

What advertisers need to know about the iYGeneration: An Australian perspective

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ABSTRACT

A great challenge exists today: how to reach youth (a.k.a. the *iYGeneration*) who consume multiple media concurrently, who can access information on demand, and who have intertwined virtual social media networks in their lives. Our research finds that Australian youth multi-task and rarely use traditional media, although significant differences between males and females, as well as late tweens and 20-somethings, exist. Technology convergence facilitates two-way dialogue, allowing growing social interactions to occur in their technological environments. Our findings show that in order for marketing communication professionals to effectively communicate with this market, it is crucial to know exactly *how* the iYGeneration use media, *which* media they use, and *when* they use it.

Keywords: virtual social networks, Gen Y, multi tasking, media meshing, iYGeneration

INTRODUCTION

Media planners should be equipped with widespread knowledge to facilitate better media selection (Keane and Fam 2005) for the iYGeneration. While great declarations have been made suggesting that advertising and promotion practitioners must understand their audiences, media researchers often do not seek this knowledge from the audience itself (Keane and Fam 2005). This research has been undertaken to identify how and what media the Australian iYGeneration consume in order to identify possible future consumption trends with regard to user-generated virtual social network (VSN) sites. More broadly, this investigation seeks to explore the relationship that youth (or the iYGeneration) have with media through qualitative and quantitative exploratory research. VSNs allow users to interact, chat, keep in touch, re-acquaint, meet, and share music, videos and photos.

The growth of mobile phones and Internet technology, as well as multimedia devices such as iPods and PlayStation Portables (PSP), has contributed to the trend of youth moving away from traditional media platforms such as television. The iYGeneration's access to technology, information, and ideas has made them very informed and technologically savvy (Fossi 2004). This generation possesses a greater independence and self-focus than any other previous generation. Furthermore, they are the most educated and aware generation of our time. They are informed and very streetwise as they have a limited disposable income (Gardyn 2003).

With the overwhelming worldwide growth of VSN users, there is now a significant need to examine the impact of marketing and promotional programs within VSNs.

VSN sites such as Facebook and MySpace have the potential to generate millions of dollars in revenue from advertising and promotions. Currently, little is known about why students become members of these sites (Gangadharbatla 2008). One of the greatest challenges that businesses face is determining how to best reach the iYGeneration, who are typically consuming three or four media simultaneously (Shoebridge 2005).

This paper makes important contributions to understanding the iYGeneration within Australian markets, specifically how this generation's media consumption will affect current and future promotion strategies. The research results in a better understanding of the behaviour of today's youth and identifies important media that the iYGeneration consume. Further, this research assists advertising and promotion practitioners to better differentiate the iYGeneration's needs and better serve this audience through the media they use. Is the iYGeneration different from other segments in their media and Internet consumption? If they are, how are they different and why?

There is a growing body of literature that demonstrates that traditional social networks are an essential element in any community because they enable discussion, collaborative frameworks, educational improvements (Gloor et al. 2007), and sharing (McConnell and Huba 2006). Few studies, however, have examined the effects of advertising within social networks. Advertising relevancy is imperative to allow communication with this new iYGeneration, particularly within VSNs across Australia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review begins by exploring the iYGeneration and its media consumption behaviours. We then review the impact that technology and VSNs have had upon this generation, specifically with regard to community, media, and new technologies. We then conclude the review with a discussion regarding multitasking and its importance for advertisers.

The iYGeneration

A generation is defined by their experiences and observations while they are young (Jorgensen 2003), not just by their date of birth. Thus, each generation structures core values that remain with them throughout their life, based on events and circumstances that occur during their formative years (MerrillAssociates 2004). Five major life-shaping influences exist: parents and family, school and education, religion and morality, friends and peers, and media and culture (Chester 2002). Communication theory suggests that individual consumers develop behaviours and consumption-related attitudes through learning experiences (Martin and Bush 2000).

Generation Y were born between 1983 and 2000 and number about 4.5 million (or 26% of) Australians (www.abs.gov.au). Generation Y have been variously labeled as *Millennials*, the *Techo-literate Nexters*, *latch key kids*, *Echo Boomers*, and the *Options Generation*. Gen Y is really four distinct groups: young adults, teens, tweens, and children. They lead the way in using MySpace, YouTube, Facebook and other VSN sites. Never having owned a vinyl album, their music is downloaded over the Internet from home (or a friend's home).

Spin Sweeney identified six distinct Australian Generation Y tribes (SpinSweeneyReport 2004/05). Each has varying characteristics, ranging from tribes who are active and fill their lives with as much action as possible so that they live on the edge, to tribes who focus on their career and hold family values higher than material gain. A full explanation can be seen in Table 1. These characteristics illustrate that this group are very individualistic and are not interested in being part of the social norm. Therefore, this large group of Generation Y is fragmented.

Table 1. Spin Sweeney Australian Gen Y tribes

Tribe name	Characteristics
Life Junkies	Pack as much into their lives as possible
Burbanites	Possess traditional values and place family relationships ahead of material gain
Drifters	Detached and introverted Have relationship issues with their parents or partner
Glitterazzi	Live for now and have no social conscience
Life Mappers	Focus on career and material accumulation
Renegades	Live life on the edge and reject responsibility

Source: Spin Sweeney Report, 2004/05

Generation C (Kaplan-Leiserson 2005; Trendwatching 2005) is a modern take on Generation Y: they are a more connected and community-minded generation aged between 5 and 30 years. Generation C tends to freely share intellectual property through an open source and open content movement, which is exemplified by Wikipedia (Towers, Smith, and Bruns 2005). They are technologically advanced and well connected to their friends.

For the purposes of this paper, we have classified this more inclusive sub-segment as the iYGeneration. The iYGeneration have never known life without technology, including mobile phones, personal computers, laptops, Internet, email, cable television, and more recently the convergence of MP4 and mobile devices. The

iYGeneration are the wired generation and their world is a much smaller and technologically-exposed environment than previous generations ever dreamed of (MerrillAssociates 2004). Essentially, this generation live life at a fast pace to keep up with the constant change that envelopes them. Speed, change, and uncertainty are a given for the iYGeneration. Thus, they are less influenced by traditional mass media such as newspapers, magazines, and television (Goetz and Barger 2008).

The iYGeneration delay adulthood: marriage, children, and mortgages can wait. Many still live at home with their parents. They are not lazy, but rather enjoy saving and possess a strong connection to their family and the community (Rimai 2004). They are independent thinkers. They also possess a fear of what their financial future will bring and a fear of whether they will make the most out of life. Despite this, they are generally confident, career-oriented, and have positive beliefs about achieving life goals (Rimai 2004).

Experiencing life that moves at such an accelerated pace has resulted in impatience for the iYGeneration. The Internet and other technological devices have taught them to wait for nothing (Bartlett 2004). They like entertainment and stimulation via all of their senses and are constantly looking for their next challenge. They also like to gain experiences and live for now (Wyld 2005). The iYGeneration process information quickly and are forward thinkers. They are efficient multitaskers because they become restless and bored quickly (MerrillAssociates 2004), so they can juggle school, sport, jobs, and social interaction very easily.

It can be argued that generational characteristics are a fad that each generation will outgrow. The iYGeneration have been judged by the characteristics they exhibit but it is widely known that values and attitudes are established during formative early years.

Therefore, we propose that these generational characteristics will not change markedly, and this has implications for the advertising and promotional strategies used to gain the attention of this segment. Having explored the iYGeneration, we now discuss the importance of VSNs and community to that generation.

Social Media and Virtual Social Network (VSN) Environments

The Web 2.0 phenomenon, with the assistance of social media, has heralded an age of transparency, communication, and sharing for both personal and professional purposes. Such activity supports the assertion that social media has played a significant role in the development of interpersonal communication. Today's iYGeneration rely on new media for information. More specifically, Gen Y spend more than 70 hours per week engaging in new media (Goetz and Barger 2008) and have pioneered the growth of MySpace, Facebook and YouTube. While few studies investigate the antecedents of joining a specific network (Gangadharbatla 2008), industry surveys show that VSNs enable relationships to develop between users with shared beliefs, interests, values or similar experiences, despite geographic, socio-economic, cultural, or other communication limitations that would have prevented or decreased the likelihood of such relationships in the past.

As an example of a VSN, Facebook links social networks (and more specifically connects people) via exchanges of email, SMS and purchases; blogs and chat forums; and photos and audio file exchanges. It also stimulates a series of marketing

communication activities that focus on cutting-edge fashion and entertainment (Kiecker and Cowles 2001; Thomas, Peters, and Tolson 2007; Weinberg and Davis 2004). In January 2008, the market share of VSNs (ranked by percentage share of visits within Australia) illustrated that MySpace headed the rankings (44%), way ahead of Bebo (8.7%), Facebook (3%), and Orkut (2%) (Hitwise, 2008). In New Zealand, Bebo topped the rankings (41%), with Facebook coming in second (35%), and MySpace trailing in third (8.6%) (Hitwise, 2008).

Beyond basic interaction, VSNs have the ability to engage the target consumer in a brand experience and connect people for very little cost (Goetz and Barger 2008). For example, a 2008 Powderfinger concert in Brisbane asked fans to vote online for songs that they wanted the band to perform at the concert.

Community Well-built communities are underpinned by factors relating to their members and how well their social needs are fulfilled from an emotional perspective. Today's youth are motivated by the need for community and self-expression. Technology such as the Internet, mobile phones, the digital music, has allowed for global community growth because information sharing is essential for the continuance of strong virtual communities (Hersberger, Murray, and Rioux 2007).

A virtual community is a sub-set of a social network and comprises a group of individuals with shared interests, problems, ideas, and attitudes who are in regular contact in cyberspace (Brezillon 2005; Rheingold 1993) defines virtual communities as "social aggregations that emerge from the [Internet] when enough people carry on . . . public discussions long enough with sufficient human feeling, to form personal

relationships in Cyberspace" (p. 5). For example, discovering what products are 'out there' and discussing where they are available is perceived as fun by certain communities (Novak, Hoffman, and Yung 2000). A person's social circle or subculture influences their behaviour (Howard and Sheth 1969).

Media and new technologies Integrated products, such as mobile phones that also contain digital cameras and portable audio systems, provide new applications for consumers and marketers. Technology has allowed companies to gain a competitive advantage (Geissler and Edison 2005), while also presenting an extensive choice of entertainment that has shortened the attention span of two generations (Bartlett 2004). Young people consume the most media of all market segments and are therefore easiest to reach through digital media (Duncan 2005). However, the iYGeneration are not one homogenous group but many sub-groups. They are the most connected generation thanks to new communication technologies (including mobile phones and the Internet) and their technological knowledge (Bartlett 2004). With nine in ten 16 to 28 year olds owning a mobile phone, digital connection and communication have become key factors in the dissemination of a brand message (Canning 2003). Due to their extensive reliance on a broad range of technology media, the iYGeneration are not easy to reach; however, the Internet and mobile phone are two important channels of communication.

Internet The Internet has been most speedily adopted by children and teens, as they have embraced the technology more than their parents (CyberAtlas 1999; Hedberg and Bedwell 2000). Youth are very skilful at navigating around sites and ignoring pop-ups. They communicate with speed and possess short attention spans (Bartlett

2004), preferring the Internet over other media for information and transactions (CyberAtlas 2000).

Mobile phones Mobile phones are key instruments that bring people together and stimulate interactive communication during the process of consumer socialisation and interpersonal communication (GSMA 2008; Lueg and Finney 2007). There are 1.6 billion mobile phones owned globally and 21.26 million active mobile phone services in Australia, a national figure that is up almost eight percent on the previous year.

More than 4.5 million of Australian phones are 3G phones (Authority 2008). This equates to 98 percent penetration in the Australian market, where the rapid convergence of the mobile handset with more features and content are being requested and delivered. Given the current introduction of HSDPA networks that can handle the data speed requirements of video and other more data-hungry applications, this uptake will grow rapidly. Mobile phone advertisers and researchers have been slow to explore the effectiveness and acceptance of using this medium for advertising (Merisavo et al. 2008). While 160 character text-only formats are at major disadvantage, MMS (multi-media messages) can deliver pictures and video clips. Both of these can have positive effects on building consumer brand relationships (Nysveen et al. 2005). SMS (short-message-service) have been regarded as the most successful and commonly adopted type of marketing communication (Scharl, Dickinger, and Murphy 2005).

Despite the increase in mobile phone messages (both SMS and MMS), there is still a large capacity to gain connectivity with the youth segment through growing advertising mobile services including news, sport updates, ringtones and graphics

(Merisavo et al. 2006). Knowing what content consumers want is an essential aspect of successful mobile advertising. Mobile marketing advertising comes with vast potential economical opportunities (Hosbond and Skov 2007). Companies wanting to utilise mobile phone promotional strategies must consider the perceived usefulness of this channel (Merisavo et al. 2008), whether it be keeping the brand top-of-mind or providing information that the consumer wants. However, problems arise when users are multitasking. This will be discussed in the following section.

Multitasking and Media Meshing

Multitasking is the norm for the iYGeneration because they generally perform more than one undertaking at a time. It is much more common these days, partly because of available technology and partly because of lack of time. Globally, the iYGeneration finds itself faced with more tasks on a daily basis than time to accomplish them, and as a result they have become highly proficient at multi-tasking and media meshing (i.e., consuming one or more media at once). Media meshing is a behavioural trend, exemplified by simultaneously watching television, surfing the Internet, listening to iTunes music, and texting, while traditional media is often pushed to the 'background'. This behaviour is explained as a constant search for complementary information, different perspectives, and even emotional fulfilment (Luck and Klaehn 2007).

In 2007, one Australian research study found that Australian youth consumed around 32 hours of media per day (Luck and Klaehn 2007). Furthermore, the Australian Communications and Media Foundation (Authority 2007) found that when the iYGeneration is online, they are also texting for 11 percent of that time, playing games for five percent, listening to music for nine percent, and doing the homework

and watching television for three percent respectively. This research suggests that when attempting to engage with the iYGeneration in new media such as VSNs, marketers need to appreciate that they may also be involved in other media activities.

In 2008, Nielsen found that Australians were spending 84.4 hours per week across a range of media and leisure activities (Nielsen/NetRatings 2008).

Table 2. Australian Multi-tasking Activities in 2007

	Homework	TV/DVD	Gaming	Internet	Mobiles	Music/Radio	General Non Media
Homework	100%	1%	1%	9%	6%	9%	1%
TV/DVD	5%	100%	7%	11%	19%	4%	6%
Gaming	1%	2%	100%	7%	2%	5%	1%
Internet	8%	2%	5%	100%	11%	9%	1%
Mobiles	3%	3%	1%	6%	100%	6%	2%
Music/Radio	9%	1%	4%	10%	12%	100%	4%
General Non media	4%	8%	6%	8%	21%	19%	100%

Source: Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2007

RESEARCH QUESTION AND METHODOLOGY

The literature review highlighted some important insights into which VSNs and media the iYGeneration consume, as well as the potential benefits of VSNs for advertisers.

This research compares different VSN channels for the youth market. We specifically asks: *What VSNs do the iYGeneration consume and what implications does this have for advertisers within these environments?*

Type of Data Collected

A number of the variables investigated were developed from prior studies. These variables included experience (Griffin, Babin, and Attaway 1996), product-related relevance, and involvement (Kapil and Srinivasan 1990; Rosbergen, Pieters, and Wedel 1997).

Survey

To answer the research question, two data sets from Australian university undergraduate advertising and marketing students were gathered and compared. The questionnaire had two sections and combined both qualitative and quantitative questions, as this was more beneficial to the research (Fraser 1991). The first section audited what online social media environments the students used, established which were most relevant, and investigated the student's level of involvement. The second section gathered demographic and qualitative information.

Sample

The population for the study comprised all students enrolled in two undergraduate subjects, Internet Promotions and Integrated Marketing Communications, which were chosen for comparison because they both used VSNs within the curriculum. The subjects were surveyed at about the same time in the course structure and the content of both programs challenged students to use VSN spaces. The majority of students studied advertising, marketing, integrated marketing communications, and public relations courses and were encouraged to complete the survey when it was administered at the end of semester. It was useful to compare the two class results to gauge their similarities or differences. Results were analysed using SPSS Version 16.

FINDINGS

The findings from 159 iYGeneration university students that participated in the survey pertaining to media consumption within VSNs illustrated that there are distinct differences in VSN usage, not only between genders but also age cohorts. The sample comprised 72.6% females and 27.4% males, with the age range 15-20 years

accounting for 47.1%, 21-25 years accounting for 41.4%, 26-30 years accounting for 7.6%, and 30+ accounting for only 3.8% of the sample. With regard to program viewing, Internet sites selection, media consumption, and multitasking, there was a distinction between 15-20 year old consumers and 21-25 year old consumers with respect to VSNs. Differences existed between males and females with respect to VSN sites utilised, as females preferred Facebook and males preferred YouTube. This can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Internet usage

	No usage	1	2	3	4	5	6	Extensive usage 7
I use.....								
e-mail	0%	0%	.6%	1.9%	10.8%	12%	74.7%	
Company Websites	0%	0%	7.2%	23.5%	29.4%	17.6%	19%	
facebook.com	14.6%	7.6%	7%	7.6%	18.4%	13.9%	31%	
myspace.com	34.8%	15.8%	13.9%	8.9%	7%	7%	12.7%	
secondlife.com	77.2%	16.5%	5.1%	1.3%	0%	0%	0%	
youtube.com	5.1%	12%	16.5%	22.8%	24.7%	10.1%	8.9%	
Search engines such as google.com	0%	0%	0%	1.3%	3.8%	17.1%	77.8%	
Tractional sites for purchasing products (goods or services such as e-Bay or any other website that enables purchasing)	15.3%	19.1%	17.2%	22.3%	12.7%	5.1%	8.3%	
Websites that enable me to pay my bills	18.5%	7.6%	12.1%	13.4%	11.5%	12.7%	24.2%	

Source: developed for this research, n = 159

The iYGeneration tribes are different in mobile technology, media and Internet consumption. We believe we have shown that they are different in numerous ways. They cannot be taken for granted and thought of as a homogenous group. Their physical, tangible ‘life-source’ (a.k.a. their mobile phone) is their world. Team this with their all-encompassing virtual world and it becomes clear that advertising and promotional opportunities are developing. Technology convergence with mobile devices will allow dialogue and social interaction within their environments, which brings many implications for marketers and advertising. Interestingly, the

iYGenerations also acknowledge their skill deficiencies, especially within virtual worlds. Considering that Facebook and MySpace are not particularly new environments to this group, over 50% state that they are not that highly proficient (see Table 4), which has implications for future advertising.

Table 4. Perceived proficiency in VSNs

	Strongly agree						Strongly disagree
I have a great deal of skill in using...	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
facebook.com	22.9%	19.7%	9.6%	8.3%	13.4%	10.2%	15.9%
myspace.com	26.9%	15.4%	14.1%	7.7%	5.8%	10.3%	19.9%
secondlife.com	24.4%	5.8%	7.7%	5.8%	5.1%	8.3%	42.9%
youtube.com	21.5%	13.9%	19.6%	19.6%	8.9%	8.2%	8.2%

Source: developed for this research, n = 159.

Students were also invited to make qualitative comments regarding VSNs and mobile devices. It was evident from the findings that this group thought very highly of information and entertainment from their cutting edge (and wearable) technology. They wanted smart and intelligent learning objects, and often found out about these from shared VSN communities. The iYGeneration generally self-promote via technology and are typically involved in VSN communities.

IMPLICATIONS

This paper has highlighted key elements in understanding the iYGeneration. Communication continually challenges them and companies want to communicate with them. Our research demonstrates that a combination of factors affect this group because it is important not just to have the technology, but to ensure that the content is

available and relevant no matter how it is delivered. Opportunities will only come to those companies who individualise their promotional programs.

Youth need to be surrounded by advertisers' integrated messages if they want to break through the media-meshed clutter and not just rely on being "digital" to get through. This research suggests that it is important to understand this generation's life stage, as media consumption will only continue to grow in the future. Being able to tap into what, when, and how this iYGeneration consume is pivotal for marketers.

With the AIMIA's *Australian Mobile Phone Lifestyle Index* report published in August 2008, it revealed that from the 2,079 Australian users surveyed only 9 percent purchased content (Association 2008). While the report demonstrated that users were not committed to purchasing or obtaining content solely through their network operators, just under half (48 percent) purchased content via the internet, with only 17 percent purchasing content from the network operator's portal. Over half had created and shared content on their phones in the last 12 months, with 61 percent using Bluetooth. The use of Bluetooth is significant, as users will continue to uncover ways to bypass network operators' costs for data upload, download and sharing.

Users are more loyal to VSNs such as Flickr, Facebook, and Gmail than they are to their network operators. The growth of iPods, MP3/MP4 players, WAP, palm pilots, SMS, the iPhone and WiFi-enabled devices will escalate this trend, as it allows users to access the internet without going through their network operator. With the convergence between these technologies, there will be an increasing separation from society as consumers hear what they want and withhold communication if they

choose. The penetration of mobile devices will reform marketing, retailing, and advertising methods and services.

Connecting with the iYGeneration means knowing them, their behaviours and their values. Music links youth globally, so the use of clever promotions including non-verbal messages will have greater impact. For example, festivals that allow song downloads and create podcasts engage this audience. In 2008, MatchBox 20's Australian concerts saw concert-goers given a USB bracelet that allowed them to download a copy of the actual recorded concert as a memory (which they could then share with friends). Viral, ambient, and guerrilla marketing will be also be a popular strategy because it will be noticed.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Our research presents an understanding the life stage and background of the iYGeneration from a VSN and marketing communications perspective, as media consumption and technological convergences continue to grow. Tapping into when and how this generation consumes different media and how they spend their time will result in success for marketers. Our sub-segment of Generation Y, the iYGeneration, is distinct.

Future research may investigate cross-cultural differences, given that the focus of this study was Australian youth. Our research shows distinct media usage differences between genders, so further insights into VSNs, media, and technology usage may help businesses determine future marketing communication strategies. Studies

investigating innovators, peer pressure, or opinion leaders may also be relevant. In addition, further studies could determine the roles of new media and product-specific segmentation for profiles to be determined.

Based on these findings, we are currently using VSNs within our courses, further extending the dialogue between course members and assessing the practicality of using these environments to improve student involvement and engagement. We believe that by creating a rewarding, challenging experiential environment that focuses on interactions, there is great opportunity for dialogue.

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