

11 Contribution of the Persona Tool to Customer Insight in Tourism

The Case of Gen Z, Y, X, and Baby Boomer Buyers of Package Holidays

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Introduction

Customer Experience (CX) research is the cornerstone of the successful development of any organization, as it avoids costly mistakes in the development of marketing influencer tools. Rather than basing activities on implicit assumptions about consumer preferences, research reveals consumers' real needs and purchase motives and provides a broad view of the consumer's touch points with the brand (from the customer's first contact, through the purchase decision process, the consumption experience, to the final departure). Focusing on customers' needs, goals, and behaviours (Caballero et al., 2014) ensures that the organization's actions are consistent and coordinated, resulting in higher customer satisfaction, higher propensity to buy again, and positive recommendations, which determines the future of the relationship (Micheaux & Bosio, 2019). For CX research, qualitative methods are important to deepen the analysis. In this context, the buyer persona method is effective, that is, the identification of the customer profile closest to the real one, based on data collected from multiple sources, both primary and secondary, not only based on qualitative methods (e.g., surveys), but above all on qualitative methods (in-depth interviews). With this method, the marketing, sales planning, and product design teams share a precise picture of the audience.

The term persona first appeared in 1999 in the context of the computer software user. It was introduced by Cooper (1999), who defined a persona as a hypothetical archetype of actual users. A buyer persona (BP) has been proposed as an analogy in marketing, interpreting the concept as 'an archetype of the actual buyers' (Revella, 2015). Buyer/customer personas are created to plan more effective strategies to promote and sell products and services. In this chapter, the focus is on the second type of persona.

A buyer persona is a marketing research method used to analyze needs and key purchase motives, uncover consumer insights, and understand purchase behavior. The purpose of the persona is to support marketing decisions within the company. BPs complement segmentation strategies and determine the target group's characteristics more precisely than profiling. In this way, they provide a richer pool of customer information, increasing the accuracy of marketing decisions.

In this chapter the buyer persona method is used to explore the characteristics of the travel agent customer purchasing travel packages. The research aimed at identifying differences in the profiles and behavioral patterns associated with people purchasing travel packages, representing different generations: Z, Y, X, and BBs. The research findings and conclusions were preceded by a literature review to define BP, establish the benefits of BP for the company, and present the research procedure specific to the BP method.

Using the buyer persona tool to obtain generational insights allows us to deepen understanding of specific age groups' motivations, needs, and behaviors in the context of their life, technological, social, and cultural experiences. The tool described in this chapter allows tourism industry companies to understand intergenerational differences better and select the optimal communication strategy and effective distribution channels. Buyer personas allow for more detailed insight than just those based on age. Knowing different people's expectations, behaviors, and concerns makes it easier to design a customer journey, personalize the tourist offer, or adjust the user experience of a website or mobile application.

Literature Review

Buyer Persona Definition

A persona is a detailed description of imaginary people constructed from well-understood, highly specified data about real people (Adlin & Pruitt, 2006). Personas are an archetypal entity – the counterpart of the real world. They represent their demographic, social, economic features, values, emotions, attitudes, and behaviors (preferences, intentions, buying patterns). Notably, BP creation is based on facts (data-based) rather than assumptions (assumption-based) (Brigham, 2013), bringing BPs as close as possible to the characteristics of actual buyers.

Personas represent the market segments a company has chosen to serve (Leão, 2018) and result from more profound insights into target markets. Target markets are identified through market segmentation based on criteria, for example, in tourism, this could be the purpose of the trip or whether the buyer belongs to a specific generational group. BP is a tool for refining the knowledge gained through segmentation while profiling market segments. The sociodemographic and economic profile of the customer is supplemented with purchasing insights that allow us to “step into the shoes of the customer” and describe what the customer thinks, says, hears, feels, and even fears in connection with purchases. The value of insights is to understand the purchase decision process in the buyer's narrative (Revella, 2015).

The buyer persona is given a ‘real’ name when establishing characteristics. Its description is supplemented with a personal photograph, leading to the ‘coming alive’ and enhancing the human dimension of BPs, which is better assimilated by marketing (Haines & Mitchell, 2014). Personas are described through personal data and clothed in specific aspirations and goals, lifestyles and daily routines, emotions, and even life mottos. BP method translates available quantitative data describing market segments into humanized information (Cooper, 1999), making

it easier for marketers to imagine and understand the behavior of actual customers (An et al., 2018).

The buyer persona is built from several elements that allow marketers to understand the needs of customers and how customers would like to interact with the company (Heinze et al., 2020). There are several proposals in the source literature for the structure of BPs (Nair & Nair, 2022). Revella's (2015) BP includes demographic/social data (consisting of personal data, roles, and responsibilities) and information about the determinants of a person's purchasing decision (i.e., the impetus to act, success factors, perceived barriers, decision criteria, and purchase path). Fenton et al. (2022) propose a five-element BP framework, including personal demographics, buyer values and emotions, motivations and intentions, concerns, and communication/search style. Personas' profiles often include goals and challenges, daily routines and lifestyles, attitudes toward new technologies, and preferred modes of communication. Depending on each project's goals and needs, the BP's design may change (Leão, 2018). It should be logically linked to the product/service for which the marketing is created and may also vary according to the type of client: individual or institutional. Despite its differences, its primary purpose is to gather a rich body of information on customer characteristics and behavior to target marketing strategies and activities better.

Companies offering complex products such as travel packages tend to develop multiple personas in search of differences between the characteristics of their customers (Nair & Nair, 2022) in order to provide the best-fit offers and marketing tools based on these different preferences and expectations, and thus broaden their audience.

Creating a Buyer Persona

Two approaches are applicable in BP profiling: development based on accurate data and science fiction prototyping (Fenton et al., 2022). The first approach is applied to existing products and services when the actual data on buyer behavior can be collected. It primarily aims to improve the company communication activities with the public, promotion, and product sales. The second approach – science fiction prototyping – serves strategic purposes and is related to the search for breakthrough innovations, including marketing innovations (e.g., in the offer distribution).

Creating a buyer persona is a multistep process based on various sources of information (multisource insights). Personas are a rich repository of reliable and relevant information for a company, provided they are built based on market research and insights gathered from multiple sources (Revella, 2015). Therefore, the first step in establishing buyer persona characteristics is the selection of information sources and data collection methods. Data and method triangulation is often used to combine different measurements and methods. Both secondary and primary sources are used to build a buyer persona. However, it should be noted that primary sources are treated as providing deeper consumer insight – the data source conditions the data collection methods. The qualitative methods always accompany the quantitative methods. In establishing the characteristics of the buyer persona, the techniques of

consumer ethnography (Venkatesh et al., 2017), including traditional ethnography (observation of the people under study in the conditions of their everyday life) and, increasingly, digital ethnography (Fenton et al., 2022) oriented towards the study of virtual communities have a special place.

Method

The research was conducted using the technique of a free, in-depth, individual interview with buyers. The principle of freedom of expression was maintained, in which the respondent describes his or her travel history and the thoughts, emotions, circumstances, and people accompanying it.

On the basis of an in-depth content analysis of the transcripts, quotations relating to individual elements of the persona and purchase stages were searched for. Then, a structured tabular presentation of the results was created. The conclusions were used to complete the description of the BP, following the convention of its structure.

Data were collected using individual in-depth interviews in January–February 2025. By Revella's recommendations (2015), 8–10 interviews were conducted in each of the analyzed generational cohorts.

Results of Consumer Insights – Buyer Personas of Package Holiday Buyers Representing Generations Z, Y, X, and BBs

The buyer persona method examined the characteristics of a travel agency client purchasing package holidays. The study aimed at identifying the differences in profiles and behavior patterns related to the purchase of tourist packages by people from different generations: BBs, X, Y, and Z. On the basis of the research, four buyer persona descriptions were proposed for each generation, as presented in Table 11.1.

The results of in-depth interviews allowed describing five areas of customer experience (an impulse to act, success factors, perceived barriers, purchasing path, and decision criteria) when purchasing a trip organized by Generations BBs, Y, X, and Z. Table 11.2 presents the most important conclusions from the in-depth interviews conducted.

To sum up, it can be concluded that the BBs' generation values safety, peace and quiet, as well as good organization, chooses proven destinations, trusts travel organizers, and makes decisions based on the opinions of friends and travel agencies. Generation X is focused on comfort and safety, and in terms of the organization trusts travel agencies and friends. Its representatives also combine traditional and modern approaches – they use travel agencies and independent online organizations. Millennials (Y) are digital; they look for authentic and unique experiences and often use online bookings. Generation Y balances comfort and adventure; they want a transparent offer and high-quality service. In turn, Generation Z is more spontaneous, focused on quick decisions, chooses budget versions, and willing to experiment. It is inspired by social media and vlogs highlighting uniqueness.

Table 11.1 Buyer personas – consumer insight: behavior of foreign package holiday buyers representing Generations Z, Y, X, and Baby Boomers

	<i>Generation Z Persona</i>	<i>Generation Y Persona</i>	<i>Generation X Persona</i>	<i>Generation Baby Boomers Persona</i>
Quote/Life Motto	“I will drop everything to find happiness.”	“Coffee in one hand, confidence in the other.”	“You don’t need to believe in miracles, you just need to believe in yourself.”	“Traveling teaches more than books.”
Name and surname	Julie Twitt	Kate Boss	Anne Smith	Bogdan Vintage
Demographics	Age: 21; Education: High School, currently studying psychology; Works part-time in a café; Lives with parents in a large city; Relationship status: Single.	Age: 32; Education: Higher economics; Place of work: Marketing manager in an international corporation; Place of residence: Large city; Relationshipstatus:Engaged.	Age: 44; Education: Higher education;Job:Executive position; Lives in a large city; Relationship status: Married, with two teenage children.	Age: 69; Education: Higher education in engineering; Former manager at a large company, now retired; Lives in a large city; Relationship status: Married with children and grandchildren.
Psychographics	Independent but sensitive. A feminist with liberal views. Rejects traditional family models. Loves animals. Values work-life balance.	Self-confident, energetic, ambitious, emotional, values family and friends, optimistic. Likes cooking, a workaholic, self-sufficient, imposes opinions on others, and stubborn.	Kind, patient, optimistic, and honest. Trusts authority figures. Cautious in financial decisions, responsible. Values family, security, and financial stability.	Curious about the world, open to new experiences. Values comfort, peace and quiet, and organization. Occasionally needs support. Values education, safety, health, and financial freedom. Prefers well-planned trips but occasionally checks other online options.

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Table 11.1 (Continued)

	<i>Generation Z Persona</i>	<i>Generation Y Persona</i>	<i>Generation X Persona</i>	<i>Generation Baby Boomers Persona</i>
Goals and Expectations	Does not plan too far into the future. Currently focused more on professional development than on starting a family. Additional work allows travelling.	Pays attention to value for money, safety, comprehensiveness of the offer, and recommendations of friends.	Seeks relaxation and regeneration after work. Prefers stress-free, fully organized trips with high-quality services (comfort, safety, organization).	Wants to travel the world in comfort, exploring history and culture. Prefers organized tours but seeks some flexibility. Expects safety, comfort, and stress-free travel.
Habits/Routines	Takes care of her image, is active in sports, reads a lot, and actively maintains her social media presence, regularly communicating with friends. Takes many photos.	The morning starts with a glass of water with lemon, next goes jogging, then takes a shower, eats breakfast and goes to work. Attends Pilates classes twice a week and spends time with her loved ones in her free time. Writes down all her plans in a calendar.	Regularly planned trips once or twice a year, often takes advantage of the last-minute offers. Accustomed to support from travel agencies.	Enjoy trips outside the peak season to avoid crowds. Frequently calls family and friends for advice and recommendations. Prefers direct interaction with people over digital communication. Appreciates comfortable transport options (trains or premium airlines). Regularly checks for promotional offers and discounts.
Technology Attitude	Amateur photo editing, records TikTok videos. Familiar with numerous opportunities offered by the internet. Open to technological innovations.	Uses technology on a daily basis. Works on a computer (Office 365 support). Canal+, Player, HBO, actively uses social media such as Facebook and Instagram. Skillfully browses travel agency websites.	Uses travel agency websites and apps but prefers in-person contact. Perceives technology as a support tool.	Capable of using computers at a basic level but gets frustrated with mobile apps. Uses new technologies but often requires support from others. Occasionally browses offers online.

Table 11.2 Five areas of customer experience when purchasing an organized trip according to Generations Z, X, Y, and Baby Boomers

Customer experience areas	Key conclusions
Generation Z	
An impulse to act	The main motivations are the bargain price, the desire to explore the world and the desire for a break from everyday life. Generation Z prefers to organize trips on their own, but considers good offers from travel agencies. They are keen to watch travel vlogs that inspire them to explore. They need safe trips with a ready-made itinerary.
Success factors	The key factor to success is the reasonable price. The quality of the offer is also important; it should be clear and complete. It should present well the information about attractions, nearby monuments, and viewpoints. The destination itself (hotel, recreation center) should be in a good location to enable participating in as many new experiences as possible.
Perceived barriers	Price is a barrier and offers from travel agents will naturally command a higher price than a trip organized on your own, especially during periods of high demand, i.e., summer, when Generation Z is on holiday. Low trust in the agency is also a barrier, with customers fearing distortion in the offer, resulting in a reduced sense of security, especially when the trip is to a culturally different country.
Purchasing path	When planning a trip, Generation Z must be sure that the offer they choose is the best one. They use price comparison websites so as not to overpay for the trip. They are looking for recommendations from friends who have already used the agency's services and opinions of influencers. Generation Z is willing to spend a lot of time planning a trip; determines the budget, time frame, and – in the case of a group trip – the destination.
Decision criteria	The price should be linked to the benefits offered by the travel agent, e.g., breakfasts in the hotel, but it is worth noting that Generation Z does not expect a high standard and is able to save through the opinions and experiences of friends. The second criterion is location; they want a balance between relaxation and new experiences, as well as good weather.
Generation X	
An impulse to act	Generation X's impetus for action comes from recommendations provided by friends and family. Generation X is inspired by what they hear from other people around them and reports about a place or a given service. It is also caused by longer time off, which they want to use, e.g., holidays, breaks.
Success factors	The key factors relate to counting on recommendations from the seller at the travel agency and from residents. Quality and prevailing conditions are also particularly important to them. An additional advantage of the offer is the attractive landscape of the destination.

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Table 11.2 (Continued)

<i>Customer experience areas</i>	<i>Key conclusions</i>
Perceived barriers	The main concern is the office's failure to provide transport and food, as well as all the necessary household appliances and electronics in the rooms. Generation X is put off by the exorbitant price of the offer. The customers' goal is to relax, so they are also reluctant about the potential presence of Poles in the destination. Some are afraid of the language barrier.
Purchasing path	The decision-making process begins with gathering information and recommendations from friends and family. They check offers on websites or leaflets posted in stationary offices. It is crucial for them that the consultant provides several offers which they can compare in terms of price and what is available in the offer. Their final decision often requires consultation with the family or obtaining additional information from the seller. The choice of the offer falls to the person most involved in the trip.
Decision criteria	The most important criterium is value for money. The location and availability of attractions close to the hotel, nice views, and a place focused on relaxation are also important to them. Opinions and recommendations of other customers and relatives/friends are also of concern. Good advertising of the offer can persuade Generation Z to make a purchase.
Generation Y	
An impulse to act	Social media and the opinions of loved ones are the main incentive for Generation Y to decide to travel, especially among younger generations. For many people, the impulse is the need for rest, visual inspiration, or a spontaneous desire to change the environment.
Success factors	The credibility of other users' opinions and the authenticity of the offer presentation play a key role in the purchase decision made by the representatives of Generation Y. Also, the high quality of services, transparency of information, and lack of logistical problems increase customer satisfaction.
Perceived barriers	The key barriers in making travel decisions among Generation Y include concerns about price, reliability of information, time availability, and safety. Many people pay attention to the quality of sources and negative opinions, which may discourage them from making a purchase.
Purchasing path	The purchasing process of millennials begins with looking for inspiration and verifying opinions on the Internet and among friends. The final decision is based on the comparison of offers, analysis of reviews, and availability of services at the preferred date.
Decision criteria	Generation Y chooses offers based on value for money, transparency, and the opinions of other users, avoiding hidden costs and uncertain offers. They value unique experiences, authenticity of local attractions, and convenience, preferring comprehensively organized options with no need for additional organization. They are willing to pay more for high quality, safety, and well-rated services.

Generation Baby Boomers

An impulse to act	An attractively priced offer, especially a last-minute one, inspired by the example of family, recommendation of friends, family, and media. They need to go to a new place, discover something new. They want to take advantage of their time in retirement. The desire to escape cold weather, rest, and discover new cultures.
Success factors	Attractive price offer, favorable travel dates, convenient location, comfort, beautiful landscape, educational value of the offer. Attractive price of the trip, discounts for retirees, and a comprehensive offer. Expert support from a consultant. Children's help in making reservations. Professional organization of a package holiday.
Perceived barriers	Noise from nightlife, the pace of sightseeing, problems with air conditioning, the quality of meals, and an artificial atmosphere constituted the significant barriers contributing to the overall feeling of disappointment, as well as incredible photos of promoted offers, limited budget, too high price of a holiday package, complicated, too long, and uncomfortable transport, and also health problems, geopolitical difficulties, lack of necessary logistical information, and difficulties with online check-in.
Purchasing path	Fast and convenient online holiday purchase procedure, advice from a travel agent consultant. Making a final decision based on the opinions and experiences of other buyers. Browsing the offers on the Internet with the children and then analyzing them in depth. Consulting the choice with friends. Looking for information in guidebooks and traditional media. Using a travel agency, sometimes organizing the trip yourself.
Decision criteria	Attractive price, convenient hotel location (close to beach, tourist attractions), views, sightseeing opportunities, relaxing and enjoyable experience, easy access to restaurants and pubs, all-inclusive offer, description of offer in line with reality, travel program adapted to age and interests, positive feedback from other clients, comfort, and safety.

The representatives of all generations rely on opinions and reviews when choosing an organized trip. Each of the surveyed age group checks opinions before making a reservation – BBs and X on travel agency websites and forums, Y and Z on Instagram, TikTok, and booking portals (Booking, Airbnb). BB and X are more likely to ask friends and family; generation Y relies on online opinions and travel forums. In contrast, the representatives of Generation Z follow the reviews on social media and recommendations from influencers.

Price is also a key decision-making factor for the analyzed generations, although each of them approaches the financial aspect differently. Y and Z like to choose cheap flights and accommodations to spend more on experiences. Generations BB and X are looking for high quality at a reasonable price; they value convenience and comprehensive organization. Generation Y analyzes the value for money and looks for promotions and last-minute offers. At the same time, generation Z strives for the lowest possible price and is ready to compromise on the standard.

When it comes to travel arrangements, Generations BB and X expect their holidays to be entirely organized by a travel agency. Generation Y wants to avoid surprises, but is more willing to plan independently. In turn, representatives of Generation Z, although they value independence, will take the risk of traveling with a travel agency if the price is attractive.

All generations travel to discover new places, cultures, and cuisines. BB and X focus more on history and monuments, while Y and Z look for unique experiences and local attractions.

Nowadays, virtually every generation plans their trips using the Internet – BB and X prefer travel agencies and booking websites, but they also increasingly buy airline tickets online. Y and Z book everything online – from flights to accommodation and local attractions. All generations prefer comfortable traveling away from excessive crowds. BB and X avoid crowded attractions and queues, while Y and Z prefer less touristy, more authentic, and remote places.

Conclusions

A number of benefits of using PB's are cited in the literature (Miaskiewicz & Kozar, 2011; Salminen et al., 2025). Identifying and accurately characterizing the customer serves the effectiveness of marketing planning and the selection of market influence tools (Nair & Nair, 2022). Stepping into the shoes of the customer makes marketers realize that the customer's preferences are different from theirs (Miaskiewicz & Kozar, 2011), which also breaks the stereotypical view of the buyer's needs and helps to empathetically understand their goals (Salminen et al., 2025). Basing personas on accurate data objectifies and gives credibility to research findings and can even challenge existing beliefs and assumptions about customers (Pruitt & Grudin, 2003), and eliminating erroneous assumptions benefits companies and improves their sales performance. Persona opens up to marketers the world of customers' values, beliefs, emotions, habits, motivations, and concerns that determine their purchase decisions. Awareness of the nature, scale, and urgency of customers' problems accelerates finding the

best solutions and communicating them effectively, and consequently increases customer satisfaction, improving brand reputation and image. Awareness of the customer's identity is essential for designing offers that are in line with their expectations. Visualizing the characteristics of the buyer persona in an attractive form of 1–2 pages of description (Nielsen, 2013), with the customer's specific name, photo, passions, story, and life motto, appeals better to decision-makers than tables, numbers, diagrams (Goodwin, 2011). Information is also easier to remember and disseminate between departments and employees of the company, as well as in the company environment (Holtzblatt et al., 2005). The BP description is, therefore, an important tool of the marketing communication system.

Creating buyer personas allows you to understand precisely what motivates representatives of a given generation to purchase tourist products, their needs, and perceived barriers, how they make purchasing decisions, and what criteria they use when choosing tourism service providers. Personas are key to understanding your audience, and practical ways to use them include marketing and customer service. Leveraging people's expertise helps ensure a consistent, more personalized, and engaging shopping experience. BPs help plan and create content.

The method described in this chapter also has disadvantages. It will undoubtedly be necessary to rely on current and reliable data, which requires qualitative and quantitative research that can be expensive and time-consuming.

Moreover, personas are static – they do not automatically respond to the changing trends, needs, or consumer behavior. This means that in a dynamic market environment they quickly become outdated.

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