

Effects of facebook brand marketing on millennials



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Exploring the Effects of Brand Marketing via Facebook on Purchasing Behaviors of Millennials

Millennials, also known as Generation Y, typically refer to the population born from 1980 to 1994 (some say 2000), almost all of whom have come into adulthood by today. Not only do millennials consist of more than 25% (75 million) of the U. S. population (Berger, 2016, p. 103), they also possess the tremendous annual purchasing power of \$200 billion (Solomon, 2015, par. 3). As millennials dominate the whole consumer population of the U. S., they have become the targets and chief subjects of analysis by marketers. Although some might argue that the characteristics of millennials are the general features exhibited by young people, most scholars have agreed on the existence of cohort effects of millennials. Schawbel (2015) argued that they seem not to be influenced at all by advertising (par. 2), but in the meantime purchasing an enormous amount of similar "in trend" merchandises with their peers, including clothes, technology products, food and et cetera. According to Walker (2008), a major question to ask by marketers is, "how do we square this marketing-resistant generation with another point that the experts always make: that many members of Generation Y demand the toniest designer clothes, the best cell phones, the most complex lattes?" (p. 103).

Millennials are too versatile to be analyzed easily, and part of the reason is that their multicultural identities have made them more complex than the generations before them. A Nielsen report published in 2017 shows that 42% of the millennial cohort population has multicultural heritage, or are ambicultural (p. 3). With their multicultural heritage, along with being

exposed to a diversity of cultures on a regular basis, millennials not only developed abroad, unique purchasing habit, but are also influencing the buying decisions of their peers and family profoundly.

When making purchasing decisions, millennials pay a tremendous amount of time and attention choosing the brands that they align their own identities with. A study by the Keller Fay Group released in 2007 claimed that millennials have roughly 145 conversations about brands a week (versus the public average level of 71). Among these conversations, 77 brands are mentioned on average. In addition, brand mentions by millennials are three times as likely to be via digital media and 57% of them cite marketing or media material (p. 4). Consumer behaviors have conventionally been disseminated by television, radio and newspapers, but in the twenty-first century, social media has begun to replace traditional media's enduring and influential role on millennials consumers. Like Uitz (2012) argued, this phenomenon puts forward both an opportunity and a challenge from a marketer's perspective (p. 5).

Reacting to the rapid growth and prevalence of social media among millennials, marketers are tirelessly planting advertisements, brand profiles and sponsored contents onto platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube and Twitter to promote sales. According to Yaakop *et al.*, implementing content that is captivating and relevant drives millennial consumers to communicate with each other and advertise the information to their friends (p. 155). This process, also known as word-of-mouth (WOM), is not only the future of social media marketing communications, but also the key phenomenon that marketers are aiming to probe into.

Past researches have proven the crucial role of Facebook to social media marketers. According to Raice (2012), customers spend between 3.5 and 6 hours daily on Google, YouTube or Facebook, with Facebook having the most time spent at 6 hours average for the user (par. 4). Reacting to this astonishing time commitment, brands have invested heavily on Facebook advertising, trying to make their content seen and engaged by users. Advertising spending on Facebook has risen from 1.87 billion to 3.15 billion in merely one year in 2010 (Advertising Age Staff, 2012). In his work, Eisenberg (2009) points out that surveys show that millennials spend more time online than they do with radio, television, and print, which helps explain why advertisers are so interested in online advertising and why the money advertisers spend for online advertising has been growing so substantially (p. 103). Instead of banner ads, Facebook advertisements either appear on the side column of users' news feed or in between two posts and usually include images of the merchandises and purchase links. Nowadays, more and more Facebook advertisements are strategically matched with the users' search history on Google or online shopping sites by algorithm, in order to maximize click-through rate (CTR). Besides, more and more businesses are allocating large budgets on the establishments and operations of brands Facebook pages, where users are able to stay up-to-date of discounts, new arrivals, events information and et cetera. As Jones et al. (2009) found, Millennials and younger generations carry the internet with them and feel at a loss if not tuned in to what is happening with friends, celebrities, or favorite retailers (par. 7). Facebook is able to influence users' purchase decisions by utilizing their social network - showing them which

friends liked certain brands and what brands influencers and celebrities are currently liking.

While all the data points to millennials and Facebook as paramount and inseparable subjects of investigation, existing studies are lacking and unfruitful in providing a comprehensive theoretical viewpoint of Facebook being utilized as a tool of social media marketing among millennials. Okazaki and Taylor (2013) reported that it was because it took time and was a cumulative process to develop theoretical foundations (p. 58). Bolton et al. (2013) agreed and added that few studies assessed whether there were differences within a separate cohort (p. 247). As discussed above, millennials have unique purchasing behaviors generated partly from their multicultural identities, and therefore studies investigating millennials specifically are in need. Besides, Bolton et al. (2013) pointed out that past studies have focused chiefly on student population and overlooked the fact that a considerable percentage of millennials have entered the workspace and altered their purchasing behaviors accordingly (p. 247). Furthermore, past researches focused on attitudes towards Facebook marketing have yielded different conclusions on the topic. Bannister et al. (2013) concluded that attitudes towards Facebook marketing communications were negative or indifferent, whereas Chandra et al. (2012) found a significantly positive behavioral propensity.

Consequently, this study seeks to explore the following research questions: Firstly, what is the attitude of millennials towards brand marketing via Facebook? Secondly, what impact does brand marketing through Facebook have on millennials intention-to-purchase? Thirdly, what effect does

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engagement with Facebook (time spent, level of activity, number of friends and public accounts followed) have on brand purchase decisions of millennials? Last but not least, what roles do demographic factors (race, gender and et cetera) play in millennials' brand purchases driven by Facebook brand marketing?

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