

Global Boomers: Looking Beyond the US

Is the Post World War II Baby Boom a Global Phenomenon?

It's been impossible to miss the media attention devoted to the Boomer generation in the US -- 78 million born between 1946 and 1964. Media outlets regularly chronicle the lifestyles, aspirations and buying behavior of this massive group. But this attention is almost entirely focused on Boomers in the US. The question Focalyst set out to answer is whether the post World War II/50+ population outside the US has a distinct profile and character like Boomers in the US. In other words, are there "Boomers" elsewhere in the world?

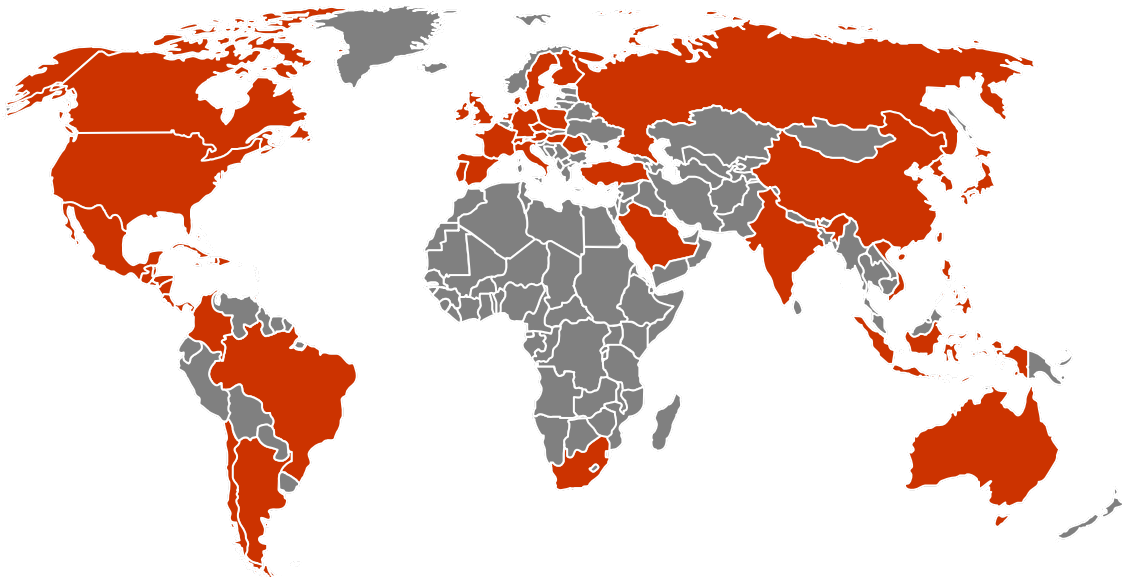
Census counts and population projections quickly reveal that we are facing a global tsunami of the aging population. While it is easy enough to look at these projections, what we really want to know is whether the aging population is, within its country, an identifiable group that perhaps has a name and, importantly, is considered a viable and valuable target by marketers and advertisers.

The world's 65+ population increases by 800,000 each month!¹

Methodology

Millward Brown has 76 offices in 48 countries. It is the job of each of these offices to stay abreast of the marketing landscape in their country. We took advantage of this expertise and sent a survey asking questions about whether a post war generation was an identifiable group in their country, did it have a name, and was it attractive to marketers/advertisers. In the summer of 2008, we sent the survey to the country heads and received replies from all countries in red below, representing most major countries.

Countries Surveyed About Boomer/50+ Market



Key Findings

The global aging population is growing and this explosion creates a need for products meeting their needs.

Twenty eight countries have an identifiable Post World War II/50+ age segment but only 13 of these countries consider this segment a desirable marketing target.

In some of these countries this attractive marketing target has accumulated wealth while in other countries generous government pensions and government provided healthcare create expendable income.

Worldwide, the Boomers/50+ are a viable, untapped market with huge opportunities. To reach this audience marketers must avoid stereotypes about this group and myths about this generation must be dispelled. Marketers must take the time, in each country, to learn what drives them.

Where are the Boomers?

Of the 40 countries surveyed, 28 have a Boomer or age 50+ segment that has been identified by either sociologists, anthropologists, marketers, etc. It's very clear that countries with an identifiable segment tend to be developed countries with many of them in Western Europe (Figure 1).

Figure 1

28 Major Countries Have an Identifiable Boomer/50+ Segment

North America

- Canada
- United States

Western Europe

- Austria
- Denmark
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Ireland
- Italy
- Netherlands
- Portugal
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- United Kingdom

Eastern Europe

- Czech Republic
- Hungary
- Poland

Asia Pacific

- Australia
- Hong Kong
- Japan
- Korea
- Philippines
- Singapore

Latin America

- Argentina
- Brazil

Middle East/Africa

- India
- South Africa

Source: Focalyst/Millward Brown

Importantly, the 28 countries with this identifiable population account for over 60% of the global gross domestic product. As you can see, 2 of the famous BRIC countries with very large GDP are missing -- China and Russia. Don't these countries have Boomers or older citizens?

Not every part of the world enjoyed Post World War II prosperity and the "good times," the positive outlook and confidence that triggered the increased birth rate. For some countries, the "good times" are a more recent occurrence as in China. In Eastern Europe, including Russia, there was the aftermath of the war and government repression. For other countries with a shorter life expectancy or an intervening war there is a relatively small older population. And in some, prosperity and the population explosion are more recent putting the spotlight on youth rather than the older generations.

In Viet Nam only 17% of the population is 50+.

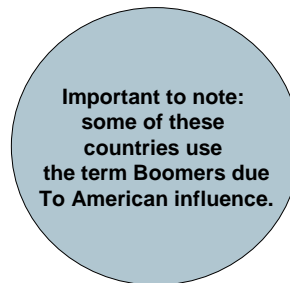
The average age in Mexico is 22.

In the 28 countries with the identifiable aging segment, do any of the countries use the term "Boomers" to describe their post war generation? Eleven countries have Boomers and its very clear that countries where this term is used have a strong western and/or American influence (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Where Are There Boomers?

- United States
- Canada
- France
- UK
- Austria
- Netherlands
- Switzerland
- Sweden
- Australia
- Singapore
- Korea



Source: Focalyst/Millward Brown

If they are not called Boomers then what are they called? Names vary widely and often have local origins, like Midnight's Children in India which refers to those born before 1950 in the shadow of that country's struggle for freedom or the Lost Generation

In South Africa the 50+ population are referred to as "Silver Spenders".

in Korea, taken from Hemingway's For Whom the Bells Toll. Perhaps the most positive name is found in Brazil and Germany where this age group is known as the Best Age or Best Agers (Figure 3).

Figure 3

If They Are Not "Boomers," What Do You Call Them?

	Call Them	Don't Call Them
Brazil	Best Age/Third Age	Velho (old)
India	Midnight's Children	Weak
Korea	Lost Generation	Burden
Australia	The New Big Spenders	Old
Germany	Best Agers	Pensioners

Source: Focalyst/Millward Brown

A necessity when attempting to communicate with the Boomer/50+ population in any country is using the correct term or descriptor. Focalyst has learned from extensive research that nothing alienates this segment more than a perceived derogatory reference.

Call Me "Desirable"

Returning to the 28 countries with an identifiable Boomer/50+ segment, if we look closer, in only 13 countries is this age segment thought to be an attractive or desirable marketing target meaning that, like in the US, they are a group that is coveted and courted by marketers. This does not mean that some companies in these other countries do not market products aimed at the Boomer segment, rather that this is more the exception than commonplace (Figure 4).

Why is the Boomer/50+ age group a desirable target in these 13 countries? Focusing on a few of these countries, the answer centers on the accumulated wealth and social programs in Western Europe where there are generous pensions and government healthcare thus creating expendable income. In Brazil, many collect a pension and continue to work. For Australia it is accumulated wealth while in Japan this segment represents a sizable number in a prosperous economy. It will be interesting to see how the current economic climate will impact this market, their buying power and their subsequent desirability.

Figure 4

Only 13 Countries Say Boomers/50+ Segment is a "Desirable" Marketing Target

- United States
- Austria
- Denmark
- Finland
- Germany
- Ireland
- Italy
- Netherlands
- United Kingdom
- Australia
- Japan
- Singapore
- Brazil

Source: Focalyst/Millward Brown

There are other countries with identifiable targets that have yet to generate interest from marketers. Why do marketers ignore this potentially lucrative segment? A common theme reported from Columbia and Italy among others is that the opportunity exists but nothing is being done. In Ireland and Canada the belief that older people will not switch brands suppresses marketing efforts. Perhaps the primary reason offered is the emphasis on youth marketing. A corollary to the above reasons is that marketers feel they do not understand this age group. Complicating matters is the age of marketers and advertisers themselves who tend to be younger and not interested in selling products to Mom and Dad or Aunt Helga. From their youthful perspective, this older target is not with it, not sexy and not edgy.

Avoiding the Stereotype Trap

Without question there is a growing global aging population and a huge marketing opportunity for meeting existing and future needs. Plus, in many countries the financial wherewithal exists to buy these products and services. And when the opportunity is there, how do marketers/advertisers ensure they are connecting with this audience?

While there are clearly cultural and country differences that must be recognized, there are also some myths about this group that cut across geographic boundaries and must be avoided. Critically important is avoiding the stereotype trap that inaccurately describes the aging population (Figure 5).



Figure 5

Avoid Stereotypes About the 50+ Audience

-  **They are resistant to change**
-  **They are low tech**
-  **They don't like new experiences**
-  **They are isolated**
-  **They are inactive**
-  **They are all the same!**

Research done by Focalyst and other organizations has shown that these consumers are active, involved and engaged. They are willing to experiment with new products and experiences. They use computers and are online. And they cannot be marketed to in the same way. As with all population cohorts there are segments that must be identified and understood.

Connecting with the Boomer/50+ Audience

There are characteristics that cut across countries and cultures that must be understood. Foremost in understanding this group is knowing their current life stage -- are they empty nesters, grandparents, have kids in college, a caregiver, etc. Age is not the defining characteristic -- it is life circumstances combined with attitude and outlook.

Just as life stages cut across countries, so do human truths and emotions that are universal and can help create a connection and bond. Love, loneliness, friendship, loyalty all transcend cultures and become particularly poignant with advancing age.

This active, engaged cohort is connected. They want information they can use and they are on the internet. They are "adult adults" who have a lifetime of experiences. A corollary to usable information and life stage is that your message must be relevant and authentic. In today's uncertain economic climate, empathy and support will be stronger hooks than aspirational appeals.



Incumbent on every marketer and advertiser attempting to reach the global aging audience is taking the time to understand what drives them. Within each country, it is essential to explore the local culture, laws and media landscape and the appropriate language and terminology that will resonate rather than fail to connect.

Focalyst™ (www.focalyst.com) is a leading source of information and insights about Baby Boomers and Mature consumers. As a Millward Brown specialty practice supported by AARP Services Inc.,SM Focalyst offers a broad range of qualitative and quantitative custom research solutions. Focalyst pioneered the largest, most comprehensive study ever conducted about Boomers and Matures and has the unique expertise to help marketers better understand and connect with this important demographic.

For more information call 212.548.7270 or email Jackie.Bartolotta@focalyst.com.

¹ *An Aging World: 2001*, U.S. Census Bureau and the National Institute on Aging (NIA).