



‘MILLENNIALS & YOUTUBE’

AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE INFLUENCE OF
USER-GENERATED VIDEO CONTENT ON THE
CONSUMER DECISION MAKING PROCESS

MSc. In Marketing

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Abstract

The digital marketing environment has changed the way consumers make their purchasing decisions. Traditional mass marketing techniques no longer have the desired effect. Today's consumers are searching for honest information to help inform to make purchase decisions. Millennials are a generation who spends a lot of time online and prioritize social networks over other media types. Millennials are characterized as a generation who are "natives of technology" and are known to use technology for many decisions that affect them, including purchasing decisions. Millennials are forecasted to have record-breaking purchasing power, and are most influenced by user-generated content (UGC). The purpose of this dissertation was to investigate the influence of user-generated video content (UGC) on the consumer purchase behaviour among millennials living in Ireland. The study was conducted based on YouTube as a social video sharing platform. The key objectives of this research were to establish usage of YouTube among Millennials, determine Millennials attitudes towards advertising on YouTube, compare the roles of peer reviewed content to branded content on Millennials decision making process and determine effect of source credibility on millennials purchase decisions. The study aimed to understand Millennials consumer behaviour, therefore the researcher conducted six interviews with millennials who had different interests and passions but frequently engaged with YouTube. The researcher opted to use qualitative research methods, selecting semi-structured interviews as the data collection tool. This allowed the researcher to use probes in order to garner opinion based responses. Findings from the interviews were coded then presented in form of themes. Major findings from the research were that millennials actively seek out recommendations from their peers by watching a variety of UGC on YouTube. One of the key findings showed that millennials trust people over brands when it comes to making purchase decisions. The study proposes that marketers use these findings to restructure the marketing strategies targeted at millennials or post millennial generations.

Keywords: User Generated content, firm generated content, online video, YouTube, Millennials, Brand image, Source credibility, Advertisements.

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In memory of my father Joseph Patrick O'Connor

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Millennials are both the 20th century's last generation and its first truly digital one. They possess an old century/new technology contrast which is intriguing to marketers attempting to understand and connect with this key demographic. The Millennial generation can be described as a unique breed of plugged-in, connected individuals who rely heavily on technology to assist with everyday tasks.

Having grown up with the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies, Millennials are a generation who are extremely comfortable with technology. They are considered to be "digital natives," having mostly grown up with technology and social media. The Millennials use of technology and the Internet is vastly different from that of previous generations, which makes it a challenging group to target (Lester, Forman, & Lloyd, 2005)

They are a generation averse to traditional mass marketing tactics, therefore, in order to effectively reach this generational cohort, companies need to understand, accept, and embrace the characteristics and values of they hold dear in order to tailor relevant marketing messages which resonate with them.

The Millennial generation is one that has a voice and a camera phone ready to take a picture or record a video at a moment's notice. They are not afraid to speak their minds or share their opinions with the world, effectively using social media platforms to do so. The result has been explosion of content on social sharing platforms including everything from the seemingly mundane to the highly creative.

1.2. Problem Statement

Evidence suggests that User-Generated Content on platforms such as YouTube have an impact on brand perception and purchase behaviour Brand engagement metrics such as how people react to online videos, affect brand objectives like awareness, perception, and interest. (Weiss and Ludes, 2015).

Previously, it was only corporations who had the ability create and broadcast video advertisement. Today, thanks to social media platforms, anybody can formulate opinions on products or services and publish it online.

These reviews from users of the products have an enormous effect on how Millennials make purchase decisions in today's environment, and this study seeks to explore the extent to which consumers trust User-Generated content by examining their relationship with the social video sharing platform YouTube, and the influencers who use it to offer product advice.

YouTube is the largest video sharing platform available with over 300 hours of video uploaded to its servers every minute. YouTube has over a billion users and on mobile alone, reaches more 18-34

year-olds than any cable network in the United States (YouTube, 2016). YouTube's popularity among Millennials made it a prime destination for advertisers who wanted to target this segment.

This study investigates the influence that user-generated content uploaded on YouTube has on Millennials consumers when it comes to making purchase decisions.

1.3. Purpose of study

The major factor that motivated this researcher to want to pursue the connection between user generated videos and purchase behaviour, was that given the reach of online video content in today's marketing environment, there is surprisingly sparse research in the area.

While recent literature about User -Generated Content exists focusing on some interesting elements like the impact of user generated images on online purchasing (Bahtar and Muda, 2016), or managing marketing campaigns based on user generated content. (Svensson and Strandberg, 2014). This researcher was hard pressed to uncover much about the use of online video and User-Generated Content.

The purpose of the study was to establish how millennials interacted with user generated content on Video on Demand services, using YouTube as a reference point. The aim was to help marketers effectively target their marketing messages to Millennials without alienating them.

1.4. Objectives of the Study

There were four main objectives that guided this study;

- 1) To establish usage of the social sharing platform YouTube among Millennials.
- 2) To determine Millennials perception of advertisements on YouTube
- 3) To compare the roles of peer reviewed content to branded content on Millennials decision making process and
- 4) To determine Millennials perception about source credibility video content credibility.

1.5. Significance of Study

The findings from this study will support both producers of content on YouTube and marketers in designing products that reflect the needs of Millennials. The YouTube content producers will benefit from the findings by developing quality content that can be trusted by Millennials as well as engage with their audience in a more meaningful way.

1.6. Organisation of the Study

The thesis is presented in six chapters. The first chapter is an introduction of the study, followed by a review of relevant literature on the second chapter. The third chapter describes the methodology used to obtain primary data with the findings presented in chapter four. Chapter five discusses the findings

in relation to the literature and finally, chapter 6 will form a summary of the study, offering recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

The following section constitutes a review of the research gathered by previous academics on the relevant subject matter. The literature review will begin by providing a detailed description of Millennials as a generational cohort and discussing their importance to marketers. The succeeding chapter will discuss the evolution of User-Generated content (UGC) from its origins as traditional word of mouth advertising (WOM). This chapter will also look at how millennials interact with UGC with an emphasis on UGC in video formats focusing on YouTube as a social video sharing platform. The third chapter of the literature will examine the theory of brand image and the effect that brand trust has on consumer based brand equity.

2.1. Marketing to Millennials

Millennials are a large and lucrative consumer market for companies and marketing professionals are starting to make this generation a priority, working to understand what drives and satisfies this influential group.

To better understand this key demographic, and the differences in consumer behaviour, it is best approached by taking a generational approach.

2.1.1. Generational Theory

Kupperschmidt, (2000) described generations as groups of individuals who shared the same birth years, age locations and significant life events at critical developmental stages. The Generational theory was originated by Karl Mannheim in 1959 who described a generation in relation to the historical and social context around which the individuals were raised. He argued that generational boundaries were formed when significant historical and social events occurred that influenced and changed the life experiences of those born during and after these events differently from those born significantly before the events took place. He further postulated that because of these events, group attitudes and behaviours vary between generations in accordance with the 'times' they grew up (Mannheim, 1959).

Building on these findings, Strauss & Howe (1991) introduced the idea that because generational differences are a result of significant life event experiences, each generation forms shared yet distinct frames of references, values, attitudes and traits making them unique. (Goldman 2006; Strauss & Howe 1991). Essentially, people born in different generations have different values, attitudes, traits and frames of reference. As a result, people who belong to the same generation tend to develop

similar work and life values, which shape their attitudes, behaviours and beliefs that guide their behaviour (Chen and Choi, 2008).

Hume (2010) holds that different generations and demographic consumer groups are exposed to different social and economic opportunities and barriers, different types of technology activities, different social perceptions and community norms, and different life experiences and events.

Therefore, generational determined lifestyles and social values, elicit as much influence on buying and purchasing as more commonly understood demographic factors like income, education and gender.

The dates that define the generations are widely accepted in literature for all except one generation; the Millennials.

Generations have been categorized by their birth dates as follows; The Silent Generation, (born between 1925-1945), Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1960), Generation X (born between 1961-1981) and Generation Y (the exact birth years differ, but the general consensus are those born after 1981).

Generation Y, or Millennials are described by Crampton and Hodge (2011) as being the most educated, well-travelled and technologically sophisticated generation to date. They live in a world of computers, the Internet, DVDs and cell phones and seem to be less process or outcome focused.

2.1.2. Generation Y and Technology

The term Generation Y, referred to in this study as Millennials are a unique and influential consumer group. Millennials are predisposed to the internet and unlike previous cohorts they are highly technology oriented making them a challenging target (Lester, Forman, and Loyd, 2005).

Crampton and Hodge (2011) compared millennials to Generation X by describing both groups as technologically savvy but seem to lack interpersonal skills. They also suggested that both generations were easily bored, tended to lack patience and expect things to happen instantaneously. Hershatter and Epstein (2010) however, postulate that the behaviour of Millennials is definitely distinguishable and unique to the generation.

The difference between Generation Y and previous generations relates to a shift in values on the part of Generation Y (Hyllegard et al., 2010). While Generation Y is similar to Generation X in size, it differs in almost every other aspect (Ciminillo, 2005). One such aspect is their use of media.

2.1.3. Millennials Media Habits

Millennials have created a challenge for marketers because they are not as influenced by traditional media as previous generations. New marketing techniques are being implemented by marketers that will more effectively reach Millennial consumers (Bellman et al., 2011). Selecting the appropriate

medium to reach consumers in this cohort has proven challenging in many aspects due to their frequent use of such a wide variety of media (Hershatler and Epstein, 2010).

The same marketing formulas that resonated with earlier generations no longer work for Millennials because this group is sceptical of traditional advertising (Finign. 2006). The proliferation of the traditional media has given way to a spectrum of network and cable channels who are now joined by dozens of niche competitors; the rise of the Internet and social media has been a game changer for marketers. Just as network TV was for Boomers, the Internet is the Millennial's medium of choice, (Neuborne, 1999).

Millennials are attracted to a wide variety of online media, regularly using status updates, blogs, reviews, images and video social networks to openly express their interests and feelings (Hershatler and Epstein, 2010). Many retailers use these sites to connect with Millennials and gather insights and feedbacks from this audience that have been difficult to reach through conventional methods (Engel et al., 2011). Marketers are now shifting their focus from traditional mass marketing efforts that worked for previous generations to more targeted efforts using product placement, event marketing and digital advertising (Ciminillo, 2005).

Because Millennials grew up in a world that was already saturated with advertising messages from various media sources, and people were more brand conscious with consumerism was in high gear, they are averse to advertising messages. The way they respond to advertisements differs from their parents. Unlike Generation X who enjoyed the television era, Millennials consume significantly less television, preferring Video on Demand services instead. Unlike their parents, they are impervious to mainstream media, and are getting increasingly resistant to advertisements (Ciminillo, 2005).

Peterson (2004) goes on to explain that millennials are distrusting of traditional media as compared to earlier generations. They are aware that they are advertising targets and dislike it. Millennials would rather seek out opinions of friends or recommendations when considering purchase choices (Peterson, 2004)

Because they are distrusting of advertisements, Pesquera (2005) advises that in order to be more appealing to millennials, the marketing messages must be direct and honest. In order to gain their attention, advertisements targeted at millennials should evoke some sort of emotion for them to take notice. Peterson (2004) explains that marketers who have successfully targeted Generation Y use fewer traditional advertisements, and the ones they do use involve using messages that contain surprise and humour.

Because millennials are not consuming traditional video media (television), they are instead opting for digital alternatives like Video on Demand (VoD) services on Netflix and Amazon or social platforms like YouTube, it is important to understand their habits in order to effectively tailor marketing messages to reach the right audience in the right place. This study focuses on YouTube as a platform.

2.2. Marketing Through User-Generated Content

Conventionally, Firms have been the sole creators of advertising content and the architects of marketing messages which are designed to convince consumers to buy their products. However, with the growth of the internet and Web 2.0 technologies, the growth of social media created an opportunity for individuals to openly discuss their experiences with brands with each other, effectively influencing one another's purchase decisions. Online social technologies have transformed the traditional one-way communication into two-way, multidimensional, peer-to-peer communication (Berthon, Pitt, and Campbell 2008).

Ertimur and Gilly (2012) posit that individuals are no longer passively consuming professionally created, brand-relevant messages, instead, in this new digital era, consumers can now generate and distribute content that they have created. Referred to in digital marketing as User-Generated Content (UGC), Haven, Li, and McHarg (2007) describes it as a variety of media content created and distributed by users outside commercial practises. Whether the content is purposely branded or subconsciously indorsed, consumers who are actively producing, engaging with, and forwarding brand-related content become ambassadors of the brands (Cheong and Morrison 2008).

2.2.1. Traditional Word of Mouth Advertising

Word of Mouth communication can be traced back to the 1960s, where various aspects of the phenomenon have been studied and analysed by researchers specifically as a form of communication relating to customer satisfaction.

Word of Mouth (WOM) is where products are recommended to individuals by friends and family instead of by marketing messages yet it is still considered to be a form of advertising. Word of Mouth advertising can be defined as the oral communication between two or more persons concerning a brand, product or service on a non-commercial basis (Woodside and Delozier, 1976).

Because the source of information other consumers who have previously purchased the product rather than the company that makes the products Woodside and Delozier, (1976) argue that information from other people is considered more reliable and trustworthy.

Positive or negative opinions about a brand can easily sway the decision to make a purchase. In 1983, a study was conducted on the relationship between negative word of mouth and the likelihood that consumers would to share their dissatisfaction with others (Richins, 1983). The study, carried out before the internet was what we know it to be today, found that 57% of the participants sampled actively shared negative experiences with their friends.

In the new digital environment, traditional Word of Mouth has been replaced by status updates, blog posts, hotel and restaurant reviews, tutorial videos, unboxing and comparison videos all coming together forming user-generated content.

2.2.2. Web 2.0 and User-Generated Content

The rise of the Internet and Web 2.0 technologies brought with it a new type of word-of-mouth, electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). This is the same as traditional WOM only, it takes place online.

The growth of Web 2.0 technologies fuelled an explosion of information and media content online which formed the basis of UGC.

There is no concrete academic definition of Web 2.0 in literature, with Kim et al. (2009) offering an explanation for this; Web 2.0 is not enabled by new or revolutionary technologies, understanding of Web 2.0 is varied, and Web 2.0 is a broad topic that encompasses many related concepts (Kim et al. 2009). The term Web 2.0 however was described by Balasubramaniam, (2009) as a popular term used to describe a new generation of the Internet that allows its engage with content through the web, and that these technological advancements are what inspired consumers to engage with one another online.

Web2.0 technologies led to the growth of user-generated content and its significance in today's society. Wunsch-Vincent and Vikery (2006) described user-generated content as having three key variables, that content be made publicly accessible online, that the content reflects a certain amount of creative effort and that it is content created outside of professional practices.

Cheong and Morrison (2008) found that individuals who post content online are considered to be opinion leaders by consumers, even if they do not personally know the people posting the content (Cheong and Morrison, 2008). They also found that consumers consider both negative and positive UGC in equal measure.

Traditional word-of-mouth has proven to be beneficial for potential consumers, because they receive unbiased information about products from other people who have also used the product.

2.2.3. User Generated Content on YouTube

The growth of YouTube from humble beginnings to the largest video content-sharing platform online began in 2005. The company was founded by former PayPal employees, Chad Hurley, Steven Chen, and Jawed Karim. The company went live in June 2005 with the aim of breaking technical barriers to the widespread sharing of online video content (Burgess and Green, 2009). YouTube provided a simple interface whereby users could easily view and upload videos without needing technical expertise.

In October, 2006, Google acquired the company and developed it into a platform that could be effectively monetised thus transforming it into a virtual Mecca for marketers today.

The institutionalization of YouTube according to Kim (2012), meant that YouTube had become a force to compete with the traditional media environment. He discussed how this new medium

replicated the rules of the old media, including legally managed distribution of broadcasting content and smooth links between content and commercials. He described pre-Google YouTube as amateur-produced videos in an ad-free environment and post-Google YouTube as professionally generated videos in an ad-friendly environment (Kim, 2012).

2.3. Impact of Brand Image on Consumer Attitudes

A strong brand image is essential to any brand's success, and theoretically, all products and services could be validated by elements, through which brand image is established. Aaker (1991) described brand image as a collective set of associations which are organized in a meaningful way, stating that a favourable brand image leads to brand equity.

2.3.1. Brand Equity

The concept of Customer-Based Brand Equity (CBBE) was originated by Keller (1993), and refers to the reactions to a branding campaign from consumers who have some knowledge of the brand in varying degrees. He postulated that brand image and brand awareness are both the basis and sources of brand equity (Keller, 1993). Building on this, Lassar et al. (1995) suggested that brand equity came from the customers' confidence in a brand. He argued that more confidence consumers have in a brand, the higher the likelihood that they would pay a higher price for it (Lassar et al., 1995).

Confidence in a brand is derived from five respects according to Lassar (1995); (a) the brand performs its functions as designed, (b) the social image is associated with procuring or owning the brand, (c) recognition and sentimental attachment to the brand, (d) a balance between the brand's value and its functionalities and (e) consumer trust in the brand.

Customers are inclined to pay more for a product that is branded because of the established attractiveness of brand equity (D. Bello and M. Holbrook, 1995). Aaker (1991), is of the opinion that brand equity is dependent on the number of customers who make regular purchases. He explained this with the Brand Equity concept. Brand Equity consists of four elements according to Aaker (1991). These include, brand awareness, brand loyalty, perceived quality and brand associations. These four elements can be used to better understand consumer attitudes towards a brand.

2.3.1.1. Brand Awareness

According to Aaker (1991) brand awareness is one of the key issues that a brand must consider when designing a strategy. Brand awareness is defined as the ability of a potential customer to recognize the brand while considering a purchase; a brand doesn't have equity unless customer is at least aware of it. It is crucial for a brand to be recognized and reach a high awareness levels among customers, because this then lets the product become part of the evoked set. Being part of the evoked set means that the consumer is likely to consider purchasing said brand. (Blackwell et al., 2001).

2.3.1.2. Brand loyalty

The reason that consumers tend to purchase products from the same brand time and time again, despite competing brands offering similar products at lower prices, improved features and convenience to the customer, is because of brand loyalty according to Aaker (1991). Loyalty to a brand is considered to be a vital component of brand equity. The more loyal customers a brand has, the stronger the position the brand has in the marketplace. Keller (2003) however, claims that repeated purchase of a brand's products does not determine brand loyalty in itself, he suggests that the reason customers make repeated purchases of the same brand is either out of habit or from effects of sales promotions and marketing messages.

2.3.1.3. Perceived Quality

A customer's perception of a brand's quality is subjective. Aaker (1991) states that perception about the product quality is constructed by different levels of familiarity about the same product specifications. When attempting to build brand equity, managers try to influence the customers' perception about the quality of a product (Kirmani and Zeithaml, 1993). In doing this, managers can create and develop a positive brand image. Perceived quality can be the reason that customers pay higher prices for a product, because they see it as an investment. DeLong et al. (2004) suggests that perceived quality can be considered a cause for brand loyalty and repeat purchases.

2.3.1.4. Brand Associations

Brand association is considered to be as a link between the brand and a customer's memory according to Aaker (1991). Keller (2003) supports this by suggesting that brand equity is reinforced by customer's association with a brand thus creating a specific and unique brand image.

Keller (2003) goes on to suggest that brand association could be classed as a collection of attributes, benefits and attitudes. Attributes are specific characteristics of the product, either product or non-product-related. Benefits functional characteristics and attitudes are the overall evaluation of the brand, the long-term feelings about the brand evaluated on negative to positive scale (Gabbott and Hogg, 1998).

When associations about the brand are combined and presented to the customer, a favourable brand image can appear, effectively influencing purchase decisions.

2.3.2. Brand Trust

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) define brand trust as the reliance of the average consumer on the ability of the brand to perform functions as stated. Brand trust is the result of evaluating company's offerings by consumers (Chaudhuri and Holbrook, 2001). Trust in the brand is developed by consumer's direct experiences with the brand.

Chaudhuri and Holbrook (2001) also described the difference between brand trust and brand affect. They stipulate that brand trust is a process of careful thought and consideration regarding consumer experiences. Brand affect is impulsive and formed, spontaneously.

Brand trust leads brand loyalty due to brand trust's ability to create valued relationships (Delgado-Ballester & Munuera-Alemán, 2001)

2.3.4. Source Credibility

The balance between marketers and consumers can be traced to source credibility according to (Hovland, Janis and Kelley 1953).

Petty and Wegener (1998) describe source credibility as having two scopes: expertise and trustworthiness. Expertise is the extent to which a consumer is qualified in their opinion, and trustworthiness is the ability of the consumer to accept information without prior evidence (McCole and Palmer 2002). Trustworthiness in particular has gained plenty of attention from academic researchers because it is a major key that affects the access of consumer's private information. (Han and Windsor 2011). The rise in trust for online media is due to its ability to include information such consumer reviews and ratings.

The literature review has highlighted the differences in generations and what this means for marketers wishing to target Millennials in particular, it highlighted the fact that this is a highly connected generational cohort that seeks opinions of others before making purchase decisions.

The literature also highlighted the effect that brand awareness, loyalty, perceived quality and brand associations have on brand equity which is key in influencing consumers to make a purchase as well as brand trust and source credibility.

There isn't however enough documented literature about the effects of user generated video content in regards to effect on brand image.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

In the methodology chapter, the researcher will expand on the methods that were employed in gathering of the information as well as discuss the philosophical assumptions that support the research. Topics outlined within this chapter include: the overall research question and its corresponding objectives, the theoretical reasoning behind choice of methods, a summary of the research design, a description of the targeted sample, the research instrument, address the ethical consideration measures that were carried out, and the data analysis method used.

The primary aim of this research study was to explore the influence that user-generated videos, published on YouTube, have on consumer attitudes and purchase intention among millennials living in Ireland.

The study was guided by the following objectives:

- 5) To establish usage of the social video sharing platform YouTube among Millennials
- 6) To determine Millennials attitudes towards advertising on YouTube
- 7) To compare the roles of peer reviewed content to branded content on Millennials decision making process and
- 8) To determine effect of source credibility on millennials purchase decisions.

3.2. Research Philosophy

Studies indicate that researchers must be aware of their philosophical approach to research because by understanding research philosophy the researcher is able to refine and clarify the research method to be used in their study and consequently help the researchers to gather the necessary evidence required to effectively answer their research questions (Easterby-Smith, et al. 2002).

This study considered the work of Crotty (2005). He posits that when analysing an appropriate research philosophy to employ, researchers should explore various epistemological considerations. Bryman and Bell (2015), describe this as a question of what should be regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline.

Quinlan (2011) describes two major epistemological positions. These are Positivism and Interpretivism.

The key research philosophy that is applied to this research study is an Interpretivism philosophy. the Interpretivism philosophy is one that is characterised as understanding human action (Bryman and Bell, 2015). This philosophy is relevant to this study because it focuses on conducting research by interacting with people rather than objects in order to understand their point of view. Essentially, we attempt to understand or interpret the perspective of another using their language.

A positivist approach was thought to be unsuitable for this study it is concerned with observing and predicting outcomes and usually involves large samples of quantitative data and statistical hypothesis testing.

In addition, Denscombe (1998) describes how for positivists, the aim of social research is to discover the patterns and regularities of the social world by utilizing a “scientific” approach with methods used that are highly organised, measurable and based on approaches taken by the scientific community involved in researching behaviours in the natural world. In a positivist approach, the researcher will not be involved with the respondents and will often use observations or statistics as a method of obtaining information.

Interpretivist methodology on the other hand, leans towards the collection of qualitative data and uses methods such as unstructured interviews and participant observation that provides this type of data. According to Livesey (2006) Interpretive researchers recognise that they will both influence and be influenced by the research activity they are involved with and that a relationship between the two will develop naturally. Interpretivists also believe that it is important to analyse how humans interpret activities and that this can be achieved through methods other than those employed by the positivist approach.

According to Pizam and Manfield, the interpretivist approach is based two guiding beliefs, relativist ontology which perceives reality as being intersubjective and is based on meanings and understandings on social and experiential levels, and transactional or subjectivist epistemology where people cannot be separated from their knowledge; therefore, there is a clear link between the researcher and research subject. (Pizam and Mansfeld 2009).

Saunders et al. (2012) references the appropriateness of the interpretivist perspective in the case of certain fields of study, one such study is organizational behaviour and marketing. Because this research focuses on consumer’s behaviour, it seemed appropriate. According to Saunders et al., (2012), a study can be designed to either develop or test a theory, and this research study allowed the researcher to explore a topic and develop a theoretical explanation from the data collected.

It is the belief of this researcher, that because of the adoption of interpretivism, this qualitative research was studied in a great level of depth. On the flip side interpretivism does have a subjective nature that creates room for bias since the primary data is heavily impacted by personal viewpoint and values. This renders reliability and representativeness of data to be undermined to a certain extent. However primary data generated via Interpretivism studies is associated with a high level of validity because data in such studies tends to be trustworthy and honest for this reason, the findings of this study are generalizable.

3.3. Research Design

The choice of research design for this study was informed by Quinlan (2011) who stated that research methodologies materialize from the philosophies, and that data collection methods subsequently occur from the research methodologies. There are two types of data that the researcher can gather, these are Quantitative data and Qualitative data (Quinlan (2011)).

Quantitative data is mathematical in nature and can be coded as such, whereas qualitative data characterises feelings, thoughts, ideas and comprehension and is descriptive in nature. The choice of research method for this study was supported by Collis and Hussey (2009) who posit that the justification for choosing a research method depends on the type of the research study as well as philosophical inclinations. The research method for this study is qualitative in nature.

The approach adopted by this qualitative research is inductive. This means that either a theory is developed or a pattern is sought based on the data collected. In this study, the researcher will be attempting to develop a pattern of meaning.

This research study is an exploratory study rather than a confirmatory trial because exploratory research is a useful method of discovering the goings on and gain deeper understanding on the topic of interest to the researcher (Saunders et al., 2012). On the other hand, a confirmatory trial is controlled where the researcher states a hypothesis in advance and evaluates it according to particular procedure. This type of trial may be implemented when it is necessary to provide additional or firm evidence of efficacy or safety. On the contrary, an exploratory study narrows the focus from a broad spectrum after research develops and progresses. This is the approach that this study has adapted.

According to Saunders et al (2007) there is no research approach that is fundamentally superior to the other, what matters is not the label attached to a strategy, but whether it will enable the researcher to answer the research questions and meet the objectives.

The choice of research strategy will ultimately be guided by research questions and objectives, extent of knowledge on the subject, the amount of time and resources available, as well as the authors own philosophical foundations (Saunders et al.,2007) state that. Taking these statements into consideration as well as reviewing other viable options, for this study the researcher chose to employ a qualitative data collection method by means of interviews. Bryman & Bell (2011) distinguish between qualitative and quantitative interviews by explaining that quantitative interviews have structures however qualitative interviews are unstructured or are at least semi -structured. Semi-structured interviews give the participant room to respond to the questions by speaking freely, while remaining on topic guided by a set of questions. The questions do not need to be in sequential order, they can vary in order to maintain the natural flow of the interview.

This choice was led by the research question and the design fit within the interpretivist research approach which lends itself to a qualitative approach.

3.4. Sampling Overview

A sample represents a portion of the targeted population chosen to represent the entire population of the study (Cooper et.al. 2013). For qualitative research, the sampling choices are made that assist a deeper understanding of the subject under investigation.

There are two approaches to sampling according to Quinlan (2011), probability sampling and nonprobability sampling. Probability sampling is used when the population is claimed to represent the population. This is used when the researcher believes that the findings are applicable to the entire population. Essentially this means that every member of the population has equal chances of being selected to be part of the sample. This is used mainly for quantitative methods.

This study used non probability sampling. Non-probability sampling is said to represent the population, however, not in a statistical according to Quinlan (2011). Non-probability sampling focuses on a fewer numbers of cases to clearly, comprehensively illustrate the phenomena that is being investigated. While non-probability samples don't necessarily represent a larger population, they are still effective.

Researchers use several types of nonprobability samples to gather data, including convenience samples, quota samples, snowball samples and purposive samples. While the former two strategies are sometimes used by quantitative researchers, they are usually used to carry out qualitative research.

Convenience sampling, also referred to as haphazard sampling involves the researcher collecting data from participants wherever they are available or convenient. This sampling method is considered useful for exploratory studies. There no inclusion criteria identified prior to the selection of subjects. All subjects are invited to participate.

Quota sampling involves the researcher identifying key categories in the study where there might be some variation. The researcher then creates subgroups based on the categories leaving the number of participants to be includes up to the researcher's discretion.

Snowball sampling is used to identify participants that are otherwise difficult to locate. It involves one participant connecting the researcher to the next and so on with the sample building and growing as they go (Vogt, 1999). This study is effective when attempting to access a sample that is isolated or secretive in nature.

Finally, a Purposive sample is one where the researcher has a specific viewpoint in mind that they are interested in pursuing then seeks out the participants who meet the specific criteria. This was the sampling technique chosen by the researcher for this study.

The criteria used to select the sample were that the respondents would need to be members of the generation Y cohort, with ages ranging from 21 – 35 years old living in Ireland, who frequently used the social media and who often used the social platform YouTube in particular. The researcher identified individuals who had different interests from one another in order to ensure the responses were inclusive and not skewing in any one direction. In this instance, the researcher decided to interview six different people in order to gather opinions about consumer attitudes towards content on YouTube.

3.5. Research Instruments

For this study, the researcher developed a set of semi-structured interviews as the primary method of collecting the data. Semi-structured interviews were used in order to get the participants comfortable in opening up to the researcher allowing for free flowing conversation. Robinson (2011) suggested that semi-structured interviews were helpful when searching for new insights into a subject matter, and according to Cooper and Schindler (2008), they are considered an appropriate tool as part of an exploratory study.

the researcher provided assurance regarding the use of the participant's confidential information and anonymity, as suggested by Saunders et.al, (2012). The researcher also ensured that the location where the interviews took place was convenient for individuals taking part in the study. Open questions were used to encourage more depth in the responses and minimise bias as suggested by Easterby-Smith et. al, (2002). After permission was granted by the interviewee, all interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed immediately after they took place. Robson (2002) suggested this as a means to enhance trustworthiness of the data. The interview guide is provided in Appendix 1.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The goal of ethics in research studies is to guarantee that there is no damage or harm caused to anybody participating in the study and that nobody participating suffers as a result of activities of the research activities (Cooper and Schindler, 2014).

The researcher communicated the purpose and benefits of the research to the participants beforehand in accordance with suggestions from Bryman and Bell (2009). The researcher also informed the participants that their participation was completely voluntary and that if they choose to withdraw from the research at any point, they were free to do so. As such, consent forms were presented to the interviewees to obtain informed consent, as well as ensure the participant had a clear understanding of the research study they would be participating in. Consent Forms were signed by respondents prior to conducting the interviews. The consent form presented to the participants is available in Appendix 2.

The privacy of the participants was upheld, informing them that no personal data would be shared without prior consent from them. The researcher explained that the interviews were part of an

academic study to fulfil requirements for an MSc degree and the respondents featured in the study provided their full permission for the researcher to use their quotes in this research.

3.7. Data Analysis

The method used to analyse the data in this research is a Thematic Analysis. Saunders et. al, (2011) describes Thematic Analysis a research grouping data according to themes. Thematic analysis is one of the most common forms of analysis in qualitative research. It is the analysis of data that emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns within data. (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

According to Gibbs (2007), Thematic coding is a form of qualitative analysis which involves recording or identifying passages of text that are linked by a common theme or idea which allows the researcher to index the text into categories and establish an outline of thematic ideas.

When analysing the data for themes, it is recommending that the researcher look for any similarities including repetitions, similar metaphors, related analogies and any theory-related material. The theory behind this analysis is to conceptualize a key of major themes and corresponding subthemes (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

The method of thematic coding was used to analyse responses from the participants in the study. Relevant ideas and remarks were grouped together and categorised by themes. Each theme was then grouped according to corresponding research objectives and presented as such.

Kvale, Brinkmann, and Plas (1996) suggested that the analysis of qualitative data should begin at the same time as collection of the data and immediately afterwards. The researcher therefore employed this suggestion in the data analysis process. This involved the researcher audio recording then transcribing each interview immediately after the interview was finished.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

4.0. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from in-depth interviews carried out with strategically selected participants who represented a good spectrum of the millennials under study. The interviews were carried out between 3rd - 22nd August, 2016. The key findings from data are discussed as study themes under each of the four objective of the study.

4.1 Millennials Usage of and Engagement on YouTube

The study sought to establish usage of the social sharing site YouTube and understand how millennials interact and engage with the social platform on a regular basis.

Because younger audiences watch more hours of video on YouTube and other digital outlets than traditional television, the researcher wanted to find out more about their behaviour on YouTube by discussing their preferred devices and the content they prefer in order to gauge the levels of engagement and discovery among these highly connected individuals. From the responses, the following themes emerged: Preferred mobile devices, Multiscreening, Peer reviewed content and engagement

4.1.1 Type of Mobile Devices Used by Millennials on YouTube

According to industry reports, 46% of all video plays in 2015 came from mobile devices like tablets and smartphones. With tablet and smartphone video consumption growing by 170% since 2013. (Tubular Insights, 2016). The researcher sought to establish if this was represented by the respondents in this study, and when questioned about the preferred devices used to watch content on YouTube, the responses seemed to confirm the reports.

While respondents mentioned a variety of devices used, the mention of mobile devices was prevalent with all interviewees indicating that tablets and smartphones were their natural choices. One interviewee responded by saying;

“I don’t really prefer one device over the other, I just use whatever is near me. When I’m at home, it is usually my MacBook or iPad, when I’m out and about I would probably use my phone.”

A second respondent echoed these views by indicating that he used his Xbox to watch YouTube videos when he was at home. He also mentions that while he owns a television, he doesn’t use it to watch network television.

“I watch YouTube videos basically on everything I own, I use my phone my laptop and my iPad, when I’m home I usually use my Xbox because I have a TV

and what else am I going to use it for other than play video games and watch YouTube videos? When I'm out of the house I just use my phone because it is convenient."

The study also found out that the time of day was a significant factor that determines which device is used. According to one of the respondents who used her laptop during the day at work and the tablet at night. She had this to say

"I watch YouTube all the time. Every day actually. In terms of devices, I either use my laptop or my tablet. I suppose it would also depend on the time of the day, during the day when I'm at work I will use my laptop because it is in front of me, and in the evening when I'm home and ready for bed I'd use my tablet mostly."

Another respondent mentioned that they would just use whatever is closest to them and made mention of Google's Chromecast service where an individual can cast video content from their mobile devices onto their TV screens

"I would probably just use whatever was closest, which is usually my phone. But when I'm at home and I want to relax or if I have friends over at my house I would Chromecast onto my TV just because the screen is bigger and I can still control it with my phone"

Convenience was also found to determine choice of device to use. When responding to this item, one respondent mentioned the use of her laptop because it freed up her hands up to take care of her baby.

"I'm at home all day with my baby, so I mostly use my laptop to look up different videos, I think my laptop is more convenient because it frees my hands up to do things for my baby"

Convenience was echoed by a respondent who indicated that, he used his PlayStation console because he needed to switch back and forth between the video game and YouTube

"When I'm playing a game on my PlayStation and I want to watch a quick video, I can just switch out, watch the video and switch back into the game. I don't need to move, or even put down my pad. It's pretty convenient actually"

From this theme, the study found out that while watching videos was a pastime for millennials, the device used was based more on convenience based on what the user was doing at the time of watching the video. The study also found that multiple devices are used interchangeably. However, these devices were mainly Smartphones and the Tablets. Video game consoles were also found to be frequently in use as they can be used to consume YouTube videos while at the same time used to play

video games. The choice of device was found to be grounded in the convenience it affords the user. Devices which can be for multiple purposes were equally used

4.1.2. Millennials and Distracted First Screen Usage

The second theme derived from the findings is the distracted first screen use or “multiscreening” which is used to describe simultaneous media use. Marketers often see the distraction of multiple screens as a challenge, competing for the attention of the consumer (McGoldrick, 2014).

The study sought to find out how study participants made use of this simultaneous media. According to the findings most respondents considered multiscreening as an asset, as one can, for example, use of their laptop to watch videos and use their phone to chat with friends. One respondent had this to say

“I prefer my laptop because I’m comfortable and I can do other things on my phone like chat to friends or look up other things online. The only time I’m actually paying full attention to a YouTube video is when I’m watching and practicing Yoga”

Multiscreening was also lauded by one participant who indicated that it helps with managing multiple social media demands such as chatting, watching and responding to twitter. The following caption captures what this respondent said about Multiscreening

“I use my tablet to cast the YouTube videos on my TV to leave me free to do other things with my phone like chat to my mates or see what people are saying on Twitter.”

Accordingly, in this study multiscreening was preferred by all participants for similar reasons which was when one needed to watch a video while engaging with other social media simultaneously.

4.1.3. Influence of Peer Reviewed Content on Millennials Purchasing Decisions

To understand what kind of content they were naturally drawn to and uncover what type of content was more prominent, branded content or user generated content, participants were asked about the kind of videos they watch on YouTube. The study revealed that the kinds of videos they watched reflected their individual passions and what they do for a living.

One of the interviewees mentioned unboxing videos. This is where the YouTube essentially unpacks new products, especially high tech consumer products and the process is captured on video and uploaded on YouTube. According to him, as a software developer, unboxing videos was not just for entertainment but was educational. These marketing strategy draws the viewer into the world of the product and a sense of ownership and belonging is created. In his own words, this is what he had to say

“I like technology videos, so I will watch a lot of unboxing videos – the channel ‘unbox therapy’ is my favourite, where they basically show you what you are getting by opening the box in front of you, it’s mainly for gadgets like phones, computers, cameras, stuff like that. I subscribe to a lot of tech channels where they do interviews with developers and programmers. I also watch some sports highlights for rugby mainly, and gaming videos... I also follow a few gaming channels where you watch people play video games. I follow one or two vlogs and lots of educational videos.”

Another interviewee mentioned tutorials, haul videos and product reviews which are all content types generated by other users.

“I watch a lot of make-up tutorials, music videos, I follow some vlogs if I know the people. But I would say mostly make-up videos, you know, tutorials, product reviews, haul videos, that kind of stuff.”

Instructional or ‘how to’ videos and recipes were highlighted by the one of the interviewees as very informative as you learn tricks anywhere instead of looking for a physical space. The participant indicated that these ‘how to’ videos also gives you privacy as a learner. As a result, this participant has been able to pursue her passion of Yoga without having to go to a yoga studio.

“I’m really into yoga, and healthy living so I do yoga classes online, like I subscribe to a few yogis on YouTube and do the sequences with them every day. I also try to eat as healthy as possible so I subscribe a lot of healthy food channels where you can get just so many healthy recipes to try at home.”

Other videos that were mentioned frequently included ‘life-hacks’ and “how to videos” according to one respondent who mostly watches DIY videos and life hacks, watching these videos is a life skills academy.

“The videos I watch most are probably DIY videos and life hacks. I like to learn how to do things myself and on video you can actually learn from people and see the process and how things turn out”.

The study established that types of videos that the participants watched reflected their interest as well their need to learn or be updated with the current happening in their fields of interest.

4.1.4. Millennials and Levels of Engagement on YouTube

Another theme emerging from the findings was the levels of engagement which was drawn from respondents who indicated that comments under the videos drew them to videos enabling them to engage in ongoing discussions according to one respondents. According the study participants, videos

that attract many comments inspires curiosity and leading to sustained engagement. According to one participant

“It is always nice to see what other people think about the video you are watching, so I do enter into conversations about them in the comments section. Usually you can find out other people’s experiences with the same products in the comments and they can even direct you to other similar videos.”

Engagement with the comments section was used by some as a source of information section. According to this respondents, comments section was mostly humorous as it boasts of some of the funniest people on the internet who hang out in the comments section. They tend to play the role of fans yet this platform is quite useful if one is looking for additional information about whatever it is the video is about.”

Other than using peer reviews, this study established that discovery of new content came from sharing videos. Millennials seem to take it as a responsibility of sharing an interesting video with their peers within their group circle and across groups since they belong to several social groups. This sharing of new information has become a source of information. As one respondent described it

“The way I find new videos is usually if my friends send me links to YouTube. My friend recently sent me a link to a man called ‘Stahr Milan’ who does make-up tutorials as a joke, but it turns out that he is really talented, and I have picked up some tips from him. I subscribe to his channel now.”

However, the quality of video or a well put together content from the brands makes for great information to share. The shared emotional videos are the most widely shared since they resonate with everyone across the ages

“I usually share video that I find interesting on my Facebook page. And I would say that a lot of them are product related. Usually funny ads or really emotional ones, like the Aer Lingus videos where they bring people home for Christmas, it gets me every time”

Engagement as a participant in video commentaries was found by this study to be a significant way in which millennials consume video content

4.2. Millennials Attitudes Towards Advertisements and Brand Sponsored Content On YouTube

The study sought to determine consumer attitudes towards advertisement and brand sponsored content on YouTube among millennials. This was motivated by the fact that millennials spend so much time on their mobile devices, traditional TV commercials do not reach them the way they did previous

generations, so brands are constantly looking for ways to get their ads in front of the consumers eyes. In the case of YouTube, ads appear in different formats on the social platform and the researcher was curious to find out what the respondents feelings towards them were. Four emerging themes are laid out as follows. Ad blocking software, Control, Brand awareness and Relevance

4.2.1. Millennials Use of Ad blocking Software

The aversion to traditional advertising means that marketers need to be where the consumers are, in this case, that place is YouTube. However, one thing that came out was the mention of use of Ad-blocking software so that ads do not appear at all when they are watching videos on YouTube

With one respondent stating that he never sees ad on YouTube because he had installed ad blocking software on his devices

“I never see ads. I have ad blockers on my laptop, tablet and phone. Basically, I haven’t seen an ad on YouTube in about two years”

Some respondents mentioned that they have ad blockers only on her laptop but not her mobile devices.

“I have ad blockers installed on my laptop but not on my phone, so if I do see any ads, I see them on my phone, which is ok because I usually only watch YouTube on my phone when someone sends me a link, so it isn’t really an issue”

One respondent mentioned the reason that he had installed an ad blocker on his laptop was because of all the clutter on the desktop version. The reason given by participants for installing ad blockers on their laptops was because of the frequency of ads pop out in the desktop version of YouTube. The level of frustration occasioned by the high frequency of ads was captured in the following response,

“There are ads everywhere, on the top of the page, on the tabs on the right, inside the ads, everywhere, I don’t want to see them. I don’t have ad blockers on my phone because the mobile version is a little cleaner with ads only inside the video”.

The study found that some millennials do not use ad block software to support the marketer. According to one response who described why he paused his ad block software for YouTube

“I am aware that You Tubers got paid when people view ads on their videos and wanted to show support.”

According to him, a number of YouTube channels that he really liked did not have a lot of subscribers so providing support seemed to him the right thing to do as presented in the narrative bellow

“I wanted to at least feel like I was supporting them in some way by letting the ads run. That’s how some YouTubers get paid you know, the ads. I didn’t want to feel like an ass and not let someone make cash, because they aren’t vendors. There are some channels where I’m one of 5,000 or 10,000 subscribers, so I know that if I see an ad, it will be appreciated.”

Attitudes towards adverts was found to vary from being a distraction to being viewed as a way of supporting marketers by participants. The choice to use ad blockers was therefore found necessary for those who prefer to completely block adverts as it formed an interference, to those who pause ad block for support and those who admit that the adverts are fun to watch

4.2.2. Control of Advertising Messages on YouTube

The issue of control was mentioned with respondents wanting more control over the content they watch and the ability to skip ads if they ever not useful

“I hate YouTube ads. I hate them. I mean, I don’t mind the ones at the beginning of the video, the ones that give you an option to skip them after 5 seconds. At least there I have a choice, you know. If it is interesting I can watch it to the end. If not, I can skip to the end. But you know what really grinds my gears? The ads that show up in the middle of the video, those are the ones that you can’t skip. I mean, it is like being forced to watch the ads. If I wanted to see ads, I would just watch TV then.”

The need to control what to watch was also reflected in one of respondent’s feedback who indicated to have seen a shift in how intrusive the video content was but even then, still wanted the option to skip the ads. He went to state that, lack of control disrupts watching momentum. In her words

“They are ok, I mean they aren’t really that intrusive, YouTube seems to do a pretty good job of keeping away those ads that come on in the middle of a video. You know, the long videos that you can’t skip, you just have to mute it wait for it to end to carry on with what you were watching. I’m seeing less of those these days which is good, because those ads are so irritating.”

So ability to control ad in video was found by this study to influence type of video content that is watched. However, the study also established that the ads which interrupt the video content will be muted or skipped if possible.

4.2.3 Millennials Brand Awareness and the Impact of Adverts on YouTube

In spite of the irritation caused by intrusive adds, brand awareness stood out as a major reason for watching adverts. The study established that because many of the respondents do not regularly view

network television, they didn't see many ads, so YouTube ads were an acceptable place to gain access to the advertisements and it has become to them the source of information about new products. One participant had this to say

“I don't mind the ads before YouTube, I don't watch TV or listen to the radio so this is really the only place I get to see ads for new products”

The respondents showed their understanding as to why adverts were placed in YouTube. One respondent noted that marketers were aware that audiences are averse to advertising and would prefer to skip the ads and therefore had found new and creative ways to grab their attention. This was captured from the following response

“I don't mind them, I mean I think marketers are getting more creative with the ads on YouTube because they know that we will skip them anyway, so it is always interesting to see how they will get attention, plus that's how to find new products.”

Besides being a creative way of getting consumer attention by marketers the participants revealed that the adverts allowed them a chance to discover branded information. In one respondent's words

“I think that the ads are good for promotions, it's a great way to discover information that I would otherwise never have heard about”

So beside being a place for marketing new products, the study established participant's awareness of the role played by the adverts for sharing information. It thus provides a symbiotic relationship between the viewer and marketer such that as the marketer gets to share new wares, the viewer gets to learn new ideas

4.2.4. Relevance of the Advertisements on YouTube

The study isolated the issue of relevance as an important component that affects attitude towards adverts shared through YouTube. The study found that when adverts were related to what was being watched, the viewer was more tolerant than when it was not related to what was being watched. One participant noted this as follows

*“If the ads have nothing to do with what I'm watching, it can be annoying. Like what does the ad about Garnier spot remover have to do with a video about cars?
It makes no sense”*

This response revealed that people can be more responsive to ads that are related to the content they are viewing. This implies that marketers should not only seek to post adverts on popular video but should as much as possible try to relate their product to the video so as to increase viewership time for

their adverts. This was reinforced by respondents who said the following with respect to relevance of the adverts

“If the ads have anything to do with what I’m interested in, then that’s great. Like say I’m looking at video game reviews, and I see an ad for a new game about to come out, I get excited and want to find out more”

“If the ads are related to the content, I don’t mind them. Like, If I’m watching a video about breastfeeding and I see an ad for breast pumps for example, I’m cool with those ads, because I probably need a breast pump.”

This was an important finding for adverts that can reduce negative attitude towards adverts and increase viewership.

The study found that attitudes towards sponsored content was influenced by the timing of the adverts, the ability to control it and the relevance of the advert in relation to the video content on the YouTube

4.3. The Role of Peer-Reviewed Content and Branded Content on Millennials Purchasing Decisions

The study sought to determine the reasons why millennials, prefer to use peer reviewed content over branded content to aid in making purchase decisions

Because user generated content has been described as the main driver when influencing purchase decisions, the researcher was curious to find out reasons why millennials would look to peer-reviewed content before making purchase decisions. Based on the findings, three major reasons were identified as a response to this objective which the researcher used as themes for discussing this objective. These include; Trust of peer reviews, product demonstration and the issue of risk reduction

4.3.1. Trust in People Versus Brands and Millennials Purchase Decisions

A theme that came out strongly among the interviewed participants was one of trust of peer reviews over branded content. The branded videos naturally tend to only show positive attributes of their products, but reviewers show the both positive and negative things. Peer reviews have gained a marketing space and most brand include this caption because it has become common place to trust those who are not afraid to be reviewed.

Peer review seems to be very important to most millennials and plays an important role in decisions they make before a purchase according to one participant, knowing what other people who have used the brand is more important than the how impressive the advert is run. The following captions from participants support this claim

“I don’t think I would buy something just because I saw an ad for it. I would need to find out what other people are saying about it, and see their experiences first”

“If I saw a new product, like a phone, I would wait for the reviewers before making a decision”

So even though the adverts creative display captures the viewer’s attention, purchasing decisions seem to be based on peer reviews more than the accolades conferred on the product by marketers. The other factor found significant for purchasing decision was seeing product in use product demonstration

4.3.2. Product Demonstration Videos and Millennials Purchase Decisions

The fact that video content makes use of both the audio and visual sensory means that the YouTube’s audience is more engaged in the content. Seeing the product in use makes for important purchasing decisions as looks have been found deceiving according to findings in this study. To express the importance of seeing the product in use one respondent said that;

“I need to see how it looks first, I’d rather have someone try out a product so I can see what it looks like instead of me being the one going out there, spending my money then suffering from buyer’s remorse because the product turned out to be horrible.”

The study found that for millennials It is important to see products in use even if the products usually come with instructions. This sentiment was well presented in the following response from the interviewee

“I like to watch makeup tutorials because I can see how to use the products. I mean, when you buy things, a lot of products come with instructions, but I think is it better when you can actually see how to use stuff”

The study found that most millennials need to be convinced of the product benefits through a demonstration. From one explanation the respondents indicated that while the company can tell you that a product works in a certain way, it becomes more convincing when they demonstrate the working of the feature, since marketer tend to copy each other’s strategies even when it is not true as an example one millennial was convinced of purchasing a Samsung 7 based on a demonstration video and had this to say;

“I was looking at the new Samsung S7 where they claimed it was waterproof, so the guy on ‘unbox therapy’ tested it. They put it in water and left it there for a while and it was still working, so I was impressed by that. I might get the Samsung

S7 because of that video, I thought great, so they were not lying about that feature, good.”

Seeing the product in use as therefore found by this study to be an important factor for marketers to consider when uploading their adverts.

4.3.3. Reduced Perceived Risk and Millennials Purchase Decisions

Lee & Moon (2015) postulate that searching for information using user-generated content is especially important when either purchasing either a new product or an expensive product due to the anxiety involved.

Respondents seemed to agree with this hypothesis with one discussing a “bend test” video and purchasing of a new phone and how the video stopped him from purchasing a flawed product. According to this millennial, getting another opinion on the workability of the promotion is important and can help in purchasing decision. This was captured from this discussion

“I wanted to upgrade my phone to the iPhone 6 plus, but I had read some articles on reddit about how the phone would bend in your pocket, and it was all everyone was talking about online, so I found this link to a channel where a guy on YouTube did a test to see if it would bend. And it did. I mean he had to really try to bend it but it did bend. So thankfully I saw that before I bought the phone.”

Perceived risk would also extend here to something important, as one respondent mentioned her baby.

“I’m a first time mum, so I’m not taking any risks when it comes to my child, I want to see and hear from other mums what products work for them and their kids before I buy anything.”

The focus on risks is powerful as this strengthens the positive aspects of a product. Every product has positive and negative aspects, when the negative aspects which form the risk factors are challenged and stand the test of usability, then trust in the product is increased and purchasing becomes an easy decision

The study found that more and more per review has become an embedded aspect before any purchase decision is done. The peer review has been strengthened by strategies that include demonstration of use and testing for risks. These are important findings that have emerged due to constant use of videos by millennials for purchasing decisions

4.4. Millennials Consumer Attitudes and Source Credibility

The study analysed consumer attitudes towards the credibility of the source of information when making purchase decisions.

Source credibility has two dimensions according to Tormala, et al. (2007), expertness and trustworthiness. The researcher wanted to know what would constitute a credible review from a YouTuber by determining the criteria used gauge expertise of the YouTuber and determine how trustworthy the information they received really was. Themes that arose were: (1) subscribers, views and comments, (2) product quality, (3) weighing the pro and cons and (4) Transparency

4.4.1. Subscribers, Views and Comments Effects on Source Credibility

Credibility of source of information when making purchasing decision was found to be attached to the number of subscribers. In regards, to the subscribers, one respondent said that high numbers were a clear indicator that the channel can be trusted.

“I look at the number of subscribers a channel has, that is a pretty good indicator isn't it? I mean, 47 million people can't be wrong can they? I think that is a clear sign that the vlogger is trustworthy”

According to this millennials, the numbers are determinants of credibility, based on this notion, marketers have made use of popular vloggers or influencers who have a large number of followers to market their products. While the marketers who can afford to pay the influencers have an advantage of reaching a large viewership, the question of credibility notwithstanding. This makes credibility of product based on number of subscribers questionable.

Not all respondents were found in this study to base their decisions on numbers. The following two narratives lends support to this argument as the results were mixed with between whether or not views were a good indicator of credibility

“I generally look at the number of views a video has, I think that if a lot of people look at this one review, then it is a trustworthy review”

In the next narrative, another respondent felt that the number of views doesn't indicate anything but how many times it had been seen, that it in fact does not speak to the credibility of the vlogger.

“I think that a lot video views either means that the video has been shared a lot, or watched a lot, but I don't think that means that it is a good review, or even that people have watched the video till the end, they could have just looked at it, got bored then moved on.”

Also mentioned was comments under the videos, with one respondent saying that the comments paint a more realistic picture of the product because it acts like a forum for discussion as captured in the following response

“The comments section under the videos is important, it is like a forum. If many people are agreeing with the review, then I’m more trusting of it. Plus, you get to see what other people think of the product too which helps make your decision easier.”

The study found that although number of subscribers helps in decision making, it does not necessarily imply that the product is good and more millennials need to confirm by looking at extra information provided in the discussion under the video than just basing their decision on the numbers. However, it is clear that the number of subscribers draws the attention of the potential purchaser. The study posits that a credible product must basically seek strategies to increase on the number of subscribers to receive market attention as this is the basic measure of credibility. Millennials will only read the comments when they are satisfied that many people have subscribed

4.4.2. Quality of Production and Source Credibility

The study established that the quality of the channel also mattered to the respondents saying that they would trust a professional channel more. According to one respondent,

“If the channel looks professionally done, I would trust it more. When the YouTuber takes the look of the channel seriously, that tells me that everything else they do is also taken seriously. So when they are doing an in depth review, they are really trying to give the audience their best”

Another respondent said that he wouldn’t even consider a low quality channel.

“If the camera is good quality, the graphics are up to date, and it looks like you have put real effort into it, then I’m into it. I wouldn’t even look at a channel with bad lighting and pixelated view.”

This finding puts quality as an important component in purchasing decision. This means that the quality of a product is determined by quality of presentation too. This is a critical finding for YouTubers who wish to market their quality products. The study posits that quality presentation is a step towards purchasing a product for millennials. This professional presentation should not be overshadowed by too much hype which casts doubt on the product. This is discussed in the theme on pros and cons next

4.4.3. Balanced Product Information and Source Credibility

Many of the respondents expressed that when a reviewer is too excited about a product or pushing a product too hard, it casts doubt in their eyes. This was clearly expressed by one respondent as follows

“I absolutely do not believe people who gush over products, like – it is so great, it is so wonderful, it is the best – I don’t buy the act. Really? Nothing at all is wrong

with it? Nothing? I'd rather get an honest review to make an informed decision.

Tell me the pros, tell me the cons, let me decide”

This was a sentiment echoed by many of the respondents with one saying that he could search for benefits on the brands channel as indicated in the following narratives

“I don't like it when the person pushes one product on you listing only the benefits. If I want to see the benefits, I will look up the ad for myself or go to the company channel to see all the amazing things about it. I'm watching a user review because I want to know the truth.”

“I think it is important to point out the flaws in a product. The iPhone 6 had a major flaw in the design. For such an expensive product, it shouldn't bend like that, but because of honest reviews about it, Apple fixed the problem. So it is good for me and good for the company, especially if they pay attention to what people are saying about their products as well.”

From these accounts it is clear that millennials have developed their own evaluation mechanisms, they have grown with the market and are mature to see beyond the rhetoric. Being honest seems to be the underlying motive for millennials in product marketing. They seek honesty and have developed perceptions that can be used to improve purchasing decisions. Cheap product promotions don't seem to resonate with this group of consumers. Under this theme it became clear from the findings that millennials believe in feedback to inform both the producer and the consumer and this understanding should be considered seriously by marketers. This leads to the issue of transparency that is discussed in the next theme

4.4.4. Transparency of Content and Source Credibility

The issue of transparency came out from a few respondents who were of the opinion that if a video is sponsored, it should be stated as such, especially when it is evident that the post has, in fact been sponsored.

“You know; you can tell when a post has been sponsored. So when the vlogger doesn't mention it, or it isn't anywhere in the description, it seems dodgy to me”

Another respondent mentioned that there is a difference between an honest review and somebody paid to promote a brand and should be made clear

“You can't have someone talking about products from the same company in every single video they do and consider them a trustworthy product reviewer, they are an ambassador is what they are, just say it, 'Hi, I'm Ashley, and I'm a MAC

cosmetics ambassador' maybe then, if I'm looking for a MAC product, I'll check her channel"

On the flip side, actually stating that a video is sponsored may improve trust levels with the viewer. This is captured in the following narrative from study participants:

"If I know a video is sponsored, I would still consider it, I mean I would also watch a few other videos to make sure, but I would still trust it, it is honest."

One respondent stated that they would essentially boycott a channel if the vlogger was deemed untrustworthy, also pointing out the legality of the matter. The participants indicated that:

"If it is mentioned that the post is supported by a brand, then it's ok, I will take that review with a pinch of salt and would probably confirm what is being said by searching other reviews. However, if I see that someone is promoting a brand, and it is obviously being supported by the brand, but there is no mention of it anywhere, even in the description link, then I'm not going to look at that reviewer's posts again, I'm just not going to trust them. Like, why wouldn't the brand demand ensure that it is mentioned that this is a sponsored post? I know that it is illegal in the UK to not mention when a post is sponsored, but I'm not sure about the legality of that in Ireland or America."

Here again the issue of trust is reiterated. Whether it is openness by providing pros and cons, or ensuring transparency in the promotions, the underlying factor that has been found to be tested in adverts and promotions is credibility. Credibility builds trust. Once trust has been built, purchasing decisions are enhanced. Millennials have developed their own systems of evaluating credibility and these systems need to be understood if the marketers need to make a breakthrough in this cohort of consumers.

CHAPTER 5 - DISCUSSION

This chapter will build on the key findings from the primary research referring to the literature review.

5.1. Millennials Engagement with User-Generated Videos on YouTube

Millennials are described in the literature as being more than just technically literate. They are described as being wired, plugged in, and connected to digitally streaming information and entertainment (Eisner, 2005). The findings agreed with this statement, with 6/6 respondents mentioning that the devices they used to access YouTube content was largely mobile and some even mentioning video game consoles in addition to laptops and mobile devices.

McGoldrick (2014) suggested that when marketers think of simultaneous media use, they often see the distraction of multiple screens as a challenge, competing for the attention of the consumer. While some of the respondents do use multiple screens simultaneously, their focus doesn't entirely shift away from the videos they are watching. One of the respondents mentioned that she would probably be using her second screen to find additional information on the product mentioned on the first screen.

Primary research showed that their normal viewing habits contained a variety of user-generated content, from unboxing videos to 'how-to' videos, recipes and tutorials. All the respondents mentioned at least one form of UGC as part of their routine. This proves Godes and Mayzlin's (2004) theory that user generated content has more impact than any other form of communication.

Millennials define themselves more by their interests and passions than their careers or even technology (Millennial Marketing, 2016) and the results reflect this. When asked what kinds of video they watched, whether brand related content or user generated content, what emerged were indicators of what they were interested in. For example, the respondent who said that he watched unboxing videos and interviews with developers clearly has a passion for technology, while the respondent who enjoyed make up tutorials and haul videos had an interest in the beauty industry. Consequently, identifying and understanding Millennial passions is an important first step in designing effective marketing programs tailored to niche markets.

There is very little literature available about video engagement, perhaps because it is a relatively new phenomenon. Scholars have not yet even reached a consensus about what engagement is (Calder, Malthouse, and Schaedel, 2009). What is known however, is that when millennials find content interesting, they are more likely to share videos with their friends and also discover new content when videos are shared with them. Research has shown that people are more likely to share videos linked to brands they like (Hayes and King, 2014). Participants in this study discussed that they joined conversations in comment section and shared videos with friends in other social networks.

Engagement is defined broadly as behaviour that includes sharing but also extends to other forms of measurable user involvement. It seems likely that different engagement-related behaviours such as commenting, sharing, “liking” and so on are connected to purchase intent. Mills, (2012) argues that the willingness to consume is highly related to the willingness to distribute, meaning that sharing and views are likely to be positively correlated.

5.2. Advertising on YouTube and Millennials Attitudes Towards UGC

Millennials are a generation who are not influenced by mainstream media, and are much more resistant to advertisements than previous generations (Ciminillo, 2005; Engebretson, 2004; Pesquera, 2005). This theory was proven correct by participants who actively avoided advertisements by installing ad blocking software. A few respondents said that they find ads intrusive and would like to control how many ads they see by skipping them or installing ad blocking software to actively avoid them.

Unlike Generation X who enjoyed the growth of TV, millennials spend less time watching television therefore they don't see TV commercials as much as the previous generation. They spend most of their time on connected devices so for marketers, advertising on YouTube is the best place to find them.

There are a number of formats for advertising on YouTube ranging from videos that play automatically to banners in the videos. This seems to be an effective way to reach audiences who otherwise wouldn't see the ads according to the participants interviewed.

5.3. Millennials Orientation Towards Peer Reviewed Content and Branded Content

A report by Nielsen (2012) found a decline in consumer trust of traditional advertising and a rise in trust for online media due to its ability to incorporate such consumer reviews and postings. Web 2.0, in particular with social media, has turned consumers into participants rather than traditional target audiences (Lefebvre 2007).

The findings thus far determined that millennials prefer peer reviewed content to branded content when searching for product information on YouTube. The reasons as to why peer reviewed content was preferred according to the participants, had to do with levels of trust, demonstration and risk avoidance.

The primary research illustrated that while branded content was great at bringing awareness to the audience, they only highlighted benefits of the products and not the flaws. In order to make an informed decision, the participants wanted to see the product from the perspective of a user. They were interested to know what else was going on

Demonstration of product use was found to provide proof that a product actually works the way the brand claimed it would. Millennials are aware that brands will only highlight the benefits of the product and sometimes have distrust for marketers. Demonstrating how a product is used proves to the audience that it works like it is supposed to and helps form the opinion. This agrees with the study of Dai, Forsythe, & Kwon (2014) when they posited that minimization of risk is important when demos accompany adverts.

Risk is an uncertainty that is normally unavoidable unless online consumers have prior knowledge and experiences to enable them for not making a poor decision (Dai, et.al, 2014). a number of respondents agreed with this statement by mentioning watching reviews or tutorials as ways they would minimize the risk of buying the product.

A high-risk perceiver would always conduct information seeking by obtaining input from User-Generated Content as common practice especially in purchasing either a new product or an expensive product due to the anxiety involved (Gemünden, 1985). This was evidenced by the respondent who discussed the iPhone 6 and how it would bend in one's pocket.

5.4. Role of Source Credibility on Millennials Purchase Decisions

Source credibility has two dimensions according to (Tormala, et al. 2007), expertness and trustworthiness.

According to Aaker (1993), perceived quality can demonstrate a better position in the market and create for the customer a reason to buy while extra price would not be considered as negative factor. This same logic can be applied to the perceived quality of the YouTube videos. Respondents said that if the vloggers channel looks professionally made with great lighting and effects, it created the illusion of quality and could therefore be trusted. This goes to the idea that expertness is a good source of credibility, as great quality creates the illusion that the vlogger knows what they are talking about.

Another factor influencing credibility is the healthy balance of reviews. In order to be considered trustworthy, the reviews shouldn't skew heavily to one side. A review where both the pros and cons are displayed and discussed goes to show that the reviewer did their research and is believable when they present their review to the audience. The study found that millennials prefer to make an informed decision, and pushing a product makes the audience see the reviewer as a brand ambassador.

Another key issue here is one of transparency. The study found that when millennials suspect a post is sponsored but isn't stated as such, all trust for the reviewer disappears. Millennials want honesty, they don't want to feel like they are being tricked into buying a product.

The Committee of Advertising Practice (2015) has clamped down on YouTube and social media users who feature products as the result of a commercial deal without explaining their relationship with the

manufacturer. vloggers, must clearly label videos containing products sent to them as advertising features or sponsored content. This ordinance was implemented to ensure that vloggers are upfront about whether their videos are impacted by companies looking for promotion of themselves or their products. The move encourages vloggers to be fair to their viewers and make it clear when content includes free products, or has been paid for by a company using it as advertising. (CAP, 2015).

Findings from this study agrees with most previous findings from regions other than Ireland on Millennials video consumption habits and consumer behaviour. This shows that millennials are more global than local. The study has highlighted some practices that marketers can consider when trying to reach Millennials with their product information. The study also identified what marketers should not do if they want to reach the Millennial consumer on YouTube. Quality of the video, honesty and trust and reviews form some of the significant findings that draw millennial attention and positively influence purchasing decisions.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION & RECOMENDATIONS

6.0 Introduction

The purpose of this research was to investigate the influence that User-Generated Content (UGC) available on YouTube had on Millennials during the purchasing decision making process.

In order to sufficiently understand how UGC influences the consumer, it was critical that the researcher gained understandable information on how millennials interacted with YouTube, the largest video content sharing platform available and find out how they perceived promotional content on the platform. To achieve this the researcher adopted the qualitative study design. Interviews were used to solicit information from selected members of Generation Y (Millennials). Data collected was presented in the form of themes that arose from the findings and from which the following conclusions and recommendations have been made.

6.1 Conclusions

The findings from the study allowed the researcher to conclude the following;

1. Millennials, the digital generation, use social media to actively seek information that impacts the decisions they make. These decisions include making a purchase, learning skills, keeping in touch with likeminded peers and other life decisions.
2. Traditional mass media which was previously used by marketers is no longer the preferred mode of communicating marketing messages to Millennials. They look to fellow consumers to inform their purchasing decisions through engagement with UGC. They also look to their favourite online personalities, who are consolidating massive followings on platforms like YouTube, for advice when considering purchase decisions.
3. For the visionary marketer, the rise of the social media influencer creates a world of possibilities. It opens up a new channel for brands to connect with millennial consumers more directly, more organically, and at scale.
4. YouTube content creators make stellar marketers, making brand's marketing messages more personal and relevant. They have the attention of the viewer and Millennials actually consider their advice when making purchase decisions.
5. Millennials can block adverts that they deem interrupting or irrelevant to them by installing ad blockers. This presents a great opportunity for the advertisers who need to take the time to create content that cuts through the noise by partnering with influencers to engage and inspire Millennials.
6. The researcher also came to the conclusion that while earlier generations were accustomed to content that has been proven as authentic by the brand, Millennials tend to disagree. Receiving a stamp of authority was a sign that something was credible to earlier generations,

having grown up in a time where the best content was provided by reputable publishers. Anything without that assurance of quality was considered suspicious. By contrast, millennials seem to shun information provided by brands – the ultimate authority on the product favours recommendations made by other people in their peer group. This is a profound finding for marketers who want to remain authentic.

7. It appears evident that User-Generated Content is not just a passing trend, and it would behoove marketers who aren't already collaborating with YouTube influencers to do so as soon as possible. UGC is more than a purchase driver. It has the potential to build a brand. UGC has the possibility to be elevated from an e-commerce tool to a brand building tool.
8. Trust is the most critical component for building a strong brand. Trust drives brand resonance. A brand is ultimately a promise to a consumer, and the strongest brands are ones that consumers trust to deliver on that promise. Trusted brands create an emotional connection with millennial consumers that generates a long-lasting bond. The study concludes that for a brand to be trusted by a Millennial, it must be transparent and accountable for its actions. The UGC that is shared must be genuine, not crafted by the PR department or carefully curated to show only glowing reviews. To build credibility, transparency by the source of information is critical as Millennial customers need to know where the content is coming from.
9. Effective marketing is about speaking to consumers in their own language. This means adopting new technologies and diversifying the arsenal of communication. Brands that do this are able to access their audience's hearts and minds with more ease.
10. Millennials choose convenience when picking a mobile device for viewing YouTube videos.

6.2. Recommendations

The following recommendations have been made with the view of supporting marketing strategists who would like to harness the power of UGC on YouTube to tap into the Millennial mind-set when it comes to making purchase decisions. A Recommendation for further study has also been made.

6.2.1. Recommendations for Marketers

1. In order to build credibility with millennials, the issue of transparency concerning the source of the content is an important marketing strategy. Ensure that customers know where the content is coming from.
2. Purpose to share UGC that goes beyond product features and benefits, ratings, and reviews. Since Millennial consumers have a world of content to choose from, marketers should consider providing value-added content that puts the needs and interests of the customer first, and product or brand second. Content that is too self-serving will turn millennial customers away.

3. Marketers need to use strategies that would give customers a reason to engage with the brand outside of a purchase review, accordingly brand fans need to be prompted to share their brand experiences.
4. Set goals around quality and engagement instead of quantity. Get started by setting goals for what you want UGC to accomplish for your business.

6.2.2. Recommendation for Further Research

- (a) Because Generation X and Generation Y have such different viewing habits, it would be interesting to design a comparison study of the two generations in regards to what kinds of video content influences purchase behaviour.
- (b) More studies should be carried out on branded content on emerging video technology on other popular social media applications like Snapchat, Instagram video, Facebook 360 video, live video formats like Periscope and Meerkat.

6.3. Significance of the Study

This study aimed at increasing marketer's awareness of what drives purchase decisions among social media savvy Millennial consumers. The study has revealed Millennials viewing trends on YouTube and their attitudes towards branded content on YouTube. Understanding how they consume online video content is the first step to help inform marketers about the kind of strategies that can be applied to access the new consumer. The key finding is that branding is not enough for today's consumers, they research, they trust other consumers more than the branded messages and they have more access to information.

Marketers have to rethink their strategies to embrace this globally informed generation who by this study were found to be Marketers on behalf of the Brand through reviews and sharing. The study posits that targeting millennials is an emerging marketing strategy which is more powerful than branding

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GLOSSARY

Appendix 1. Interview Guide

- 1) How would you describe your viewing habits on YouTube? how often, what do you watch,
- 2) What devices do you use to watch YouTube videos?
- 3) How do you feel about adverts on YouTube?
- 4) How do you end up watching product related videos on YouTube?
- 5) How do you use YouTube to discover product information? What kinds of videos do you look for?
- 6) What are your thoughts on product reviews from vloggers on YouTube? do they affect your opinion of the brand in any way?
- 7) How much do you trust product reviews from vloggers on YouTube?
- 8) How would you determine the credibility of a vlogger?
- 9) How do you feel about the content from vloggers whose posts are sponsored by brands? In what way would it alter the perception of the brand sponsoring the post?
- 10) When considering a purchase Does it make a difference to you if the product information is brand generated video or user generated one and why?

Appendix 2. Consent Form

Consent Form

Please consider this information carefully before deciding whether to participate in this research.

Purpose of the research: To understand the influence that user-generated content on YouTube has on consumer purchase behaviour among Millennials living in Ireland.

What you will do in this research: If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in one interview. You will be asked a series of questions. Some of them will be about how you interact with YouTube on a daily basis. Others will be about your opinions on branded content and content presented by peers online. With your permission, I will record the interviews so I don't have to make so many notes. You will not be asked to state your name on the recording.

Time required: The interview will take approximately 20 minutes.

Risks: No risks are anticipated.

Benefits: This is a chance for you to tell your story about your experiences concerning what you think about the videos you watch on YouTube every day.

Confidentiality: Your responses to interview questions will be kept confidential. At no time will your actual identity be revealed. You will be assigned a random numerical code. Anyone who helps me transcribe responses will only know you by this code. The recording will be destroyed/erased as soon as it has been transcribed. The transcript, without your name, will be kept until the research is complete.

The data you provide will be used for my dissertation to fulfill the requirements for an MSc. in Marketing and may be used as the basis for articles or presentations in the future. Your name or information that would identify you in any publications or presentations will be omitted.

Participation and withdrawal: Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study without penalty. You may withdraw by informing the researcher that you no longer wish to participate (no questions will be asked). You may skip any question during the interview, but continue to participate in the rest of the study.

Agreement:

The nature and purpose of this research have been sufficiently explained and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time without incurring any penalty.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name (print): _____