

CHAPTER 1

MILLENNIALS USHER A POST-DIGITAL ERA: THEORIZING HOW GENERATION Y ENGAGES WITH DIGITAL MEDIA

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ABSTRACT

Dubbed as the “first digital generation,” the millennials (or Generation Y) have been ensconced in digital technologies throughout their lives. As a demographic cohort, the eldest members of Generation Y were the first to reach adulthood by 2001, which heralded the third millennium, and were, therefore, called the millennials.

This research study theorizes that the millennials are ushering an emerging post-digital era that is redefining how we live, work, and play. By situating media consumption within a cross-disciplinary context of mediated engagement, this study analyzed how millennials consume media based on a 2019 meta-analytical research analysis of 22 cross-disciplinary studies, published between 2015 and 2019.

This research study analyzes how millennials curate and engage with digital media and information content in the midst of incessant evolutions of their identity, media use, and digital life. This study explicates six theoretical insights into how millennials consume information and engage with media. In their pursuit of easy access to media, the millennials get most of their information and media content from social media.

In theorizing how millennials engage with digital media, this study explicates important conceptual trends such as incidental news exposure (INE), which refers

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to people stumbling upon news stories they otherwise would not have purposefully seen or sought. INE spawns “bumpers” who involuntarily bump into news items, as opposed to “seekers” who actively search or seek news content. This leads to the news-finds-me mindset among some passive news consumers who rely and expect other active news consumers to share important news and information.

Keywords: Post-digital era; Generation Y media engagement; media consumption by Generation Y or millennials; millennials’ media consumption; millennials’ media engagement; digital media engagement

Millennials have often led older Americans in their adoption and use of technology, and this largely holds true today ... More than nine-in-ten Millennials (92%) own smartphones, compared with 85% of Gen Xers ..., 67% of Baby Boomers ... and 30% of the Silent Generation Similarly, the vast majority of Millennials (85%) say they use social media.

Pew Research Center’s January 2018 survey data on technology use of Americans across generations. (Jiang, 2018, para. 1–2).

Dubbed as Generation Y, the millennials lead in adopting technology, as enunciated in the epigraph. Born between 1981 and 1996, the millennials (or Generation Y) are called the “first digital generation” because they have been ensconced in digital technologies throughout their lives. As a demographic cohort, Generation Y was the first generation to attain adulthood by 2001, which heralded the third millennium, and was, therefore, called the millennials. In a January 2018 Pew survey, almost all millennials (97%) said they use the Internet, and 28% of them said they accessed the Internet only with smartphones, without traditional broadband service at home (Jiang, 2018, para. 1 & 2).

Besides embracing digital life, the millennials constitute human history’s largest generation with 1.8 billion people, about a quarter of the global population (Tilford, 2018). In 2019, the millennials were America’s largest generation, totaling 73 million and surpassing the baby boomers (Fry, 2018).

Over the years, media consumption has varied among different age groups. Newspapers and television were popular with the Silent generation (people born 1928–1945). The Internet significantly transformed media use among baby boomers (born 1946–1964) and Generation X (those born 1965–1980). The rise of social media has significantly transformed media consumption of millennials or Generation Y. Compared to other demographic cohorts, millennials have also distinguished themselves as the most educated generation.

In this backdrop, the research reported in this study analyzed the influence of the digital media and the associated technologies on enhancing the millennials’ *Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC)*. By scope and definition, ICC connotes an individual’s ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in various cultural contexts. Key ICC components include motivation, self-knowledge, cognition, and tolerance for uncertainty. In her 25-year review of scholarship on ICC, Martin (2015) identified the “ABC” (affect, behaviors, and cognition/knowledge) triumvirate in most ICC models among other significant theoretical contributions. Martin suggested future theoretical research into ICC

should focus on frameworks that capture more holistic, relational, and spiritual view of ICC, thereby moving beyond individual-focused, reductionistic models (Martin, 2015, pp. 6–7). Martin called for future ICC studies to acknowledge that power relations are part of every intercultural encounter (Martin, 2015, pp. 6–7). Martin urged researchers to focus on conceptualizations that acknowledge the fluid, dynamic, contested nature of cultures, multiple cultural identities, and intercultural interactions. Such focus would revamp the existing practice of implicit conceptualization of culture with its extant focus on national culture groups presumed to be homogenous. Although far from being homogenous, the millennials, albeit increasingly fragmented, provide many opportunities to study their media use, as the next section outlines.

STUDY OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH METHOD

Responding to Martin's clarion call (2015), this study focuses on how technology connects the millennial generation across the geographical spectrum creating more awareness and acceptance of multiculturalism. Pertinent to the "Mediated Millennials" theme of the *Emerald Studies in Media and Communications*, this study identifies six theoretical constructs that explicate how millennials, as the first digital generation, are ushering an emerging post-digital era that is redefining how we live, work, and play. By situating media consumption within a cross-disciplinary context of media engagement, this study analyzed how millennials consume digital media based on a 2019 meta-analytical research analysis that integrates 22 cross-disciplinary studies, published between 2015 and 2019. The studies were selected for their relevance to millennial's media consumption, participation, and production. We analyzed each study to derive key theoretical perspectives and conceptual ideas that explicate the social, cultural, and multidisciplinary implications relating to millennials' engagement with the digital media. Informed by an array of conceptual, analytical and empirical insights, this research study explicates six theoretical perspectives into how millennials engage with the digital media.

Millennials engage with the media and influence technological innovations with their media consumption. Media technologies such as AirDrop, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and Spotify, to name a few, have transformed millennials' identity, media use, and digital life. The research reported in this study spawned broader theoretical frameworks with an abundance of theoretical, conceptual and empirical fragments, whose interrelationships and relevance represent the repertoire of communication processes that inform how millennials consume media. In the spirit of theoretical consolidation, this study critically analyzed the relevance and implications of the research findings to revisit and expand epistemological and historical foundations relating to millennials' media use. This study integrated relevant theories, media models and core concepts that inform media use across different societies in our globalized and digital media ecosystem.

Research into millennials often connotes age-specific generational monikers such as the Silent Generation, the baby boomers, Generation X, Generation Y or

the millennials, and Generation Z or post-millennials among other monikers with seemingly confusing connotations. The next section defines each generational group.

Defining the Millennials' (Generation Y) Demographic Cohort

This study identifies age-specific generational segments based on [Pew Research Center \(2019\)](#) categories. People born between 1928 and 1945 are in the Silent generation, baby boomers were born between 1946 and 1964, and Generation X members were born between 1965 and 1980. Dubbed as millennials, Generation Y designates people born between 1981 and 1996. Post-millennials or Generation Z constitutes people born in 1997 or after. With no chronological endpoint, the Generation Z age ranges vary by analysis and the year of study, according to the Pew Research Center ([Pew Research Center, 2019](#)).

We interchangeably use the terms Generation Y and millennials in this study because they refer to the same age group of people born between 1981 and 1996. The next section previews the six theoretical constructs explicating the news consumption habits of Generation Y or the millennials.

STUDY SIGNIFICANCE: SIX THEORETICAL CONSTRUCTS FOR MILLENNIALS' MEDIA USE

In theorizing how the millennial generation engages with the news media, this study presents six theoretical constructs relating to mediated millennials. We will discuss specific details of each theoretical construct later in this study, but for the sake of convenience, here is a quick preview.

First theoretical construct: Millennials usher a post-digital era. Generation Y manifests the advent of a post-digital era. Millennials have actively adopted digital innovations as the first digital generation ensconced in digital technologies throughout their lives. Digital technology is no longer an aspiration but an essential element in our lives. Technology-driven changes are transitioning us from the present digital age toward a new reality of the post-digital world that is redefining how we live, work and play.

Second theoretical construct: Millennials consume news through multiple media platforms. In today's multifaceted media environment, millennials consume news with a somewhat promiscuous preference for platforms ranging from mobile to television. A plethora of emerging news sources enables millennials to switch between news platforms on social and digital media for their news. To that end, leading news organizations offer news on multiple platforms.

Third theoretical construct: Millennials depend on social media for news, entertainment, and a sense of connection. Despite their concerns about

inaccurate information in social media, millennials live, literally and virtually, in digitally networked spaces because they cherish the interactive experience.

Fourth theoretical construct: Millennials cherish digital media and immersive storytelling. Millennials prefer media storytelling with multifaced features such as video, visuals, audio, data-driven content that engages them.

Fifth theoretical construct: Millennials are an influential demographic cohort. With increased influence and spending power, millennials are an influential demographic cohort that has hindered or helped innovations in media and journalism. Media consumption trends of millennials have influenced industry-wide changes in news content, entertainment, marketing, political communication, and beyond.

Sixth theoretical construct: News-Finds-Me Mindset affects millennials. The *news-finds-me* mindset occurs when passive news consumers rely and expect active news consumers to share important news and information. *Incidental news exposure* (INE), the moniker for stumbling upon news, has become the dominant mode of information acquisition for millennials and other population groups. INE spawns “bumpers” who involuntarily bump into news items, as opposed to “seekers” who actively search or seek news content.

The millennials’ media consumption, participation, and production signify theoretical insights that focus on digital media use and information engagement. These theoretical constructs signify important issues relating to media use by millennials, as outlined in the ensuing six sections. The next section enunciates key elements of the first theoretical construct.

FIRST THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT: MILLENNIALS USHER A POST-DIGITAL ERA

This section explicates the first theoretical construct, which posited, “Generation Y manifests the advent of a post-digital era. Millennials have actively adopted digital innovations as the first digital generation ensconced in digital technologies throughout their lives. Digital technology is no longer an aspiration but an essential element in our lives. Technology-driven changes are transitioning us from the present digital age toward a new reality of post-digital world that is redefining how we live, work and play.” In analyzing how millennials consume news media, we would be remiss to ignore important theoretical perspectives relating to emerging post-digital trends that are central to the theoretical framework of this study.

The fruition of Gibson’s cyberspace in the twenty-first century: Science fiction visionary William Gibson (1984) famously prophesied cyberspace as “a consensual hallucination” of “[u]nthinkable complexity.” While writing *Neuromancer* on a manual typewriter, Gibson delineated cyberspace as a computer-generated landscape where characters enter by “jacking in” (Gibson, 1984, p. 127 & 246) or plugging electrodes directly into sockets implanted in the brain. Gibson’s

imaginary world of cyberspace has become a reality over three decades since Gibson conceptualized cyberspace.

In today's digitally connected world, cyberspace connotes both theoretical and practical potential for enhancing communication enriched by interaction in our global village. Contemporary communication mirrors the society it serves. Cyberspace has redefined ideas to enhance the future of communication. Gibson (1984) envisioned cyberspace as a data-rich space where all the information is stored in "every computer in the human system" (p. 51) amidst "gleaming spires of a dozen identical towers of data" (p. 248). Gibson's imaginary world of cyberspace has inspired sustained initiatives for a globally interlinked computing environment fostered by robust connectivity. In a myriad of ways, the twenty-first century digitally networked society manifests Gibson's imaginary world of cyberspace.

New realities of the post-digital era: We are poised to enter a *post-digital era* where almost everyone is digitally connected. Accenture, a global professional services company, defined the "new reality" of the *post-digital era* in these words: "The lightning-speed of change, driven by technology, is taking us from the digital age toward a new reality, one we call the post-digital world" (Daugherty, Carrell-Billiard, & Biltz, 2019, p. 2)

The Accenture report by Daugherty et al. (2019) stated, "Digital is no longer a differentiating advantage – it's now the price of admission" (p. 2.) Expedited by technology saturation, the *post-digital era* connotes an obvious next step of extending the digital prowess. Now that almost everyone is digitally connected, the *post-digital era* sets a higher bar of rising expectations instead of indicating the end of digital technologies. The post-digital era has also prompted industry leaders to explore its potential.

"[A]s digital continues to take hold and the next wave of powerful technologies ushers in a new era ... everything is becoming digital We see examples of this everywhere – in how people shop, work, learn, communicate, decide, respond and even elect leaders," according to the Accenture report (Daugherty, Carrell-Billiard, & Biltz, 2019, p. 2).

Aikat attributes the rise of the *post-digital era* to our rapidly evolving "relationships with digital technologies" and the "assumption that we are constantly connected with the digital realm" (Aikat, 2017, pp. 139–140). Aikat posits the *post-digital era*, as encompassing an extended manifestation of, "Gibson's imaginary world with the dominance of data-driven media decisions, news algorithms, social media apps, mobile media, and ubiquitous computing among other digital innovations that empower media consumers to act as content creators who significantly influence and interact with digital technologies" (Aikat, 2017, p. 140).

Post-digital innovations transform the media ecosystem: Post-digital developments in products, people, platforms and perspectives are transforming the twenty-first century media ecosystem. In the *post-digital era*, digital technologies and media permeate our life, work, play and community. The post-digital media ecosystem mandates use of digital devices such as the mobile phone to accomplish daily tasks ranging from authenticating with two-factor verification our identity with digital devices, accessing news, information, and entertainment

through smart devices, and a range of other functions that require digital connectivity. People without a requisite digital device and connectivity will be devoid of these services. We are, therefore, dependent on the power of the data-driven digital devices, which have made us subservient to automated mobile apps functions ranging from waking up with mobile phone alarms to paying with our smartphones.

The impact of these post-digital dimensions extends beyond our personal lives. For instance, the digital media ecosystem has forced legacy media groups and journalists to cede their dominance over knowledge, wisdom, and storytelling. This is akin to the sixteenth century Protestant Reformation when religious, political, intellectual, and cultural upheavals splintered the dominance of the Catholic Church. After the Reformation, people turned into their own priests in attempting to communicate directly with God. In a similar way, the twenty-first century media ecosystem has empowered everyone, in theory and through digital technologies, to practice journalism, thereby eroding the previously uncontested and dominant role of the journalist.

In the post-digital era, media consumers have turned into new content creators who deftly mimic journalistic practices and use digital tools to bypass journalists and legacy news media. They create news, information, and entertainment content on platforms as diverse as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, and YouTube to reach out to their target audiences. Such disintermediation of primary news channels has contributed to compelling news outbreaks based on factual reporting. It has accelerated the pace of news dissemination with powerful storytelling and sharing on diverse media channels.

Digital technologies ensconce our lives in the post-digital era. Post-digital developments in media strategies are re-defining the world of news with new trends, themes, tools, and theories. For instance, since 2012, the *New York Times* newspaper has earned more digital revenues from online subscribers than advertisers (Ember, 2016). This was a significant shift because advertising was *New York Times's* traditional revenue source for more than 160 years. Besides the *New York Times*, several other prominent national and international newspapers now boast more digital subscribers than print. These newspapers include the *Financial Times*, the *Times of London*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the *Guardian*, and the *Boston Globe* (Benton, 2019). In many ways, these newspapers' rise in digital revenue indicates post-digital trends in media.

Post-digital trends have transformed other media realms. Empowered with digital tools, everyone, from dictators and democrats to demagogues and divas, is a content creator influencing the media agenda. By circumventing the once critical role of journalists as media gatekeepers, the content creators strategically engage their audience with persuasive messages and customized content on multiple platforms. The post-digital media milieu is replete with self-publishers. Look at top brands, sports teams and official entities ranging from state governments to the White House. Using diverse media channels on both traditional and modern platforms, they run their own media channels. Each owns their own media platforms. The best brands lead the narrative with the power of storytelling and persuasive messages. Storytelling has emerged as the root of social, political, and

economic influence. In the post-digital era, a powerful story lasts forever archived in diverse spaces ranging from the Internet Archive <<https://archive.org/>> to YouTube <<https://www.youtube.com/>>.

The deleterious misuse of media in the post-digital era: Not all is well with post-digital media developments. On the negative side, ubiquitous access to digital media tools for publishing has led to individuals disseminating fake news that disrupt the pursuit of truth, or *veritas*. Such developments have beleaguered journalism. Egregious misuse of social media has fueled sinister situations such as widespread accusations of “fake news.”

Post-digital issues have affected entrepreneurs such as Mark Zuckerberg, who was born in 1984, and, therefore, a millennial. Faced with controversy and criticism, Facebook’s CEO Mark Zuckerberg published on February 16, 2017, a manifesto for building global community (Zuckerberg, 2017). Over 2017 and 2019, Facebook faced manifold privacy scandals ranging from the fake news crisis to Cambridge Analytica’s wholesale data harvesting in wanton violation of consumer privacy. On January 24, 2019, Zuckerberg commemorated Facebook’s 15th anniversary by authoring a *Wall Street Journal* op-ed titled “The Facts About Facebook” to say, “We need your information for operation and security, but you control whether we use it for advertising” (Zuckerberg, 2019). He also ruminated “I built a service people could use to connect and learn about each other. Over the years, billions have found this useful, and we’ve built more services that people around the world love and use every day” (Zuckerberg, 2019).

Zuckerberg’s trials and tribulations give credence to the challenges that accompany the rich-get-richer syndrome of the post-digital era. Even as Zuckerberg reels under Facebook’s privacy concerns, his unabated net worth of \$62.4 billion makes him among the richest millennials.

The rich-get-richer syndrome of the *post-digital* era contributes to the widening digital divide. Nearly 10% of US adults do not use the Internet even as most US residents consider the Internet as an essential element of a meaningful life, according to a Pew Research Center survey in January–February 2019 (Anderson, Perrin, Jiang, & Kumar, 2019).

On the international level, less than half (about 48.2%) of the world’s population do not have adequate Internet access. That digitally deprived segment lives in pre-digital darkness and devoid of opportunities in the post-digital era. There is a significant digital divide in Internet penetration rates between the developed and developing nations (ITU, 2016). Compared to 81% Internet penetration in developed countries, the developing countries lag with 45.3%, according to International Telecommunication Union (ITU), the United Nations specialized agency for information and communication technologies (ITU, 2018).

Post-digital era ushers the fourth industrial revolution: Notwithstanding these *post-digital era* inequities, we are in the midst of the Fourth Industrial Revolution with a range of new technologies merging the physical, digital, and biological worlds (Schwab, 2016). German engineer-economist Klaus Schwab, who founded in 1971 the World Economic Forum and spurred Centre for Fourth Industrial

Revolution (C4IR), has predicted that the Fourth Industrial Revolution will fundamentally alter how we live and work in developments affecting all disciplines, economies, industries and governments, with challenging ideas about what it means to be human (Schwab, 2016).

Post-digital technologies will fuel the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Informed by perspectives on technological evolution, Schwab credits the Fourth Industrial Revolution with “ramifications more profound” and “more significant” than in any “prior period of human history” and with the evolution of succeeding innovations (Schwab, 2016). While the First Industrial Revolution mechanized production with water and steam power, the Second Industrial Revolution created mass production with electric power. The Third Industrial Revolution automated production with electronics and information technology (Schwab, 2018, para 2). Schwab placed the Third Industrial Revolution toward the middle of the twentieth century when the digital revolution began. Schwab predicted that the effect of the Third Industrial Revolution will catalyze the Fourth Industrial Revolution’s fusion of technologies that blurs physical, digital, and biological spheres (Schwab, 2018, para 2).

Relevant to the post-digital era, the Fourth Industrial Revolution will also spawn complex challenges. In his 2016 book, Schwab envisioned the Fourth Industrial Revolution as an opportunity to implement innovative ideas to harness change and shape a better future with technology empowering people instead of replacing them, progress serving society but rarely disrupting it; and innovators respecting moral and ethical boundaries instead of flouting them. Envisioning the fourth industrial revolution as “different in scale, scope and complexity from any that have come before,” Schwab called for developing new frameworks that advance progress (Schwab, 2016).

Mired in the humdrum of a technology surfeit, the sustaining dictum of the post-digital era is to inform and influence your audience with the power of a great story. The post-digital world emphasizes human factors such as high-touch (or human impact) instead of high-tech in a society satiated with digital technologies. Digital access is as ubiquitous as the air we breathe. We, therefore, should take time to be away from technology because it is less stressful and a relief from the over-consuming world of constant digital interaction. Ignoring such over-consuming pressures of technology, millennials are permanently connected to digital technologies and seem addicted to their digital devices. The next section enunciates key elements of the second theoretical construct.

SECOND THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT: MILLENNIALS PREFER MANY PLATFORMS

This section explicates the second theoretical construct, which pointed out “Millennials consume news through multiple media platforms. In today’s multi-faceted media environment, millennials consume news with a somewhat promiscuous preference for platforms ranging from mobile to television. A plethora of emerging news sources enable millennials to switch between news platforms on

social and digital media for their news. To that end, leading news organizations offer news on multiple platforms.”

Unlike older generations who were loyal to one or two news sources, millennials get their news through multiple media platforms such as news websites, television, radio, mobile media, and social media channels.

Diehl, Barnidge, and [Gil de Zúñiga \(2018\)](#) developed a multiplatform news use index (MPI), to measure the amount of news consumed and the different types of media. They analyzed a nationally representative survey from the United States to conclude that multiplatform news was also positively related to alternative modes of political engagement ([Diehl et al., 2018](#)). Using their MPI scale, Diehl et al. measured the amount of news consumed and the different types of media to identify overlaps. They concluded that “Low MPI reflects reliance on one or two communication modalities (low diversity), and high MPI reflects reliance on several media and technological modalities (high diversity)” ([Diehl et al., 2018](#), p. 3). High diversity of news led to better political engagement ([Diehl et al., 2018](#)). When people interacted more on news platforms, they seemed more politically engaged (p. 7).

Multiplatform news positively related to alternative modes of political engagement. The differences among generations in media consumption affect political participation. “The shift toward multi-platform news use occurs in tandem with changes in the way people engage in democratic society” ([Diehl et al., 2018](#), p. 16). [Diehl et al. \(2018\)](#) inferred that when people increased their use of different media platforms to consume news, they absorb more information leading to increased political participation (p. 7). Our media consumption “will determine the nature of democratic society in the coming decades” because our media consumption fosters more political movements in our society, [Diehl et al. \(2018](#), p. 18) concluded. The next section explicates key elements of the third theoretical construct.

THIRD THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT: MILLENNIALS DEPEND ON SOCIAL MEDIA

This section explicates the third theoretical construct, which stated “Millennials depend on social media for news, entertainment, and a sense of connection. Despite their concerns about inaccurate information in social media, millennials live, literally and virtually, in digitally networked spaces because they cherish the interactive experience.”

Compared to other demographic groups, millennials have stronger affinity for online convenience and place greater reliance upon online information than Generation X. Millennials cherish the convenience of social media. Millennials enjoy how readily accessible news is on the social media platforms they also use for social interaction, about 21% of people said that convenience was their favorite thing about social media as a source of news. Younger generations regularly

access social media sites to engage and interact with people anyway, so getting informed about current news makes it easy.

Social media makes millennials more informed (Schomer, 2018). When evaluating a specific topic, concept, method or decision, people rely on *availability heuristic*, defined as a mental shortcut that relies on immediate and compelling examples in a person's mind. The concept of *availability heuristic* explicates why people seek and absorb information available to them. With dependable access to information, social media nurtures *availability heuristic* by offering news and information just a screen swipe or click away (Shearer & Matsa, 2018). Availability heuristic explains why people are inclined to engage and absorb information that is readily available to them because it is readily available at our fingertips and involves least effort to seek it. Social media allow people to access news content that they would have otherwise missed if they did not see it on social media. Millennials are able to learn about, and engage with, information that they would not have sought out had the information not been presented to them (Shearer & Matsa, 2018; Matsa & Shearer, 2018).

Millennials consider convenience as important when access news content (Whittle, 2018). Millennials prefer to get their news quickly and efficiently via social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter. According to a 2018 Pew study, in 2017, about 67% of people accessed news from social media sites. In 2018, nearly 68% of people were getting news from social media, indicating that, while people are still getting their information from social media, the number of people that do so is not increasing as quickly as it had in the past and is beginning to plateau (Shearer & Matsa, 2018; Matsa & Shearer, 2018). This indicates a possible opportunity for other innovations to disrupt social media's prominence.

Millennials appreciate the convenience for social media, but not the price of credibility. While millennials use social media as a source of news, over half, around 57%, expect the news they see on social media to be inaccurate (Shearer & Matsa, 2018). This is important because social media platforms are becoming news sources themselves as more and more individuals decide to derive news from them (Antunovic, Parsons, & Cooke, 2018, p. 634).

Social media news consumers are wary of inaccuracies. While millennials use social media as a source of news, over half, around 57%, expect inaccuracies in news from social media. Recent survey trends posit a growing public distrust over news content on social media. Inaccuracy is the primary concern among millennials regarding news on social media. More than 42% people who prefer social media sources to get news expect the news they see to be largely inaccurate (Shearer & Matsa, 2018).

"Social media is a major influencer when it comes to the purchasing decisions of millennials. In fact, 72% of them report buying fashion and beauty products based on Instagram posts." The amount of money invested in social media advertising has continued to grow since 2010 with increasing influence of social media. Companies engage in social media advertising are doing it because it works (Arnold, 2017, p. 1). The next section posits key elements of the fourth theoretical construct.

FOURTH THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT: MILLENNIALS CHERISH DIGITAL MEDIA STORYTELLING

This section explicates the fourth theoretical construct, which enunciated: “Millennials prefer media storytelling with multifaced features such as video, visuals, audio, data-driven content that engages them.”

The millennials’ preference for digital video and immersive storytelling illustrates the power of merging the visual, verbal and the viral aspects of media. Since the first regularly scheduled news broadcast on US television in 1940, television news has been, for more than 70 years, the most popular news source, especially among the older generations, and it is also popular among younger generations.

Millennials prefer shareable and entertaining content (Marantz, 2015, para. 7). Diehl et al. (2018) concluded that television was most frequently used news medium among millennials, baby boomers, Generation X and “Dutiful citizens” (p. 10) although their news consumption varied for other media platforms (Diehl et al., 2018, p. 12).

Even among Dutch millennials, national television was the most frequently used news medium and the printed newspaper was the least frequently used news medium (Drok, Hermans, & Kats, 2018, p. 708). Nearly 73% of the high-engagement group used national television at least regularly (three to four times a week). By contrast, only 25% of the same group use printed newspaper (Drok et al., 2018, p. 708). People born between 1965 and 1980 liked social media for the “social” rather than the “media,” and more than 90% viewed non-digital TV at least once per month (Rody-Mantha, 2017).

News has transformed beyond an “electronic newspaper” with text and pictures on a printed page or online. The twenty-first century news audience appreciates media content that used its digitally-networked features to offer *interactivity* and *engagement*. Jacobson, Marino, and Gutsche (2018) define *interactivity* as a form of storytelling that empowers audiences with choices to gain more knowledge through details and game-like features and *Engagement* as audiences connecting with the story and enabling engagement effects like sharing, commenting, and liking a story (Jacobson et al., 2018, p. 3). Journalists reach audiences and enhance the news with an interactive impact by utilizing these new features.

Compared to other generations, millennials comprehend the news in different ways that involve more about understanding news events instead of knowing what happened. Millennial attain knowledge by “reading, watching, viewing, listening, scanning, liking, commenting, and sharing” news content (Jacobson et al., 2018, p. 5). Millennials interact with the news in a deeper process by not learning and checking the facts themselves, but by also giving feedback and sharing their knowledge with others (Jacobson et al., 2018, p. 5). The next section enunciates key elements of the fifth theoretical construct.

FIFTH THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT: MILLENNIALS ARE AN INFLUENTIAL DEMOGRAPHIC COHORT

This section explicates the fifth theoretical construct, which delineated, “With increased influence and spending power, millennials are an influential demographic cohort that has hindered or helped innovations in media and journalism. Media consumption trends of millennials have influenced industry-wide changes in news content, entertainment, marketing, political communication and beyond.”

Marketers are eager to reach millennials with spending power and influence. With media habits vastly different from past generations, millennials and have a major impact on the overall media landscape and the consumption of media content (Nielsen, 2018a; Nielsen, 2018b). Marketers worldwide judiciously consider millennials as the importunate and imperative demographic cohort because millennials command attention with their size and their growing spending prowess (Nielsen, 2018a; Nielsen, 2018b).

Taneja, Wu, and Edgerly (2018) investigated the role of infrastructures in shaping online news usage by contrasting use patterns of millennials and boomers to note that millennials were moving away from traditional news sources. Taneja et al. (2018) compared online news use between millennials and baby boomers to conclude that “even in high-choice environments that offer users a great deal of autonomy to choose their preferred news sources, these two generations largely consume the same set of popular outlets.” Taneja et al. (2018) hypothesized that this was likely out of habit and tradition that all consumers, regardless of age, gravitate toward mainstream outlets for news.

Compared to older generations, millennials still consume many of the same news outlets. Taneja et al. (2018) concluded that while the baby boomers are more likely to use traditional news methods, millennials were more likely to use social media and newer media (p. 1809).

Millennials are less connected to local news media. Compared to older generations, millennials pay less attention to local stations (Taneja et al., 2018). They do; however, check national news sites frequently and show little interest in international news (Taneja et al., 2018). Taneja et al. recommended legacy news corporations to actively engage online with the younger generation to target millennials. The next section posits key elements of the sixth theoretical construct.

SIXTH THEORETICAL CONSTRUCT: *NEWS-FINDS-ME MINDSET* AFFECTS MILLENNIALS

This section explicates the sixth theoretical construct, which enunciated: “*News-finds-me mindset* occurs when passive news consumers rely and expect active news consumers to share important news and information. *Incidental news exposure* (INE), the moniker for stumbling upon news, has become the dominant mode of information acquisition for millennials and other population groups.” INE spawns

“bumpers” who involuntarily bump into news items, as opposed to “seekers” who actively search or seek news content (Media Insight, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

News audiences feel overwhelmed by voluminous levels of news coverage throughout the day. Gil de Zúñiga, Weeks, and Ardèvol-Abreu (2017) studied this trend to conclude that the unmitigated flow of news have prompted audiences to feel that they no longer need to seek out news. Widespread news apathy causes this. Significant segments of millennials ignore the work of professional journalists. Based on a 11-nation study, Curran et al. (2014) concluded that: 37 percent of people from the age group 18–34 years “do not seek information, on a regular basis, from any news medium, compared with only 13 percent of those aged over 54 years old” (Curran et al., 2014, p. 884). This indicates that the older you get, the greater the need for news but although this is still the case, there is also a cohort effect. A cohort effect occurs when a commonly aged group indirectly affects results due to their common age-related influences.

More people expect the news to “find them” through digital media feeds and interactions with peers. Gil de Zúñiga et al. identified the *news-finds-me mindset* among some passive news consumers who rely and expect other active news consumers to share important news and information. In addition, an incessant deluge of news has negatively affected the people’s will to seek news or inform themselves about current events (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2017). Related to this, INE refers to people stumbling upon news stories they otherwise would not have purposefully seen or sought (Drok et al., 2018, p. 1790).

With widespread prevalence among the younger generation, INE affects audiences in diverse ways ranging from news apathy to political participation. INE may increase existing gaps in political participation between people who prefer news and people who prefer entertainment online (Kim, Chen, & De Zúñiga, 2013).

Through their constant connection to media platforms, young users encounter the news throughout the day. They get news on their mobile devices that ping breaking news. Boczkowski, Mitchelstein, and Matassi (2017) concluded that “incidental news” as a characteristically typical mode for young users to consume news on social media. Boczkowski et al. (2017) concluded that young users sporadically clicked on news items instead of looking for news. Such sparse engagement with news content, leads to news being undifferentiated from the rest of the social and entertainment information. “This mode of news access marks a significant discontinuity with the consumption of news on other media and raises major editorial and political implications,” (Boczkowski et al., 2017, p. 1785).

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH, CAVEATS AND LIMITATIONS

This study analyzed how millennials consume media based on a 2019 meta-analytical research analysis of 22 cross-disciplinary studies, published between 2015 and 2019 mostly in the United States. It would be worth exploring Generation Y’s

media use across a global geographical spectrum, creating more awareness and acceptance of news use in multicultural milieus or how the millennials interact with news platforms in both developed and developing nations. Further, we examined only 22 cross-disciplinary studies, published between 2015 and 2019, of media consumption habits of millennials or Generation Y (1981–1996).

It would be worthwhile to compare and correlate theoretical constructs from this study with users of other age-based groups such as the Silent generation (born 1928–1945), the boomers (born 1946–1964), Generation X (born 1965–1980), and Generation Z (people born in 1997 or after), as defined by the Pew Research Center (2019). With no chronological endpoint, Generation Z age ranges vary by analysis and the year of study (Pew Research Center, 2019).

This study featured thought-provoking conclusions consistent with theoretical implications on how Generation Y consumes media. As with any study, we should recognize research limitations in interpreting the study's implications, the contributions of the findings and the results reported here. Despite these limitations, the strength of this study is its theoretical perspectives on how millennials mediate, curate, and consume news media. In the concluding part of this study, the next section presents lessons learned, discussion and key implications.

LESSONS LEARNED, DISCUSSION, AND KEY IMPLICATIONS

By situating media use within a cross-disciplinary context of news engagement, this study analyzed how millennials consume media based on a 2019 meta-analytical research analysis of 22 cross-disciplinary studies, published between 2015 and 2019. This research study explicates six theoretical insights into how millennials consume news and engage with the news media. In their pursuit of easy access to news, the millennials get most of their news from social media.

Pertinent to the “Mediated Millennials” theme of *Emerald Studies in Media and Communications*, this study also sheds light on ICC. Martin (2015) suggested that future ICC studies explore a dialectical approach – emphasizing the ongoing, processual, the both/and (contradictory) – that allows for a complex, dynamic, historically, and contextually situated conceptualization of ICC (Martin, 2015, p. 7). To that end, this study theorized that the millennials are ushering an emerging post-digital era that is redefining how we live, work, and play.

Relevant to the ICC context, this study highlights the reasons behind the significant decline of *Intercultural Communication Apprehension (ICA)* among millennials. Neuliep & McCroskey (1997) conceptualized *ICA* as the fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated interaction with people of different groups, especially cultural and ethnic and/or racial groups (Neuliep & McCroskey, 1997). In their 2017 study of millennial college students, Lin, Clark, and Maher (2017) asked participants between the ages of 18 and 35 to evaluate the likelihood they would respond to help an elderly stranger who speaks with heavily foreign accented English. They concluded that spirituality indirectly

influenced initial interactions with strangers and, when controlled for gender and age, the students studied indicated the participants' likelihood of acting to help were directly dependent on their level of spiritual intelligence and the level of "perceived harm" to the stranger (Lin et al., 2017).

Members of Generation Y were the first to attain adulthood in 2001 that heralded the new millennium. The millennials were the first generation to transition as adults with widespread, worldwide access to the Internet. The research reported in this study leads to key conclusions, with important implications in theorizing news consumption habits of the millennials. The concluding section lists implications of the six theoretical constructs related to the news usage of the post-millennial generation.

Generation Y ushers a post-digital era: The first theoretical construct posited, "Generation Y manifests the advent of a post-digital era. Millennials have actively adopted digital innovations as the first digital generation ensconced in digital technologies throughout their lives. Digital technology is no longer an aspiration but an essential element in our lives. Technology-driven changes are transitioning us from the present digital age toward a new reality of post-digital world that is redefining how we live, work and play."

Millennials are ushering a post-digital era, which will supersede digital age innovations. The term, digital, refers to a representation of information on electronic and other media. Digital representation adds great potential for enhanced functionality and utility of information corpora. Once media messages have been digitally encoded, tools and algorithms are coded to create new ways to extract meaning.

Accenture's 2019 technology vision report predicted the advent of a new "post-digital" era, where success is based on an organization's ability to master artificial intelligence and other new technologies. The post-digital era does not mean that digital is over, but rather, that it is no longer a differentiating advantage – and now the price of admission (Daugherty et al., 2019). More than 79% of the 6,600 executives that Accenture surveyed October through December 2018 across the globe believe technologies such as mobile, analytics, social platforms, and cloud platforms were essential elements of their businesses. Building upon such essential digital elements, the post-digital era is largely a reaction to the assumed certainty of digital constancy of innovation and capitalizes on the dominance of data-driven media decisions, news algorithms, social media apps, mobile media, and ubiquitous computing among other digital innovations.

Digital media dominate the space and time of life, work, play, and community in the post-digital world. The post-digital era will enrich our rapidly transformed technology-rich environment that extends beyond traditional function of digital technologies to an advanced media platform for collaboration, curation, cognition, and community. The post-digital era points to an assumption of a media space where we are constantly connected to digital devices and related networks.

Millennials consume news through multiple media platforms: The second theoretical construct pointed out: "In today's multifaceted media environment, millennials consume news with a somewhat promiscuous preference for platforms

ranging from mobile to television. A plethora of emerging news sources enable millennials to switch between news platforms on social and digital media for their news. To that end, leading news organizations offer news on multiple platforms.” Millennials rely on multiple platforms for news. Similar to the older Generation X group, millennials get most of their news from social media and in almost all categories of consumption including web, TV, radio, newspaper, web news, and social media (Diehl et al., 2018, p. 13).

The news audience relies on multiple platforms. To be seen and heard in the twenty-first century media ecosystem, media organizations must be present across multiple platforms and know where their audience devotes most of their time. By engaging with more news platforms, millennials educate and empower themselves to be more active at work. With the growth of social media and online news sources, millennials and the succeeding generations that follow will see fewer people turning to print news such as newspapers. Over time, millennials will become more focused on online sources and switching between digital media and different social sites to get their news.

Millennials depend on social media for news, entertainment, and a sense of connection: The third theoretical construct posited, “Despite their concerns about inaccurate information in social media, millennials live, literally and virtually, in digitally-networked spaces because they cherish the interactive experience.”

Convenience is everything, but not at the price of credibility. Although the twenty-first century posited requires the ability to present and communicate on social media, ultimately allowing the public to “catch up on the latest news, comment on various events and situations and sharing other people’s posts, “the millennials or the younger generation tend to show success in following the trend,” unlike mature people, including Generation X (Dabija, Bejan, & Tipi, 2018).”

One important key point in this theoretical construct is how millennials are not only using multiple media platforms to get their news entertainment and information, but they are curating reliable information from numerous sources, instead of a sole platform. A quarter of users look to two or more sources to derive their news (Shearer & Gottfried, 2017, para 10). This is important because users are no longer taking one news source at face value, but considering other forms to ensure what they are reading is accurate and truthful. For example, about 40% of Instagram’s users are likely to also get news on Snapchat.

Millennials cherish digital media and immersive storytelling: The fourth theoretical construct enunciated: “Millennials prefer media storytelling with multifaceted features such as video, visuals, audio, data-driven content that engages them.” The millennials, preference for digital video and immersive storytelling relates to the dominance of digital video and immersive storytelling in twenty-first century media ecosystem. This theoretical construct ratifies the power of merging the visual, verbal, and the viral aspects to enhance the media engagement for the audience.

Jacobson et al. (2018) have concluded that millennials cherish interactive web-based media as it allows them to stay engaged with the news provided to them. Millennials enjoy embedded interactive mechanics in news content, especially in long-form journalism (Jacobson et al., 2018). Adding interactive components in

between chunks of text make the news content less threatening and more inviting for millennials. However, some millennials believe that interactive tools are distracting so it is important to make sure that the interactive experience is an additive and not required to understand an article.

Millennials are an influential demographic cohort: The fifth theoretical construct explicated how “With increased influence and spending power, millennials are an influential demographic cohort that has hindered or helped innovations in media and journalism. Media consumption trends of millennials have influenced industry-wide changes in news content, entertainment, marketing, political communication and beyond.”

Millennials are easier to target, persuade even influence through social media (Dabija et al., 2018). Millennials consume a diverse stream of digital media. The best way to connect with millennials is to engage with them through social media platforms, the two biggest being Facebook and Twitter. Legacy news organizations are aggressively using social media to target millennials.

Millennials are paving the way toward more innovative forms of news through media and digital sources. Media leaders have changed the way they disseminate media content in response to changes in millennials’ media use. (Towner & Munoz, 2016, p. 3). Media consumption trends of millennials have motivated industry-wide changes in news content, entertainment, marketing, political communication, and beyond.

News-finds-me mindset affects millennials: The sixth theoretical construct enunciated “*News-finds-me mindset* occurs when passive news consumers rely and expect active news consumers to share important news and information. *Incidental news exposure* (INE), the moniker for stumbling upon news, has become the dominant mode of information acquisition for millennials and other population groups. INE spawns “bumpers” who involuntarily bump into news items, as opposed to “seekers” who actively search or seek news content.”

INE, news-finds-me mindset, “bumpers” and “seekers” highlight how current news sources have not adapted along with the changing nature of the digital interaction of their target audience. Millennials enjoy interaction, and with news sources rarely engaging with the public, they may feel disconnected and will be less likely to view news items (Drok et al., 2018).

Truth be told, millennials and other young people are not instinctively motivated to regularly consume news until news events directly affect them. Most millennials do not read news stories every day. Some millennials browse the headline, and maybe the lead sentences, and skim the article text. Besides news apathy, the primary reason for this is people, not only millennials, find it difficult to keep up with the voluminous pace of news and the speed of its dissemination. While most millennials and other young people recognize that they should “read more news,” but they run out of time and inclination to do so. Such trends have prompted the news industry to launch a myriad of innovations such as emailed newsletters and social media feeds among other ways to attract audience attention. The millennials’ media consumption, participation, and production signify the theoretical insights that signify important issues relating to news media use by millennials.

IN CONCLUSION: THEORIZING HOW GENERATION Y ENGAGES WITH DIGITAL MEDIA

The millennials (or Generation Y) have earned the moniker of the first digital generation for being ensconced in digital technologies throughout their lives. As a demographic group, the millennials have been in the midst of an incessant technology revolution that has transformed their identity, media use, and digital life. This study highlighted how millennials mediate, curate, and consume news media. As explicated in this chapter, the six theoretical constructs signify important issues relating to digital media consumption by millennials. The millennials are ushering an emerging post-digital era that is redefining how we live, work, and play. In their pursuit of easy access to media, the millennials get most of their information, news, entertainment, and sense of connection from social media. The unifying significance of this study focused on news consumption habits of millennials and their engagement with digital media.

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