



## New Solutions for Digital Advertising: Gen Y Playing Roles of Personas

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**Abstract:** In this article we continue our interest in generation Y, Millennials, abbreviated Gen Y As we assumed, we confirm with a short survey that they are really innovative and creative. In that article we proved Gen Y's creativity with using methodology of international survey on DOBA's online student's bachelors' courses of Advertising Campaigns. For these student's creativity overwhelmingly meant *Original/Different/ Unique* (64,28 %), therefore we assumed that they were the right *personas* - first persons to share creative products/services further. This hypothesis was confirmed in a case study in which students play *personas*. We recommended that our students design persona with characteristics of one of their team-mates, on real-life data. The results of this *case study* were useful innovations for promoting online study of DOBA Faculty. With this method we could turn business models into reality and make them interesting and worthy of buying from modern consumers. Our practical implications are that a smart company/business/entrepreneur/ creative industry should involve Millennials as their key *persona* when preparing their advertising campaigns, especially on social networks with its interpersonal relations. This solution could strengthen and empower their link with consumers and increase their profits.

**Keywords:** Gen Y; persona; real-life data; creativity; trends & innovation in marketing.

## Nove rešitve v digitalnem trženju: ko pripadniki generacije Y igrajo vloge porabniških person

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**Povzetek:** V tem članku nadaljujemo naše zanimanje za raziskovanje generacije Y, Milenijcev oz. skrajšano Gen Y. Kot smo predpostavili, s kratko anketo potrjujemo, da so res inovativni in kreativni. Ker za njih kreativnost v 64,3% pomeni izvirno/različno/edinstveno, domnevamo, da so idealne persone – torej porabniki, ki bodo kreativen izdelek/storitev delili naprej. Ta hipoteza je bila potrjena v izpostavljenem primeru in tudi v ostalih projektih, kjer so študenti igrali persone. Priporočili smo namreč, da so študenti pri tiskem delu med sabo izbrali persono in projekt gradili na podlagi njenih resničnih lastnosti. Rezultati takega pristopa so pokazali, da je ta metoda zelo uspešna in je zanimiva tudi izven uporabe v okviru online študija na DOBA Fakulteti. Menimo, da bi sodobna podjetja in podjetniki morali večkrat vključiti Milenijce kot persone v svoje priprave oglaševalskih akcij. Na način bi okrepili svoj odnos s sodobnim potrošnikom in povečali svoj profit.

**Ključne besede:** generacija Y; persona; podatki iz resničnega življenja porabnika; kreativnost; inovativni marketinški trendi.

## 1. Introduction

"Client-centricity is the most important factor in a successful business digitalization, since client-centric companies are 60% more profitable compared to companies not focused on the customer" - Deloitte, July 2017 (Mac Donald, 2020).

We could not agree more with this statement. We live in the era of consumer or client centric company, which is together with digital native culture one of the new marketing trends. If the consumer should be the centre of company's attention, the next question is: Why is it important to identify customer needs? The latest research shows that about 76% of customers expect companies to understand their needs. The more you know about your customers, it helps you define your brand positioning around their needs (Mac Donald, 2020). This insight can be used to build products or services to satisfy customer needs and provide a faster and effective support.

The next question is: how can we identify consumer needs? The traditional answer is » ... segmentation, choosing target markets, and positioning, which is also called target marketing«. (Vukasović and Jagodič, 2017). Current market researching methods are to research consumers' lifestyle and personal values (Vukasović 2018, 287).

One great way to meet your customer needs is to create a company culture that is focused on customer experience at every point.

The customer experience (CX) is the major differentiator for every business but creating a great CX isn't that easy. It includes visualizing interactions through every touchpoint from the customer's perspective: What are the expectations, what makes sense, and where do you have a chance to surprise and delight someone? (Patel, 2020).

"Everything we do starts with the consumer," CEO Mark Parker told investors. "It's our obsession with serving the consumer that sharpens our focus and drives our growth." (Lutz, 2012).

In recent years personalized advertising has become the cornerstone of an effective marketing strategy. Creating compelling, personalized, and targeted experiences drives better engagement and sales. To add value to the customers' lives, marketers must identify each customer and recognize their expectations based on their demographics, location, age, gender, purchase patterns, behaviour, preferences, budget, shopping journey, and many more aspects. 58% of companies pursue personalization strategies for customer retention (Dautovič, 2020).

Today, personalization is a crucial part of a consumer's life – on both digital and offline channels. Consumers benefit from recommendations that are based on their past purchases and are more confident about buying products that others have purchased.

If company create ads based on well-informed data about consumers' needs, users will talk about such ads and share them and eventually they could go viral. But there is a dark side of this euphoria: consumers could find personalized ads too invasive.

Why are customers sceptical about personalization?

The truth is customers don't hate ads; they hate the intrusion and misuse of their personal (sensitive) information. Customers today understand that to receive personalized content and relevant promotions, retailers need to identify them and use their personal information, but with the increase in identity thefts, hacking, data misuse, and other such cybercrimes, customers are becoming more concerned about protecting their data and privacy (Groove, 2019).

We should search for new solutions for our sceptical consumers. Our alternative is clear: maybe we can skip marketing research, managing by professional researchers, and try to get data directly from our consumer. Our proposal is that the companies include their consumers as real »personas« into promotion of their products or services.

We have made a primary test to see what happened if we do it. We include one of the most credible target group in 2020: we will focus on Generation Y, which is now the biggest and the most potent group of consumers, and which is still growing in influence.

Our hypothesis is that with this method you got some clients for sure and the rest of them you could catch with standard methods.

In this article we went one step further. We were interested how Millennials would behave if they were offered a possibility to create business projects themselves. Since we have had five years of experience, observation and communication with Gen Y, we can safely rate them as creative and ambitious people, who want to get higher in their careers. But first we wanted to confirm what creativity means to Gen Y (Van den Bergh, 2016). After the results were available, we went further: members of the Gen Y stepped into the shoes of ideal customer: he/she was The Man /The Woman that started the promotion of creative product/service (Arih, 2016).

Our hypothesis is that they are real "personas", who can create and promote successful advertising projects, tailor made for their generation.

## 2. Methods

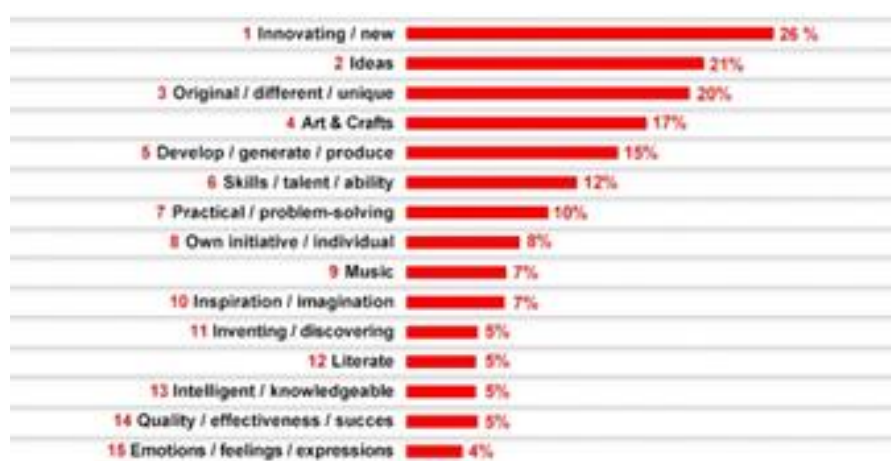
### 2.1 First step: Creativity survey

First, we decided to verify the statement of their creativity. We used data of international survey, which was acquired by online InSites' researchers. They decided to find out more about Millennials through a worldwide survey, and to get to the bottom of how exactly Millennials are (re)defining creativity. They used Twitter:

"Hot tweetaway: How #Millennials are (re)defining #creativity insit.es/1xaZOSr by @Joeri\_InSites via @CoolBrands #GenY #coolbrands".

They received a wide range of answers when asking Generation Y what creativity means to them. Here are the top 15 answers as to what they associate with creativity.

Table 1: Online in sites survey 2015: What creativity means to Millenials, Top 15 (based on an online survey among 15 to 25 years olds (Gen Y) in 13 countries worldwide



Source: Van den Bergh, 2016.

As you can see, creativity means more than being artistic (singing, painting...); it also represents solving problems, socially interacting/ expressing oneself, being successful and producing new ideas. For this Millennial generation, creativity is a combination of artistic expression and the discovery and development of new ideas (Van den Bergh, 2016).

In our survey we added two questions to the basic one: “What creativity means to Millennials”, since we wanted to get students’ argumentation why they have chosen one of the proposed answers, and we also wanted to get acquainted with their age and gender. So, our questions to student respondents were:

A: to choose one of the 15 possible answers from Van den Berghs survey to the question “What does creativity means to you?”

B: to explain their choice

C: to state their age and gender.

Because our survey was not obligatory, we got answers from only 14 students between 20 to 40 years, which fell into Gen Y. But the results were significantly different from international survey.

## 2.2 Second step: Pilot study

One of the researching methods to get information about consumers’ personalities is to create ideal profile of user or “persona”.



Figure 1: The customer needs analysis

Source: Patel, 2020

Since in the first phase of research we confirmed that our students of Gen Y are creative and love originality, we anticipated that they could play real ideal persona for original and creative services such as on-line study on DOBA Business School.

We made pilot test, or pilot experiment in the environment of Black Board Learn. Our research sample was 140 students. We suggested to these 140 students of 18 teams to choose one of their mates in each team. This student then represented “persona” and the whole advertising campaign based on him/her.

## 2.3 Third step: Evaluation of case study – Alma’s team advertising campaign

As evaluation methods we used a scale of grades from 1 to 10 and sponsor’s statement of content with students’ advertising creative solutions.

### 3. Results and Materials

#### 3.1 Results of creativity survey

Table 2: Answers with explanations

	What does Creativity mean for you?	Argumentation	Age and gender
1.	A/10	For me personally I see creativity mostly reflected in inspiration and imagination. I believe that a person with a developed imagination is also more creative. We can see this in children, who are full of imagination and creative ideas that they are expressing any time they are creating.	C/39/M
2.	A/10	Even though the famous Belinka ad is almost 20 years old, I still remember the tagline »Where can we get without imagination?!« That is why I think that the same is with creativity, just can't get it without imagination.	C/37/F
3.	A/3	Creativity is for me best described with the word's originality/difference/uniqueness. Creativity is something that allows people to display their capabilities. And these are unique for every individual.	C/27/F
4.	A/3	I believe that there are many meanings hiding/interlocked in creativity, but the outliers are definitely originality, difference, uniqueness. To be original, special, one of a kind; these are the attributes, that make us different from each other and can enable our excellence to flourish and at the same time make the outside world shine in rainbow colours. To dare, to be courageous!	C/34/F
5.	A/3	Having an idea to make something that does not exist yet means you are creative, different, special and you will succeed and build a career on your own. For me this means you raise above the averageness.	C/26/F
6.	A/3	I think that creativity can be seen when we create a product or service in a different way, that it is special and dissimilar to all the other products or services.	C 37/F
7.	A/3	I always want to do some task differently.	C/24/F
8.	A/3	I believe that creativity can be best described with the word's originality, difference and uniqueness. When I think about creativity, I start to associate it with the words create, creation – I see creativity as making something new, never before see and therefore one of a kind.	C/35/F
9.	A/6	Of course, every point from A in its own way describes the meaning of the word »creativity«, but I believe that creativity cannot exist without knowledge and skills. It is necessary to gather the relevant knowledge and skills to be able to work creatively. You also need a certain amount of talent. People that are more talented for creativity (that also includes being very communicative) will much easier acquire and understand the rules of creativity.	C/36/F
10.	A/3	Because it fulfils us.	C/40/F
11.	A/10	I could since I was little, I have a very active imagination. That has served me very well in my work environment and also in my free time.	C/28/F
12.	A/5	I believe that the process of creativity consists of connecting what seems to be unconnectable parts or concepts and developing a new and different idea or product.	C/22/F
13.	A/3	For me creativity represents something new, something that we cannot copy and is unique, one of a kind. People are attracted to new and never before seen things. The marketplace is filled with similar products. With the help of creativity, we can recognize those that can be presented in a new and different light.	C/30/F
14.	A/3	I am happy when, during the course of taking on challenges I can contribute new and fresh ideas, solutions, imagination and emotions, that brings us to a creative way of solving an assignment. Creative solutions are possible in relaxed environments, when innovation, individuality and thinking outside the box is expected. I work in tourism. After studying the ads, that an outside company is developing for Hotels Bernardin d.d. I can see that while they are nicely done, they are also too classic. They lack originality, courage, creativity and uniqueness with a hint of how people live in Istra.	C/39/M

Source: Creativity Survey, Bachelor course Creative Communication 2018, DOBA Business Scholl

On international scale the winning response for the question: *What creativity means for Millennials?* was: *Inovating something new* (26 %) but our students had a different priority: for them creativity in the first place meant:

*Original/Different/Unique*



Nine students (64,29%) have chosen this answer, three students (21,43 %) *Inspiration/Imagination*, for one student (7.14%) creativity meant *Skills/Talent/Ability* and for the last one (7.14 %) *Develop/Generate/Produce*.

### 3.2 Results of pilot study

Below we presented case study of Alma's Team 7 and their *persona* Alma. She is one of 18 real life personas which students' teams has created, but we must limit to one case study in quality analysis.

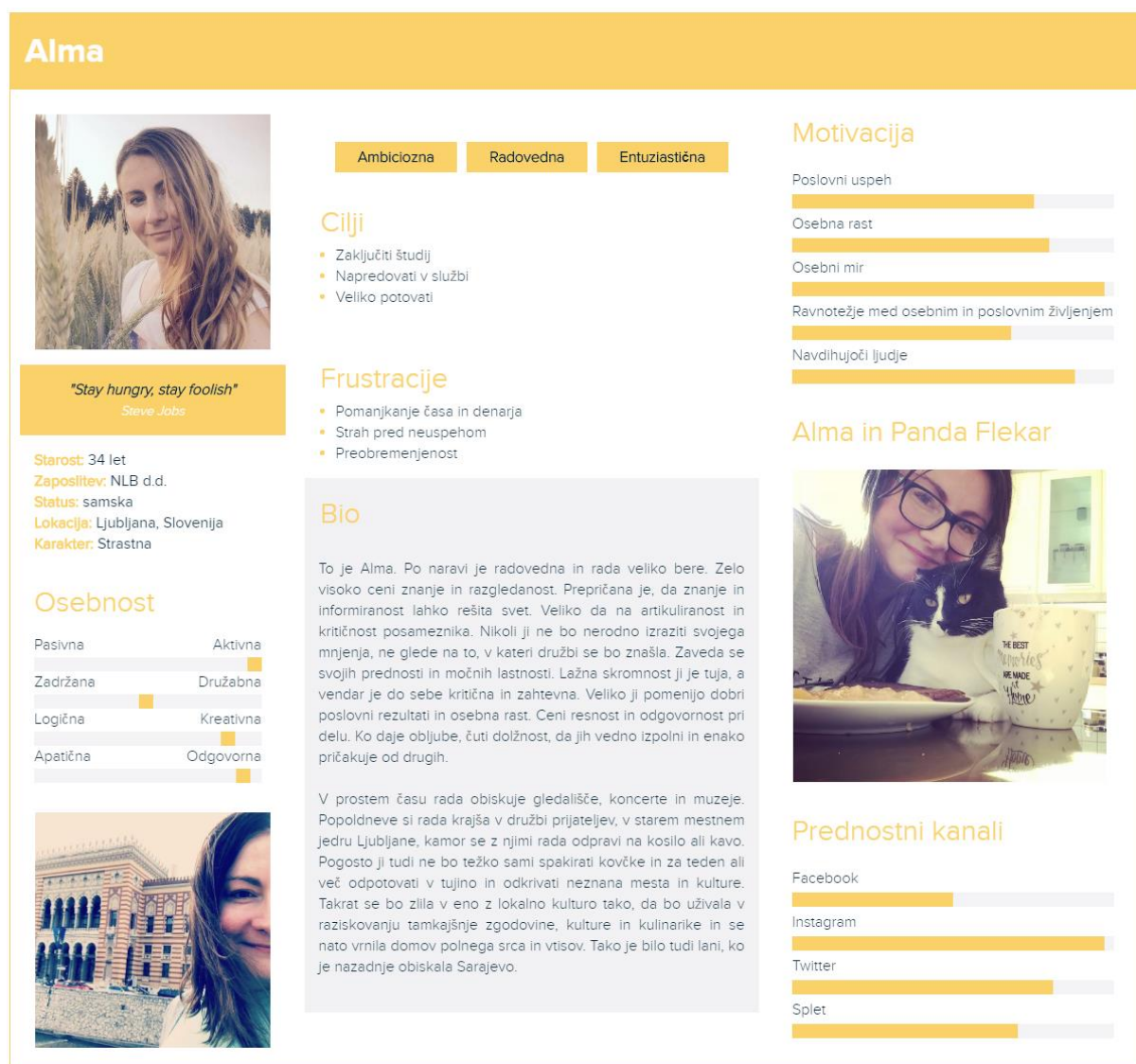


Figure 2: Visualisation of real-life *persona* Alma

Source: Čuden, Dindić, Fajfar, Horvat, 2020

Alma is a real person who was chosen by her three teammates as a suitable person for the promotion of online study at DOBA.

She has described herself as passionate, active, creative, responsible. She is curious and a big reader. She highly values knowledge and is sure that knowledge and information could save the world. She places importance on critical thinking and argumentation. She is aware of her advantages and strong assets. False modesty is not her style. She loves good business results. And she loves her cat, Panda Flekar, who is treated as family member.

She is active, communicative, ambitious, and enthusiastic.

She was also the leader in team 7, popular among them all. She was also one of the best online students of DOBA.

She could be listed into international frames of target groups of Gen Y, certainly into group Hip-ennials.

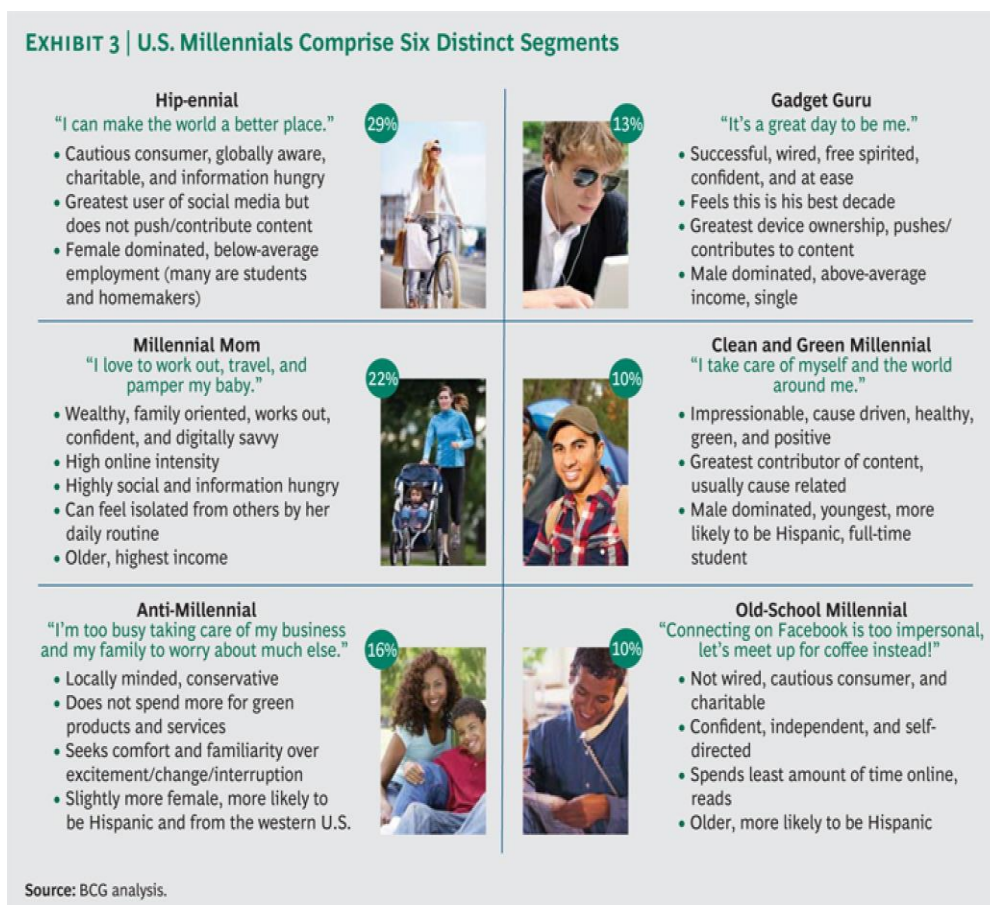


Figure 3: Six Distinct Segments of U.S. Gen Y  
Source: Barton, Fromm and Egan (2012): Debunking Stereotypes

### 3.3 Results of case study

#### 3.3.1 Alma's team's Creative advertising message for promotion of online study on DOBA Business School

Alma's team has done the advertising campaign accordingly to her real *persona* and the results were *Original/Different/ Unique*.



Figure 4: Advertising message for Facebook and Instagram  
Source: Čuden et al., 2020



Figure 5: Advertising message on sugar wraps

Source: Čuden et al., 2020.

The main characters for advertising online learning were two cat friends. One, Panda Flekar, has already graduated and another, Cveto Praskež, was (very lazily) preparing to follow him.

Their dialogue on Figure 2 is:

*Panda Flekar:* Studying online at DOBA school is a piece of cake. A friendly student greeting! Graduate wise-cat Panda Flekar.

*Cveto Praskež:* I just have to do another stretch, and then I am off to study. My friend Panda Flekar has already graduated. A piece of cake! If he can do it, so can I! A friendly student greeting! Cveto Praskež.

Their messages on sugar wraps, Figure 3, are:

*Panda Flekar:* Studying online at DOBA school is a piece of cake.

*Cveto Praskež:* Studying at DOBA? Piece of cake!

The main slogan of DOBA is:

When others are only trying, we have been implementing online study for 21 years.

Students have added another slogan (*Študirati online na DOBA Fakulteti je mačji kašelj*) – Studying online at DOBA school is a piece of cake – with using creative method of copywriting: proverb. *Mačji kašelj* in Slovenia literally means cat cough - something that can be done easily – it is unfortunately not translatable into English.

“Using animal characters always draws attention to the advertising message. Theory suggests that humans are genetically predisposed to attend to, be attracted by, and be drawn to other living beings such as animals.” (Stone, 2014, 6). And of course the cats are in second place of Top 5 animals used in commercial advertising (Stone, 2014, 14).

I must mention another efficient use of advertising possibility: sugar wraps for coffee or tea. Since Millennials are social beings, the information about super online study on DOBA could be shared also in cafes, bars, restaurant. Advertising on sugar wraps is relatively cheap and efficient, since everybody would be surprised by cat with graduating cap. Again: *Original/Different/ Unique*.



### 3.3.2. Evaluation of grades

Grades of students' seminar works »Creative advertising message for promotion online study on DOBA Business school« are extremely high. 117 active students on this Course have got average grade 9,7! 90 students (77 %) have concluded course with highest mark 10, 23 students (20%) with 9 and 4 students (3 %) with 8.

### 3.3.3. Sponsor's statement

Sponsor has confirmed that the results of our pilot project is excellent:

Dina Potočnik, director of marketing and sales on DOBA Business School, has stated:

The students of DOBA Business School have at the class of Advertising campaigns prepared an ad campaign, based on their own online study. Together in a team they developed an ideal persona, which in advertising forms the basis and requirement for creating ad messages. The greatest advantage was surely the fact that the students could choose a real persona, a real person based on someone in their team. The most exciting thing for us was seeing them thinking how they can use the ad messaging to be different from the competition. They were daring, innovative and creative and their ads differed from one another. We at DOBA Business School were very impressed by three teams and their ads, since they were developed at the level expected of professional ad agencies. We can rate our cooperation with students as very successful and we have already used some of the ad messages in the marketing campaign of our business school.

## 4. Discussion

From results we could conclude that our DOBA's online students Millennials, chose as a synonym for creativity the words *Original & Different & Unique*. There was a logical conclusion in that they searched for the same qualities as consumers. Therefore, Millennials could play the role of consumer for the products/services they appreciated. Since in the dynamic model of communications the first consumer is named *persona*, we decided to asked students to play a role of *personas*.

Our second methodological step was to include our students' personalities into their seminar's business case. In dynamic communications (Arih, 2016), which we used in our teaching contents, the first phase was to create The Man / The Woman, an individual who starts the advertising campaign. His or her pen and visual" profile is *persona*, first user of a new product or service.

*Persona*, who in our case is an individual, not a group, is the key for creative strategy, slogan and texts of advertising campaign and also for viral promotion on social networks. "Customer personas are detailed representations of segments within your target audience." (Havice 2020).

We were always trying to provide sponsorship for online study Advertising Campaigns and to get a real-world case for students to work on. "It is important that we operate with a real business problem, so we at the same time can bring learning to real life and vice versa" (Ašanin & Mahnič, 2018, 81).

The best opportunity has shown in June 2020 when our students of Advertising Campaigns were challenged by a memo from DOBA Business School. DOBA invited her students to prepare an advertising campaign to promote DOBA's online study. And since our DOBA's online students knew all about the advantages and shortcomings of online learning, we recommended that they designed their *persona* on the characteristics of one of their teammates, with real-life data. Students loved the idea since it had added value for them.

Playing the *role method* was very effective. The results of this *case study* were useful innovations for promoting online study of DOBA Business School. So, with this method we could turn some creative business models into reality and make them interesting and worthy of buying from modern consumers /Millennials.

We hope that this study has managed to accomplish the goal and confirmed the hypothesis set.

But here are a few limitations of this study.

A pilot study can provide only limited information on the measured responses. But this method is appropriate for some new ideas and approaches. We hope that it provides some new information and views on the concept of persona and all resulting effects.

Also, the research sample in the creativity survey (Table 2) is numerically malnourished. We intend to repeat this survey on a larger sample and made it a mandatory part of every bachelor course of Advertising campaigns.

We also intend to continue with pilot studies of real-life *personas* in next seminars on advertising. A pilot study is an invaluable tool when you start an experiment and want to gather information prior to a larger study.

In further research we also plan to make a questionnaire for sponsors to measure their satisfaction. We plan specific questionnaire about using real life persona also for students.

With all these tools we hope to get all the input that we need to prepare a "draft model" for advertising and creative projects: that real life *persona* become official research and advertising method.

## 5. Conclusions

Advertising on social networks is becoming more and more popular among advertisers because it enables them to reach a relatively large targeted audience. Advertising messages are customized according to customers interests, habits, age, gender, location and so on. The more the advertising is customized, the more it is successful (Vukasović, 2016).

We could build our *persona* and customized our advertising based on a data driven research, customer surveys, phone and in person interviews, web surveys etc. *But:* The goal is to get inside your customers' heads and make sure your personas are based on what *real* people think, not just your *idea* of what they think (Havice, 2020).

Maybe our approach to build *persona* from real data and even ask her/him to build his own advertising campaign is not just a very interesting experiment, but also an alternative solution.

To conclude: Gen Y are not just creative and innovative, they are also great consumers, *personas*, who know what they want. Millennials could be the key actors, key consumers, which could stimulate new business models that are efficient AND – at the same time consumer and not company oriented. But there are a few problems: if students do not get a brief for a product or service, which they love and which is original, different, and unique, they do not do it so well. They were likely to participate in promotion of product/service, which has added value for them. Keep this alternative solution as a control point.

"Often created in silos, and primarily demographically focused, Personas can have little connection to the stakeholders who need to use them. They tell part of the story but fail to instate real insight into what users are trying to accomplish; why or why not they might consume a product and be satisfied with it." (Vitali, 2019).

Our practical implication is that a smart company/business/entrepreneur/ creative industry should involve Millennials as their key *personas* when preparing their advertising campaigns, especially on social networks with its interpersonal relations. This solution could strengthen and empower that company's link with consumers and increase their profits.

"Most importantly, we have to remember that your personas should reflect real people with real motivations, desires, and concerns. When we lose sight of the human element, the customer isn't far behind" (Havice, 2020).

The idea that we start our advertising from real persons and that they participate in the project with the advertiser is original in the sense, that we do not just use influencers, but an entire generation, in this case, the Millennials.

Jančič has perfectly ranked ages of advertising in periods of antique, information, exaggeration, differentiation, one-off sales proposal, image, positioning, creating events, new social responsibility, and dialogue (Jančič, 2013).

Maybe we could upgrade the age of dialogue with new advertising age of socialization.

With all new social trends as *Me too* and *Black lives matter!* we dare to announce that another social trend of consumers could be *Real consumer's lifestyle matters!* It's an exaggeration. But maybe the time is for new alternatives.

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