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.

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
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.

- **Generation Y** (or natives and immigrants). People born over the years 1978–1995. They are the first generation to surf the internet. They are called “digital natives” as they grew up with technology. They are linked on the internet and social networks. They are independent, open to many possibilities and they are satisfied with almost anything.

- **Generation Z** (or link-out generation). People born over the years 1996–2010. They are called “digital immigrants” as they grew up with technology. They are linked on the internet and social networks. They are independent, open to many possibilities and they are satisfied with almost anything.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typology according to age (demographic typology)</th>
<th>Typology according to activity (behavioural typology)</th>
<th>Google typology—based on using the technology (user experience typology)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>„Builder“ generation</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Mobile and social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>„Baby boomers“ generation</td>
<td>L</td>
<td>Search engine generation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation X</td>
<td>Show Off</td>
<td>Multitasking, multi-screen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation Y</td>
<td>Natives and immigrants</td>
<td>Silver surfers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation Z</td>
<td>Link Out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1. Typology of generations

• 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)
The Wroclaw School of Banking Research Journal I ISSN 1643-7772 I eISSN 2392-1153 I Vol. 15 I No. 3

Figure 3. Google typology– based on user experience

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 – combing 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 tomorow. Insight and observations About generation Z. Grail Research 2011: http://www.slideshare.net/slideshow/embed_code/11688637# (access: 10.08.2014)’


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


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


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


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


Internet i technologie komunikacyjne w kontekście różnorodnych klasyfikacji pokoleń

Abstrakt

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

JEL: D11