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## Article

# Dual quality of products : myths and facts through the opinions of millennial consumers

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## DUAL QUALITY OF PRODUCTS: MYTHS AND FACTS THROUGH THE OPINIONS OF MILLENNIAL CONSUMERS

**Abstract.** The paper focuses on the dual quality of daily consumption products through the lens of the Millennial generation. According to the literature sources, Millennials are a generation of people that would become the main purchasing power in a few years. There are many diverse opinions on dual quality. Few are based on actual evidence, making it hard for regular consumers to differentiate between what is real and what is made up. This research study aims to sort out the myths and facts concerning the dual quality of daily consumption products utilizing the Millennial customers as a subject of research and information sources. Investigating the topic of dual quality revealed that the greatest attention was allocated to product testing and proved that dual quality existed. In Slovakia, however, there was a lack of research on consumer opinions on this topic. Therefore, the results of this study examining the Millennials' views on dual quality are unique. The empirical research was carried out in the years 2019 - 2020 on a sample of 987 respondents. From them, 395 consumers were selected who met the Millennial generation's characteristics in terms of age. The methodological tools of the research were the Binomial test, Multivariate Regression Analysis and the Chi-square test. As the research results show, the dual quality is most commonly observed by the Millennials with higher incomes and living in smaller settlements. The research empirically confirms and theoretically proves that Millennials consider dual quality to be the most ethical issue. Based on empirical research results, the paper presents suggestions for companies on how to manage the production and supply of products to different European Union countries without breaking the rules and aggravating the consumers. The proposals are based on current EU legislation and are formulated according to the authors' empirical research results.

**Keywords:** dual quality, the millennial generation, consumer behaviour, marketing innovations, European union.

**Introduction.** The issue of dual quality is not a new phenomenon, but lately, its value promoted an increase in talks. In the 1990s, the inhabitants of Slovakia noticed that some products, especially cosmetics, bought abroad have a different consistency, smell and intensity under the same brand and in similar packaging (Cimova, 2017). The dual quality arose naturally after the fall of communism and the opening of Eastern and Central Europe's markets to Western products and brands. Due to the low

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236

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standard of living in the countries of the former Soviet bloc, producers from the West had to adjust the recipe and composition of their products so that they could be purchased in Central and Eastern Europe. It would not be economically possible to offer the same products as Western Europe with the same composition and quality.

However, nowadays the situation has changed. The standard of living is slowly levelling off. People are travelling and shopping abroad. The new EU member states' residents gradually found out that the goods they know from the counters at home have different properties in foreign trade in a form of different composition, different colour, smell, and product density. And all are provided in the same or very similar packaging, however often at a different price, allegedly to the detriment of new countries (European Commission, 2018).

Sisto et al. (2019) refer to the practice of dual quality as situations when international food producers manufacture their goods through various recipes, using different standards for products marketed under the same brand name and in extremely alike looking wrappings but of inferior quality. As a result, customers and politicians from countries located in Central and Eastern Europe criticize this practice since various food products offered on their markets are of inferior quality and with more health risks compared to products from the same manufacturer designated for markets in Western Europe.

Manufacturers and brand owners commented little on the findings of these cases. Some have confirmed the existence of dual quality of their products, provided an explanation and eliminated the use of dual quality (Cimova, 2016, Lacenova, 2018). Some objected to the results and explained their point of view (Samekova, 2017). Some declined to express or explained the dual quality in terms of different taste preferences and consumption habits in individual countries (BeneSova et al., 2017). However, there were cases where the manufacturer did not even manage to react, as it was not represented in the country where the dual quality was revealed. In general, manufacturers were little involved in both the international and national dual quality talks.

From the beginning, the European Commission was reluctant to intervene in this problem with the premise of responsibility being at individual member states' level. Comparative tests confirming dual quality have been carried out in the several Member States. The main caveat to the tests performed was that they were not performed using the same methodology and compared different products, so their results were unrepresentative. Therefore, the Joint Research Center of the European Union prepared a uniform research methodology and, at the same time, carried out extensive testing. According to the results, the problem of dual quality in the European Union does exist, but its geographical pattern has not yet been confirmed (Joint Research Center, 2019). Dual quality was subsequently included in Directive 2019/2161 as an unfair practice, and this Directive also regulates sanctions for non-compliance. Member States were then given two years to apply these measures to their own legislation.

Therefore, several comparison tests were performed to tackle the dual quality. The results confirmed that dual quality exists in the EU. Although, it was confirmed that better products are always in Western Europe. Testing authorities, national politicians, the European Commission and the European Parliament (European Parliament, 2018) and manufacturers and distributors, abroad and consumers, all provided their unique opinions on the topic (dTest, 2016; Mth, 2016, Forbes, 2019). Furthermore, food quality and safety affect consumers' demand (Grunert, 2005). In Slovakia, research on consumer attitudes to the issue of dual quality was lacking. But the higher intensity of research activities could lead to better economic performance (Hiadlovsky et al., 2018). Therefore, this paper provides empirical research to analyze consumer behaviour in Slovakia in the context of dual quality. The research focuses especially on the Millennials' generation, as it is a promising group of consumers for the near future. There are many diverse opinions on dual quality. Few are based on actual evidence. This research study aims to sort out the myths and facts concerning the dual quality of daily consumption products utilizing the Millennial customers as a subject of research and sources of information on consumer behaviour.



**Literature Review.** The Millennial generation or Generation Y, or Generation N (Generation Next or Generation Net), refers to people born between 1980 and 1995 with slight variations, following baby boomers and generation X (Howe and Strauss, 2000; Brosdahl and Carpenter, 2011). The characteristics of this generation vary depending on the social and economic condition of each region. In a broader sense, this cohort is characterized by a favourable attitude to communications, media and digital technologies (Trees, 2015; Taylor and Keeter, 2010). In most parts of the world, their education has been marked by an increased liberal approach to politics and economics. Millennials are a generation that has grown up or adapted quickly to technology, hence called themselves technologically literate (Molinillo et al., 2020). They control the tools that previous generations have problems with, living with social media, which also influence their consumption behaviour and could quickly adapt to new processes (Carrasco-Gallego, 2017; Schuster, 2019; Purani et al., 2019). No other generation has been offered so many opportunities for good education, international stays, and travelling worldwide. Therefore, it is not surprising that the Millennial generation is confident, ambitious, mastering foreign languages and performance-oriented.

Today's Millennials fall into the developmental period of early adulthood, which is characterized by an effort to distinguish themselves from their peers in outer marks such as clothes they wear, the music they listen to or food they eat and so on. They are constantly developing a specific lifestyle, so-called youth culture. It is a period of searching for one's own identity, uniqueness and authenticity, a period of the social moratorium to search and experiment in different areas. Marcoen (1981) described the expectations and goals for the future and set new adulthood roles – independence.

Physical appearance is an important part of the identity of a member of the Millennial generation. They focus extensively on their body. It is a narcissistic focus (Credo et al., 2016; Arli et al., 2019). For a Millennial, the exterior and its attractiveness are a means of achieving social acceptance, social position and prestige. Therefore, e. g. wearing clothes with a prestigious brand is very important for them. Expenses on fashion items rise yearly (Lachance et al., 2003; Vermaak and de Klerk, 2016). They need to like themselves and others to be sure of their value and influence their consumer behaviour (McGregor, 2008). Valuation of one's own appearance is influenced by the social environment and «fashionable» standards and stereotypes (Hurst and Good, 2009). It is essential for them to what they wear, and they choose fashion brands that are just «in», they buy quality cosmetics. Millennials are more sophisticated shoppers, more influenced by the symbolic aspects of brands, and more motivated to consume for status than older customers (Eastman and Liu, 2012; Shin et al., 2017; Yoo and Sarin, 2018; de Kerviler and Rodriguez, 2019). They require personalization and seek popular products at low cost (Aluri et al., 2016; Alhabash and Ma, 2017; Linnhoff et al., 2017; Weber, 2017). Millennials are also eager to exercise social influence, which impacts their purchase intentions toward luxury products (Butcher et al., 2017; Soh et al., 2017). Any restrictions are nonsense to the Millennials, and they believe that everything needs to be tried, and they prefer intense pleasures (loud music, fast driving, climbing high peaks, etc.) since the goal is to achieve maximum. They are characterized by the need for urgent satisfaction, which is usually manifested by the tendency to shorten the time required to achieve a goal. They consider delays as a burden. They strive for an absolute solution, accepting in an emotional relationship and moral evaluation. Such behaviour often results in exaggerated activities that advocate a particular relationship or the idea since they have high compassion towards social causes and community values, are members of various organizations, e.g. environmental, prefer green products and are concerned about environmental sustainability (Kim et al., 2016; Cavaliere and Ventura, 2018; Wang et al., 2018; Deloitte, 2019; Gray et al., 2019; Ivanova et al., 2019). They are also willing to pay a higher price for socially responsible or environmentally friendly products, including organic food (Organic Trade Association, 2016; Liu et al., 2019; Küster et al., 2019; Molinillo et al., 2020; Hussain et al., 2020).

The millennial generation supports diversity, showing a fairer understanding of race and ethnicity, tolerance, open-mindedness and multicultural thinking (Nielsen, 2014). A millennial consumer is a



cosmopolitan, less ethnocentric individual and displays increased interest in acquiring global skills such as foreign languages, experiences, social interactions and global media (Kim and Drumwright, 2016; Licsandru and Cui, 2019). Millennials travel, explore new countries, buy products they know from home, and compare their properties, composition, and quality.

From the point of view of purchasing power, the Millennials have no problem spending even higher sums of money for quality. They do not have problems shopping online and could orient themselves in online retailers' ratings (Mangold and Smith, 2012). They also like to travel a lot, so they have no problem comparing the quality of the various goods offered at home and abroad. This generation is much more likely to invest in an experience than in a home mortgage or buying a new car. Millennials associate the best experiences of life with some purchased experience like attending a concert or a festival. Millennials are expected to be a significant group of consumers soon, and their consumption of goods and services would account for the majority of all consumption in all countries (Lee et al., 2020). Millennials already play their own role in the food consumption process and represent a significant and affluent market segment (Wang et al., 2016). Therefore, it could be expected that the Millennials would soon be the most important market for all sectors of the economy (Manfreda et al., 2019).

This research provided starting points as the basis for the main aim and subsequent sub-objectives. It is clear that the Millennial generation has been a subject of extensive research. However, there is no information on how these young people react to daily consumption products' dual quality.

**Methodology and research methods.** Due to the lack of research on consumer opinions on the issue of dual quality in the EU and the Slovak Republic, a survey was conducted on a sample of 987 respondents through a questionnaire. To examine the Millennials' consumer behaviour in the context of dual quality, 395 respondents were selected from the total sample, who indicated in the questionnaire that they were aged 26–40 years at the time of research. Subsequently, their attitudes towards dual quality were examined, and their consumer behaviour was analyzed in its context.

This research study aimed to explore the effects of dual quality of products on consumer behaviour of Millennials. This main goal was subsequently derived into partial objectives: to discover the extent of information the Millennial consumers have on dual quality issues; to examine their experiences with dual quality of products; to ascertain the changes in their consumer behaviour as a direct result of dual quality of products; to provide suggestions for an acceptable solution to Millennial consumers, and to differentiate between facts and myths concerning the dual quality.

To achieve these objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: The influence of media on the perception of Millennials' dual quality is stronger than opinions of close acquaintances.

Millennials' generation has grown up with technology or adapted quickly, so they are very technologically literate. These people could be online 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and effectively utilize digital technologies for anything (Ordun, 2015). A large number of media attracts Millennials. The media are important factors in creating the lives of individuals, groups and society as a whole, and it is not possible to isolate any Millennial consumer from their influence (Miklosik et al., 2020). Their efforts are to change how consumers think about a particular product and how they approach it. The power of the information being transmitted is so great that one could trust them faster than one's own eyes. Television and other similar media such as newspapers of the previous generation are losing their lead since it is the Internet that has become the main source of Millennials' information. They regularly use blogs, reviews and social networks to open up expressions of their interests and feelings. In general, this generation has a wider range of online activities than other generations. Much of their attention is being moved to YouTube. They listen to music on the Internet, watch the series and also use it for study. Advertising and information through the intermediary transmit their message much faster than other information from friends or family. Therefore, this study explores the importance of various sources of information on dual



quality and their influence on Millennial consumers assuming the importance of media as the strongest source.

H2: The majority of Millennial consumers have already had a personal experience with the dual quality of products.

Millennials do not know closed borders. They travel freely, and they often visit abroad. Language is also no longer a barrier, borders are being erased, and young people travel, preferably several times a year. It's all about experiences. No generation has offered so many opportunities for good education, staying abroad and travelling around the world. And there, of course, Millennials sample and compare the quality of a product of the same brand. They gain such experiences that could subsequently influence their consumer behaviour and attitude towards dual quality products. This study assumes that most Millennial consumers have already had a personal experience with the dual quality of products gained through such experiences.

H3: The perception of dual quality is affected by the age of customers.

People's perception and subsequent behaviour are often caused by their personality or the situation in which they find themselves and their age. Their preferred values, needs, attitudes and priorities are closely related, not to mention finances. While people who are dependent on their parents' finances are young, they do not think about the quality of the product. Still, on the other hand, the need to care for the offspring and/or older parents arises along with the maturity and interest in the quality and composition of products. Today's Millennials are currently 25-45 years old, so they are in productive age. These people are characterized by independence, the relative freedom of their own decisions and behaviour, responsibility concerning other people, responsibility for their decisions and actions. Professional, partner and parental roles are becoming an important part of their identity. They choose their own lifestyle. These consumers are mostly economically self-sufficient, and they are free to manage their money. Still, they are not in a situation where they are saving for an apartment or another significant investment. Online shopping does not cause problems and is familiar with online retailers' ratings, to a lesser extent subject to so-called scams. They select and consume products that help them determine what is important to them and products that express certain aspects of their personality or image. They want to make the best decisions in terms of price and quality and pay attention to good investments for the future. Millennials have confidence in brands of their choice (Ordun, 2015). Millennials expect many items, personalization and customization of products as immediate satisfaction (Howe and Strauss, 2003). They are demanding, flexible and gradually richer individuals. Most of their expenditure is for clothing, footwear, jewellery, sports equipment, entertainment, medical and cosmetic aids and food (Barbagallo, 2003). Therefore, this research study aims to explore the factor of age as the most significant distinction between consumers' perception of the dual quality of products.

H4: The customers most likely to change their behaviour due to the influence of dual quality perception are Millennials living in larger cities.

People living in villages generally have less access to shopping centres or large malls. Such places often provide only grocery stores with limited product range in their vicinity. For many consumers, it is more important to buy the products quickly rather than to think about their quality. These are often the people who do not travel, do not have a permanent job, their financial situation is bad, and struggle to survive, leaving little opportunities to think about the quality of products. Such people also resort to cheaper options, which are not always the most modern or of the highest quality. In cities, consumers may be more influenced by products and brands, which are consistent. They could choose from many products and qualities and factors, based on which they decide. Therefore, the factor of dual quality information could be more influential for Millennials living in larger cities. This supposition is analyzed through hypothesis H4.

H5: The majority of Millennial customers who are aware of dual quality perceive this issue as an ethical problem.



The generation of current Millennials is considered to be more environmentally friendly. Millennials are interested in environmental protection and rescue planes, humanity, etc. Thus, the dominant theme has been the fight against climate change or the pursuit of equal rights for minorities. They promote positive discrimination, the suppression of gender pay gaps etc. (Yarrow and O'Donnell, 2009). Since they are so sensitive to injustice, the assumption that they mostly perceive dual quality as the ethical problem would be examined.

H6: The Millennials customers with higher incomes tend to change their purchasing behaviour more often due to dual quality perception.

The consumer decision-making of an individual connected with fulfilling needs depends on its economic situation (income, savings, loans, etc.). When they have a regular and good income, they could also afford better things or services. They no longer have to be satisfied with cheap and low-quality products or with products purchased by their parents. With increasing incomes, people could afford the purchase of prestigious products of well-known brands at a higher price rate, from which they expect a premium value. If they become aware that these labels offer a lower quality in their country, a disappointment occurs. Therefore, the assumption exists that there might be differences in perception of dual quality among Millennials of different income groups.

These hypotheses were formulated based on previous research studies conducted on the issue of dual quality perceptions (Bartkova et al., 2018; Bartkova, 2019; Bartkova et al., 2019; Veselovska, 2020). However, these surveys focused on customers of all age segments without distinguishing the differences in consumer behaviour that age could create. Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by focusing on consumers' selected age segment.

Several statistic tests were used to analyze data and to verify formulated hypotheses. A binomial test was used for hypotheses H1, H2 and H5; regression analysis was used for hypotheses H3, H4 and H6. To further explore correlation relationships between the importance of dual quality and customers' social or economic characteristics and provide a more detailed image of the Slovak market Multivariate Regression Analysis performed in SPSS Statistics. The relationships were tested at a confidence level of 95 %. The model is formulated as follows:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \times X_1 + \beta_2 \times X_2 + \beta_3 \times X_3 + \beta_4 \times X_4 + \beta_5 \times X_5 + \sigma(Y) \quad (1)$$

where Y – level of dual quality importance for the customer;  $\beta_0$  is an intercept;  $\beta_1$ – $\beta_5$  – the regression coefficients;  $\sigma(Y)$  – a residual standard deviation; X1 – customer's age; X2 – customer's gender; X3 – customer's level of achieved education; X4 – customer's household income; X5 – customer's living conditions.

To verify the representativeness of the sample file, the Chi-square test was performed. The base file consisted of all people living in the Slovak Republic within the same age parameters. The Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic (2020) provided the data. Gender of Millennial consumers was selected as the criterion to verify the representativeness, and the sample file was constructed accordingly (Table 1).

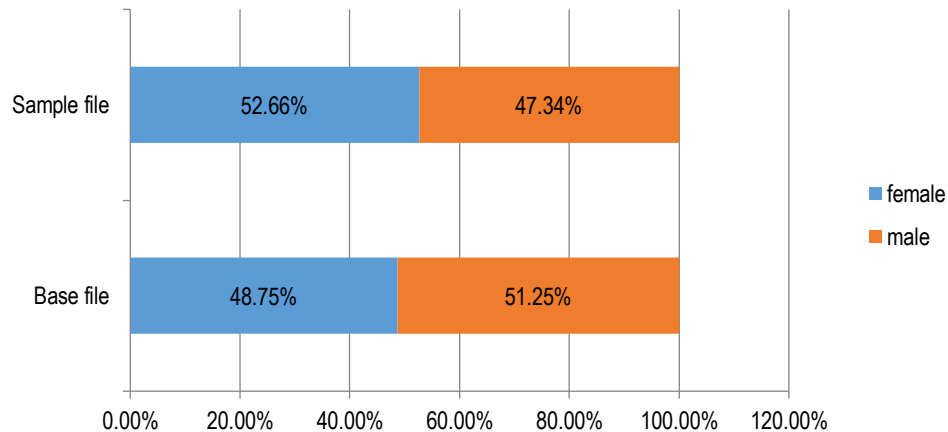
**Table 1. Verification of representativeness**

	npi		ni		(ni-npi) <sup>2</sup>	(ni-npi) <sup>2</sup> /npi
	Number	%	Number	%		
<b>Female</b>	820028	48.75	208	52.66	15.28	0.31
<b>Male</b>	862110	51.25	187	47.34	15.28	0.30
<b>Total</b>	1682137	100	395	100		0.61

Sources: developed by the authors.



The size of the Millennial consumer sample was 395 people of corresponding age. Figure 1 shows the comparison between base file structure and sample file structure.



**Figure 1. Sample file according to the gender of Millennial consumers**

Sources: developed by the authors.

**Results.** According to the research, Millennials are interested in the product information. These consumers read the packaging during the purchasing process and check the quality of the goods, so they are highly interested in the purchase. The quality of goods is more important to them than the price when deciding about buying.

Most Millennials (86%) have heard of the dual quality of goods in the EU. The issue of dual quality is an important topic for nearly three-quarters of Millennials (73%). The majority of them have heard about this issue from the media (73%), but some have their own experience (42%) and also a friend with personal experience (26%). Besides, the results confirm that the Millennials travel a lot and are interested in shopping. Therefore, they perceive the issue of dual quality and even have their own experience with it.

Millennials consider this problem to be most serious with food products. That is understandable since everyone consumes food daily and spends most of their income on it. In the second place after food, detergents and cleaning products were placed in an important Millennials position. They are a generation whose members often have families and have small children. Therefore, their priority is to take care of the offspring and the household (cleaning, cooking, washing, ironing). In third place were cosmetics, which confirms that the body's appearance and cult are important for young people. Thus they emphasize quality in cosmetics.

Therefore, it is essential to understand what factors influence consumer behaviour. Table 2 shows the difference in product features' influence based on the degree of dual quality awareness and importance for Millennial consumers. The individual numbers provide the information on the proportion of consumers of a certain degree of dual quality importance consider a particular product feature as a significant influencing force for their purchasing decision. The differences among spate Millennial groups show that the more consumers are aware of dual quality, the more significant is the influence of factors such as perceived quality, health risks and previous experience with the product. On the other hand, these consumers are less likely to be influenced by the availability of either the product or its substitute. The influence of price as a factor is relatively evenly distributed among different segments.



**Table 2. The influence of product features based on the degree of dual quality importance**

Degree of dual quality importance for Millennials	Product features influencing the purchasing decision (in %)					
	price	perceived quality	health risks	availability of product	availability of substitute	previous experience with the product
Millennials are aware of dual quality products and this issue is considered important	93.46	98.74	87.55	54.32	42.63	85.51
Millennials are aware of dual quality products, and this issue is not considered important	92.06	74.21	89.20	61.73	39.43	82.04
Millennials are not aware of dual quality products	97.37	69.35	74.94	63.45	62.54	70.69

Sources: developed by the authors.

Furthermore, it was discovered that the Millennials are interested in being informed about the issue of dual quality and whether they would be willing to inform other consumers about the dual quality cases they identified. This research focused on examining what information channels they would prefer. The research results showed that up to 92% of Millennials are interested in being informed about dual quality. This confirms the assumption that the Millennials are particularly sensitive to the issue of social responsibility. As many consider dual quality to be unfair behaviour by manufacturers, they are interested in this problem's course and solution.

On the other hand, 81% of Millennial consumers stated that they would be willing to share their dual quality experiences with other consumers. The majority of them would prefer a dedicated website for this purpose (57.35%). Such a website, drawing attention to cases of dual quality, was originally supposed to be created in the autumn of 2017 under the Slovak Republic's responsibility. However, it has not been created to this day. Millennials would also be interested in sharing through a specialized profile on social networks or a mobile application where it would be possible to insert photos and information directly (34.43%). These ways of obtaining information were the most preferred among the Millennials, which was not surprising, as this generation is the most technically and informatively competent. Another preferred method was to report dual quality cases to the Slovak Trade Inspection Authority (12.91%).

Subsequently, the verification of defined hypotheses provided further evidence on the Millennial customers' negative opinions on the dual quality of products in Europe. The most preferred information channel that they would welcome as a source of information on dual quality is the media, closely followed by the Internet. That confirms that the Millennials are computer literate and proficient on the Internet. Hypothesis H1 focused on examining the influence of media on the perception of dual quality. It was discovered that this influence is stronger than the opinions of close acquaintances, even family members. Therefore, hypothesis H1 was confirmed by the binomial test. These results show an interesting trend on the Millennial market confirming the position of media as the strongest influencer of opinions of young people in current modern society.



Another way of obtaining information that the Millennials would welcome is the regular report of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic. This discovery shows that the Millennials are politically engaged, which confirms the theoretical assumptions about the Millennials provided in the literature review above. As another source of information on dual quality, the respondents mentioned the Slovak Trade Inspection and the European Commission. Given that individual countries would implement the prepared European legislation into their own national legislation. In turn, in the case of Slovakia, it would be the work of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic. In the whole process, however, it would be necessary to establish a responsible and coordinating body. According to the results of this research, this should be the Slovak Trade Inspection Authority. The research findings showed that the Millennials considered their own experience or that of family members and acquaintances to be credible sources of information. Scientific research results are not considered valuable for this customer segment since only 9.85% of them consider these sources when seeking out new information on the dual quality of products. Thus, the dual quality information provided to the public should be professional and credible.

Hypothesis H2 focused on exploring the assumption that most Millennial customers have already had a personal experience with the dual quality of products. The binomial test was used to verify this hypothesis. It was discovered that 42.28% of Millennials had already encountered at least one product of dual quality (Table 3). However, they do not represent the majority of this age segment. Therefore, the hypothesis H2 could not be confirmed. On average, 35.29% of Millennial consumers has not yet had a personal experience with dual quality products. In turn, they have a relative of an acquaintance with such experience. Approximately 15% of Millennials have only heard of dual quality through media, and 7.44% have not yet been aware of this issue.

**Table 3. Dual quality product awareness**

Millennial's characteristics	Degree of experience with dual quality			
	High (personal experience)	Medium (acquaintance with experience)	Low (only media information)	None
<b>Gender</b>				
Female	51.38	39.06	9.56	0.00
Male	33.18	31.52	20.45	14.85
<b>Household income</b>				
400 – 1000 €	38.14	36.47	13.89	11.50
1001– 1600 €	38.98	38.56	13.53	8.93
over 1600 €	49.68	30.84	17.59	1.89
<b>Highest completed education</b>				
Primary	42.37	46.08	5.26	6.29
Secondary	39.69	35.49	11.19	13.63
Tertiary	44.81	24.29	28.51	2.39

Sources: developed by the authors.

Created regression analysis model provided several interesting discoveries. People with lower incomes are more bound by their habits and preferences. Therefore, they do not change their behaviour due to the influence of dual quality information. The situation is the same for Millennial consumers since only 56.81% of those with lower income would change their customer behaviour under the influence of dual quality information. Incomes reflect the economic situation of the consumer and influence consumer behaviour. If consumers do not have sufficient funds to buy whatever they want and, likely, they will not change their consumer behaviour in terms of dual quality. Low-income Millennials buy only what they need and those products that are primarily intended to survive. They are more sensitive to stocks, discounts.



They prefer economically advantageous and proven brands with advantageous packaging. Therefore, their consumer behaviour is very stable with only slight fluctuations, as they do not have so many alternatives. Although they could be interested in the dual quality, the product price remains the main factor influencing consumer behaviour. On the contrary, higher-income consumers have a greater opportunity to meet their needs, and their demands on purchased products and services are also increasing. Table 4 provides further information on these tendencies depending on the income of Millennials. An index measuring the potential change in buyer's behaviour of the millennium generation customers (RMCBC) was created as a rate representing two factors: 1) potential consumer behaviour change under the influence of dual quality information and 2) the strength of change in the form of new controls implemented by these consumers during their purchasing process. Nearly 40% of Millennials living in a household with an income less than 600 euro would not change their consumer behaviour under the influence of dual quality information. On the other hand, 43.48% of Millennials living in a household with income between 1801 and 2000 euro would change their consumer behaviour under the influence of dual quality information. The created regression analysis model showed a medium-strong direct dependency (0.574) between household income and consumer behaviour change. This finding also confirms hypothesis H6 focused on this issue.

**Table 4. Millennial consumer behaviour changes by income**

Millennial consumer household income	The rate of potential change in buyer's behaviour in customers of the millennium generation (RMCBC)		
	insignificant	medium	high
400 – 600 €	39.13%	26.09%	34.78%
601 – 800 €	22.58%	51.61%	25.81%
801 – 1 000 €	24.56%	49.12%	26.32%
1 001 – 1 200 €	27.69%	36.92%	35.38%
1 201 – 1 400 €	46.34%	41.46%	12.20%
1 401 – 1 600 €	31.48%	50.00%	18.52%
1 601 – 1 800 €	30.00%	46.67%	23.33%
1 801 – 2 000 €	21.74%	34.78%	43.48%
over 2 000 €	38.03%	47.89%	14.08%

Sources: developed by the authors.

Furthermore, created regression analysis model proved that the factor of consumer's education has virtually no effect on Millennials' tendencies to change their behaviour under the influence of dual quality information. However, gender could significantly affect consumer behaviour change. It was discovered that 73.26% of female Millennials would change their shopping habits under the influence of dual quality information. However, significantly fewer male Millennials would consider such changes (65.69%).

Hypothesis H3 assumed that the perception of dual quality is affected by the age of customers. The created regression analysis model proved that it was not the case. The living conditions were determinate as the most significant factor influencing consumer behaviour changes under the influence of dual quality information. Hypothesis H4 focused on this factor of influence. However, the initial assumption was that the customers most likely to change their behaviour due to the influence of dual quality perception are living in larger cities. An interesting phenomenon was discovered.

Millennial consumers living in smaller cities and villages are the ones more prone to consumer behaviour changes under the influence of dual quality information. The dependency was calculated as a strong indirect one with the coefficient at a value – 0.781. This finding could be perceived as contradictory since these customers supposedly have fewer opportunities to choose from. And it is fewer opportunities to shop in the countryside that are likely to make shopping on the Internet so interesting for these



consumers. Millennials are technologically proficient. Thus, everyday internet communication has become a natural part of life for them. Millennials do not need to learn what these technologies are for. They know how to use them intuitively, and they feel comfortable in a digital society. It is a generation that has access to a considerable amount of information. Even when buying goods or services, they have no problem obtaining and verifying information about their price and quality.

Millennials living in the countryside, precisely because they do not have so many shopping centres in their area, use e-shops. Although, they often carefully check profiles of sellers and brands on social networks. Thanks to price comparators on the Internet, they could discover the best offers. Goods and services would be delivered to their exact address within a few days. Besides, it is not a problem to reach for goods of the specific brand from abroad at affordable prices. Millennials want good value for their money. They want products that appeal to them. When choosing and buying goods or services, they are often guided by reviews from portals or social media, which provide them with detailed characteristics and the ones who are happy to provide these reviews. Besides, based on these facts, they could change their shopping behaviour concerning the dual quality of products. Millennials are more brand-oriented than Generation X. However, on the other hand, they are looking for products of preferable brand at various promotions and discounts. It would be correct to assume that this is one reason why Millennials in the countryside change their consumer behaviour more than their peers living in big cities.

Perception of the nature of the dual quality problem was yet another interesting factor to explore. The assumption (hypothesis H5) was that the majority of Millennial customers who are aware of dual quality perceive this issue as an ethical problem. However, this initial estimate was proven incorrect. The Binomial test results proved that the majority of Millennials (52.56%) perceive the issue of dual quality as a legal one. These findings could be considered as the best possible outcomes since it enables the governments to create solutions that would be perceived as suitable by the Millennials. According to the Millennials, the solutions from the EU and national governments that create policies on the matter are the correct path. Some of this age segment representatives perceived this issue as an economic one (22.38%). However, it is not true since companies do not have higher profits due to dual quality. Therefore, it is positive that the majority of Millennial consumers does not believe this myth. Dual quality could also be perceived as an ethical issue by these consumers (14.79%). That provides an opportunity for companies to attract these customers sensitive to this issue through marketing promotion clarifying that their company provides the same product for all its customers regardless of their country of origin. These findings provide various ideas for possible solutions to this problem that would suit this specific consumer segment.

Some researches confirm that consumers (including those in Slovakia) increasingly prefer quality over price when buying goods, especially food products (GfK, 2008; GfK, 2015; Kušnirova, 2016; GfK, 2017; Bartkova et al., 2018). In turn, this research's findings indicated that this fact also applies to the Millennial generation, for which the quality at the time of purchase is more important than the price of the goods. Most of them have encountered dual quality, and this practice instigates negative response in them. For this reason, the conclusion of this study offers suggestions for possible solutions to this problem.

The European Commission has prepared legislation in the form of an amendment to the Directive 2005/29/EC, which considers dual quality to be an unfair practice. It has laid down sanctions for breaches. The new methodology guides countries on how to proceed with product selection, sampling and testing. Food producers for whom the tests show differences would have to explain to the competent authorities (Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic, 2018). The same methodology should be gradually introduced for other types of products. It is the responsibility of individual Member States to apply European legislation to their own national legislation. In general, the dual quality solution should take place in three phases: the first is product selection, the second is sampling, and the third is testing itself. These three phases are subject to uniform arrangements and ensure that test results are cohesive and representative throughout the EU.



In the first phase of dual quality testing, it is necessary to determine which goods are affected by this problem. At this stage, a list of products would be created to be tested and inspected for dual quality. The creation of a targeted list is based on previous campaigns and customer complaints regarding dual quality. In this step, the proposal resulting from this research recommends creating a specialized website established in Slovakia and that the Slovak National Inspectorate (SOI) be responsible for this website. Respondents in our research identified SOI as the most trusted organization in dealing with the dual quality and at the same time showed a willingness to inform others about identified cases of dual quality through a specialized website, which could be an alternative to a special section on the SOI website.

Therefore, this study proposed to create a separate internet channel on the SOI website and provide responsible persons who would further address the issue of dual quality. Even older consumers are using the Internet a lot. It is a universal proposal regardless of the consumer age (Bacik et al., 2020). On the one hand, consumers could forward a complaint or a suggestion to the responsible authority. On the other hand, they would keep a record of these submissions and subsequently participate in preparing a list of products targeted for testing. A separate website could also be set up to report dual quality cases. The complainant could be redirected to this page from the SOI site or could be inserted directly. That would make it easier for consumers to share experiences with dual quality in line with their preferences and provide competent authorities with a clear database of cases to work with. The proposed list of products to be tested is further supplemented by random items, taking into account the availability of products and their market share. The draft product list is then consulted with the brand owner on its availability and equivalence in different markets. The design of the list of products to be tested shall also consider the constraints imposed by the special requirements for the handling of products and the feasibility of laboratory and sensory testing. The result of this testing phase is a list of products to be sampled.

The second phase of testing is sampling. Sampling shall be the responsibility of the competent authorities under national rules. For food, it is the State Veterinary and Food Administration in Slovakia and its regional components. As the problem of dual quality also concerns non-food products, to which a harmonized testing procedure should also be gradually applied, other authorities would be involved in the whole process (for example, in cosmetics, the Public Health Office). Moreover, a central authority is needed to centralize data and information and pass it on to stakeholders. Millennials from our research prefer the Slovak Trade Inspection.

The third phase is the testing of the products. If the composition and sensory properties' analysis shows differences, the owner of the mark would be asked to explain the competent authority. Given that the respondents from our research were interested in continuing to be informed about the dual quality, the Slovak Trade Inspection Authority as the main coordinating body of the whole process and the institution responsible for the website publishing data should publish the results and stakeholder statements after testing, including brand owners.

Most Millennials said that dual quality should not exist, and manufacturers should offer uniform products in EU markets. They do not exclude different products adapted to the specifics of individual countries. In turn, they only require them to be properly labelled. Food is an important element through which national identity could be promoted in everyday consumption. Traditional dishes play an important role in authenticating ethnic and national culture, as proven by various empirical studies (Bardone and Spalvena, 2019; Parasecoli, 2017). Therefore, it is legitimate to adapt products to the specific tastes and customs of each country. Herewith, they should not be packed in the same or at first sight very similar packaging. Manufacturers should turn this in their favour and differentiate the packaging of their products. Some suggestions include the inscription «Made in ... (Slovakia)» or «Made in ... (Slovakia)». Another designation could be «... (Slovak) recipe» or the title «Slovak product» above the main product name. This label evokes a sense of authenticity in the consumer and encourages conservative and traditionalist



consumers to buy them. Such labelling shall generate an increase in revenues concerning local products' value and quality (Foltys et al., 2015). Similar differentiation could be made for EU member states.

**Conclusions.** This research study aimed to explore the effects of the dual quality of products on Millennial consumer behaviour. This main goal was subsequently derived into partial objectives that created guidelines for this research and helped categorize the findings. This research discovered the extent of information Millennials have on dual quality issues, with media playing the key role in forming this age segment's opinions. Furthermore, it was discovered that many people know about the dual quality. However, they do not change their purchasing behaviour. In the research frameworks, the authors considered whether the information on dual quality influenced the Millennial consumer behaviour and what solution they would propose themselves. As many as 68% of Millennials stated that they had changed their behaviour to increase their controls over the composition of the products they buy, especially in food products. At the same time, most Millennials stated that an acceptable solution for dual quality would be a significant differentiation of goods by different packaging and a different price.

Several interesting findings provided an overview of which characteristics influence the consumer behaviour of Millennials. It was discovered that people living in villages or small settlements are more likely to change their behaviour, even though their choices are more limited. Millennial consumers with lower incomes are more bound by their habits and preferences. Therefore, they do not change their behaviour due to the influence of dual quality information. Education does not affect dual quality perception. However, gender significantly affects consumer behaviour. Other authors noted the same trend among similar age groups (Flagg et al., 2014; Carlson et al., 2018; Crane et al., 2019). Women are generally considered to be responsible for the whole family's purchases since they also prepare food and obtain other household goods. In turn, it makes them more conscious of the price-quality ratio. The Millennial generation is currently the group that represents the greatest purchasing power. They are key customers in many segments. It stands to mention that they are a cohort of earning and productive people, unlike a group of teenagers and seniors. They are not indifferent to dual quality and are interested in what products they buy. Millennials are among the smart online consumers who are skilled in finding the best offer, but they emphasize product quality. Thus, manufacturers should respond to this generation's opinions and innovate products to their individual needs, be sensitive to their attitudes, values and preferences. They should be able to address the Millennial generation correctly, have something to offer and, last but not least, provide true information about dual quality products that are easily accessible and professionally substantiated. When using local raw materials (or raw materials allowed in any given country), if they differ in the purchase price or simplify the processing process, this fact should also be taken into account in the goods' selling price. Millennials perceive ethical behaviour on the market. Therefore, the companies need to offer fair products at a fair price and adapt the marketing mix to customer requirements.

This research's last objective was to differentiate between facts and myths concerning the dual quality that had previously never been examined by other researchers. According to the Millennials, what are the myths and what are the facts concerning the dual quality of products? Millennials are seen as a generation that is closely tied to communication technologies and sensitive to ethical behaviour. This research has also confirmed it. The Millennials perceive dual quality mainly through the media and the Internet. Moreover, they perceive this topic as an ethical issue. These assumptions explain some research results that residents of smaller settlements are more likely to change their consumer behaviour concerning the dual quality. It is so precisely because of the possibilities of obtaining information and shopping on the Internet. There are several myths about dual quality as follows: Central and Eastern Europe are a waste bin of the EU; the producers are abusing their business power when selling low quality at high prices to some European consumers, and so on. It should be noted that the dual quality cannot be viewed unilaterally. This phenomenon arose naturally due to the different economic situation in different European countries. Besides, manufacturers are not always able to ensure the same composition of products for all



countries due to different rules and regulations and different consumer habits and preferences. It is legal to offer different products, but it is necessary to label them properly.

The opinions of Millennial consumers differ from those of other age segments. That proves the need to carefully diffuse these consumers' incorrect beliefs (so-called myths) with strategies designed specifically for them. The findings from this research prove that the general solutions may not be acceptable for all consumers. Therefore, they could be incorrect. The findings showed that Millennial consumer behaviour concerning dual quality corresponds to the general Millennial behaviour as similar research on consumer behaviour in the context of dual quality is lacking.

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**Подвійні стандарти якості продукції: міфи та факти з точки зору споживачів-міленіалів**

Статтю присвячено дослідженню проблематики подвійних стандартів якості продукції з точки зору покоління міленіалів, яке через декілька років стане найбільш купівельноспроможним. Систематизація наукових напрацювань засвідчила існування різних поглядів на існування подвійних стандартів якості продукції. Лише незначну кількість наявних робіт підкріплено реальними фактами. Авторами встановлено, що звичайні споживачі не завжди спроможні розмежувати реальні факти від вигаданих. У роботі зазначено, що за результатами тестування продукції, автори низки наукових напрацювань прийшли до висновку про існування подвійних стандартів якості продукції. Однак, встановлено, що думка споживачів Словаччини не є достатньо дослідженою. З огляду на це, аналіз думки споживачів покоління міленіалів щодо подвійних стандартів якості продукції є актуальними. Метою статті є виявлення та розмежування реальних фактів від вигаданих міфів щодо подвійних стандартів якості продуктів щоденного споживання. Об'єктом дослідження є споживачі покоління міленіалів. Емпіричне дослідження проведено на основі панельних даних, сформованих для вибірки з 987 споживачів, з яких 395 є міленіалами. Періодом дослідження обрано 2019-2020 рр. Для аналізу панельних даних використано інструментарій багатоваріантного регресійного аналізу, біноміальний тест та тест Хі-квадрат. За результатами дослідження встановлено, що міленіали із високим рівнем доходу та ті, що проживають у невеликих населених пунктах, стикались на практиці з подвійними стандартами якості продукції. Дослідження емпірично підтверджує та теоретично доводить, що міленіали надають етичного виміру проблематиці подвійних стандартів якості продукції. За результатами емпіричних досліджень та відповідно до чинного законодавства ЄС, у статті представлено рекомендації компаніям щодо управління виробництвом продукції та її постачання у різні країни ЄС без порушення правил та уникаючи тиску на споживачів.

Ключові слова: подвійна якість, покоління міленіалів, споживча поведінка, маркетингові інновації, Європейський союз.