An understanding of Screenagers attitude towards media

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Abstract

To effectively use marketing communications to reach consumers, it is important to study their attitude towards various media. To elaborate, it is an understanding the perspicacity of various screen based and non screen based media. Today's teenagers are able to quickly and easily integrate new media technologies and multiple channels into their busy lifestyles. To effectively use marketing communications to reach this big consumer of tomorrow, it is important to study their attitude towards various media - both - screen based and non screen based. Being born in the digital area, these teenagers take technology for given and demand instant access to information.

This study of screenagers is of relevance to academia, marketing practitioners as well as public policy makers and sociologists. Attitude and preferences towards various media have implications for psychological development of an individual, impacts inter-personal orientation of an individual, has broader socio-economic dimensions and is of obvious interest to marketers. Marketing managers are ultimately concerned with influencing behavior. A clear understanding of what are the determinant and influencing attributes is essential for marketing professionals in order to design effective marketing and communication mix aimed at this target audience.

***Keywords:** Screenagers, Screen based media, Interactive Digital Media, Attitudes, internet usage, mobile phones*

Introduction

Danny Bloom has extensively popularized the word screening which means the act of reading on screens. Bloom has been writing voraciously on how the English vocabulary needs to include a new word for reading content online – screening. As more and more teenagers engage in reading content downloaded on various screens, they are screening and not reading according to Bloom. With this new definition, one could conjecture that what we do online is not reading per se, but "screening."

Screenagers is a term that combines two words to describe "teenagers who are online" and who are "always looking at the screen." The term was first coined in 1996 by Douglas Rushkoff. Rushkoff used it to describe 12-18 year olds who have developed great affinity for electronic communication,

computer, cell phone, and television. Universally referred to as Teens, but they're really Screenagers. They are teenagers who have been born in the computer era, have been surrounded by electronic communication from birth. They have from day one never known of a world without computers and televisions. They are the youngest members of the "Millennial Generation". They have been referred to as Echo boomers to signify the children of baby boomers. They are also known as the Net Gen or simply as Millennials. Members of the Net Generation (Net Gen) were born between 1979 and 1994, and have been raised in a socially networked technological environment. Being a member of the Millenial generation, they have not known life without internet.

According to researched insights, Marc Prensky has written about these teenagers' communication and information-

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seeking behaviors. Accordingly his studies indicate their behavior towards digital technology of being distinctly different from those of previous generations. He refers to them as the Digital Natives as against the generation prior to the Net Gen who are referred as Digital Immigrants. Digital Immigrants are all born prior to the Net Gen. They have adopted the new technology and have not been born with digital media or electronic communication all around. In their book, Growing Up Online Young People and Digital Technologies Sandra Weber and Shanly Dixon agree with the term digital native that was coined by Mark Prensky (2001) to refer to people born and raised surrounded by and comfortable with evolving digital languages. While they don't object to the term being used to describe the Net generation, they disagree with the oppositional term "immigrant," which he used to refer to the adult brigade or cross-over generation.

Being born in the digital area, almost always, the screenagers take technology for given and demand instant access to information. It is like they do not store or have any memory of their own - if they need to look up information they always have the option to Google it. They tend to be result oriented and practical when looking for information.Used to turning to the Web for help, Google and Wikipedia have become familiar and trusted resources for information queries. Their entire world revolves around being connected and information sharing. As mentioned by Chuck Thomas and Robert McDonald, it is an "infosphere" with blurred boundaries linking work, home, and recreation. Online communication styles for the Net Gen have revolve around instant messaging (IM) and chat rooms. In the book Educating the Net Generation, the authors have quoted that generation who have a great affinity for screens prefers to learn actively and by discovery and processes visual information efficiently.

Watching television and videos, being on Social Networking Sites like twitter and facebook, surfing the Internet, texting and chatting on the cell phone, playing computer or video games is the daily routine of the screen addicts. It is evident that young people are immersed in screens and spending more of their time staring at screens than ever before. The use of technology is not a great task for these 24/7 screenagers. They learn and adapt to tech developments without any difficulty. They also learn to inter twine and integrate the same to their gadgets and lifestyle. They may use it with ease, although their knowledge of these technologies may be shallow. For them mastering "how to use" is important than understanding what type of technology is less important. Hence their tech use knowledge is high where as the actual tech knowledge is almost always shallow.

What make these screenagers different from their predecessors are not just their demographic details, but they are the first to grow up surrounded by digital media. Computers and other digital technologies, such as digital cameras, are common place to Net Gen members. They work with them at home, in school, and they use them for entertainment. Increasingly these technologies are connected to the Internet, an expanding web of networks which is attracting a million new users monthly. It is therefore no wonder that as they are constantly surrounded by technology, today's youth are accustomed to its strong presence in their lives.

As this demographic becomes a force to be reckoned with, given their large numbers and given their influential power, there are large number of extensive studies being undertaken to understand them. Researched insights from around the globe confirm that screenagers are opinionated, are open to experimentation and indulge in fun activities. They are independent in their thought process, prejudiced and rebellious too. Although independent, they feel the need to follow the pack and to belong. They have social qualities that come with the comfort of being in a group and a feeling of being wanted. Being the offspring's of baby boomers, they are better educated and mobile. They are digital to the core - they use smartphones which are digital, their games have become digital, their music is digital and the television they love is also using digital technology.

In the Neilson report on Kids Today: How the Class of 2011 Engages with Media, they state that The teenage demographic spends the least amount of time watching television, talking on the phone or using personal computers. The report states that it is Mobile technology that is being used the most. It elaborate that Teens are using text messages to communicate with their social circle over twice as much as any other demographic. And teens also watch more mobile video content than any other demographic.

Review of Literature

An Australian study published by the Alannah and Madeline Foundation, mentions that young people see technologies, especially the internet, as a fundamental part of their social life and the building of their identity. And among these technologies, the mobile phone has become the vital part of the young people's social lives. The young adults view it as an extension of their personalities and this is seen when they personalize it with colourful stickers, ringtones and even mobile covers. The latest model of the mobile phone is what many have on top of their inspirational lists.

Besely (2008) has coined the phrase "always on" to describe young people as they are constantly fused with technology of one kind or another. In Canada, the average time spent by young people (12-17 year olds) online was about 13 hours per week.

Another study conducted by Third et al confirms the research done in Australia. Majority of the young people interact with one another and the world around them using the internet or mobile phone. They use it to source information, engage, construct and maintain social networks. The continual use of technologies have had an effect on young people's relationships with one another.

The rapid innovations and development in mobile technologies and the broadband technologies have resulted in the full fledged growth of the web. The ordinary cell phone has been transformed into a smartphone. It has become a gadget that has become an extension of one self. So not only has the improvement been dramatic, it has now managed to create a powerful presence in the lives of young people. Today's children and even infants are growing up in an omnipresent digital media. In this digital media world, instant messaging, virtual reality, social networks have become ingrained in their professional, social and personal lives. Almost all experiences have the digital connection.

It is no surprise that the impact of screens is so high that members of this generation of young adults are living their lives online. As Advertising Age reported, "more than 16 million children aged 2 to 11 are online, making for a growth rate of 18% in the period 2004 to 2009-the biggest increase among any age group, according to Nielsen." The same report explains that according to a Nielsen Online survey conducted in July 2009, "Time spent online for children ages 2 to 11 increased from about 7 hours to more than 11 hours per week, or a jump of 63% over five years."

Richard Watson who is the author of the bestselling book - FUTURE MINDS, How the digital age is changing our minds, why this matters, and what we can do about it, has written extensively on screenagers. He believes that the technology ubiquity and electronic flood are resulting in significant shifts in both attitudes and behavior.He has devoted the entire opening chapter of the book on screenagers.

In the book Watson has mapped the characteristics of screenagers in the premier chapter. He mentions about their multitasking, parallel processing ability. He further writes that screenagers prefer images over words and also read text in a non linear fashion. The screenager brain is hyper alert to

numerous streams of information, even if their attention span and understanding can be pretty trivial. The screenager brain is over reactive to the multiple information and screens that they are exposed to.

The screen ubiquity, fast electronic communication and a lifestyles that is dominated by technology 24/7 are resulting in significant shifts in behavior and attitude. Renowned neuroscientist Michael Merzenich has tabulated in his article "Re wiring of the brain" that the internet has the power to review and hence change the fundamentals of our brain, leading it to be "massively remodeled"Marc Prensky has documented in his writings what Dr. Bruce Perry of Baylor College of Medicine has researched. He write that different kinds of experiences lead to different brain structures. As a result of how today's teenagers are growing, exposed to digitial communications, it is likely that their brains have physically changed and are different from the previous generations. Lazio has made a statement that "Screenagers are the new generation that are software and hardware savvy and are programmed to react to a blink of light in a nano-second".

Research Insights

Children who are as young as 5 years are spending an average of 42 hours every week engaging with some sort of screen. This translates into a staggering 6 hours every single day. Teenagers and young adults and older people are spending many more hours glued to the screens as mobile phones, laptops and iPods become the central forces of everyday existence around the world. The phenomena is not restricted to office and schools but its across households too. Leisure time at home is also spent online or watching TV. It could also be spent watching TV, texting and being online all at the same time. Information technology is woven throughout a screenager's life. These trend, although, emphasise on the generational terms, can be applicable across age groups. Age may be less significant dimension than exposure to technology. People across age groups who are very prolific users of IT tend to have similar traits as that of the Net Gen. Infact, sometimes, the use of technology is so unavoidable, in our work and personal lives, it is impossible to not keep staring at screens.

The screenagers are downloading content from the web, which they may not be reading well enough from want of time as they are busy with screens. Or worse they maynotevenbe reading it. The smartphones, ipods have a memory of thousands of songs. Probably songs that haven't been heard or played by the user himself, or when screenagers jump from one song to another clip without scarcely even listening to the selected song. Motorola has used a phrase called "micro boredom" which

addresses this phenomena of describing the minuscule free time available. Influenced by this addiction to being constantly engaged, even in very tiny available slice of free time, a significant number of product development activities have taken place. Motorola has used this concept to bring about many new product ideas into the market. Micro boredom is accompanied by increase restlessness.

Mobile marketing-combining text messaging, mobile video, and other new applications-is one of the fastest growing digital commerce platforms throughout the world, and a particularly effective way to reach and engage children. As a recent Kaiser Family Foundation study noted, "Over the past five years, there has been a huge increase in [cell phone] ownership among 8- to 18-year-olds: from 39% to 66%. The cell phones have become true multi-media devices, in fact, young people now spend more time listening to music, playing games, and watching TV on their cell phones than they spend talking on them." According to the latest industry data, roughly half of all children use a mobile phone by age 10, and by age 12, fully three fourths of all children have their own mobile phone. As one media executive commented, the mobile phone is "the ultimate ad vehicle - the first one ever in the history of the planet that people go to bed with."

Mobile advertising will increasingly rely on interactive video and has become firmly embedded in "mobile social networks." Advertising on mobile devices will be especially powerful, since it will be able to target users by combining both behavioral and location data. Ads on mobile phones will be able to reach young consumers when they are near a particular business and offer electronic pitches and discount coupons.

Behavioral targeting uses a range of online methods-including cookies and invisible data files-to learn about the unique interests and online behaviors through the tracking and profiling of individual users. Through a variety of new techniques, marketers use this data to create personalized marketing and sales appeals based on a customer's unique preferences, behaviors, and psychological profile.

In today's dynamic media backdrop, ubiquity of digital media and constant need to be connected, it is going to be a challenge to reach out to consumers. Consumers are open to wide information and have more choice and more control over what media to use, when and how. Consumers are going to make full use of the knowledge that they are being exposed to while making decisions. These decisions could be routine or crucial to them. The media explosion and choice is going to be a big factor in making up their minds when picking products, brands or any kind of media offerings. They will also tend to be far less loyal

and will be open to all the plethora of options that are available at the click of the mouse on the internet or a flick of the finger on the smartphones.

It is common sense and every day knowledge gained through experiential evidences that conclude that media communications does have an emphatic influence in creating awareness about products. Along with this it can be added that word of mouth communications are very effective in forming or reinforcing attitudes once they reach a person (Engel, Kollat, and Blackwell, 1968).

The popular press is full of information about the adoption of new media, as well as the subjective and speculative information about its impact on people's lifestyle. Computers, Internet, cell phones are changing the way people communicate and also changing the way people are communicated to. Computers and information technologies have become important components within societies' and peoples' lives globally. The mobile phone is increasingly perceived as a multi-purpose device (Hulme and Peters, 2001) that has a series of social connotations that are reshaping our ways of interactions (Brown, Green and Harper, 2001). Besides being a communication tool through voice telephony and SMS text messaging, it is an entertainment device through games, a locational device, an information tool, an alarm clock, and an agenda and address book. In this way, the mobile phone covers different needs and motivations (Lin, 1996) of the customer.

As Leung and Wei (2000) found, mobile telephony not only provides the obvious enhancement of mobility, but also six additional gratifications of the mobile phone are fashion/status, affection/sociability, relaxation, immediate access, instrumentality and reassurance.

Siemens conducted a Mobile Lifestyle Survey in the Asia region in 2001, which reported new ways of behavior of the Filipino youth. They used their phone not only to keep in touch via voice or SMS messaging, but as well to exchange jokes (89%) or to cheat during exams (17%). In a qualitative study carried out by mobilethink (2001), it has been found that there are significant differences of mobile phone usage and especially text messaging between teens (age13-15) and young adults (age 18-22). While teens seem to be more lifestyle driven and are more cost conscious just looking for simple phones that are easy to use and offer cheap calls and SMS, young adults are looking for more efficiency driven applications. Little quantitative empirical evidence exists about how technology adoption and literacy influences the use of mobile telephony among young people.

Public attitudes towards advertising have been a major issue in advertising research. Recent studies (Schlosser, Shavitt, & Kanfer, 1999) suggested that consumers generally have negative attitudes towards advertising. Given the apparent decline in positive consumer responses to advertising, it is unclear how consumers perceive advertising messages on their mobile phones, what would make consumers perceive mobile advertising differently, and how their attitudes affect their behaviors. It is worthwhile to explore what consumers' attitudes towards mobile advertising are and whether their attitudes will lead to positive or negative behavioral intentions. Because there has been little study about attitudes toward mobile advertising, many empirical studies of attitudes toward mobile advertising (Tsang, Ho, and Liang, 2004) borrowed the factors from Internet advertising to predict customer's attitudes, patterns and preferences. Mobile advertising shares many features with Internet advertising. Both are emerging media used to deliver digital texts, images and voices with interactive, immediate, personalized, and responsive capabilities (Tsang, Ho, and Liang, 2004). A review of empirical studies in this area shows that the theories of Reasoned Action (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975) and Acceptance Model (Davis, 1989) are among the most popular theories used to explain online shopping behavior.

Agreeing with Prensky, the researcher can say that the media behaviors, media attitudes and media relations of the new breed of screenagers are very often different from previous generations. In a white paper published by Alan White, Judy Vogel and Julian Baim, Mickey Galin, Bob Murnane, they found that Gen Y were much more passionate about emergent media while the older (boomer) consumers are more reluctant adopters. The boomers would most use the new media as an extension of the traditional media behaviors while the Net Gen would more likely to adopt new media behaviors. It is safe to state that as they think differently, their attitudes would most certainly be influenced by this different behavior.

Screenagers behave differently towards media. Furthermore, it also emphasizes that they need to be considered differently while formulating marketing strategies and communications plans. And this communications needs to be different not just for offerings that are directly targeted at screenagers. In the 24/7 always connected world, consumers will continue to control media experiences.

How they react to new media is important. By that it would mean what is their attitude towards new media. By new media one may be referring to a variety of primarily digital media offerings, ranging from broadband internet access, to Bluetooth technologies, to TV on phone.

Conclusions & Directions for Further Research

It is important to study screenagers likely long-term behavior and their related pathways between different media types. While the outcome is not to be able to predict the future, but to put forth researched evidence that can help predict their behavior towards various media and give insights and directions on their media consumption patterns.

The avenues for further research can be undertaken are to understand screenagers information seeking and navigation pathways. Beyond the typical time spent, engagement and reach, frequency - to seek to understand why they use the media they use and how and where those choices drive them. This will have implications to the business world and help in designing communications that are targeted at screenagers.

The researchers strongly feel that a phase two of the review study needs to be conducted, with focus on studying attitudes of young adults in the age group of 12 to 19 years. Today's teenagers are able to quickly and easily integrate new media technologies and multiple channels into their busy lifestyles. To effectively use marketing communications to reach this big consumer of tomorrow, it is important to study their attitude towards various media - both - screen based and non screen based. Marketing managers are ultimately concerned with influencing behavior. Although of paramount importance, it is often difficult to directly influence these attitudes that ultimately result in buying behavior or positive attitudes. A clear understanding of what are the determinant and influencing attributes is essential for marketing professionals in order to design effective marketing and communication mix aimed at this target audience.

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