				
Virtualisation	1.088	198	0.278	0.10500	0.09648	-0.08526	0.29526
Virtual Tribalism	-1.807	198	0.072	-0.17833	0.09870	-0.37297	0.01630
Tribalism in real space	-2.506	198	0.013	-0.18571	0.07410	-0.33185	-0.03958

\* Due to the results of Levene's homogeneity of variance test, the Mann-Whitney U test was conducted for these variables.

N = 200, p = 0.05.

Regarding the results of the k-means cluster analysis, the number of segments and the initial cluster centres were adopted from a study by Kacprzak-Choińska (2011). Table 3 represents the final cluster centres for Poland and Korea.

**Table 3**

Final cluster centres for nonhierarchical cluster analysis

	Materialists		Ecologists		Moderns		Traditionals		Netizens	
	PL	KR	PL	KR	PL	KR	PL	KR	PL	KR
Materialism	3.6	3.6	2.7	2.8	3.5	3.4	2.7	2.8	2.8	2.7
Impulsive consumption	3.2	3.4	2.5	2.5	3.6	4.0	2.2	2.2	2.5	2.4
Greening	2.6	2.6	3.5	3.4	3.5	3.4	2.3	2.2	2.7	2.6
Virtualization	3.1	3.0	3.0	2.9	3.6	3.7	3.0	3.0	3.8	3.8
Virtual tribalism	2.0	2.0	2.1	2.0	2.9	3.2	1.9	1.8	3.0	3.0
Tribalism in real space	2.7	2.6	2.7	2.8	3.2	3.0	2.4	2.4	2.7	2.7

1 – completely disagree, 5 – completely agree.

The five market segments that were distinguished are:

- 1) **Materialists.** Representatives of this segment display a high level of conspicuous consumption, impulsive consumption, and attach great importance to the possession of material things. To the greatest extent of all segments they agree with the statement that they like to have things that make an impression on others. They are not interested in issues related to protecting the environment or social responsibility. They exhibit fairly high level of virtualization and tribalism in real space. Opinions of peers are very important to them when making purchasing decisions. To a lesser extent, they engage in participation in virtual tribes.



- 2) **Ecologists.** This segment includes young people with high levels of greening, and at the same time low levels of indices associated with consumerism and virtualization. Ecologists from all of the segments distinguished pay attention to the conditions under which products were manufactured, say they boycott products from companies which are known to exploit their employees and that they are willing to buy goods promoted by cause-related marketing techniques.
- 3) **Moderns.** Representatives of this segment achieve relatively high scores on all six scales. In particular they buy products just to improve their mood more often than others, are willing to use the Internet for social networking and say that belonging to a group is important for them.
- 4) **Traditionals.** The members of this segment are not susceptible to any of the highlighted new trends in consumer behaviour. They use the Internet primarily to search for information and not to make friends, and are the least likely to do online searches before making larger purchases.
- 5) **Netizens.** This segment brings together people who are highly dependent on the Internet and who transfer part of their lives to the virtual space while exhibiting a low level of consumerism or interest in greening. Representatives of this segment are most likely to agree with the statement that they spend free time in front of a computer screen to an extent that concerns their parents.

As far as the distribution of respondents among the five segments is concerned, in the case of Poland the segment of the *Materialists* (32%) proved to be the most numerous, and in the case of Korea the *Ecologists* (45%). The second most numerous segment in Poland were the *Ecologists* (21%) and in Korea the *Moderns* (19%). The least numerous segments of both countries were *Netizens* (13% in Poland and 11% in Korea) (see: Table 4).

**Table 4**

Ratio of population of each segment

Segment	Poland	Korea
Materialists	32%	14%
Ecologists	21%	45%
Moderns	15%	19%
Traditionals	19%	11%
Netizens	13%	11%
Total	100%	100%

N = 200.

Regarding the diversity of segments set up by gender of the respondents, in the case of Poland the variation was statistically significant but in the case of Korea not (see: Table 5). In both countries, the *Materialists* segment contained equal proportions of men and women. The *Ecologists* segment was in turn dominated by women (57% in Poland, 56% in Korea). The *Netizens* segment was male-dominated in both countries (69% in Poland, 73% in Korea). The largest difference is visible in the *Moderns* segment, which in Poland is strongly dominated by women, who represent 87% of the members of this segment, while in Korea the proportions are balanced (53% women to 47% men). The *Traditionals* segment in both countries are characterized by a dominance of men (63% in Poland, 54% in Korea).

**Table 5**  
Profiles of segments by gender

	Poland		Korea	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Materialists	50%	50%	50%	50%
Ecologists	57%	43%	56%	44%
Moderns	87%	13%	53%	47%
Traditionals	37%	63%	46%	54%
Netizens	31%	69%	27%	73%
Pearson's chi square test*	$\chi^2 = 11.593, p = 0.021$		$\chi^2 = 2.972, p = 0.563$	

\* N = 200, p = 0.05.

## 6. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The segment of *Materialists* is much more numerous in Poland than in Korea (32% vs. 14%). The explanation of this is the fact that Poland did not have a capitalist economy up to 1989. Parents, grandparents and perhaps the older siblings of the young people in the sample have lived through times of general market deficiencies – and in the 90s succumbed to the fascination of suddenly emerging opportunities to expand their assets. Material values began to dominate among life motivations (Czapiński and Panek, 2013) and were passed on in the process of socialization to the younger generation. Referring to Inglehart's theory (1977) on silent and rational revolution, it may be noted that Poland has undergone only the first phase – involving the appearance of cultural values associated with having a large amount of physical goods. On the other hand, Korea is a country at the higher level of economic development, as well as richer than Poland. GDP per capita in 2012 amounted to USD 32,272 in Korea compared to USD 20,592 in Poland (IMF, 2013). In turn, the Human Development Index, which measures the standard of living, was 0.909 in the case of Korea (ranked 12th in the world), while it was 0.821 in Poland (39th in the world) (UNDP, 2013). Therefore it should be assumed that Korea, like other highly developed countries, has already passed the so-called “rational” revolution, as a result of which changes in the hierarchy of values occurred. Ecology, self-fulfilment, education, political and social involvement, social and other post-material values also emerged next to the material values (Inglehart, 1977; Inglehart, 1997).

Previous studies of Korean researchers (Kim, 2000: 64–65; Park, 2000: 49; Park et al., 2008; Yoon, 2003; Gluck, 2002) suggesting a high level of consumerism among Korean youth do not seem to be confirmed. More precisely, the level of consumerism may be higher for younger Koreans than for their parents' generation, but it is lower than that presented by the youth of the Western cultural circle – in this case, Poland. This is true especially when it comes to the index measuring the propensity to consume impulsively. World Values Survey results also show that parents in Korea attach much more importance to thrift and saving money during the process of socialization of their children than parents in Poland (important for 68% of Korean parents and only 36% of Polish ones (World Values Survey 1999–2004 Wave).

Differences in the level of prosperity of both countries and a greater interest in post-material values in Korea explains also the large difference in the size of another segment – *Ecologists*, to which as many as 45% of young Koreans and only 21% of Poles have been classified. It has

to be mentioned that Korea remains under the influence of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism (Scarborough, 1998: 73), which highlight the importance of living in harmony with nature. Poland belongs to a Christian culture, for which the message is rather “subdue the Earth”. According to Hofstede’s research, Korean culture is more feminine than Polish (39 points on a scale of masculinity compared to 69) (The Hofstede Center, 2013), and thus attaches greater importance to caring for others and quality of life than the competition and achieving goals.

Korean studies cited above (KOSIS, 2012; Kim and Choi, 2013) indicate lower interest in environmental issues among young Koreans than older generations. In Poland, the situation is reversed (young consumers are more aware of the problems associated with environmental protection and social responsibility). Even so, the intercultural difference in this case appears to act more strongly than the fact that they belong to the same generation. Young Korean consumers achieve significantly higher scores on a scale measuring green consumer behaviour than their Polish counterparts.

In Poland, a greater number of young consumers belong to the segment of *Traditionals* than *Moderns* (19% vs. 15%), while in Korea the situation is reversed and 19% of young people are counted as *Moderns* and only 11% as *Traditionals*. This fact is associated with a higher score achieved by young Koreans on scales related to tribalism in virtual and real space. According to Trompenaars’ research (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars, 1993) Korea has a collectivist culture. This is confirmed by the results of Hofstede, according to which Korea scores only 18 points out of 100 on the individualism scale. Poland’s result is 60, which places this country in the group of cultures where the independence of individuals seems more important (The Hofstede Center, 2013). Collective societies tend in a natural way to be more susceptible to tribal behaviour. While searching for information about products, young Koreans are highly reliant on opinions of their peers, which is consistent with previous studies of Hafstrom et al. (1992) and Choi and La Ferla (2004) which suggested a higher tendency to conform with peers among Koreans than among Western youth. According to Hall’s theory (1976), Korea is classified as a high-context culture. In such a culture, conformism, the common good and deep relations among members of the group are most valued (Kim et al., 1998). Research shows that Poland is characterized by a lower level of social orientation ( $M = 3.06$  on a scale of 1–5) than Korea ( $M = 3.37$ ), which is the result of different levels of cultural context (Hensel, 2011).

Regarding the last segment – the *Netizens* – numbers are similar in both of the groups surveyed, which is probably associated with the lack of any statistically significant difference in the level of virtualization. It can be assumed, therefore, that the widespread use of new technologies, ease of following technical innovations and willingness to transfer social life, entertainment, work and shopping to the virtual world are characteristic features that bond Generation Y on a global scale (Tapscott, 2008).

According to Clark (1990), there are two main approaches to international marketing: *etic* and *emic*. The former focuses on similarities while the other one concentrates on differences among cultures. It is reflected in the theory of cross-cultural management providing three different approaches towards other cultures, which in turn influence managerial decisions. An ethnocentric approach assumes that cultures of foreign countries are inferior to the culture of a manager’s home country. Therefore, management methods should be exported as products. According to a polycentric approach, all countries are different and difficult to understand and because of that foreign branches of a company should be allowed to adapt their activities and operations to local conditions and consumer preferences. The last approach, global, acknowledges both similarities and differences among cultures and uses the best management practices regardless of their country of origin (Perlmutter and Heenan, 1986).

When it comes to designing products, services and marketing campaigns targeted at young people worldwide, it seems that an ethnocentric approach will operate best mainly in the case of the new technologies sector. In turn, the Internet should be considered as a compulsory

communication channel while planning a promotion strategy. Our research shows that except for virtualization the other important values, attitudes, norms and beliefs remain different in countries from various cultural circles represented here by South Korea and Poland. Thus a global or polycentric approach to marketing products and services addressed to young consumers is still needed.

Economic or political unification does not have to imply the standardization of culture. Frequent contacts with representatives of other cultures can foster an appreciation of own culture as an equivalent to the foreign ones. The words of Huntington (1998), who believes that the so-called “global culture” is just a thin layer covering a vast variety of values, norms, traditions and attitudes shaped by history, still seem to remain true.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although the present study provides some interesting insights for researchers and practitioners, some limitations of the findings should, however, be mentioned. There are three major limitations and implications derived from them for further research. First, during the study, the judgmental sampling method was adopted, thus, the results cannot be generalized to the general youth population. It is suggested, therefore, that a probability-sampling method be used in future research. Secondly, the study is of cross-sectional nature and thus it does not identify customers' attitudes over time. A longitudinal study could, therefore, further broaden understanding of the research phenomenon and allow observation of changes in the sizes of segments of young consumers. The third limitation results from the nature of psychographic research. Respondents are asked about their personal issues relating to self-image and their answers may be influenced by their need for social acceptance. In order to overcome this limitation, more extended research comparing attitudes and actual actions is recommended.

As for the directions for future research, in looking for an answer to the question of whether a young global consumer exists, it would be interesting to conduct a study with the same tools but in countries with different cultural backgrounds. Finally, behavioural studies should be conducted in order to find product or brand preferences among consumers from a particular segment. This could provide guidance for the marketing decisions of companies targeting their offer at young consumers.

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