NET GENERATION CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that the Internet is changing our culture and particularly that of the Net Generation - those who are growing up using the Internet. A review of the literature identifies the key values attributed to Internet culture. It is argued that if the Internet is stimulating cultural change this is more likely to occur in younger Internet users. Data from the 10th GVU WWW Survey (Graphic, Visualization, and Usability Center (1999) is analysed to compare the attitudes of the 'Net' generation with those born in an earlier generation; younger Internet users were significantly more likely to have liberal attitudes in line with Internet cultural values. The marketing implications of these cultural changes are explored. These include the adoption of these cultural values in youth advertising and observing netiquette rules in Internet marketing.

1. Introduction

Many believe that we are in the midst of a revolution. Deighton (1997, p 347) writes, *"The ferment in the field of marketing in particular is unprecedented"* and predicts that marketing intellectual capital is depreciating faster than ever before. Horn (1999, p. 42), *"Information technology will change everything in the world in which we live. There will be no institution, no person and no government that will be unaffected."* Hoffman (2000, p.1) describes the Internet as having the potential *to "radically transform not just the way individuals go about conducting their business with each other, but also the very essence of what it means to be a human being in society."*

This paper argues that the Internet is changing our culture, and particularly that of the younger generation growing up using the Internet.

2. Internet Culture

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) identified 164 different definitions of 'culture'; here culture is defined as *"Sets of learned behaviour and ideas that human beings acquire as members of society. Human beings use culture to adapt to and to transform the world in which we live."* (Schultz and Lavenda, 1995, p. 5). Culture is learned and shared, it affects perception, attitudes and behaviour, and hence responsiveness to marketing activity. As culture is learned it changes (e.g. with exposure to other cultures); the culture of the younger generation may differ from that of their parent's generation.

The term cyberculture has been given to Internet culture (Kozinets, 1998). Kozinets describes a new qualitative research method, netography, devised specifically to investigate cybercultures, which combines immersion in the culture and observation. Internet citizens or 'netizens', (Hauben and Hauben, 1997) have a defined etiquette called 'netiquette' (for example, avoiding capitals, which denote shouting), and a symbolic language for emotions called 'Emoticons', (Shea, 1994; Spinks, Wells and Meche, 1999).

Johnston and Johal (1999) explore the Internet as a virtual cultural region, and apply Hofstede's (1980) four cultural classifications. They argue that when on-line, surfers are citizens of the 'virtual community'; the culture of this community is created through communication and socialisation on the Internet. Internet culture exhibits low 'power distance' (because of the informality and openness of the Internet), and low 'uncertainty avoidance'.

Many different cultural values have been ascribed to Internet culture and Internet communities including democracy, openness, liberty, equality, fraternity, preference for anonymity, acceptance of multiple identities and anti-commercialism. Early studies suggested that due to its anonymity, Computer Mediated Communication (CMC) was a more democratic form of communication. Hiltz & Turoff (1978) found that in computer conferencing, ideas were considered on merit, rather than on the basis of their source. Fischer, Bristor and Gainer (1996) argue that Internet communities are liberating and empowering. Kiesler, Siegal and McQuire (1984) found that social anonymity, and the absence of status and position cues made CMC a more democratic medium. Schlosser and Kanfer (1999) point out that commercial sites were banned until 1995, and that the Internet ethos includes freeware, shareware and open source software.

The lack of social cues on the Internet is thought to make people more open and friendly (Sproull and Kiesler, 1991). Joinson (2001a, 2001b), confirm this, finding heightened self-disclosure during CMC compared to face-to-face discussions. The market research company Harris Polls have also found that responses to online surveys are "*richer, longer and more revealing*" than those generated from their mailed surveys (Taylor cited by Curasi, 2001, p.364).

Willson (2000) discusses three characteristics of virtual communities: *liberty*, freedom from the social and geographical constraints of embodied identity; *equality*, the removal of hierarchies related to embodied identity so that communities are open to all, and *fraternity*, the connectedness felt between members of a community.

Tambyah (1996) identifies three Internet characteristics or dimensions: 1) *space/time compression*, where the Internet enables people to communicate instantly despite being in different places, creating instant travel in real time; 2) *no sense of place*, interactions take place in a world which provides anonymity, enabling multiple roles and selves; and 3) *blurred boundaries and transformed communities*, on the Internet traditional national boundaries are blurred and new virtual communities created.

These dimensions give rise to the Net Self and Net Communitas. Internet users can assume various roles and personalities, using 'handles' instead of their real names, and maintaining relationships in the virtual world, creating the 'Net Self'. Tambyah argues that the Internet has a democratising and liberating effect: race, gender and age are immaterial. Net Communitas refers to the fraternity of users in communities; freed of status and rank Internet users can relate to one another on a common basis.

Many of the cultural values of the Internet derive from its origin in text only interfaces. This removes cues relating to identity such as age, race, gender, status, disability and location. Removal of these cues provides the opportunity for anonymity and allows the adoption of different identities. The absence of non-verbal content and voice tone limits and changes the expression of emotion, (Bellamy and Hanewicz, 1999). The emphasis moves away from the worth of the communicator to the value of the communicated message (Dann and Dann, 1998). Using text-only communication, participants can choose their own gender, race, age, etc, freeing them from the constraints of embodied identity, creating anonymity and the potential for multiple identities, (Turkle, 1995).

2.1. Digital Divide

The effect of the Internet is not ubiquitous; not everyone has the opportunity or desire to access the Internet, so the impact of Internet culture will vary. The digital divide (Katz and Aspden, 1996) refers to the disparity in Internet access between different ethnic and economic groups. Hoffman, Novak, and Schlosser (2000) found those in the U.S. without Internet access were generally poorer, less educated and more likely to be African Americans. Card, Johnson and Patel (2000) found that the biggest gap in Internet adoption rates in the U.S. exists between rich and poor, not between ethnic groups. In the UK children's access to computers outside school is patterned along socio-economic lines, and young people without access at home are less likely to take advantage of school facilities, Facer and Furlong (2000). The digital divide exists not just within countries, but also between countries, as Internet usage varies between 1% (Indonesia) and over 60% (U.S.).

The Internet will not directly affect the culture of non-users and Internet rejecters. Internet ex-users are estimated at 11% of the U.S. population, (Katz and Aspden, 1998), with teenagers being more likely to drop out than older users.

2.2. Net Generation

'Acculturation' is defined as the cultural transmission experienced by an individual due to direct contact with another culture, (Berry et al., 1992). Age and lifecycle stage have been related to acculturation (Kuo and Lin, 1977; Moschis, 1987; Harry, 1992), with younger people being more open to this process. Internet culture is therefore more likely to be adopted by the younger generation.

Generational names have been used to label and describe the culture of different generations (see Table 1). 'Baby Boomers' describes the post war generation, and 'Baby Bust' describes those born between the mid-sixties and mid-seventies. Tapscott (1998) invented the term 'Net Generation' which he defined as those born between 1977 and 1997. These are the children of the Baby Boomers (and hence the generation is also called 'Echo Boom'). The Net Generation grew up with computers, and latterly, the Internet.

Table 1. Generational Terms

Name	Date	Name	Date
Baby Boomers	1946 – 1964		
Baby Bust	1965 – 1976	Generation X	1964 – 1979 (approx.)
Net Generation (Echo Boom)	1977 – 1997	Generation Y	1975 – 1983 (approx)
		Millennial	1983 – 2000

Sources: Tapscott, 1998; Howe and Straus, 1993; Gartner, 2000.

There are alternative labels: 'Generation X' derives from the title of a novel by D Copeland (Copeland, 1996); Generation Xers are variously defined, e.g. those born between 1964 – 1979, (Howe and Strauss, 1993). 'Generation Y' refers to the subsequent generation, describing teenagers/young adults of approximately 18 – 23, born between 1977 and 1983, (Gartner, 2000).

Alch (2000, p.43), writing about the Echo Boom or Net Generation, states: *"Having grown up with technology at school and at home, they are infinitely more comfortable with it than their parents are. Unlike television, the Internet is something they feel control over"*. He describes the core values of this generation as: optimism, civic duty, confidence, achievement, morality and diversity. The needs of this generation are to: control their environments, obtain information quickly and easily, have more time for themselves and live less structured lives. Poindexter, (1999) found that Generation Xers were twice as likely as Baby Boomers to use the web for entertainment, and significantly more likely to use it for finding information about entertainment or for fun.

Tapscott (1998) argues that growing up with the Internet instead of watching TV has changed the Net Generation. While TV is passive, the Internet is participative and active, a pull rather than a push medium; because of this, he asserts that it has a formative effect. He posits ten characteristics of this generation, these are: independence, investigation, immediacy, innovation, the need to authenticate, openness, inclusion, free expression, sensitivity to corporate interest and preoccupation with maturity. The first five arise from the nature of the medium, which encourages independence and investigation, emphasises innovation and immediacy, and creates doubts about authenticity. The next four relate to the values of the Internet culture discussed above; from its inception the Internet has been an open, inclusive, uncensored medium with some suspicion of commercial interests. The last derives from the technology-knowledge gap between themselves and their parents. The Internet creates authority and thus maturity for young people; they are seen as the authorities, teaching their parents and older people how to use the medium.

Tapscott and Alch depict children as the authorities on the Internet; there is some evidence of this. In their study of 601 children, Grunwald Associates (2000) found that 62% of teenagers claimed to have retrieved product information on behalf of a family member. The HomeNet (Kraut et al. 1996, p289) study also found evidence of teenagers as authorities. *"Our statistical analyses show how being a teen was associated with .. the role of family guru. Our home interviews show how teen gurus introduced a new, sometimes abrupt, dynamic into families unused to the teen's role at the interface of the family and the new world of the Internet"*

The Net Generation could just be an instance of the traditional generation gap. Generation gap is measured as the difference (in attitudes) between groups of different ages at one time; differences in attitudes of equivalent age groups at different points in time are not considered generation gaps. In the late 1960's and 1970's there was considerable research on the generation gap (e.g. Jennings and Niemi, 1975; Markides, 1978; Thomas, 1974), but interest waned as the 'gap' declined. Smith (2000) used the General Social Survey dataset, (National Opinion Research Centre, 2000) to compare the generational differences in America from the 1970's to the 1990's. His older group were 35 – 44 years old in 1997 and are Baby Boomers as defined above, but his youngest group, 18 – 24 in 1997, only partially fall into the Net Generation. Smith's analysis shows a decreasing gap as the attitudes surveyed have spread throughout society. The process of acculturation may explain generation gap. If the younger generation acquire new cultural values more quickly this will create a generation gap until the older generation too acquire these values. Thus in periods of cultural change the generation gap will initially increase.

3. Research Agenda

The literature suggests that through the process of acculturation Internet users acquire the cultural values of the Internet. The process of acculturation depends on age, so the Net Generation are more likely to develop cultural values from their early, formative, exposure to Internet, therefore this generation will have different values compared to the Baby Boomers generation.

From this we can hypothesise:

H_1 the cultural values of the Net Generation Internet user are different from those of the Baby Boomer Generation.

However this could just reflect the generation gap. If the Internet is causing this cultural change we would also expect:

H_2 the cultural values of the more experienced Internet user are different from those of less experienced users.

and

H_3 the cultural values of Internet users are different from those of non-users.

4. Methodology

This secondary research used two surveys in the public domain available on the Internet:

1) The GVU (Graphic, Visualization, and Usability Center) 10th WWW Survey (GVU, 1999)) available at: http://www.gvu.gatech.edu/user_surveys/

2) The General Social Survey, 2000 (National Opinion Research Centre, 2000) available at http://www.icpsr.umich.edu/GSS/index.html

The two datasets were used because they combine questions on cultural values and Internet usage, although only some of the cultural values covered in the literature are surveyed. The GVU survey includes several cultural values but is confined to Internet users. The GSS survey covers both Internet users and non-users, but covers only freedom of speech.

5. Results

5.1. The GVU 10th WWW Survey

The GVU 10th survey consists of a non-probabilistic, self selected sample of 5002 Internet users, solicited through Internet advertising, press advertising and newsgroups. Consequently the data has a bias towards the experienced and more frequent users. This survey was used to compare some of the values of the Net Generation with those of Baby Boomer Internet users. The survey consisted of a number of sub-surveys, and the number of respondents differed between the various questionnaires. Table 2 gives the number of respondents for each sub-survey used. The datasets were downloaded from the site and analysed using SPSS.

Table 2. Respondents GVU 10th WWW Survey

Questionnaire	***Total Respondents***	***Net Generation 11 – 20 years***	***Baby Boomers 26 – 50 years***
General Demographics	5022	300	3171
Online Privacy & Security	1482	79	895
Web and Internet Use	3291	174	2054

Source GVU (1999)

The youngest age band was 11 – 20: these respondents were born between 1977 and 1987, which puts them in the Net Generation as defined by Tapscott. In this analysis they are compared to the 26 – 50 age range who were born between 1948 and 1962, which puts them into the Baby Boomers generation. Questions analysed concerned attitudes to censorship, Internet community, attitudes to anonymity and the falsification of personal information. Significance has been tested using Pearson Chi-square, unless otherwise stated.

The GVU survey contained two questions on attitudes to censorship; results are shown in Table 3. Respondents were asked to indicate agreement with the statement *'I believe that certain information should not be published on the Internet'*. The Net Generation were significantly more likely to disagree strongly. This anti-censorship stance is consistent with values of democracy, openness and liberty. Respondents were also asked what was the most important issue facing the Internet. For the Net Generation censorship was one of the '*most important issues facing the Internet*', with 12.7 % of responses (8% for the older generation). The data was recoded, separating those who saw censorship as the '*most important issue facing the Internet*'. A Pearson Chi-square test on the recoded data found that the younger group were significantly more likely to see censorship as the key issue.

Table 3. Attitudes to Censorship by Generation

	Net Generation	***Baby Boomer***	***Chi square value***	***Deg. free***	***p***
I believe that certain information should not be published on the Internet. 'Disagree strongly'	41.0%	28.1%	29.477	4	.000**
What is the most important issue facing the Internet? 'Censorship'	12.7%	8.0%	7.585	1	.006**

Source: GVU 10th WWW Survey Base = 3471 **Significant at 99% level

In order to explore whether this gap related to Internet experience the analysis was repeated in terms of different levels of Internet experience, less than 1 year and more than 4 years, as shown in Table 4. The statement *'I believe that certain information should not be published on the Internet'* was significantly related to Internet experience; the relationship for censorship being the most important issue was strong but not significant at the 95% level.

Table 4. Attitudes to Censorship by Internet Experience

	Less than 1 year	***More than 4 years***	***Chi square value***	***Deg. free***	***p***
I believe that certain information should not be published on the Internet. 'Disagree strongly'	19.9%	32.1%	85.144	4	.000**
What is the most important issue facing the Internet? 'Censorship'	6.6%	8.7%	3.075	1	.080

Source: GVU 10th WWW Survey Base = 3286 **significant at 99% level

There is also evidence of more Internet fraternity among the Net Generation, see Table 5. Many regularly use the Internet instead of going out/socializing and, for most, communication (excluding email) is the primary use of the web. While they may socialize less off the Internet, they feel the Internet has improved their '*connection with people*'.

Table 5. Internet Fraternity by Generation

	Net Generation	***Baby Boomer***	***Chi square value***	***Deg. free***	***p***
Regularly use the Internet instead of socializing. [1]	63.2%	51.7%	36.070	4	.000**
Since going on the Internet I have become more connected with people like me[2]	64.7%	57.1%	7.047	3	.070
Primary use of web (excluding email) 'Communication'[1]	52.3%	33.1%	26.260	1	.000**
Chat rooms/online discussion is indispensable 'Agree'[1]	45.4%	18.6%	69.866	1	.000**

Source: GVU 10th WWW Survey [1]Base = 2282,[2]Base = 3471 ** significant at 99%

Table 6. Internet Fraternity by Internet Experience

	Less than 1 year	***More than 4 years***	***Chi square value***	***Deg. free***	***p***
Regularly use the Internet instead of socializing.[1]	46.9%	52.8%	13.272	4	.010**
Since going on the Internet I have become more connected with people like me.[2]	43.5%	61.7%	156.508	3	.000**
Primary use of web (excluding email) 'Communication' [1]	37.8%	35.3%	0.812	1	.368
Chat rooms/online discussion is indispensable 'Agree' [1]	21.6%	17.9%	2.724	1	.99

Source: GVU 10th WWW Survey [1]Base = 2144,[2]Base = 3286 ** significant at 99%

There is evidence that younger people socialize more (Smith, 2000) so again this effect may be an instance of generation gap. Therefore the analysis was repeated for different levels of Internet experience: the results are in Table 6. Those with longer Internet experience are significantly more likely to use the Internet instead of going out/socializing, and much more likely to feel that their connection with people has improved. However, Internet experience is not related to the other two measures of Internet fraternity: use of the Internet for non-email communication and attitude to chat rooms; in fact directionally these are more popular with the less experienced. This may be a result of sample bias, as age and Internet experience were highly correlated (Pearson correlation 0.085, significant at the 99% confidence level) with older users having significantly more experience.

The Net Generation is much more likely to accept the use of false identities, as shown in Table 7, they are also slightly more positive about the use of aliases, but this is not significant.

Table 7. Anonymity/False Identities by Generation

	Net Generation	***Baby Boomer***	***Chi square value***	***Deg. free***	***p***
Falsify personal information when registering on sites 'Never'[1]	65.7%	42%	71.833	6	.000**
Ought to be able to assume different roles/aliases on the Internet. 'Agree strongly'[2]	35.4%	33.7%	2.549	5	.769

Source: GVU 10th WWW Survey [1]Base = 3471, [2]Base= 970 ** significant at 99%

Repeating this analysis for different levels of Internet experience (see Table 8), more experienced users were significantly more likely to falsify personal information and agree with the adoption of aliases.

Table 8. Anonymity/False Identities by Internet Experience

	Less than 1 year	***More than 4 years***	***Chi square value***	***Deg. free***	***p***
Falsify personal information when registering on sites 'Never'[1]	33.4%	53.7%	256.122	6	.000**
Ought to be able to assume different roles/aliases on the Internet. 'Agree strongly'2	21.6%	37.3%	68.895	4	.000**

Source: GVU 10th WWW Survey [1]Base = 3286,[2]Base=1012 ** significant at 99%

5.2. The General Social Survey, 2000

The General Social Survey was conducted in 2000 using a full-probability sample of 2,184 adults living in households in the United States; it includes questions on cultural attitudes and Internet use. A selective dataset was downloaded from the site and analysed using SPSS. The questions relevant to the Internet cultural values were a) a series of questions on free speech containing scenarios on the issue of whether anti-religionists, racists, communists and homosexuals should be allowed to speak and b) a question about whether the press should be completely free.

Table 9 shows an independent sample t-test for the means of the four questions on whether different categories should be allowed to speak. The coding was '1' for yes and '2' for no. Internet users were significantly more liberal in their attitudes.

Table 9. Internet Users and Non-users Independent Sample T-Test

	Internet Users	***Non-Users***	***T***	***Deg. free***	***p***
Allow Anti-religionists/ Racists/Communists/ Homosexuals to speak. 'No'	1.318	1.518	-4.913	1859	.113*

Source: General Social Survey 2000 Base:1861 *significant 95% confidence level

Table 10 shows responses to questions on freedom of the press. Response is significantly related to Internet use; interestingly, non-users were much more polarised opting either for complete freedom or for government interference; users preferred a self regulating press.

Table 10. Internet Users Compared to Non-users

	Internet Users	***Non-Users***	***Chi square value***	***Deg. free***	***p***
There should be complete freedom of the press	19.7%	21.2%	45.614	4	.000**
The press should develop a code of ethics	79%	56%			
The government should keep the press from printing	8.3%	18.4%			

Source: General Social Survey 2000 Base:1861 ** significant 99% confidence level

6. Discussion

The data supports the three hypotheses:

H_1 the cultural values of the Net Generation Internet user are different from that of the Baby Boomer Generation.
H_2 the cultural values of the more experienced Internet user are different from that of the Baby Boomer Generation.
H_3 the cultural values of Internet users are different from non-users

The analysis above suggests that attitudes to censorship, fraternity, anonymity and false identities are different among the Net Generation. In order to distinguish the generation gap from any Internet acculturation process, the attitudes of those who had been exposed to Internet Culture for over four years were compared to those who had used it for less than a year. The values of those who had used the Internet for four years were generally significantly different in the predicted direction, except for the use of non-email communication and chat rooms. This could be because the sample of inexperienced users was biased towards younger users who are more likely to use non-email forms of Internet communication. Using the General Social Survey, (National Opinion Research Centre, 2000) we also found Internet users more supportive of the freedom of the press.

7. Research Limitations

The cultural values explored here were not directly researched and this study provides only indirect evidence of these values. Unfortunately due to the limitations in the datasets used, only a limited number of cultural values linked to Internet culture were tested.

The GVU survey employed non-probabilistic sampling and self-selection, it is therefore not representative of the general population of Web users, but is biased towards experienced and more frequent Internet users. Most of the data does not include a control group who were not exposed to the Internet, therefore the differences between the

two age groups may not be due to their exposure to the Internet, but may reflect the generation gap. Further, the youngest age band being 11-20 (in 1998) excludes the full impact of those growing up during the expansion of the Internet. These surveys were conducted when there was still a significant socio-economic bias in the demographics of Internet users, so the differences in cultural values found may reflect this bias rather an acculturation effect. Comparing generations assumes a homogeneity of cultural values that may be inaccurate. These U.S. specific generational terms were applied to a multi-national survey; however a separate analysis of the U.S. only respondents found the same differences between the age groups.

8. Marketing Implications of Internet Culture

Nicovich and Cornwell (1998) explore the marketing implications of Internet culture. The Internet is seen as enhancing cross-cultural communication and hence lowering the barriers between cultures. Other implications for marketers include the ability to observe and analyse the process of word-of-mouth, the opportunity to target opinion leaders directly, and the use of messenger style services in negotiations. Nicovich and Cornwell (p 29) claim that marketers should observe Internet cultural norms, especially in advertising and direct mail, and should learn these by *"becoming members of the communities in which they wish to communicate."*

Schlossser and Kanfer (1999) describe a 'culture clash' in Internet marketing, which arises both from the inappropriate use of traditional marketing strategies and from the open, egalitarian, anti-commercial tradition of the Internet community. They use the analogy of intercultural relations, and recommend new strategies to cope with this new 'host' culture: these include moving from 'push' to 'pull' tactics, following netiquette rules, and customising communication messages. They also suggest using the Internet to establish mutually beneficial relationships with customers, such as buying market research directly from consumers, providing personalised 24-hour customer service, and enabling online product customisation.

Tapscott (2000) describes five expectations of the Net Generation as consumers: trial before purchase, customised products, the ability to change their minds, function rather than form, and brands that deliver genuine benefits. He argues that a shift to informed choices means that marketers should use relationship marketing, which is made possible by the interactivity of the Internet.

If the values of the Net Generation are different, because they have assimilated the values of Internet culture, it will affect marketing to this generation. This generation will expect companies to be more open, and will value information access. If this is not forthcoming, they now have considerable ability to find information for themselves. Consumer awareness of database marketing is increasing and there is concern about the use of personal information. Companies can try to provide better information, making customer records available through the Internet, and transparently obtaining customer information in exchange for promotional offers or discounts. They can also openly purchase information from consumers, rather than the false economy of obtaining free but inaccurate data.

Believing in equality and fairness, this generation will expect companies to offer similar prices to different customers and in different markets, and they can use the Internet to compare prices. In the U.K. the Internet has increased the pressure on manufacturers (e.g. in the automotive market) to reduce prices in line with Europe, resulting in a decline of prices of approximately 20%. These values may also expose companies to a consumer backlash if they exploit third world countries (such as the consumer pressure which Nike has recently experienced about its employment practices, with Internet sites promulgating slogans such as 'Just stop it' and 'Sneakers for children made by children'). Increased awareness of equality may also make it easier for small brands and foreign countries to enter new markets, mitigating adverse 'country of origin' effects.

Fraternity creates the opportunity for viral marketing, increasing the power of both positive and negative word-of-mouth. The use of viral marketing, where recipients pass-on emails to their friends, can be very successful; a recent UK viral email campaign for a Ferrari test drive obtained 40,000 responses from an initial list of 5,000 email addresses. However, fraternity can also threaten marketing, as Internet users pass on adverse, or erroneous, comments about brands (as in a recent U.K. viral email campaign about the drink Red Bull). Internet communities create new sub-cultures and enable marketing to target smaller segments. Companies need to increase segmentation and offer opportunities for customisation.

Anti-commercialism suggests companies may need to avoid blatant marketing, substituting more subtle methods and permission marketing. This is particularly true for global brands (Klein, 2000). The anti-commercial tradition of the Internet means that consumers are used to free downloads, and are consequently reluctant to pay for content. Hence, although the average user spends more than 3 hours a week using the Internet, reflecting a substantial change in leisure-time usage, the value of consumer ecommerce is still very small.

The importance of anonymity is reflected in increasing concern about privacy and security. Multiple identities and role-playing may make segmentation and database marketing less reliable. Instant Messenger Chat such as

AOL encourages users to adopt different 'screen names', and privacy software (e.g. Freedom from Freedom.net) is available which automatically generates 'nyms' or false identities. This will affect the reliability of marketing databases unless a fair and transparent method of data collection is adopted.

Advertising which reflects the cultural values of this generation will avoid alienation and be more credible, as shown by the recent success of Cadbury's U.K. text messaging campaign. Zhang and Gelb (1996) found that culturally congruent appeals were more effective in general. The use of Internet language, such as Internet messaging abbreviations and emoticons, will also involve this age group. The image of teenagers as Internet authorities suggests they should be targeted when advertising computers and software. Poindexter, (1999) suggests that advertisers targeting this generation should use entertainment sites.

With their use of P2P software like Napster, chat rooms and instant messaging, this generation is communicating across geographical boundaries on an unprecedented scale. This should increase the rate of diffusion of new products, and create new media opportunities, e.g. advertising on Instant Messenger. As Internet marketing merges with mCommerce, the high penetration of mobiles in this generation makes them accessible and targetable by location and time. Use of mobile advertising, particularly SMS text messages, is relevant and pertinent to this generation.

Companies should be aware of Internet culture when using the Internet for marketing, following netiquette in email marketing and when using newsgroups and chat. Scheuermann and Taylor, (1997) identified two netiquette rules for advertising, i.e.: never place advertisements in newsgroups except in sections specifically designed for this purpose (e.g. classifieds or sponsored areas) and never email people who have not requested it.

9. Conclusions

This paper has explored cultural change derived from early Internet values. Other sources of cultural change include increased cross-cultural contact and new communication forms such as Internet Messenger Chat, text messaging and email. These technologies enable people to make, build and renew connections with people who are geographically dispersed, increasing cross-cultural fertilization and reducing national cultural differences. However, the Internet also increases cultural diversity in the digital divide, and in the stimulation of cultural sub-groups by Internet communities. Marketers need to avoid alienating those who do not use the Internet whilst recognizing its relevance for those who do. The cultural sub-groups that the Internet fosters are important bases for marketing segmentation.

The Net Generation have different cultural values from their parents; an understanding of these values will improve marketing to this age group. This is particularly relevant in advertising aimed at this target market where the use of relevant cultural values will encourage involvement and empathy towards the brand. The fastest growing segment of Internet usage is among the older 'Baby Boomers' generation; it is likely that Internet users in this age group will also acquire some of the values identified here among the Net Generation. As Internet use becomes ubiquitous the cultural values discussed here may be diluted; in the meantime marketers need to recognize the opportunities and threats they create.

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