

Connecting with the Digital Native

Knowing the Self Interests of Millennials

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First in 2008 and again in 2020, recessions banged on the doors of Americans. For some, these knocks just made some dust fall; for the less fortunate, the recessions cracked the very foundation of their metaphorical home. This latter group now questions all sense of financial security, if they even have a sense of security anymore.

Many millennials fall into this category of the less fortunate. The Great Recession put financial strain on the older millennials freshly entering the workforce; the COVID-19 pandemic similarly threatened the younger millennials, while further pressuring the older millennials.

Companies now have to appeal to this trodden-down generation; else, they will lose an entire generation of consumers to those who do play to millennials' self-interests. Throughout this article, I shall analyze four key aspects of millennials: mental health, social responsibility, fragmented identity, technologically integrated.

Mental Health

The average millennial seeks comfort. We are dealing with an entire generation that is very concerned with mental health and self care. Fifty percent of millennials are stressed all of the time

(Deloitte, 2020). This pandemic has lowered that percentage from 50 to 44 (likely due to more time with family and various free time excursions), but that still means half of millennials are stressed out by various aspects of life.

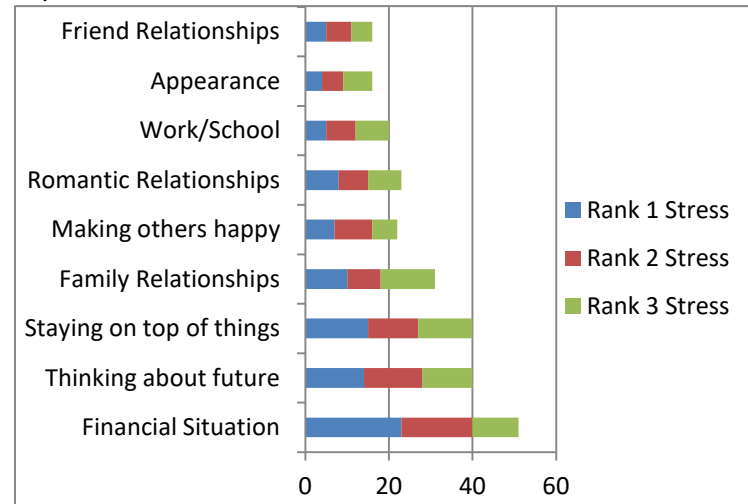


Figure 1: Millennial Stressors by Percentage (Boesel, 2019)

As shown on Figure 1, 51% of millennials are stressed out by their financial situation. Compassion needs to be shown to these struggling consumers if one wants any chance of raising loyalty. Companies would be wise to appeal to the indebted millennial.

I will not exactly suggest how one should achieve such appeal, as the creative team must make an authentic and personalized attempt at such to truly attract millennials. Show that the company cares for them and is not only looking for the sale.

As hinted at, debt is the largest stressor of the average millennial. This generation is 75% more likely to carry student loan debt and 44% more likely to carry debt from a family member (Boesel, 2019). With the combined pressure of debt and two economic recessions, less than 40% of millennials feel stable (Boesel, 2020).

Millennials then fall back on brands they know they can trust to get them through the week. This provides an advantage for the brands who maintain that nostalgia, but a weakness another company may be able to capitalize on. A key element of the nostalgia factor that comforts the average millennial is the guarantee of reliability.

If a company can offer **reliability** and **comfort** to the wary millennial, that is the most important self-interest one can appeal to in these times of trouble. Understand their circumstances, and offer a solution to win the hearts of millennials.

Social Responsibility

Millennials appreciate when responsibility over our environment and categories of need are taken care of. The pandemic itself has brought a new curve of views towards such subjects for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, the pandemic heavily reduced traffic and many omissions. These times of quarantine proved that we (as humans) can make a difference for the better. Majority of millennials take the side of the environment, as a survey found 80% of its respondents believe that government and business need to make greater efforts to protect the environment; however, two-

thirds of those same respondents believe the environment will not be treated as a priority during this pandemic (Deloitte, 2020).

Clearly, millennials are concerned for the environment and will support any business that takes a stand with them. The environment is not the only sense of social responsibility they have though.

When asked the following, about 70% of millennials agreed with these statements (Deloitte, 2020):

- “This pandemic has highlighted new issues for me and made me more sympathetic towards the **needs of different people around the world.**”
- “This pandemic has inspired me to take **positive action to improve my own life.**”
- “This pandemic has highlighted new issues for me and made me more sympathetic towards the **needs of others in my local** community.”
- “In response to the pandemic, once restrictions are lifted, **I will take** actions to have a **positive impact on my community.**”
- “In response to the pandemic, **I have taken immediate actions** to try and have a positive impact on my community.”
- “The pandemic has given me a strong sense that people are trying to **‘do the right thing.’**”
- “The pandemic has given me a strong sense that everyone around the world is **‘in this together.’**”

This pandemic has further inspired millennials to look towards those in need. While they face constant stress in their own financial struggles, they have a strand a

selflessness and caring for those less fortunate than themselves.

This is not the first time this strand has become apparent, as millennials are the face of protests; a shift in their perception seems to be taking effect though.

To appeal through this self interest, [find a cause](#) associated with the company's industry and vision. Toms Shoes is an example here. I would even draw your eye to Wendy's; the Dave Thomas Foundation is something less often talked about, but the cause is a genuine one. Find your belief and be active in current social topics to gain the attention of millennials.

Fragmented Identity

Millennials are more passionate about their identity than any other generation, and each of their identities is pretty unique. Thanks to the internet, most have interests that vary from any norm of their area. With the older generations, there were cultural interests shared amongst many; "but that's becoming less and less true because those industries are so much more fragmented" (Khan and Niedermeier, 2017).

More than just varying in culture, millennials attach themselves to culture that aligns with their values. Most millennials care if "brands represent their own personal values" (Boesel, 2019). The first thing millennials look for (in terms of seeing if a company matches the values of the consumer) is how the company treats its employees. Relating to the self interest of mental health and financial security, millennials respect a company that respects its employees.

A company should not take a controversial stance to appeal to customers though. One might assume this strategy would appeal to consumers on the side the company would be supporting (trying to satisfy the social responsibility self interest), but only 15% of millennials think taking a stance of such a subject appeals to their values (Boesel, 2019).

Nike took a stand with Kaepernick in 2018, and the campaign did experience a positive outcome. However, most attempts to take a stance in a sensitive issue are too risky with minimal potential.

There is a key element about the unique millennial identity that I do not hear of often, but this element is crucial. [Millennials are becoming increasingly diverse in ethnicity.](#)

About 55% of millennials are white, and the Census shows that post-millennial generations will have white as a minority (Frey, 2018). Millennials are being referred to as the "bridge" generation, as the future will only grow in the cultural and ethnic variety.

Currently, research shows that black and Hispanic families "possess fewer resources to lift up their younger generations" (Frey, 2018). Marketers must be aware of this fact. Millennials are educated, but there are many families in the lower end of the market. This group will be a key area to aim for to offer reliability and comfort (as mentioned in the mental health self interest).

Marketers must keep in on this element. The presence of multiple ethnicities will loom over the market. I would suggest gathering ethnographic research and

ensuring varied cultural knowledge. Appealing to all ethnicities will be required to thrive in future years.

Technologically Integrated

The nativity to technology that millennials possess is a trait that previous generations cannot truly understand.

“They grew up swiping and on the internet.”

“We will always be digital immigrants, and they will always be digital natives... I think that’s really changing the way they consume music, the way they consume media, the way they react to marketing” (Khan and Niedermier, 2017).

The entire generation is plugged in to technology and the internet. Their information comes from the internet; they stay connected to the world through their phone. This generation changes the game of marketing.

Information is at their fingertips. That statement is a cliché by this point, but do not underestimate that statement. Millennials find all the answers they seek in moments. As they hear about your brand, you have seconds to give them a positive image of the brand before they find negative reviews on Google.

Millennials are much more likely to do the following tasks online (Boesel, 2019):

- Manage their money.
- Post on social media.
- Buy something online.
- Click on online advertisements.
- Use multiple devices, including a tablet and smart speaker.
- Video chat.

These commonalities should not be overlooked. They present many opportunities! Brands can connect to millennials through social media. Brands can offer ways to connect through media in a personalized way, perhaps having a tool that can connect to a speaker. The possibilities do not end as long as technology can achieve your goal.

Get creative. Connect to these digital natives through their pocket. Their connection to the internet presents every opportunity to generate brand loyalty if they appreciate your services.

Conclusion

These digital natives are full of nothing but opportunities to those who appeal to the four self interests identified: reliability, social responsibility, identity and values, and connecting directly to millennials. Applying these to your future campaigns will ensure success as you will gain a millennial following.

Sources

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