

Chapter 3

Millennial Culture and Its Reluctant Acceptance of Modern News Media: Examining Millennial Media Habits and Media Credibility in the Age of Listicles

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ABSTRACT

The growth of new media has caused dramatic changes in the types of news stories millennials are consuming. A new media phenomenon that has become ubiquitous throughout the media landscape are listicles (or articles that are simply lists and offer arguably less journalistic value than traditional articles). Millennial culture has embraced listicles and made BuzzFeed one of the most popular websites on the internet. This chapter examines millennial media habits and ways news credibility is evolving with the preferences of this digital native generation. Using a sample population of millennials, the author's own study sought to better understand their information-seeking behavior and the online and offline media sources millennials use regularly. Additionally, an experiment was conducted to determine which online article format is considered more credible to millennials: traditional articles or listicles. Analysis revealed that article format was an important factor in credibility ratings as participants found the listicle to be significantly more credible than the traditional article.

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INTRODUCTION

New media and the online environment are vital aspects of daily life for individuals in the digital age. The limits of the Internet are seemingly boundless, and people use it every day to communicate with others, purchase goods and services, find their way around town, and even decide where to eat. People of all ages are reliant on new media in some way, and as technology advances, this reliance on smartphones, computers, and the Internet will only continue to grow. While most individuals see new media as essential, millennials have an even deeper, more profound connection to all aspects of media. Millennials are digital natives who were raised with computers and understand the complexities of mediated communication (Gottfried & Shearer, 2016; Serazio, 2015). They also exhibit a “networked hypersociality” where advanced online networks are paramount to their social media-based culture (Serazio, 2015, p. 599). Millennials also engage in “participatory exhibitionism” in which every aspect of their daily life is broadcast to followers online, which range from close friends and family to complete strangers (Serazio, 2015, p. 599).

Millennials are characterized as a generation of young adults born between the early 1980s and the late 1990s, and have a connection to media that is so ingrained in their daily lives that it can be characterized as a “perceived technological intimacy” (Serazio, 2015, pg. 600). Generations that immediately preceded millennials were reliant on a more constrained media environment of mass broadcasting in which news and information were delivered via traditional channels (Serazio, 2013). Conversely, the media ecosystem has since evolved to be more inclusive with user-generated content, social networking, and a collaborative culture built around community. Gumpert and Cathcart (1985) suggest that the value system, and even the way each generation comprehends information, is determined by that era’s established media ecosystem. For example, the newspaper and print media ecosystem made people process reality in a way that was logically ordered, linear, and continuous. Heavily influenced by radio and television, the subsequent generation established an electronic reality in which logic was visual and auditory. The authors conclude that “different world perspectives and human relationships are as much a matter of media gaps as they are generation gaps” (Gumpert & Cathcart, 1985, p. 23). Thus, the digital age has brought forth a new age of media that has profoundly changed the way millennials think, behave, and process information.

Modern media organizations have had to progress to stay in line with advancements in technology as well as changes in audience preference (Kasiazek, Malthouse, & Webster, 2010). A new wave of media storytelling has formed from a hybrid media system in which traditional media and new media coexist (Chadwick, 2013). Unlike previous generations which dedicated large blocks of their day to consuming news (such as watching an evening broadcast or reading the morning paper), millennials

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