

# **Evolving International Marketing Curriculum: Learning from Gen Y and Preparing for Gen Z<sup>®</sup>**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*The research discussed in this paper investigated Generation Y and Generation Z views regarding use of technology, use of social media, and related issues. The variables studied relate to current literature and key indicators representative of these generations. Business students were included in the group of targeted participants. This paper describes the evolution of an international marketing course's curriculum as generations' learning needs change. The course material has evolved considerably for Generation Y needs and expectations. New opportunities exist for further course revisions as Generation Z enters the classroom.*

## **INTRODUCTION: INTERNATIONAL MARKETING PEDAGOGY**

This paper discusses the evolution of an international marketing course's curriculum as generations' learning needs change. The author has taught this course approximately 25 years and has evolved the course material considerably for Generation Y needs and expectations. Plans are being made to address new opportunities as Generation Z enters the classroom.

Millennials and Generation Z are global consumers. Demographers and marketers do not always agree about the time span that encompasses Millennials. The general consensus is that it is individuals who were born from 1981 to 2000 (Mello, 2011, p. 43). Some writers end the birth year at 1990 (Mathis and Jackson, 2009). Using the larger time spans, there are 85 million Generation Yers in the United States.

While research is limited on Generation Z, many consider the Gen Z birth period between 1994 and 2004 (Mueller, 2011). Recent Pew research (Jones, Fox, 2009, cited in SHRM report, 2010) lists their birth years possibly ending in 2010, or even 2020. It is estimated that Gen Z are

23 million strong and growing. Interestingly, given their birth years, many of the members of this generation also overlap the latter Millennial years. This observation is useful, yet somewhat deceiving as you will read, when studying Generation Z.

Furthermore, limited academic work has been done to study Millennials as college students, and very little academic research has studied Generation Z as college students. To effectively teach these generations in an international, global marketing college course, the professor needs not only to be competent in delivering the subject matter, to understand the demographics of the students, but one also needs to implement effective pedagogy to engage these students. These generations want an active learning environment. Relationships between the professor and students are expected. Hartley, Berkowitz, and Rudelius (2006) support this process when they state that the "hallmark of developing and maintaining effective customer relationships today is called relationship marketing...[and] requires the involvement and commitment of managers and employees throughout the organization" (p. 16, 20). Professors find themselves adapting to the youngest higher education student-consumers. Furthermore, McGlynn (2008) notes that Millennials are shaped by an attitude of consumerism in the classroom.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This research investigated Generation Y and Generation Z views regarding use of technology, use of social media, and related issues. The variables studied relate to current literature and key indicators representative of these generations. Business students were included in the targeted participants. Generation Z students were also surveyed in Liberal Arts Curriculum courses after permission of the instructor was attained. The student survey questions were the basis for the subsequent face-to-face interviews with faculty that teach and interact with these generations. Those interviews are in the early stage.

Mixed methodology was utilized and methodological triangulation was implemented. The research employed a web based questionnaire for quantitative methods. The questionnaire included multiple choice and short completion question types. The survey was pre-tested by a small group of faculty. The instrument was then administered to undergraduate students in the targeted courses. During Stage 1, which is reported in this paper, a sample of 148 students was the student participants. Observation of some of the student participants in classroom settings was also conducted. The university in which the research was conducted is a small private institution. In Stage 2, the research expanded to include faculty from business and other disciplines who were interviewed. This stage will later include administrative staff interviews. The interview questions are based upon the student survey questions and ask professors their perceptions of Generation Y and Generation Z to determine if their views of students' responses are accurate compared to actual student research's findings. Stage 3 may then be conducted in other academic higher education colleges and universities.

## **DESCRIPTION OF CONTEXT AND SETTING: EXPERIENTIAL PEDAGOGICAL FOUNDATION**

The following describes the transitions of teaching international/global marketing over the last several years in order to adapt to Millennial styles of learning. Furthermore, plans for making additional changes in the approach to teaching this class for Generation Z are outlined.

Student engagement and learning are key outcomes of the course's planning process. The immersion of students in this process is appropriate since the product that higher education offers "is in large measure being produced by the customers themselves: they play a big role in determining the quality and quantity of the output of the academic enterprise" (Temple 2006, p.17). This student engagement and learning was accomplished through "hands-on" assignments completed by students in an undergraduate, international marketing course.

The international marketing course implements project-based pedagogy in a team setting. Millennials enjoy collaborative work (McGlynn, 2008). Stanier (1997) supports team projects as learning enhancement tools. Many students see the value of taking responsibility for their learning through practical, real-life experiential projects (Razzouk, Seitz, and Rizkallah 2003). This course also incorporated active learning in which students "access information and examine issues critically" (Kellar, Jennings, Sink and Mundy 1995, p.253). Simultaneous to the introduction of the project to the class is the development of teams' composition. Since it is written that "students are more likely to be involved in a group project, if they get to select their own group" (Razzouk, Seitz, and Rizkallah 2003, p. 36), student teams were configured by the students. A liaison or leader was established for each team. According to Reisenwitz and Eastman (2006), teams appeared to perform best when team members comprehend and are committed to the team's goals. Therefore, during the first week of the course, the students were instructed in the significance of the group-based project, the weight the assignments carried in their course evaluation, and the relevance and transferability of the project outcomes. Team work was nurtured throughout the semester. Therefore, "while groups are just assembled, *teams are constructed and managed*. With teams and a team learning approach, the processes and skill sets needed for 'teaming,' 'team building' and 'learning to work together' are as much part of the curriculum as the deliverables linked to the course assignment " (Brunel and Hibbard 2006, p. 15). This team focus has been well-received by Millennials.

The National Survey of Student Engagement for four-year institutions and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement found that "student engagement is the key to academic motivation, persistence, and degree completion" (McGlynn, 2008, para. 5). Facilitating students' hands-on implementation of classroom principles is essential as universities prepare their students for professional lives and for graduate studies. The literature supports the efficacy of active learning for university students (Augier and March 2007; Wingfield and Black 2005; Young, Sinnar, Ackerman, Carruthers and Young 2007; Young 2002), and this paper's study shows this is true for Generations Y and Z in particular.

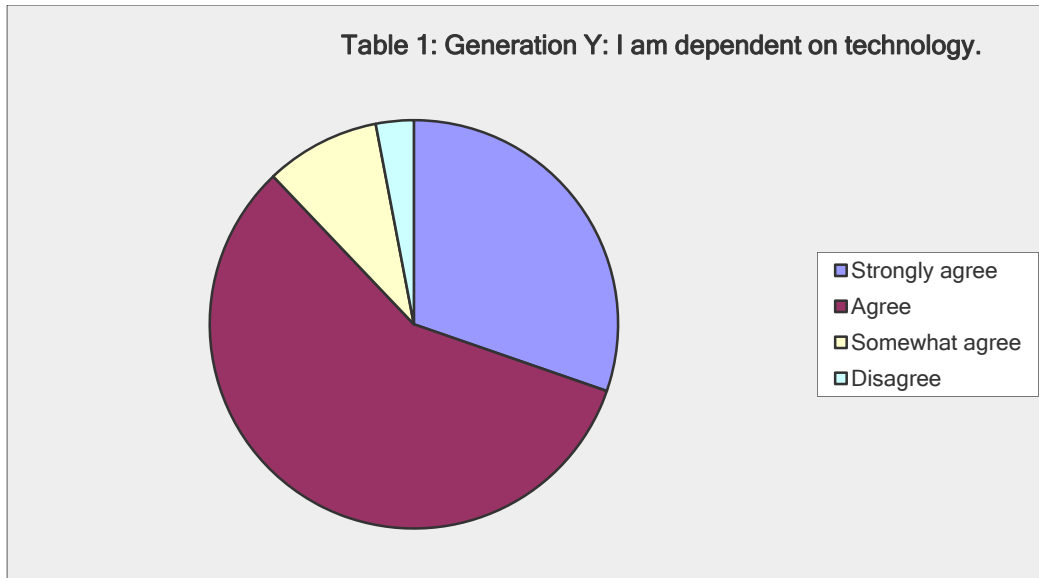
Course content for an international/global marketing course must be updated continuously given the "hypercompetitive new reality in the global marketplace" ( Miller, Slocombe, 2012, para. 1). Students respond well to discussions of changes made, especially since Millennials have experienced so much change in their lifetimes. Students have been involved in so many competitive extracurricular environments that they understand the pressure on them to succeed in the business world. They appreciate when a course has been updated, in the same way they appreciate a new upgrade on one of their electronic devices. We anticipate that Gen Z will respond in the same way because they have not known a world that did not involve frequent updates.

## TEACHING MILLENNIALS: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Professors in higher education have found the Millennial generation students differ in many ways from their Generation X predecessors. The Millennials are known for being high maintenance, even to the point of having been called the “Me Generation” (Twenge, 2009, cited in Miller, Slocombe, 2012). In the classroom, they ask a variety of questions, sometimes appearing to question the teacher’s authority. Yet, they are a loyal group and expect a reciprocal respect and helpfulness in the classroom. They have a long history of busy elementary and high school schedules, and come to the classroom having not always devoted time to homework. Open to criticism from authority, they have realized that to be successful in a tight job market, they must perform well in the classroom. They have been called an open group in regards to sharing information with others. Gen Y have been noted for being more formal with teaching authority in the classroom as they learn the process of this unique educational “world”.

It has been said that the Millennial generation has experienced more technological change than any generation since the Victorian Era. The ability to quickly access information, to download new software, and to communicate instantaneously with friends throughout the world has impacted their view of what is possible. Marketers knew the size and potential buying power of this group and sold them on their importance. The sense of entitlement for which Gen Yers are often maligned is partly the result of marketers probing for their interests and wants and then customizing products and services to anticipate future needs and to cater to existing needs. This sense of importance finds itself in the classroom.

Students in international marketing are eager to use technology to build content knowledge and to bridge their experiences with others in the world. As Jones and Healing (2010) note, students are more engaged in the social character of their smart technology and social networking. In recent research of Millennial students, conducted for this paper, the Millennials agreed that they not only use technology considerably; they stated that they perceive themselves as *dependent* upon technology. (See Table 1 below.) They are accustomed to an abundance of information. As one faculty member who was interviewed for this research study stated, this generation is “well-suited” for an emerging business world that will be more of a virtual environment.

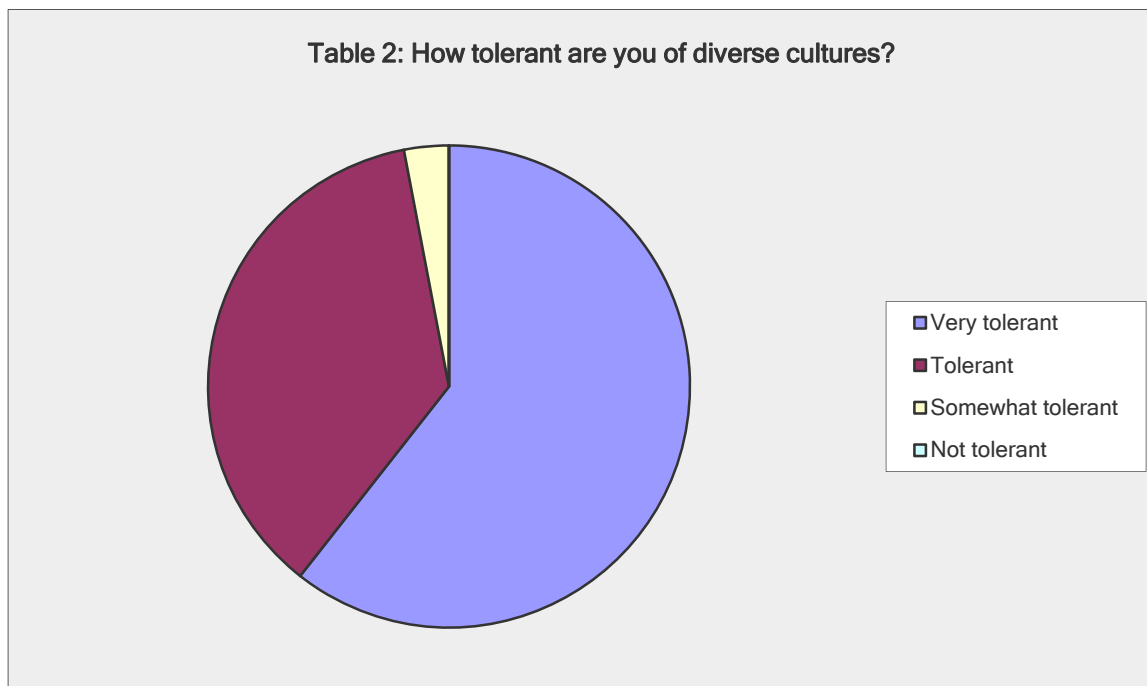


Although it is expected that they will be cognizant of current affairs (Chigewe, 2013), the author of this paper has found that students do not read information that is relevant to the world's events. Therefore, adaptations have been made to the curriculum. For example, use of the BBC iPad app and regular, spontaneous questions about how a global marketing concept related to a particular international event enhanced the students' appreciation of why knowledge of current news is crucial for a global marketer.

Even though technology has opened the world to this group, they can be naïve and not realize the differences that exist from one culture to another. Additionally, faculty are challenged to use current media to meet the Millennial's expectations. Over the last two times that this author has taught the international marketing course, iPad Apps, the constant presence of laptops and Internet connectivity, and the availability of credible, global sources to engage students in different countries' cultures, life styles, and marketplaces have become commonplace. These technological advancements require more real-time adjustments to some classroom examples and exercises, but Millennial students have responded very positively. These adaptations to the course's curriculum led to a student saying, that the professor "always does a fine job of creating classroom space that is conducive to learning." Additionally, in this course's feedback, a Millennial appreciated the "great working and participating environment. By doing so, it allowed students to participate in class learning from each other."

One approach to further broaden the Millennial students' awareness of different cultures is an expanded number of experiences with off-campus speakers who share their professional advice for establishing business relationships with people from other countries and cultures. Overlapping this approach with technology, SKYPE was used in a recent class to facilitate a Mexican professor working with my students about global marketing trends in his country. I reciprocated with a SKYPED-class session with Mexican students. I shared the similarities and differences of these student experiences with my class in the United States. One striking similarity was the comfort that students showed interacting with a faculty member in another country. It supported the statement that "Millennials understand how to be personable with others, even if they are not sitting directly in front of them" (Chigewe, 2013, p. 31).

Millennials are the most diverse generation, compared to predecessors, in the United States (Dayan, as cited in Malloy, 2012). As part of this professor's recently conducted research of Millennial students, one of the questions asked if the students perceived themselves as being tolerant of diverse cultures. As Table 2 (below) shows, most students thought they were "very tolerant" of diverse cultures. In an international marketing course, the professor needs to provide content and experiences for students to realize that an American perspective is not the only view in a global marketplace. Students in the most recently conducted international marketing course acquired this insight. On a scale of 5 (as the best), students rated the end-of-the-year evaluation question, "I have gained a clearer understanding of the concept of culture as a complex, intricate and interrelated fabric of meaning and symbols" as a 4.75. Furthermore, students ranked the question, "I compared and contrasted my own culture with other cultures..." as a 4.72. This type of focus in a global marketing course is essential for students' academic and professional preparation.



Given the amount of change that Millennials have experienced, one might expect them to be open to change (Gloeckler, 2008). This professor's research investigated if the students see themselves in that way. As Table 3 (below) shows, they agree with this depiction. This trait facilitates the global marketing professor's job of expanding the student's paradigms and encouraging open-mindedness in the classroom, and of nurturing professional preparedness for a global setting. Correspondingly, one of the faculty interviewed for this study commented that this generation is "very adaptable to new ideas and ways of doing things because things change so quickly from their perspective." They are perceived as being very sensitive to different trends.

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>
Very adaptable	24.6%
Adaptable	72.1%
Somewhat adaptable	3.3%
Not adaptable	0.0%

Millennials expect a learner-centered, not a teacher-centered or content-centered classroom environment (McGlynn, 2008). They desire frequent feedback and an openness to positive, constructive feedback (Generation Y revamping annual performance review, 2008, para 6). Recently, 85% of Millennial employees said that their age group wanted frequent and candid performance feedback. Somewhat paradoxically, though, due to very structured time commitments as they grew, they need structure guided by authority figures. Professors need to be adaptable to this unique situation.

Wagner (2009) has noted some unique characteristics of Millennials. They are increasingly “viral”; they rely heavily on “word of mouth” (or emails, blogs, etc.). They appreciate 24/7 conveniences, so they more easily understand a global marketplace in various time zones. This group texts approximately 17 messages/day; 400 messages/month is not atypical. Therefore, classroom management, particularly in an interactive classroom instituting small group work centered on virtual information becomes a new challenge. Some additional teacher reactions to this age group include that we can be impressed with their deferential words, yet surprised by very independent action. We may have become accustomed to our voicemails being “ignored” by students. Like the global market, faculty life has become 24/7. Yet, the relationship building expected by this generation can be an opportunity, as well as a challenge for professors. As one faculty member interviewed for this paper’s research stated, Millennial students have a “need for ‘social glue’”, but it must be “authentic” and connect to what they believe. They need to see issues that they connect with as “real”. This professor noted that their culture is focused on benefitting their wants, needs and desires, and an immediacy for fulfilling those needs through the speed and access of the Internet. Ironically, this generational characteristic appears to facilitate these students understanding consumers’ expectations for immediate attention to their wants, needs, and desires.

The majority of students who completed the international marketing course most recently reported enhanced academic knowledge and heightened professional confidence. Academic research has established a formal linkage between self-efficacy and subsequent performance. "When self-efficacy is high, individuals will engage in tasks that foster the development of their skills and capabilities." The outcomes of this course’s assignments support that assertion. Through classroom endeavors, students developed marketable skills, including critical thinking, communication skills, problem-solving, project management skills, team building skills, and leadership skills (Laverie 2006). See Table 4 (below) for specific student perceptions of their growth during this course. Through this study’s research, 93% of Millennials respondents stated that they are tolerant-to-very tolerant of a diverse culture. This receptivity to new ideas

juxtaposed against their ignorance of global cultural differences led to a dynamic learning environment in the international marketing class.

<b>Table 4</b>	
<b>Advanced Student Outcomes</b>	
<b>Average ratings</b>	
The instructor effectively used a variety of resources and/or educational technology to promote learning	4.81 (5 = strongly agree)
The course materials (i.e. textbooks, handouts, media and other resources) contributed to learning the subject matter.	4.69 (5 = strongly agree)
I was able to ask questions and discuss ideas with the instructor.	4.72 (4 = agree)
The instructor challenged me to think more deeply about the course content.	4.69 (5 = strongly agree)
The instructor encourages students to express their ideas freely and respectfully with the other students.	4.78 (5 = Strongly agree)
I have gained a clearer understanding of the concept of culture as a complex, intricate and interrelated fabric of meaning and symbols.	4.75 (4 = agree)
I compared and contrasted my own culture with other culture...	4.72 (5 = Strongly agree)

Below is a depiction of how this professor continues to realign her international marketing pedagogy for the learning styles of Millennials. There is increased use of shorter-time, team-based exercises. iPads and new high-speed, interactive technologies are infused into the curriculum. More individual, hands-on, virtual, global marketing exposure has been developed for this course.



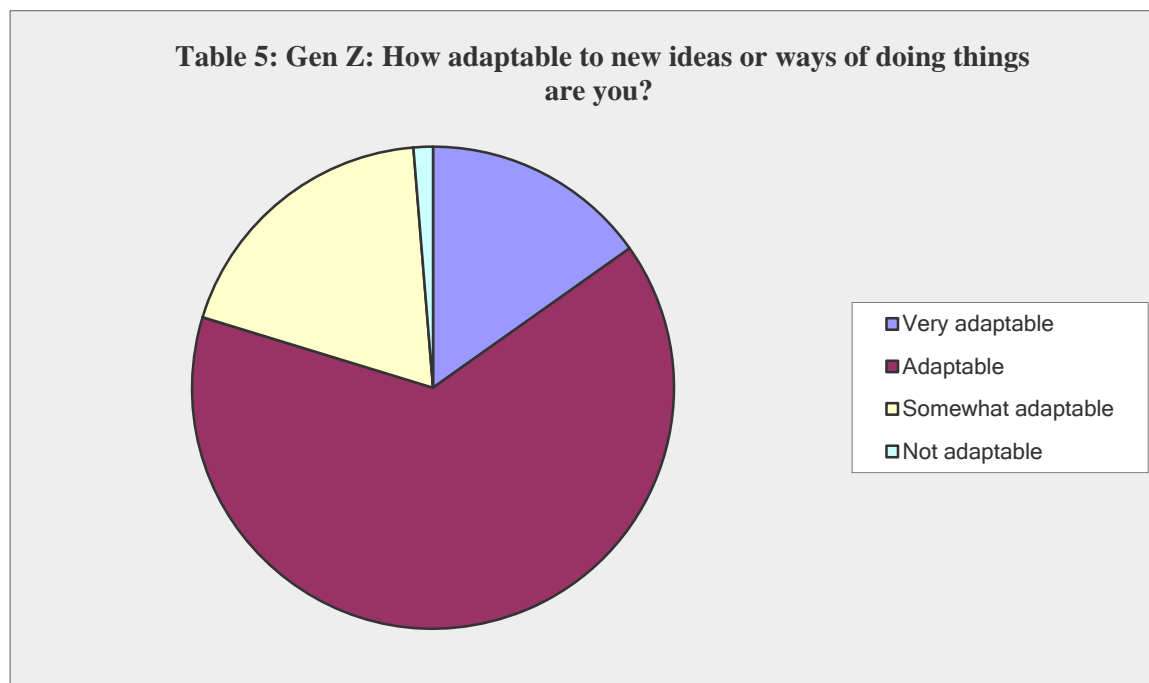
<b>Pre-Millennial Approach to Teaching International Marketing</b>	<b>Post-Millennial Approach to Teaching International Marketing</b>
Assignment of country research project with library based academic research required. Relatively limited pool of extensive relevant country and government websites for research	Assignment of country research requiring library academic resources and a myriad of Internet-based, credible, academic databases and research sources.  Students encouraged designing their own international product or service to market.
Relevant case studies assigned and discussed in class.	Relevant case studies assigned and partly discussed in class, with continued discussion through electronic course site. Additional shorter, interactive, small group exercises
Relevant videos viewed	Short video clips, Internet-based news reports
Extensive array of guest speakers	Extensive array of guest speakers, including via SKYPE to other parts of the USA and to other countries for effective discussions with experts anywhere in the world.
Some international food introduced	International food and artifacts utilized
Small group work	Small group work having those with international experience divided into more homogeneous groups. Use of iPad and laptops for report –outs, and on-ground, real-time research. Gradual introduction of virtual teaming via course site Forums, Dropbox, Google docs, Google Hangouts.
Current events via new technologies	Required, increased use of iPad apps, for example, those provided by the BBC and CNN, for news and small group activities connecting events that have relevance to international marketing. There is a multitude of Internet-based research sources, many are open source.
Connections through music	International music begins each class with a short discussion of the country-of-origin of the music.

## **PREPARING FOR GENERATION Z COLLEGE STUDENTS: RESEARCH FINDINGS**

While research is limited on this generation, many consider the Gen Z birth period between 1994 and 2004 (Mueller, 2011). It is estimated that Gen Z are 23 million strong, and growing. Thomas (1999) describes this group as somewhat outspoken, idealistic and action-oriented. Like the Millennials (Generation Y), they are optimistic. They display introspective intellectualism. Furthermore, being tech-savvy, and having no memory of pre-Internet history,

they believe computer technology is commonplace. They see social networking as the norm and are facile with various social media sites and networking platforms. Therefore, they are members of various 'Net communities. As new technologies emerge, they may be among the first to use them and to become immersed in them. Since they are so active in electronic communities that grew up, Mueller (2011) notes that they have little concern for privacy and no problem sharing even the most intimate details of their lives with virtual strangers. They are frequent bloggers and enjoy digital publishing (Lyon, 2010). Correspondingly, similar to Generation Y, Generation Z are very collaborative and creative.

In preparing for changes to an international marketing class based upon Gen Z learning styles, the professor envisions more small-group work in which students, during class time, investigate different companies' global marketing efforts. The students can then blog their observations. Given students' responses to this professor's Generation Z research (Please see Table 5 below.), it is anticipated that they will enjoy this challenge.



In 2012, the survey by *USA Today* of college freshmen found that this group was more studious than their counterparts of the past few years. More of them took notes in class, did homework, and took more demanding coursework as high school seniors. Fewer of them came late for class. It was anticipated that these activities gave this college freshmen class a greater chance of succeeding academically. It is thought that this group of college freshmen is more serious about achieving in college. More students reported spending six or more hours a week studying and doing homework than students in other survey years (Markelein, 2012). In 2011, there was an increased numbers of entering freshmen who said that getting a better job was a significant reason for going to college. This information will facilitate the international marketing professor's emphasis on career preparedness. Whereas global marketers have always been part of this class' curriculum, more workshop-type experiences in which the speakers offer career advice as well as marketing content may be a new norm in the classroom.

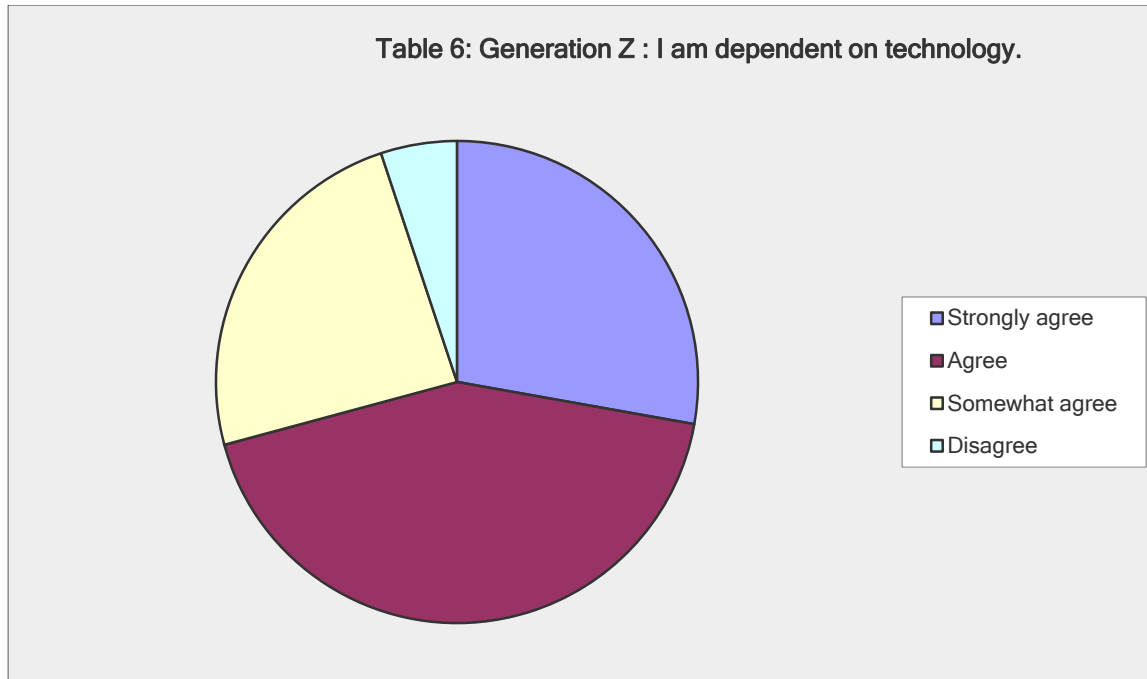
Gen Z are comfortable, and they believe capable at multi-tasking. There is concern that they may not perform well in areas such as public speaking, which is an essential business and marketing skill set. Therefore, for the international marketing course that is the focus of this paper, one of the planned adaptations for this generation will be more assignments involving public speaking presentations. Coupled with their love of technology, these presentations will involve new social media platforms. Students may “tweet” their observations to fellow-students.

Professors will also want to prepare students to display the trust they expect of others. Garff (2011) noted that virtual teaming at the workplace will increase. A recent survey of America’s largest companies found that executives are concerned about a “lack of trust-building opportunities” in those virtual settings (p. 22). The growth of this workplace practice creates a potentially paradoxical situation for Generation Z future business managers. They will very likely be comfortable in the virtual setting due to their acculturation, yet they will also be responsible for building and fostering the trusting relationships they value. This challenge creates an opportunity for marketing educators to utilize social media as part of team-based assignment criteria.

Per Posnixk-Goodwin (2011), Generation Z would rather text than talk. They prefer to communicate online — often with friends they have never met. They don’t spend much time outdoors unless adults organize activities for them. They can’t imagine life without cell phones. They have never known a world without technology or terrorism or Columbine. They prefer computers to books and want instant results. They are growing up in an economic depression and are under tremendous pressure to succeed. Mostly they are growing up fast, and exhibiting behavior far beyond their years. They are very collaborative and creative. Difficult to classify precisely, they are children of Gen X parents, who came of age during the greatest technological leap in history, and they are headed for an even greater leap forward as they come of age this decade.

Generation Z also brings their technological capability to campus. As Table 6 (below) depicts, in this professor’s research of freshmen, Generation Z students, they perceive themselves as dependent upon technology. The tech-savvy generation expects use of this technology in the classroom. Professors may need to design course work that infuse more virtual connectivity. Medina (2008) has found that individuals who have used high speed technology during their formative years have shorter attention spans. He recommends that the teacher should respond to this Generation Z trait and divide class time into shorter, 10-minute segments. Each of these segments should be followed by a short “connector” such as a practical example of the materials’ application, a short small-group exercise, or a “technology break” in which the students are encouraged to use their technology to research data, so on. It has also been noted that, “a short attention span, perhaps brought on by the tendency to multitask, also requires information to be delivered in rapid, short bursts if it is to be understood. Generation Z thrives on “instant gratification” (quoted in Mueller, 2011). These neurological, psychological findings may lead to the need for faculty professional development endeavors. The campus where this manuscript’s research occurred has instituted that type of training to facilitate faculty’s comfort with effectively educating Generation Z. Therefore, as part of the international marketing curriculum, students will be encouraged to take “real-time research” breaks during which they read an academic journal article and then write a short reaction on the course’s website. They may be challenged to develop short video-taped presentations before class as short, sales calls.

Table 6: Generation Z : I am dependent on technology.



As Wellner (2000) noted, Gen Z may be computer literate before they even get to [elementary] school...Multimedia will be as prevalent in the classroom as the chalkboard, (para. 4). Higher education faculty will institute more computer and technology-based actions as pedagogical tools while maintaining academic integrity. For content-heavy courses, this infusion of technology may be a challenge because of the time taken in class for social media interaction. Typically, international marketing is a content-dense course, so “lecture-capturing” by the professor, with pre-assigned lecture viewing, may become a pedagogical norm.

This is a word of caution to Gen Z’s professor, though. It relates to an MTV show called, “Catfish”. In this show, a small team investigates online profiles of individuals involved in Internet-based relationships. In this show, that is viewed by many Gen Zers, the team unveils that the online profile is vastly different than the person’s real-life profile. This show’s popularity demonstrates Gen Z’s interest in technology, but it also shows the naiveté that they often exhibit in regards to the transparency on the Web. If these students are going to develop as business professionals, they must be guided in the classroom to be business-like, to maintain appropriate confidentiality, and to become a bit “jaded” by information that may be available. The credibility of marketing databases can be woven into this classroom discussion and experience.

As part of this professor’s research about this generation, in-depth interviews of faculty who teach these students have occurred. Faculty insights are interesting. These faculty research participants stated that they perceive that Gen Z are good collaborators. They are good at receiving feedback; they are “socially engaged”, and more resilient than prior generations. It is perceived that they may rely too much on technology. A recent survey noted that 75% of all American teenagers today have a cell phone, and 54% of them text daily (Johnson and Johnson, 2010).

A concern is that Gen Z has not yet developed their own logic and thinking; therefore, they are not confident with their own, individual ideas without affirmation from a group.

Furthermore one professor, as part of the research for this paper, stated that “social media is like table tennis” in the speed of delivering and receiving information. This insight directly corresponds with Medina’s (2008) suggestion that this group of students requires information to be delivered in rapid, short bursts if it is to be understood. Generation Z thrives on “instant gratification”. This information will directly influence the professor’s plans to build students analytical ability to study relevant global market information and to make independent decisions based upon that work. Short, individual decision-making exercises with students presenting their insights via technology will use Generation Z’s current strengths to build new capabilities needed by international marketers.

To prepare for Generation Z students in a junior-senior level course, the following table shows the anticipated adjustments to the international curriculum that is the focus of this article.

**Table 7: Anticipated Curricular Revisions in Preparation for Generation Z**

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|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Blogs</li> <li>2. Unique Twitter account</li> <li>3. More extensive use of iPad apps</li> <li>4. More use of country and government videos displaying various cultural aspects of different countries.</li> <li>5. A “virtual” trip to another country with speaking engagements by students who have studied on-ground in another country</li> <li>6. More short small group exercises using technology for report-outs</li> <li>7. More discussions requiring students to develop their own opinions and “voices” regarding global marketing techniques, policies, and practices</li> <li>8. More assignments including public speaking</li> <li>9. Lecture-capturing and “flipping” the classroom</li> </ol> |
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The future action plans for this course include Gen Z’s interests, and match those interests with new technology-based, content-rich international marketing material.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The Millennial generation has influenced higher education’s delivery of pedagogy. This study analyzes the impact of this generation and the Generation Z’s direct influence on pedagogy in an international marketing course. The result is a far more technology-based, fast-paced learning environment in which students are open to diverse cultures and expect relationship building by the professor. Challenges exist for the professor to facilitate educated, independent thinking by the students. Future research in this area will expand the base of student and faculty respondents.

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