Into the Minds of Millennials

University Relations - Communications
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By the year 2025, 75 percent of the global workforce will be millennials, who by definition are people born between 1980 and 2004.

In a presentation to members of the UA’s University Relations team last week, Anita Bhappu, associate professor of family and consumer sciences, discussed how to engage millennials from a marketing or communications standpoint, based on their consumer behavior and attitudes.

During the second half of the presentation, a panel of 19 students from a freshman honors class taught by Bhappu answered questions from the audience about how they think and behave as part of the millennial generation, which now represents roughly one-third of the U.S. population.

Based on the presentation, here are six things you may want to note about millennials and the way they think.

1. They value education.

Millennials invest heavily in education. Forty-seven percent have a postsecondary degree and think it’s important to go to college in order to get a good job, Bhappu said.

Students on the panel said they will base their opinion of how successful they were in college on how well they do in getting a job after graduation and if they were prepared properly for the competitive job market.

Although millennials find education important, they are coming away from it with a lot of debt, Bhappu noted, which leads to the next point.

2. They are concerned about money.

Bhappu said 2014 college graduates averaged $33,000 in student loan debt, and that amount grows every year with each graduating class.

Millennials came of age during some of the most economically hard times in recent years, and because they saw their parents struggle with finances, they are making different choices to avoid similar financial difficulties, Bhappu said.

More and more often, millennials are choosing to save money by living communally, whether that be the 26 percent who are living with their parents or the 48 percent who are sharing households with roommates.

To conserve money, they also are fans of the “sharing economy,” using services such as
Uber and Netflix or sharing textbooks, Bhappu said.

Because they are money conscious, millennials also try to make wise decisions on their spending.

3. They do their homework.

The millennial generation thoroughly researches nearly every purchase that they make, from a pair of running shoes all the way to a college education, Bhappu said.

The freshman panelists said they often research products online before purchasing them to make sure they know everything about where they are investing their money.

Many students on the panel said they rely heavily on online reviews for products, as well as recommendations from their friends or family.

4. They want to change the world.

Despite the misconception of some that millennials are "lazy" or "entitled," they actually volunteer their time in large numbers and they truly care about the world, Bhappu said.

"They give a lot in context of volunteer time," Bhappu said. "It's amazing how they actually will engage with you if you give them opportunities to make the world better through some type of socially responsible experience."

They also take action through their consumer behavior, Bhappu noted. For example, they might make it a point to buy only from stores with ethical business practices or businesses that don't produce a large carbon footprint.

Millennials also are the most diverse generation in terms of race, Bhappu said. With only 58 percent identifying as white, millennials are more apt to be accepting of other races, she said.

5. They move around a lot and are delaying many traditional milestones.

Employers are struggling to keep millennial employees; on average, 60 percent of millennials leave their jobs in less than three years, Bhappu said.

Bhappu described millennials as idealistic, optimistic risk takers. They don't wait for things to happen but go after what they want and will stop at nothing to make sure that they have it, she said.

Because of this attitude, they won't settle for a job that they don't want and will continually seek better employment.

They often have the flexibility to do this because they are relying on financial support or housing from their parents longer, while delaying traditional milestones such as home ownership, marriage and children, Bhappu said.

6. They love technology and expect a lot from it.

This generation is known for always being with their technological devices: phones, tablets and computers.
They love their technology so much that 90 percent of them sleep next to their phones, and 40 percent connect to social network while in the restroom, according to Bhappu's research.

Because millennials have grown up with these devices, they have high expectations for how technology should work.

For those trying to market to or communicate with this generation, it's essential to engage them with technology that is intuitive and user-friendly, Bhappu said. She also noted that millennials actively seek the opportunity to customize and personalize their online experience.

"They largely view the world through a phone or iPad or some kind of tablet," Bhappu said. "Their view is: 'I should be able to see everything through this little interface.' Their world is through these small screens. So how are we representing what we offer to them?"

Bhappu, an expert on digital retailing and service delivery, has been studying millennial engagement for several years as co-director of the Consumers, Environment and Sustainability Initiative in the Norton School. She also founded Sharing Tribes LLC to develop and market an employee sustainability program for the millennial workplace. For more information on Sharing Tribes, read this UANews article.

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