

## **Generation X - the unknown potential in the wellness market**

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### **Extended abstract**

Today, the term “wellness” is increasingly being redefined to mean “quality of life” (Hartman Group, 2012). Besides underlining individual responsibility for and activity in promoting one’s health and preventing illnesses (SRI International, 2010; Grénman et al., 2012, McMahon & Fleury, 2012), wellness features with the harmony of the body, mind, and spirit. This embraces elements such as physical fitness and beauty care, nutrition and diet, mental activity and education, rest and meditation as well as social contacts and environmental sensitivity (Mueller & Lanz Kauffman, 2001; Roscoe, 2009; Grénman et al., 2012). The redefinition of wellness as quality of life experiences concurs with descriptions of wellness consumption, where place, atmosphere, settings, service, products, and professional staff are frequently mentioned (e.g. Konu et al., 2010).

The baby boom generation (born according to Eurostat, 1946–1964; according to definitions commonly used in Finland, either 1945–1950 or 1945–1956) has been the core consumer group driving the growth of wellness industry until recently (Hartman Group, 2012). The ageing boomer generation is health-conscious, wellness being the major goal for this generation who is focused on staying young and energetic (Williams & Page, 2011). As the generations are not alike by experiences which influence their values, attitudes, preferences, and consumer behaviour (Williams & Page 2011; Parment 2013), the boomers’ interpretation of wellness consumption is supposedly different from those of younger generations (SRI International, 2010). As the study by Rentz and Reynolds (1991) show, traditional forecasts based on cross-sectional patterns among age groups can produce results that are even opposite in direction from forecasts based on cohort analysis. Therefore, it is vitally important for retailers and actors in leisure business to understand the various ways consumers at different ages and belonging to different generations define “wellness” in their own lives.

Generation X (aka Xers, born around 1960–1980) is the generation between the well-known baby boom generation and generation Y (born around 1980–2000) (see Brodahl & Carpenter, 2012). Up to its name, generation X is rather unknown and undefined generation. Earlier literature portrays the generation X as a group without a clear identity (Wilska, 2004; Sirias et al., 2007). Being high-educated, but being hit by the economic recession of the 1990s, the Xers have been characterised as consumer-wise as well as technologically and media savvy, but being at the same time sceptical and rational (Sirias et al., 2007; Reisenwitz & Iyer, 2009; Eastman & Liu, 2012). Having come of age in the environment of the apparent dominance of individualism, the Xers have also grown up in the era when the pursuit of health and healthiness became "the most important metaphor of Western culture" (Wilska, 2004).

In our study we focus on generation X’s wellness orientation reflected in their consumption-related attitudes and behaviour with the aim of identifying the similarities and differences in their wellness orientation compared to the baby boomers. The study is based on the household survey data collected in 2011 in Turku area, Finland. Out of 7 246 questionnaires, mailed to randomly selected households, 2 010 were returned yielding a response rate of 28%. The number of

respondents revealing their age (18–86 years) was 1949. The generational approach (e.g. Brosdahl & Carpenter, 2012; Parment, 2013), was applied. In terms of generational cohorts, respondents aged 35–54 represent generation X (n=587), and respondents aged 55–64 baby boom generation (n=428).

As the baby boomers were born into times of prosperity and economic expansion, they take for granted that they deserved products and services without a need to earn them. For them, everything was possible. Generation X, on the other hand, has been buffeted by tumultuous political and economic conditions. For them hard work has been a pragmatic necessity and they are careful in planning for the future. They are even expected to embrace some of the values of matures/silent generation (born before 1945) because they have lived through uncertain formative years. (Smith & Clurman, 1997.)

We performed exploratory factor analyses (principal components, varimax rotation) to reveal the wellness orientation dimensions based on 27 statements concerning shopping- and consumption-related opinions and behaviours of the respondents. In our previous study on wellness consumption across different age groups, the wellness dimensions extracted among the respondents belonging to generation X and baby boomers were rather similar (Marjanen et al., 2014). However, baby boomers were found to be more responsible and more service and quality oriented than the represents belonging to generation X. The Xers were, on the contrary to our expectations, less appearance-oriented than boomers although more inclined to recreational shopping.

By separate factor analyses in both groups we managed to reveal some differences in their wellness orientation structures. By further investigating these two major generations, we try to identify the core wellness consumers in both groups and whether they are similar or not across the generations. This has major implications for the players in wellness market as they aim to create products, services, and messages that appeal to that segment that will take over after the wellness-oriented baby boomers.