

# **DETERMINANTS OF THEATRE ATTENDANCE: DIFFERENCES BETWEEN GENERATIONS Y AND Z**

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*Abstract: With the advent of cinema, television, internet (IT revolution) and the current complicated economic situation in the country, less Bulgarians spend their spare time attending theatre performances. This is especially true for the new coming generations that are expected to have a significant impact on the future of theatre art. The article aims to reveal the determinants of theatre attendance for the young Bulgarian audience, representing generations Y (born between 1980 and 1991) and Z (born after 1991). Therefore, a stratified random sample of 384 spectators, aged between 14 and 32, is taken in the third biggest city in the country (Varna). The two generations were tested towards their preferences about price, genre, plot, actors, etc. There is a difference between them on their preferences about the price. Some recommendations for better marketing strategies and relations with the tourism industries are given.*

*Keywords: arts marketing; generation Y; generation Z; theatre attendance; theatre performances*

JEL: M31; M29

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The segmentation of generations or the so-called “generational cohorts” have been attracting research interest for many years. The various business areas include sports and entertainment (Bednall et al., 2012), internet banking usage (Heaney, 2007), e-travel retailers (Nusair, Parsa and Cobanoglu, 2011), fashion (Dias, 2003; Littrell, Ma and Halepete, 2005; Pentecost and Andrews, 2010), fair-trade consumption (Ma, Littrell and Niehm, 2012), shopping behavior (Parment, 2013), wine consumption (Fountain and Lamb, 2011), work commitment (Bristow et al., 2011; Montana and Petit, 2008; Solnet and Hood, 2008), commitment to online social networking sites (Nusair et al., 2011), arts (Scheff-Bernstein, 2007), restaurants (Lim and Loh, 2014). However, the research of the young generations, classified as Y and Z in the area of visual & performing arts (theatre, opera, cinema, dances, circus etc.) has received little attention. In attempt to fill in the

research gap the present study explores the factors concerning the theatre attendance by the young Bulgarian audience. It tests empirically the factors, which determine theatre going in Bulgarian Y and Z generations.

We analyze the factors determining theatre going for the generations Y and Z because they are the youngest theatregoers and their attitude towards theatre will determine its future.

In the next section, firstly we review the literature on the classification of the young generations by presenting some of the main characteristics of Y and Z and then we describe the theatre system in Bulgaria. Afterwards, we empirically test the factors determining the theatre attendance of both generations. Finally, the methodology is followed by results and discussion.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. Classification of generations and purchase determinants**

„Generational cohorts are groups of people who are born during the same time period, and go through similar experiences of external events. These shared experiences affect their beliefs, attitudes and purchasing behavior in ways that remain with them over their entire lifetime” (Ting and Run, 2012: 25). These cohorts include Pre-Depression generation, Depression generation, Baby boomers, Gen X, Gen Y, Gen Z (Williams and Page, 2011). There are different classifications of the generational cohorts' time of birth. Y are born 1978-1994 (Sheahan, 2009), 1981-2000 (Gursoya, Chib and Karadagc, 2013), 1980-1994 (Schiffman et al., 2008), Z are born after 1994 (Williams and Page, 2011). We agree with the last generational cohort segmentation where Y are born between 1980 and 1994 and Z after 1994.

There are many similarities but also some differences between these young generations. In 2014 generation Y are aged between 20 and 34, and generation Z are still in high school.

Generation Y are students and/or in transition of having family and/or children (Bednall et al., 2012). They were raised during the technological development in the world and during the economic progress (Bristow et al., 2011).

Generation Z are the youngest generation. They were raised during times of economic crisis and influenced by the terrorist attacks from September 11 (Williams and Page, 2011).

The characteristics of both generations on different aspects are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1 Multifaceted aspects of generational differences

Aspects	Generation Y	Generation Z
Social-economic	Born and raised in times of economic growth; more rights and opportunities for women; respect for ethnic and cultural diversities, (Williams and Page, 2011), question authority (Noble, Haytko and Phillips, 2009)	Born and raised in hard times: terrorist attacks (Williams and Page, 2011), economic crisis; have never lived without Internet (Benjamin, 2008; Langford, 2008)
Lifestyles and attitudes	Selfish, living for today, overspending, believing that everything is possible	New traditionalists, family values, self-controlled, optimistic attitude.
Sustainability concerns	Interested in green living and implementing energy efficient technologies.	The unhealthiest and overweight generation. They take global warming to heart. Education is a means of gaining security. (Grier et al., 2007; Matthews, 2008)
Product	Less attention to quality	Attention to quality and diversity
Price	In search for a competitive price	In search for convenience
Advertising	Magazines, Internet, radio, video gaming, social media – Facebook and Twitter (Dickey and Sullivan, 2007), reality TV	New media, virtual friends, TV – MTV, Disney channel (Williams and Page, 2011)
Communication	Online (Lester, Forman and Loyd, 2006), Word-of-mouth, voice mail, e-mail, texting, social network, sms, Youtube, podcast, blogs (Chung and Holdsworth, 2012; Kim, Knight and Crutsinger, 2009)	Chat, need quick response. If not they get disloyal to the brand. Social network. Crowdsourcing

Source: Own development

## 2.2. Generations Y and Z in Bulgaria

In the last years, many world theatres have survived times of drastic cuts in funding from public and private sources as well as from funding from donors and sponsors (Boeuf, Darveau and Legoux, 2014). Bulgarian theaters do not make an exception. This is the reason why young theatre audiences will have a strong impact on theatre going in the next few years. We assume that according to the Bulgarian conditions the young Bulgarian generations can be classified as Y (born 1980-1991) and Z (born after 1991). This is due to the political and economic changes, which happened in Bulgaria in the late 80s and early 90s – a transition from planned to market economy and European Union (EU) integration in 2007 (World Bank, 2005). Internet began to spread in Bulgaria after 1996, so Bulgarian Zs are influenced by it from an early childhood. Young Bulgarian generations have not been surveyed for their theatre preferences but it is known that they do not attend theatre performances very often (Bulgarian ministry of culture, 2010). Consequently, this is expected to cause problems for the theatre sector in the following years because young

generations will define the future demand of the theatre market. Therefore, we define our first hypothesis:

H1: There is a correlation between the type of generation and the frequency of theatre going.

### **2.3. Theatre system in Bulgaria**

Currently, in Bulgaria there are 38 state-owned and 14 privately owned drama theatres (National statistical institute of Bulgaria, 2014). Bulgarian theatre system is in transition from full state to mixed subsidies. The reform that started in 2010 (Bulgarian Ministry of Culture, 2010) in attempt to more efficient administration and financing led to the merge of some small-sized and regional theatres. In 2012, the Ministry of culture elaborated a new directive for regulation of the subsidizing conditions of the state-owned theatres (New chart, 2013). The evaluation criteria include: the number of tickets sold per year, the implementation of benchmark management practices, theatre equipment conditions and the sources of private sector revenues. Some of the major barriers to the Bulgarian theatre system are: 1) lack of legislation concerning the performing arts which leads to some difficulties such as copyrights, status of the theatres, etc., 2) middle and high managers are primarily former actors and directors without any previous management experience or skills, 3) obsolete equipment and materials, 4) struggle for finding sponsors, especially in smaller towns, 5) lack of overall marketing strategy. Another research (Stanoeva, 2013) revealed that the Bulgarian theatre managers predominantly use conventional marketing communications, such as posters, flyers, advertisement in newspapers that are not effective enough for reaching the younger generations.

In the following section we present the survey we made with representatives of the young generations so that we can find what determines their theatre going and how the communication between theatre managers and young audience could be improved. Therefore we define our second hypothesis:

H2: There is a significant difference between the factors influencing the two generations.

## **3.METHODOLOGY**

To achieve the aforementioned article goals we applied a qualitative and quantitative approach towards the determination and measurement of the factors influencing the young audience theatre attendance.

### **3.1.Qualitative methods**

In order to determine the factors influencing the theatre going among the young audience, firstly, we conducted a qualitative research by using primary and secondary sources of information. The primary sources consisted of two focus groups with representatives of the generations Y and Z and ten semi-structured in-depth interviews

with theatre managers, directors and actors. The main topics discussed during the personal interviews and the group discussions were the frequency of attendance, preferred sources of information and types of performances, and determinants of theatre attendance for the young generations in the 21 century.

The secondary sources of information that we used within the qualitative approach were official reports of the Bulgarian ministry of culture (2010, 2013) and two interviews with the Minister of culture, Stefan Danailov published in the local press (2010, 2012). The significance of each of the determining factors drawn within this phase are evaluated within the quantitative research.

### 3.2. Quantitative methods

The survey was conducted in the city of Varna - the third biggest city in Bulgaria, known as “the Sea Capital”, with a population of about 500 000 people. It is a university city and a Black Sea resort that attracts students and young people from all over the country. It is an important cultural center with more than 10 903 stage arts performances per year. There are three theatres in the city: 1 private and 2 state-owned theatres (including 1 puppet and 1 drama theatre). The focus of our study is on “Stoyan Bachvarov” state owned drama theatre. Its annual attendance is about twice higher than the national average (National Statistical Institute, 2013) which makes it representative.

In order to select a sampling method for the quantitative research we assumed that there was a statistically significant relationship between the type of generation (measured by the age of the consumers) and the frequency of theatre attendance. Since theatre attendance varies considerably according to the age of the audience and there are two homogeneous subsets with heterogeneity between them (Y and Z), we decided to use the stratified random sampling method (Rubin and Babbie, 2011). In consequence, 384 young people, aged between 14 and 32 participated in the survey. The allocation of the two strata within the sample is proportionate to the age distribution of the city population (see Table 2).

Table 2 Stratified random sampling based on the proportional age distribution

Generations	Age groups	Population of Varna	Proportion	Stratum size
Generation Z	14 – 22	47 731	48 %	184
Generation Y	23 – 32	51 709	52 %	200
Total	14 – 32	99 440	100 %	384

$$\sigma^2 = 0,25; P = 0,05, Z = 1,96$$

Source: Own development

## 4. RESULTS

### 4.1. Frequency of theatre going

More than half of the respondents taking part in the survey (62%) declared attendance to theatre performances at least once during the last year. Almost all of them

(91 %) do it no more than 4-5 times per year. Less than 0.5 % go to theatre once a week. About 8 % attend theatre performances 2-3 times per month.

By measuring the rank correlation coefficients of Spearman’s rho and Kendall’s tau c, we tested the first hypothesis.<sup>1</sup> We found that there is no significant correlation between the type of the generation and the frequency of the theatre going (See Table 3). This reveals that we cannot expect to see more often representatives of generation Z than of generation Y or vice versa at theatre performances. If this happens, it will be a result of random factors influencing the consumer behavior because from statistical perspective the frequency of attendance in the twenty first century does not depend on the type of generation. The different young generations attend theatre performances with equal frequency – on average 4-5 times per year or rarely.

Table 3 Rank correlation coefficients for measuring the association between frequency of attendance and generational cohorts

Correlation coefficients	Valid sample cases	Rank correlation values	Degree of freedom	Asymptotic significance (2-tailed)	Standard error
Spearman's rho	238	0.044	236	0.501	0.66
Kendall's tau c	238	0.044	236	0.508	0.67

*P= 0.05*

Source: Own development

#### 4.2.Preferences towards theatre performances

About 75 % of the young generations attending theatre performances prefer comedies. 45 % of them have a preference for classic comedy authors such as Moliere and Racin and 55 % are interested in contemporary authors such as Neil Simon. 15 % of the respondents prefer drama performances, and 63 % of them want more contemporary authors, but 37 % like more classic drama authors like Shakespeare. There is no significant difference between preferences of generations Y and Z. The difference in the answers given by the respondents of both generations about their preferences on the genre of theatre attendances is in the range of 2-3 %.

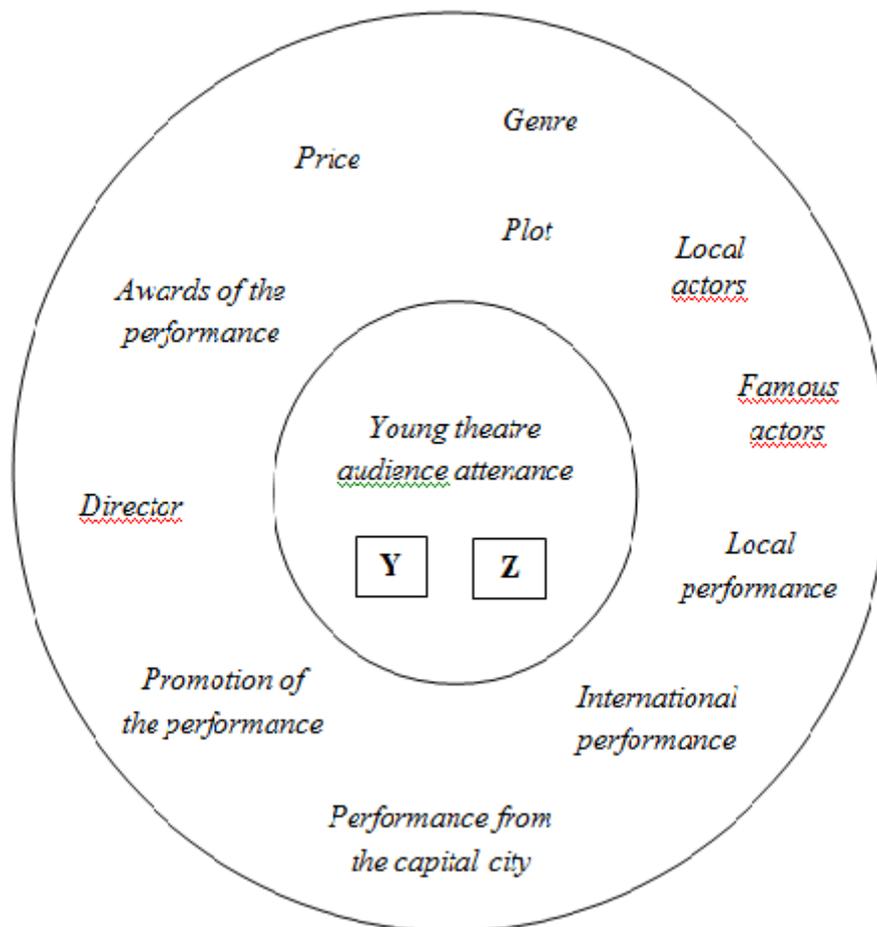
#### 4.3.Sources of information

The most frequently used source of information by the young generations is “word-of-mouth”. More than 40 % of the young customers receive information for the forthcoming theatre events from friends, family members and school teachers. The second most important source of information is Internet (35.1%) including theatre websites (15%), online newspapers (9.6%) and group buying websites (10.5%). The conventional advertising media such as radio, television and newspapers is a preferred information channel by 17.2 %. There is no significant difference between the generations Y and Z towards the sources of information. The difference in the answers given by the respondents of both generations about the sources of information is in 3-4 % range.

#### 4.4.Determinants of theatre attendance

The qualitative research revealed 11 determinants of theatre attendance for the young generations (See Figure 1).

Figure 1 Determinants of theatre attendance for young generations



Source: Own development

Within the quantitative research we tested hypotheses about the equality in the distribution of the two independent groups („Y” и „Z”) by using U-test of Mann-Whitney and Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The results showed that there is statistically significant difference between the both generations only regarding the “price” factor. It is more important for generation Y (65 %) compared to generation Z (42 %). The rest of the researched factors (genre, plot, participation of local or famous actors, a capital city performance, international or local performance, director, promotions and awards) are of equal importance for the both generations (See Table 4).

Table 4 Determinants of theatre attendance by statistical significance

Determinants of theatre attendance	Generation	Statistic tests <sup>2</sup>	Asymptotic significance
Price	Y	Mann-Whitney U	0.000
	Z	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.009
	Total:	There is a difference between Y and Z	
Genre	Y	Mann-Whitney U	0.427
	Z	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	1.00
	Total:	There is no difference between Y and Z	
Plot	Y	Mann-Whitney U	0.295
	Z	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.890
	Total:	There is no difference between Y and Z	
Participation of local actors	Y	Mann-Whitney U	0.440
	Z	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.270
	Total:	There is no difference between Y and Z	
Participation of famous actors	Y	Mann-Whitney U	0.080
	Z	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.160
	Total:	There is no difference between Y and Z	
Local performance	Y	Mann-Whitney U	0.200
	Z	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.661
	Total:	There is no difference between Y and Z	
Performance from the capital city (Sofia)	Y	Mann-Whitney U	0.47
	Z	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.589
	Total:	There is no difference between Y and Z	
International performance	Y	Mann-Whitney U	0.125
	Z	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.273
	Total:	There is no difference between Y and Z	
Director	Y	Mann-Whitney U	0.123
	Z	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.696
	Total:	There is no difference between Y and Z	
Awards of the performance	Y	Mann-Whitney U	0.249
	Z	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.407
	Total:	There is no difference between Y and Z	
Promotion of the performance	Y	Mann-Whitney U	0.261
	Z	Kolmogorov-Smirnov	0.280
	Total:	There is no difference between Y and Z	

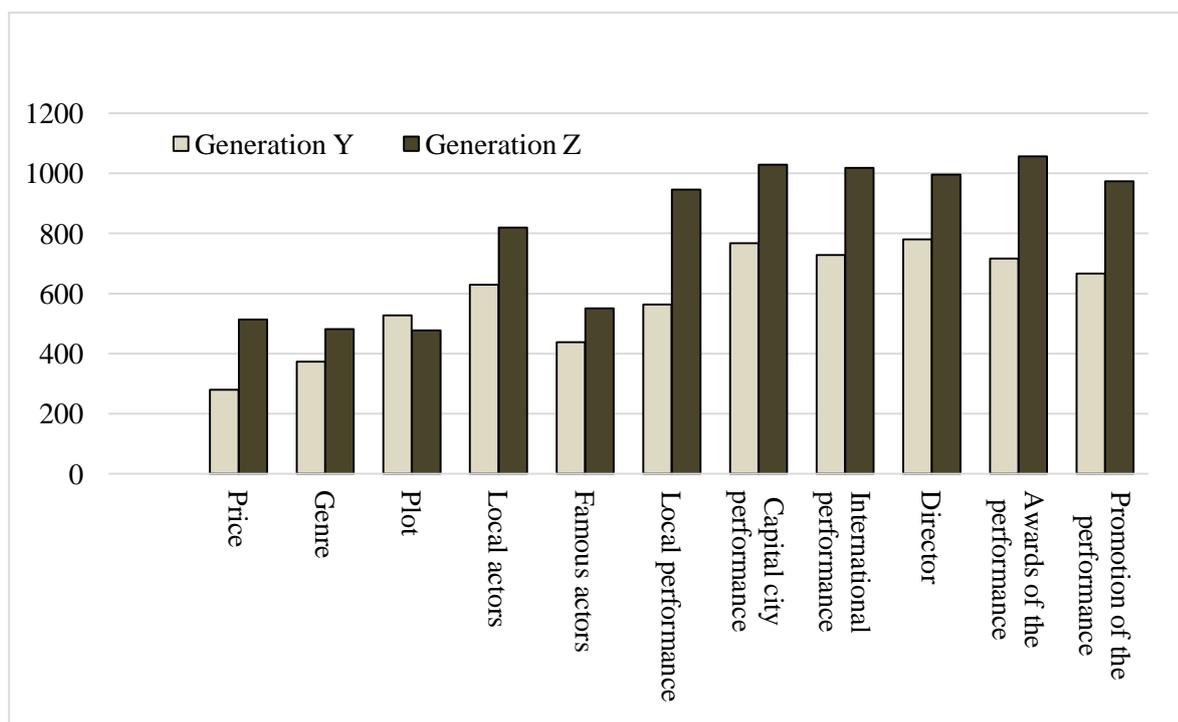
$P = 0.05$

Source: Own development

Concerning the level of importance of each of the determinants, the most important factors for the audience are the price (54,9%), the genre (73,3%), the plot (62,8%) and the participation of famous actors (62,2%). Only about 25 % found the director and the awards important. The factors that are neither important, nor unimportant for the consumers are whether the theatre performance is local or international and whether it is promoted or not in media such as radio and TV. Our survey shows that the most important factors for Bulgarian Ys are price, genre and participation of famous actors. The Zs find the genre, the plot and the price most important.

The respondents were asked to arrange the factors from 1 to 11 so that we could understand which the most important factor was. In the questionnaire the most important factor is 1 and the least important one is 11. Figure 2 shows the ranking of the determinants of theatre attendance for both generations. Plot, price and genre are the most important factors for both generations. The figure confirms the results discussed earlier.

Figure 2 Ranking of the determinants of theatre attendance: generations Y and Z



Source: Own development

## 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This study investigated the differences between young generational cohorts Y and Z and their motivations for attending theatre performances. We tested two hypotheses. The first one revealed that there was not a strong correlation between the type of generation and the theatre going. Our survey confirmed the results of the report of Bulgarian ministry of culture that young people do not attend theatre performances very often (Bulgarian

Ministry of Culture, 2010). One of the possible explanations is that nowadays theatres are in competition for young audience's attention with many forms of entertainment such as TV, cinema, Internet, social networks, sports, visual arts, etc. Another one might be the fact that theatre education has been sparse in the last few years (Scheff Bernstein, 2007).

The second hypothesis revealed that there was a significant difference between the two young generations only in regard to the price. Yers were more price-sensitive. This might be due to financial reasons because the representatives of this generation are either new graduates looking for a full time, permanent job or parents with small children. Consequently, spending on arts is not a priority in their budget. Zers are still studying and financially dependent on their parents. All the other motivations for the two cohorts are of equal importance within the theatre attendance decision making process.

Our survey leads to some interesting implications for managers. The young cohorts want more comedy genres. They like more entertainment type of arts, performances that can make them happy and smile. The reason for this could be that drama performances are either too difficult to understand or just more suitable for adults who are more educated. Another reason might be the difficult economic situation in Bulgaria with youth unemployment rate of 28.1 % higher than the annual average for EU-28 (Eurostat, 2014). As a consequence young people prefer entertaining performances in order to forget about their problems. However, we have to remember that theatre has educational and aesthetic functions in the society so that these preferences should be considered, but not followed fully. For example, there should be more comedy performances, but drama ones should not be forgotten as well. It would be useful if theatre managers make some performances dedicated especially to young generational cohorts including authors and texts from the school programme. In this way young people will understand the play and will explain better to themselves why they are learning it in school. Another useful practice is an "open-doors day" with meetings with the actors or going to a rehearsal.

The research showed that young generations are informed for new performances mainly by worth-of-mouth and Internet. Our survey confirmed the world tendency of the Internet influence (Euzeby and Martinez, 2012). This might be due to the fact that young people want to go to the theatre with friends or receive a recommendation from a friend that the performance will be interesting. They don't want to go to see something boring. For this reason it is advisable for theatre managers to use more traditional word-of-mouth techniques to stimulate theatre going. For example, a ticket buyer can be rewarded with a free or discounted ticket if he brings a friend. Modern word-of-mouth techniques are related to social media and Internet (Hausmann, 2012). And nowadays young people are more and more Internet connected (Mohr, 2007; Slack, Rowley and Coles, 2008). Therefore, theatre managers need to use more effectively Internet and Social media as communication and distribution channels. Theatre websites could be improved by adding some interactive functionalities such as online ticket buying, online surveys and e-mail bulletins. Blogs and social media profiles (Facebook, Twitter, Google +, YouTube channels, etc.) should be created. Although these are common practices in the USA and Canada (Scheff-Bernstein, 2007), and Western Europe (Euzeby and Martinez, 2012), in

Bulgaria these channels are still not applied by arts and theatre managers because of the lack of managerial skills. (Stanoeva, 2013)

Since approximately 40% of the new generations do not go to theatre at all, it is very important to the theatre managers to adopt some measures in order to attract new customers by stimulating first trial in the short term and create loyalty in the long-term. In order to do this they might consider the application of the following marketing tools and activities: price discounts or special packages for students and young couples, loyalty cards. At the end of every month we suggest rewards for customers who have accumulated the most points or raffles for meeting theatre celebrities. As collective shopping is gaining popularity among the consumers nowadays (Wang, Zhao and Li, 2013) Bulgarian managers might also use it for theatre purposes. The distribution of informational booklets in the hallways of high schools, universities, public libraries and bookstores might also be a good way to reach the potential young audiences. Thus theatres can create awareness among customers about current and forthcoming theatre performances.

Theatres are important for cultural tourism as well. We would recommend that their performances are translated in foreign languages, especially in English, so that tourists from other countries could watch them. Tourist agencies might also be involved in the tourist attraction process by negotiating contracts for guiding tourists to the theatres. In return they can advertise the tourist agencies activities to their audiences.

Our analysis is the first attempt to segment and survey the young generational cohorts Y and Z in Bulgaria and the first that tries to explain what the reasons for theatre going are. Our survey discovered that there are no significant differences regarding frequency of theatre going, preferences and determinants. This shows that in Bulgaria we cannot distinguish Y and Z or they should be classified in one generational cohort as some authors suggest (Gursoya, Chib and Karadagc, 2013).

Our research can be extended to the other generational cohorts (X, Baby Boomers and Depression generations) and other geographical regions (other cities in Bulgaria, countries from Eastern Europe or EU members). From marketing perspective it is important to segment theatre audience on a generational criterion because it helps theatre managers to target more precisely their messages and adapt their offers in order to meet the challenges of the highly competitive environment.

### **Notes**

Since the two categorical variables (the type of the generation and the frequency of the theatre going) are measured on ordinal scales, the non-parametric statistical tests, applied in this case for determining/estimating the relationship between them, are Kendall's tau c and Spearman's rho (Lomax and Hahs-Vaughn, 2012). The asymptotic values of the two correlation coefficients are higher than the  $p$  significance level of 0.05 which proves that we can accept the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant

correlation between the two variables. Therefore, we can conclude that if there is any correlation at all between the two variables it is due to random factors (the standard error).

Mann-Whitney U and the Kolmogorov-Smirnov tests are nonparametric tests used to compare two groups of data that are not related. They both compute P-values in order to test if the two groups have the same distribution (Corder and Foreman, 2014). When the asymptotic values of the two tests are higher than the  $p$  significance level of 0.05 that we accepted in/for this survey, this will prove that we cannot accept the null hypothesis that there is no statistically significant difference between the two groups. Otherwise, we can conclude that determinants included in the table are not of equal importance for the two generations.

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