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Investing in the Millennials: A comparison of financial services web pages

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Investing in the Millennials: A comparison of financial services web pages.

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Abstract

A current opportunity exists for financial services companies to find new customers in the "Millennial Generation." This requires incorporating persuasion techniques that are effective on this generation into marketing strategies, particularly with the mass media outlet of choice for Millennials, the Internet. This research explored tenets of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to consider how Millennials' characteristics as a generation, as well as individual traits such as Need for Cognition (NfC), might influence their perceptions of a company's credibility. Students were shown one of two Internet home pages for a fictional financial services company that varied in information quantity and asked how credible they found it and whether they would invest in it. The results of this study give some merit to using a less informative message for a high-involvement service such as financial services specifically to gain the attention of Millennials and begin the process of building credibility. However, results also indicate that to ultimately convert Millennials into active investors, a firm will need to provide rich information to them. Findings did not indicate that individual level of NfC affected credibility ratings.

Introduction

Once the generation of most interest to marketers due to their size and spending power, Baby Boomers, or people born between 1946 and 1964, are now nearing retirement (U.S. Census Bureau, 2007). They are being replaced by the next largest generational group, Millennials, who are loosely defined as those born between 1982 – 2002 (Jayson, 2009). Millennials stand to inherit 41 trillion dollars of their parents' wealth over the next 40 years (Money Management Executive, 2009), and are in fact often already receiving these funds in the form of cash, securities, family limited partnership interests, and trusts as their parents age (Johnsons & Larson, 2009). This transfer of wealth means marketers, including those who manage money and investments, would be wise to turn their attention to this up and coming generation.

At present, the average age of an individual investor is around 55 years old, making Baby Boomers the number one priority of financial services marketing (Coughlin & D'Ambrasio, 2009). Financial services companies are organizations that provide investment advice to individuals and businesses. They offer financial planning for investors to reach their financial goals. A financial services company has to focus on building a long-term relationship with a client rather than completing a short-term transaction (Martenson, 2008). As the Baby Boomers retire, the financial services industry's focus will need to shift to younger individual investors.

There are several key indications that younger people are about to begin investing more seriously. In addition to the wealth they are beginning to inherit, current economic woes create a sense of urgency for Millennials, who have been called the "Recession

Generation” (Jayson, 2009). Millennials have seen the losses of their parents during bad markets and have a strong will not to experience the same pitfall. They are learning to be more frugal, save and plan with the money, giving them a newfound interest in financial planning (Jayson, 2009). Financial planning also “will take on a new urgency in the face of continuing social debates about the solvency of programs (social security and Medicare) and the importance for individual planning and self reliance” (Johnson & Larson, 2009, p. 66). On top of all this, young people often don’t know where to turn for financial advice. *Money Management Executive* (2009) found that 54% of young adults believe that they don’t have the necessary tools and resources for getting financial help. Inherited wealth, a turbulent economy, and lack of personal financial knowledge among Millennials means there is an opportunity for the financial services industry to shift their focus from Baby Boomers to younger adults who are of the Millennial generation. They just need to figure out the most effective and efficient way to do so. Despite similarities between the two generations, there are some big differences as well, meaning financial companies will not necessarily be able to continue using the same marketing strategies and tactics that have worked for them in the past.

This study will consider characteristics of the Millennial generation, with an emphasis on those 18 and over, and apply theory in how persuasive messages are processed to explore what strategies marketers might use to effectively shift to a younger target market. Results will not only add to what is known about how persuasion works in marketing, but also provide practical advice to financial companies as they face this new challenge.

Millennials

New research is bringing more clarity to how marketing to Millennials is currently positioned. A recent Pew Internet & American Life report found the 93% of Millennials are currently online and make up the largest generation of internet users (Jones & Fox, 2009). *Vox Marketing*, an online marketing magazine, stresses that digital and online marketing is important to reaching a younger demographic. A strong digital presence is important because Millennials are difficult for advertisers to directly reach, “There’s so much clutter in the world of advertising that it is hard to break through” (Littman, 2008, p. 74). Millennials have a large number of media choices and it can be challenging to get their attention, but due to their heavy reliance on the internet, it is a wise place to locate messages targeting them directly.

In addition to their use of the Internet, Millennials are unique in the types of advertising and marketing that appeal to them. Popular companies marketing commodities or one-time purchases have mastered creative tactics, such as humor and personal marketing approaches like blogs and testimonials that fuel spending impulses with young adults (Littman, 2008). To pair with the creative approaches and personal appeals that resonate with Millennials, accessibility and entertainment are also important. Advertisements must be quick and up to date to catch the attention of Millennials (Morton, 2002).

Millennials tend to be active information seekers. They are skeptical about being advertised to and thus don’t necessarily need or want an advertiser to put information in front of them (Wallace, Walker, Lopez, & Jones, 2009). In their study of Millennials’

information-seeking behavior, Wallace et al. (2009) found that this group frequently utilizes Word of Mouth (WoM) or personal referrals from friends and contacts on social networks, and will then use the internet to seek out company information themselves before committing to a purchase. This makes a company's website of great importance to anyone hoping to target this age group since many Millennials will go out to the Internet to validate WoM references. Recognizing this, "nearly half of marketers at financial services firms say digital initiatives will be integral to their marketing within two years, but their lack of experimentation, low digital budgets and difficulty with measurements are preventing them from realizing digital's full potential now" (Oct. 2008). Dahlen, Rasch and Rosengren (2003) looked at the effectiveness of websites that market high involvement or long-term product purchases. They found that visiting a product's website builds attitude towards the brand as well as allows consumers to satisfy their need for more information. Dahlen et al. (2003) emphasized the importance of a well-structured site with information that is easily accessible. In keeping with this, traditional advice to professional marketers for financial services has been to be explicit about their products, be practical, and to treat financial services consumers as well-educated (Nagdeman, 2009). Of course this advice is geared toward the traditional financial services client who tends to be more mature. In contrast to this advice and to most financial services marketing Levy (2008) notes that a less cluttered message presented in a simpler manner is important to Millennials satisfaction with messages. This means that less is more when it comes to the amount of information that is presented on a company's website. Thus, while a well-structured site is typically thought to satisfy a consumers' need for information, particularly for financial service products, with Millennials'

information needs to be easily accessible and formatted in an easy to follow and simplistic design, suggesting that more simplistic advertising may be more effective.

In this day and age, marketers are challenged to grab a young adult's attention in new unconventional ways as traditional advertising becomes less prevalent. In addition to other challenges, young adults have been called the "know- it- all" generation (Novack, 2009). They are not as likely to look to an advertisement or a website thoroughly to get their purchasing information. They are more likely than older generations to be influenced by quick snippets of catchy information and taglines because they don't always think they need to put forth more effort to make an informed decision. This may be a function of their tendency to block out traditional advertising such as pop-up ads and TV commercials (Novack, 2009).

Currently, many financial services websites are aimed at educated, conservative older adults who have been in the market for years. Information-driven sites are typical for financial services firms that place a high value on nearing retirement and portray older adults enjoying their retirement for their consumers to relate to. Youngman (1998), in discussing the amount of financial literature and information that is usually contained in financial services marketing materials, noted, "Financial services advertising was often boring and only sought to improve the corporate image" (Youngman, 1998, pp. 64-65). Contradictory to what is incorporated in traditional financial services marketing, Levy (2008), believes that Millennials are looking for clear and simple marketing since they are so bombarded with information all the time. Additionally, Millennials are not savvy or educated in the basics of personal investments. Volpe, Haiyang and Pavlicko (1996) found that young adults have low literacy scores when it comes to their knowledge of

investments, particularly in the case of women and non-business majors. Thus, marketing materials that are heavy in information may not be appreciated, if they are noticed at all. If this is the case, it becomes clear that current financial services marketing does not directly align with the Millennial generation, who likes attention getting-devices, is turned off by too much information, and many of whom are historically illiterate in understanding personal investments.

In summary, Millennials are a complicated group for financial companies to advertise to. They are characterized by emphasis on technology, a preference for self-directed information-seeking, need for fun and entertaining marketing, and limited financial knowledge. They can be a bit unpredictable in that even when marketers have an idea of what appeals to them by giving them snippets of messages, they turn around and do more research on their own by utilizing technology. Littman (2008) pointed to the presence of technology as the trigger for reaching the masses of Millennials. A homepage is often the first point of interaction with products and services for many internet users so it is important that companies keep in mind first impressions when building their site. A structured and minimalistic site could be most effective with Millennials' message processing tendencies (Dahlen et al., 2003), even though for financial services companies, a less informative message is not typically the norm.

Given this disconnect, it is worthwhile to move beyond examining Millennials' preferences and habits to consider what communication theory suggests about how persuasive messages, such as marketing materials and more specifically homepages of websites, are processed. This research will attempt to identify trends in how Millennials view financial services marketing in the form of a company homepage, including ways in

which they differ from members of older generations. This will provide practical advice for marketers in how to appeal to Millennials.

Central versus Peripheral Processing

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) demonstrates how persuasive messages are cognitively processed to influence a person's attitude. ELM argues that people typically process messages one of two ways, depending on their motivation and "ability to engage in issue-relevant thinking" (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984 p. 673). According to the model, people with higher motivation and/or ability are more likely to elaborate on a persuasive message, or follow the central route, a more time and energy-intensive processing path. This more highly motivated route involves deeper thinking about the message. People lacking motivation to really think about a message, or who are distracted or otherwise unable to do so, are more likely to take the peripheral route, named due to the catchy, easy heuristics that these people tend to notice more than the actual arguments being made (Cacioppo & Petty, 1984). Cacioppo and Petty (1983) found that those who process via the peripheral route are more open to changing their attitude about the message or message producer than those who processed via the more intense, central route. Cialdini, Petty and Cacioppo (1981) note that several factors including motivation, persistence (recurrence) of the message, distractions, and ability to relate to the audience, can have an impact on the route taken and the subsequent effectiveness of a persuasive message.

Central route processing represents an effortful processing path. With central route processing, a person is willing to invest the time and energy necessary to pay

attention to the message and to process it. Central route processing takes place when the elaboration likelihood is high. This high elaboration includes a more detailed evaluation of the message than the peripheral route. Thus, message strength plays an important role in persuasion (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984) and can outweigh the value of the peripheral cues if the individual has the motivation to process via the central route. People will be more likely to scrutinize all aspects of a message when they are putting in the effort to arrive at an accurate judgment. Those who will process centrally are still likely to take notice of some of the peripheral cues like the source of the message (Chao, 1999); however, they have a more vested interest in further processing the message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Thus, source and heuristic cues incorporated into a message cannot stand alone to persuade when elaboration likelihood is high. This means that the message producer needs to be aware of both the peripheral and central cues they are sending. Regardless of which way they are hoping the message receiver processes the message, a highly involved individual will notice all cues. For example, a financial services webpage that is information-rich and contains a great deal of centrally processed cues also needs to have awareness of heuristic cues such as the visual layout and source citing. In some cases, the heuristic cues can discredit a message for someone processing the central route. A person with high processing ability might receive these cues as manipulative or biased on the part of the marketer or company (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Although this path can require more thoughtful communication from the message sender, an enticing benefit for marketers to try to design messages likely to be processed centrally is it induces an attitude change that is more permanent and can withstand the test of time over other processing paths (Cialdini, Cacioppo & Petty, 1981).

There are instances when a person doesn't have the time, motivation or opportunity for central processing. This is where peripheral processing comes into the picture. Peripheral route processing is on the other end of the spectrum from the central processing path, occurring when elaboration likelihood is low. "Attitude change occurs because the person associates the attitude issue or object with positive and negative cues or makes simple inference about merits of the advocated position based on various simple cues in the persuasion context" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984, p. 668). While it does bring about an attitude change for the message receiver; this attitude is more open to a change in opinion than that of a centrally processed message. The quick cues (source attractiveness, lack of effort needed to process and visual appeal) of peripheral processing leave less of an impression on individuals. People who are processing via the peripheral route do not have the ability or convenience to put more effort into processing or they may also not have the motivation to elaborate on the given message. Additionally, Chao (1999) described the subject's prior knowledge of the message, product or company as an indicator of ability. With products or companies in technical industries or industries with a great deal of jargon, central route processing might not be possible if an individual is not knowledgeable on the topic. Thus, ability can also be overall intellect for the topic presented. For example, a financial services website can be full of helpful information; however, if it has jargon and an uneducated consumer is confronted with the page, it is more likely they will process peripherally, since they do not have the knowledge to process the central cues. This might very well be the case with many Millennials, who are novice to investing. For an individual to process a message using the central route they

must have both the ability to further elaborate and the motivation to do so; otherwise, the result might be a peripherally processed message.

In determining which of the previously discussed routes are taken (central vs. peripheral), the two main factors affecting persuasion are motivation (i.e., involvement) and ability to process (Chao, 1999). Motivational factors include issue involvement, commitment to the product or issue, arousal, and a person's need for further processing. An example of what can trigger involvement or motivation can be the relevance of the issue at hand. The more relevant the issue or message is to the individual; the more likely s/he is to further elaborate; if an issue is not personally relevant to the individual, the less likely elaboration is. A personal involvement or previous commitment to the message source can influence the amount of arousal that the message elicits, which can determine the route of processing. Even if a person has the motivation to process elaborately, the ability and situation for further elaboration must be present (Petty & Cacioppo, 1981).

The other factor, ability to process, is tied to lack of interference or distractions, message comprehensibility, prior knowledge, and convenience (Chao, 1999). Bitner and Obermiller (1985) explained the ability variable as situational. While a marketer cannot control the situation in which a marketing message is processed, s/he can control what cues go into the message and can insert cues that are predictive of peripheral or central processing. If there are not cues that facilitate the central route, such as ample information, then the receiver doesn't have the ability to process centrally (Obermiller & Bitner, 1985). This is often how marketers attempt to control the route of processing. If the characteristics that lend themselves to central route processing are not present, despite

the message receiver's motivation and ability, they would process via the peripheral route. For example, a financial services advertisement that merely shows a picture of a smiling retired couple and lists a phone number to call to speak to a representative regarding financial services doesn't provide the consumer with the information to process centrally. If prospective customers choose to call the number, they have likely processed peripherally unless they have done other research on their own. On the other hand, filling an advertisement or other marketing message with data and information cannot guarantee it will be processed centrally, especially since most people exposed to it may not want to bother reading it. The presence of the information does at least give motivated consumers the ability to process centrally if they so desire. If they do not desire to indulge in effortful processing, even in the event central cues are present, then peripheral processing is likely to take place

The type of processing that occurs can depend not only on the consumers' characteristics and motivation; it can also depend on the product and service. Decisions about low-involvement products, which refer to one-time buy, commodity transactions that are typically lower in price and/or risk (Um, 2008), are typically made via peripheral processing (Bitner & Obermiller, 1985). For example, purchasing a bottled soda is likely to be a peripheral route decision. It is a quick purchase decision for a low priced item that is not likely to cause problems regardless of which brand is chosen. On the other hand, purchasing a home, which is a long-term decision about a high priced item, is considered a high-involvement decision. It is important to note that even though a specific type of product message is more likely to be processed one way or another, it still depends on product involvement or relevance (Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). For example, a

Petty et al. (1983) study featured an advertisement for a new razor among college students. One group of students was told the new product would be tested in their community, while another group was told the product would be tested nationwide. Although a disposable razor may not seem like a product that would generate central processing, the message was centrally processed by the students in the group who thought the new product was coming to their town (Petty, et al., 1983). In this case, relevance was an important factor in the students' involvement. The students who processed centrally had the ability and motivation to further elaborate, whereas the low- involvement processing students had the ability, but did not have the motivation since they believed the product was not personally relevant to them even though they were presented with central cues. Again, the motivation and ability element are vital to a central processing route. For financial services companies, they need be able to create relevance for Millennials to see that they also can benefit from investing. Often, if a message is tailored to an older adult, a younger consumer might not believe that the product or service is even relevant to them. Therefore, they might not even pay any attention to the marketing of a financial services company. However, in order for marketers to build relationships with and ultimately gain the market share of Millennials, individuals need to feel personally spoken to by the company through their messaging.

Need for Cognition and Financial Services.

ELM is informative with respect to how individuals generally process persuasive messages and how to build a persuasive message for a desired outcome. It also argues that individual differences play an important role in what type of processing someone

engages in. For example, some individuals have a need and enjoyment for deeper thinking. Differences in how people process messages can be attributed to their Need for Cognition (NfC), defined as the “need for tendency to engage in and enjoy effortful cognitive endeavors” (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984, p. 306). NfC can be predictive of how an individual will process a message regardless of the message strength or heuristic cues (Areni, Ferrell & Wilcox, 2000). People who are higher in NfC naturally seek out more information and enjoy the cognitive effort that is involved in doing so, whereas people low in NfC are more persuaded by simple cues and don’t seek out more information that would induce central route processing (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982).

Haugtvedt, Petty and Cacioppo (1992) confirmed notions that an individual’s level of NfC can be explained through their personality. In Haugtvedt et al.’s (1992) study, differences in how various advertisement attributes are processed differently by those high in NfC and those low in NfC were noted. High NfC individuals were significantly more drawn to the central route than those low in NfC, who were not. Central and heuristic cues have a bigger impact on decision-making in regard to a product or service depending on the individual’s NfC. Thus, while many Millennials as a population might be drawn to marketing materials geared for peripheral processing, this would not necessarily hold true for Millennials high in NfC. Those high in NfC are still likely to process using the central route despite how the messaging is presented. It is important not to lose sight of how persuasion may vary among each individual when appealing to a generation.

Financial services is a high-involvement product which may inspire those high in NfC to want to process centrally even if they are presented with peripheral cues. Healy (2007) used the example of drug companies marketing their high-involvement drugs using peripheral cues. They used expert opinions and buzz words to market their drug products. This created a situation in which the consumer couldn't process centrally if they desired to without further research and they assumed their drug sales were from those who were processing peripherally. Those who did purchase were likely low in NfC. While we know this type of advertising is more appealing to Millennials in general, those Millennials with high NfC will likely still seek more information before making a decision about purchasing the drug products or any other high-involvement process. Similar to pharmaceuticals, financial services is a service that has typically required effortful processing and has assumed that consumers will put in that extra effort. High NfC individuals might also be more financially savvy or have a better understanding of investment products and services, building their case for having higher involvement. Therefore, they would demand more central cues to make a judgment and common sense would tell us that they would not appreciate messaging that is not designed to be centrally processed. Without much previous research specifically on Millennials and their reaction to a high-involvement product with use of peripheral cues, it remains to be established where Millennials fall with regard to NfC and financial services.

ELM and Financial Services Sites.

The challenge faced by marketing campaigns for a financial services company is determining if appealing to new, young consumers differs from what their campaigns

have traditionally entailed. For most service categories and high-involvement purchases, including financial services, central processing would typically be ideal to gain consumer loyalty. Indeed, in financial services marketing, straightforward information that allows an educated consumer to draw a conclusion is valued (Nagdeman, 2009). This would take into account the seriousness of the product offering, and provide information for those high in NfC and/or financial savvy. It would also generate the type of processing associated with lasting and strong attitude change. In terms of a financial services website or advertisement, this would entail creating a website that is rich with information for people who are highly motivated and able to take the time to process centrally.

However, as these companies turn their attention to a new target market, they would be wise to recognize that characteristics of Millennials suggest they might respond better to marketing materials designed to be peripherally processed. Typically, this age group does not have the time, motivation, or desire to read complex marketing messages and evaluate facts, particularly on a subject that is largely unfamiliar to them, and is more likely to be drawn in by heuristic cues. In terms of a financial service company homepage, this means they will be more likely to notice a site that has a clean or attractive layout. In fact, even though financial services are a high-involvement service, Stanford, Tauber, Fogg, and Marable (2002) discovered that consumers evaluated financial websites on their overall design and layout, and considered these their most influential factors. This was in contrast to financial experts, who were much more concerned with the type and quality of information on the sites, mimicking perceptions of an older more educated consumer. While Stanford et al. (2002) found this for all age

groups; presumably it is especially true for Millennials given the characteristics discussed above.

At the same time, marketers face two challenges: getting Millennials to notice and pay attention to their companies and products, and convincing them to give the company their business once they do pay attention. Investing with a broker is long-term commitment that requires a relationship of trust and credibility, not just the initial attention of the target audience to marketing messages. Given what is known about ELM and Millennials, this study therefore seeks to determine Millennials' perception of a financial services website, to see if they find an information-rich site or a less informative, simple site to be more credible. Will Millennials follow the norm of traditional financial services marketing and go for more information, or will they find a simple page more appealing?

Credibility

In addition to eliciting the preferred processing route for their product or service, a financial services company must be able to portray trust and credibility to build and maintain a client base (Coughlin & D'Ambrosio, 2009). Investing one's money is not something that is done without trust or belief that a company is credible. Financial services companies brand their reputation with the hopes that consumers will find they are credible. For the purposes of this study, Erdem and Swait's (2004) perspective on credibility will be used, "The credibility of a brand as a signal (i.e. brand credibility) has been conceptualized as the believability of the product position information contained in the brand" (p. 191). The ability to create "believability" in the minds of consumers can be

built various ways depending on the service, product or audience. Stanford et al. (2002), characterized credibility as incorporating trustworthiness and having the messaging delivered by an expert source; additionally they referred to credibility as “perceived quality” (p.79). In this sense, credibility is not a tangible quality, but a personal frame of reference to an individual. A company must be able to show how their product fits into that frame of credibility in the mind of the consumer. Overall, corporate and brand reputation are greatly affected by the perceived credibility of the product or service.

Credibility is an important judgment to companies because it can influence purchase behaviors of consumers (Lafferty, Goldsmith, & Newell, 2002). The importance of credibility breaks generational barriers. Credibility is ranked highly among young adults seeking out financial advice (Johnson & Larson, 2009). Thus, Millennials are no different than older adults in needing to do business with a credible company. However, building a sense of credibility in a consumer’s mind is something that researchers and marketers have been trying to understand due to its complicated nature. It is not yet clear what type of processing (central or peripheral) is most effective for building credibility in the minds of younger adults. It would seem that credibility would be an outcome of a centrally processed decision. Zinkhan and Zinkhan (1985) confirmed the importance of financial services being processed centrally and why it is the most likely route for the average consumer. They studied consumers’ response to a financial services advertisement based on its attractiveness or meaningfulness of the message and found that a favorable cognitive response (meaningfulness) was more highly correlated to consumers’ intentions to learn more about investing from the marketer (Zinkhan & Zinkhan, 1985). This type of processing is a common theme among traditional financial

services advertising. However, looking at Millennials, they often seem naturally geared toward processing via the peripheral route. They enjoy advertising that is accessible, requires low-involvement, less thinking and is entertaining (Feld, 2008). This would then suggest that peripheral route processing would be most effective for this group in building credibility even though logic tells us that the central route is more likely for a conclusion of credibility. Understanding which route is the best traveled for company is vital. A lack of credibility or the inability of a company to communicate can be disastrous for a high-involvement product such as choosing a financial services company to manage investments.

Indeed, several research studies have illustrated that the peripheral route can be effective for building credibility in some cases. Lafferty et al. (2002) found that companies whose products involve less processing or involvement from the consumers have used heuristic cues such as endorsers, listing awards or noting accreditations to influence credibility. The same study showed that the individual endorsing the ad had an effect on the consumers' attitude toward the brand. They also found strong ties between using an expert source and brand attitude. In the Stanford et al. (2002) study, two industries that rely on central processing, health and finances, were used to understand how consumers judge a website on credibility. They found that despite the high involvement nature of these services, peripheral cues such as page design and organization did not go unnoticed by consumers. The participants rated the peripheral cues as important indicators of credibility, higher than the message substance, quality and quantity. Clow, Berry, Kranenburg, & James (2005) found that visual aspects in advertising interacted concurrently with the strength of the message to impact a

credibility judgment showing that peripheral cues can help strengthen the central cues. They ultimately found that ad copy is more significant in terms of credibility than heuristics; this might not necessarily be true when looking specifically at Millennials. While the previous research mentioned here looked at consumer across generations, Lackaff and Cheong (2008) surveyed a more specific demographic on their perception of credibility, college students. They found that the credibility of a website was tied to peripheral cues for students, “Heuristics based on organization of the information are employed in students’ search and evaluation of online information” (Lackaff & Cheong, 2008, p. 25). Based on these findings, there might be connections with Millennials, who primarily make up college populations, peripheral cues and the use of the internet. Stanford et al. (2002) and Lackaff and Cheong, (2008) both found significant relationships between heuristics and websites that will be further explored in this study.

Given the importance of the Internet to Millennials, and the ubiquity of corporate homepages as a form of advertising, consideration must be given to how evaluations of credibility occur for websites. In addition to the believability of its messages, a website’s credibility can also be tied to other variables such as look, usability, realistic feel (i.e., contact information, credentials) and overall functionality. As compared to other communication forms, the internet involves many more variables when building credibility. Fogg (2003) theorizes that when someone makes a credibility judgment about a website, “the user notices something (prominence) and the user make a judgment about it (interpretation)” (p.722). Therefore, even if a marketer doesn’t intend for the layout or functionality of the page to be very influential, it can be because of how people make interpretations and form opinions. With web pages, it is not just the message or

information, but also source cues that influence determination of credibility. Although functionality isn't specifically explored in this study, layout or organization of the page are variables to consider, and all these elements are important to building a persuasive website. Stanford et al. (2002) did find that people will give high marks for both central and peripheral cues in terms of credibility for a site. Professional design, up-to-date and quick answers to questions were rated highly for heuristic cues whereas authors' credentials and the privacy policy were rated well in terms of central cues. These studies build the case for how credibility judgments of websites can happen via central and/or peripheral processing.

Based on the previous research and understanding of Millennials, web pages can be designed to predict how credibility might be formed. If marketers design a web page that assumes central processing will occur for this audience, we might expect to see increased credibility for just those who have a high NfC. This would suggest that a careful evaluation of a message had been made and suggest the message is proposed in a way that encompasses detail and is informative. This would also be the assumption under an information-rich designed homepage since quantity and strength of message are central cues. However, Stanford et al. (2002) discussed how cleanness of a page can also affect credibility. In much of advertising, this is known as white space. *Smashing Magazine*, an online magazine, believes that a simplistic website that correctly uses white space can improve readability and make a better impression (www.smashingmagzine.com, 2009). Nice clean format and layout without clutter is also considered an aesthetic heuristic (Hilligoss & Reih, 2007). These peripheral cues seem to be important factors for web page designers when looking at those who process

peripherally, which might include Millennials who are looking for simple, less cluttered messages (Levy, 2008). Therefore, a less informative, more simplistic page could also receive high credibility ratings from Millennials. Although several points have been made on how websites should include central and peripheral cues, the individual differences that were explained by NfC can also be a factor for credibility.

How credibility is formed in the mind of the consumer can be based on the person's background and personality, including NfC, as well as their ability, in the form of prior knowledge. We know that financial services are clearly a high-involvement product due to the longevity of the relationship and personal commitment involved. When building a website, companies in health and financial services must understand that credibility level can vary according to the background of the consumer due to the variance in subject knowledge (Stanford et al, 2002). This study will measure how financially savvy a person is in order to control for previous knowledge and ability and its impact on a credibility rating.

Integrating principals of credibility and ELM and NfC make several points prevalent. Although choosing a financial services provider is a high-involvement decision, the average Millennial consumer may not be using central processing cues to make an effective decision. Peripheral cues can be an indicator of credibility to the average internet user (Lackaff & Cheong, 2008; Stanford et al., 2002). Not only would previous knowledge and motivation of the subject matter cause variances on processing no matter how the website is designed, but Haugtvedt et al.'s (1992) research also tells us that variances in personality have an effect on processing path. In addition, Millennials

are less likely to find appeal in highly informative messages. Hilligoss and Reih (2007) found that heuristics such as white space play a part in website credibility among the college demographic in regard to a website. In addition to the website design, NfC predicts an individual's likely route of processing based on their personality. How people with low or high NfC assess credibility can vary. While we are unsure of whether an information-rich or a simple site built with scarce information will be found as more credible for Millennials, ELM and NfC help indicate how different groups will interpret each page. Based on the research of central processing, how high NfC individuals react and how ability (specifically prior knowledge) affects credibility, the following research questions are posed:

RQ1: Will Millennials who have a high need for cognition rate the information-rich page or the simple page as more credible?

RQ2: Will Millennials who are low in need for cognition rate the info rich page or the simple page as more credible?

Millennials and Intent to Invest

Investment firms trying to reach the younger generations are struggling with how to gain a larger market share of Millennials, which means ultimately winning their business and long-term loyalty. The final goal of financial services firms when appealing to Millennials and building credibility in their minds is to have them invest their savings and remain lifelong customers as they build their wealth. Although there are a variety of outlets that firms can use to start the relationship with Millennials and build credibility,

the Internet is one of the best ways to directly reach the masses of Millennials out there seeking information. The Internet is reported to drive purchasing behaviors. A study by DoubleClick, an online research company, reported that web sites and online marketing had an impact on consumers wanting to learn more in the purchasing stages of a product (Parker, 2003).

Ran Kim and Jin, (2003) found that credibility was significantly tied to a consumer's attitude formation of a company and their website. They also found that this attitude influenced an individual's purchase intent. In general, credibility is a major contributor to attitude formation of a company on the Internet (Ran Kim & Jin, 2003). Knowing that the Millennials are heavy users of the web and receptive to technology-based advertising (Mitchell, Mclean, & Turner, 2005), a website could be a key driver to which company they invest with. Thus, financial firms need to jump on the technology bandwagon and must know how to build websites and advertising that speaks to credibility, which is tied to purchasing intentions.

For a high-involvement service like choosing an investment firm, it is important to build a webpage that relays a message of credibility and also leaves the consumer with positive feelings about the site and company. Those positive feelings will drive behaviors such as considering investing with a financial services company or least contacting them to find out more information. In order to examine purchase intent, another research question is considered:

RQ3: Are Millennials more likely to consider investing with a company with an information-rich site or with a site that is simple?

Methods

Participants were recruited to participate in an experiment with a 2 (information rich vs. simple web page) x 2 (low versus high NfC) design to determine the influence of information quantity on credibility and purchase intention. Two versions of a homepage for a fictitious financial services company were created; one with a large quantity of information and text (the “information-rich” page) and one page with significantly less information, corresponding to more of a peripheral processing path (simple page). Participants were randomly assigned to the information-rich or simple condition and then completed a survey based on what they viewed.

Procedure and Participants

Students in undergraduate communication or business (finance, marketing and general business) classes received an e-mail from one of their professors inviting them to participate in an online survey. Students were offered a modest amount of extra credit for agreeing to participate and completing the survey within twelve days. Participants in this study were 377 undergraduate students 18 years of age and older at a large Midwest public university. Any participants not answering at least two-thirds, or 25 out of 37, of the questions were deleted from the data pool. The final number of participants after the data was cleaned was 363. A majority of participants were female (61%) and approximately 289 (79.6%) of these participants were Millennials falling under the age cutoff of 26. Of the 363 participants, 36.5% were business majors and more than half (63.5%) were not.

The email contained a link to either the information-rich or simple webpage. In most cases, students within each class were randomly assigned to the conditions. However, in a few cases, entire classes were only provided the link to one condition. Once this was realized, a reminder e-mail was sent several days later, with a random subset containing the link to the condition that had not yet been represented. In other words, some of the students received the same link they received in the original e-mail and some received the link to the other condition.

Participants were instructed that their answers were anonymous and that if they felt distress at any time, they could discontinue the study and still receive credit. The survey was distributed online via Survey Monkey. After viewing a consent page, participants were asked to read through the website home page that would appear next, and then answer questions about it. Once they clicked through, participants viewed either the information-rich or the simple site; they then completed a brief survey. A back button was provided so that participants could look back at the homepage since no parts of the study entailed recall or first impression. Upon completion of the survey, a link was provided to a separate survey to enter their personal information for extra credit. This assured anonymity of the study was protected. Approval of this method was received by the Institutional Review Board by the researcher for this study at the University of Missouri – St.Louis.

Stimulus

Two versions of a homepage for a fictitious financial services company were designed with the help of a graphic designer. For convenience purposes, an existing website for a small financial services company in a different state was used as a template for the stimuli; however, the company name was changed to Mesary. Two versions of the site were created; both were identical with the exception of the amount of information they contained, which was manipulated to represent an information-rich and a simple condition. Both pages were static so that the participant only had the opportunity to view and read over the homepage, but did not have access to go to other areas of the site since this study did not measure page functionality. However, both pages contained tabs across the top that gave the perception that other information would be available to access if this were not a static site.

The information-rich site (See Appendix A) was full of text, including financial facts, analyst reviews, and industry jargon. An assessment of it would require the participant to read through the information to learn more about the company and the type of services they offered. Based on Stanford et al. (2002) and Hillgross and Reih's (2007) research, the simple page (See Appendix B) was cleaner, used more white space, and contained significantly less information than the information-rich page. For example, while the information-rich site contained several data-packed sentences discussing how the company provided account protection under the heading "Elite Account Protection", the simple page had the same heading with nothing below it for elaboration. Additionally, the simple page had only two tabs indicating additional linked pages,

whereas the information-rich page contained eight tabs that resulted in a more cluttered or full appearance.

Pilot test

A pilot test of the stimulus was carried out prior to data collection. Forty students at the same university were randomly shown one of the websites and asked to indicate agreement on a 5-point Likert scale with the following statements: “This site is visually appealing;” “This site is easy to read;” “This site is informative;” “This site is well organized;” and “This site is detailed.” Two of the results suggested the difference between the two pages was not as distinct as desired. The pilot test revealed that participants found the information-rich page as significantly easier to read than the simple page $t(40) = 2.47, p = .022, (M_{info-rich} = 2.59, SD = 1.12, M_{simple} = 1.82, SD = .63)$. Additionally, they found the info the information-rich page as less detailed than the simple page $(M_{info-rich} = 1.76, SD = .56, M_{simple} = 2.71, SD = .85)$.

This led to removal of additional text, information, and tabs from the simple page. After these edits, the simple page, as used in the final experiment, was judged to be easier to read $t(283) = -3.66, p < .01, (M_{info-rich} = 3.31, SD = .95, M_{simple} = 3.73, SD = 1.01)$, less informative $t(281) = 7.31, p < .01, (M_{info-rich} = 3.96, SD = .63, M_{simple} = 3.25, SD = .63)$, and less detailed $t(286) = 10.84, p < .01, (M_{info-rich} = 3.88, SD = .73, M_{simple} = 2.77, SD = .74)$ than the info-rich page, which did not receive any modifications.

Measures

Need for Cognition

Need for Cognition was measured using a scale from Petty and Cacioppo's (1984) study. NfC was measured by asking individuals to respond to the following 15 statements on a five-point Likert scale: "I like tasks that require little thought once I've learned them;" "I prefer to think about small daily projects instead of long-term projects;" "I really enjoy a task that involves coming up with new solutions and problems;" "I don't like to have the responsibility of handling situations that require a lot of thinking;" "The idea of relying on thought to make my way to the top does not appeal to me;" "I prefer complex problems to simple problems I think only as hard as I have to;" "I prefer to just let things happen rather than trying to understand why they turned out that way;" "The notion of thinking abstractly is not appealing to me;" "I would rather do something that requires little thought than something that challenges my thinking abilities;" "Thinking is not my idea of fun;" "I find satisfaction in deliberating hard and for long hours; I prefer my life to be filled with puzzles that I must solve;" "I try to anticipate and avoid situations where there is a likely chance that will have to think in depth;" "Simply knowing the answer rather than understanding the reasons for the answer to a problem is fine with me." A scale was created by calculating each participant's mean answers to the answers of these 15 items resulting in an overall NFC score. The 15 items on the scale had good reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha (estimate of internal consistency) of .86.

Financial savvy

Each individual's knowledge of investing was measured through a short quiz of 6 questions that asked about how a Financial Advisor is paid, familiarity with types of retirement plans (e.g. 401k), diversification, and definitions of investment terms (e.g., blue chip stock, Annuity). Correct answers were summed to give each participant one point for each correct answer, resulting in a score between 0 and 6 to represent their financial savvy. These scores were used in analyses to examine relationships between the dependent variables of the study and financial savvy, but no significant results were found with a participants' score and the dependent variables. Participants' financial savvy score was significantly correlated with their self-reported age group, $r(363) = .11, p < .05$, revealing that as participants' financial savvy score increased so did their age.

Credibility

Credibility questions were modified from a credibility scale originally adapted from Hovland, Janis, and Kelly, (1953) and Newell and Goldsmith (2001). Participants indicated their agreement on a five point Likert-scale with the following items: "The homepage is accurate;" "The homepage is trustworthy;" "The company is honest;" "The company has experience with financial services;" "The company is knowledgeable in regards to financial services;" "The homepage was complete." The Cronbach's alpha for the 6-item credibility scale was .77 ($N = 350$). A mean credibility score was computed for each participant.

Intent to invest.

To measure the dependent variable of intention to invest, two questions were asked: “Do you currently seek advice from a professional Financial Advisor or Financial Planner?” and “In the future, would you consider investing with the financial services company of the homepage you previously viewed.” The possible answers were “yes” or “no”. Those indicating a no response to the question about investing were asked “why” and able to give an open-ended comment that provided the reasoning behind their answer. This resulted in 163 open-ended comments that were examined by the researcher and split into 4 categories: needed more information, already had a financial services provider, not interested in investing, and didn’t find the web page appealing. Next, a second coder sorted the replies into these same categories, with an inter-rater reliability score of 93%. The remaining 7% were corrected for full agreement.

Results**Millennials, NfC & Credibility**

ELM suggests that both an individual’s level of need for cognition (NfC), as well as the informational content of a persuasive message, can affect whether central or peripheral route processing occurs, ultimately affecting the credibility assessment of the message. To explore this, RQ 1 and RQ 2 were proposed. RQ 1 asked how individuals high in NFC and RQ 2 asked how those low in NfC would rate the credibility of the information-rich and simple web pages.

To begin, an independent samples t-test was run comparing the credibility ratings given to each webpage, regardless of NfC. This test revealed that Millennials found the

information-rich webpage significantly more credible than the simple page $t(287) = 4.48$, $p < .01$. The mean rating was close to the midpoint of the 5-point scale ($M_{info-rich} = 3.51$, $SD = .44$; $M_{simple} = 3.26$, $SD = .48$) in both cases.

To fully investigate the relationship among NfC, type of webpage, and credibility, a regression analysis was run next, with NfC and type of webpage (information-rich or simple) as independent variables and credibility as the dependent variable. The regression revealed a significant main effect for type of webpage ($\beta = -.264$, $t(287) = 11.70$, $p < .01$) when controlling for NfC ($p = .10$). NfC was not a significant predictor variable of credibility with Millennials ($p = .073$), nor was there an interaction between NfC and webpage type ($p = .10$). Thus, there was no meaningful difference in how high and low NfC people evaluated the web pages' credibility (See Table 1).

Table 1 Millennial rating of credibility.

	Credibility
Information-Rich	3.51 ^a
Simple	3.26 ^a

a = $p < .01$

Comparison to Non-millennials.

Although the focus of this study was Millennials, the population of the university where it was administered was such that a number of participants ($N = 73$) were older than 26 and still answered the questionnaire. All participants over 26 were combined into a "Non-millennials" group and used in further analyses comparing Millennials to older

people representing those traditionally targeted by financial services companies. The Non-millennials ranged from 27-56.

An independent samples t-test was run comparing these two age groups on credibility ratings across both types of web pages. This revealed that overall, Millennials gave higher credibility ratings to the websites than Non-millennials $t(361) = 2.51, p < .012$, ($M_{\text{Millennials}} = 3.38, SD = .48, M_{\text{Non-millennials}} = 3.22, SD = .48$). Next, a t-test was used to compare Millennials' and non-Millennials' credibility ratings for each type of web page one at a time. In the case of the information-rich page, no significant difference was found ($p = .23$), although ratings for Millennials were higher ($M_{\text{Millennials}} = 3.50, SD = .44, M_{\text{Non-millennials}} = 3.41, SD = .48$). A significant difference was found for the simple page $t(177) = 2.51, p < .01$, ($M_{\text{Millennials}} = 3.26, SD = .49; M_{\text{Non-millennials}} = 2.99, SD = .40$). Thus, Millennials gave higher ratings for credibility for both types of webpage, but the significant difference between them and Non-millennials was driven by the difference in ratings for the simple page (See Table 2).

Table 2 Millennial and Non-Millennial Credibility.

	Information-Rich	Simple	Combined
Millennials	3.50	3.26 ^a	3.38 ^a
Non-Millennials	3.41	2.99 ^a	3.18 ^a

a = $p > .01$

Intent to invest.

A one-way chi-square test indicated that across both web pages, significantly more Millennials (56.4%) than not (43.6%) indicated they would be willing to invest with the company $X^2(1, N = 289) = 4.74, p = .03$. RQ3 asked how that tendency might be affected by viewing an information-rich page as compared to a simple page. To answer this question, a Pearson's chi-square was calculated, revealing no significant difference in Millennials' willingness to invest with the information-rich versus the simple webpage $X^2(1, N = 289) = 1.51, p = .13$. However, as might be expected, more Millennials (53%) said they would invest with the information-rich page than said they would invest with the simple page (47%). More specifically, when looking only at participants who saw the information-rich website, Millennials were significantly more likely to say they would invest than not, $X^2(1, N = 163) = 6.72, p = .010$. But for those who saw the simple webpage, there was no significant difference in the number of people who were and were not willing to invest ($p = .62$). Seemingly Millennials were more willing to invest than not, and that trend was driven by the webpage that gave them more information. A one-way chi square was calculated for the coded open-ended comments made by those who said they would not invest. Significantly more Millennials in the simple page group cited "Needing more information" as their reasoning than did Millennials in the information-rich group $X^2(1, N = 35) = 2.314, p = .05$. No other significant difference was found between the two conditions of Millennials without intent to invest.

Additionally, a chi-square was run to see if Millennials were significantly more or less likely than non-Millennials to invest. This chi-square was not significant ($p = .107$).

Thus, participants appear to be somewhat more willing to intend to invest than not, regardless of being a Millennial or not.

Discussion

Traditionally, financial services companies have marketed to older generations, such as Baby Boomers, who have dominated their clientele. These same companies are now realizing that Millennials are the next generation of investors and need to be scooped up early on. With this in mind, financial services companies are striving to learn how to best communicate with Millennials and win their loyalty. This study therefore asked, “How should Millennials be treated when it comes to marketing financial services?”

Millennials are a unique challenge for marketers due to the difficulty that comes with grabbing and holding their attention. Unfortunately, for marketers, there is a tremendous amount of noise in the competitive landscape to gain market share with Millennials. They are a generation of high-tech internet savvy youth who have strong opinions about what they want out of a relationship with a product or service. Armed with the knowledge of how important the Internet is when marketing to Millennials, this research utilized a home page to find out more about the impression that a company can make on a potential Millennial consumer searching the web. The results of this study indicate a number of opportunities for financial service companies to improve how they are appealing to Millennial investors. The data indicate that Millennials should be treated differently than target markets that have preceded them to some extent. Millennials tend to be more generous with the ‘credibility’ label than their older counterparts when evaluating communications from financial services companies. At the same time, the

differences between Millennials and older generations are not large enough to suggest drastic changes to how financial services currently market.

The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984) helps to explain why these differences may exist. ELM explains that people process messages through the central and peripheral routes. A persuasive decision is often based on how much information is found in the message as well as how motivated audiences are to elaborate on it. Research on Millennials suggests they can often lack the motivation to process a message centrally. They seek out convenient and enticing messages to devote their attention to. This suggests that they would lean towards being more attracted to a webpage that has less information, such as the simple page in this study. However, messages with less information are often viewed as less credible, which could be damaging to a financial services company peddling a high-involvement product. Financial firms traditionally send messages intended to be processed via the central route due to the long-term commitments typically associated with investment decisions and also the high stakes of investing one's wealth.

This study showed that Millennials were able to find credibility in both the information-rich and the simple pages for the financial services company. In other words, Millennials were more generous with credibility ratings than older consumers when there was information lacking. This tells us that Millennials do respond to messages lacking central processing cues differently than older adults in terms of finding them somewhat credible. Millennials were fairly tolerant of the simple page that didn't include very much information and contained little industry jargon. It didn't seem to bother them that the company was providing very little information on the simple page. This could show

that Millennials don't necessarily need to be bombarded with information and that a simpler approach to marketing to them could be influential. This aligns with Levy (2008), who suggested Millennials are more satisfied with simpler messaging.

However, Millennials still rated the information-rich page as more credible than the simple one, showing that they are responsive to more substantive messages and can distinguish between them and quick tidbits of messaging. This is key in understanding how to appeal to Millennials because we know that building credibility in the minds of consumers is important to generating purchase intent. In terms of message processing, the results lead us to believe that peripheral processing is still effective when marketing to Millennials since the simple page which contained peripheral cues, was ranked as somewhat credible. It is reasonable to build awareness and even credibility with more personality than traditional financial service marketing has done in the past. However, to call Millennials to action and to do business with a company, it may be more appropriate to provide a more informative page with greater credibility, encouraging central processing. At least, this is what appears to be the case with a high-involvement service like financial planning; results may differ for lower involvement products that don't assume the risk involved with investing one's savings.

Thus, while less informative marketing can be used with Millennials, in some ways they might not be so different than the more mature traditional financial planning consumer, such as Baby Boomers. The thinking behind traditional financial services marketing has been to impress consumers with displays of information and knowledge. Apparently, that can also work for Millennials. This means a high-involvement service can use peripheral cues to build brand recognition in the mind of Millennials, but when it

comes to building their client base, they need to give them enough information to see the company as credible. In summary, this study found that when provided with more information, Millennials still have a tendency to view the company as upstanding and deem it credible like older generations do. However, they also have a greater appreciation for simpler messaging than Baby Boomers.

In addition to age, Need for Cognition (NfC) might also play an important role in predicting individuals' reactions to information-rich versus simple marketing messages. Those high in NfC usually finding messaging with central cues more appealing and are more likely to process centrally than peripherally. For this reason, it was hypothesized that participants exposed to the simple page who are high in NfC might not feel that they have enough information to make a decision on the credibility of the page, whereas the low NfC participants would be able to and are more comfortable with the lack of information. However, support for this assertion was not found in this study, despite previous research that found that NfC affected the ways in which a person evaluates an advertisement (Haugvedt et. al., 1992).

In the current study, NfC was not found to be a determinant of how credible the participants found either page. There are a few explanations for this finding. First, while, Haugvedt's study pointed to high NfC participants using central cues and low NfC participants paying attention to peripheral cues, he asked specific questions about the product being offered. The current study did not ask specific questions about the company itself. The questions asked pertained to individual thoughts and feelings surrounding the webpage (honest, trustworthy etc.). Because the questions were targeted at how the webpage appeared, not specifically an interaction the individual had with the

company or products they offered, participants may have separated their feelings about the webpage from the company, which would explain why their credibility rating in each group was not predictive of their level of NfC.

Second, participants self-reported on NfC, with the outcome that none of the participants scored extremely low on NFC. On a one to five scale, no participant scored under a two and most scores fell around the median of three. This made it difficult to make determinations about high and low NfC participants. The lack of a normal distribution suggests a level of social desirability when reporting on NfC. Generally speaking, people do not like to admit they are mentally lazy, even in an anonymous survey. The social desirability effect could have contributed to the lack of variance, which in turn led to not finding statistical significance with NfC. There was truly not a pool of low NfC individuals to analyze from: everyone fell in the middle of the road or on the high end of the NfC spectrum. Lastly, this may be an indication that NfC doesn't play a large role in short-term evaluation of a persuasive message. The survey took the students no more than 15 minutes, which didn't leave much time for a personality factor, such as NfC, to affect their overall impression of the site. This might be further tested in future studies by follow-up questionnaires a few days after completing the initial survey, and might be tested outside of a college population to see if more variance in NfC could be found and if this impacts credibility ratings.

For a company in the financial industry, credibility is crucial to sustaining a reputation. In addition, credibility can fuel purchase intentions of a client. In the end, all companies create their marketing and advertising to gain a positive image in the mind of consumer for the purpose of persuading the consumer to purchase with them. In the

current study, the only touch point that consumers had to determine credibility was reviewing the webpage shown. Credibility ratings were based on how honest, trustworthy, and knowledgeable they found the company and how complete they thought the page to be. Future studies should use more robust credibility measurements, as well as solicit participants' opinions of other facets of the stimuli as well as predisposed attitudes to the financial services industry.

Although Millennials did find the information-rich page more credible than the simple page, they were not more likely to consider investing with the company based on one page over another. In fact, there was very little difference in the number of participants who would invest with the information-rich page over the simple page. Additionally, there were more participants in each group who said they would invest than not invest. Millennials seemed open to the possibility of investing with a company from just viewing a snapshot of their webpage, suggesting they are open-minded about the lack of information contained in the simple page. This tells us that financial services companies may be able to use less informative communications to make an impression on Millennials. However, when Millennials who indicated they would not invest with the company presented on the webpage were asked "why not," comments included, "Not enough qualifying information provided" or "I can't say yes based on just a webpage." These comments were even more prevalent among the group that viewed the simple page. So for those who wouldn't invest from viewing the simple page, there was a trend of needing more information and also indicating that with the message being tailored differently, they might consider investing with them.

Informative communication directed at potential clients is important in building credibility, regardless of the generation. A change that marketers of long-term services may want to consider is to have additional specific marketing targeted to Millennials to draw them in and gain their attention for the company. This marketing should contain streamlined messaging and a smaller amount of clutter. These initial marketing pieces would be designed to build brand recognition and set the stage for a financial service company starting to foster a relationship with Millennials. However, to hold on to consumers long-term, they do need an image of credibility built with substantial, more informative messaging.

There were some limitations with this study. It is important to keep in mind that this was a hypothetical scenario and participants did not actually have to commit to investing. Thus, the study suffered from low ecological validity, as there is a big difference between saying you would consider investing with a company and actually investing. Once participants are faced with a real-life situation pertaining to these variables, the outcome could be different. At the same time, participants were only allowed to answer “yes” or “no” so they had to commit one way or the other.

Another limitation was the stimulus. A webpage was chosen since the Internet is the vehicle of communication that most Millennials are familiar with, and also because it provided a convenient method for the researcher. We know that the Internet is a common source of information for Millennials making decisions. Now that it can be accessed from just about anywhere, Millennials are constantly receiving digital information, and with so much of their time spent online, it was appropriate to test this group’s judgment call with a webpage. However, it is not uncommon for someone to visit a webpage for just a few

moments to see what the company is about and form a quick impression. This doesn't necessarily mean they will do more research or even purchase anything. It can also be by accident that they stumble across a page. Thus, to truly understand how to best market to Millennials, additional forms of marketing and media must be studied. Just knowing how Millennials will act towards a webpage is not enough. For now, these findings are limited to web pages.

There were some additional drawbacks to using a webpage. Unlike most real web pages, it was static, meaning there were no active links to take viewers to additional pages. As a result, real world applicability is limited. Future studies should show Millennials a fully functioning homepage to gain a better understanding of how web pages should be set-up.

Due to sampling a college campus, a majority of participants were in the Millennial age parameters. A larger sample of consumers over age 26 would be useful in future studies in order to further test differences between the two age groups; thus, a university setting is not necessarily recommended. Some of the results approaching significance might be significant with a larger sample of Non-millennials. Lastly, the survey was given via the internet. There was no control of the environment in which participants viewed the stimulus and answered the questions. The times of day, noise or other external factors were not controlled. Outside environmental variables that affect an online study could be controlled for by bringing participants into a lab setting.

Despite limitations to this study, it still provides some practical advice to companies in the financial services industry looking at how to gain Millennial market

share. The tremendous opportunity that exists to build a Millennial clientele will not be won with peripheral cues alone such as scarce information. Marketers can use both peripheral processing and central processing in tandem to build a long-term relationship with Millennials. Those firms that master altering their marketing messages to appeal to the next generation in the right doses will be positioned to provide service to Millennials throughout their lifetime.

Appendix A

Information- Rich Page



[Home](#) | [Careers](#) | [Newsroom](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Company

Services

Investment Management

Investment Services

Insurance Services

Investment Banking

Consulting Services


Real Estate

Founded in 1937, Mesary Financial is a diversified financial services firm headquartered in Chicago.

We currently have \$30.8 billion in assets under management and revenues of \$467 million for our last fiscal year.

Mesary Financial
 555 Clark Street
 Chicago, IL 60654
[All office locations >>](#)
[Contact Us >>](#)

Market Watch
[NYSE Updates >>](#)
[Wall Street Journal >>](#)
[Morningstar >>](#)



Our CEO, John C. Tye, has 37 years of industry experience as a Financial Analyst, Planner, CFO and the last 9 years as Mesary's fearless leader. John's philosophy and mission for Mesary is simple,

"Independence is not only an integral part of our history, but remains a driving force today. We find inspiration in our clients' challenges and believe that independent minds are best able to offer innovative solutions."

JOHN C. TYE, CEO

Independent minds...bring innovative solutions.
 Mesary has financial solutions. We're equipped to assist you in any market condition.

Thought leaders from various financial disciplines. Our talent carries a number of designations, including CFA, CFP and AAMS.

Employees are the backbone of our business. Our staff receives investments at NAV and continuing Series 7, 66, 63, 65 and 67 education.

WHAT WE PROVIDE

Elite Account Protection
 Mesary Financial, Inc. (MFI) is a member of the Securities Investor Protection Corporation (SIPC). As a second level of protection, Mesary Financial has purchased additional SIPC coverage from Lloyd's of London. This policy provides additional account coverage of up to \$34,500,000, including up to \$2.9 million for cash, per client as defined by the SIPC rules and is subject to a firm aggregate limit of \$125 million.

Careful Asset Collection
 By allocating your investment dollars among a carefully chosen mix of asset classes, we aim to help you maximize your return potential while managing your exposure to investment risk.

Strategic Mutual Fund Analysis
 Our internal Investment Strategies group consists of 12 professionals with dedicated responsibility for monitoring and evaluating investment managers.

MARKET UPDATES

Economy Moves In a Positive Direction
 Real GDP rose at a 3.5% rate in the third quarter - its first significant move into the black since the fourth quarter of 2007. Real GDP growth moved modestly into the black in the second quarter of 2008, supported by surging exports and the \$150 tax rebate program, but quickly slipped off the cliff again in the third quarter of 2008. - *Chief Economist.*

Stanley buying Black & Decker in \$4.5 Billion Transaction
 In a major consolidation of the tool industry, Stanley Works agreed to acquire Black & Decker in a \$4.5 billion all-stock deal, the companies said Monday. Under the terms of the deal, Black & Decker shareholders will receive 1.275 shares of Stanley Works (SWK) common stock for each B&D share. That's a 22.1% premium to Black & Decker's closing share price on Friday. The deal is expected to close in early 2010, and the new company will be called Stanley Black & Decker. Black & Decker shares rose almost 20% in after-hours trading, while Stanley shares jumped 2.6.

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Appendix B

Simple Page

The screenshot shows the Mesary Financial website. At the top left is the logo "MESARY FINANCIAL" with a blue square icon containing a white stylized 'M'. To the right of the logo are navigation links: "Home | Careers | Newsroom | Privacy Policy". Below these links is a search bar with a "Search" button. Underneath the search bar are two tabs: "Company" and "Services".

On the left side, there is a vertical text block: "Founded in 1937, Mesary Financial is a diversified financial services firm headquartered in Chicago." Below this is the company address: "Mesary Financial, 555 Clark Street, Chicago, IL 60654" and a link "All office locations >> Contact Us >>".

The main content area features a large blue banner with a photo of John C. Tye, CEO, on the left. To the right of the photo is a quote: "Independence is an integral part of our history, and remains a driving force today. We find inspiration in our clients' challenges and believe that independent minds are best able to offer innovative solutions." Below the quote is the name "JOHN C. TYE, CEO".

Below the banner is a section titled "WHAT WE PROVIDE" with four items arranged in two columns: "Elite Account Protection", "Independent Minds; Innovative Solutions", "Careful Asset Collection", "Thought Leaders in Various Disciplines", "Strategic Mutual Fund Analysis", and "Our Employees - Backbone of our Business".

At the bottom of the page is a footer with the text: "Copyright 2009 Mesary Financial Holdings, Inc. All Rights Reserved | [Terms and Conditions](#) | [SEC Disclosure](#) | [Site Map](#) |".

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