

The Scrolling Mind



*How Social Media and AI Are Reshaping Information Consumption
for a New Generation of Professionals*

Doorway

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Summary

The convergence of social media and artificial intelligence is fundamentally altering how young professionals engage with information. This white paper investigates cognitive, behavioral, and technological changes, focusing on how Millennials and Gen Z within financial services consume business and financial content. We examine the decline of traditional formats like PDFs, the popularity of short-form content, and the rise of algorithmically-optimized, hyper-personalized communication. Our findings offer strategic guidance for firms aiming to engage effectively in today's attention economy.

Introduction: A Paradigm Shift in Information Consumption

Information consumption has entered a fundamentally different era. Historically, professionals depended on print reports and static digital documents to process business insights. Recent studies, however, show that average screen attention span has dropped from approximately 150 seconds in 2004 to just 47 seconds by 2024¹. Fueled by smartphones and social platforms, this transformation demands content that is not only high-quality, but also mobile-optimized, algorithmically structured, and visually compelling. In such an environment, format is as crucial to content efficacy as the information itself.

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The Rise of the Social Media Native

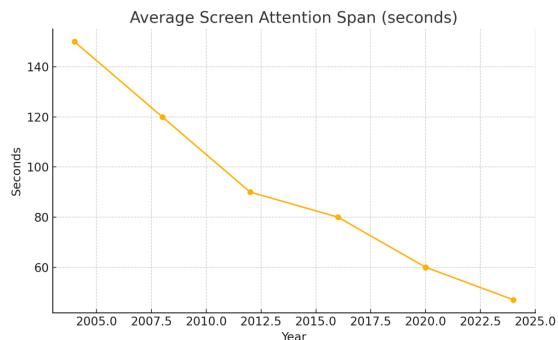
Gen Z and younger Millennials were born into a digital world. They expect professional content to exhibit the immediacy, shareability, and visual polish of social media. A survey by Deloitte Digital found that consumers follow nearly twice as many content

creators as brands². In financial services, this translates into professionals favoring dynamic formats—like videos or infographics—instead of traditional memos. This marks a cultural shift: social-visual context now factors into perceived workplace credibility.

Attention as a Finite Resource

In a world saturated with digital content, attention has become the scarcest and most valuable commodity. The average attention span is shrinking, not due to any deficiency, but because of an environment that demands constant context switching and multitasking. Platforms like Instagram and LinkedIn, powered by AI recommendation engines, have trained users to expect a steady stream of bite-sized, visually stimulating, and emotionally resonant content. Professional communications are now forced to compete with these highly optimized systems of engagement. A 30-slide pitch deck or a 20-page investment memo isn't just long—it's inaccessible unless carefully adapted to the consumption habits of its intended audience. As firms flood inboxes with more information, they paradoxically make it harder to capture and retain real engagement. Winning attention now requires a shift in design, tone, and delivery.

Attention is no longer assumed—it must be earned in under 50 seconds.



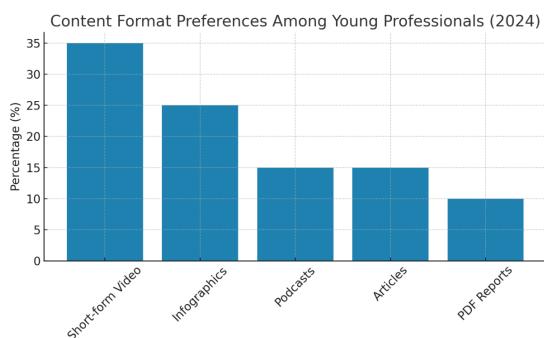
Source: Dr. Gloria Mark, UC Irvine, 2024

AI and the New Information Layer

Artificial intelligence is not just a tool—it's becoming the gatekeeper of knowledge. A 2023 study found that algorithmically curated short-form video feeds can significantly reduce users' ability to recall information later³. In finance, AI assistants like Goldman's GS AI Assistant and JPMorgan's LLM suite are reshaping workflows, summarising documents, and surfacing key information^{5,6}. As a result, the snappy AI-highlighted snippet often becomes the primary touchpoint for insights. Firms must now ensure their content is designed to be both machine-readable and algorithm-approved.

Implications for Financial Firms: Moving Beyond Static PDFs

The humble PDF, once the backbone of business communication, is rapidly losing its utility in this evolving landscape. Static documents, while still widely used, offer little in the way of real-time engagement, feedback, or insight into readership behavior. In an environment where data-driven optimization rules, the inability to track how content is consumed represents a major blind spot. Moreover, the lack of interactivity in PDFs makes them feel antiquated to digital natives accustomed to touch-responsive, scrollable, and multimedia-rich environments. Firms that continue to rely on traditional document formats risk having their most valuable content go unnoticed. To maintain relevance and effectiveness, communication must evolve toward formats that prioritize user engagement, interactivity, and analytics.



Source: HubSpot, Munch, Yaguara Reports, 2024

The PDF is the fax machine of this generation: tolerated, not trusted.

Engagement Redefined: What Young Professionals Want

Engagement, once measured by email opens or clicks, is now a more nuanced and multidimensional concept. Young professionals seek content experiences that reflect the personalization and intuitiveness of their consumer apps. This includes mobile-optimized design, content modularity, contextual recommendations, and responsiveness to individual behavior. Relevance is no longer a nice-to-have—it is a baseline expectation. A research report that adjusts its emphasis based on the recipient's past interactions or role within a firm will always outperform a one-size-fits-all attachment. Firms that rethink engagement not as a metric but as an experience will find themselves better equipped to build relationships, convey authority, and drive action in an increasingly distracted digital world.

How Leading Financial Firms Are Adapting

Financial institutions are embracing new content formats. Goldman's short-form video summaries complement interactive portals, while Blackstone and other firms publish LinkedIn posts that condense key takeaways for wider audiences^{8,9}. Meanwhile, JPMorgan is implementing over 100 AI tools under a \$18bn tech budget to streamline client communication, fraud detection, and advisory services⁶. Stripe, known for its developer-first orientation, offers content in linkable modules, allowing users to jump directly to the most relevant insights. Even traditionally conservative firms like McKinsey have introduced "5-minute reads" and podcast briefings to offer multiple entry points into complex ideas. These adaptations signal a broader recognition that format is no longer neutral—it is strategic.

The Role of AI in the Evolving Financial Workplace

AI systems like Goldman's GS AI Assistant and JPMorgan's in-house LLM suite enhance employee productivity by automating mundane tasks and providing on-demand summarizations^{5,6}. In investment banking, firms target junior-level automation to reduce repetitive 'drudge work,' freeing talent for higher-impact tasks⁷. These tools extend beyond internal efficiency—they inform external content norms by making machine-optimized delivery formats a de facto standard.

AI is not replacing analysts—it's amplifying their reach.

Risks and Considerations

Despite its potential, this rapid evolution presents risks. Social media and algorithm-driven consumption can foster echo chambers within financial decision-makers. Regulatory concerns are paramount, as short-form communication may inadvertently oversimplify complex financial instruments. Transparency in behavioral data usage is essential. At the same time, firms must safeguard their talent's capacity for deep analysis amid increasing digital distractions.

Conclusion: Designing for the Scrolling Mind

The professional information environment is no longer immune to the cultural and technological dynamics shaping the consumer internet. In this new landscape, attention must be earned, relevance must be proven, and design must support the way people actually consume information. Firms that evolve beyond static documents and generic messaging—those that embrace dynamic formats, AI-augmented workflows, and personalized experiences—will stand out in a crowded market. As we look to the future, the key to effective communication will lie not just in what we say, but in how well we understand the scrolling mind.

Sources & Footnotes

1. Gloria Mark, UC Irvine – Screen attention decline, 2004–2024.
2. Deloitte Digital – Consumers follow twice as many creators as brands.
3. Study on short-form video and information recall (2023).
4. Engagement impact of concise messaging (2019).
5. Goldman Sachs – GS AI Assistant across 46,500 staff (WSJ, 2024).
6. JPMorgan – \$18B tech investment and 200K AI integration (FT, 2024).
7. FT – Investment banks use AI to reduce junior-level drudge work.
8. London Stock Exchange – 66% of firms use social media to engage investors.
9. Financial Times – 52% increase in LinkedIn CEO posts; Blackstone example.