

CSR ACTIVITIES IN THE PERCEPTION OF REPRESENTATIVES OF GENERATION Z

Joanna Mariola GAJDA

Faculty of Management, Częstochowa University of Technology, Poland; joannagajda@vp.pl,
ORCID: 0000-0002-7235-7506

Introduction/background: Modern management theories require organizations to recognize the expectations of the environment in order to improve the quality of their products and services. The ability to listen attentively to the needs of stakeholders is one of the key pillars of any company's competitive strategy. The concept of social responsibility, which is based on a long-lasting dialogue with stakeholders, sheds new light on the role of organizations in society, and social engagement promotes obtaining the precious intelligence employed in shaping new sources of value growth.

Aim of the paper: The aim of this paper is to present the results of research on the perception of representatives of the Generation Z in the field of corporate social responsibility. The research allowed gathering the information needed to determine the existing state of knowledge of people belonging to this generation with respect to their understanding of the subject of CSR.

Materials and methods: The research included 320 students of the Częstochowa University of Technology. The results were subjected to the chi-square independence test. On its basis, it was assessed whether the responses to given questions depended on the field of study of the respondent.

Results and conclusions: Only 75% of the respondents indicated that they held knowledge of the problem. Considering their declarations regarding the need to receive more information about CSR, education must be conducted skillfully using appropriate tools. Despite the average level of knowledge of the young generation in the field of CSR, they are positive about it and believe that organizations should be more involved in social activities.

Keywords: CSR, Generation Z, knowledge management, organization management, perception.

1. Introduction

Modern management theories require organizations to recognize the expectations of the environment in order to improve the quality of their products and services. The ability to listen attentively to the needs of stakeholders is one of the key pillars of any company's competitive strategy. The concept of social responsibility, which is based on a long-lasting dialogue with

stakeholders, sheds new light on the role of organizations in society, and social engagement promotes obtaining the inestimable data used to shape new sources of value growth (Losa-Jończyk, 2014).

The aim of this paper is to present the results of research on the perceptions of Generation Z regarding the field of corporate social responsibility. The research allowed gathering information needed to determine the existing state of knowledge of people belonging to this generation regarding their understanding of the subject of CSR. In focusing upon this generation, the author of the study made efforts to determine to what extent the idea of CSR penetrates their environment, how aware they are of the importance of corporate social responsibility, whether they are interested in this issue and what is their attitude towards CSR.

2. Generation Z – characteristic features

Generation Z is now beginning to dominate the labor market. This is what we call people born after 1994, and who pose a challenge for employers, especially those who come out of the usual patterns of action. The new generation is already considered fully digital because, from an early age, they are perfectly aware of the possibilities offered by new technologies. These technologies allow them to function efficiently in the virtual world and quickly analyze information presented in the digital form (Biernacki, 2014).

The people of Generation Z are described as the children of wealth and comfort, and are notable for smartphones and tablets being extensions of their selves. Their ability to use these devices results from the fact that they were born in the years of the IT boom, hence they are well-versed with various types of technical innovations. Indeed, their entire lives are focused on the virtual world.

This is an instant generation – everything in their case must happen immediately, they do not wait for opinion or feedback, they do what they do right away. This will change the communication system in organizations. Generation Z is also transparent and does not fully understand the confidentiality of information (Pawłowska, 2013).

Generation Z researchers emphasize that they commonly multi-task – which is problematical in that they cannot focus on one thing at one time. Thanks to their continuous access to modern technologies, often without responsibility, they are noted for sharing raw information that should not reach a wide group (Młodzi 2011, 2011).

They are considered to be pragmatists because they are aware of the changes that come with future automation and lack of stability. By observing the surroundings, they learned that one should be flexible and ready for quick change or to expand held competences. They are practically oriented to their work and know that they will not achieve much without effort.

With this generation, employers will have to develop a new system of work and communication, a new way of functioning in the workplace (Stokowska, 2018).

3. CSR in the modern concept of management

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is an important concept of management. According to the European Commission, it is described as "(...) the concept that companies voluntarily take into account social and environmental interests in their market strategies, as well as in relations with various stakeholder groups" (Bojar, 2013; Kwietniewska-Sobstyl, 2013). D. Kopycińska emphasizes that the concept of corporate social responsibility is not only the responsibility of the organization towards internal and external groups, but also the responsibility for the company. In this sense, social responsibility focuses on pursuing the interests of each party, excluding the possibility of benefiting at the expense of others (Kopycińska, 2001).

The European Commission, using the elements proposed by Freeman, assumes that the company is not an independent entity and operates in a specific closed environment. Stakeholders are, therefore, treated as all people who are in any way related to the company's activities, both from within and outside the enterprise. Most often they include employees, investors, shareholders, business partners, clients, public authorities, non-governmental organizations and the local community. Therefore, CSR is a process of managing the relations of organizations with various entities that in the long run may be a source of opportunities, innovation and competitive advantage. Therefore, it is emphasized that the management cycle using CSR should be considered in the category of long-term investment, and not as an unnecessary cost of operations (Bender, 2017).

The increasing pressure imposed by external and internal environments has compelled enterprises to take actions of an economic, legal, social or ecological character, taking into account the needs of various interest groups. The primary goal of organizations that practice social responsibility is to maximize their contribution to sustainable development (Charucka, 2015), as well as to the constant and harmonious development of the environment in which they operate (Baretta, 2002). The aim of the sustainable development activities is to minimize the harmful impact of production and consumption on the environment, contributing to the balance between economic development and the preservation of natural resources for future generations, and thus to improve the quality of life of people around the world (Krzepicka, 2013; Tarapata, 2013).

In the opinion of K. Davis and R. Blomstorm, CSR should be treated as an obligation for managers to choose decisions and actions that can contribute to the care for their own interest, as well as to protect and enhance social welfare (Jabłoński, 2013). CSR is a business model that

translates ethics, responsibility, high social and environmental standards into management processes towards employees, marketing practices, value chains and innovation processes that take into account the needs and expectations of stakeholders. The ethical sphere of business management in accordance with CSR includes the creation of an organizational structure, and one of the elements of the infrastructure implemented within the framework of social policy is the ethical program (Skrzypek, 2015). E. Jastrzębska notes that when the CSR concept is inscribed in the entire sphere of an entity's activity, its business strategy and management system will bring mutual benefits to both the company and all stakeholders (Jastrzębska, 2011).

4. Knowledge management in the area of CSR

In the era of permanent development of the organization, knowledge is more and more appreciated because it is the main factor responsible for the development of a given organization and a key element in achieving success on the market (Drucker, 2001). Hence, knowledge managed in a manner appropriate to the specifics of business operations of a given company generates profit in the financial and non-financial dimension. Knowledge in the context of CSR thus becomes the main and dynamic factor determining the strength and success of the company in the market, contributing to maintaining or improving its competitive position. Therefore, skillful knowledge management leads to improvement of the organization's effectiveness in terms of social responsibility. A good characterization of this type of action is made by P. Drucker, who writes that an entity's management should take care of transforming social needs into opportunities to create a thriving business (Klimczok, 2013).

In the literature on the subject, many definitions of knowledge management can be found, but for the purposes of this paper, a simple approach can be used, according to which it is ensuring that stakeholders have the right information at the right time to increase their effectiveness and the results of the entire organization (Preuss, 2009; Cordoba-Pachon, 2009). This interpretation shows that knowledge should be understood not just as information and data, but also inclusive of intellectual capital. This consists of:

- knowledge,
- experience,
- technologies,
- relations with clients (relational capital),
- skills (Pobrotyn, 2012).

The main carriers of intellectual capital are the employees of a given organization. Thus, they, in the knowledge-based economy, become the most important resource of the organization. It should be noted that the knowledge that employees have derived from various professional experiences may remain unconscious, and the task of knowledge management is

its "extraction" and reformulation in such a way that it is useful for the whole organization (Zych, 2012).

According to J. Fazlagić, knowledge management is defined as the management style of an organization that is characterized by (Fazlagić, 2012):

- taking into consideration the values preferred by the organization's stakeholders: employees, customers and suppliers,
- appreciating the importance of synergy effects (taking into account the relationship between many elements),
- having the desire to learn about and improve the holding and release of effective methods of employee intellectual work – especially creative work,
- building favorable conditions for creating knowledge,
- providing the right information to the right employees at the right time,
- creating conditions conducive to sharing knowledge and its use in such a way as to improve the operation of the organization.

The uniqueness of knowledge lies in the difficulty of locating, capturing, codifying, using it effectively and of continually updating it (Gołuchowski, 2007). Additional reasons for difficulties in skillful management of this specific resource should be seen in reaching hidden knowledge and transforming it into open knowledge. This problem becomes particularly noticeable in the context of knowledge management regarding CSR. The descriptive knowledge of social responsibility is only the basis for revealing the hidden knowledge that should be passed on in the master-student relationship. It is worth mentioning that there is a risk of a high degree of formalization of knowledge about CSR in documents, ethical codes, strategies that then becomes an obstacle to taking specific socially responsible actions, and good practices are doomed to replicate in a standard way, without providing the expected benefits to the organization (Ćwik, 2012).

Organizations that have included CSR in their strategy, and, hence, manage knowledge in a conscious and properly mapped-out way, contribute to strengthening the results in terms of social responsibility. To achieve this goal, employees should be provided with the right information in the right amount and at the right time so that they can effectively carry out the tasks entrusted to them, taking into account the CSR criteria and the strategy that the organization is directed towards. The information employees need is related to:

- specifications of what is a corporate social responsibility, why the organization implements CSR strategy and how it translates into the organization's results;
- CSR strategy, its organization and its implementation plan;
- tasks of a given department in the CSR strategy implementation plan;
- the key stakeholders for the organization, as well as the data needed to prepare social reports (Losa-Jonczyk, 2014).

Managing knowledge about social responsibility and sharing it with the environment is a significant challenge. This is because it directly translates into the achievement of defined CSR goals and programs, as well as the level of employees' competences and knowledge in this area. The implemented process enables an efficient flow of information about projects implemented by individual departments in the area of CSR, and it organizes resources related to this issue. It is also important to increase the level of employee involvement in activities related to responsible business when they know what CSR means (Makuch, 2012).

The basic channels for disseminating knowledge about CSR in organizations are internal communication tools, among them newsletters, thematic mailings, intranets, educational materials and team meetings. Frequent actions to support the development of employees' knowledge about responsible business also include internal and external training, thematic educational programs and co-financing for individual activities in this area. Responsible companies have access to training and e-learning that contain elements of knowledge about CSR. Those that are dedicated to responsible business present a broad spectrum of themes related to CSR areas, namely: workplace, labor market, social involvement and natural environment (Piwowar, 2012).

Careful management of the employee's knowledge brings positive effects to the company, but also to the employees themselves. Bearing in mind the benefits of knowledge management, organizations should ensure the creation of an organizational culture conducive to the free flow of knowledge leading to the continuous development of employees.

5. Purpose of research

The aim of the empirical research within this article was an attempt to determine the perception of Generation Z in the field of corporate social responsibility. The research allowed gathering information needed to determine the existing state of knowledge of persons belonging to Generation Z, as to their understanding of CSR. Focusing on the group of the younger generation, the author of the study made efforts to determine to what extent the idea of CSR penetrates their environment, how aware they are of the importance of corporate social responsibility, whether they are interested in this issue and what is their attitude towards CSR.

The research was carried out in 2017/2018, using a questionnaire survey among students of the Czestochowa University of Technology. The research covered 320 students, 82% of whom were students of the Faculty of Management who participate in lectures in the subject of human resources management in financial institutions. The remaining respondents were students of other faculties of the university that expressed their willingness to participate in the study.

The study covered people in the age group of 20-23 years, i.e. representatives of the Generation Z who have just entered the labor market. This is a generation whose attitudes shape dynamically and whose current choices will largely determine the quality of future social and economic life in Poland. These people will decide in the near future how economic units will respond to development challenges. It is up to them to determine whether responsibility and ethics will become a standard in the practice of managing the organization (Odpowiedzialny Biznes, 2019).

The results were subjected to the chi-square independence test. On its basis, it was assessed whether the responses to given questions depended on the field of study of the respondent. The null hypothesis (H0) assumes that there is no statistically significant relationship, while the alternative hypothesis (H1) assumes that such a relationship exists. The level of significance assumed for the tests is $\alpha = 0.05$. The fields of study included Finance and Accounting, Occupational Health and Safety, Logistics, Management.

6. Analysis of the obtained research results

In the first part of the study, an attempt was made to determine the level of knowledge of the concept of social responsibility of the organization among Generation Z employees. CSR was interpreted as a series of activities, which are presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Understanding of the CSR concept among Generation Z

Characteristics	Percentage of responses	χ^2	α	Hypothesis
Maintenance and creation of jobs	62%	6.48	0.05	H0
Improvement of the financial conditions of employees	57%	35.73	0.05	H1
Caring for the professional development of employees	69%	7.61	0.05	H0
Application of ethical and moral rules in the workplace	42%	41.45	0.05	H1
Contributing to positive social change and improving people's lives	35%	17.58	0.05	H1
Protection of the natural environment	30%	1.59	0.05	H0
The allocation of income from the sale of products to social purposes by business owners	38%	0.66	0.05	H0
Engaging the company and its employees in pro-social actions	49%	7.44	0.05	H0
Engaging in activities for the benefit of local communities	32%	58.12	0.05	H1

Source: author's own research.

The obtained research results show that the young generation of employees shows interest in the subject of CSR, and adherence to the principles of social responsibility is an important aspect for them.

The research shows that a significant part of the research group – $\frac{3}{4}$ of all respondents have come across the concept of socially responsible business. Among the surveyed students, the notion of CSR is known because they are people participating in lectures and exercises in the subject of human resource management and are professionally active people (12%).

Considering the respondents' opinions, it can be noticed that the issues most often indicated by them as important concerned the workplace and care for the employees of the organization, that is, running business in a way that would allow employees to take into account the ethical and moral principles in the workplace, and where compliance with the principles of responsible personnel policy should be the norm in relations with employees.

The young generation notes that corporate social responsibility activities should be addressed primarily to employee teams, and then to consumers and the environment. They perceive strength in teamwork due to the fact that its members can exchange competences and transfer held knowledge to each other. They attach great importance to the work environment. People belonging to Generation Z are oriented to their own development, which is why, as the reason for choosing an employer, they indicate the need to work in an organization ensuring the possibility of professional development. In their opinion, the socially responsible employer should invest in their development through the creation of financing programs and co-financing of education. Financial issues are the second most important factor mentioned by the respondents. Compliance with ethical and moral principles is an important aspect for 42% of all respondents.

Other frequently provided answers (49% of all indications) touched on issues related to the involvement of companies in pro-social actions to counter malnutrition and maltreatment of children, counteracting the exclusion of disabled people, creating equal educational opportunities for children from different environments and (38% of all indications) the allocation of income from the sale of products to social purposes by business owners.

A slightly smaller number of indications (32%) were towards engaging in activities for the benefit of local communities (financial support for charities, sponsoring sports and cultural events, promotion of culture) and environmental protection (reduction of pollutants below applicable standards, energy saving). Among the representatives of Generation Z, there are advocates of modern solutions created for the sake of environmental protection. Young people declare that they consciously choose energy-saving devices, and among them, there are supporters of environmentally friendly public transport, thanks to which the air in cities is less polluted.

Based on the chi-square test, it can be concluded that a statistically significant relationship can be found between the age of the respondent and the following responses: application of ethical and moral rules in the workplace, contribution to positive social change and

improvement of people's lives, protection of the natural environment, engagement of the company and its employees in pro-social actions.

In the further part of the survey, respondents were asked to mention companies implementing CSR projects, and the results obtained are presented in Table 2.

Table 2.

Knowledge of companies and organizations implementing CSR strategies

Responses	Percentage of responses
Public television, Polsat, TVN	16%
Tesco, IKEA, Coca-Cola, Danone, PKO SA	56%

Source: author's own research.

Obtained data show that the majority of respondents know and can name some companies or corporations that are associated with a socially responsible business (72% of all responses). People who had previously encountered the concept of CSR more often pointed to various corporations (56%), while 16% of all respondents associated only public and commercial television with the CSR activity.

An important part of the research was an attempt to recognize whether young people perceive corporate social responsibility as a risk or a benefit. The results are revealed in Table 3.

Table 3.

Benefits from the activities of socially responsible companies

Responses	Percentage of responses	χ^2	α	Hypothesis
Strengthening the company's image on the market	78%	3.65	0.05	H0
Gaining the trust and loyalty of stakeholders	60%	0.56	0.05	H0
Increase in employee activity for the organization	40%	8.86	0.05	H1
Cooperation with business partners	72%	10.58	0.05	H1
Satisfaction among consumers of using the company's services and products	34%	7.07	0.05	H0
Recognition of local authorities	70%	29.09	0.05	H1
Access to financing sources	65%	5.50	0.05	H0

Source: author's own research.

Based on the survey, it can be stated that young people see many benefits from applying CSR principles in an enterprise.

Building upon the chi-square test outcomes, it can be concluded that a statistically significant relationship can be found between the age of the respondent and the following responses: gaining the trust and loyalty of stakeholders, cooperation with business partners, access to financing sources.

Answers to the next question made it possible to verify the respondents' knowledge regarding contact between the younger generation and information on corporate social responsibility. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4.
Contact of Generation Z with information about CSR

Responses	Percentage of responses	χ^2	α	Hypothesis
Workplace	32%	5.21	0.05	H0
University	79%	38.66	0.05	H1
Internet	26%	6.11	0.05	H0

Source: author's own research.

To the question as to where Generation Z encountered the term corporate social responsibility, they most often indicated the workplace (23%), University (79%), Internet (26%). The results of the survey show that a high percentage of respondents became acquainted with the subject of CSR while studying at university. From the question of whether or not this type of information was sought out of their own volition, one can deduce that the subject matter of corporate social responsibility was not in the sphere of their interests. Respondents, therefore, had had to familiarize themselves with this concept via the classroom, and as part of the preparations for the classes. However, they increased the knowledge in this area from the Internet and by analyzing the literature on the subject. Thus, it is optimistic that information about CSR permeates the higher education curriculum.

On the other hand, 26% of all people who previously had heard/read of this concept sought knowledge on it from the Internet on their own in order to satisfy their own curiosity. Therefore, the Internet remains one of the main sources of information for people participating in the study, so its high position on the list is not surprising.

As declared by 19% of all respondents – companies as part of in-house training seek to bring employees closer to CSR initiatives and identify basic issues related to CSR. This is to promote a better understanding of CSR.

Based on the chi-square test, it can be concluded that a statistically significant relationship can be found between the age of the respondent and the indication of a workplace as the place where the respondent met with the term CSR.

Organizations strive to build the best image of the employer by seeking the attention of the best job candidates. Creating good opinions on the local labor market is an indispensable tool for improving the image of the employer. At the same time, it is an area of corporate social responsibility. Companies trying to develop a well-known brand and to build a favorable image will be able to receive attractive applications. Therefore, an important subject of the research was an attempt to determine whether the activities of companies in the field of CSR are a motive for Generation Z in choosing a place of employment. The analysis of collected research material allows the conclusion that running a business in a socially responsible manner is not in itself a major factor for attracting the young generation of would-be employees. In line with their expectations, organizations operating on the Polish labor market should conduct socially responsible activities mainly in the sphere of employment. Factors that influence the choice of employer in the opinion of respondents are presented in Table 5.

Table 5.*Factors affecting the decision of Generation Z on the choice of employer*

Responses	Percentage of responses	χ^2	α	Hypothesis
High salary	68%	7.68	0.05	H0
Training and the possibility of professional development	74%	1.06	0.05	H0
Stability of employment	62%	78.46	0.05	H1
Friendly work atmosphere	60%	6.33	0.05	H0
Compatibility of work with education or interests	55%	1.09	0.05	H0
Work-life balance	53%	22.61	0.05	H1
A positive opinion of the company among friends	32%	2.80	0.05	H0
Employers' rankings	16%	6.01	0.05	H0
Charity activities	8%	5.03	0.05	H0

Source: author's own research.

The results of this part of the study show what values are important for the younger generation of employees. Despite the changing situation in the labor market, this opinion remains unchanged. The most motivating factors when choosing a place of work for representatives of Generation Z are training and personal development (74% of all responses), earnings (68%), friendly working atmosphere (60%), work compliance with education or interests (55%). Beyond the top five, there is work-life balance (53%), which means that young people do not want to make work the center of their lives, but want to have time for their passions, family and friends. It is worth noting that jobseekers do not base their actions solely on advertising portals. An increasingly popular method of finding an employer is acquiring information about him from friends. Therefore, the obtained data in this respect are not a surprise when respondents declare that they are looking for information about employers among friends. Employer rankings and charity companies were notably of low rank. The rarity of taking into account information about charity activities by young people does not necessarily mean that they do not value such practices. The results of this part of the study reflect the positive attitude of the young generation towards a responsible employer using practices in terms of their social consequences in the sphere of employment.

Based on the chi-square test, it can be concluded that a statistically significant relationship can be found between the age of the respondent and the following responses: training and the possibility of professional development, the stability of employment, positive opinion of the company among friends, employers' rankings.

Representatives of Generation Z were also asked if they are willing to be involved in social activity while working for an organization. The results of the research on this issue are presented in Table 6.

Table 6.

The affiliation of the Z generation to an organization that undertakes CSR activities

Responses	Percentage of responses
Affiliation to a non-governmental organization with a social profile	2%
Volunteering or taking part in charity activities	10%
Cooperation with environmental organizations and volunteer centers	1%

Source: author's own research.

Participants in the study showed that they are not interested in being involved in activities of a social nature. It should be emphasized that people who previously came across the concept of CSR more often pointed positively to this type of activity.

7. Conclusion

The awareness of CSR issues among the younger generation is insufficient. It is, therefore, necessary to promote this topic. How to effectively inform about corporate social responsibility is a challenge for the education system, as well as for public institutions. Knowledge of the problem was shown by only 75% of all the respondents, and yet most of them already have or will have contact with business entities. Considering the respondents' declarations regarding the need to receive more information about CSR, education must be conducted skillfully using appropriate tools. Despite the average level of knowledge of the young generation in the field of CSR, they are positive about it and believe that organizations should be more involved in social activities.

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