
Responsible Activities of the Company/Brand and their Impact on Its Positive Image in the Opinion of Generation Z Consumers

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Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the study is to present the relationship between the way generation Z consumers perceive socially responsible company/brand activities in the area of consumer rights protection and initiatives undertaken in the social environment and the creation of a positive brand image in the eyes of young consumers.

Design/methodology/approach: The study was conducted on a sample of 500 consumers in the period August-September 2023 throughout Poland (16 voivodeships). The sample selection was random. The study covered consumers of Generation Z (aged 18 to 28), both sexes and from towns with different numbers of inhabitants, following clothing brands on social media. The method used in the study was a diagnostic survey.

Findings: The research results show that Generation Z consumers are more likely to notice socially responsible brand actions in relation to consumer rights than initiatives implemented by the brand in the social environment. They also show that the perception of a brand's socially responsible actions determines its positive image. On the other hand, the perception of these actions as socially irresponsible does not translate into a lack of a positive brand image. Moreover, consumers who do not have an opinion on the brand's actions that demonstrate their social responsibility declare an equally high perception of a positive brand image.

Practical implications: The research results show that a significant percentage of Generation Z consumers do not have sufficient knowledge about socially responsible initiatives undertaken by their favorite brands in the social environment. Therefore, socially responsible brands that engage in local social problems, support the local community, or encourage customers to practice responsible practices in their activities should use more opportunities to communicate to consumers the actions taken in this area in order to create a more expressive image of a responsible brand.

Originality/value: The article has primarily cognitive value, emphasizing the importance of the perception of socially responsible actions taken by brands in creating a positive brand image. Until now, many studies have contributed to understanding the impact of brand actions perceived as socially responsible on building a brand image. However, few of these studies concern Generation Z consumers. The article therefore enriches the current theory of

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socially responsible brand practices and their role in building a positive brand image in the minds of young consumers.

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1. Introduction

In today's competitive markets, the commitment of companies/brands to sustainable and socially responsible development is a fundamental factor that determines the success or failure of many companies/brands. CSR is defined as the voluntary commitment of companies to the development of society and environmental protection, resulting from their social commitment and responsible behavior towards companies and social stakeholders with whom they interact.

CSR is a concept according to which the aspect of society, environmental protection and respect for the demands of broadly understood stakeholders influence the shape of the management strategy of economic entities (Daszkiewicz, 2009). According to the above, a company/brand should be characterized by responsibility for the effects of economic activity (Grima and Thalassinos, 2018; Thalassinos, 2024).

More and more stakeholders pay attention to the socially responsible aspects of the activities of companies/brands. Among all stakeholders, consumers, especially the younger generation, are one of the important groups that seems to be particularly susceptible to corporate social responsibility initiatives (Tian, Wang, and Yang, 2011).

The article addresses the issue of the relationship between socially responsible business (Corporate Social Responsibility - CRS), especially in the context of the brand's responsible initiatives in the social environment and activities related to the protection of consumer rights, and the perception of a positive brand image. It is argued that consumers evaluate the brand image based on the company's/brand's involvement in CSR activities (He and Lai, 2014).

The aim of this article is to examine the impact of Generation Z consumers' perception of sustainable brand actions in the area of social responsibility on their perceived brand image. The study assumes that the perception of a brand's actions as

socially responsible contributes to building a favorable brand image in the eyes of consumers. The perception of social brand responsibility in this article is considered from the perspective of the young generation consumer (Generation Z), who increasingly cares that the actions taken by companies/brands take into account the good of society and consumer rights (Leonidou, Katsikeas, and Morgan, 2013), engaging in social problems, supporting the local community, conducting honest communication with consumers and trying to meet their needs.

Only the social perspective of brand sustainability was taken into account in the considerations. It was defined as the consumer's perception of the practices undertaken by clothing brands in relation to consumer protection and involvement in the social environment by undertaking various socially responsible initiatives.

Many contemporary studies suggest that brands can benefit greatly when they are perceived as socially responsible by their stakeholders (Crowther, 2003; Idowu, Towler, 2004) and that corporate social responsibility activities undertaken by brands are positively and significantly related to brand image (Jung, Kim, and Kim, 2020).

2. The Social Dimension of Sustainable Development

Sustainability is a key concept that is attracting increasing interest among many stakeholder groups, including consumers (Halişçelik and Soytaş, 2019; Song *et al.*, 2019; Ukko *et al.*, 2019). For this reason, more and more companies are interested in adopting a sustainable management approach in order to strengthen their competitive position (Ramesh *et al.*, 2019; Schmidt *et al.*, 2018; Grima *et al.*, 2025).

Sustainability is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Hosta and Zabkar, 2021), a concept through which organizations voluntarily integrate economic, social and environmental aspects into their activities and interactions with stakeholders and implement them regardless of applicable regulations (Porter and Kramer, 2006).

Companies are responsible for their actions and their impact on society, which has a positive impact on their perception by stakeholders. Hence, sustainable development practices help in effectively achieving business goals while contributing to the well-being of society as a whole (Goyal and Kumar, 2017).

The concept of sustainable development is based on three main pillars: economic, social and environmental (Clune and Zehnder, 2020; Purvis, Mao, and Robinson, 2019; Chen, 2018). Actions taken within these areas are equivalent, which means that initiatives taken in one area affect results in others, and development must balance social, economic and environmental development.

The activities undertaken within the economic pillar focus on the financial results of enterprises (Dyllick and Muff, 2016) and refer to "sharing economic benefits through economic support in the region" (Jung, Kim, and Kim, 2020, p. 295). Therefore, the company's economic activities should bring benefits and profits to its key stakeholders, including partners, employees and customers (Choi and Park, 2015).

Social activities achieve other company goals, beyond business tasks aimed at making profits (Jung, Kim, and Kim, 2020). They focus on the social responsibility of the company/brand (Dyllick and Muff, 2016), which is understood as the process by which companies/brands manage relationships with various stakeholders who can have a real impact on the acceptance of their activities" (Bernatt, 2009, p. 26).

Activities related to social contribution may include, for example: initiatives supporting the local community (employee volunteering, social campaigns, sponsorship); activities involving the company in social problems (socially responsible investments), activities encouraging the community to undertake responsible practices (e.g. collecting clothes for the needy), and activities aimed at open and honest communication with stakeholders (social reports, eco-labeling) (Leoński, 2016).

Activities undertaken within the environmental pillar are "all activities aimed at generating and facilitating exchanges aimed at satisfying human needs or desires, so that the satisfaction of these needs and desires has a minimal harmful impact on the natural environment" (Jung, Kim, and Kim, 2020, p. 295). They focus on protecting the natural environment (Dyllick and Rost, 2017) and limiting the negative impact on it.

Business activities related to, for example, saving energy, raw materials and materials and reducing pollutant and carbon dioxide emissions, intended to reduce the company's operating costs, have an ecological aspect (Bączkiewicz, 2011).

A socially responsible company/brand undertakes actions aimed at mitigating climate change and protecting and restoring the environment (Borkowska-Niszczoła, 2015), has a positive impact on the natural environment also by monitoring the level of greenhouse gas emissions, supervising the level of emissions of pollutants that have a negative impact on the air, water or soil, and conducting environmental assessments or reports on environmental activities (Olejniczak, 2013).

Consumers' beliefs about a company/brand, their reactions and attitudes towards its products are shaped by the social activities in which it engages (Park, Lee, and Koo, 2017). Due to global brands that spread their innovative solutions in the business world, sustainable development practices are implemented, and more and more consumers pay attention to the social aspects of their activities (Roztocka, 2018).

Therefore, sustainable marketing initiatives should take into account all three aspects: economic, social and environmental (Ko *et al.*, 2015) and their goal should be to promote the growth and harmony of several elements, including the economy, environment, society (Jung, Kim, and Kim, 2020; Gleim *et al.*, 2023).

Thanks to such activities, the company gains a positive image of a responsible company, because customers' perception of organizations involved in economic, social and environmental development is positively related to a better brand image (Kim and Oh, 2020; Gong, Xiao, Tang, and Li, 2023). In further considerations, the focus was only on the social responsibility of the brand, trying to show that there is a relationship between the brand's actions taken in this area and its image perceived by consumers.

3. Corporate Social Responsibility in Creating a Brand Image

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is a management strategy based on the assumption that a company's activities should take into account the interests and needs of employees, the environment and environmental requirements. CSR supports sustainable practices, i.e., responsible organizational governance, human rights, employment and labor relations, the environment, fair operating practices, consumer issues, social involvement and development of the local community, and building and maintaining respectful relationships with stakeholders, suppliers, customers, local communities (Ukko *et al.*, 2019).

Many contemporary studies suggest that brands can reap enormous benefits when they are perceived as socially responsible by their stakeholders (Crowther, 2003; Idowu and Towler, 2004), including consumers. Positive perceptions of CSR activities by consumers contribute, among others, to the creation of a positive brand image (Cowan and Guzman, 2019) and trigger positive consumer attitudes towards the brand's products (Torres *et al.*, 2012).

The brand image is created by many attributes, such as: company philosophy, employees, salespeople's attitude, organizational culture, company name, its logo, advertising campaigns (Abratt and Mofokeng, 2001). Similarly, the structure of brand image is defined by J. Van Riel and J. Balmer (1997), who claim that the brand image is presented in the form of behavior, communication, and symbolism to internal and external audiences.

It is therefore the result of a comprehensive process in which customers compare and construct various attributes of the company. Brand image is a network of mental positive and negative associations, stored in consumers' memory, which create these brand attributes (Gilliam and Voss, 2013; Podsakoff *et al.*, 2016). It is commonly assumed that brand image is a set of meanings based on which a given brand is known and by which consumers describe it, remember it, and refer to it (Dowling, 1986).

In this sense, brand image refers to the symbolic meaning associated with individual brand features. The beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has about a certain thing are combined into what is known as the consumer's cognitive image (Cretu and Brodie, 2007).

Dobni and Zinkhan (1990) argued that image is an intangible aspect of a company/product that represents consumers' self-esteem, self-expression or social acceptance of the brand. Altkorn (2002), defining brand image as a subjective idea of it, pointed out that it is not permanent, it changes as the brand and the customers who follow it change. Issues of company/brand image are one of the most common market reasons for a company to implement sustainable development practices.

The relationship between socially responsible initiatives and consumers' perception of the company's image is illustrated by many global studies. Corporate marketing initiatives in the field of sustainable development improve the perception of the company/brand (Jung *et al.*, 2020; Gleim *et al.*, 2023). As a result, by improving the perception of the brand, they can significantly increase the competitive advantage and foster favorable consumer behavior (Huo *et al.*, 2022).

Authors such as Park, Lee, and Kim (2014) argue that corporate social responsibility builds and nurtures consumer trust in the company, which in turn leads to positive or enhanced perceptions of the company. Therefore, CSR seems to have a positive impact on the company's image. Other researchers, Maignan and Ferrell (2001), argue that brand development, corporate profit growth, and longevity are positively related to sustainability marketing initiatives.

Consumers will benefit from these initiatives, appreciate the company, and raise corporate awareness if the company invests in strengthening them (Morales, 2005). Furthermore, a company's reputation and image are better when it is perceived as performing well in social responsibility than when it is not (Alexander *et al.*, 2014).

Generally speaking, companies that strongly implement sustainability have a stronger brand image. This has also been demonstrated by brand image research related to the three pillars of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental (Chavalittumrong and Speece, 2022). Although this mapping is not perfect, researchers have shown that consumers perceive sustainability efforts through company products and CSR initiatives that are communicated to the public.

They tend to build a sustainable brand image based on their own experiences with products and marketing and PR activities undertaken in various types of media. Sustainability research extended to the cultural dimension undertaken by Jia *et al.* (2023) confirmed that companies that focus on marketing activities in the field of sustainable development can better present their brand image as environmentally and socially responsible.

This is due to the fact that each dimension of sustainability marketing positively affects brand image. The results of this analysis confirm previous studies that linked sustainability marketing to brand image (López-Pérez *et al.*, 2017). Similarly, other studies on socially responsible marketing activities also show positive associations with brand image (Ali, Danish, and Asrar-ul-Haq, 2020; Lu *et al.*, 2019). Thus, thanks to the responsible activities in which a company/brand engages, customers maintain ongoing relationships with it, demonstrate positive reactions and attitudes towards it and its products (Park, Lee, and Koo, 2017).

In conclusion, it should be added that companies should remember that the socially responsible idea they support should be as closely matched as possible to the brand image, so that there is full compatibility between them (Hajdas, 2009). This means that each organization can look for another, previously unused tool and support an original idea (important from a social point of view) that has not been previously supported by any other company/brand. Conscious consumers definitely prefer companies/brands that are able to demonstrate that they support a given social idea with pure intentions, and not only out of a desire to increase sales.

4. The Relationship between the Perception of Socially Responsible Activities Undertaken by Brands and the Brand Image in the Opinion of Generation Z Consumers – Methodology and Analysis of our Own Research

Research on the attitudes and behaviors of Generation Z consumers towards clothing brands, undertaken as part of UGB research grant no. 853, was commissioned to the IPC Sp. z o.o. Research Institute in Wrocław and conducted on a sample of 500 consumers in the period August-September 2023 throughout Poland (16 voivodeships).

The method used in the study was a diagnostic survey, the technique was a survey, and the tool was an online survey questionnaire. The research sample was selected randomly. Only people aged 18 to 28 and following clothing brands on social media were recruited for the study. The quantitative structure of respondents adopted in the study included three layers, i.e., gender, age and town from which the respondent came³.

The research covered several areas. One of them was the area of social responsibility of brands and brand image. The aim of the research undertaken in this area was, among others, to determine the awareness of Generation Z consumers regarding

³The quantitative structure of the respondents in each stratum was as follows: gender: 50% female, 50% male; locality: rural area - 20%, city with less than 50,000 inhabitants - 20%, city with 50,000 to 100,000 inhabitants - 20%, city with 100,000 to 200,000 inhabitants - 20%, 20% city with more than 200,000 inhabitants - 20%; age: 18 to 22 years - 50% and 23 to 28 years - 50%.

socially responsible practices undertaken by their favorite brands and to learn how the perception of brand activity in this area determines their perception of the brand image.

In order to learn how young consumers perceive the brand's actions taken within the framework of social responsibility, as well as the brand's image, a seven-point scale was used: I strongly disagree, I disagree, I rather disagree, I have no opinion, I rather agree, I agree, I strongly agree.

The brand's socially responsible actions were reduced in the study to five basic statements regarding the brand's care for consumer rights, i.e., statements from 1 to 5, and five statements referring to the initiatives taken by the brand in the social environment, i.e. statements from 6 to 10 (Figure 1). Respondents were asked to refer to the clothing brands they most frequently buy in response to these statements.

Customer-favorite brands, in all five areas of brand responsibility towards the consumer, are perceived by most customers as responsible. On average, 74,8% of respondents claim this. The largest percentage of respondents (84%) believe that their brand provides consumers with convenience when shopping (comfort, order, tidiness in the store, nice customer service), while 80% claim that it tries to satisfy consumer needs in terms of products (e.g., variety of assortment, sizes, compliance with fashion trends).

Only 6% of respondents believe that their brand does not take the indicated actions in relation to consumer protection. However, there are people among the respondents (on average 19%) who have no opinion on socially responsible practices undertaken by brands towards consumers.

Around 1/3 of respondents (28%) do not know whether their favorite brand educates consumers about the impact of fashion on the environment, e.g., whether it provides information on how to maintain clothing, uses eco-labelling, or informs about recycled clothing, and 25% do not know whether it responds appropriately to customer dissatisfaction, e.g., considers their complaints. In the second case, this may result from a lack of negative experiences related to the perceived dissatisfaction.

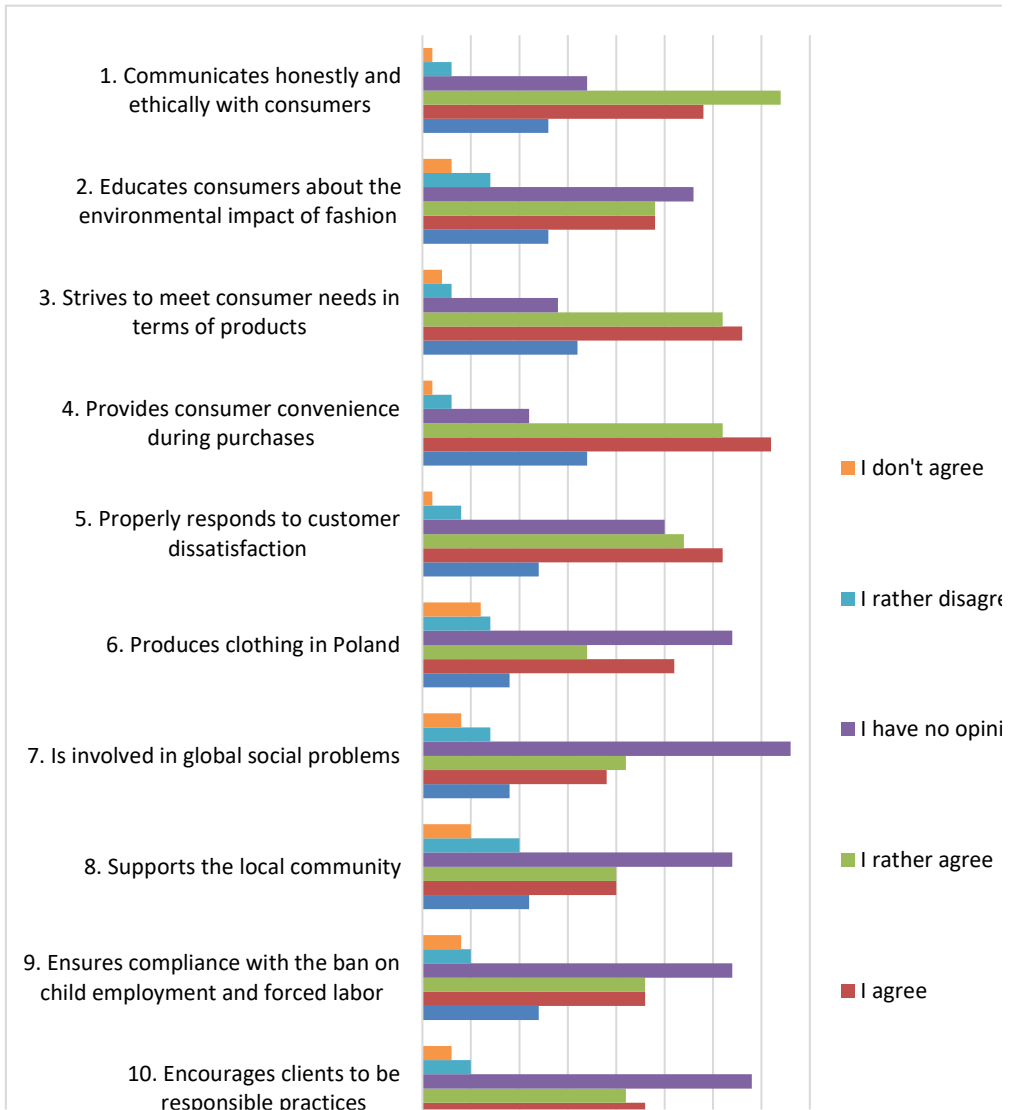
The perception of social initiatives undertaken by brands in the social environment is less satisfactory. On average, only 53% of respondents claim that their favorite brand undertakes such initiatives. The highest percentage of respondents (58%) believe that their brand takes care of compliance with the ban on child labor and forced labor throughout the supply chain, and 55% that it encourages customers to adopt responsible practices, such as collecting clothes for those in need.

On average, 13,2% of respondents believe that the indicated social initiatives are not undertaken by their brands, while as many as 34% have no opinion on this matter. In

this group, 38% of respondents do not know whether the brand is involved in global social problems, such as child malnutrition, helping refugees or limited access to drinking water.

In view of the above, Generation Z consumers perceive the responsible actions of a brand towards the consumer much better than the initiatives undertaken by them in the social environment.

Figure 1. Perception of the brand's responsible actions in the area of consumer rights and initiatives undertaken in the social environment (N=500)



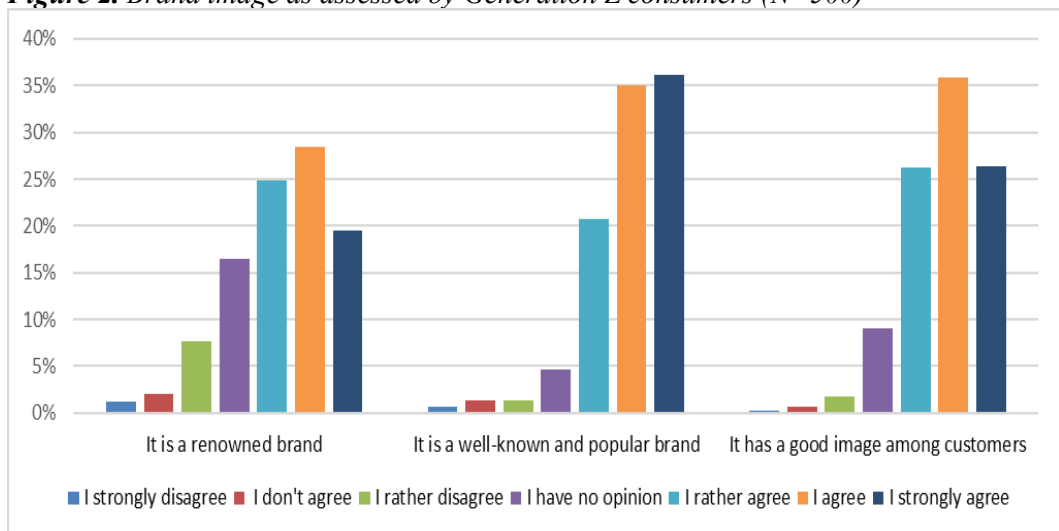
Source: Own research.

The issues of considerations regarding the brand image perceived by Generation Z consumers were reduced to three statements indicating a positive brand image: "It is a renowned brand", "It is a well-known and popular brand", "It has a good image among customers" (Figure 2).

In general, the image of the brand favored by respondents is perceived positively by them. This is confirmed by an average of 84% of Generation Z consumers. The largest percentage of respondents (92%) claim that their favorite brand is a well-known and popular brand, while the smallest (72%) claim that it is a reputable brand.

On average, 10% of all respondents are unable to assess the image of the brand they use, especially they do not know whether their favorite brand is reputable (16%). 11% of respondents who have a negative opinion about the image of the brand they use claim that their brand is not reputable. In view of the above, the statement that the brand used by respondents is reputable was assessed the least by the respondents.

Figure 2. Brand image as assessed by Generation Z consumers (N=500)



Source: Own research.

In order to show the relationship between the way in which Generation Z consumers perceive socially responsible actions taken by brands towards consumers and initiatives involved in the social environment and their perception of a positive brand image, a three-point scale was adopted: undertaking actions that demonstrate the brand's social responsibility and perceiving features that constitute a positive brand image (answers: I rather agree, I agree, I strongly agree), no opinion on the issue of brands undertaking socially responsible actions and on the issue of the brand having features that prove its positive image (answer: I have no opinion) and no actions that demonstrate the brand's social responsibility and not perceiving features of a

positive brand image (answers: I strongly disagree, I disagree, I rather disagree) (Table 1).

The study confirmed that the vast majority of young consumers, among those who perceive their favorite brands as responsible, both in terms of consumer care and initiatives undertaken in the social environment, also indicate a positive brand image (an average of 89,2%). In the area of consumer care, an average of 94,8% of respondents claim that their brand is well-known and popular.

This is also the opinion of a similar percentage (94,4%) of those who perceive the brand as responsible in the area of initiatives undertaken in the social environment. The lowest average percentage of respondents who perceive the brand as socially responsible also believe that their brand is reputable. This indicator for the area of consumer care is 78,4%, while for socially responsible initiatives it is 83,8%.

The highest percentage of respondents (95% each) of those who perceive the brand as one that communicates honestly and ethically with consumers, educates them on the impact of fashion on the environment, tries to satisfy their needs in terms of products and responds appropriately to customer dissatisfaction, i.e. is responsible towards consumers, also believe that it is a well-known and popular brand.

This is also stated by the same number of consumers (95% each) who believe that their brand undertakes socially responsible activities, i.e. produces clothing in Poland, cooperates with local producers and encourages customers to adopt responsible practices by conducting programs such as: collecting used clothing for the needy, and a slightly smaller percentage of respondents (94% each) who believe that the brand is involved in global social problems: malnutrition of children, help for refugees, etc., supports the local community (e.g. sponsors sports teams, supports schools, conducts social campaigns and volunteering, as well as compliance with the ban on child employment and forced labor.

A high degree of correlation was also demonstrated between the social responsibility of the brand perceived by the respondents and the third indicator of a positive brand image, i.e. the respondents' belief that the brand has a good image among customers. Over 90% of respondents who perceive the brand as socially responsible, in all areas of consumer care and initiatives undertaken in the social environment, also believe that the brand has a good image among customers.

It would be consistent to expect that there is a relationship between the lack of perception of the brand as socially responsible and the lack of a positive brand image. This relationship was not confirmed in relation to the two indicators indicating a positive brand image. On average, 87% of respondents who claim that the brand does not undertake socially responsible initiatives at the same time believe that the brand is known and popular, and 79,6% that it has a good image among customers. The same applies to the area of consumer care.

On average, 78% of those who believe that the brand does not care about the consumer in the above areas at the same time claim that the brand is known and popular, and 72,4% that it has a good image among customers. In the case of the last indicator, the above trend was not confirmed.

Here, a much lower percentage of those who do not perceive the brand as socially responsible at the same time believe that the brand is reputable. For the area of consumer care, this indicator is on average 48,4%, while for social initiatives it is 56,2%.

Similar trends were observed in the case of respondents who had no opinion on whether their brand was responsible towards consumers and whether it took responsible actions in the social environment. A significant percentage of respondents (an average of 89,6%) who had no opinion on the brand's socially responsible initiatives also believed that their favorite brand was well-known and popular, and 85,6% that it had a good image among customers.

This was claimed by 85,6% and 80,2%, respectively, of those who had no opinion on the brand's responsibility towards consumers. In the case of the last indicator, indicating that the brand has a positive image, a significantly smaller percentage of those who had no opinion on the brand's socially responsible actions and at the same time believed that their brand was reputable was found. For the area of consumer care, this indicator was on average 60%, while for social initiatives it was 62,4%.

Table 1. Perception of responsible brand actions in the area of consumer care and initiatives undertaken in the social environment and the brand image in the assessment of Generation Z consumers (markings: Y – yes, DK – I don't know, N – no) (N=500)

Socially responsible brand activities	Positive brand image indicators									
	It is a renowned brand			It is a well-known and popular brand			It has a good image among customers			
	N	DK	T	N	DK	T	N	DK	T	
In the area of consumer care										
Communicates with consumers in an honest and ethical manner	N	38%	8%	54%	13%	13%	75%	4%	21%	75%
	DK	12%	27%	61%	6%	10%	85%	5%	17%	79%
	T	9%	15%	76%	2%	3%	95%	2%	7%	91%
Educates consumers about the impact of fashion on the environment	N	40%	20%	40%	9%	7%	84%	7%	20%	73%
	DK	10%	29%	61%	4%	8%	89%	4%	11%	86%
	T	6%	10%	84%	2%	3%	95%	1%	6%	92%
Strives to meet consumer needs in terms of products	N	44%	4%	52%	16%	8%	76%	16%	20%	64%
	DK	10%	29%	61%	1%	15%	83%	4%	18%	78%
	T	9%	15%	76%	3%	2%	95%	1%	7%	92%
Ensures consumer convenience when shopping	N	44%	12%	44%	20%	8%	72%	4%	20%	76%
	DK	2%	38%	60%	5%	11%	84%	2%	20%	78%
	T	10%	14%	76%	2%	4%	94%	3%	7%	90%
Responds appropriately to	N	39%	9%	52%	17%	0%	83%	13%	13%	74%

consumer dissatisfaction and handles complaints	DK	15%	28%	57%	2%	11%	87%	3%	17%	80%
	T	7%	13%	80%	3%	3%	95%	2%	6%	92%
In the area of social environment										
Produces clothing in Poland (collaborates with local producers)	N	25%	18%	57%	5%	6%	89%	3%	15%	82%
	DK	11%	26%	63%	3%	8%	89%	1%	13%	86%
	T	6%	10%	83%	3%	2%	95%	3%	5%	92%
Engages in global social issues	N	27%	17%	56%	5%	5%	91%	6%	14%	80%
	DK	12%	28%	59%	3%	7%	90%	2%	13%	85%
	T	6%	7%	87%	4%	2%	94%	2%	5%	93%
Supports the local community	N	23%	26%	51%	8%	6%	87%	1%	13%	86%
	DK	13%	25%	63%	3%	6%	91%	2%	14%	84%
	T	5%	8%	87%	2%	3%	94%	4%	4%	92%
Ensures compliance with the ban on child and forced labor throughout the supply chain	N	25%	13%	62%	12%	4%	85%	10%	23%	67%
	DK	10%	26%	64%	1%	8%	91%	1%	11%	88%
	T	9%	11%	80%	3%	3%	94%	2%	6%	92%
Encourages customers to practice responsible practices	N	21%	25%	55%	17%	0%	83%	2%	15%	83%
	DK	14%	23%	63%	2%	11%	87%	2%	12%	85%
	T	7%	11%	82%	3%	3%	95%	3%	6%	91%

Source: Own research.

In view of the above, the assumption that perceiving a brand as socially responsible translates into a positive brand image in the eyes of consumers has been confirmed. It is also encouraging that respondents who do not perceive the brand as socially responsible or have no opinion on the issue of the brand's social responsibility, in the vast majority in two areas indicate that the brand has a positive image, claiming that it is a well-known and popular brand and that it has a good image among customers.

5. Conclusions

Companies/brands, in order to stay competitive on the market, must adapt to the constantly changing environment and build their positive image. Many instruments are used to build a positive brand image. For some time now, attention has been drawn to the growing importance of information on corporate social responsibility.

Thanks to brands, social responsibility practices are implemented, and entrepreneurs (companies) that implement the CSR concept build long-term and positive relationships with consumers. These practices concern not only initiatives aimed at reducing their negative impact on the natural environment, but also initiatives taken towards the social environment or in relation to the protection of consumer rights.

The analysis of the perception of the actions taken by brands as part of social responsibility generally gives positive results. Almost $\frac{3}{4}$ of young consumers confirm that their favorite brand protects consumer rights through the initiatives it undertakes, primarily ensures consumer convenience when making purchases, provides them with pleasant service, takes care of order and tidiness in the store; tries to satisfy the needs of consumers by providing them with a diverse assortment,

as well as keeps up with fashion trends and communicates with consumers in an honest and ethical manner through advertising or promotion.

Young consumers perceive the initiatives taken by the brand for the benefit of the social environment less optimistically. In this case, on average only about half of the respondents claim that their brand, produces clothes in Poland, cooperates with local producers, is involved in global social problems, e.g. child malnutrition; supports the local community, e.g., sponsors sports teams, conducts social campaigns and volunteering; takes care of compliance with the ban of child employment and forced labor and encourages customers to practice responsible practices, e.g., through programs such as collecting used clothes for the needy.

It is interesting that as many as about 1/3 of young consumers have no opinion on this issue. It can therefore be assumed that if the initiatives undertaken by the brand directly concern consumers, their rights and sense of security, the respondents are more aware of them and pay attention to them than when they concern social activities that do not directly affect the consumer.

In general, the image of the brand that respondents like is perceived positively. This is confirmed by an average of over 80% of Generation Z consumers, who believe that their brand is well-known and popular and has a good image among customers.

This result seems to be justified, because when choosing brands, young consumers pay attention to whether the brand is recognizable among young consumers and whether it enjoys a good reputation. A slightly smaller percentage claim that it is also a renowned brand.

Perhaps this slight difference in brand perception results from the fact that young consumers attach great importance to the price of the brand's products and choose cheaper brands, which are not always solid and of good quality. It is encouraging that only an average of about 10% of respondents claim that their brand does not enjoy a good image, and the same number have no opinion on this matter.

The research results provide a basis for the statement that the perception of a brand as socially responsible determines a positive brand image. Young consumers who perceive the brand's activities as socially responsible, both in terms of the brand's initiatives in the social environment and in the area of consumer rights, also declare that they perceive a positive brand image, claiming that it is a well-known and popular brand and has a good image among customers. To a slightly lesser extent, they indicate that their brand is reputable.

An interesting observation is also that the perception of a brand as socially irresponsible does not translate into a lack of a positive brand image in the eyes of young consumers. On average, 66,3% of respondents who believe that their brand is not taking action to protect the rights and safety of consumers and 74,3% of those

who believe that their brand does not engage in initiatives in the social environment, also declare a positive brand image.

In addition, a significant percentage of young people who have no opinion on socially responsible activities undertaken by brands also declare that they perceive a positive brand image. This applies to over $\frac{3}{4}$ of respondents who have no opinion on the brand's socially responsible activities. Therefore, the assumption made in the study was confirmed by the research results.

The results cited are consistent with the research presented earlier by other researchers, which are described in Section 3. However, in these studies, little attention is paid to young consumers. Therefore, the current study not only provides further insight into understanding the relationship between consumers' perceived socially responsible actions undertaken by brands and their perceived brand image, but also allows for a closer look at Generation Z consumers.

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