
John. Hall, Victoria University
G. Barry O’Mahony, Victoria University

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/15699/gender/v06/GCB-06

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Gender and Consumer Choice: The influence of perceived body image on the food purchasing behaviour of generation X females.

John. Hall, Victoria University
G. Barry O’Mahony, Victoria University

ABSTRACT

Little research has been conducted into the food purchasing habits of the market sector known as Generation X. Using a sequential mixed method research design, this study investigates the links between perceived body image and food purchasing behaviour among Generation X females. The study found that while there are eight specific factors that influence food purchasing behaviour among this group, the most dominant factor related to physical appearance.

Whilst weight, health, diet and exercise receive constant media attention, little work has been undertaken into the effects of perceived body image on purchasing behaviour. This study sought to determine the influence of body image on food purchasing behaviour among young women in the age range of 18-30 years. Referred to as Generation X, this sector of society is difficult to characterise because it is one of the most diverse and broad-based groups of individuals to encompass a generation (Foley, and LeFevre 2000). The importance of this market segment has been recognised by Hall, Babubaka, and Oppenheim (2001), however, who report that, in the United States, the Generation X market represents more than $120 billion in annual spending power.

The study employed a sequential mixed method design, which began with the collection of qualitative data. In this phase, a semi-structured interview schedule that incorporated themes and topics identified in a review of literature was used to interview a non-probability, convenience sample of 50 female respondents. The resulting analysis guided the development of a quantitative questionnaire which comprised of 72 questions presented as a semantic differential scale where respondents rated each question from 1-7. Netemeyer et al’s (1995) vanity scale and the LOV scale developed by Kahle (1983) were added to the questionnaire along with a number of classificatory and demographic questions (in total there were 153 questions). The questionnaire was distributed to a non-probability, convenience sample of 488 female respondents. Of this number 243 were between the ages of 18 and 24 years and 245 were between the ages of 25 and 30 years. A subsequent factor analysis identified factors relating to Physical Appearance; Time; Marketing; Price; Food Qualities; Culture, Ethical and Philosophical considerations; Environmental concerns and Filling Food. The most dominant factor in this...
analysis, however, related to physical appearance and body shape. This paper focuses on the analysis of this factor which accounted for 24.4% of the variance.

The results highlight the influence of perceived body image on food purchasing behaviour among generation X females revealing that physical appearance is a major concern for this target group. It was found that this group also seek healthier eating alternatives including food options that are low in fat, low in carbohydrate and low in calories. It was also found that this trend is driven by media influences and the body shape ideals portrayed within magazines, movies and TV. This group is also influenced by marketing, suggesting that hospitality operators and producers of manufactured foods and food products need to emphasise the content and health benefits of their products when targeting this group. Moreover, they need to have strong marketing strategies and advertising campaigns specifically targeted to this particular market segment.

REFERENCES


