# Understanding the Millennial Mindset:

A NEW PERSPECTIVE ON ENGAGING WITH GEN Y



### Introduction

Marketers looking to engage with 'Millennials' may be missing the point. This highly desirable audience continues to evade stereotypes – for good reason. Millennials are evolving, maturing, and most importantly, fragmenting. Many of the assumptions marketers are working with are too broad, or worse, inaccurate. To truly engage with Millennials, we need to take a closer look at the ways their experiences have aligned and diverged.

After analyzing the behavior and characteristics of over 4 million Millennials, Exponential identified 12 illustrative profiles of this young audience. In exploring these, we hope to help marketers truly understand the Millennial mindset.

As you read through, it is key to note that no person will fit neatly into a single category, and many will be represented in more than one. Ultimately, it is more profile that both tie together and diversify the Millennial generation.



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### The Economy

Millennials are the first generation in the modern era to confront an increasingly narrow "winner take all" economy. A few will demonstrate earning power far beyond what young people might have accomplished in previous decades. Yet many are unemployed or underemployed, in degrees of poverty that are often masked by continuing parental support.

Not that these Millennials are ill-prepared. They are global in outlook and technologically savvy. Educational achievement is at an all-time high, with one-third of Millennials completing a four-year college degree. But to many, higher education seems to be a better guarantee of student debt rather than financial prosperity.

As the income gap continues to widen, older Millennials suffer most; many of those who graduated from college during the Great Recession (2007-2009) are still struggling. It may take decades for them to make up these few years of lost ground.

Despite the unforgiving economic climate, Millennials seem to be eternal optimists. When asked if they feel that they earn enough money to live comfortably, <u>8 in 10 responded that they either currently do or expect to in the future.</u><sup>1</sup>

### Globalization

Rapid globalization, accelerated by the Internet, has delivered an unprecedented level of connection across the globe. This has proven to be a huge influence in shaping the beliefs and attitudes of Millennials. This is a generation that consider themselves "global citizens" with a humble approach that truly celebrates diversity and individual rights.

Our data adds depth to the portrait one finds through qualitative studies of this generation. Not only are Millennials more aware of international issues (23% more than Boomers\*), they are also more open to other cultures. For instance, they are 22% more interested in different cultural foods, 18% more interested in foreign music, 10% more interested in foreign film and 5% more interested in international sports.

Correspondingly, they are leaning away from more traditional pastimes; for example, they showed 26% less interest in golf and even 23% less interest in rodeo than previous generations.

\*Born 1946-1964

### Social Media

Millennials are the first generation to have come into adulthood under the watchful eye of social media – an influence that is underappreciated and not fully understood.

Millennials grew up as citizens of an interconnected society largely irrespective of geography and connected to peers and strangers alike in a way that other generations never experienced. This came with an unspoken demand that Millennials continually define and curate their online identities. For many Millennials, social media sparked a perpetual struggle for external validation and acceptance.

To embrace social media, one invites a thousand watchful eyes and is given a glimpse into the lives of a thousand more. Millennials not only battle to keep up with expectations of their friends and families, but also acquaintances, strangers and even celebrities from around the globe.

Ultimately, social media amplifies every young person's passage to adulthood, as well as the effects of globalization and a struggling economy, under a very public microscope.



### 'Boss Babe'

A Boss Babe is more than your proverbial 'boss' – as in, an awesome person. Boss Babes\* are not just in it to win it, but intend to do so with flair and femininity.

(\*'Boss Babe', an empowering term for a Millennial female 'boss', is credited to #bossbabe Inc.)<sup>2</sup>

The nature of the modern economy, with an emphasis on collaboration and decentralized management, is a natural fit for women. We see this in economic data, which shows that young women have almost closed the wage gap (up to 93%) with young men.<sup>3</sup> Our data validates the trend, although it's clear that women are still underrepresented when it comes to upper management.

Boss Babes are a hugely valuable segment for marketers to engage with:

- They are spending and shopping a lot. Boss Babes take great care to decorate their home or apartment with everything from posters to clocks to bookcases and couches.
- Personal image is just as important. When compared to Boomer females, these young women demonstrate 54% more interest in blazers, 27.9% more interest in eyeliner and 37.9% more interest in masks and facial peels.
- They still strive to be 'well-rounded', balancing 'feminist' ambitions with 'feminine' purchases, especially bakeware, cookbooks, knives and cutlery – which in practice may see little use.
- They are world travelers, and go big with their adventures. Boss Babes fly business class, and often opt for glamorous or indulgent all-inclusive vacations.









# **Nostalgics**

The idea that Millennials embrace nostalgia can be plainly obvious, but the motivation behind this impulse is not as widely understood.

Nostalgics seem to celebrate products that have long faded from view because they were decidedly worse than the alternatives. The list includes cheap beer, cassette tapes, "dive bars", film cameras, suspenders, and even glasses. Some will argue that they really like cheap beer, but given the panoply of options available, this does not explain the overwhelming preference for specific brands, especially when the beer itself is produced under contract by the largest multinational brewers.

Two major themes are evidenced by Millennial nostalgia. The first is that of working class life from several decades ago – or even a century ago. The first generation to grow up online has cultivated a desire to return to a seemingly more "authentic" time when work implied manual labor, one's devices were mechanical, and leisure time was limited and predictable. This seems especially true of Millennials who are struggling to leverage their education into a career. The desire for a blue collar lifestyle comes from a generation that recognizes this era has long past, but not that manual labor was unrewarding work, with no possibility of career advancement and often performed in dangerous conditions.

A second, simpler type of nostalgia is a return to childhood. These Nostalgic Millennials can be found using apps that imitate the poor quality of their old VHS tapes, buying cheap record players to recreate the hollow sounds of their parent's music collection, and embracing their grandparent's pastimes such as shuffleboard or knitting. Here, nostalgia serves as a comforting, bittersweet retreat. Our data shows that all types of Millennials return to their childhood favorites during times of stress; breakups and colds are hugely predictive of canned spaghetti purchases, for example.

### **HOW TO ENGAGE WITH NOSTALGICS:**

Nostalgics respond well to brands they were familiar with in their own childhood, offering multiple opportunities for re-branding and co-branding. For example, <u>Fruit Loops' 'Bring Back the Awesome' campaign aligns with Nintendo's Mario Brothers.</u> Marketers can also utilize nostalgic positioning to bring Millennials back to an easier, carefree time.

Despite having a preference for interests from yesteryear, Nostalgics are still avid digital users and can be reached across any platform. Ensuring your brand's messaging is authentic is one way to cut through the clutter. Behind-the-scenes video content within expandable units is a great way to communicate with an audience that craves authenticity.



# **Culinary Explorers**

Millennials have access to an increasing number of transporting experiences waiting for them in local restaurants. From fast-casual to haute cuisine, today's emphasis is not only on fresh, but also exotic, tastes and flavor combinations. Many restaurants emphasize the journey with open kitchens and meticulously themed dining rooms. Those yearning for novel experiences but lacking time to travel can experience a foreign culture (or an American subculture) over a long meal.

The more ambitious the cuisine, the more the Culinary Explorer seems to relish it. Our data shows they are 35% more interested in Korean cuisine, 26% more interested in Japanese cuisine, 24% more interested in Middle Eastern cuisine, and 21% more interested in Indian cuisine... to name a few.

While cut from the same cloth, higher-earning Millennials are counterintuitively more likely to be Culinary Explorers than Travel Enthusiasts. Those with better career tracks (or salaries) simply have more to lose by wandering off. The similarities between the two are many – a taste for the exotic and the desire for an authentic experience – all made safe by an array of reviews and resources. The more ambitious Culinary Explorers will even set up a private meal at a stranger's home.

### HOW TO ENGAGE WITH CULINARY EXPLORERS:

The Culinary Explorer is especially attuned to trendy, up-and-coming brands; this taste for the 'next big thing' shows in their dining preferences. For advertisers looking to reach the Culinary Explorer, engage them while they are reading not only about foreign foods, but researching popular brands, fashion and current local news. It is also important to note that they are likely to be prioritizing their career development, and therefore, are often researching jobs, technology and business on their digital devices.

Like Nostalgics, Culinary Explorers are hungry for authentic experiences. Engage with this audience by offering something of value, such as behind-the-scenes video content within expandable ad units.





# Older generations may scoff. It is admittedly hard to imagine that someone in their twenties could be convinced they had few options left, little to be proud of, and nothing to look forward to. But consider how severe it must feel to really have a stereotypical mid-life crisis at twenty-five, and one can begin to imagine how overwhelming these feelings can become. The real question is: How could this possibly happen? There are three factors that may explain it:

First, we return to social media. Never before has the world offered such a broad and intimate look into the lives of others. In the past, we might have compared ourselves to our immediate friends and neighbors, most of which had similar circumstances. Now, we compare ourselves to hundreds (if not thousands) of people, from different walks of life, with wildly varying degrees of privilege and success. Worse, the seemingly authentic profiles we see are simply projections of the happiest moments and most flattering poses – a reality we may understand in principle, but fail to comprehend emotionally. Social media, more often than not, is an egocrushing experience.

Second, the modern economy offers more choices, at every level, than we are capable of handling. The parents of Millennials had a few broad categories of careers to choose from, and were given strong social signals about which to choose. Their children encounter millions of job openings, eagerly aggregated across the web, some so specialized and esoteric that they are impossible to explain in casual conversation. Overwhelming clutter and noise even seep into their daily decisions – which of the 40 toothpaste brands is best? Or, as we're asked by modern marketing, which toothpaste brand is for me? Having options is a good thing. But having too many options can be paralyzing.

Third, the Millennial transition to adulthood is abrupt and unexpected. After achieving what they were assured was the highest honor – getting into, and then graduating from, a good college – Millennials suddenly feel a sense of autonomy and a responsibility for their lives. Ironically, despite their careful upbringing, many feel unprepared.

Our data reveals significant evidence of Millennials in the midst of a Quarter-Life Crisis. Millennials are 47% more likely to be reading blogs offering advice, and 16.3% more likely to be interested in Religious & Spirituality than non-Millennials. Millennials also show high interest in aromatherapy (23%) and herbal remedies (12%). We also note that this group is far more likely to be in severe debt from student loans.

### HOW TO ENGAGE WITH THE QUARTER-LIFE CRISIS MILLENNIAL:

Communication with this type of Millennial may sound daunting, but this is not the case. These are individuals looking to redefine themselves, set priorities, and explore new experiences. This audience provides advertisers with a 'sweet spot' for trialing new brands.

Light-hearted "personality quizzes", offering feedback on any number of subjects, are likely to appeal to this audience. Incorporate quizzes within expandable ad units matching quiz results with a specific product within a new product range.



### Millennial Moms

Perhaps the most interesting and complex of all the Millennial groups, Millennial Moms have encountered most of the influences described above, but reinterpret it from the perspective of a parent. If you need proof that our concept of Millennials is not only over-generalized, but becoming rapidly outdated, consider the Millennials having kids. Of the 4 million Millennials analyzed, we found that roughly 1,130,000 were Millennial Mothers.

Millennials are already big spenders, and Millennial Moms possess even more purchase power – especially given that many of them are working outside of the home. Our data shows that they express greater interest in DIY, fitness, home and décor and healthy eating when compared to their non-parent Millennial counterparts.

Somewhat unnerving is that there are limited expectations for Millennial Dad – we find no consensus on what he should do, and what's more, little sense of young men changing in a significant way when they become parents.

### **HOW TO ENGAGE WITH MILLENNIAL MOMS:**

Millennial Moms are reacting to significant changes in their lives, and shifting their priorities. This can often prompt a redefining of brand preferences and as a result, they welcome new product launches and are open to trial.

Millennial Moms are digitally-savvy, which makes them highly accessible through their computers and devices. Cross-platform approaches are vital for brands speaking to this consumer.

While they are open to trying new products, Millennial Moms are surprisingly traditional in their brand tastes. In addition, these women become hyper-socially conscious as they become parents. To engage with this segment, marketers must understand and emulate the value systems that Millennial Moms acquire with parenthood.

Furthermore, advertisers can increase engagement amongst an audience searching to be inspired via interactive, visually-appealing creative especially around DIY, fitness, home and decor.

Read our research on our "Marketing to Millennials Moms" study here. 16





Exponential Interactive is a global provider of advertising intelligence and digital media solutions to brand advertisers.

Our e-X Advertising Intelligence Platform combines proprietary audience data and technology to deliver advertising intelligence that enables smarter, better-informed marketing decisions.

Our audience engagement divisions - Adotube, Appsnack, Firefly Video and Tribal Fusion - apply advertising intelligence to deliver high-impact, high-engagement campaigns across display, video and mobile media.

Exponential offers solutions in 22 countries and reaches more than 500m unique users worldwide every month.

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