

## The internet and communication technologies in view of various typologies of generations

**Author:** Agnieszka Dejnaka

### Abstract

The principal background for considerations over changes to generations of communication technologies users is provided by a dynamic development of the internet and Web 2.0 in view of accessibility of information in the information process- both in terms of gathering and generating information. Contemporary behaviour constitutes evolution of users' behaviour resulting from the access to the internet and virtual social bonds in the internet space. The knowledge on forms and directions of activities of contemporary generations of communication technologies users and factors determining their activities constitutes the basis for deliberations included in this elaboration. According to G. Zaltman without an in-depth understanding of the generations using information technology one cannot define an action strategy of enterprises in the market and influence their behaviour (G. Zaltman 2008: p.52-53). This paper aims to present and evaluate various typologies of generations of internet and communication technologies users in view of various typologies of generations.

**Keywords:** internet technologies, internet communication, generation X, generation Y, generation Z, generation C, L, Google barometer.

**Historia:** otrzymano IV kwartał 2014, poprawiono 10.03.2015, zaakceptowano 10.04.2015

**JEL:** D11

### Introduction

The principal background for considerations over changes to generations of communication technologies users is provided by a dynamic development of the internet and Web 2.0 in view of accessibility of information in the information process- both in terms of gathering and generating information. Contemporary behaviour constitutes evolution of users' behaviour resulting from the access to the internet and virtual social bonds in the internet space. The knowledge on forms and directions of activities of contemporary generations of communication technologies users and factors determining their activities constitutes the basis for deliberations included in this elaboration. According to G. Zaltman without an in-depth understanding of the generations using information technology one cannot define an action strategy of enterprises

in the market and influence their behaviour (G. Zaltman 2008: p.52-53). This paper aims to present and evaluate various typologies of generations of internet and communication technologies users.

### Typology of generations

According to the Dictionary of the Polish Language, a generation is constituted by „a group of people of more or less the same age who is shaped by similar or the same experience” (Słownik Języka Polskiego, PWN). However from the sociological point of view and according to the Dictionary of Sociology and Social Sciences –a generation is a group of people born in the similar period (G. Marshall 2005: p. 240). The quoted definitions emphasize the importance of age as a factor forming particular groups of people. However I think that the age criterion

**Table 1. Typology of generations**

Typology according to age (demographic typology)	Typology according to activity (behavioural typology)	Google typology– based on using the technology (user experience typology)
„Builder” generation	C	Mobile and social
„Baby boomers” generation	L	Search engine generation
Generation X	Show Off	Multitasking, multi-screen
Generation Y	Natives and immigrants	Silver surfers
Generation Z	Link Out	

Source: elaboration of one’s own based on: R. Hicks, K. Hicks 1999: p. 229-353; N. Hatalska, A. Polak, Generacje C i L, cyfrowi imigranci i tubylcy - o współczesnych e-konsumentach, <http://www.wirtualnemedi.pl/artykul/generacje-c-i-l-cyfrowi-imigranci-i-tubylcy-o-wspolczesnych-e-konsumentach#> (access: 10.08.2014); Barometr Google <https://www.consumerbarometer.com/en/> (access: 10.02.2015).

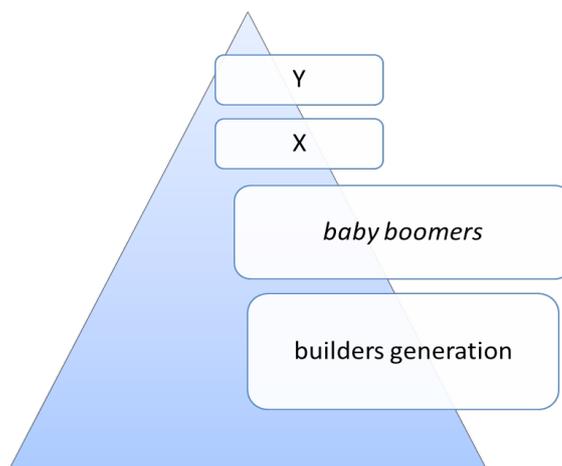
should not constitute the basics of division of users into particular generations. Important factors are presented by behavioural determinants as well as broadly understood users’ experience (UX, user experience) including abilities to use communication technologies among others. Basic typologies of generations which will be analysed later one in view of using the communication technology are presented by table 1. Each generation forms a specific sub-culture whose members are joined by similar values, goals, likes and views. A generation develops under cultural, social and technological events which happen in particular time influencing the life and the way its members think.

**Typology of generations according to age (demographic typology)**

According to R. and K. Hicks the following generations may be distinguished (based on the demographic criterion) (R. Hicks, K. Hicks 1999: p. 229-353)– figure 1. Particular generations presented in the above figure are as follows:

- Builders generation (or a *silent generation*) – people born over the years 1901–1945 influenced by the Great Depression and the World War II. They are characterised by frugality, life activity, belief in toil. These people are dutiful, disciplined and appreciate education. They aim at hard work, they believe in ideals and think that thanks to their efforts their children will have a better and easier life.
- Generation *baby boomers*. People born over the years 1946–1962 influenced by television and social changes of the 60s. They are characterised by impatience, belief in changing the world, they are innovative however after years they go back to tradition. They were the first to access technological innovations: television, contraceptives etc. They aim to develop, believe that there are no impossible things, they family oriented a little (M.E. Masey 1979).
- Generation X (or *gen-X*). People born over the years 1963–1977. They were the first to get access to computers and the internet. They are computer literate.

**Figure 1. Typology of generations according to age (demographic typology)**



Source: elaboration of one’s own based on R. Hicks, K. Hicks 1999: p. 229–353.

- Generation Y (or otherwise called NetGeneration, GenNetters). People born over the years 1978–1997 (W. Cwalina 2001; p. 54-58). The first “wired” generation. They are characterized by: freedom in using the internet: shopping, information about acquaintances– everything is done over the internet. These people are aware of their abilities, active, information oriented and critical (D. Tapscott 1998). They easily get information and analyse it, they easily initiate contacts online. They do not have problems with communicating with other (they know foreign languages). Their interests are focused on strengthening and expressing the identity of the consumer (J. Katz, Birth of a Digital Nation ). Generation Y, because of being active on the internet- is also called Web 2.0. generation, Google generation, millennium generation, Homo Internetus, „net children”, young people “born with headphones over ears and a mouse in hand”. (M. Wawer 2013: p. 164)
- Generation Z (or Digital Natives, Connected Generation) (Customers of tomorrow. Insight and observations About generation Z. Grail Research 2011). People born over the years 1998–2010 at times of a dynamic growth of the importance of the internet and new communication technologies. Its members think that the so called new technologies have always existed – they were something common and of everyday nature. One may say that modern technology provides them with natural environment necessary for efficient functioning. The basic reference point is the digital world. The world without

computers, laptops, smartphones , an access to the internet is an abstract notion. Because of their internet activity they are called generation M (Multitasking) or net generation (typology: Nieustannie podłączeni – pokolenie Z ).

According to H. Rheingold the main aspect of building social networks by a particular generation is about the need of community and defining an identity on the internet. An especially visible information activity of generation is visible in generations X and Y. Generations of Builders and *baby boomers* are less active in cyberspace- due to poorly developed technological skills of using the internet as well as psychological and social determinants.

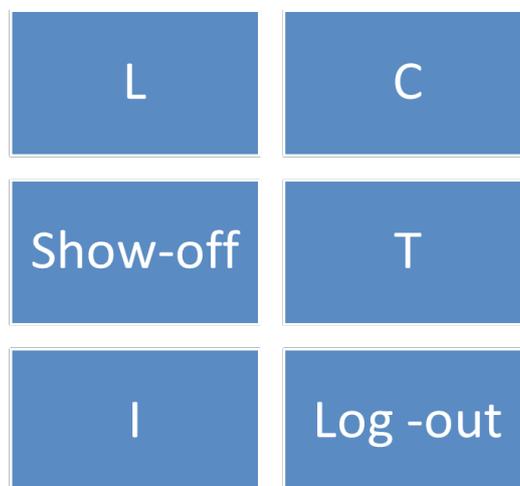
The presented typology, in the author’s view, not entirely enables presenting generations in terms of using the internet and communication technology. This rigid division into birth years constitutes too simplified a form- **not always age may be identified with activity online** and communication abilities. Age may constitute an important but not the only criterion of dividing generations.

#### Typology according to activity (behavioural typology)

More often when dividing generations in terms of using the internet and communication technologies certain behavioural features are taken into account instead of age (Figure 2).

**Generation C** was the first to be defined from the behavioural behaviour. Letter C stands for connected (being online, contacted), content-centric (focused on the content),

Figure 2. Typology according to activity (behavioural typology)



Source: elaboration of one’s own

computerized, community-oriented, always clicking (R. Friedrich, M. Peterson, A. Koster, S. Blum 2010: p 4). This group is characterized by **4 C** (N. Hatałska, A. Polak, Generacje C i L, cyfrowi imigranci i tubylcy - o współczesnych e-konsumentach):

- control – willingness to influence and control;
- creativity – over-average creativity;
- communication
- connection- large number of contacts.
- L generation is also called lazy generation (N. Hatałska, A. Polak, Generacje C i L, cyfrowi imigranci i tubylcy - o współczesnych e-konsumentach). Letter L may stand for lazy, link share (sharing links without commenting). This generation is characterised by **4 L** (N. Hatałska, Generacja L):
- leads- - shifting preferences towards short news;
- like –clicking „I like it” online and offline;
- local – using geolocation services;
- life- stream – „broadcasting” one’s own life 24 hours mainly through social networking sites.

Next generation may be characterised as:

- Generation **Show Off** – described by public display of oneself including material belongings and the way of spending free time on social networking sites (typologia: Lanserzy alternatywni, Beauty Queens i in).
- **Natives** – generation of young people who do not imagine life without the internet and communication technology. Their life in on the internet- they are not always able to

experience emotions in the real world (typology: Cyfrowi imigranci i tubylcy).

- **Immigrants**– an active generation after 40 who “migrated to the net”. They use the internet functionally and separate cyber-life from real life.
- **Generation Log Out** – their philosophy limits the usage of modern digital communication technologies and improves the way they are used and seek a moment of relaxation, reset or even digital detox.

The above typology, in the author’s view, **presents generations from the perspective of using the internet and communication technologies**. Thus typology was made by researching contents on the internet by means of the author’s methodology *naive listening* as well as ethnographic and monographic research- they speak about strategic actions targeted at these generations. The knowledge of published contents possessed by those generations, familiarization with motivation and behaviour of particular generations and communication technologies used by them – allows us to look at contemporary internet users from a broader perspective.

#### Google typology– based on user experience

Generation may be also classified on the basis of age, experience and abilities of people. Habits of people from particular generations differ significantly depending on their age and experience which was presented in Google barometer (typology: Barometr konsumencki Google) (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Google typology– based on user experience



Source: elaboration of one’s own based on <https://www.consumerbarometer.com/en/> (access: 10.02.2015).

This typology is based on the research carried out by Google on informational and shopping behaviour of groups of internet users. According to Google typology we differentiate:

- 16-24 group – „generation of the **mobile and social**”. They are information active and make use of numerous tools and communication places at the same time. A large part consults their shopping decisions on social networking sites. This habit does not concern 8% of customers whereas in other groups it is only 4%. They use smartphones to search offers (38%) while 15% share purchased products on social networking sites.
- 25-34 group – „**search engine generation**”. They look for current information and are communication active. About 31% of this group members use the internet before making a final purchasing decision. They visit products websites before making a purchase (30%).
- 35-44 group- „**multitasking , multiscreen**”. They are trying to make up for information arrears, the usage of communication tools is conditioned by their abilities. About 44% use computers, tablets and smartphones for these purposes. Due to the lack of time people of this age are willing to buy online (53%).
- 55+ group- „**silver surfers**”. Their usage of information technology is determined by both their abilities and health. People over 55 are more willing to use the internet to compare

offers online (68%). This group chooses brands and buys on the basis of their own experience.

The above typology, in the author's view, presents generations from the perspective of using the internet and communication technologies – **combining both demographic and behavioural factors**. One can see multiple layers in distinguishing the groups – age, abilities, experience and the use of communication technologies.

## Conclusions

Typologies presented in the paper are very few and far between, selected classification occurring in the literature and articles online. In the author's view, behavioural typology distinguish in more detail generation in terms of the use of the internet and communication technologies. The internet is not only the place of information gathering but space where generation willingly share their experience (**UGC- user generated content**). „Generation existence” requires information transfer and exchange of opinions, being „together” and sharing experiences. Regardless of their division – generation interacts, communicates and want to be „together” – in reality or virtually. More or less typologies constitute guideline for marketing activities and are necessary if we want to get to know individuals from particular generations , who they are and how they think and communicate.

## Bibliography

Barometr konsumencki Google: <https://www.consumerbarometer.com/en/> (access: 10.02.2015)'

Customers of tomorrow. Insight and observations About generation Z. Grail Research 2011: [http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed\\_code/11688637#](http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed_code/11688637#) (access: 10.08.2014)'

Cwalina W. (2001), Generacja Y – ponury mit czy obiecująca rzeczywistość, [w:] T. Zasępa, Internet – fenomen społeczeństwa informacyjnego, Częstochowa 2001;

Cyfrowi imigranci i tubylcy: <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf> (access: 10.08.2014)'

Dejnaka A. (2013), Proces podejmowania decyzji zakupowych przez e-konsumentów w kontekście

mediów społecznościowych, Difin, Warszawa 2013

Friedrich R., M. Peterson, A. Koster, S. Blum (2010), The Rise of Generation C Implications for the World of 2020, Booz & Company, 2010;

Hatalska N., A. Polak, Generacje C i L, cyfrowi imigranci i tubylcy - o współczesnych e-konsumentach, <http://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/arttykul/generacje-c-i-l-cyfrowi-imigranci-i-tubylcy-o-wspolczesnych-e-konsumentach#> (access: 10.08.2014)'

Hatalska N., Generacja L, <http://hatalska.com/2011/12/09/generacja-l-infografika/> (access: 10.08.2014);

Hicks R., Hicks K. (1999), Boomers, Xers and Other Strangers: Understanding the Generational differences that Divide Us. Wharton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers 1999;

Katz J., Birth of a Digital Nation, <http://www.wired.com/wired/archive/5.04/netizen.html>. (access: 10.08.2014)

Masey M.E. (1979), *The People Puzzle: Understanding Yourself and Others*. Reston, VA: Reston Publishing Co 1979;

Nieustannie podłączeni – pokolenie Z, <http://trendfuture.wordpress.com/2012/02/21/kim-jest-pokolenie-z/> (access: 10.08.2014);

Rheingold H. (1993), *The Virtual Community: Home.standing on the Electronic Fronfier* Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley 1993;

Słownik Języka Polskiego, PWN, <http://www.pwn.pl/> (access: 10.08.2014);

Słownik Socjologii i Nauk Społecznych, red. G. Marshall (2005), PWN, Warszawa 2005;

Tapscott D. (1998), *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation*, McGraw-Hill, New York 1998;

Wawer M. (2013), *Edukacja pracowników pokolenia Y – nowe potrzeby i rozwiązania*, Edukacja - Technika - Informatyka, Uniwersytet Rzeszowski, Rzeszów 2013;

Zaltman G. (2008), *Jak myślą klienci. Podróż w głąb umysłu rynku*, Rebis, Poznań 2008;

## Internet i technologie komunikacyjne w kontekście różnorodnych klasyfikacji pokoleń

### Abstrakt

Zasadniczym tłem do rozważań nad zmianami zachodzącymi między pokoleniami użytkowników technologii komunikacyjnych jest dynamiczny rozwój Internetu oraz Web 2.0 w aspekcie dostępności do informacji w procesie procesu informacyjnego – zarówno pozyskiwania, jak i generowania informacji. Współczesne zachowania stanowią ewolucję zachowań użytkowników wynikającą z dostępu do Internetu i wirtualnych powiązań społecznych w przestrzeni internetowej. Wiedza na temat form i kierunków aktywności współczesnych pokoleń użytkowników technologii komunikacyjnych oraz czynników wpływających na ich aktywność stanowi podstawę rozważań zawartych w niniejszym opracowaniu. Według G. Zaltmana bez pogłębionego rozumienia pokoleń korzystających z technologii informacyjnej nie można określać strategii działań przedsiębiorstw na rynku oraz oddziaływać na ich zachowania (G. Zaltman 2008, s. 52-53). Artykuł prezentuje wykorzystanie technologii komunikacyjnych – w kontekście różnorodnych klasyfikacji pokoleń.

**Słowa kluczowe:** technologie internetowe, komunikacja internetowa, pokolenie X, pokolenie Y, pokolenie Z, pokolenie C, L, barometr Google

**JEL:** D11