

6-1-2018

## Exploring Millennials' Motives in Media Class Preferences: Advertising Implications

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### Recommended Citation

Hutto, Alexandra and Kassaye, W. Wossen (2018) "Exploring Millennials' Motives in Media Class Preferences: Advertising Implications," *International Review of Business and Economics*: Vol. 1: Iss. 2, Article 1.

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.56902/IRBE.2018.1.2.1>

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/irbe/vol1/iss2/1>

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### Abstract

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Millennials have become a preoccupation for marketers, especially as they enter their peak earning and spending life stages. This exploratory study represents a touchstone to the motivations, beliefs, feelings, and behaviors members of the millennial cohort, those born between 1980-2000, exhibited toward three major media classes (print, broadcast, and Internet). Forty-one millennials participated in a series of synchronous online focus groups administered through a learning management system (LMS), or focus group chats (FGCs) for short. This study compares millennials' views toward traditional media (namely, television and newspapers) against the Internet with an emphasis on perceived advantages and disadvantages of each medium, especially as they relate to millennials' media class preferences. Support for the participants' suppositions and expressions of their motives, behaviors, and opinions came by way of their verbatim answers to questions posed by the online focus group moderator. The findings suggest that millennials' media class choices are influenced by convenience, access availability, time shift issues, and preferences. The participants showed discernable control anxiety about new Internet connected devices (ICDs) and media content sources.

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## INTRODUCTION

With the mission of gaining a greater understanding of millennials' motives, mindsets, and behavioral tendencies in media preferences, the researchers collected data in a series of synchronous online focus groups administered through a learning management system (LMS), or “focus group chats” (FGCs) for short [Hutto 2012]. To the extent that advertising and marketing strategies cannot be formulated without a solid understanding of not only *how* but *why* millennials prefer Internet-related technologies, this study endeavors to provide a layer of data not typically found through surveys.

The findings suggest that millennials' media class choices are influenced by convenience, access availability, time shift issues, and preferences. The participants showed discernable control anxiety about new Internet connected devices (ICDs) and media content sources. Data collection for this study commenced at a unique moment in time—just as the mobile advertising trend began to emerge and Internet advertising escalated.

As context, the share of ad spending going to online advertising hit a landmark in 2013, surpassing broadcast TV advertising in the U.S. alone by about \$2.7 billion US [IAB.Net 2014]. In 2016, digital advertising received 72 cents on every incremental dollar of ad spending, projected to rise to 77 cents in 2017 [Stein 2016]. As of 2017, over 50% of Internet advertising revenues came from mobile [IAB.Net 2017].

Given the desire to capitalize on changing behaviors, industry experiments with new advertising formats, collects data on users, and so on [Flosi et al. 2013]. Notwithstanding such efforts and advertisers' interest in digital engagement [Brown et al. 2013], measurement problems are proving to be quite a challenge. Advertisers are not certain how well they are connecting with the market segment of interest—the much-coveted demographic known as millennials. Now the largest generation in the U.S. [Fry 2016], millennials recently surpassed the Baby Boomers in sheer numbers. Given their media habits and preferences, millennials have driven a large proportion of this revenue shift which is likely to be accelerated by the Centennial generation coming up behind them.

Although there are several variations found in the literature, the definition of millennials used by Yu Research [Anderson 2010] that includes individuals born between 1980 and 2000 is the one the researchers will refer to throughout this paper. Pew has conducted extensive research on millennials' demographics,

attitudes, behaviors, and use of the Internet, ergo the choice.

## BACKGROUND

Media content providers, historically, did not focus on why audiences behave as they do, including how they choose which major media (i.e., print, broadcast, digital, social), media classes (e.g., newspapers, magazines, television shows, etc.) and vehicles (specific media such as *The New York Times* or the “CBS Evening News”) they use. In the past, when media choices were limited, providers did not have to concern themselves with cross-platform migration, equipment compatibility, and the like. Consumers had few options. However, with the Internet’s varied platforms, the cost of switching from one platform to another can be substantial, both for industry and consumers. Moreover, the choices are numerous, both in terms of devices available to access the Internet (e.g., smartphones, tablets, laptops, etc.) and platforms (i.e., the underlying hardware or software) through which to access it. Furthermore, as choices have proliferated, the competition has intensified, particularly vis-à-vis the high usage and demand for such technology...not to mention many consumers’ willingness to chase the latest “hot” gadget—although this trend, more apparent as these data were being collected, has cooled somewhat with 54% of smartphone users waiting until their phone completely stops working to replace it [Meola 2016]. However, more Americans than ever have become smartphone-dependent, relying on these devices to navigate through a host of life activities such as searching for a job, checking health information, and completing college courses [Smith 2015]. In fact, 10% of Internet users in the U.S. depend on their smartphones as their sole Internet connection [Smith 2015].

This study explores some of the root causes affecting millennials’ migration to Internet connected devices. In fact, the generation, as seen through the lens of this sample, seems to have a “love affair” with the technology. Millennials are enamored with Internet access, applications (or “apps”), and devices—particularly as compared to broadcast and print alternatives. For the sake of time, which, as described in the Research Methodology section, was very limited, most of the emphasis in the focus group chats was directed around three primary media classes: Internet (digital), television or “TV” (broadcast), and newspapers (print), all of which have been experiencing dynamic evolutions. Consumers may migrate from one media class to another, sometimes for the sake of content, sometimes as a permanent change.

However, recently they have spent more of their time coalescing around smartphone usage [Perez 2017].

Millennials and Gen X'ers (born 1965-1979) “live, eat and breathe” the Internet. A 2013 study by the University of Southern California's Center for the Digital Future reveals that these cohorts keep their smartphones handy 22 hours a day—essentially during virtually all activities, including sleeping. In fact, the first thing 80% of Americans do upon waking is check their smartphones [Oswalt, 2014]. Sixty-six percent of millennials check their smartphones upon waking when they're still in bed! [Guettou 2017]. Eighty-three percent of millennials reported keeping their smartphones active day and night [Guettou 2017]. In 2014, 46% of smartphone owners reported that they “couldn't live without” these devices, although 54% described their smartphones as “not always needed” [Pew]. As of 2012, smartphones were the fastest diffusing innovation in history with tablets on their heels [DeGusta 2012].

It is not that uncommon for millennials to send dozens, if not hundreds, of text messages each day [Palmer et al. 2014]. A study conducted by Flurry Analytics in 2016 noted that U.S. daily time spent on mobile devices nearly doubled from the fourth quarter of 2013 to the fourth quarter of 2016 to five hours a day, with a slight majority of time (51%) spent in social media, messaging and media entertainment applications [Perez 2017].

In a quote from Sheryl Connelly, Ford's head of Global Consumer Trends, a good smartphone and data plan appears to substitute for goods previous generations aspired—namely a car and a house. “You no longer need to feel connected to your friends with a car when you have this technology that's so ubiquitous, it transcends time and space” [Thompson and Weissman 2012, 50].

Pursuing a new generation inherently requires responding to their changing media habits, developing strategies that will attract them, etc. To not do so puts opportunity at peril [e.g., Sydell 2013]. Williams et al. [2011] describe several generation-based segmentation strategies. Although there may be observable differences within cohorts (e.g., for Baby Boomers, the gap between the oldest and youngest is 18 years), those differences frequently get overlooked in the interest of pursuing a cost-effective segmentation approach. In order to develop an operational/initial segmentation approach that effectively reaches millennials, knowing *why*, *how* and *when* the cohort uses digital tools and technologies is critical.

Millennials are the target audience for anything digital [e.g., Whitney, 2013]; the cohort's experience as a basis for segmentation is undoubtedly appropriate [e.g., Pew Research Center 2013]. Millennials watch more videos, play video games, multi-task, and often use multiple devices simultaneously [Whitney 2013].

The cohort has been indulged by parents with the latest electronic games, digital devices and other techno-gadgets. They possess a strong affinity toward technologies that link to the Internet. For the first time in recorded human history, their generation makes up a global force [Cohen 2009]. According to a recent survey by commissioned by Telefonica in partnership with *Financial Times* [Telefonica 2013], covering six regions, 27 countries and 12,171 individuals between the ages of 18 and 30, regardless of where they are from, millennials across the globe share much in common with regard to media habits and technology use.

Millennials are the most digitally-connected demographic group in history [Baar 2013; Horovitz 2002]. They have complicated and layered relationships with media devices and platforms. Despite all these facts and figures, reaching them effectively still presents a challenge [Rosales 2012; Young 2012; Baar 2013]. The current segmentation-targeting-positioning strategies companies use to reach millennials do not appear to be effective for connecting with the cohort [Welch 2007; Sullivan 2012; Poggi 2013].

As far as marketers are concerned, the pursuit of reaching millennials effectively makes sense on at least three levels. First, the generation has and will continue to have a sizeable economic impact—currently and going forward; secondly, they are influential socially and culturally; finally, they make a huge ripple effect regarding the adoption of Internet-based technologies [YuMe and IPG Media Lab 2011].

### **Behavioral Tendencies Unique to Millennials**

In congruence with the theory of cognitive fit and/or the search for it [Vessey 1991; Vessey and Galletta 1991], the researchers propose that identifying the preferred media class is important in reaching different niches within the cohort. Cognitive fit characterizes the most “effective and efficient” approach to problem solving [Vessey and Galletta 1991]. Understanding the concerns and expectations of the participants will provide a better understanding of millennials' media class preferences. . Looking at this issue in the context of new media, the major problems and possible solutions [e.g., Vessey 1991] include: (1) the unprecedented popularity of social media among members of the cohort, (2) the convenience of *on-demand* availability



of video and other content, and (3) the consequential effect on *time shift* (consuming content on one's preferred schedule) in their media exposure habits.

With an increased diffusion of Internet connected devices, millennials have embraced these technologies enthusiastically. A survey conducted by Ipsos for Microsoft in 2014, revealed that millennials own an average of 3.9 Internet connectable devices (as compared to 2.4 for Baby Boomers). Ninety percent of millennials carry a smartphone, the most popular electronic device among the cohort's members; 73% use it to connect to the Internet. Comparatively, 54% of Baby Boomers use a smartphone; 41% of them employ it to log onto the Internet [Microsoft 2014]. While a laptop is the device millennials use most to connect to the Internet, 19% use their smartphones as their primary device to surf the Internet—six times the rate at which Boomers rely as heavily on their smartphones for Internet connectivity [Microsoft 2014]. Anderson [2015] notes that ownership of digital devices other than smartphones and tablets has flattened out in recent years. of video and other content, and (3) the consequential effect on *time shift* (consuming content on one's preferred schedule) in their media exposure habits.

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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective was to explore how millennials used ICDs and preferred media classes to receive and transmit news. First, by asking the participants open-ended questions, the researchers attempted to understand what motivated them to make the choices they did and form the opinions they had. Secondly, the

methodology was chosen because it allows researchers to return to the group to ask follow-up questions on issues that are not well explored, thus allowing them to make continuous comparisons and zero in on interpretations of the data. Unlike typical focus groups where interactions end at a predetermined time, or surveys with a limited focus, this arrangement enables the researchers to continue exploring the issues in-depth within the same group or in other groups sharing the demographic markers.

With the focus of learning the rationale behind device and media choices, a series of seven FCGs were conducted among 41 participants. One of the authors of this paper [Hutto] coined the term “focus group chat” in February 2012 to reflect the simulation of synchronous online focus groups using the chat function in a learning management system (LMS) such as Blackboard. The basic steps include:

1. Develop a guide for a topic of broad interest.
2. Lay out some basic ground rules
3. Assemble the students in synchronous groups
4. Managing the discussion(s)
5. Assess contributions (optional, but done here).

**The Sample:** Ninety-five percent of the participants were between 21 and 32 years old at the time of this study, classifying them as millennials; only two were older than 32. As to gender, 61% (25) were men and 39% (16) were women. All were undergraduate students in an online Marketing Research course at a large southwestern university in an urban setting. They participated in this study early in the spring, summer and fall terms of 2012. The seven focus group chats were run by the same moderator between February 8, 2012 and September 24, 2012. Therefore, the sessions were conducted in a rather short time frame, yet enough time passed between each of the three series of sessions that the researchers had an opportunity to review the outcomes and decide on the next related line of questioning for upcoming groups.

**Table 1: Sample Prompts Used by the Moderator**

We'd like to get your thoughts and opinions about the impact and influence of the Internet regarding your media usage. Please contribute any top-of-mind thoughts you may have on this topic.

Be more specific now by sharing which go-to sites you typically visit for news and information.

Describe how you found your go-to sites.

What influences you to stick with them?

**Length of Sessions:** The focus group chat sessions were limited to one hour each. While there was a focus group guide for the sessions, there were variations in the line of inquiry due to the responses given (this methodology allows for exploration of fruitful paths and abandonment of less productive ones) and the natural progression of the research. Therefore, when the researchers found concurrence in one line of questioning, they allowed themselves to drop that line of questioning and add a new one. The process was iterative.

While each session was rather brief, especially when considering the time it took to assemble the group, introduce the topic and review the ground rules, it was also intense and action-packed. The researchers harvested rich data from the sessions. A major factor contributing to the productivity per session was that participants answered questions simultaneously before responding to another participant's comments.

One of the major reasons, the researchers believe, that this methodology proved productive lies in the fact that the focus group chat took advantage of the participants' proclivity toward chatting and texting online. Although participants and the moderator alike typed at a fast pace, the responses were coherent; however, more typographical errors than usual may be found in the transcripts. The quotations extracted and presented were left in the form in which they were written.

The participants quickly revealed candid insights rarely enjoyed in a typical focus group setting or classroom. The topic captured the participants' interest, leading to a high level of engagement.

### **External Validation of the Research Approach**

To seek external validity of the instrument and research approach, the researchers asked three Marketing professors representing three major universities to evaluate whether or not the participants' responses allowed the researchers to formulate hypotheses about the changing media habits, and/or make additional

interpretations along such lines. Once they expressed their willingness to review the documents and evaluate the study and its approach, complete online chat transcripts were sent to them. All three professors wrote evaluations in support of using this research for its intended purpose, the exploration of millennials' device and media-class preferences.

After reviewing the transcripts, the interview protocol and the researchers' approach to the topic(s), all three expressed their confidence in the protocol followed, the appropriateness of the in-depth questions asked and their relevance in understanding millennials' evolving media habits. Here are some excerpts from their evaluations:

- “The procedure meets the purpose of the research. The types of questions asked were appropriate for the task.” --Expert #1.
- “The questions used during the chat session and the responses provided by participants provide adequate coverage of media exposure habits of millennials.” --Expert#3.
- “This approach enabled researchers to gain insight into the participant's current media use habits, consequently the study absolutely measured what the researchers intended to determine.” --Expert #2.
- “Based upon the detail of the responses, the online chat group provides sufficient information concerning media habits to formulate hypotheses for further study on the topic.” --Expert #1.

### **Research Approach and Rationale for the Study**

With a moderator leading each of the seven focus group chats, several Internet use and media-class preference related questions were asked of the participants. The responses that they typed into the chat function in the Blackboard LMS were captured through the software, making them available to the researchers for further analysis and follow-up inquiries. This process was followed by (1) initial coding (a detailed word-by-word analysis of subjects' written responses and word-for-word responses in an attempt to generate preliminary theoretical categories), and (2) initial categorizing (an examination and analysis of the possible differences, similarities and relationships in the categories initially identified with the intent to determine the relevance of the core categories).

Fundamental in understanding millennials' media class preferences are the functional benefits and primary motives sought by the cohort. To uncover the underlying motives, their preferences were framed and choices organized in terms of "cognitive fit," and "consideration sets" which, in turn, are based in the functionalist theory of psychology [e.g., Rodgers and Thorson 2000]. This approach to the problem is consistent with thinking that the best way to understand consumers' responses is to examine a scenario from their viewpoint [Cross and Smith 1997; Rodgers and Thorson 2000].

## FINDINGS

After categorizing several bits of data, patterns emerged. Millennials display a strong preoccupation with *access, control, and format* of media content, in that order. They want liberal access to a variety of content and on their terms. The rich data in the focus group chat transcripts reveal a desire to get any type of content imaginable, ostensibly on-demand...and at a low cost or free. They are "cutting the cord" to cable, zipping and zapping through commercials with the help of Digital Video Recorders (DVRs) and other recording devices, and relying on the Internet with greater frequency, which they access through a multitude of devices. Print is nearly dead to them; many have never even touched a newspaper.

Millennials are techno-savvy, multi-tasking consumers seeking out devices and content that fit their preferences and lifestyles. They want to be in the driver's seat and control content to the extent possible, including when and where to view ads, the few that they choose not to skip. They seamlessly accumulate credible sources and review content with lightning speed.

**Table 2: Categories and Subcategories of Advantages Millennials Perceive of Major Media Classes**

<b>Medium:</b>	<b>Internet/Mobile</b>	<b>Broadcast/TV</b>	<b>Print/Newspapers</b>
<b>Advantages:</b>			
<b>Access:</b>	Excellent Availability Nearly Instantaneous 24/7/365 User-friendly	Excellent Availability Relatively Speedy 24/7/365	Good Availability
<b>Control:</b>	Highly Flexible Time-shiftable	Flexible Time-shiftable	Somewhat Flexible
<b>Content:</b>	Infinite Variety	Wide Variety	Some Variety
<b>Credibility:</b>	Variable Credibility	Credibility	High Credibility
<b>Format:</b>	High Quality "Snackable" Bits	High Quality	Good Quality

## Advantages Perceived of Major Media Vehicles

**Access:** The most-referenced positive attribute of the three major media vehicles was access. In reference to the Internet, the participants talked about *availability of content, speed, 24/7/365 access and user-friendliness*. Internet content knows few geographic boundaries; it is convenient to retrieve, accessible 24/7/365, available quickly and in a user-friendly fashion. Commenting about the focus group chat format, one of the participants remarked, “i love the internet. Here we are engaging each other from remote places. its amazing” (18). [Note: All seven transcripts were merged into one document. The number after the quote indicates the page on which it can be found. The quotes were left in the state in which they were written—grammatical, spelling and diction errors included.]

Millennials want fingertip access to the entire Internet. The following quote is indicative of the broad spectrum of content sought and the enthusiasm toward the Internet that prevailed in the focus group chats:

“I learn all of my events on the internet, I do all of my research on the internet as well. If I am wondering what a job’s pay is like I can find it on glassdoor, if I want sports I can go to ESPN, if I want to watch videos I can go on Youtube, literally you can use the internet for everything!...Now that we have this technology, I don’t know how I ever lived without it!” (25).

Several participants mentioned their need for instantaneous late-breaking news, not to mention speedy connections. Read a supporting comment from a focus group chat participant: “I love being able to search for news that you hear about from other people on the internet, its fast easy and gets you to the point” (36).

With regard to TV, the participants wanted broad geographic *access to content* (i.e., local, national and international) and access to their preferred shows on-demand. A lot of enthusiasm for watching marathons was evident, as supported by this representative quote: “Sometimes, I throw down a marathon—when I get involved. I personally hate those cliff hangers that hold you over for the week. I like to know” (3). They expect to find a wide-range of content and appreciate the relative speed of television. The appeal of newspapers pales in comparison. While they are available for local, regional, national, and international markets, the millennials we spoke to had all but abandoned this medium. This sort of comment prevailed: “I haven’t touched a newspaper in years” (1).

**Control:** The second construct is *control*. In the mindset of millennials, this is more relevant for digital and broadcast media. A modicum of control presides within the print medium, but barely a spec as compared to the other two major media covered here.

Of the three major media considered here, digital exhibits the highest level of control. Not only does it possess more controllable attributes, its characteristics also are imbued with more intensity. The millennials spoke passionately about the Internet—a medium without substitute, the “most superior” among “equals.” A life without the Internet would be unimaginable to them. At the core of this love affair are four attributes: *selectivity*, “*snackable content*,” *choice*, and *time-shiftability*.

One of the Internet’s greatest strengths resides in the fact that one can choose where to explore, what to view, how long to view it, etc. *Selectivity* is at the core of its appeal. Millennials zealously exhibit a desire to control their environment, experiences, and time; selectivity enables them to exert more control. The Internet puts control at their fingertips, literally. Users not only choose the subject matter, but also the format of the content. Some exemplary quotes from the focus group chats include:

“I think the Internet has achieved something amazing with media usage. It has enabled us to view it freely whenever we want at our own convenience” (7).

“the internet is so user friendly, i can google search nearly anything of value to me. also the information comes in several forms via the internet such as: interviews, images, even video” (17).

What represents control more than being able to select content “on the fly?” “I do it [skip commercials] often. Although if a commercial looks interesting I stop to watch” (10).

*Choice* of content can range from informative to entertaining and everything in between. Millennials have eclectic tastes—the Internet caters to their varied interests. Participants mentioned a wide-range of websites they visit regularly that speak to their preferences. Furthermore, this attribute is about zeroing in on content that suits their needs of the moment, as illustrated by this comment: “If I go to a news website I can look at what I want to learn about.... instead of having to hear about the polar bear at the [City] Zoo that is sick, sometimes I feel that the news on TV focuses on the wrong things!” (25).

With respect to TV, the diffusion of DVRs, on-demand television and similar innovations have been a boon to control, in many instances, to the chagrin of advertisers. In answer to a question about the trade-offs of watching TV live vs. through a DVR: "...you do not have to deal with as much commercials...plus it is more of a convenience..." (2<sup>nd</sup> Participant) "...it frees you up to do things you want..." (3<sup>rd</sup> Participant) "I actually just prefer recording it and watching it after it is live so that I can forward past all the commercials." (3) Another participant mentioned the ability to choose which commercials to watch on TV: "I do it [skip commercials] often. Although if a commercial looks interesting I stop to watch" (10).

*Time-shiftability* represents the third control attribute of which these millennials spoke. They love consuming content on their schedule. Both the Internet and television, when watched on-demand or via a pre-recorded method, enjoy this benefit. One participant noted, "I record some shows. I will just program my TV to record a whole series and I will go back and watch them when I have time" (3).

**Credibility:** Content on the Internet proliferates at an amazingly high rate of expansion; however, TV and, especially newspapers, enjoy higher credibility. Nonetheless, millennials defer to the Internet thanks to ease of use. Additionally, over time they learn which websites possess trustworthiness and which ones trade in suspect content. This comment illustrates the lower credibility of a lot of Internet content: "the internet is a dangerous place so checking the credibility of a source is crucial...there is a lot of bad information out there" (19).

While newspapers and other forms of print are not viewed by these millennials as having nearly the access of the Internet, the print medium still retains some advantages. They respect the greater credibility of newspapers. Newspapers employ professional journalists who check sources and facts. This trait is shared to some extent by TV; however, TV combines entertainment with information to a greater degree than newspapers, thereby diminishing its credibility a notch.

As far as their own consumption of newspaper content, a few participants mentioned reading the sports and/or comics sections; they shared a distinct bent toward culling entertaining content from the paper, namely sports and comics. However, here is one perception shared on the *credibility* of a reputable newspaper indicative of the participant's reality: "I honestly feel like the New York Times would have more



more accurate information, just because they have a broader customer base and so probably have a much greater need for accuracy” (20). Despite the high credibility of newspapers, the participants showed an anemic interest in the format.

## **Format**

**Quality:** Quality comes in many forms with respect to these three media vehicles. For the Internet, valued characteristics include attributes such as, “beautiful design, user-friendliness, and an intuitive interface” (10-11). With TV, the quality factors are a combination of the device and the medium. TV shows tend to be shot in high resolution, much of the content is of good quality, and it can be viewed on a large screen.

With respect to newspapers, most of the complimentary comments came in the form of praising the look and feel of newspapers. The format is preferred by many for causing less eye strain and making long-format copy easier to read. Some mentioned that paper versions enable them to keep track of their progress and learn better. “...I learn better by having a physical book in my hand than reading information online. But maybe someone that was a strong, visual learner would have a more enjoyable time reading from a Kindle or Ipad” (22). Newsprint offers a tactile experience not afforded by computer screens. “I love the smell of newspapers and turning the pages, you just cant do that on a nook, or tablet” (37).

**“Snackable” Content:** The second format attribute is “snackable content; this characteristic only relates to the Internet among the three media studied here. One of the great strengths of the medium lies in one’s ability, thanks to current devices and platforms, to consume Internet content in bite-sized bits. Waiting for a bus, taking a break, or passing time before a professor starts a class can be enough time for a tech-savvy user to squeeze in a bit of content. “Everyday about 2 times a day I check my huffingtonpost app. I spend about 10 minutes or less reading a couple of the news articles. Business, Technology, and a little bit of politics...and some interesting or bizarre news every now and then” (40).

**Table 3: Categories and Subcategories of Disadvantages Millennials Perceive of Major Media Classes**

<b>Medium:</b>	<b>Internet/Mobile</b>	<b>Broadcast/TV</b>	<b>Print/Newspapers</b>
<b>Disadvantages:</b>			
<i>Inadequate Access:</i>	Inadequate Access*	Spotty Access*	Declining Access
<i>Lack of Control:</i>	Advertising Intensive Full of Distractions	Advertising Intensive	Random Content
<i>Untrustworthy Content:</i>	Biased Lack of Validation	Biased	Somewhat Biased
<i>Unappealing Format:</i>	Uncomfortable	Expensive	Inconvenient Wasteful

\*Inadequate or spotty access depends on budget, infrastructure, etc.

### Disadvantages Perceived of Major Media Vehicles

#### *Lack of Control:*

**Advertising Exposure:** Too many ads, unavoidable ads, etc. make up complaints voiced about too much ad exposure on the Internet. The following comment is indicative of the sentiment conveyed by several participants: “I’m paying to have a smartphone and the service to it; I don’t want to have ads on it” (5).

In the *Control* section of this paper, participants describe how they like to fast-forward through commercials. Obviously, a lot of participants think there are too many ads on TV...and too many not of interest to them. “When I do watch [TV] I do a lot of channel surfing to avoid commercials” (27).

**Random Content:** This attribute pertains to newspapers. Participants talked about the unpredictability of newspaper content and it not being as well organized as Internet content. They don’t want to sift through several newspaper pages in the hope of finding content that interests them. “I think print media is slowly dying off. It is way easier to click a button and find exactly what interests you rather than have a whole newspaper or magazine with one or two stories you actually care about” (8).

**Distraction:** Quite a few participants chatted about the distracting nature of the Internet. The Internet “can be a distraction because I am constantly reading the news on my phone during work time” (17). The Internet, “makes everything so accessible and convenient that once you begin to distract yourself with Youtube, etc it’s hard to stop” (18). Following is another quote supporting the distraction theme: “...I do sometimes catch myself ‘wasting’ time with searching for the answers via Internet on my smartphone when I could

sometimes solve the problem and/or find the answer in real time by simply asking a human being” (29).

### **Untrustworthy Content**

**Lack of Validation:** One attribute newspapers do have in their favor, according to these millennials, is trustworthy content. Some of them expressed their faith in the integrity of newspaper content. The Internet, on the other hand, was viewed as the most suspect source (although it is the source the millennials depend on the most). The authors struck a rich vein of opinions in a lively discussion from June 19, 2012: “Facts can be easily accessed but also provide false information” (19). “The Internet has allowed anyone to be a journalist, They can write whatever they want” (19). “the internet is a dangerous place so checking the credibility of a source is crucial...there is a lot of bad information out there” (19). These insightful comments demonstrate that these young people are not naïve—they are aware of the lack of fact-checking and the inherent shortfalls that produces.

**Biases:** As they are aware that too little fact-checking go on with Internet content, these participants are also cognizant of biases present in some of the content: “...I find that the longer the internet is in existence, the more facts get muddled. Multiple sources have multiple answers; people are now able to create websites and write anything, regardless of the truth behind it” (19).

The biases some of these participants remarked on with regard to TV mentioned content choice decisions on the part of editors, especially at the local level, more so than an out-and-out slanting of the news. “my perception is that sometimes (in times of slow news) they choose to cover silly things instead of whats happening in the world” (39). Local TV news is “less informative, sometimes scares your local community” (39).

Although the prevailing sentiment gave newspapers a pass on bias, that view was not uniformly shared across the participants, as evidenced by this comment:

“...[at] the risk of sounding paranoid, I feel like news publishers have a goal in mind of how they want the world to respond; what if they purposely published false information in order to get a specific reaction from the public? It would be so easy and the public, as a whole, would probably not double check the sources” (19).

## Unappealing Format

The lack of appeal of the format is medium-specific. Participants commented on attributes they did not like about each of the three media in question. Naturally, some of their comments are device- or media-class-specific.

***Discomfort:*** As to the Internet, there were comments regarding the discomfort of trying to digest too much content on a small smartphone screen. Some mentioned switching over to another device or medium when that issue became too intense. There were also remarks like this one: “Too much screen time is bad for you, I think. The brightness, the electricity...it makes me feel icky if I look at it too long” (37).

***Inadequate Infrastructure:*** An awareness of the hassles of poor Internet connections existed; however, most of the participants either did not mention them or accepted them as an unavoidable drawback.

***Expense:*** Many participants expressed, either directly or indirectly, the price of cable being too expensive for them, especially now that other options abound. Quite a few of the participants mentioned that they no longer own a TV and/or watch television shows from the Internet which they access through websites such as Netflix, Youtube and Hulu. This comment may be indicative of the direction in which millennials are going with respect to TV/video content—they want it cheap or free...and they want to multi-task while watching it: “We no longer do TV...Hulu and Netflix for us. And sometimes we are online and watching TV at the same time!” (35) The television screen appears to be morphing into a conduit for Internet content, often accessible through gaming consoles. “I haven’t watched typical TV programming in years” (7).

***Inconvenience:*** This attribute applies mainly to newspapers. Their perception is that the newspaper format is cumbersome and inconvenient. “I do not read the newspaper because it is faster, more convenient to watch news online....” (36) “I cant really think of anyway to convince the younger generations that a paper is superior to a tablet” (32).

***Waste:*** There were a multitude of comments on the wastefulness of printing on paper—especially with regard to newspapers. Some of the more colorful ones include: “I only use newspaper for A:) Wrapping paper, B.) Coupons, and C.) If a prof. required a written source” (31). “I used it during the winter a LOT to start a fire in my fireplace...haha” (32). Cynicism emerges in these comments.

## DISCUSSION

The choices millennials make with regard to what media they access and how they access them are evolving at an ever-increasing rate. While the emphasis in this paper was on three major media—the Internet, TV and newspapers—the authors realize that social media are displacing traditional media rapidly. Major social media stories continue to break frequently. Facebook reported on November 14, 2014 that it designed new filters to reduce overly promotional posts and give users greater control over the advertising content they see [Facebook Newsroom, 2014]. Twitter announced in November 2014 that it would track users' apps in the name of better customizing content [Lopez and Zieminski 2014]. Social sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram added “Buy Now” buttons to ease commerce. In 2015, wearable tech increased, vlogs (video blogs) surged and users sought more privacy and anonymity via apps like Snapchat.

These recent developments dovetail with what we observed in our focus group chats. Millennials are obsessed with *control*. They value their time and energy and, to the extent possible, want to choose how they spend these precious resources.

In addition to wanting to exert control, millennials desire free (or at least low cost) and easy *access* to speedy Internet connections and a lot of content that captures their interest. In short, they want it all!

They dislike uncontrolled advertising exposure, untrustworthy content and formats that do not conform to their preferences. Content and devices to access it should tread lightly on the environment as well as take budgets and ergonomic factors into consideration.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The perception of millennials is that the world is their oyster. They enthusiastically take advantage of technology for their own benefit, regardless of the cost to the content owner. “Seller beware” encapsulates the sentiment. If content providers are “dumb enough” to post free content on the Internet, someone will access it—given that it is deemed worthwhile by an audience, however large or small.

It should come as no surprise that advertisers are migrating away from traditional media such as TV and newspapers. Advertisers actively pursue 18-49 year-olds, sometimes with an even greater emphasis on the 18-34 year-old population, precisely the demographic occupied by the millennials.

Speaking of precision, millennials show little tolerance for mass media. They appreciate seeing a message they want to view when they are ready to see it—neither earlier nor later. They do not have the time or the patience to wade through clutter to get to what they want. They will quickly search for other channels with all the resources at their disposal...and they will do this speedily. Advertisers need to be increasingly creative and nimble to keep up, let alone stay ahead of, this demographic. Expect to find it increasingly difficult to reach this cohort.

“The Internet, social networking, and inter-active technologies are empowering millennials to be more active in the creation and advancement of products and brands” [Smith 2011, 490]. These vocal, connected consumers have little tolerance for brands that interrupt their activities; brand stewards need to be cognizant of this so they can work to develop strategies that are less intrusive.

The exuberance millennials have for the Internet cannot be overstated. They find it engaging and empowering and they have become inextricably dependent upon it...at least until a superior technology displaces it.

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