

THE ANALYTICS OF SOCIAL–LISTENING TO THE NOT-SO-VISIBLE

FAY COBB PAYTON, KAMAR GALLOWAY

Millennials (18 to 29 year olds) have been described as confident, open-to-change, digitally-connected and self-expressive.

They are significantly influencing how society lives, works, plays and defines the social networks to do so. They are debunking traditional business models, reshaping how society communicates and redefining what it means to be social – both in the physical and on-line worlds.

Despite these characteristics, a recent *Time* magazine cover offers a somewhat different picture of millennials. That is, they are the ‘ME-ME-ME’ generation, lazy, stay at home, narcissistic young adults and often described as the selfie generation. They are detached from institutions but social and digitally connected to their network of friends (Pew Research Center, 2014). Yet, the cover contains a line that warrants our attention: ‘Why they’ll save us all’.

If they are to save us all, we must be open to listening and mutual learning. Listening and learning can occur in the spaces and places where millennials engage. According to Pew Research Center (2010), social media is enabling millennials to create generational identities and ecosystems at a higher rate than older generations. Seventy-five percent of millennials have created social networking profiles, 62 percent use wireless Internet in the home and 14 percent are Twitter users. The Pew Research findings are based on a U.S. survey of a national cross-section of 2,020 adults with an oversample of millennials.

Even more interest is the following statistic reported by Pew Research:

Social networking is especially popular with young women. While roughly similar proportions of young men and women have created their own social networking profile, more women (33%) than men (24%) social networking users visit a social networking site several times a day. There also are differences by race and ethnicity. White millennials are the most likely to have created a social networking profile (83%). By comparison, 71% of blacks and 52% of Hispanics have done that. But among those who have created their own profile, blacks are more likely to use these sites multiple times a day (45% vs. 25% of whites).

This fact suggests that the millennials, in general, and those of color, in particular, are socially engaged and connected. Their engagement informs the field that they have skills and experiences that can (re)shape, support/debunk and (dis)prove any discourse (e.g., health, politics, education, social justice) via social media. To capture one such discourse, we highlight MyHealthImpactNetwork.org with Twitter username @myHealthImpact.

‘Today’s millennials are the current and future producers and developers of social health computing. Social matters and social analytics, particularly for voices often dampened, matters even more.’

@myHealthImpact is an online experience targeting and engaging millennials and Black college students with a focus on health awareness. The website has launched in August 2012 and is still functional. Though this demographic is often not so visible, the analytics of social computing demonstrates that much learning and listening can take place. More recent analytics shows that @myHealthImpact has over 1,000 followers with 70% between 18 and 35 years old. These are the millennials! In the past 30 days, followers are consuming health information with 329 mentions and 232 retweets. @myHealthImpact’s online activity has grown over the past two years. Developing creative social and digital content is key to this growth and to keeping the users engaged and interested in the experience.

While needle-free, robotic check-ups and caregivers, sensor-adherence checks, intelligent pills are technologies that will impact health care, there will be big data generated by the users of these innovations. Yet, the social networks and the people aspects should not be overlooked. Today’s millennials are the current and future producers and developers of social health computing. Social matters and social analytics, particularly for voices often dampened, matters even more.

After all, what we learn from the not-so-visible – meaning under-represented – can and will play a role in the question asked by the *Time* magazine author, Joel Stein.