

# THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION: A PUZZLE TO THE LIBRARY PROFESSION!

Tonderayi W CHANAKIRA

Chief Librarian, Education Library Service, Namibia Library & Archive Service,  
Ministry of Education Arts & Culture. Windhoek, Namibia  
Email: tonderai.chanakira@gmail.com

## Abstract

*This paper assesses the behaviour of a new generation of learners who are addicted to the Internet using social media and social platforms such as face book as a model of communication and learning. This generation of learners is known as the millennial generation which further believes in action learning through networked information means. The paper further contextualises the millennial generation as a puzzle that needs assistance from information professionals such as librarians due to its information inquisitive seeking behaviour which is greatly reliant on the Internet as they visit libraries. The millennial generation's information seeking behaviour has challenged librarians to reconsider the way they deal with satisfying the information needs of this peculiar breed of clientele. This is particularly the case when millennial searches for information cloud computing using Internet as a mode of information seeking. The millennial puzzle has challenged librarians as information professionals to teach this generation new information literacy skills due to the proliferation of information on the Internet popularly known as information explosion. Specific skills are needed in order for a millennial to be able to sift the exact information wanted. The millennial generation is also a paradox to the librarian in that it is a new generation of learners that is gifted and addicted to using various modes of communication which are available on the Internet such as Twitter, Face book, You Tube and many other social channels that are synonymous with the Internet service provision of today. This scenario has further complicated the job description of today's librarian who is now challenged to move with the times by being conversant in manipulating these new tools. Another characteristic unique feature that is synonymous with the millennial is its ability to survive learning using the Internet on a trial and error basis at times aided by open source software tools which are available for purposes of information management.*

**Keywords:** Millennial Generation; Learning Commons; Internet; Librarian; Facebook; Social Networking Platforms

## 1. Introduction:

The Millennial generation is sometimes referred to as the "Generation Y" which is an offspring of the "Generation X". The historical origin of the millennial generation is contextualized within the history of the American society dating from the early 1980s to the early 2000s (William Strauss and Neil Howe, 1991) Strauss and Howe argued that generations are people in a particular age group sharing a distinct set of beliefs, attitudes, cultural values and behaviours reflective and peculiar to a particular time frame in history.

The millennial has their own learning styles, attitudes, and approaches to gathering their information needs as today's students. The learning habits of the millennial differ from those of past generations. As such Librarians who understand these learners and take these differences into account when acquiring their information needs as well as redesigning the learning environment of such learners can do much to insure students' success in their studies.

The paradox facing librarians as they deal with this peculiar client is that it has been regarded as a puzzle with particular reference to its information seeking behaviour which is heavily dominated by addiction to Internet usage in combination with modern learning which is nowadays popularly referred to as learning commons.

## 2. Who is the Millennial Generation?



Figure 1: Namibia's Millennial Generation addicted to learning using the Internet learning commons

Broido (2004) defines the Millennial as a generation that emerged in the early 1980s as alluded to by William Strauss and Neil Howe in the earlier analysis. This scholarly view is also confirmed by B Mumanyi (2011) as well by Scott, K and P Taylor (2009) who also argue that the millennial generation has a peculiar addiction of learning using technologies such as You Tube, podcasts, Really Simply Syndication (RSS), blog platforms such as blogger, type pad and edublogs. Librarians are therefore being challenged to be abreast in knowing how to manipulate these technologies if they are to be of any use in assisting millennial learning requirements.

There is also another school of thought which identifies the millennial as the "*Digital Natives*" who embrace computer and cloud computing techniques in the way they learn and study (Struss and Hove, 1997). It is argued that the millennial learning styles have forced new adaptations in libraries forcing librarians to introduce what are now referred to as "*learning commons*"

(Mumanyi, 2011). Other scholars argue that it is now time for librarians to revisit their own information science curriculum for professional development initiatives so as to cope with the new learning demands of the millennial clients, especially in the context of those librarians working in academic institutions (A Chikonzo etl, 2014).

### 3. What are Millennial Learning Commons?



Figure 2: The Millennial generation studying at Vision School Library, Namibia

Learning Commons are defined as modern learning environments which fit the learning vocabulary of the millennial generation through combining traditional library services, various technologies and other learning resources dominated by the Internet to create a conducive learning atmosphere that suits the millennial learning needs based on social network modes of learning such as facebook. Learning commons are sometimes known as scholars' commons, information commons or digital commons which are educational spaces, similar to libraries and classrooms that share space to accommodate information technology, remote or online education, tutoring, collaboration, content creation, meetings and reading for study purposes.

Learning Commons are also a learning environment for the millennial combining library services, technology and other learning resources to realise a library learning environment that supports the learning process suitable to meet individual and collaborative learning in addition to providing a social atmosphere. (Babcock, 2005). Learning Commons are also further defined as constituting information or knowledge commons with special needs for postgraduates and researchers known as research commons. Learning Commons are guided by principles such as openness and feedback, shared decision making, diversity, social equity and sociability (Mumanyi, 2011).

It is now common to come across libraries that combine computer workstations/labs with other services offered to clients. In Namibia for instance forty seven Millenium Challenge Account (MCA) have benefited to have school libraries that combine computer workstations with other services offered to young learners. This is because the millennial client is now addicted to seeking for needed information using technology rich libraries where provision of information literacy skills by librarians is the key in unlocking discovery to sources of information as desired by the millennial client.

### **3.1 Millennial Learning Commons and the Librarian Paradox:**

Although it can be argued that the millennial generation is gifted to have natural abilities to use emerging technologies, the paradox is that while this generation of learners easily grasps the entertainment and communication value of the devices they use such as U Tube and facebook and other web 2.0 technologies, this generation needs to be taught by librarians on how these tools can be effectively used in learning and critical thinking for lifelong learning benefits! This is a task for the Librarians which has nowadays been popularized as information literacy skills teaching to the millennial learners.

There is growing consensus among librarians in liaison with educators that the millennial need to learn transferable skills in order to work efficiently and successfully in order to effectively address their information needs and demands. To achieve this, millennial students will need to become critical consumers of information, effective problem solvers, capable decision makers and innovative communicators as well. They will require the skills and ability to flow with change and will need to understand that these transferable skills will empower them to have the capacity to make a difference in this world

Some scholars further argue that Learning Commons provides boundless opportunity for growth. It is based on a cross-curricular perspective that recognizes literacy, numeracy, knowledge, thinking, communication, and application as foundations for learning how to learn. A Learning Commons becomes the physical and virtual catalyst where inquiry, imagination, discovery, and creativity come alive for the learner. Today's librarian has been challenged to move with the times by being required to be information literate in having skills that they will translate to the millennial client

There is seamless integration within today's libraries regarding today' learning commons. Many libraries are equipped with computers which rely on open source software which is free to the public and allows access to web based library catalogues without any hindrances.

## **4. How should librarians respond to millennial information needs?**

The 21st century librarian should be no fewer customers driven, and no less responsive to customers' needs and wants. Being in touch with library users' interests and habits is more essential to a modern librarian's relevance to his/her community than ever before.

Understanding the business of the librarian is paramount to understanding the library's users and being able to provide them what they want from their library. Without the ability to adapt, librarians will suffer the same decline in their perception in the eyes of the millennial which might influence millennial clients to shun using libraries as they search for information using

their private cell phones and smart phones.

As libraries try to figure out how to become relevant to the communities they serve, it is critical to understand the patrons/customers/ members/users who are growing up to be the ones who either support your library and become engaged with it, or ignore it as having nothing to offer them. When young people dislike something, it's nearly impossible for parents to convince them that it is "good for them," which means the parents may no longer support the library either because it can't meet their children's needs.

A recent assessment of Millennial' purchasing habits claim that their changing interests and behaviours are having detrimental effects on retailers. This is another eye opening example of how libraries must understand their younger users or face the consequences of irrelevance to the communities, just like clothing retailers are facing commercial irrelevance!

### 5. The librarian puzzle

Librarians should continue to be challenged by the learning styles of the millennial to the point of regarding this generation of clients as a puzzle. This is because the millennial is a paradox to modern learning that need to be continuously taught information literacy skills as they do cloud computing searching for information via the Internet. What makes it more puzzling for the librarian is that there is too much proliferation of information via the Internet and some of this information is useless and not validated for authentic research findings and conclusions. The librarian's job is further complicated by the millennial's usage of the Internet on a trial and error basis when seeking information for learning purposes. Adoption of learning commons by libraries is one way of solving and meeting the learning needs of the millennial generation.

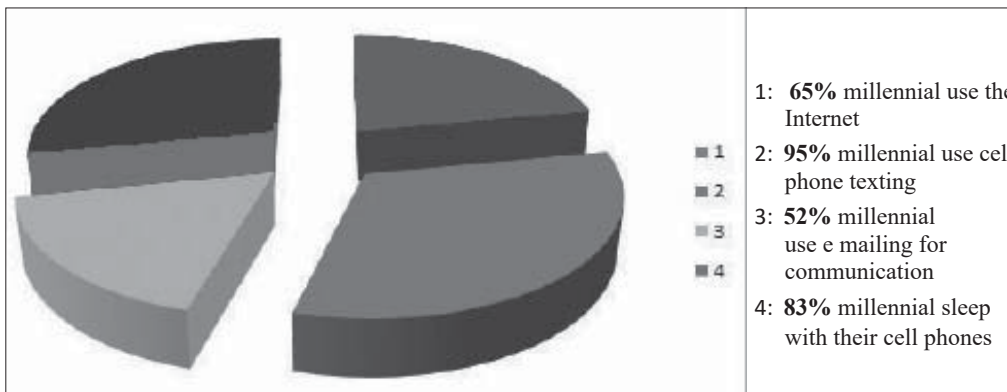


Figure 3 Researched Millennial Generation Habits

The millennial generation learning habits have been research and the findings have revealed that they are a generation that frequents the Internet almost on a daily basis targeting social networks such as Twitter; Facebook; You Tube etc. As such millennial internet usage is rated at sixty five (65%) percent. Ninety five percent millennial (95%) use cell phones for phone texting. On e mail communication the millennial is rated at fifty two percent (52%). A research euphemism has concluded that eighty three percent millennial (83%) are sleeping with their cell phones!

## 6. Conclusion

The millennial generation has remained a puzzle to learning, especially regarding its addiction to heavy reliance on the Internet. This puts into perspective the critical role that the librarian should play in order to remain relevant in servicing and meeting the information needs of this peculiar generation of learners. Failure by today's librarian to move with the times through failure to incorporate some of the learning environments such as learning commons in particular will certainly mark a dooms day for librarians of today. Given this scenario it is therefore factual that the millennial generation is a reality that has shaped libraries to revise their services in line with the demands of this breed of learners most of whom are now getting into universities at a very young age. This paper therefore concludes by challenging librarians to move with the times by changing their library set ups to suit and meet the information needs of a millennial client.

## References:

- Beagle, D, R. (2006) *The Information Commons Handbook*. New York: Neal Schuman
- Bollier, D. (2004). "Why we must talk about the Information Commons" *Law Library Journal*, 96, 2, pp 274 – 275.
- Chanakira, T. (2014) "Enter the Millennial Generation" In *Newsday Newspaper*, February 3 2014
- Chikonzo, A, Bothma, T; Kusekwa, L and Mushowani, A. "An Assessment of the Changing Needs of Information Professionals in Zimbabwe" In *African Journal of Library, Archives & Information Science*, Vol 20, No. 1 April 2014
- Lippincott, Joan, K. "Information Common: Meeting Millennials' Needs" in *Journal of Library Administration*, 50 1, January 2010
- Mumanyi, B. (2011). "Learning Commons: an idea to Embrace a Contemporary Library Design". Paper presented at the Best Practices in Leading and Managing Exceptional Libraries & Information Centres Africa Conference, Sandton: South Africa.
- Mumanyi, B. (2011). "Web 2.0 Technologies: An Untapped Potential in African Libraries". Paper presented at the Best Practices in Leading and Managing Exceptional Libraries & Information Centres Africa Conference, Sandton: South Africa.
- Oblinger, D & Oblinger, J, (eds) (2005) *Educating the Net Generation*. Boulder EDUCAUSE <http://www.educause.edu/educatingthenetgen>
- Palfrey, J & Gasser U. (2008) *Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives*. New York: Basic Books
- Prensky, M. (2001) "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, Part 11 Do They Really Think Differently" *On the Horizon*, 9 (6) 1 – 9 <http://www.marcprensky.com/writing>
- Straus, W and Howe, N. (1997). *The fourth Turning: An American Prophecy*. New York: Broadway Books