

Generational Marketing: The Different Generations in Bulgaria

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Abstract— Studying the consumer, his behavior and habits is one of the most important tasks of marketing. Every person is part of a generation. Each generation shares a common life period in which it experiences common historical events and is influenced by the same fashion trends. In this sense, when studying consumer behavior, it is important to consider which generation the target consumer belongs to and what is characteristic of that generation. This question must always be considered in the context of a given country, due to the different political and economic processes that take place in it, as well as the different culture, traditions and customs that are characteristic of it. The purpose of the article is to characterize the different generations in the context of Bulgaria. The characterization of generations is important for a more detailed study of the consumer, which is a prerequisite for creating more effective marketing strategies.

Keywords—generational marketing, generation, consumer, consumer behavior

I. INTRODUCTION

Segmentation is one of the basic concepts in marketing. It is also the main link with the generational marketing. This stems from the fact that one of the most commonly used criteria for market segmentation in practice is the demographic criteria "age".

Generational marketing is a marketing approach that uses segmentation based on a cohort of people born in the same time period who share the same stage of life and who are shaped by certain common events and trends to have certain experiences, attitudes, values and behaviour. Based on this, generational marketing aims to create a marketing message that meets the unique needs and preferences of each generation.

This stems from a number of circumstances related to the fact that people born in a given time interval:

- witness the same historical events that influence them;
- are influenced by social trends in society, as well as by fashion trends that shape their taste for a certain period;
- have similarities in terms of priorities, preferences, habits, desires and behaviour;

- move through different phases of their life cycle over time, changing their priorities, preferences, habits, desires and behaviour.

All these circumstances should be considered in the context of a given country. Based on this, the aim of the article is to characterize the generations in Bulgaria.

II. GENERATIONS IN BULGARIA

As of 2024, seven generations coexist in Bulgaria, as can be seen in Table 1. Their classification is based on the work of Strauss and Howe [1]. Each of them fulfills a different social role in society.

TABLE I. THE DIFFERENT GENERATIONS [2]

Generation	Born between (year)	Age in 2024	Social role
Greatest	1901-1927	97-123	Pensioner
Silent	1928-1946	78-96	Pensioner
Baby Boomers	1947-1964	60-77	Adult working or unemployed Pensioner
X	1965-1980	44-59	Adult working or unemployed
Y	1981-1996	28-43	Adult working or unemployed
Z	1997-2009	15-27	School student, University student, Adult working or unemployed
Alpha	2010-2025	1-14	Child in nursery or kindergarten, School student

As can be seen from the table, the group of pensioners in Bulgaria is formed by the representatives of the Great, the Silent and part of the Baby Boomers. The labor force in the country is formed by part of the Baby boomers and generation Z and the representatives of generations X and Y. Those studying at University or school are part of the representatives of generation Z and those of Alpha. In

this sense, the entire population of learners is formed by these two first digital generations, since it was the first cohort of Generation Z that was born when the Internet became widespread. For this reason, they are also the subject of consideration in this article.

III. CHARACTERISTICS OF GENERATIONS

The Greatest Generation

The representatives of the Great Generation are those born in the period 1901-1927. Those who have reached the venerable age between 97 and 123 form 0.08% of Bulgaria's population by 2024. According to NSI data [3], as of 31.12.2023 there are 396 persons over 100 years of age. All representatives of this oldest living generation are pensioners.

The early representatives, born in the period 1901-1917, lived through the First World War. Together with the late representatives, born in the period 1918-1927, they also witnessed the Second World War. The childhood and youth of the "Great" was formed during the Kingdom of Bulgaria until the end of the era of Tsar Boris III, who died on August 28, 1943. The 3-year reign of the last Bulgarian king, Simeon II, who was a minor at the time, followed. For this reason, the government is through a regency - Bogdan Filov, Prince Kiril Preslavski and General Nikola M. Mihov rule on behalf of the minor Tsar Simeon II. The "Great" witnessed the proclamation of the People's Republic of Bulgaria on September 15, 1946. The coming of age of the last cohort born in 1927 coincides with these events. In 1947, the Sixth Great National Assembly adopted the first Constitution of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, which lasted until 1989. Since 1990, the political system in Bulgaria has changed, as has its name - from the People's Republic of Bulgaria to the Republic of Bulgaria. This marks the beginning of the period known as the Transition to Democracy and Market Economy. For the "Great" themselves, this event coincides with their transition to the last stage of the life cycle - retirement. The most significant media for this generation since childhood is the radio. The influence of newspapers increased later in their lives.

This brief historical review aims to outline the main and most significant historical events that have had their impact on the people who witnessed them directly and influenced their lives. Undoubtedly, the three periods - the post-liberation Bulgaria, the First World War and the Second World War, are full of difficulties and shortages, which have taught the "Great" of hard work, struggle and faith. The main value that can be highlighted on the basis of the historical events during the outlined period and the resulting living conditions is interpersonal relations. I believe that thanks to the social environment and support, as well as the strong family and friendship ties, the "Great" have preserved the Bulgarian spirit and traditions.

The Silent Generation

The second oldest generation in Bulgaria are the people born in the period 1928-1946. As of 2024, they are aged between 78-96 years and are part of the group of pensioners. As a share, they occupy 5.13% of the country's population as of 2024, based on NSI data.

The early representatives, born 1928-1937, like the "Great", witnessed the decline of the Kingdom of Bulgaria, associated with the death of Tsar Boris III, who died in 1943. They lived during the time of the last Bulgarian king, Simeon II, whose rule passed under the sign of the regency, due to his minor age. In their youth, the early representatives of the Silent experienced the transition from the change of two radically different forms of government - Kingdom and People's Republic.

The early representatives of the Silent, together with the late ones, born in the period 1938-1946, witnessed the Second World War. The birth of the last cohort in 1946 coincided with the creation of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, proclaimed on September 15, 1946. Together with the late representatives of the Greats, the most significant part of the youth of the Silent, passes during the time of the People's Republic of Bulgaria.

The silent generation also experienced the transition from the People's Republic of Bulgaria to the Republic of Bulgaria in 1990. For the early representatives, this period is a transition to retirement. By this point, the latecomers have entered their last decade before retirement. The two main media that accompany their youth are radio and newspapers. Television came later in their lives.

The representatives of the Silent Generation share a large part of their lives with those of the Great Generation. The years after the First World War and those during the Second World War were challenging and filled with difficulties and deprivation. For this reason, I believe that the interpersonal relationships and the cohesion and support that result from them can also be cited as a core value characteristic of this generation. Like the "Great", we can give them the same qualities of hard work, struggle, and faith.

Baby Boomers

The "Baby Boomers" generation are those born in the period 1947-1964. The first cohort of them were born at the dawn of the People's Republic of Bulgaria in 1947. As of 2024, they are aged 60-77 and occupy the largest share of the country's population, compared to other generations – 25.6%. Their representatives fulfill two roles in society by 2024. The earlier representatives are in the retirement age. In this way, together with the Great and the Silent, they form the group of pensioners in Bulgaria. A small proportion of the later representatives have entered their final years before retirement and are employed or unemployed.

This is the first generation of the seven under consideration to be born after World War II. The childhood, most of the youth and the active age of the "Baby Boomers" passed through the years of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. At a more mature age, they witnessed the change of two forms of government and the transition from the People's Republic of Bulgaria to the Republic of Bulgaria. This period of Transition to Democracy and Market Economy is associated with a significant change in life. Like any significant change, it hides both fear of the new and uncertainty and hope for the future.

Parents of the "Baby Boomers" are the late representatives of the Great Generation and the representatives of the Silent Generation. As noted for them, creating and caring for a family is a major value characteristic that can be attributed to them. In this sense, the Baby Boomers grew up under this influence, which undoubtedly had a great impact on them. Subsequently, creating their own family, the model of behavior and family, imparted by their parents, grandparents, has been transferred to theirs. This has built them as responsible and caring. Growing up in a close-knit social environment, this generation also builds an aspiration to complete higher education and an aspiration to career development for themselves and their children in the future.

The media that Baby Boomers grew up with and have been a regular part since the beginning of their lives are radio, newspapers and television. "Baby boomers" are the first generation that not only witnessed the spread of the Internet, but also used it since the end of the 20th century. Unlike younger generations, however, they encountered the World Wide Web at a more mature age. At the very beginning, after the introduction of the Internet, a large part of the representatives of this generation used it for the first time at their workplace. The main reason for its initial use was to fulfill work duties. Baby Boomers are not active on social networks, but use the Internet to search for information and make online orders.

Generation X

Generation X includes people born in the period 1965-1980. This is the second most numerous generation in Bulgaria, after the "Baby Boomers" - 22.3%. By 2024, the representatives of this generation are aged between 44-59 years. They form a significant part of the country's labor force, being of active age. Therefore, their role in society is precisely that of working or unemployed persons.

All X were born during the time of the People's Republic of Bulgaria. The earlier representatives in their youth, and the later ones in their childhood, witnessed the change of two forms of government and the transition of the People's Republic of Bulgaria to the Republic of Bulgaria. For the earlier representatives, this coincides with the upcoming entry into the labor market. This is one of the significant moments in a person's life, which marks the beginning of his career development

Such a significant change in the state management system is associated with changes in the economy, the labor market and a number of other sectors. For this reason, many members of this generation face financial uncertainty, which makes them more cautious and less willing to take risks. The same can be said about the late representatives who entered the labor market in 1996-1997. This is a period of political crisis in the country and a high level of inflation.

Parents of Generation X are the late representatives of the Silent Generation and the early Baby Boomers. These generations are concerned about the career realization of their children, which

prompts them to make sure that their children get a good education and, subsequently, a profession.

The influence of television is great with this generation, who are exposed to it much earlier in their lives than previous generations. They, like the Baby Boomers, witnessed the spread of the Internet, but at an earlier age. They use the Internet to fulfill their official duties, but also for personal purposes such as surfing, searching for information, watching video content, online orders and others.

Generation Y

Generation Y is formed by people born in the period 1981-1996. As of 2024, their age is between 28-43 years. This is the third most numerous generation in the country with a share of 19.3% of the population of Bulgaria, after the representatives of the "Baby Boomers" and Generation X. Together with the representatives of Generation X, they form the most significant part of the labor force in the country.

During their childhood years, the early representatives of generation Y lived in the time of the People's Republic of Bulgaria and witnessed the change in the form of government in 1990, and these are those born in the period 1981-1989. The first cohorts of them are of primary school age, so they have vague memories of these events. The late representatives were born at the dawn of the Republic of Bulgaria, after 1990 to 1996, which coincides with the first years of transition to democracy and a market economy.

Generation Y parents are the late Baby Boomers and early Generation X. They continue the tradition of striving for a good education and realization on the labor market for their children.

From the beginning of their lives, this generation has been exposed to the media influence of television. Already in his childhood years, they have access to global channels such as MTV, to world television productions such as "Baywatch", "Alf", "Emergency Room", "Doctor Quinn Medicine Woman", "The X-Files", "3rd Rock from the Sun", "Friends" and many others. In their childhood years, they participate in the process of renting video cassettes and DVDs from video libraries. Earlier in their lives, they also witnessed the rise of portable Walkmans.

This is the first generation that, at an earlier stage of their lives, has the opportunity to access the Internet, and not for the purposes of fulfilling their work duties, but for entertainment. They are also the first with more substantial participation in social networks. Subsequently, its representatives use the Internet for various purposes - surfing, watching movies, listening to music and podcasts, using streaming services.

Generation Z

Generation Z includes people born in the period 1997-2009. As of 2024, its representatives are between the ages of 15-27 and form 13.4% of the country's population. Due to the age range in which the representatives of this generation are, it is the only one

that fulfills three different social roles in society, namely – student, University student and worker/unemployed.

This is the first generation born in the years of the Republic of Bulgaria, which did not witness the transition to a market economy and did not experience the political crisis in the country in 1996-1997. The challenges it faces in his school and student years are of a different nature. They stem from the global coronavirus pandemic, which has included a period of social isolation. This contributes to increasing the usability of the Internet for online learning and various other activities. As an effect of the impact of pandemic conditions, young people are sinking even more into the digital world.

Parents of this generation are the representatives of Generation X, who face financial uncertainty during the period of entering the labor market, which makes them more cautious and less willing to take risks. In the role of parents, they are also more pragmatic in the desire for their children to realize themselves quickly on the labor market.

Gen Z are digital in nature and used to live with technology from their earliest days, and can also be considered less reluctant to test and use different types of technology. They perceive technology as part of their daily lives and constantly consume online content. Z are used to get information from various online sources, they are influenced by the figure of the online influencer, by the content of podcasts and streaming platforms. As consumers of digital content, centennials need a different type of experience in their consumer journey. Expectations for the emotions they want to experience are high throughout the purchase decision journey.

According to Philip Kotler, Generation Z is the most numerous generation worldwide by 2023 [4]. By 2025, its representatives will form the majority of the workforce and become the most important market segment for the consumption of products and services. This fact testifies to the future great market potential of this generation, which makes it an object of interest for marketers. Studying the behavior and habits of the "first digital" generation will provide a good starting point for the next generations, which are expected to be technology-oriented as well.

Generation Alpha

Generation Alpha is formed by people born in the period 2010-2025. As of 2024, they make up 14.1% of the country's population, which percentage will be updated with the birth of the last cohort of them in 2025. At the time indicated, the representatives of this generation are babies, young children in nurseries or kindergartens and students. This is also the youngest generation in the world as of 2024.

The members of Generation Alpha are the first to be entirely born in the new millennium, as the first four cohorts of Generation Z were born in the past. Like them, Generation Alpha was witness of the spread of the global coronavirus pandemic and its attendant social isolation and online learning.

Generation Alpha parents are Generation Y, who, influenced by their Baby Boomer parents and following their parenting model, are nurturing while striving to meet their children's needs, thanks to the great variety in the market.

It is characteristic of this generation that from an early age they can handle various smart devices such as smart phones and tablets, as well as the Internet. This allows them to search and define the content they want to watch themselves. This testifies to their digital nature and to the fact that they are prone to use different technologies. For that reason, I think they will be more ready and willing to use the Metaverse, augmented reality technology, and virtual reality technology than any previous generation.

Each generation is different from the others. This is directly related to the era and the historical events and social movements running through it. Generations are shaped to a great extent by the conditions of life offered by the time they are living in. In building them as individuals, generations are influenced by various interrelated factors:

- Culture
- Social
- Economically
- Politically
- Technological development directly affecting economic development.

Marketers must know what is characteristic and distinctive about each generation in order to know how to reach them.

CONCLUSION

The application of generational marketing will allow a deeper study of consumer behavior and what influences it. This, in turn, is a prerequisite for developing effective marketing strategies to reach the target group of consumers in the best way.

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