

## ASSESSMENT OF DISTRESSED, PROACTIVE AND MANIPULATIVE SELLERS' BEHAVIOR IN TERMS OF THEIR GENERATION AND GENDER

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Received: November 28, 2019 / Revised: January 10, 2020 / Accepted: March 4, 2020  
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**Abstract:** *Sellers' behavior is an important part of trading effectiveness. The objective of the presented research, which included participation of 208 sellers, was to identify and specify differences among the selected generations (Baby Boom, X, Y, Z generations) of sellers in the context of gender. The data were collected by TBQ-T(r) (Trading Behavior Questionnaire – Traders – revised form). The paper presents the results of the multivariate analyses, which confirmed statistically significant differences among generations of sellers from the point of view of the Distressed behavior attribute. At the same time, these results confirmed statistically significant interactions between the generations and gender in assessing the Distressed, Proactive and Manipulative sellers' behavior. Limitations of this research are the limited sample size and focusing attention only on the selected factors of sellers' behavior.*

**Keywords:** *Seller, Behavior, Baby Boom, X, Y, Z Generations, Gender.*

**JEL Classification J16**

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This paper was presented at the Third International Scientific Conference on IT, Tourism, Economics, Management and Agriculture – ITEMA 2019 – October 24, Bratislava, Slovakia, [www.itema-conference.com](http://www.itema-conference.com)

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## **1. INTRODUCTION TO DISTRESSED, PROACTIVE AND MANIPULATIVE SELLERS' BEHAVIOR**

As reported by Glazer & Liu (2017), work-related stress has a negative impact on individuals and their productivity. As Kożusznik, Rodriguez and Peiro (2015) state, there are many aspects that affect the level of stress. According to Oksanen and Stähle (2013), a pleasant work environment has a great impact on welfare, creativity, attitudes, perceptions, but also interactions of individuals with others. Selling is generally ranked at the top of the list of stressful jobs and there are plenty of stress-triggering factors in the daily life of a seller. Sellers are put in situations that create a high-stress environment (Johannson, 2018). According to Kemp et al. (2013), stress that affects sellers has both a positive and a negative side and every seller perceives a different situation as a source of stress. As Johannson (2018) points out that demanding situations should be a challenge and an opportunity for sellers to grow and learning how to cope with stress and with severe situations is an essential skill in the workplace.

Proactive sellers' behavior is manifested by an assertive, committed approach of dealers, effective, pleasant and courteous communication, attention, respect and mutual trust of the customer and the seller (Štefko et al. 2019). Committed and assertive behavior is part of the concept of positive occupational psychology in view of their content, which is defined by Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi (2000) as a scientific study of optimal employee performance, aimed at discovering and supporting factors that enable employees and organizations to prosper. Joy (2016) claims that engagement has a positive effect on both productivity and well-being at work, resulting in a positive attitude of sellers towards customers. Medhurst and Albrecht (2016) define assertiveness as an effort to address situations that arise from customer requirements. Assertiveness of sellers brings about increased sales, happiness, satisfaction, fulfillment, well-functioning teams, confidence, trustworthy sales demonstration, creativity, customer service quality, less stress. Garner (2012) adds that assertive, passionate, honest and humble sellers work on customer loyalty.

Manifestations of manipulative behavior can be observed in the field of business behavior. A variety of tools, principles, and approaches are used in the business environment to influence and manipulate customers (Sunstein, 2016). Manipulation is a universal social phenomenon, a part of persuasive communication through which, according to Štefko & Gallo (2015), the source seeks to deliberately influence the addressee in order to change their mental state in an atmosphere of free choice. Braiker (2004) sees manipulation as a social impact which aims to change customer decisions through different tactics. This may include misrepresenting information about products and services, unclear arguments, unfair compliments, and unwillingness to help. Unethical practices are reported by dissatisfied customers and cause greater damage than the short-term benefits of one-off sales (Dooley 2011).

## **2. BABY BOOM, X, Y AND Z GENERATIONS**

Strauss & Howe (1991) define generation as a large group of people and internally differentiated delineated population that grew up in a certain time period, which is connected by a similar way of behavior, thinking and acting. Troksa (2016) says that the major events often impact the culture within each generation and in every generation, there are social, political, and economical events, which can shape the ways that a generation is perceived. For the purpose of this research, we used the time periods of generations as defined by Horváthová & Čopíková (2015), which are in the Slovak conditions as follows:

Following World War II, the number of children increased dramatically, what made the Baby Boom generation substantially larger. The concept of **The Baby Boom generation** (1946 – 1964) has showed as a significant theme within social gerontology, increasingly in a European context (Phillipson, 2008). This generation values precious work and strenuousness. They are independent, confident, achievement-oriented, dedicated, career-focused, extremely hardworking and motivated by position, perks or prestige. They are not afraid of confrontation and do not hesitate to challenge established practices (Kane 2019). **The Generation X** (1965 – 1981) is a small, highly educated and widely diverse group of individuals, which values freedom and independence, they are competitive, individualistic, self-assertive, hardworking, and less loyal. As Appelbaum et al. (2005) state, this generation is more productive and motivated, easily trainable, and reflects high job satisfaction levels. According to Shen Kian, Yusoff & Rajah (2013), individuals from this generation are independent, technologically skilled and very good multi-taskers. They are motivated by an extra time off rather than money, and they place a high value on their personal lives. **The Generation Y** is the most technologically savvy generation in the workplace. They tend to need more feedback, prefer to work in teams, and are highly adaptable. As Cugin (2012) claims, they like candor, openness, transparency, flexibility of time and try to be polite. On the other hand, they don't like rules and bureaucracy. According to Shen Kian, Yusoff & Rajah (2013), they are friendly, positive, interactive, entertaining, and strongly team-oriented. They are open to education, challenges, development, and require a positive work climate as well. Members of the **Generation Z** (1993 – 2010) are just entering workforce and for them, technologies are a natural part of life. For Gen Z, the technological sophistication in the workplace is an important part of their decision-making process when considering job offers. For sales teams, this means the latest sales tech is necessary for attracting the top talent (Quan, 2019). According to Csobanka (2016) this generation can find and check the information they need. Communication among them is continuous because of social media, but personal meetings are also important to them.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY, SAMPLE AND RESULTS

The main aim of the research was to find out whether there exist any statistically significant differences in assessing the distressed, proactive and manipulative sellers' behavior and specify differences among the selected generations (Baby Boom, X, Y, Z) of sellers in the context of gender. Data obtained from the respondents were analyzed by the mathematical-statistical method of Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) in the statistical program IBM SPSS 22.00. For the purpose of assessing the sellers' behavior by the sellers, the original TBQ-T(r) questionnaire was used which was developed on the basis of the TBQ-T methodology (Štefko et al., 2019). The questionnaire TBQ-T(r) contains 19 items designed for the participants-sellers and enables assessment of three factors specified according to their content as follows: **F1: Distressed sellers' behavior** - is saturated with 8 items that specify the factor content in terms of customers' willingness to tolerate stress manifestations in sellers' behavior. A higher score also represents a higher rate of this tolerance. **F2: Proactive sellers' behavior** - is saturated with 16 items and is aimed at assessing the engaged, committed and assertive behavior of sellers. The content context is related to the awareness of the relationship between the seller's proactive approach and the positive customer response in the form of product selection. A higher score also represents a higher degree of this awareness. **F3: Manipulative sellers' behavior** - is saturated with 5 items and is aimed at the use of manipulative sales techniques. It focuses on whether sellers feel that they manipulate customers, or accept manipulative behavior as part of the sales process. A higher score also represents a higher degree of manipulation.

The respondents were to respond on a 6-point Likert scale from 1 to 6 to what extent they agree with the given statement (1 – definitely no/ 6 – definitely yes). The time periods for individual

generations were set in accordance with Horváthová and Čopíková (2015) as follows: 1946-1964 Baby Boom, 1965-1981 Generation X, 1982-1992 Generation Y, 1993-2010 Generation Z. To the fore came the analysis of the interaction relationship between generations and gender.

The research sample consisted of 208 respondents, 106 (51.0%) of which were men and 102 (49.0%) were women aged between 19 and 61 years, with an average age of 37.77 years (SD=13.017 years). The Baby boom generation (1946-1964) was represented by 44 (21.2%) respondents, the Generation X (1965-1981) by 52 (25.0%) respondents, the Generation Y (1982-1992) by 64 (30.8%) respondents, and the Generation Z (1993-2010) was represented by 48 (23.1%) respondents.

The research is aimed at finding statistically significant differences in assessing the Distressed, Proactive and Manipulative sellers' behavior by the selected generations of sellers: Baby boom (BB), X, Y and Z in the context of gender. The multivariate analysis results did not confirm statistically significant gender-related differences but confirmed the existence of statistically significant differences in the analysis of generations ( $F = 3.850$ , sig. = .000) and the gender-generation interactions ( $F = 3.606$ , sig. = .000).

The tests of Between-Subjects Effects confirmed the existence of statistically significant differences in the analysis of gender in the Manipulative sellers' behavior factor ( $F = 3.587$ , sig. = .049) (Table 1) and generation in the Distressed sellers' behavior factor ( $F = 6.830$ , sig. = .000) (Table 2 and Table 3).

**Table 1.** Assessment of the Manipulative sellers' behavior factor by male and female sellers  
Source: own processing

Gender	M	SD
male	3.3653	1.28882
female	3.6220	1.16650

In the assessment of the Manipulative sellers' behavior factor, female sellers scored higher than the male sellers. The male sellers expressed a greater degree of disagreement when assessing this factor, which means that they assess their behavior as less manipulative than it was among the female sellers (Table 1).

**Table 2.** Assessment of the Distressed sellers' behavior factor by different generations  
Source: own processing

Generation	M
Baby Boom (1946-1964)	3.3651
X (1965-1981)	4.0272
Y (1982-1992)	4.1333
Z (1993-2010)	4.0109

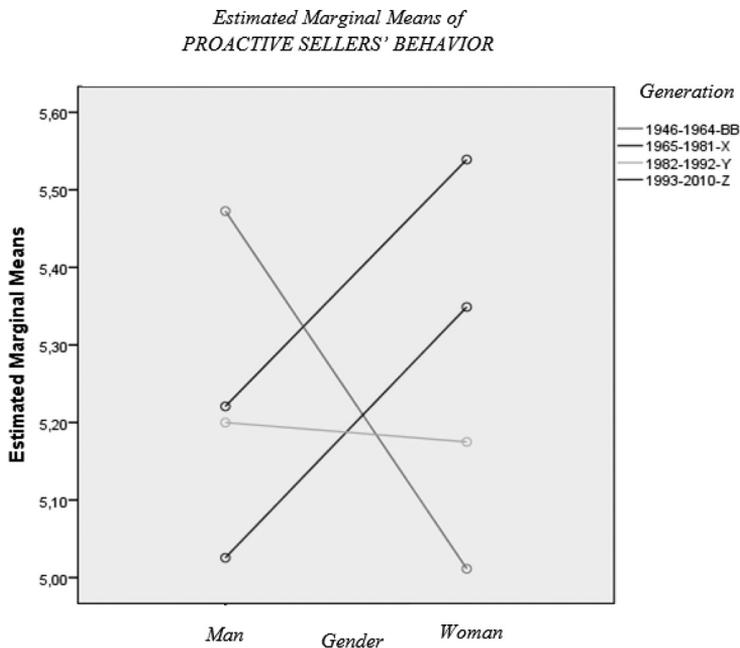
In terms of assessing the manifestations of stress in sellers' behavior, the respondents from the Baby Boom generation (1946-1964) had prominently the lowest scores (Table 2). In the Tukey test results, they were a separate subset of respondents (Table 3). It means that they did not agree with the expected tolerance of stress manifestations in the behavior of sellers by customers. Respondents of the other three generations have expressed some degree of agreement with the tolerance and acceptance of these manifestations in the behavior of sellers.

**Table 3.** Assessment of the Distressed sellers' behavior factor by different generations – Post hoc Tukey HSD test  
Source: own processing

Dependent Variable			Mean Difference (I-J)	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Distressed	1946-1964-BB	1965-1981-X	-.6620	.001	-1.1225	-.2016
		1982-1992-Y	-.7682	.000	-1.2037	-.3327
		1993-2010-Z	-.6457	.002	-1.1062	-.1853

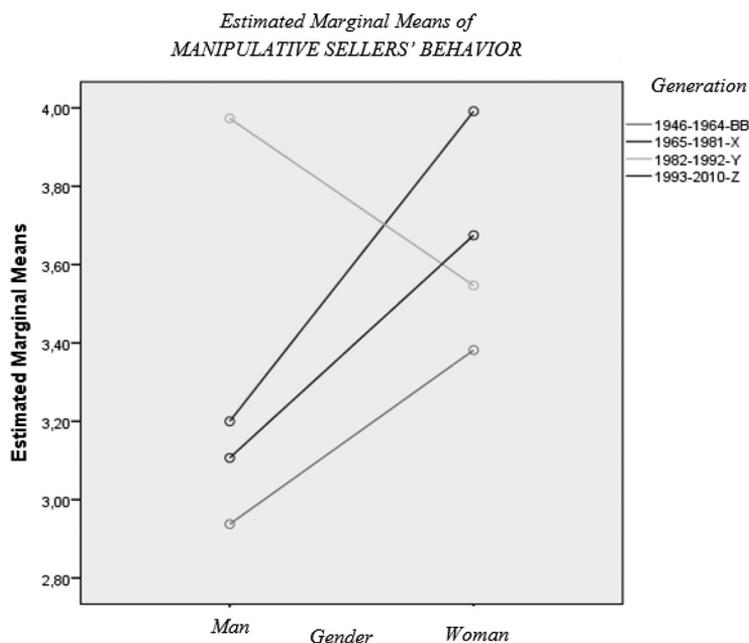
At the same time, these tests confirmed the existence of statistically significant differences in the analysis of gender-generation interactions in the Proactive sellers' behavior ( $F = 6.851$ , sig. = .000) (Figure 1) and the Manipulative sellers' behavior factors ( $F = 2.616$ , sig. = .049) (Figure 2).

In assessing the Proactive sellers' behavior factor, the Baby Boom generation male respondents expressed a higher level of agreement than the female representatives of this generation. On the contrary, the Generations X and Z females expressed a higher level of agreement than male representatives of these generations. In terms of the Generation Y respondents, the recorded gender-based differences were not significant (Figure 1).



**Figure 1.** Proactive sellers' behavior factor – the gender and generation interaction  
Source: own processing

In assessing the Manipulative sellers' behavior factor, the Generation Y males expressed a higher level of agreement than females of that generation. On the contrary, the Baby Boom, X and Z generation females expressed a higher level of agreement than the male representatives of these generations (Figure 2).



**Figure 2.** Manipulative sellers' behavior factor – the gender and generation interaction  
Source: own processing

#### 4. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS AND CONCLUSION

The shop is a place where sellers' behavior is affected by sellers' gender-based and generational differences. The generational differences in the context of gender were confirmed from the point of view of Proactive sellers' behavior and Manipulative sellers' behavior. In assessing the Proactive sellers' behavior factor, the Baby Boom generation males expressed a higher level of agreement than the females of this generation. The males of this generation are more marked by the characteristics of the Baby Boom generation, which is extremely hardworking and motivated by position, benefits and prestige (Kane, 2019). They are more aware of the importance of the relationship between a proactive seller's approach and a positive customer response. On the contrary, females of the Generations X and Z expressed a higher level of agreement in assessing the importance of Proactive sellers' behavior than males of these generations. In terms of the Generation Y respondents, the differences between the male and the female sellers were not significant. These results confirm the adequacy of considerations about the interaction effects of generational differences and gender in the context of the assessment of Proactive sellers' behavior. The results of the assessment of Manipulative sellers' behavior also support the considerations about the interaction effects of generational differences and gender. In assessing this factor, males of Generation Y expressed a higher level of agreement than females of this generation. They have a stronger feeling that sellers manipulate customers while taking the manipulative behavior of the seller as part of the sales process. Contrarily, in this context, the female representatives of the generations Baby Boom, X and Z expressed a higher level of agreement than males of these generations.

Based on the results obtained, it is possible to discuss the question of to what extent is the assessment of Distressed, Proactive and Manipulative sellers' behavior universal, or what is the meaningful level of generalization in analyzing these manifestations. The above findings point to the necessity of accepting the minimum interaction effect of generational differences and gender.

At the same time, it is possible in the future research within this context to pay attention to the positions of sellers, customers and their personality characteristics, or other socio-demographic characteristics. These findings should also be interpreted in the context of the cultural, social and historical conditions in which these generations lived. Simultaneously, this issue represents also a possible orientation of the future research, which presupposes cooperation of several scientific disciplines and is obviously of an inter-disciplinary nature.

The main aim of the research was to find out whether there exist any statistically significant differences in the assessment of the Distressed, Proactive and Manipulative sellers' behavior from the perspective of the Baby Boom, X, Y and Z generations of sellers in the context of gender. The presented results of the analyses support the considerations about a broader concept of examining generational differences in assessing sellers' behavior as such. The findings suggest that there is a need to discuss a meaningful level of generality in identifying and specifying intergenerational differences. This discussion does not only concern the differences examined in terms of assessing the behavior of sellers, but also relates to the concept of examining intergenerational differences as a whole.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was supported by the projects KEGA 012PU-4/2020 (Trading Behavior - Creation of the subject and textbook for non-economic study programs), and VEGA 1/0807/19 (Research on the determinants of trading behavior and marketing effects in the area of neuromarketing and the relation to neuro-linguistic programming).

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