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REVIEW

Has Advertising Lost Its Meaning? Views of UK and US Millennials

Sally Laurie[a], Kathleen Mortimer[a], and Fred Beard[b]

[a]University of Northampton, Northampton, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland; [b]University of Oklahoma, Oklahoma, USA

ABSTRACT

The findings of a study of Millennials in USA and the UK—an increasingly important and digitally savvy segment of consumers—reveal that they see advertising as *Companies promoting a product or service to people through media*. Their perception is simple and all-encompassing with no evidence that they distinguish between different types of media or different types of communication. Some variation between the views of Millennials in the two countries is also identified, although this is less than expected. The findings contribute to an important and continuing debate among academics and marketing practitioners over how advertising should be defined in today's multichannel environment. The findings are also compared with other recent definitions of advertising, and their implications are discussed.

Introduction

The advertising landscape has changed considerably during the past two decades as e-mail, search engines, smartphone apps, advergames, social media networks, mobile, and other forms of digital media and marketing have become increasingly important. These trends have led numerous scholars and industry observers to question whether the term "advertising" continues to adequately capture marketing communications in a digital world (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016a; Laczniak, 2016; Richards & Curran, 2002). This clarity of meaning is important in order to ensure that there is a common understanding and a common language for educators, researchers, professionals, regulators, and consumers.

While contributors to the scholarly literature on marketing and advertising have occasionally explored the need for new definitions for advertising, limited research is available examining how Millennials have come to view

advertising as a concept and industry. Their views are especially important as this segment of society has grown up in this digital environment and is now the world's largest generational market (Fry, 2016; Khomami, 2015) with considerable purchasing power.

This article first examines the debate that is taking place in the academic literature on the definition of Advertising. It then discusses the importance of Millennials in the debate and what is presently known about their views. The findings from a quantitative content analysis of data from both UK and US Millennials are then presented, and their implications explored in line with the literature.

What does "advertising" mean?

The term "advertising" has many different meanings. It is often used in its widest form to encapsulate the whole marketing communications industry and all its outputs. An examination of the work of professional groups such as the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), and the UK Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) confirms that different types of marketing communications such as direct marketing and sales promotion are being included under this wide "advertising" umbrella. Further evidence of this is in the compilation of industry statistics. For example, it is reported that UK advertising expenditure in 2017 was £22bn (WARC, 2018). These statistics refer to marketing communications expenditure as a whole.

However, this generic reference to advertising is not evident in advertising academia. An examination of any marketing communications textbook indicates that advertising is consistently differentiated from other disciplines of professional practice, such as direct marketing, sales promotion, public relations, and personal selling. This list of marketing communications tools has changed very little despite the transformation of the industry that has resulted from the development of digital media and marketing.

This dilemma of using the word in different ways was recognized by Rust and Oliver (1994) in their widely read article entitled "The Death of Advertising." More than 20 years ago, they argued that traditional advertising was already being challenged by an increasing reliance among marketers on direct marketing, sales promotion, and the adoption of Integrated Marketing Communications. They posited that the concept of advertising could soon become meaningless and would need to be replaced by a generic term to cover all marketing communications such as "Customer Communications."

It would seem that these predictions have come true. Richards and Curran (2002), for example, recognized a need to create a revised definition of advertising that would distinguish it from the generic term of "marketing communications" and which would hold the same meaning for consumers,

scholars, practitioners, and industry observers. They examined existing definitions and identified the following five recurring themes: (1) paid, (2) nonpersonal, (3) identifiable sponsor, (4) use of mass media, and (5) persuasion or influence, cumulating in the following definition (Richards & Curran, 2002, p. 64):

> Advertising is a paid nonpersonal communication from an identified sponsor, using mass media to persuade or influence an audience.

However, Richards and Curran (2002) also posited that some of these elements were already being challenged, particularly due to the increasing use of the internet, where advertising was often more personalized and where communication was no longer "mass" because the technology facilitated two-way, one-to-one, one-to-many, and many-to-many types of communication. After bringing together the views of advertising academics and professionals, Richards and Curran reported that general agreement emerged around the following revised definition:

> Advertising is a paid, mediated form of communication from an identifiable source, designed to persuade the receiver to take some action, now or in the future. (Richards & Curran, 2002, p. 74)

This new broader definition retained the word "paid" as this was considered important to differentiate advertising from other communications, particularly public relations. "Mass media" was changed to "mediated," and "nonpersonal" was removed to reflect the impact of personalization.

Since the publication of Richards and Curran's (2002) work, there has been a growing acknowledgement that advertising continues to change and that the way scholars research advertising should respond accordingly. Kerr and Schultz (2010) proposed that existing definitions were based on the premise that advertising is a message transmitted from an organization to a large audience with the aim of making them more aware of or more likely to buy a product. Clearly, this view retains its links to established advertising models such as the hierarchy of effects. However, Kerr and Schultz (2010) argued that the relevance of these models must be questioned. Millennials today are time poor, or at least they perceive themselves that way. Citing a recent survey of 5,000 Millennial respondents in USA, Carmichael (2016) reported that "Millennials are actually more likely to see themselves—proudly—as 'work martyrs' than older workers, and less likely to use all their vacation time." Others propose that Millennials are time poor in that they are impatient and expect immediacy. Consequently, their customer journey is shorter than previous generations, with purchases often made with a click or a tap (Thomas & Chatalic, 2016). The theory that communications can encourage customers to move through various stages of the consumption process is therefore now redundant. Kerr and Schultz (2010) also argued that the "pushing out" of messages is no longer

applicable in the digital landscape because consumers have increased power and can block messages they do not want to receive and access information that they do.

More recently, Dahlen and Rosengren (2016a) agreed that the revisions to the definition of advertising had not gone far enough and more change was necessary for the following three main reasons: (1) the increase in the use of digital media, (2) the different ways in which consumers can now respond to advertisers, and (3) the extended effects that advertising can have. They proposed that many communications are now delivered via private media such as websites and, therefore, should no longer be considered "paid" or even "mediated." They also argued that the term "receiver" no longer reflected the interactive nature of marketing communications and should be replaced by something more generic such as "people." Lastly, the word "persuade" needed to be replaced with a less one-directional term such as "impact." In summary, they proposed the following definition, which was validated with a survey of practitioners and academics and by a review of the topics and terminology used in recent advertising research:

> Brand-initiated communication intent on impacting people. (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016a, p. 339)

Dahlen and Rosengren (2016b) acknowledged that this broader definition could incorporate the marketing communications tools discussed in textbooks and that this was necessary to reflect the industry and how it operates in the 21st century. Critiques of the definition, published in the same issue of *Journal of Advertising*, however, revealed some concerns and criticisms. The removal of the word "paid" was questioned because this resulted in the definition being vague (Stewart, 2016). Huh (2016) proposed that the new definition was clearly from a marketing perspective rather than a mass communications perspective. This is important because many US advertising courses are taught in departments of journalism, where the terms "paid" and "mass media" are useful differentiators. Circumstances, however, are different in Europe, where advertising is often taught alongside marketing in business schools. As Dahlen and Rosengren are based in Sweden, a more European perspective may have been taken. Rust (2016) felt that the definition was so wide that advertising no longer existed. Laczniak (2016) supported this view and proposed that the term "advertising" should be replaced by "Brand advocacy communication." Here again, however, there was a concern that the inclusion of the word "brand" meant that other initiative or objectives, such as social marketing, would be excluded. It is also worthy of note that professionals preferred the new wider definition more that the academics (Huh, 2016).

In summary, there is presently confusion over whether advertising is a clearly defined marketing communications tool, as described in the

textbooks or a general term for any marketing communication sent out by an organization to have some kind of impact on an audience. The quantitative research reported here attempts to shed some light on the problem by approaching it from a different angle. It explores the views of an increasingly important segment of consumers, whose experiences of advertising have been heavily influenced by the digital landscape and who are often the recipients of these communications, i.e., the Millennials.

Millennials and advertising

The term Millennials is frequently used to define the segment of society with birth years approximately between 1980 and 2000 (e.g. Howe & Strauss, 2000; Twenge, Campbell, Hoffman & Lance, 2010). They are the world's first generational cohort to come of age with the internet. Thomas and Chatalic (2016) propose that Millennials have been influenced by two significant phenomena: technology and the economic recession that occurred not long after the turn of the century. They are also the largest generational cohort, in both USA and UK, overtaking both Baby Boomers and Generation X in size and purchasing power (Fry, 2016; Khomami, 2015), with approximately 75–80 million in USA and 16.2 million in the UK. Some research focusing on Millennials discriminates among sub-divisions within the larger cohort, with "Digital Natives" being the youngest third, i.e., including those up to about the age of 24 years. It is this segment that is the main focus of this research.

These digital natives are happy to share and create more online content than other generations (Thomas & Chatalic, 2016) and much of this activity is now on the phone (Pew Research Center, 2015). The average American millennial spent 2.35 hours/day on his/her mobile phone in 2016 and 54 minutes of that time was spent on social media (WARC, 2017). Circumstances are similar in the UK, where mobile ad spending in 2018 is expected to increase by nearly 25% from 2017, representing 70% of all digital ad spending (eMarketer, 2017). A comprehensive review of research into social media concludes that is has a big influence on the relationship between brands and customers which influences their perceptions of the brand overall (Arora & Sanni, 2018). It seems likely many of these trends will have an impact on Millennials' perception of what advertising is. These distinct characteristics support a generational marketing approach where segmenting cohorts by age is warranted and consequently an understanding of the "mind-set" is crucial (Kassaye & Hutto, 2016).

Millennials are of special interest to marketers because they are increasingly economically powerful. More specifically they are (1) early adopters of technology, (2) currently reaching major life milestones (Gray, 2015), (3)

influence the consumption of other cohorts, (4) enthusiastically share brand preferences and experiences with others via social media, (5) anxious to participate in the co-creation of advertising content (Gower, 2014), and (6) respond poorly to conventional mass communications (Newman, 2015). Their relationship with the digital world is different from other segments of society. An industry study of 1,800 Millennial consumers from several countries found that a large majority willingly connect with marketers and share personal information via social media, although they expect to receive something in return (SDL, 2015). Consequently, trust is very important to them. The Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Survey (2015) found that Millennials had a higher level of trust than other generational groups across the vast majority of advertising media and formats, including traditional legacy media, online, and mobile.

The study described in this article compares what advertising means to US and UK Millennials because—although these two countries obviously have many similarities in terms of sharing a common history, culture and language—there is evidence that there are also important differences in their attitudes and behaviors. The recent survey by Ipsos MORI (2017) indicates that UK Millennials tend to be more liberal than their US counterparts. They also trust businesses less, are more likely to buy unbranded products and are less concerned about brand ethics than US Millennials. These findings are supported by the Nielsen (2015) study, which found that US Millennials have a higher level of trust in advertising than in Europe across both social and traditional media, and they are more influenced by value orientated advertisements. Furthermore, although the UK and USA are categorized as individualistic/low context cultures (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010), international management consultancy firm IOR (2017) reports that UK residents favor a more indirect communication style, compared to most other countries in the same culture category. This difference may help explain why, historically, UK residents are believed to be opposed to the overuse of facts in advertising, favoring, instead, the "evocation of hopes and pleasant moods" (Boddewyn & Marton, 1978, p. 40).

Available studies into Millennials' attitudes toward advertising reveal that perceptions are generally not positive in either country. Tanyel, Stuart and Griffin (2013) found that US Millennials had a generally negative perception of advertising and this negativity was stronger with reference to the internet compared with outdoor, print, and TV. Mortimer and Laurie (2016) found that the majority of UK Millennials believe that advertising should be more truthful, that it was too exaggerated and that it encouraged materialism. These results were not dissimilar to a study undertaken by Beard (2003) in USA, which would suggest that perceptions of advertising

Table 1. Profile of participants by course.

| | Country | | |
Subject	UK	USA	Total
Business and management disciplines			
Journalism/law/business/event man./HRM/creative media production/T&T	79	144	223
Marketing	42	46	88
Advertising	39	34	73
Unclassified	30	8	38
Others	3	10	13
Total	193	242	435

are generally negative and have not significantly changed over the last 15 years, despite considerable changes in the media landscape.

Although the findings of these worldwide surveys of Millennials and their attitudes toward advertising are of value, care must be taken when drawing conclusions because they are based on an underlying assumption that all the respondents have a common understanding of what advertising is. It is this assumption that is being examined in this research. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to (1) explore the meaning of advertising for Millennial consumers in the UK and US as a whole, (2) identify any differences that might exist between the two countries, and (3) create new definitions from the findings that can be compared with those previously proposed in the literature.

Methods

This study adopted a positivistic epistemology. An online questionnaire on attitudes toward advertising was distributed to under-graduate students across a range of different courses at two universities, one in the UK and one in USA, thereby utilizing a purposive sampling method. Before exploring their attitudes, the students were asked the open-ended question "What is advertising?" and were provided space for their responses. This question was posted at the beginning of the questionnaire to minimize any influence on the responses. The question was piloted with Millennials in both countries to ensure that they understood the question and responded appropriately.

The survey produced 435 responses, 193 from the UK and 242 from USA (Tables 1 and 2 for participant profiles). The data were uploaded into the NVivo 10 software package in order to perform a quantitative content analysis. Content analysis has been described as the "objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication" (Berelson as cited in Bryman & Bell, 2015, p. 298). Answering the research questions required an analysis of the linguistic format of the text and an explication of the language and terminology that the participants chose to describe advertising. NVivo was the ideal tool to drill down into the text.

Table 2. Profile of participants by age.

	Country		
Age group (years)	UK	USA	Total
18–21	157	220	377
Over 21	28	9	37
Missing	9	13	21
Total	193	242	435

A word frequency was initially run to get a feel for the data and identify the top 50 most-used words. This was then refined to remove general linking words and words of fewer than four letters (e.g., *and*, *in*, and *to*, as well as *make*, *showing*, *getting*, *way*, and *think*). The word *advertising*, which was used as a repeat of the question, was also removed. The data were then explored using the exact stem and synonym approach to see how words were being used and to ensure that all relevant meanings were captured. For example, the word "good" was used to identify a product or service but also to identify something positive. Twenty-three key words were identified as having a frequency of 20 or more, and these words and their related synonyms were each then used in a text search within the total data set and within the UK and US subsets. This step ensured that typos and abbreviations were included. It was then possible to identify themes and create definitions that brought together the most common words.

Findings

The findings are presented in Table 3. These identified words are shown in order of the frequency found in the total dataset. The synonyms used are also provided to demonstrate how the words were being utilized by respondents. Findings are presented in response rate percentages for comparison purposes.

The table shows that the word *promote* in its various forms is used extensively to describe the meaning of advertising for the respondents. For example, a number of participants just said "Promoting a product," while others expanded a little more, e.g. "Advertising is a form of promotion through the media. Whether it be in newspapers or online social sites." This quotation demonstrates that respondents did not distinguish between non-digital from digital media. A number of respondents even included word-of-mouth in their descriptions.

Other frequently used terms utilized to explain advertising are linked with the idea of *selling*. The words *awareness*, *idea*, and *information* are also evident, which refer back to traditional advertising definitions and theories. The findings indicate that the participants saw advertising as having a business purpose, e.g. "Advertising is using media to promote a business, person, or product to certain audience in order to grow consumer

Table 3. Frequency table of words to describe advertising.

Root word	Total count (n = 435)	Exact words used in text search	Root word included proportion of responses (%)	
			UK	US
Promote	129	Promote, promoted, promotes, promoting, promotion, promotional, promotions	35	26
Service	125	Service, services	42	19
Products	62	Products	15	14
People	60	Masses, people, peoples	10	17
Sell	56	Sell, selling, sells	11	15
Company	56	Companies, company,	13	13
Public	54	Public, publically, world	12	13
Consumers	48	Consumer, consumers,	15	8
Media	42	Media	8	12
Business	44	Business, businesses	15	7
Audience	42	Audience, audiences	12	8
Idea	39	Idea, ideas, theme,	4	13
Awareness	39	Aware, awareness, *awarness, mind	12	6
Person	38	Individual, individuals, person, persons, someone	5	12
Persuade	37	Convince, convinces, convincing, persuade, persuading, persuasion, persuasive	4	12
Want	30	Desire, need, needed, needs, want	9	6
Information	28	Info, inform, information, informative, informing, informs	11	3
Brand	27	Brand, branding, brands, *bran	11	2
Attention	27	Attention	7	5
Event	26	Event, events, issue,	6	6
Communication	25	Communicate, communicated, communicating, communication, communicational, communications, convey, conveying	10	2
Good	20	Good, goods,	4	6
Target	20	Aimed, target, targeted, targeting	7	3

*Typo found in responses.

numbers." The table also indicates that participants tended to emphasize what the communication is referring to, with many of them referring to *products* and *services*. Advertising is seen mainly as something that companies do, with the words *Company* and *Business* having high frequencies, e.g. "Advertising is the way in which a business generates interest from consumers for their product or service, and is a way of encouraging them to buy what they are selling."

There are also a number of terms used to describe to whom advertising is typically directed. The most frequent descriptors are *people*, *public*, *consumers*, and *audience*. Conversely, the word *paid* does not appear in Table 1, which would suggest that Millennials do not use this characteristic to differentiate between different forms of marketing communications. Interestingly, there were also very few negative descriptions of advertising, with only a few comments referring to words such as *manipulation* or *propaganda*.

Based on the words with the highest frequency, the following definition of advertising can be created from the findings:

Companies promoting a product or service to people through media.

There are some differences in the choice of words used by UK and US Millennials to describe what advertising is, but overall, these are minimal. Table 1 shows the main differences between the two groups. Perhaps most importantly, the word *promote* is more frequently used in the UK than USA but is still the strongest action word in both countries to describe what advertising is trying to achieve. The comparisons suggest other, possibly important differences regarding advertisers and their objectives, whereas UK respondents refer to advertising more frequently as *information* and *communication* intended to create *awareness* and US participants are more likely to use the term *persuasion* or some variation of it. The promotion of services as well as products is also identified more strongly in the UK. In terms of the source of advertising, the UK participants refer to *Businesses* more, while in USA, the main descriptor is *Companies*. Although the word *Person* is popular in USA, further analysis indicated that the word is being used in a number of different ways, to include not only the receiver but also the source of the message. The word *People* is used more consistently to describe the audience of the message in USA, while *Consumers* seems a more common term in the UK.

From these findings, the following definitions of advertising for both countries emerged:

For the UK respondents: *Businesses promoting or informing about a product or service to consumers through media.*

For US respondents: *Companies promoting a product or attempting to persuade people through media.*

Other differences are also of interest. US Millennials are more likely to refer to *ideas,* although further analysis revealed that this may refer to the creation of the message as well as the message itself. References to brand and branding are more prevalent in the UK than in USA.

Discussion

This research sought the most basic meaning of the word "advertising" for Millennials. This is an important starting point in the effort to understand their perceptions and responses to marketing communication and their views on its role in the economy and society in general. Millennials are having an increasingly significant impact on how the world is run and therefore it is essential to understand what the word means to them (Thomas & Chatalic, 2016).

First, the findings indicated the importance of the word "promote." Many of us can remember when textbooks were entitled "Promotions," consistent with the original Four Ps of Marketing (McCarthy as cited in Fill & Turnbull, 2016). The term may now be perceived by some academics

as rather outdated and linked to product-focused and inside/out approaches, which are at odds with more recent audience-focused integrated thinking (Kliatchko, 2008). Our findings show that the term "promote," however, is actually very current and it is being extensively used by Millennials to describe advertising. Millennials see advertising as businesses trying to promote a product or service to the public. Their perception is simple and all-encompassing. There is no evidence that they differentiate between different types of media or different types of audiences. There is no recognition of the distinction between direct marketing or sales promotion. Even public relations can be thrown into the mix as the word "paid" is not used widely. This would suggest the industry's concern to maintain a clear distinction between free editorial content and paid for marketing communications is not successful as young people seem unaware of that distinction. This finding is supported by a recent industry report by Kantar Media (2017), which found that consumers are very aware that branded messages can be communicated in many ways but it is all "advertising."

The definition of "promote" in the Oxford English dictionary is "to publicize and sell." Its use by Millennials is an indication they are strongly aware that advertising is trying to sell them something despite its delivery through a wide variety of both traditional and digital media and formats and despite advertisers' efforts to "fly below the radar" with, for example, social media marketing, branded entertainment, and native advertising.

Although some differences are evident between the two countries, these do not seem to be fundamental and may be linked simply to the use of different terminology. For example, US Millennials are less likely to link advertising with services. One possible explanation for this is that the term "products" is used in USA as a more generic term to include services. The UK participants also link advertising with branding more strongly, which could be a result of most UK advertising courses being taught from marketing departments in business schools (Huh, 2016). Overall, and in light of the strong cultural similarities between the UK and US, these respondents' perceptions are similar in that they see advertising as a commercial activity intended to encourage people to buy products and services. Moreover, there is little evidence to support previous studies that indicate growing concerns over trust or ethical behavior.

A comparison of the most recent definition by Dahlen and Rosengren (2016a) with the Millennial definition reveals some differences.

> Brand-initiated communication intent on impacting people. (Dahlen & Rosengren, 2016a)

> Companies promoting a product or service to people through media.

The definition provided by Dahlen and Rosengren (2016a) has been criticized by some academics as being too wide and general. Interestingly,

the Millennials' definition is more explicit in that it is linked to promotion or selling rather than just having an impact. Of course, it could be argued that a purchase of some sort is the ultimate long term goal of any brand-initiated communication.

Consequently, the research findings support the conclusion that Millennials are using the word Advertising to refer to all marketing communications which is in line with present industry usage and therefore there is a strong argument for academic researchers and teachers to also adopt this approach. There would then be no need to replace it with new terminology as proposed in the literature, i.e. "Customer Communications" (Rust & Oliver, 1994) and "Brand Advocacy Communication" (Laczniak, 2016). An alternative conclusion that could be reached from the findings is that all marketing communications could be referred to as Promotion. However, this is a term often used in the industry to represent Sales Promotion and may therefore find some opposition from industry and academia. The idea of describing all marketing communications as Advertising is pushing at an open door in terms of its existing acceptance.

However, it is important to consider whether such a wide definition of Advertising is suitable for all parties. There may be a need for industry and academia to break down this all-encompassing term into more defined groups even if customers do not. Organizations need to identify contributions from different agencies to an integrated campaign. Academics may need to explain the characteristics of various types of communication to their students.

If some differentiation is required, then the present classification of advertising, sales promotion, direct marketing, and public relations is obviously no longer valid. The lines are too blurred and the definitions are no longer appropriate in this digital landscape. A study by Kassaye and Hutto (2016) into choice of media channel found that the main issues for Millennials were connectivity and convergence across different platforms so seamless campaigns across channels are key.

One possibility is to utilize the classification of paid, owned and earned media which is already being used widely in the industry and is a distinction that is useful to industry and academia. Obviously, there is some overlap with the original terminology, with "paid" referring mainly to advertising as previously defined, "owned" referring to such communication as websites and social media pages and "earned" referring mainly to PR activity (Stephen & Galak, 2012). Despite, or perhaps because of, this link, the terminology moves between online and offline activity as smoothly as today's Millennials do, which is important as campaigns become increasingly integrated (Batra & Keller, 2016). A study by Snyder and Garcia-Garcia (2016) found that the use of multiple platforms increases the

effectiveness of campaigns and that the most optimum mix for Millennials still includes both traditional and digital media and therefore definitions need to be suitable for both. Stolyarova and Rialp (2014) also found that the internet was not effective on its own but could create synergy working alongside more traditional media such as TV. This integration of POE (i.e. paid, owned, and earned) is also acknowledged by Green (2011), who suggests that the objective of paid media is to move the customer over to earned and/or owned media and that integration is key to facilitate this movement, although how to measure the contribution of these different activities within an integrated campaign is still work in progress (Pessin & Weaver, 2014). The PR literature has also acknowledged this recent terminology and identified an increase in the demands on organizations to produce media content to feed their owned media channels (Savic, 2016).

So it is necessary to take the lead from the Millennials and industry bodies and acknowledge that advertising is a generic term that covers all promotional activity. Unfortunately, the academic world has not kept up to date with these changes. The internet has created a new environment and the old models and tools no longer fit; indeed, they may be responsible for sustaining the old organizational and inter-organizational silos and creating unnecessary barriers to creativity and integration (Mortimer & Laurie, 2017).

Theoretical implications

It is obviously crucial to create clear definitions of key constructs before any academic theories can be proposed, to ensure a common understanding and clarity. This article supports the argument that the marketing communications' landscape has changed so fundamentally that it is necessary to revisit the definitions that many existing advertising theories are built on and thereby the theories themselves. Kim, Hayes, Avant, and Reid (2014) undertook a comprehensive study of advertising research and found that the most prevalent theories and frameworks underpinning advertising research were dual-process models, the Elaboration Likelihood model, the involvement construct, and information processing theories. However, many of these theories are based on a one directional communication that pushes out a message to the unsuspecting public. Kerr and Schultz (2010) argue that the prevalence of digital communications means that this approach is no longer fit for purpose and new constructs of understanding are necessary to acknowledge the control that consumers now have on how, when and where they receive and respond to communications. Obviously, a text message on a mobile phone is very different from a TV advertisement and yet advertising research is not reflecting these differences. Kerr and Schultz (2010) found that although an increasing amount of

advertising research is on digital communications, it tends to be undertaken by less experienced researchers and is generally lacking theoretical underpinning. This article responds to the call for self-reflection in order to establish a new understanding of what advertising is and to address the paucity of new theories in this area.

Managerial implications

Campaigns running across multiple media platforms in multiple formats are becoming increasingly common and practitioners need to understand how such campaigns are viewed and received by their customers. These findings indicate that Millennials do not differentiate between different communications and see it all as "advertising." It is therefore vital that these messages are integrated and coordinated to create a clear brand identity. The future is all about the use of data, and Millennials will happily share information and participate in brand engagement if they have trust in the brand and feel that value is being created. Practitioners need to share the responsibility of creating a brand identity with their customers and value their contributions.

Limitations and future research

The present study examines the views of a sample of Millennials from two countries, and these participants were purposively drawn from university students on a range of courses across two universities. Students are a good representation of the Digital Native segment of the Millennial cohort with nearly 40% of all 18 year olds going to university in both countries (NCES, 2017; UCAS, 2017). It could also be argued that they are the most important group of Millennials from a marketing perspective because they will have more money to spend in the future, are trend setters and have a significant influence on the purchase behavior of their friends and family (Tanyel et al, 2013). So the findings are based on a significant and important sector of Millennials and seem in line with data on Millennials as a whole. Consequently, although generalization of the findings is not appropriate, they may well be transferrable as indicative of the beliefs of Millennial consumers in USA and the UK. However, it would be valuable to extend the study further to include the views of Millennials outside of higher education and to establish whether there are any differences in their perceptions. The study could also be extended to compare the findings with other generations, younger and older, to establish how these segments differ. There is now increasing attention on the *Z* generation, i.e., those born since the year 2000. This segment has not only never known a world without digital media but also has always included social media.

Consequently, it would not be surprising to find that Generation Z perceptions are significantly different from those of their immediate predecessors. This study could also be extended to include other countries, which might produce rather different results because of the culture or the popularity of digital communications.

A second limitation of this study is that it relied on a content analysis of the descriptions of advertising provided, thereby adopting a quantitative deductive research design. It is possible that the meaning of words may vary across different groups of people and that this reductionist approach is unable to capture the nuances of this variance. This limitation could be addressed by undertaking follow-up interviews or focus groups with Millennials, where their understanding of and views on advertising could be explored in greater depth.

Conclusion

This article adds to the current debate on what the word Advertising means by examining the views of Millennials. Results indicate that Millennials see advertising as any type of promotion that encourages people to purchase products and services. Their perspective is wide, uncritical, and incorporates all types of marketing communications. Although some differences have been identified between USA and the UK, they are minor and less than the literature would suggest based on the differences in levels of trust and ethical concerns.

When the Millennials' definition is compared with the most recent definition put forward in the academic literature, it becomes clear that it is more focused in terms of the emphasis on selling rather than creating an "impact," although further analysis of the data does show that this can be the selling of products, services, ideas, and events. This definition illustrates that Millennials, who are a significant audience for the majority of marketing campaigns, do not distinguish between different types of communication. They recognize that advertising is a selling tool and there is little evidence of negativity around that recognition.

Our findings suggest that it is time for academics to catch up with the industry and consumers in accepting that advertising refers to all types of marketing communications and that if any differentiation is necessary then it should be across paid, owned, and earned media. The internet has created a new environment where power has shifted from the advertiser to the consumer, which means that old definitions and theories are redundant; indeed, they may be responsible for creating unnecessary barriers to integration and preventing the creation of new ways of thinking. If we wish to

communicate effectively with Millennials, we need to move forward and to see the world through their eyes.

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