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Luck, Edwina M. and Kleahn, Michael (2007) Digital clutter: Relevance of new media to Gen Y. In *Proceedings Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy (ANZMAC) Conference 2007*, Dunedin, New Zealand.

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### **Digital clutter: Relevance of new media to Gen Y**

**Edwina Luck, Queensland University of Technology  
Michael Kleahn, belong**

#### **Abstract**

One of the greatest challenges for marketers is to find out how to reach youths who are consuming three of four media at the same time. Today's youth have been able to quickly and easily integrate new media technologies and multiple channels into their busy lifestyles. They possess far more freedom to multitask activities and have information on demand. Marketing communication does not work like it once did. Our study found that Australian youth consume around 32 hours of media per day, which brings enormous implications for marketers. We suggest that in order for marketing communication professionals to communicate with this market, that they know exactly how to use new media in their media mix.

#### **Introduction**

Generation Y's access to technology, information and ideas have made them very informed and technologically savvy (Fossi 2004). They possess a greater independence and self focus than any previous generation. They are the most educated and aware generation of our time. Coupled together with being informed, they are also very streetwise as they have limited disposable income (Gardyn 2003). One of the greatest challenges for marketers is finding out how to reach youth who are consuming three of four media consecutively (Shoebridge 2005). We propose that by better understanding youth media consumption, marketers can better serve them.

This research paper identified how youth consume media and what this means for marketing communicators. The broad basis of this investigation sought to explore the relationship youth have with interactive media through both qualitative and quantitative research techniques. Growth of the mobile phone and direct marketing including txt, Internet based media and msn, and multimedia devices such as the iPod have had a significant impact on the way that our youth, or Generation Y divide their time. They are one of the world's largest consumer groups. They cannot be ignored, but like to ignore advertising.

This review overviews this generation, multichannel marketing and how advertising operates within in it, the 'community' interaction factor which is so strong with this group. We then turn to how Gen Y multi-task media into their busy lives.

**Generation Y.** Generation Y were born between 1983 and 2000, aged 5 – 22, represent 26 percent or 4.5 million of the Australian population ([www.abs.gov.au](http://www.abs.gov.au)). This generation has never known life without technology; mobile phones, PCs, email, cable television; CNN, MP3s, MTV, ATMs are the norm. The high tech media society in which they live has made their world smaller and exposed them to more than previous generations ever dreamed of (Merrill Associates 2004). Speed, change and uncertainty are a given for a generation that are less influenced by traditional mass media such as newspapers, magazines and television.

They are confident; careers oriented and have positive beliefs in achieving life goals (Rimai 2004). The Internet has taught them to wait for nothing. They like entertainment and being stimulated across all of their senses, living for now (Wyld 2005), process information quickly, are forward thinkers and very good at multitasking as they become restless and bored quickly (MerrillAssociates 2004).

**Multichannel Marketing (MCM)** focuses on long-term loyalty by giving consumers convenience (Dholakia, Zhao, and Dholakia 2005), synchronising two or more channels to practice and implement CRM (Rangaswamy and Van Bruggen 2005). By tracking behaviour across channels, customer understanding will be improved (Rangaswamy and Van Bruggen 2005). Gen Y are adverse to traditional marketing methods and do not want to be interrupted in their time-poor day to day life. Marketers need to engage youth with contextually relevant information and offers, or otherwise run the risk of being ignored.

**Advertising.** Postmodern advertising allows for being vague and hazy (Van Raaij 1998). Today's youth like this. They hate the hard sell used in contemporary advertising. Rather, by using 'non-commercial' messages they are not obliged to form an opinion or act in a certain manner, but offered choice that they can use as they wish. Today's youth interpret brands, and therefore advertising in their own unique way. This allows for meaning, value and relationships to be created and formed. Ritson and Elliot (1995) advocated that advertisements produced a unique meaning, while Lannon and Cooper (1983) found that viewers formed a relationship that was also proactive and reactive. Marketers are allowing co-creation of meaning, allowing their audience to create their own view (Ritson and Elliot 1995). MySpace will spend \$525m in advertising this year compared to \$190 in 2006 (eMarketer, 2007).

**Community.** Today's youth are motivated by the need for community and self expression. Technologies including social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook and applications such as Messenger have allowed for the growth of the global community. People within a person's social circle or sub-culture influence behaviour (Howard and Sheth 1969). Communities are about sharing ideas on any topic that the group is focused on (Forrest 1999). They satisfy both social and economic goals (Rheingold 1993; Wind and Mahajan 2002). Strong communities can be formed because strong word of mouth online adds differential value because of the offer of greater amounts of information about product ranges (Haubl and Trifts 1999; Lynch and Ariely 2000). Recent research suggests that 96 percent of online tweens and teens connect to a social network at least once a week giving credibility to these channels as an advertising option for marketers if executed correctly (Klassen 2007). Further, Facebook can create polls, just like any other poll you would see on the Internet. The difference is that because Facebook has everyone's details, you can

target the poll to a specific age, sex and geographical location. So while the poll only takes two seconds for the person to do, all this demographic information is collected.

**Interactivity** is not new, it is a far more sophisticated phenomenon which may consist of personal, machine and database interaction (Van Raaij 1998). The Internet allows for the most complete method for collection of personal information and this can in turn allow for better and more improved communication to add value to the consumer. SMS allows for contact in a mobile environment and the ability of the mobile handset to do more is rapidly approaching. However, it is not always essential to know the consumers name but rather their behaviour in relation to your brand. As long as the marketer understands the market's behaviour, then they know they are doing the right thing. Knowing more details about customers can sometimes make them uncomfortable if the information requested is not relevant to the brand or product. As social networking increases along with mobile handset capability this will all become online 24/7.

With 98 percent penetration in the Australian market of mobile phones and the rapid convergence of the mobile handset with more features and content are being requested and delivered by the minute. The current introduction of the HSDPA networks that can handle the data speed requirements of video and other more data hungry applications this uptake will grow rapidly. The new iPhone is all but on the shelf.

**Multitasking and media meshing.** Multitasking is a popular and seemingly essential habit of doing more than one thing at a time. It is much more common and vital these days, partly because of technology and being time poor. We'd have more time on our hands if we didn't have to read our e-mail, surf the Internet, return phone calls, txt, msn, go to the movies, read the gig guide, study, and watch television.

Globally, Gen Y finds itself on a daily basis faced with more tasks than time to accomplish them, and as a result have become highly proficient at multi-tasking and 'media meshing'. Media meshing is a behavioural trend that occurs when people begin experiencing one medium, for example watching television, then shift to another, such as using the Internet, and maybe even a third, like listening to music, and even a fourth txting their friends. The explanation for this behaviour is the constant search for complementary information, different perspectives and even emotional fulfilment. This is where advertising can be layered between media to gain this groups attention.

A recent study revealed that sixty percent of 13 to 24 year-olds in 11 countries prefer the Internet for music, compared to 20 percent who prefer radio (OMD 2005). Also this generation often consumes multiple media formats at the same time and that traditional media are often pushed to 'background' in the 'media-meshing' hierarchy. A key finding from this study is that this generation can fit up to 44 hours of activities in just one day. They have the ability to simultaneously use multiple technologies, which allows them to potentially increase their media consumption during their average waking hour day. Young people living in Australia, UK, Germany and Mexico perform the highest number of other activities while surfing the Internet.

Table 1: **Activities youth aged 13-24 multitask while online**

Task	Percent
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	%
Listen to CDs, MP3s	68
Eat	67
Watch TV	50
Talk on phone	45
Listen to radio	45
Do homework	45
Read	21
Nothing	5

Source: Kaiser Foundation Study, 2005.

The Kaiser Family Foundation (2005) found young people who multitask are cramming 31.5 hours into a 24-hour day (Ackman 2005). Youth are exposed to over eight hours of media content per day, during their 6.5 hours of daily use (Kaiser Foundation 2005). The media most utilised is television and videos (see Table 1), which suggests that youth are attracted to saving time to make their lives easier.

### **Methodology**

In order to gain a first-hand and more comprehensive understanding of these youth generations and their media consumption, it was necessary to probe deeper by conducting primary research. It was conceivable that there would be differences. Thus primary research took a snapshot of media usage of 16 to 24 year olds. This research asked the challenging question: *How are marketers going to reach the youth markets who are consuming three of four media at the same time?*

To answer this question, a two phased study involved collecting two data sets from qualitative focus groups and quantitative surveys. Both methods used undergraduate advertising and marketing students studying in two Australian universities and students from two secondary schools. The sample sizes for the survey was 80, while the focus groups were 40. The survey was constructed in three sections. Section one was a lifestyle analysis. It asked respondents to describe what they did with most of their time (eg work, study, school etc), how they chose to relax and what they did when they were bored. The second section audited media habits. It looked at media consumption and the specific vehicles consumed. Finally, the third section was a further elaboration of the media audit that sought to highlight any multi-tasking trends. This section asked respondents to mark in a grid what media was consumed and when this media was consumed over a 24 hour seven-day week.

To enable this research to yield a combination of both qualitative and quantitative responses, four focus groups were conducted. Discussions centred on youth values, attitudes toward and use of different media, and the role that digital media played in their lives. The strength of focus groups was the insight gained from an individual and collective perspective. Each focus group followed a sequence of pre-prepared questions, although inquiring and debate was encouraged from the participants to make for a spontaneous and semi-structured collection of data. This enabled the researchers to compare of differences between the groups. There were 18 participants aged 16-19, with 9 males and 9 females; 22, 20 to 24 year olds, with ten males.

### **Findings**

Our findings illustrate that there are distinct differences between 16-19 year olds and 20-24 year olds with regards to what programs they watch, what Internet sites they visit, what and how much media they consume, as well as multitasking activities. However, there are distinct similarities when it comes to consumption patterns. Involvement for 16-19 year olds included a lot of multi-tasking, Internet community activities and utilized during the evenings. This group also has high television program loyalty. For 20-24 year olds, Internet involvement depended on the actual purpose or task. This group consumed the Internet throughout the day, on sites such as hotmail, ninemsn, messenger and sports sites. 20-24 year olds also viewed their University and ebay websites. Television was predominantly evenings, with shows including The OC, Simpsons, Australian Idol, Rove, Grey's Anatomy and House.

It was evident from comments within the focus groups that this demographic thought very highly of information and entertainment from their cutting edge (and wearable) technology. They wanted smart learning objects and intelligent toys, and often found out about these from shared online communities and hip advertisements layered within TV programming and Internet sites. They promote their self-image, and technology was a large focus of respondents' comments about being accepted and involved in a community. Primary mediums utilised from our study included television, mobile phones and the Internet. The Internet was primarily used to chat, socialise, email, shopping and news. Further choices included magazines, radio and street press. However the highest used was their mobile phone.

### **Implications, conclusions and future research**

This paper has demonstrated significant findings for our youth Generation. If the average attention span is 11 seconds, there are strategies media can take into consideration. Our research suggested that a combination of factors affect this market. It is not enough to have technology, but to ensure that content is available and relevant whether via phone or a PSP. The television style of maintaining interest will be applied to new media and will create many new opportunities. Most companies are not configured for providing customers with an integrated brand experience (Rangaswamy and Van Bruggen 2005), but will need to in the future. Organizations must invest time and resources in MCM systems and those who offer integrated cross-channel service are those who will be successful with this group. Even a simple mainstream method driving traffic to a website, followed by a personal email can be an effective cross-channel strategy. Message consistency is the key to producing customer satisfaction and loyalty (Rangaswamy and Van Bruggen 2005).

With the current trend of increased personal media consumption through MP3 players, 3G mobile phones and wireless enabled laptops there is an increasing separation from society; you hear what you want; don't communicate unless you want to. Sensis estimates the mobile phone market to be worth A\$200m by 2010. Our research has provided insights into Gen Y regarding their acceptance and involvement in their community and that group acceptance is sought, allowing further opportunities for marketers. Research by P&G Tremor has also found that youths like to receive direct mail; reinforcing that to reach this elusive market, campaigns need to be layered and cover a myriad of channels. Youth need to be surrounded to break

through the clutter and not just rely on being “digital” to get through. This research has found that it is important to understand the life stage and background of youth from a marketing communications perspective, because media consumption will only continue to grow. Being able to tap into what, when and how these generations consume different media will mean success for marketers. It is also noteworthy, that only demographic information was collected. Future studies could interpret psychographic information to determine the beginnings of micro-markets for the youth market. Gen Y consider many media in their mix, and this includes magazines as well as interactive, as viable alternatives to traditional retail environments (Keen et al. 2004).

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