

# What still binds the baby boomer to brands

Not so long ago, the great potential of the best agers was discussed in marketing forums. Now the baby boomers are the new old people. The baby boomers have different expectations of brands than the generations before.



**Baby boomers are free when it comes to brands: In some contexts they play a lesser role, in others the new Best Ager are definitely brand affine. What is important is whether the brand fits into their self-concept as experiencers, doers and caretakers.**

For a long time, the baby boomer generation, born in post-war Germany between 1950 and 1964, shaped the economy and the labour market by their numbers alone. With their ageing, various demographic age indices will continue to intensify - without the long-term migration effects even more profoundly. Due to the great absolute and relative importance of the baby boomers also as consumers, it is grossly negligent to ignore the over-60s in consumer analyses.

### Self-realisation in youth

The baby boomers were a generation that grew up in multi-child and multi-person households, but had few children themselves. Even in their youth, themes such as emancipation, self-realisation and the desire to change the social norms of the time played an important role. The rise in divorces and the increase in patchwork families are, among other things, demographically measurable consequences of this attitude.

### TV images from the baby boomers' youth: social responsibility and individuality



Two hearts in one baby boomer chest: social responsibility plus self-fulfilment shape their self-image

However, to reduce the youth years of the baby boomers only to buzzwords like student revolt and flower power would be too superficial. In fact, the 1950s were marked by economic growth after the reconstruction phase and a growing desire among Germans to travel. The 1960s also saw the beginning of an expansion of education and an increasing differentiation of lifestyles. More reading also meant more knowledge, which helped the baby boomers to drive social change as doers and shapers. This sometimes led to critical confrontations with the traditional roles and norms of their parents: discipline, diligence, duty and order were no longer the measure of all things in the youth of the baby boomers; instead, liberal attitudes, self-realisation and individualisation counted, while at the same time social responsibility was assumed.

### Advertising makes a brand

Brands played an important role in the differentiation of the young baby boomers. Psychologically, they served both the desire for individualisation and communalisation. Especially in the former Federal Republic with its strong orientation towards the Western community of values, brands also had a political role: the NSDAP was followed by the USA - whereby the baby boomers always critically questioned trends and did not automatically follow just one course. They wanted it to be more multi-faceted and self-determined, which is shown not least by the student movement in 1968 and its effects.

The youth of most baby boomers also saw the increasing reach of radio and television. Advertising made brands! The advertising world of the 1970s was colourful but memorable. The number of channels, which was nevertheless manageable compared to today, had the advantage that the recipients listened to the advertising messages. As a result, brand signals, messages and stories are still anchored in the minds of older consumers. Clementine, Mrs Antje from Holland or Dr Best are icons of the youthful advertising world

of the baby boomers. Testimonials, if you will, that emphasised the USP of brands. Claims like 'Persil - da weiß man, was man hat', 'Für Camel geh ich meilenweit', 'Mars macht mobil' or 'Nogger dir einen!' have also become anchored in the memory of those born between 1950 and 1964.

### **Self-realisation even in old age**

Now, the baby boomers who are interested in brands are mostly Best Ager. Within the framework of a psychological in-house study by K&A BrandResearch, their wishes, needs, attitudes and also fears were therefore analysed and compared with the results of the psychological Best Ager study from 2003.

Unlike the traditionalists of the previous generation, retirement for baby boomers is no longer a drastic experience and an agonising step into old age. They were able to realise themselves as shapers through work, profession, interests and leisure time and will continue to do so. A large proportion of baby boomers have already developed options in advance for the time after work. Compared to the past, this now also applies to a greater extent to ageing men, who no longer define themselves exclusively by their experience and performance in their working lives.

*Knowledge and sympathy do not mean automaticity and unconditional loyalty in terms of brand loyalty.*

Dr. Uwe Lebok, K&A BrandResearch

### **No unconditional loyalty**

Baby boomers have much more creative will in old age (meaning 60+). It is true that routines simplify procedures. For the new best agers, however, routines are a good thing, but not rigid and cramped. This can also be applied to the way baby boomers deal with brands. They are aware of the fact that brand diversity is an expression of freedom of choice and individual realisation. Therefore, in principle, they appreciate the wide range of options and, in retrospect, recognise the importance of brands for their own development. Baby boomers also know more about brands overall than younger generations and they naturally have their favourite brands. But knowledge and liking do not mean automaticity and unconditional loyalty. Brand loyalty has become fragile and porous even among baby boomers, as the results of a YouGov study show: According to this, 85 percent of consumers over 50 in Germany tend not to buy a favourite brand when another brand is on offer.

Baby boomers have internalised advertising slogans à la 'I'm not stupid after all'. What is the point of brand loyalty if other brands are just as good or certain brands cannot prove to actually be a better product? Here, the new Best Ager always tend to faithfully follow a biographical leitmotif: Not to be socially disconnected, but to always be as up-to-date as possible.

### **Efficiency in old age**

Baby boomers are convinced that they can think and act in a differentiated and critical way. They like to apply this principle to everyday products and the choice of food brands. On the one hand, it is no longer in keeping with the times to spend more money than necessary. Private labels that emphasise their regionality or even have an organic label are popular. On the other hand, baby boomers still listen to brands - which is more difficult for younger generations due to the abundance of information and permanent distractions. If brands succeed in communicating a credible added value and adding a proven reason why, brand affection

can be very emotional. Psychologist Tory Higgins sees efficiency as the central motivator for feeling emotionally good about decisions. In his terminology, however, this is more than emotional relief, but also business or physical efficiency. For baby boomers, this is true: In the past - in their youth - brands efficiently contributed to emphasising one's individual class. Today, brands must efficiently convey what makes them better, more beautiful, more relevant and thus more worthy of purchase than other options.

### **Do not rely on routines**

Brands today have to fight for best agers. Relying on routines would be grossly negligent. Of course, nostalgic feelings ("from the past", "like back then", "learned from parents") are possible door openers, but they are not self-fulfilling. Because keeping up with the times is also essential for baby boomers. They take their cue from their own children in order to maintain their mental youth. It is therefore worthwhile to find out more about the previous use and expectations of brand communication in order to reach this target group.

#### **Authors:**



Dr. Uwe Lebok holds a doctorate in demography and has been with K&A BrandResearch since 1999. He has been on the board and a shareholder since 2005. Today, he is the key to people and successful brand management, especially for medium-sized companies.



Polina Ginzburg is a Senior Brand Consultant at K&A BrandResearch and has been working there since 2006. She mainly serves clients from the healthcare, B2B and FMCG segments. She is a trained psychodrama practitioner for group facilitation, counselling and role play.

Magazine: markenartikel 6/2019  
Translation: DeepL (<https://www.deepl.com/translator>)