

COMPLAINT BEHAVIORS OF THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION

A Thesis

by

BRITTANY DIANE PHILMON

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of  
Texas A&M University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

December 2009

Major Subject: Recreation, Park, and Tourism Sciences

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## ABSTRACT

Complaint Behaviors of the Millennial Generation.

(December 2009)

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Chair of Advisory Committee: Dr. Ulrike Gretzel

The Millennial Generation, typically agreed upon by researchers to be those born from 1982 through 2000, displays exclusive characteristics making it truly different from other previous generations. As of 2000, this generation comprised about one fourth of the total US population, making this cohort's attributes demand consideration. The Millennials are quickly becoming a large factor in the workforce, now finishing college and becoming active consumers in the economy; hence, rapidly becoming a large portion of the traveling population as well. Because this generation is the first to be exposed to the Internet from birth, generally retain positive, trusting views of companies, and have a constant need to congregate with friends and family, questions arise regarding how and to whom Millennials complain, possibly engaging in negative electronic word-of-mouth. Negative e-WOM is especially pertinent to the travel industry due to the potentially extensive harmful outcomes it can cause for practitioners.

Therefore, an explanatory study was conducted with a research design that applied a qualitative approach in efforts to gain further insight to the complaint behaviors of the Millennial Generation. Research questions to whom Millennials

complain were asked, as well as how and why Millennials complain in certain ways. Findings indicate Millennials typically voice complaints to friends and parents in efforts to discuss their emotions concerning the complaint and obtain their advice on the complaint. In the rare cases where Millennials do complain directly to the company, the relational aspects, convenience, and quickness of response the media offers influence which media Millennials use to issue the complaint.

## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather and grandmother, James H. Boothe and Gloria Boothe, who instilled the love of reading and learning in me at an early age. Thank you for your inspiration and faith in me. I love you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my committee chair, Dr. Gretzel, and my committee members, Dr. Outley, and Dr. Rutherford, for their guidance and support throughout the course of this research. Your motivation and faith in my abilities *truly made all the difference*. Thank you also to Dr. Henderson—your qualitative methods class inspired me and opened my eyes to qualitative research, and I am thankful for the opportunity to have learned from you.

Also, I offer a huge thank you to Marguerite VanDyke for your continuous smiles, motivation, and support. Your personal touch on every graduate student in our department is nothing short of amazing, and I will never forget your warmth and guidance throughout these past two years.

Thank you also to the Office of the Commandant at Texas A&M for allowing me to spend six years wonderful with you, two of those as your Graduate Assistant. As bosses and co-workers, you all have been so helpful, kind, warm, and giving that I truly believe I will never have such a wonderful work environment as I have had while being here. You are all more like family, and I am so thankful to know you.

To the wonderful LIST Lab graduate students, both past and present— your dedication to research and your genuine warm-hearted personalities are inspiring. I cannot express my gratitude for your continuous motivational talks and smiles throughout these past two years. I have learned so much from your mentorship, and will always appreciate your kindness and friendship.

For all of my graduate student friends, thank you for being a wall of constant support. From our class assignment research papers through our thesis defenses, you have all truly kept me going. I could not have done this without you. To my loving boyfriend and his family, thank you for your constant support through sleepless nights and paper revisions. I am so blessed to have you in my life.

Finally, thank you to my entire family for your unvarying love, motivation, and support throughout my life. It is because of you that I had faith in myself to continue my education. You all are so special to me, and your faith in me is truly what keeps me going from day to day. I love you all. Last but not least, thank you to my mother and father. From your home-cooked dinners and late night talks, to the cutting and pasting of sentences onto index cards, your continuous help along the way has made me who I am. Words cannot express my love and appreciation for you.

## NOMENCLATURE

U.S.	United States
eWOM	Electronic Word-of-mouth
WOM	Word-of- Mouth



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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

In today's world where the continuous advancements of communication technologies provide quick and easy avenues for conversation, service providers have begun to face increasing competition because it has become easier for consumers to find, and also share, information. When a consumer experience results in dissatisfaction, the consumer may be apt to easily communicate with friends and family, offering recommendations for their valued income to be spent elsewhere. Consequently, complaints and complaint management have become ongoing discussions in academia and practice due to the immense repercussions that negative word-of-mouth (WOM) and dissatisfied consumers can bring to a company's overall profit and success, leading to a great need for understanding drivers of complaint behavior. Complaints are agreed by researchers to be consumers' feelings or emotions of perceived dissatisfaction (Day, 1984; Landon, 1980; Singh, 1988). The behaviors associated with complaints are defined as any or all consumer actions that convey an expression of dissatisfaction (Landon, 1980; Singh, 1988).

#### **Customer Satisfaction and Word-of-Mouth**

In the tourism industry specifically, customer satisfaction is paramount because it determines whether a destination or tourism business has repeat visitation, positive

word-of-mouth, and in general success, as many travelers rely on personal sources for information about destinations and travel products (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, 2007).

Due to the variability and inseparability of services and the complexity of tourism-related offerings, satisfaction is hard to achieve for every customer. When dissatisfaction occurs, many travelers resort to negative word-of-mouth both in the traditional format and online. The act of consumers talking online is referred to as electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM), and is typically defined as “all informal communication directed at consumers through Internet-based technology related to the usage or characteristics of particular goods and services, or their sellers” (Litvin, Goldsmith, & Pan, p.461).

Because e-WOM is such an easy way to spread news to millions of people, researchers and marketers have realized this tactic of complaint behavior is extremely volatile to businesses and needs to be carefully managed. Successful management of WOM in general requires a profound understanding of motivations and preferences regarding the media used to spread WOM.

**Table 1** Generations within U.S. Population

<b>Generation</b>	<b>Birth Years</b>	<b>Characteristics</b>
G.I. Generation	1901-1924	Civic-minded, Appreciate Friendships, Rely on Teamwork
Silent Generation	1925-1942	Adaptive Nature, Appreciate Fairness
Boomer Generation	1943-1960	Idealistic Nature, Absorbed in Own Lives
GenXrs	1961-1981	Reactive, Self-Reliant
Millennial Generation	1982-2000	Civic-minded, Appreciate Friendships, Team Oriented, Optimistic

## **Generations and Technology Use**

Currently the U.S. population is comprised of four generations. The names of each generation, birth years that divide the generations, as well as their characteristics are shown in Table 1.

The Millennial Generation is believed to hold similar characteristics to the G.I. Generation due to the cyclic nature of generations. This cycle is described by Strauss and Howe (1991) to mean that because of particular spiritual awakenings (social and religious upheavals and a reordering of private life) and secular crises (threats to national survival and the reordering of public life), generations will take on similar characteristics of those four cycles before them. Such is now being proven with the Millennial Generation as they are similarly civic-minded and team oriented.

The adoption of technology has increased rapidly since the public introduction of the Internet in the 1990s. The oldest generation in the United States comprises approximately 9% of the total adult population. They are 73 or more years old, and are members of the G.I. Generation. This group makes up approximately 4% of the total Internet-using population (Jones & Fox, 2009). Next, the Silent Generation, comprising another 9% of the total adult population, range in age from 64-72 years old and encompass 7% of the Internet-using population (Jones & Fox, 2009). The Baby Boomer generation follows comprising approximately 23% of the total adult population. This cohort ranges in age from 45-63 years old, and make up approximately 35% of the total Internet-using population (Jones & Fox, 2009). Next, Generation Xrs encompass 20% of the total adult population, ranging in age from 28-44 years old, and compose

approximately 23-25% of the total Internet-using population (Jones & Fox, 2009). The last age group consisting of ages 18-27 years old is titled the Millennials and make up roughly 26% of the total adult population and approximately 30% of the total Internet-using population (Jones & Fox, 2009).

This younger age group has been immersed in actively using new media such as the Internet, instant messaging, and online social networks in their everyday lives. Recent research found that younger travelers trust, use, and are impacted by e-WOM more than their older counterparts, specifically in the context of online travel reviews (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008; Yoo, Lee, Gretzel, & Fesenmaier, 2009). In the case where this younger generation had a negative experience, they may resort to spreading negative WOM by writing their own negative reviews. However, because few researchers have studied the complaint behaviors of the newest consumer generation, only assumptions currently exist of how these Millennials may complain. Because this generation makes up 26-27% of the total population, (U.S Census Bureau, 2000; Horrigan, 2009), this generation's complaint behaviors certainly demand attention. This cohort is now finishing college, entering the workforce, earning a disposable income, and becoming active members of the consumer world (Eubanks, 2006; Howe & Strauss, 2007; Sutherland & Thompson, 2001). Thus, they can be expected to soon become a major portion of the traveling population.

Because of their constant exposure to digital communication devices such as cell phones and the Internet from birth on, and their continuous need to congregate and keep in contact with friends and family (Howe & Strauss, 2007; DeBard, 2004), questions

arise of who Millennials complain to and how they choose to voice these complaints, possibly spreading negative electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM) to a large group of others. This is especially pertinent to the travel industry as recent studies have shown growing numbers of travelers rely on the opinions of others posted online to judge experiential travel offerings (Litvin et al., 2007; Yoo & Gretzel, 2008).

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine this generation's complaint behaviors in regards to a) whom they complain to, b) how they complain specifically regarding technologies used, and c) why they complain. A qualitative methodology research design was used in order to find deeper explanations of the research problem.

### **Organization of Research**

This thesis discusses relevant literature in Chapter II. The chapter includes a discussion of general technology use, consumer service quality expectations, and an overall review of complaint behaviors. An examination of the literature on the Millennial Generation is included, discussing this cohort's particular characteristics, technology use, service quality expectations, and likely complaint behaviors.

Chapter III describes the methodological approaches used in this research. A brief justification of using a qualitative methodology is given and the measures used to select the sample of participants are discussed. The data analysis procedure of constant comparative method, followed by the assumptions and biases of the researcher are presented.

Chapter IV reports the findings of the research. Phrases from the participants' interviews are incorporated as examples to support the findings.



Chapter V then provides a discussion of the research project. It offers a summary of the research findings and will address research and practical implications of the results. Limitations of the study are presented and directions for future research are given.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter will begin by exploring technology uses among all age groups within the United States as they apply to communication. Reasons regarding which media are chosen from these technologies to communicate with others will be discussed next. Following this, a closer examination into the voicing of complaints regarding dissatisfaction with a company or service provider will be presented. Then, literature regarding the specific age group of the Millennial Generation will be discussed including descriptions of this cohort's particular characteristics, technology use, and media chosen for communication. Finally, existing assumptions regarding Millennials' complaint behavior will be discussed. Based on the current literature, a qualitative study was developed to thoroughly examine the complaint behaviors of the Millennial Generation. This understanding will become increasingly important as this cohort begins to have disposable income and increases within the travel consumer populace.

#### **Technology Use**

The constant use of technologies undeniably plays a role in consumers' daily lives. Although communication-based technologies have continuously advanced throughout the years, it has been in the past twenty-five years that vast changes have made their way into the American home (Szeto, 2005).

Land-line telephones, previously a given technology in most homes, restaurants, and businesses across the United States, have recently begun to decrease in popularity as

competition from the mobile cellular phone has increased. Even just six years ago in 2003, 21% of Americans had, or were strongly considering, dropping their land-line home telephone in lieu of using only cell phones (Horrigan, 2003). By 2004, more than 75% of homes had at least one mobile phone per household (Szeto, 2005). The technology of the cell phone continues to advance at a rapid pace.. Research has found the mobile phone and its ever-increasing capabilities such as email, text messaging, Internet browsing, calendars, and even global positioning systems has created a “deepening attachment to digital resources-wired and wireless...a need for continuous information exchange” (Horrigan, 2009, p.16).

Computers also have become a rising trend, appearing in more than 90% of U.S. homes by 2004 (Szeto, 2005). Internet access and computer-based activities are now elements of daily life, with the Internet most often being used at work and at home by various age groups from primary school children to senior citizens. Web users represent a full spectrum of the US population, with 90% of 18-29 year olds, 85% of 35-49 year olds, 70% of 50-64 year olds, and 35% of the 65 and older age group surfing the Internet (Jones & Fox, 2009).

Internet-based communications such as email, instant messaging, blogs, and online social networks have developed, now being used by various age groups. According to eMarketer (2004), more than 30% of Gen Xers and 25-31% of Boomers are instant messaging users. Email, while gaining in popularity with the older age group of 65 years and above, has decreased in use among younger Americans. With 75% of Americans 65+ years old and 74% of 18-32 year olds currently using email, this

communication medium may not be the only choice for contacting friends or family, but is still a primary means for Internet-based communication (Jones & Fox, 2009).

## **Media Choice**

### ***Media Niche Theory***

The adoption of new media technologies may be explained in part by the media niche theory, which is defined as “positing that each communication medium occupies a niche, or set of gratifications for which that medium is used” (Ledbetter, 2008, p. 548). Media categorized as “specialist” are media from which consumers obtain a narrow range of gratifications and media that fulfill a broader range of gratifications are considered “generalist” resources (Dimmick, Kline, and Stafford, 2000). Therefore, some media may not offer the gratifications needed by communicators, or in some cases multiple media may offer the gratifications needed. Dimmick, Kline, and Stafford found that sociable gratifications that are highly affective in personal relationships such as the giving of advice, expressions of emotions, and providing of companionship are fulfilled by the generalist resource of the telephone because it allows for the human voice to be heard, specifically the tone of voice. When geographical distance is to be bridged, sociable gratifications could also be obtained by the medium of email, which aids in keeping in contact with friends who cannot be seen in person. These media therefore may overlap to some degree in the gratifications they fulfill. However, email is less capable of providing sociable gratifications because the social cues it can convey are limited.

### ***Media Richness Theory***

Certain characteristics of different media influence the gratifications each can provide for communicators. The “richness” of the media, defined by Daft and Lengel (1986) as “the ability of information to change understanding within a time interval,” (p. 560) is also a factor in how and why particular media are gaining in popularity and adoption. Media richness is influenced by a) the ability of the medium to transmit multiple cues such as vocal inflection, b) immediacy of feedback, c) language variety, and d) the personal focus of the medium (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Therefore, a certain medium may be chosen for communication needs based on the gratifications and richness it may provide to the communicator.

With technology gaining such wide acceptance across the globe and social life ever expanding, researchers have begun studying which communication media are used to keep relationships and friendships intact. According to a longitudinal study conducted from 1987 through 2002, Ledbetter (2008) found that with the introduction of email, the sending of postal letters has decreased as a means to maintain relational closeness. Consequently, emailing, once considered only to be used in task-oriented functions, has taken on an additional role by being used to preserve relationships (Sproull and Kiesler, 1986; Ledbetter, 2008).

Email, however, is not used to the same extent as other forms of media in regards to maintaining relationships—telephone calls and face-to-face interactions have been found to be the primary resources chosen because both allow communicators to hear verbal cues (and in the case of face-to-face communication even non-verbal cues) during

a conversation. Telephone calls have continued to be a standard choice for a communication medium throughout the past twenty years (Ledbetter, 2008)—a phenomenon possibly explained by the media niche and media richness theories (Dimmick et al., 2000; Daft & Lengel, 1986). Also found was that the telephone provided a sense of intimacy while email provided convenience. These findings identify that communicators appreciate the ability to relay emotions and intimacy; however, the convenience of communicating remains important as well. As technologies such as cell phones and Internet based video calls such as Skype and Google Talk continuously advance, relationships may be maintained using a variety of media-rich tools that provide multiple gratifications for communicators.

Now that communication media preferences and the technologies used to maintain relationships have been established, a closer look will be given to a particular form of communication- that of complaints. The discussion will explore how these communication trends influence consumer expectations regarding service providers and the communication behaviors taken to voice these complaints.

### **Complaint Behaviors**

Complaint behaviors cannot be understood without an understanding of consumers' expectations regarding service providers. Therefore, the discussion of complaint behaviors will begin with first exploring the literature describing consumer expectations, then examining the complaint behaviors that consumers take as a result of their expectations not being met.

### ***Consumer Expectations***

Commonly recognized in service industries such as tourism and hospitality is that relationships must be built between the consumer and the company in order for a business to remain successful. Consumers have specific expectations for these relationships, and it can be assumed, as in everyday relationships, these expectations will carry into expectations for the quality of service provided. These expectations may be thought of as the exchanges consumers expect in their relationship with the company.

### ***Social Exchange Theory***

Social exchange theory has been applied by researchers to these consumer expectations, explaining that “people will have expectations with regard to outcome, procedure, and interpersonal treatment in a complaint situation and that the perceived justice as measured by these dimensions will influence how people evaluate exchanges” (Yuksel, 2008). Therefore, a company cannot only consider the outcome as the most important result in their relationship with the customer. The full procedure and interpersonal treatment of the customer during the interaction are equally important to the customer feeling satisfied with the social exchange during the interaction between them and the company (Mattila, 2001). Therefore, the role of the company-consumer relationship includes the same social exchanges expected in personal relationships. Exchanges included in the construction of relationships are building trust and customer-employee rapport; incidentally, these two elements have been found to be a main driver in customer satisfaction (Hennig-Thurau, Gwinner, Walsh, & Gremler 2004).

### ***Expectation for Human Compassion***

Also concluded is that customers want a personal relationship with their provider, having their concerns or complaints “addressed with sensitivity and efficiency and...individualized solutions rather than cookie-cutter responses” (Schenck, 2009, p 1). In the case that a face-to-face interaction is possible, consumers anticipate positive non-verbal communication such as eye contact, open body language, and positive emotions such as smiling (Yuksel, 2008). Regarding efficiency, consumers have little patience for waiting. “When people wait up to about a minute and a half, their sense of how much time has elapsed is fairly accurate. Anything over ninety or so seconds, however, and their sense of time distorts...taking care of a customer in two minutes is a success; doing it in three minutes is a failure”(Underhill, 2000, p. 189).

Human compassion, a care for personalized service, and a respect of the consumer’s time during the handling of this complaint serve as overall expectations of consumers (Mattila, 2001; Schenck, 2009; Yuksel, 2008). With the consumer expectations examined, the discussion will now turn to exploring consumers’ general complaint behaviors, specifically taking a deeper look into technologies used to voice these complaints.

### **Typology of Complaint Behaviors**

Commonly known throughout most industries, especially retail, hospitality, and tourism, is that most often consumers will complain either to the company or to other consumers by spreading negative word-of-mouth because of dissatisfaction with a product or service, or a negative customer-employee interaction (Gruber et al., 2006).



Older technologies such as postal letters and telephone calls found to be used in contacting a company (Ledbetter, 2008), are now being joined by newer computer and Internet based technologies, giving customers a variety of communication media with businesses. However, because new technologies play a significant role in word-of-mouth dispersion, the ease and timeliness of spreading information has advanced. Media such as text messages, online social networks, blogs, forums, and even mass email capabilities can provide customers with a means to give their opinions quickly and easily with the simple click of a button (Holloway & Beatty, 2003). In the case of dissatisfaction, a customer can easily spread negative word-of-mouth about a company if the customer's problems are not handled to his satisfaction. As Goldenburg et al. suggest the damage of negative word-of-mouth has typically taken a longer time to be noticed in the net profit; however, now with the Internet making distribution of information quick and easy, this diffusion can make strides within just a few weeks (2007). Therefore, a deeper examination of how and to whom consumers complain is necessary.

### ***Overview of Complaint Behaviors***

Beginning with basic ideas of complaint behavior, Day and Landon (1977) constructed a two level hierarchical classification for consumer complaint behaviors. As the overarching classification, level one distinguishes consumers' complaint manners as taking action or no action. Then, as a second level, actions taken are divided between public actions versus private actions. Day and Landon explain that "consumers who are unwilling to ignore their dissatisfactions but wish to resolve them in a private or personal way can modify their future purchasing behavior and/or urge their family and friends to

do so (p. 430). The terminology of a private action being simultaneous with an action deemed as personal is understood to mean consumers who do not wish to voice a complaint to a company, yet cannot deny their dissatisfaction, will either change their purchase behavior or spread negative WOM to their friends and family. These are considered private actions due to the fact that it is unknown to the company and is an indirect form of complaining (Day and Landon, 1976). Previous studies conducted by Day and Landon as well as other studies are incorporated into this idea that consumers feel their actions that are not directed at the company are private, and personal, reactions to their dissatisfaction (Day and Landon, 1977). The advancement of the Internet has begun to blur the line between private and public actions, with the emergence of social media such as blogs and profiles on online social networks providing an avenue for consumers to voice their thoughts and opinions to a general public audience. Therefore, for the remainder of this study, public and private complaint behaviors will be referred to as direct and indirect behaviors.

### ***Indirect Complaint Behaviors***

Actions typically unknown to the service provider have also been found by Lam and Tang (2003) to most likely be a decision to not return to the business as well as warning others not to patronize the business. This spreading of negative word-of-mouth takes great presence in the hospitality and tourism industries. One study found that more than 78% of travelers surveyed replied they used “some form of word-of-mouth information source in their trip planning” (Murphy, Mascardo, and Benckendorff, 2007). This word-of-mouth, with the popularity of the Internet and other technologies such as

mass text messaging, can quickly lead to a company or destination's demise. Indirect complaint behaviors are significant, and have been found to lead to negative outcomes. Nearly 45% of customers agreed they may simply act by switching service providers based on a single incident of failed complaint handling. In cases where consumers have issued a complaint with a third party, previous studies found consumers had typically issued a complaint with the company first, but did not receive a satisfactory redress to their issue (Day and Landon, 1976). These indirect actions are important, given that long-term customers produce greater overall profits and maintain loyalty (Keaveney, 1995).

Barlow (1996) offers the following reasons to explain why consumers choose to not voice their complaints directly to a company: a) Either they do not think complaints are welcome and no one will listen to the complaint, b) complaining is more trouble than going somewhere else next time, c) they do not know who to complain to, or d) if a complaint is sent in writing they must wait for a response, which may take a longer period of time than they prefer to wait. These no-action behaviors may be explained by equity theory, described by researchers as consumers choosing to take no action possibly because they have low expectations of achieving a satisfactory result (Furlong, 1993), and consider complaining as not worth the time and effort (Day, Grabicke, Schaeztle, & Staubach, 1981). Negative past experiences when issuing a complaint to a company may be a factor for consumers having these low expectations.

### ***Direct Complaint Behaviors***

Direct behaviors refer to the issuing of a complaint directly to a company, while indirect behaviors refer to issuing or discussing the complaint with others such as friends

or family (Day and Landon, 1977; Rogers, Ross, and Williams, 1992). Motivations for directly complaining to the company may be to seek a tangible outcome to a problem or to vent (Mattila and Wirtz, 2004).

### ***Role of Gender and Age in Complaint Behaviors***

The elements of gender and age also play roles in the complaint behaviors of consumers. Gender has not been fully agreed upon by researchers to have an effect on how or if consumers voice complaints (Lam & Tang, 2003). However, the same is not true for age. The more vocal and active complainers have been found to be younger, better educated, and earn higher incomes. Younger consumers are also more likely to bring forward their complaints in public (Lam & Tang).

### **Role of Technology in Complaint Behaviors**

Research has found that consumers differ on technology chosen to voice complaints. As seen in their daily interactions, consumers use a variety of technologies to communicate- the issuing of complaints is no different.

### ***Desired Outcome Influence***

A variety of factors influence customers in their decisions on which media to use in issuing their complaints. Mattila and Wirtz (2004) proposed that the compensation consumers want from their complaint influences the choice of media they use to complain. Those looking for tangible compensation seek face-to-face interactions or a telephone call while others who wish to vent use remote interactions such as written letters or emails (Mattila & Wirtz) or third party complaint issuing (Schibrowsky & Lapidus, 1994). These third parties may include media-sponsored consumer advocates,

governmental consumer protection departments, and even solicitors (Schouten & Van Raaaij, 1990).

These findings convey that consumers appreciate the providing of multiple ways for their complaints to be voiced, hence providing the opportunity for complaints to go directly to the service provider before negative word-of-mouth is distributed through emails, blogs, social networks, etc. (Mattila and Wirtz, 2004; Tyrrell and Woods, 2004).

### ***Technology Adoption***

Although the Internet has grown in popularity, not all consumers may choose new Internet-based media as their technology to voice complaints. Parasuraman (2000) offers an explanation to why consumers do not always choose new media for communication. Customers' technology readiness for adopting new technologies is explained in a pyramid model, showing less-ready consumers will use older technologies to communicate with a company (i.e. calling, face to face interactions, and postal letters). Technologically-comfortable consumers might have lower levels of need for interaction with the provider (Dabholkar, 2000). Therefore, a face to face or voice to voice interaction might be preferred by consumers who are less familiar with electronic communications (Parasuraman, 2000). However, there is no denying that because of its vast adoption the Internet is also a viable and widely used technology used in communicating complaints.

### ***Complaint Websites***

Because nearly 90% of U.S. households have access to the Internet, researchers have taken an active role in studying the effects of negative word-of-mouth spread via

the Internet (Szeto, 2005). Negative eWOM can spread via complaint websites and forums which are normally established by an individual or group not affiliated with the target company who has had a negative interaction or experience with the company (Harrison-Walker, 2001). These sites are not only hazardous to companies because potential customers could possibly see them before viewing the official company website, but the complaint websites also help spread negative word-of-mouth quickly (Harrison-Walker, 2001).

Even a small percentage of unsatisfied customers can spread negative views of a company to a large audience using these media. When customers decide to spread negative word-of-mouth online via complaint websites, they are providing information to people they have no ties with and therefore present their complaints as a problem which warrants public concern. According to Laczniak, DeCarlo, and Ramaswami (2001) complaint website creators: a) present commercial failures as betrayals of customer rights; b) magnify the harm inflicted; c) typecast company executives as betrayers of trusting customers; d) show other customers' complaints to add blame to the company; e) present themselves as fighters for the respect of all customers; and, f) encourage others to unite as a group.

Unfortunately for companies, researchers have found most consumers who complain via a complaint website had previously complained directly to the company, but did not receive a positive result (Ward & Ostrom, 2006). After having the company disregard their previous complaints, the customers felt betrayed, disrespected, and

treated rudely hence providing their reactions to seek revenge via complaint websites (Ward & Ostrom, 2006).

### ***Email***

Email is another medium for complaints. When consumers voice their complaint via email to a business, researchers have found consumers expect immediate results from the service provider (Mattila & Mount, 2003). After emailing a survey to customers who had complained via email to a hotel website within the last two weeks, Mattila and Mount found that customers were dissatisfied with the complaint management if their original email was not responded to within 24-48 hours. Therefore, just as customers dislike their complaints being ignored or put on hold in a face-to-face interaction, they also are dissatisfied when the same management practices are done online with email complaints. Williams, Cheung, and Choi (2000) agree with this finding and label it cyber-ostracism, saying that being ignored online is likely to make customers who complain via the Internet very frustrated. Unfortunately, email is not proving to be a successful medium for customers to issue complaints. According to researchers, it is estimated that fewer than 50% of email complaints receive a response from the company and when they do, the customer is not satisfied (Naylor 2003; Gruber et al. 2006). Consequently, consumers who have used email to complain in the past might no longer see it as an effective means of complaining.

### ***Online Reviews***

Customers can also issue their complaints via online reviews, particularly significant in the travel industry (Yoo and Gretzel, 2008). These reviews can be on the

company's own website or can be found on third party websites (Chatterjee, 2001).

Third party sites such as tripadvisor.com and expedia.com are especially popular within the tourism industry and offer consumers the chance to review hotels, travel services, and destinations. Reviews on both types of websites are seen as very important (Chatterjee), especially in influencing new patrons. If the reviews are negative, a potential customer will pay closer attention to it, whereas a current customer will more likely dismiss the negative review as a one time event (Chatterjee, 2001). Consumers' motivations to express their opinions through reviews are more often based on the desire to help other travelers by suggesting good or bad areas to go, etc. (Yoo & Gretzel, 2008). While these three types of media are prominently mentioned in the literature based on general consumer samples, it has yet to be established whether they play an equally important role for the complaint behaviors of the younger consumer age group-the Millennial Generation. Therefore, the following paragraphs will now discuss the Millennial Generation.

### **Millennial Generation**

This section will first describe particular characteristics that differentiate the Millennial Generation from other generations in the general public. Then, the relationship Millennials have with their parents will be explored, important because of this cohort's closeness and advice-seeking with their parents that may influence their role as consumers regarding their knowledge, expectations, and behaviors towards service-providers. Following that will be a discussion of this generation's technology use, significant because with the advancement of technology comes new communication



trends that may influence expectations and communication behaviors, specifically complaint behaviors, of Millennials in their role as consumers. Next, research regarding this cohort's consumer expectations of service-providers and their anticipated complaint behaviors towards these providers is examined in order to gain perspective on elements found to influence Millennials' complaint behaviors. This will serve to shed light on the elements that have not yet been discovered and the existing holes in the research regarding Millennials' complaint behaviors. These undiscovered elements are then brought in as the building blocks of this study's research questions as to how and why Millennials complain, the final discussion of this section.

Because the Millennial Generation does make up 26% the population (Jones & Fox, 2009) and its members are becoming active consumers and travelers, researchers have begun to study the specific characteristics of this cohort. Each generation throughout history has been distinctive in some form—the Millennials are no exception. According to Howe and Strauss (2007), the leading researchers in Millennial Generation studies, the children of baby-boomers have been raised differently to possess certain characteristics.

### ***Characteristics***

Millennials have been told by their parents, schools, universities, and even marketers that they are “special” meaning each of these parties have assured Millennials they play an essential role in the party's overall goals (Howe & Strauss, 2007; DeBard, 2004). These parties ensure the Millennial has the means necessary to feel special and accomplished. DeBard (2004) explains that parents of Millennials have been successful

in having their children feel this way by such actions as giving each member of a team a trophy for completion of the sport's season instead of only giving those children who advanced significantly in the sport, or won a championship tournament for example, a trophy. Consequently, the Millennial can become accustomed to expecting to be treated as special and accomplished—expectations that last throughout their lives.

With these feelings of accomplishment come pressures of performing at high levels of satisfaction and achievement for Millennials. Researchers agree this generation may choose to rely on conformity and structure of a process or organization to help them deal with the pressure to succeed (DeBard & Kubow, 2002; Howe & Strauss, 2007). Millennials do like to work in teams and be part of a collective action on a project. They will comply with a group's expectations and desires in order to be part of the team and also because they may feel this compliance will earn them achievement versus creating dissonance within their team (DeBard, 2004; Sweeney, 2006).

Researchers have also identified the following personality traits to be specific to the Millennials: “Warm and outgoing, more abstract than concrete, more adaptive and mature, more dutiful, more socially bold and adventuresome, more sensitive and sentimental, more self-doubting and worried, more open to change and experimenting, and more organized and self disciplined, and finally, less solitary and individualistic” (Borges, Mauel, Elam, & Jones, 2006 as found in Sweeney, 2006, p. 6; Winograd and Hais, 2009). These traits are displayed through characteristics of this cohort such as high interaction with peers and team work, i.e. corresponding with the trait less

individualistic, and their high need for achievement correlating with the self-doubt, organized, and self-disciplined traits of Millennials.

### ***Relationship with Parents***

Another important characteristic of this cohort is their firm attachment and relationship with their parents. Millennials are extremely close with their parents, and often ask their advice (Howe & Strauss, 2007). The sharing of advice also links to findings that this cohort has also taken on aspects of their parents' virtues. Although some Boomers and GenXers have been found to not agree, researchers have found that the Millennials' values are "more aligned with their parents than those of previous generations" (Sweeney, 2006, p. 6) because these parents have taught "their children manners, as well as their virtues of patience, tolerance, and respect-enforced by a strict zero tolerance policy" (Nystrom, 2007). The literature does not fully reach an agreement regarding Millennials' possession of these particular virtues (Howe & Strauss, 2007; DeBard, 2004). Parents of this cohort also listen to their children, particularly in purchase decision-making. Researchers have concluded Millennials largely influence their family's purchase decisions on items from apparel to vehicles, and even spend more than \$56 billion dollars of their parent's money on an annual basis (US Census Bureau, 2008).

This deep attachment parents have with their Millennial Generation children, as now seen to even extend into conversations regarding how to spend the family earnings, can have a negative influence on the Millennials when such attachment leads to over involvement by parents in their children's lives. Termed helicopter parents (Cline and

Fay, 1990; Pope, 2005), parents of this cohort have hovered over their children's daily activities-planning their play time and extracurricular activities, and now into their high school and college years keeping in daily contact via phone calls and emails (Howe & Strauss, 2007). This relationship with their parents may likely influence many behaviors of the Millennials, including technology use and media choices.

### ***Millennials' Technology Use***

The Millennials are a unique generation in that during their lifetime many technologies that may be considered new to most are considered normal to them. Referred to as digital natives, Millennials are the first generation to be constantly exposed to the Internet, and therefore use information and communication technologies extensively to stay in touch with friends (Prensky, 2001). Even four years ago, in 2005, 87% of 12-17 year olds (only a partial set of the Millennial Generation) said they go online (Fox & Madden, 2005). Millennials have been raised with computer classes and the Internet being taught at school and being used as a tool for their homework (Howe & Strauss, 2007).

The use of mobile phones has also been a constant exposure to the Millennials, resulting in their use of this technology multiple times on a daily basis. The cell phone provides a variety of communication tools, and this cohort uses them to their fullest extent. One such tool widely seen in use by Millennials is text messaging. As Thurlow and Brown (2003) discuss, text messaging like other technologies that were "initially intended for purely commercial purposes...is another example of how the human need for social intercourse...bends and ultimately co-opts technology to suit its own ends" (p.

2). Millennials have taken the usage of this medium to new levels; with more than 2,800 text messages sent on average each month per US teen mobile phone subscribers ages 13-17 (eMarketer.com, 2009). The amount of messages sent ties directly to the fact that the majority of Millennials have unlimited text message subscriptions, with only 13% having a limit of text messages for their cell phone plan subscriptions (eMarketer.com, 2009).

Millennials, with this wide use of technology, can be considered multi-channeled teens, defined as teens who use the Internet, have cell phones, use instant messaging, text messaging, and use social networks (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). Because Millennials use technology most often to maintain close contact with friends, the discussion will continue by drawing the links between this generation's uses of technology in their relationships with others.

### ***Role of Technology in Millennials' Relationships***

Millennials are found to be very fond of congregating and keeping close contact with people in their social world (Howe & Strauss, 2007; DeBard, 2004). Because this generation places a high regard for maintaining close friendships, Millennials use the Internet, text messaging, and cell phones to communicate with friends that may be displaced over geographical distances (Sweeney, 2006).

Their constant use of the cell phone assists in maintaining their friendships. In a 2007 study, 59% of Millennials relayed they talk on the phone at least one hour per day (US Census Bureau, 2008). As formerly mentioned, text messages are another cell phone technology used by this generation predominately to maintain friendships and make

social and practical arrangements, with more than 60% of messages having a highly intimate and relational orientation (Thurlow & Brown, 2003). This cohort group also portrays their characteristic of being highly connected to a social group by having constant access to the opinions and recommendations of their peers with such media as social networking sites like Facebook and Myspace, instant messaging, and even Internet now being available through the majority of mobile cell phones.

This accessibility of the Internet via cell phones or the more conventional computer, allows this group to constantly interact with their friends through the recently popular technology of social networking sites. A social networking site, as defined by Lenhart & Madden of the Pew Internet & American Life Project, is “an online location where a user can create a profile and build a personal network that connects him/her to other users” (Lenhart & Madden, 2007, p. 1). Fifty-five percent of Millennials ages 12-17 have a profile page on a social networking site of which over half visit once per day, and 22% visit several times per day (Lenhart & Madden, 2007; eMarketer.com, 2008). They are more inclined to use the Internet to maintain peer networks than to explore other areas such as online shopping or news (Howe & Strauss, 2007). This is further shown in a recent study by eMarketer.com, where it was found that 75% of Millennials ages 12-17—15.5 million US internet users—will use social networks in 2009 mainly to stay in touch with friends (eMarketer.com, 2009).

Within social networking sites, this group communicates through different ways: 84% post messages to a friend’s wall on their profile page, 82% send a private message to other friends (similar to email but stays within the site), 61% send a bulletin or group

message to friends, and 3 out of 4 respond with comments to their friend's blogs (Lenhart & Madden, 2007). This finding gives businesses a peek into the easy accessibility and large usage of WOM behaviors within social networking sites, a topic most businesses may not fully understand without further detailed research.

Related to the finding above, Millennials exchange peer recommendations on a regular basis. According to the Federal Trade Commission, 51% of teens ages 12-17 referenced their friends as the largest influence on their money spending behaviors meaning that peer recommendations play a large role in how the Millennial Generation makes decisions (United States Federal Trade Commission, 2000). Just as Millennials take suggestions from their peers, 33% of this group also offers their own advice through postings on online rating systems on such sites as amazon.com (Hitlin & Rainie, 2004). This interactivity between peers can be one way to see the team-oriented, connected nature of the Millennials and the optimistic trust they give to their friends and peers (Rainie, 2006; Howe & Strauss, 2007). This phenomenon can be a rising concern for service-related industries due to the immense damage negative WOM within the peer social networks of Millennials can cause. Therefore, the interconnectivity and trust this cohort shares with their friends may consequently be of importance in their roles as consumers. The following discussion will explore current findings regarding Millennials in their consumer role.

## **Complaint Behaviors of the Millennial Generation**

Research in the area of Millennials and their complaint behaviors is sparse, however by taking a closer look at the service expectations Millennials have in their role as consumers, an understanding of their expected complaint behaviors can evolve.

### ***Service Quality Expectations of Millennial Consumers***

In response to the immense expectations of achievement placed on Millennials throughout their lives, this cohort may now apply the high expectations they have routinely been given by others to their expectations for service-oriented consumer experiences. These expectations extend to include the Millennials' need for a variety of services and products (Sweeney, 2006). Service providers, travel destinations, and even universities are seeing a need to include a variety of choices for this new consumer generation. This variety of services and products is also preferred by Millennials to be accessible whenever and wherever they need (Sweeney, 2006).

Because this cohort places a large value on their personal time, they expect flexibility from companies, employers, and even schools in the accessibility of their services. Recent technological advancements in smart-phones such as the iPhone and Blackberry accommodate this necessity for flexibility by including email capabilities, text messages, global positioning systems, and even wireless Internet capabilities. Therefore, these technologies allow a Millennial to efficiently multitask at their convenience. The expectations for complete flexibility further extend, with Millennials also expecting to obtain human assistance whenever needed, which may require service providers to reorganize customer service representative schedules and business hours



(Sweeney). Researchers agree the convenience factor of new technologies and services alike is extremely important to Millennials, and when this cohort's convenience is impaired, they become frustrated (Howe & Strauss, 2007; Sweeney). Sweeney (p. 3) states, "Millennials, by their own admission, have no tolerance for delays. They expect their services instantly when they are ready... Their worst nightmare is when they are delayed, required to wait in line, or have to deal with some other unproductive process. Their desire for speed and efficiency can not be over estimated. The need for speedy satisfaction, or as some believe instant gratification, permeates virtually all of their service expectations."

Business executives are recognizing this generation's anticipations. According to a global survey produced by the Economist Intelligence Unit in 2008, 75% of top-level managers believe they will need a "millennial strategy in place", but only 32% have begun to make changes (Alcatel-lucent, 2008). A millennial strategy was described in the study to consist of ways to handle Millennials' customer service needs concerning "convenience, customization, community... reliable service, frictionless interaction, a tailored approach, honesty and trust, and a personal touch" (Alcatel-lucent, 2008). Although it was understood by top-level managers across various industries that this generation prefers to interact through community-based technologies such as social networking sites and blogs, business leaders relayed they still "rely on telephone, email, and store/office-front points of contact" (Alcatel-lucent).

### ***Expected Complaint Behaviors***

Therefore, there seems to be a great potential for Millennials to be frustrated with services that are essentially designed to satisfy other generations. This may lead to this generation possibly complaining through the Internet, via social network sites or instant messaging. Researchers predict that Internet-based media may be Millennials' first manner of complaining because they have been raised from birth with the Internet and have familiarity with using this as an everyday way to communicate (Prensky, 2001; DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2007). Also assumed is that a complaint will be issued by the Millennial to a large social network, hence spreading at a quicker rate. However, studies regarding Millennials and their possible complaint behaviors have yet to be thoroughly conducted by researchers. Because Millennials have such a unique communication behavior compared to other generations, it is important to explore the ways in which this group communicates complaints about service providers. Therefore, based on a review of this literature, the following research questions are presented.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions have been developed in an attempt to gain a greater understanding of the consumer expectations and complaint behaviors of this young generation:

Q1: To whom do Millennials complain, specifically does this cohort take a public action and complain directly to service providers? If not, do Millennials complain privately to friends, family, or other third parties?

Q2: How do Millennials voice complaints, specifically which technologies do Millennials use to complain and what is the practice for using these technologies in issuing complaints?

Q3: Why do Millennials choose to complain in particular ways, specifically why do Millennials choose to either voice complaints as a public or private action and what reasons do Millennials give for choosing to complain to certain entities, and why certain media is chosen to issue the complaint?

In order to answer each research question, a qualitative methodology approach was utilized. A description of the qualitative methods used to answer these research questions is discussed in the following chapter.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter will describe the methodology utilized in conducting this study. A description of the qualitative methods used will be presented, followed by an account of the sampling techniques used. Then, the data collection techniques will be discussed. Finally, an explanation of the data analysis will be given. The researcher's role in the study, as well as her assumptions and bias will be stated last in this chapter.

A qualitative methodology was selected due to a lack of research in this area. The study would need an approach that offered a deeper exploration in the questions of how and why Millennials complain. While the literature makes some projections regarding Millennials' complaint behaviors, qualitative methods were utilized to allow the researcher to probe in depth questions regarding these behaviors as "relevant variables have yet to be identified" in this field of study (Marshall and Rossman, 1995, p. 43). As stated by Marshall and Rossman (1995, p. 39), the most compelling argument for using qualitative methods is "the unique strengths of this paradigm for research that is exploratory or descriptive, that assumes the value of context...and that searches for a deeper understanding of the participants lived experiences of the phenomenon." Therefore, in this study a qualitative methodology was employed to gain perspective and explanation to the participants "lived experiences" of their complaint behaviors.

Important in qualitative research is the assessment of trustworthiness. The assessment of trustworthiness is a process in which qualitative researchers can ensure

rigor of the research methods without sacrificing the relevance of qualitative research. Following Gupa's model, as discussed by Key (1997), the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are needed in qualitative research to maintain the trustworthiness of the study. The steps the researcher took to ensure these criteria were met will be addressed throughout this chapter.

### **Sampling**

Because the aim of this study consisted of exploring the complaint behaviors of the Millennial Generation, the sample consisted of only those born from 1982-2000. Although this generation ranges in age from 9-27 years old, only those ages 16-27 were recruited since those below age 16 have not fully developed the area of the brain that is used in making decisions (Schvaneveldt & Adams, 2001). Also, they are not likely to make travel decisions or major purchases independently.

As discussed by Merriam (1988), the sample size for qualitative studies is typically small, and non-random. Therefore, the following recruiting method was implemented. After an initial discussion with parents of Millennial age children, who were acquaintances of the researcher, it was found that parents were hesitant to allow their children to participate in a university research project, regardless of the subject. Therefore, the researcher decided a snowball recruiting method would ease parents' worries regarding their children's participation in the study. This recruiting method was implemented to ensure that potential participants, and their parents, had a general knowledge of the researcher and the study's intentions. Acquaintances of the researcher were the first participants asked to provide names of potential participants for the study.

Participants over 18 years old were given a consent form, asked to read it, check whether they did or did not approve to be recorded with a digital recorder, and sign the form. A copy of the consent form was given to the participant to keep. In the case of 16-18 year old participants, parental consent was sought and agreed upon by the signing of a parental consent form. A copy of the parental consent form was given to the parents and participants for them to keep. Assent was also obtained for participants 16-17 years old by first greeting the participant, engaging the participant in discussion, then inviting the participant to take part in the study. The participant was told that he/she did not have to participate in the study and they could stop the interview at any time and no one would be upset. Reaffirmation of assent was established twice throughout the interview, once ten minutes into the interview and another at forty-five minutes. Both times the researcher asked the participant if he/she still felt comfortable, and if they wanted to end the interview they may and no one would be upset. The participant could verbally say yes or no or non-verbally shake their head up and down for yes or side to side for an answer of no.

The sample for this study resulted in recruiting twenty-two participants ranging from age 16-26. The sample size of 22 was the result of interviewing participants until the information obtained reached a point of saturation.

A median age for this group was 20-21 years old (Table 2). The participants were from the geographic area of the Central Texas region in the United States. Each participant's name has been changed to a pseudonym and will henceforth be referred to only by the pseudonym as shown in Table 2.

The researcher found the point of saturation to be around the eighteenth to twentieth interview. An additional two interviews were conducted to assure that no additional new information was obtained. This number is also reflective of the intention to collect in-depth information. The small number of interviews satisfies the threshold of eight, proposed by McCrackin (1988, p. 17) as sufficient for generating themes or categories in the process of conducting qualitative research.

**Table 2** Participant Description

<b>PSEUDONYMS</b>	<b>AGE</b>	<b>GENDER</b>	<b>OCCUPATION</b>	<b>LOCATION</b>
Steven	16	Male	High School Student	College Station, TX
Rebecca	16	Female	High School Student	Beaumont, TX
Jessica	16	Female	High School Student	Beaumont, TX
Mary	18	Female	High School Student	College Station, TX
Kim	18	Female	College Student	College Station, TX
Kelly	18	Female	College Student	College Station, TX
Lisa	18	Female	College Student	Beaumont, TX
Zach	19	Male	College Student	College Station, TX
Jeff	19	Male	College Student	College Station, TX
Jody	20	Male	College Student	College Station, TX
Damien	21	Male	College Student	College Station, TX
Phillip	21	Male	College Student	College Station, TX
Jonathan	21	Male	College Student	College Station, TX
Annie	22	Female	College Student	College Station, TX
Holly	22	Female	College Student	College Station, TX
Trent	22	Female	College Student	College Station, TX
Julia	22	Female	College Student	College Station, TX
Patricia	24	Female	College Student	College Station, TX
Ross	24	Male	College Student	College Station, TX
Martha	25	Female	Graduate Student	College Station, TX
Thomas	25	Male	Graduate Student	Beaumont, TX
Joe	26	Male	Full-time Worker	Beaumont, TX

Steven is a 16-year old white male high school student in College Station, TX. He is actively involved in his high school baseball team. Although somewhat shy, he becomes talkative when discussing baseball or sports. He travels with his parents and with his sports teams to tournaments across the state of Texas and surrounding states.

Rebecca is a 16-year old African-American female high school student in Beaumont, TX. She is very shy and talks in low voice. She does not talk of many hobbies, but seems to enjoy spending time with friends. Her travel experience is unknown.

Jessica is a 16-year old white female high school student in Beaumont, TX. She is talkative and willing to give her opinion freely. She has traveled with her high school marching band and her parents to different areas across the U.S.

Mary is an 18-year old white female high school student in College Station, TX. She is outgoing and has a bubbly personality. Her hobbies include choir and English-riding competitions. She has traveled across the U.S. with her family.

Kim is an 18-year old white female college student in College Station, TX. She is quiet and shy. Her hobbies include studying, dance, and visiting with friends. She has traveled across the U.S. with her family.

Kelly is an 18-year old white female college student in College Station, TX. She is outgoing and willing to give her opinion freely. Her hobbies include joining a sorority and volunteering at veterinary clinics. She has extensive travel experience, and participated in a study abroad in Belize.



Lisa is an 18-year old white female college student in Beaumont, TX. She is outgoing and has a bubbly personality. Her hobbies include hanging out with friends and shopping. She has traveled across the U.S. with her family and her high school marching band.

Zach is a 19-year old white male college student in College Station, TX. He is talkative and willing to help others. His hobbies include ultimate Frisbee with a large group of his friends. He has extensive travel experience, in and outside of the U.S.

Jeff is a 19-year old white male college student in College Station, TX. He is very shy and quiet and is not quick to talk. His hobbies include talking to friends on instant messaging, studying physics, and playing ultimate Frisbee with friends. His travel experience is limited.

Jody is a 20-year old white male college student in College Station, TX. He is quiet and nervous tempered. His interests are joining the U.S. Navy and studying history. He has traveled in the U.S. with his family.

Damien is a 21-year old Latin male college student in College Station, TX. He is calm mannered and precise with his wording. His hobbies include visiting with friends, studying, and playing ultimate Frisbee with his friends. He has travel experience in the U.S.

Phillip is a 21-year old white male college student in College Station, TX. He is a twin to Jonathan. He is talkative and willing to assist others. He enjoys working on computers and has recently graduated college. He has traveled with his parents around the U.S.

Jonathan is a 21-year old white male college student in College Station, TX. He is the twin brother of Phillip. He is shy and quiet, opposite of his brother. He also enjoys working on computers and recently graduated college. He and Phillip are close friends. He has traveled across the U.S. with his family.

Annie is a 22-year old Hispanic female college student in College Station, TX. She is outgoing, and has a bubbly personality. Her hobbies include decorating, going out dancing with friends, and shopping. She has traveled across the U.S. with her family and friends.

Holly is a 22-year old white female college student in College Station, TX. She is reserved, yet friendly. She attended a study abroad.

Trent is a 22-year old white male college student in College Station, TX. He is outgoing and talkative. His hobbies include going out with friends and preparing for graduation from college. He has traveled within the U.S.

Julia is a 22-year old white female college student in College Station, TX. She is bubbly and friendly. Her hobbies include going out with friends and preparing for graduation from college. She is originally from New Hampshire and travels often between the Northeast of the U.S. and Texas. She has also lived overseas in England.

Patricia is a 24-year old white female college student in College Station, TX. She also works two jobs and is planning her wedding. Her hobbies include visiting with friends, church, working, and planning her wedding. She has limited travel experience.

Ross is a 24-year old white male college student in College Station, TX. He has a straight-forward personality and will share his opinions with others. He looks forward to

commissioning in the U.S. Army upon graduating from college. He has extensive travel experience, and has traveled outside of the U.S.

Martha is a 25-year old white female graduate college student. She enjoys visiting with friends, country music, and cooking. She has traveled within the U.S. with friends and family.

Thomas is a 25-year old Middle Eastern male graduate college student. He enjoys visiting with friends and performing scientific experiments. He looks forward to being accepted in to Physicians Assistant School in the near future. He has traveled in the U.S.

Joe is a 26-year old white male full-time worker. He is outgoing and enjoys visiting with friends and playing softball. He has traveled throughout the U.S. with family and friends.

### **Data Collection**

Data was gathered from October 2008 through May 2009, and included one-hour, semi-structured interviews with 22 participants. To begin, after collecting names and email addresses from Millennial cohort acquaintances of the researcher, the potential participants were emailed with an introduction letter that described the study and why they were being contacted. Attached to the email was a consent form that further outlined the study. Potential participants were then asked to email the researcher back to schedule an interview. In the case that a potential participant was under 18 years of age, the email stated the attached consent form must be signed by the parent and brought to the interview with the obtained signature of their parent or legal guardian. This

recruitment tool worked well in particular with the younger participants because in most cases the researcher was told parents of the participants read the email and consent form and evaluated the email and study as credible.

Each participant was given their choice of location for the interview, with suggestions of local coffee houses, a local university study room, and their or their parents' homes given by the researcher. Semi-private locations were suggested by the researcher in efforts to maintain the participant's confidentiality; however, semi-public locations were also suggested after some parents of participants stated they only approved of their child meeting the researcher in a public place where they felt safety would not be an issue. As Wilson (1977) discusses, the act of participants feeling comfortable in their environment is crucial to the context variables of internalized notion of norms, traditions, roles, and values that can unconsciously be hidden from the researcher's observation during the interview if the participant is not at ease. Therefore, the researcher agreed to meet participants at the location of their choice. The majority of interviews were conducted at a local university coffee-house or restaurant.

The semi-structured interviews ranged in their duration from sixteen minutes to one hour and thirty minutes. The sixteen minute interview was ended before the one hour duration due to the 16-year old Rebecca's mother arriving early to pick her up. Participants were asked for their consent in being audio-recorded, to which all 22 participants agreed. All but two interviews were conducted with only the researcher and one participant present; however, in two instances, participants requested to be interviewed together. As Krefting (1991) discusses, group interviews can be useful, and

indeed were found to be of assistance in both participants voicing their opinions openly. Interviews were conducted using a general outline of previously prepared questions. This list acted as a worksheet of sorts for the researcher to use as a guide in her questioning; however, not all questions were asked to all participants and the questions did change throughout the twenty two interviews. After the first five to ten interviews, the researcher realized additional gaps in participants' answers and therefore adapted her questions to probe deeper at some areas being discussed. Because qualitative research is designed to allow flexibility as new information emerges, the evolution of the interview questions was appropriate (Merriam, 1988).

Rapport was established with participants from the very first stages of the study due to the snowball recruiting method that allowed for participants to have a general acquaintance with the researcher. The characteristics and age of the researcher also assisted in building rapport. The researcher is a 24 year old female graduate student, therefore belonging to the Millennial Generation and incidentally viewed as a fellow student in cases where the participant was a college student and also a native Texan. Each interview began with the interviewer offering the incentive of a beverage, but only one participant accepted the offer. Conversation began about the participant's day, classes (high school or college), work, or in some cases comments made by the participants about siblings and parent issues. In a few cases where participants were initially quiet and meek, the researcher shared characteristics about herself or talked about her classes and work, then asked the participant how their classes and work were

that day. Such initial conversation starters seemed to relax the participants and their interview answers became more detailed and lengthened.

### ***Defining Action of Complaining for Study***

Defining specific terminology used in the interview was an important step that occurred towards the beginning of each interview. In particular, defining what a complaint was and meant to the participant was imperative. The definition for complaints agreed upon by researchers is a feeling or emotion of perceived dissatisfaction (Day, 1984; Landon, 1980; Singh, 1988), and the behavior associated with a complaint is defined as any or all consumer actions that convey an expression of dissatisfaction (Landon, 1980; Singh, 1988). Therefore, because these definitions allow for consumers, and in the case of this study participants, to interpret complaining in regards to the feelings they have of perceived dissatisfaction and the actions they take to express this dissatisfaction, the researcher gave participants cues as to what her meaning was of complaining. Such cues included asking the participant if something went wrong during their day that upset or frustrated them, who would they go to talk to about it and why. Often, participants then described an event that took place during their day and then said they would “vent” to their friends. Therefore, for this study, complaining was often referred to as venting. Complaint behaviors were also generally action-oriented and goal-directed because the venting action to friends resulted in the participants wanting feedback and advice for problems with service providers.

When the researcher discussed complaining to a company, she gave the cue of asking if the participant complained to a company, what would be an event that would

push them to contact a company and how would they contact the company. In the case of contacting the company, participants would usually describe a problem they had with a product or service, and then discuss how they contacted the company to receive a solution to their problem. Therefore, for this study, participants described complaining to friends as venting and complaining to a company as contacting the company in efforts to find a solution to a problem.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of the data began by transcribing interviews from the digital recordings into a word document. With the participants' words now written in print, a constant comparative method was applied as a process of analysis to the text (Grove, 1988; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Constant comparative method has various descriptions and ways of being applied to research; therefore, it is necessary to discuss the application of constant comparative method in this study.

As described by Glaser (1965, p. 438) the “constant comparative method is not designed to guarantee that two analysts working independently with the same data will achieve the same results; it is designed to allow, with discipline, for some of the vagueness and flexibility which aid the creative generation of theory.” Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose a four-step version of constant comparative method that, with two stages titled by Grove (1988) was followed as the analysis process for this study.

Analysis began with the first step of the Lincoln and Guba-Grove method, *unitizing*. After reading each transcript, sentences and paragraphs from the text were cut out and pasted on index cards. Then, each card was coded by the source it was taken

from (i.e. the participant's pseudonym) and the episode, or interview, during which each unit was collected. A pile of over one thousand index cards resulted from this first step of analysis.

Next, the step of *categorizing* consisted of placing cards in unnamed category piles. Cards that did not relate to any other categories at a first glance were placed in a miscellaneous pile. When piles reached at least fifty to sixty cards, the categories were reexamined. Sub-categories then emerged in each category. Categories of the Millennials' general technology use, relationships with friends and parents, complaint behaviors associated with issuing a complaint to companies, and expectations regarding companies were found in this second step. Sub-categories that surfaced were: Millennials' technology use regarding the contacting of friends, technology use regarding how Millennials voice complaints to companies, and particular feelings about complaining. Category names remained basic, as stated here, in order to keep the researcher open-minded to seeing relationships building between categories throughout the remaining analysis. *Identification of category properties* and the creation of provisional rules for inclusion into each category also took place during this step.

Following categorization, the researcher sought to *fill in patterns* within categories by reviewing the categories for overlap and searching for relationships between groups of categories. In order to see all the categories and their information in one area, the researcher wrote each category, sub-category, and important quotes from those categories onto one large poster-board which assisted in seeing relationships emerge between the information. From here, the researcher asked peers to examine the



relationships being found; this step was necessary as to establish credibility and dependability, showing an assessment of trustworthiness for the study (Krefting, 1991). Three peers (a university professor and two graduate students) participated, with two offering additional relationships and patterns they observed in the data.

Also during this stage, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose *filling in gaps* in the relationships with three additional steps-*extensions*, *bridging*, and *surfacing*. The *extension* process includes using known units as the base to answer other questions, particularly by looking further into interviews for additional information helpful to the explanation of any findings that still have gaps (Grove, 1988). This process was applied to a question regarding the relationship between Millennials' common-place uses of instant messaging programs and their beliefs regarding live chat-instant messaging oriented systems. The researcher re-examined particular interviews where instant messaging and live chat were discussed at length, and found information that aided in "filling the pattern" in this relationship. The *bridging* process is described as the reviewing of units in the same category whose relationship is not understood, and diving deeper into the existing data to find information that bridges the units together (Grove, 1988). This process was not utilized in this study because no particular relationships within a category were left in question. The *surfacing* process, explained as the proposing of new categories once a set of known categories is identified through reason (Grove, 1988) was employed in this study by drawing overarching sub-categories within categories. For instance, when a larger category had a theme or subcategory emerging within it, the researcher used this process to guide her in understanding and explaining

the additional theme that surfaced. The re-evaluation and cross-analysis utilized in this step provided dependability in the assessment of trustworthiness pertaining to this study (Krefting, 1991).

Next, the constant comparative method of analysis was completed by checking the analysis of the study with participants. Jessica, a 16-year old female; Lisa, a 18-year old female; Martha, a 25-year old female; and Joe, a 26-year old male offered to review results from the study. These participants made additional suggestions regarding reasons for their complaint behaviors, which aided the researcher in returning to the data to find examples of their suggestions in the interviews. This information was added into the analysis and assisted in the comprehension of why particular complaint behaviors were chosen by these Millennials to voice complaints. Member checking is discussed by Krefting (1991) as a technique to provide the credibility to this study's assessment of trustworthiness.

### **Assumptions and Bias**

Finally, a discussion of the researcher's role, assumptions and biases in this study is required. As previously stated, the researcher is a 24 year old female which places her in the Millennial Generation. For this study, the researcher's role assisted in creating trust and rapport with participants. Also, the researcher began the study with an internal understanding of Millennial characteristics and technology use. However, she proposed this study because she did not fully understand Millennials' relationships with service providers and consequently, their complaint behaviors when dissatisfaction occurred with a service provider. Because the Millennial Generation communicates in such

different ways from previous generations, the researcher began the study with assumptions that Millennials will complain to friends first during their daily interactions, using technologies widely available to their counterparts such as text messaging, instant messaging, and online social networks. Considering this cohort's ample use of the Internet, it was also assumed Millennials may issue complaints regarding a company or service provider using an online medium that allows them reach a large audience of peers such as email, blogs, social networking sites, or complaint-based websites. Confirmability of the study was produced by the researcher taking notes of her assumptions and biases throughout the study; the method of keeping a reflexive journal during a qualitative study is suggested by Krefting (1991) as a technique to assist in confirmability.

The next chapter will present the findings from this research project in detail.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS

This chapter will present the results of this research project. First, the findings regarding this cohort's technology use will be presented, explaining and confirming the characteristic technology use behaviors of this generation. Next, relationships between Millennials and their friends, parents, and persons of perceived authority as well as the technology uses involved in each relationship will be discussed. Following this, a discussion of Millennials' complaint behaviors with their friends and peers will be presented. Then the Millennials' expectations for service providers, the expression of complaints and media used to register complaints to service providers will be presented.

Overall, the study did not find any difference in terms of age or gender in the answers from participants. Also, in regards to travel, this group of Millennials did not have much travel experience or travel complaints. Their discussions of travel were related to family or group trips, and they did not feel it was their responsibility during these trips to issue a complaint.

#### **General Technology Use**

##### ***Extent of Use***

The technology uses of Millennials in this study confirmed previous research (Sweeney, 2006; US Census Bureau, 2008), by finding that this generation uses the Internet and cell phones on a daily basis. A discovery, however, was the amount of time that this cohort uses these technologies to communicate with friends, shown by 19-year

old college student Jeff—“I wake up and I’m on the computer while I’m eating breakfast...I’m on the computer pretty much whenever I’m not in class.” Other college-age participants, specifically those living in dormitories on a university campus had similar responses to using the Internet during the day.

### *Social Networking Use*

Programs or social networking sites that had been popular among this cohort in previous years yet are no longer used by acquaintances of the participants, are now considered obsolete. Mary, an 18-year old high school student, explained, “I used AOL Instant Messenger like in middle school...I know like no one would ever be on anymore so...well, like a low number compared to [before].” Zach, a 19 year old, agreed by saying, “that was the thing to do in middle school—you had Xanga.” When asked about other online social networking sites that may still be used by participants, a common response was, “most of the people I know are on Facebook”, and therefore few other sites are used.

These participants stated that often their time spent on their computers while in their rooms was visiting with friends via the online social networking site Facebook. Within this website, participants used the instant messaging chat feature due to its convenience and quickness. Jody, a 20-year old college student says he will “sometimes leave it [the Facebook chat feature] running...but I’ll usually turn off the chat option (when I go to class)”. Ross, a 24-year old college student describes how Millennials are using this technology— “the only thing I use on a regular basis is the little Facebook chat feature. I use that feature oh every couple of days or so I will chat with

somebody...I would be like hey do you want to have lunch this week, you know, that kind of thing I would use that for but otherwise it just to say hello to people I haven't talked to in a while." When time is of essence for these Millennials, they turn to this chat feature to contact friends because "it helps me get in contact..." explains Jody. Posting a message to another friend's profile wall was also mentioned as communication within Facebook. Internet usage was extended to include newer technologies as well such as Skype.

### ***Email Use***

Emails were found to not be used as often to contact others, except in situations where accessibility was an issue. Because participants did not discuss use of emails in a generic sense, this communication medium will be further discussed as it pertains to specific relationships.

### ***Cell Phone Use***

Although the Internet can be accessed in a variety of public areas such as workplaces and universities, it was not found to be the only communication medium used by Millennials. Calling others or sending text messages using cell phones was also found to be of common use among this cohort. When asked why he would call another person versus sending him/her a text message or email, 26-year old full-time worker Joe replied, "I don't have access to email, at work all day, in and out, easier to call and find out what I need to know-they can call me." Participants that do have access to a computer throughout the day also agreed that calling and text messaging their friends was a convenient and quick way to communicate with friends.

## **Role of Technology in Relationships**

Technologies were found to play a role in this cohort's daily lives; however, these technologies were used differently when communicating with friends, parents, or persons of perceived authority. The relationships between Millennials and these groups had additional varying differences beyond the type of technology used to communicate.

The following paragraph will discuss the characteristics of relationships between this cohort and their friends, parents, and persons of perceived authority including an applied formality existing within the communication styles of these relationships.

### ***Relationship with Friends***

This study's findings confirmed previous research regarding Millennials having close friendships with their peers (Howe & Strauss, 2007); still, a deeper explanation was uncovered as to how and why Millennials communicate with friends. Participants agreed that they appreciated the casual nature of their friendships, and that this characteristic of their relationship made them feel more relaxed and comfortable sharing intimate conversations. Although casual, these friendships were described to be very important to Millennials, and the technologies used to converse with one another were specific to the degree in which the Millennial wanted to maintain a closeness and quality of the friendship.

### ***Face-to-Face***

If possible, face-to-face interactions were the first choice by Millennials to visit with friends because they "get to see their body language and hear their tone" and in general felt these interactions were more personal and meaningful.

This generation feels a better quality of friendships and relationships can be created by having face-to-face discussions rather than using technologies. Millennials agreed topics they consider to be important conversations should not take place over the phone or Internet if at all possible. “Like my best friend, if a guy was cheating on her, I wouldn’t just call her up and say ‘hey your boyfriend is cheating’...that’s something I should tell her in person,” explained Mary.

Overall, this cohort stated that although they agree technology plays a strong role in their lives, it should not always play a role in their personal friendships and relationships. “Technology has made it easier to connect to people, but we’ve actually gotten further apart,” explained Zach.

#### *Cell Phone*

In the situation where face-to-face communication is not physically possible, Millennials use the cell phone to call and text friends as well. Calling and the sending of text messages was used in instances where a quick response may be needed. Also, cell phones were considered to be an easy way to communicate with friends due to accessibility-“everyone has one, so it’s just easier to call,” explains Julia. Also, text messages were found to be sent to friends when a situation was considered inappropriate to talk, such as during a class.

#### *Internet*

Online communications such as social networking sites, instant messaging, or email were described by participants as being used often to maintain relationships, in most cases daily, due to convenience. Regarding online social networks Ross explains,



“I find that it is easy to use and everybody I know pretty much is on it. So it’s convenient. I don’t need to use multiple different programs. Since it is more of a if I need to get in touch with you and say you aren’t answering your phone or something it’s a convenient way to send a message.”

Interestingly, instant messaging and the sending of emails to friends were typically cited by participants as being used when geographical distance between friends was an issue. One participant uses email two to three times per week to keep in contact with friends who live in Germany. Instant messaging programs such as American Online Instant Messaging, or AIM, were also discussed as used as communication tools with friends living across the United States attending different colleges. Facebook was also used to post comments to friends’ profiles, Julia who maintains contact with close friends explains: “I also have friends from England and it’s also easier and I don’t have to call them like it’s expensive to call and it’s a lot easier to communicate with them this way because they live in England.” These media were described by participants to be a helpful way to maintain close friendships even over large geographical distances where face-to-face communication may not be possible. Although not very common among this group of Millennials, technologies that combine face-to-face interactions with instant messaging, such as Skype, were mentioned by some as technologies used to visit with friends.

### ***Relationship with Parents***

Millennials have been characterized as having a more unique, stronger association with their parents than previous generations in U.S. history (Howe & Strauss,

2007). This association was confirmed in the study as Millennials stated they talk to their parents anywhere from once every other day to three times per day. Some participants discussed how maturing while in college has begun to change their relationships with their parents, where they now may not discuss their lives in detail with their parents as they once may have done. The college student Holly states, “I’ve kind of been doing things on my own and you know, not that you know we don’t love each other or anything like that it’s just that I don’t feel that she needs to know everything that’s going on in my life.”

### *Formality*

Conversations with their parents were considered more formal by this generation in regards to the subjects discussed and the amount of emotion brought into the discussion by the Millennial. Kim who lives away from her parents explains by saying, “I try to explain the problem more like with my friends I’m like this sucks, but with my parents I explain everything and see what kind of advice they can offer me, and with my friends it’s more like venting getting it out there.” Subject matters were described as being something more “important...like maybe life altering decisions that will impact me for a little while,” states 25 year old Thomas. Other topics mentioned were school, grades in school, money, future careers, and work related issues. The formality of these relationships appears in the reasons given by participants as to why they often only discuss these types of issues with their parents.

Also, participants stated that their relationships with their parents were more formal because they did not relay as much emotion in their discussions as they do with

their friends. Regarding school, grades, and money, participant Jody explains that he discusses these with his parents because “they’re paying for school so they should know how I’m doing.” Julia explains, “I feel like I can complain more to my friends, depending on what it is they can relate better if it’s something to do with tests, etc. ...it’s not like my parents can’t relate, but my friends are going through the same thing. Especially relationship wise...if I have a problem I can go ask them if they have been through it too. But with my parents it’s more like, with friends, it’s more personal, but with my parents...I feel like I’m more able to talk to my friends fully and truly and with parents it depends on the situation. With parents it’s more advice at this point.”

Millennials did relay they trust and value their parents’ opinion on these subjects as well and do seek their advice on these issues.

#### *Parents’ Accessibility*

Technologies used in the relationship between Millennials and their parents were found to be chosen based on the accessibility parents’ have to the technology. Email and calls to personal cell phones were found to be used because of the parents’ having access to these technologies at their work. Only two participants relayed they use different media for contacting their parents; Jeff uses instant messaging because he does not like talking on the phone due to his quiet voice, and Holly writes her biological father letters and sends them by postal mail because they do not have a close relationship. Although these media were not found as common communication tools, they are worth noting due to the fact that although this sample was small and these alternative means of communication were only discussed by two participants, other Millennials may

communicate with their parents in these ways, making this finding more pertinent to discussion in future research.

### ***Relationship with Persons of Perceived Authority***

Possibly due to this generation's conventional respectfulness or the pressure by and their acceptance of authority (Coomes & DeBard, 2004, p. 53), this group of Millennials distinguished their relationships with persons they perceived to be an authority from other relationships they maintain. These persons were most often referred to as professors, school officials, sports team coaches, and in a business setting, managers.

### ***Formality***

This was found to be the most formal of the relationships discussed, with the interviewed Millennials stating their actions would be more "mature and calm" towards these individuals. When approaching a person of perceived authority, participants explained they would be respectful in their tone of voice and by allowing the person to handle the issue on their own time. Emotions were described as needing to be "censored" and a serious tone and prepared strategy where the participant explained the situation and "stated the facts" instead of getting emotional would be the required way to address an authority figure.

### ***Technology Chosen Based on Respect***

Twenty-five year old Thomas stated the communication technology which would show the most respect to the authority figure, in his case a student society advisor at his university, was email. He believed email allowed the advisor to reply at his own

convenience to the participant's email and therefore kept him from appearing disrespectful. "A good example, have had issues come up and I've had to talk to my advisor. And I talk to Dr. Hassman (pseudonym) as if I'm talking to Dr. Hassman. I guess I respect the title and I'm not going to talk to him in the same way I would talk to my friend about an issue. I approach him and maybe I ask him if I can schedule a time I come by...not just barge in to his office. He does email better, so I will email him and tell him that I need to talk to you about this situation I'm having here." Kim, an 18-year old female participant, agreed that using well-written, professional email to discuss her test grade with her professor was an appropriate, respectful way to address the issue.

Other participants, however, viewed the formality of this relationship as a reason to approach any situations with these individuals with face-to-face communication. One possible reason for the use of email and face-to-face communication approaches in these situations may be due to the initial communication styles between the authority figure and participant. For example, professors may often correspond with their students via email and hence possibly set a communication style protocol with their students based on the action being repeated over a semester. In the case of high school age participants Steven and Mary who discussed school teachers and sports team coaches as persons of perceived authority, communication styles between these participants and authority figures may be more commonly represented by face-to-face interactions, hence setting a communication medium protocol in that situation.

Discussion of these relationships between Millennials and their friends, parents, and persons of perceived authority construct a foundation for understanding the

formality Millennials determine appropriate for the relationships among each group listed.

### **Complaint Behaviors**

This section will present the findings of Millennials' complaint behaviors. Participants' complaint behavior with friends and peers will be described followed by this cohort's expectations regarding service providers. Finally, the complaint behaviors and media used to voice these complaints will be discussed.

#### ***Friends and Peers***

The discussion of the Millennials' complaint behaviors with their friends included situations where Millennials were upset with their friends and either did or did not issue a complaint to their friends. Participants handled these situations with two types of action: non-confrontational and confrontational.

Non-confrontational actions consisted of not discussing the issue at all, complaining in a small amount to other friends within the social group then terminating the discussion, or making a joke about the issue. Confrontational actions consisted of Millennials presenting the issue to their friend as a discussion, in either a face-to-face interaction or using a technology such as instant messaging or Facebook instant messaging chat feature. In both non-confrontational and confrontational actions, the relationship and concern for the other person's feelings ruled the participant's behavior. A need to "be nice...and diplomatic" was stated by most participants as an appropriate way to handle the situation. Multiple participants also relayed they would discuss the issue with other friends within the social group to gain their advice. In a face-to-face

confrontational discussion, Millennials discussed appreciating that the emotions of both people involved could be seen, possibly helping the situation be better understood. The rather mature Thomas explains, “I like to do it face-to-face because I like to read people’s body language and totally get if they understand what I’m saying and I just think it is better for all parties. There are just some things that you have to do in person.” The Millennials’ focus on relational aspects of complaint behaviors also colors complaint behaviors with respect to service providers.

### ***Expectations of Service Providers***

The expectations Millennials hold for service providers are generally positive thoughts that the company will care about the Millennial as a customer. Again, a relational context is provided by the participants. This context is seen by participants saying such phrases as “if they value their customers, companies will handle complaints.” In general, Millennials felt companies would do something to help them, even if their complaint could not be fixed in entirety. “People will do whatever you want to help you out. Example, a couple of months ago I was paying my credit card bill and I sent the wrong payment to the wrong one [credit card company], so my credit card company...it me with an outrageous fee...so I called them up and I was nice...and they were like ok ya, we are going to credit you for the fee we charged you and we are going to take your interest rate back down to what it was before. Basically, they did everything I wanted them to do and basically you just have to be nice about it,” explained Ross. Holly agreed—“They’ll at least make the effort to get me in contact with the right people.” Damien, a 21 year old college student, stated the positive expectations well—“I

always think I am going to go into a win-win situation, and I feel like I can talk to people...if they truly value the customer, they'll give me my money back.” Holly, who had to complain once because her television broke after the warranty expired, explained her positive expectations by saying, “I feel in general, the company as a whole, if their product...has some sort of issue with it then I feel that they would handle it.”

#### *Small versus Large Companies*

There were instances where Millennials did not have positive expectations that a company would handle their complaint. One issue responsible for their negative viewpoints was company size. Trent summarized this view by saying, “smaller companies value their customers more, so they’re more willing to help out a customer.” In support of this statement, Annie stated, “customer service is *always* bad at big companies.” Participants also felt if that if the company had not received many complaints similar to theirs, the company may overlook their complaint, blame the situation on the customer, not fix the issue because it may cost the company additional money, or be unwilling to resolve the issue unless they believe the Millennial’s business will be lost.

#### *Forgivingness*

Millennials were found, however, to give exceptions often when discussing previous situations with a service provider where their complaint had not been handled. In these instances, the Millennials sometimes even took responsibility for their role in the complaint by stating they may not have had correct information ready (i.e. receipts and other such documentation) or their negative attitude affecting the company’s



response behavior to the complaint. Damien explains taking responsibility for his role in contacting his credit card company to have a double-charge for luggage removed— “I had the original receipt and information and they told me to hang on to it, but if I had lost it I could have just asked about it and hopefully it would have worked out, but if not, then I lost the receipt so it’s partially on me.”

Surprisingly, when a company did not handle a complaint, this cohort was quick to believe that one event must be an exception to the normal way the company would handle complaints. Damien discusses how if another person asked his advice on flying with Delta airlines, the airline that double-charged him for his luggage, he would say it may be a one time event—“I would bring that up, but I’d also say that also may be a single case, and it wasn’t so much Delta, but the people at the Delta center in Dallas, they accidentally made a mistake.” Kim also believed her issue with a company was a single incident—“ Usually I don’t have that many complaints about services so I don’t know, just basing it off of, well besides that cable thing-which I guess was just an exception. I think I consider it an exception because all of my other problems are usually just like things like with the restaurant just ‘cause usually if you have a problem they’ll just fix it.”

### **Media Choice for Complaint Behaviors**

Complaint behaviors were found in this study to be split between indirect and direct actions. Indirect actions consisted of discussing the complaint with others not affiliated with the service provider; most often, this discussion was between a Millennial and his or her friends. This group of Millennials would ask their friends’ advice and

opinions regarding the complaint situation as means of checking their viewpoints to be rational or emotional. These discussions helped these participants calm down and talk through their emotions regarding the situation, a discussion that participants feel cannot take place with a service provider. Only after these discussions would they make a decision on whether to contact the company.

Reasons for discussing these complaints with friends was partially described their want to “be nice”, “not get anyone in trouble [at the company]”, “try at brushing it off”, “taking a step back and thinking of it from their [the company] perspective”, and their belief that they needed “to show human compassion.” Damien explains, “It’s always a great feeling of relief and it helps to bounce off somebody else, maybe I can see a different perspective. I always ask my friends to challenge me if they can from time to time and it helps resolve things better because typically if I’m too narrow-minded about something it’ll just make me more frustrated about the situation.” Thomas agrees as he said, “it’s not good to have a discussion when something is really new and fresh. I think you have to maybe deal with it for a while.” When asks who he will complain to first, Trent answers, “One of my buddies because they can usually help calm me down.”

This cohort’s concern for their effect on strangers was found here, by such phrases as “maybe they [service provider] were having a bad day” and as stated above, their worry that their complaint may get an employee in trouble. Ross explains that in a restaurant complaint situation, he will address the issue with the waiter first—“I will usually try to do it with the waiter. Especially if it is something if they are going to be

nice and get it fixed I don't see the point of bringing in a manager making them look bad because a lot of times it's not their fault anyways. I don't want to lay blame or get somebody in trouble. Generally, I'm not out to get somebody, so the lowest level that I can get, whatever it is fixed, that's what I will do." Relational components again surface, and their appreciation for "human compassion" is mentioned often as reason to complain in private to friends.

Second, complaint behaviors categorized as direct actions are behaviors where Millennials contacted the company. Findings were varied regarding how often this group of Millennials actually voices their complaint to the company, with most participants unsure they would contact the company directly. Some participants would only voice complaints to companies when the issue that was being complained about regarded money or situations that inconvenienced them. Regarding money, Thomas contacted his bank not necessarily to complaint, but to report an identity theft on his account. Patricia, a 24-year old, said "if it costs me extra money, then I may get upset about it and tell the company." Julia said, "I went to Ross a couple of weeks ago and it rang up a couple of dollars more than the shirt really was and afterwards I was looking at the receipt and saw it rang up for two dollars more than it was supposed to be, but I didn't feel like it was big enough to warrant a complaint...now, if it was ten or fifteen dollars more than it should have been I would have gone back." Another participant, Damien, contacted an airline after being double-charged for his baggage. Regarding a situation of inconvenience, one participant contacted her insurance company after she was told a rental car would not be paid for by her insurance, leaving her without a mode of transportation after being

involved in a wreck. Although findings regarding this cohort contacting the company directly were varied, participants did discuss which media they would choose, or in some cases may have already chosen to use, when voicing complaints to a service provider. Questions were asked during the interviews regarding which complaint medium would be chosen first to contact the service provider, why that medium would be chosen, to what degree they felt their complaint would be handled and how satisfied the participant expected to be with voicing their complaint in that manner.

Media chosen to voice complaints consisted of calling the company, sending an email to the company, and having a face-to-face discussion with the company. Some participants mentioned only a few situations where they may talk in a live chat instant messaging program with the company or send a letter via postal mail to the company. Overarching themes in their decision making process include relational aspects such as personal interactions, and time aspects such as quickness of response by the service provider and convenience for the Millennial.

#### *Contact via Call*

Interestingly, Millennials chose to call a company first before using other media available for contacting the company. Often, the participant stated he or she had asked their parents and friends for advice on how to contact the company. This is surprising because researchers have assumed Millennials will complain via Internet resources (Prensky, 2001; DeBard, 2004; Howe & Strauss, 2007). Reasons for this choice included the perception that the company would respond quickly with “straightforward answers” and “I get a result right then and there”, although the participants were aware

their call may be transferred to many different customer service representatives, which may cost them more time and result in dissatisfaction. Holly stated, “I tried calling them and I kept getting you know forwarded, and to different people and eventually, it, I didn’t get anywhere with it and so it resulted in my boyfriend calling...and actually yelling at someone...the situation wasn’t solved...which was frustrating.” Some participants stated that, like Holly, if their complaint was not handled after one call to the company, they may either call back again themselves or ask another person (typically a significant other, friend, or parent) to call back on their behalf and have the complaint redressed. A surprise in this finding is that both Millennials and parents gave the same medium recommendations to the participant seeking advice.

Convenience for the Millennial was mentioned as key factor in this decision, with participants saying they call because it means they can handle the complaint from home or wherever else they are. Convenience was also discussed by the time a call took to resolve an issue versus using another media. Eighteen year old Kelly stated, “Usually talking to them on the phone is the easiest thing to do. Easiest because if I don’t have everything I need, or if we’re not able to connect on the issue, then we can figure it out right then instead of sending several emails going back and forth saying I don’t understand this, well I don’t understand this and so it’s just easier spending 5 minutes on the phone rather than sending tons of emails... I save a lot of time just talking to them on the phone saying ok here we go, it’s usually getting done.” Kim states, “It’s also convenient because you’d have to call during certain hours sometimes, but you can still do it from your own home, you don’t have to travel.”

However, a common answer given by participants considers again relational aspects, and an appreciation for a human to human interaction. “It’s easier to kind of understand what they mean and kinda-like their tone of voice or whatever...it’s easier to tell if they’re being friendly or not” and “it’s still a conversation that you’re having with them so they can still...you can still express your ideas easy and they can still like tell by your emotions what you’re trying to get at.”

Handling the conversation in a formal, “professional way” was discussed by participants as having an effect on the overall outcome of the complaint. Although this group wanted a human interaction, they felt showing too much emotion would not be considered professional. Millennials had a strong belief that their complaint would be handled and they would be satisfied from calling to voice a complaint, but understood they may have to call back multiple times or get transferred to additional representatives before their complaint was handled in its entirety.

#### *Contact via Email*

Email was the next medium chosen by participants in order to voice a complaint to the company. Reasons for this choice consisted of convenience for the Millennials and the opportunity for rereading the correspondence before sending it to the company. Participants appreciated that this medium could be used “on my own time” where “you don’t have to worry about their business hours.” Also appreciated was the fact that the email could be re-read and changes made so the correspondence can be “written professionally.”

However, even though Millennials chose this as their second way to contact a company, they did not portray a high level of confidence regarding their complaint being handled via this medium. A few causes for this were that the email is “likely to be ignored because it’s not a person...just an email of words” or may be “tossed out or not read” because “companies get lots of emails” and a large company may overlook the message. Kim said, “One time I ordered clothes off the Internet and they were supposed to be here but they hadn’t come yet, and I sent an email to the company and I never received an email back from the company-but my clothes did show up a few days later but they just didn’t email me back...I would have liked to know it [clothes order] was coming.”

When asked how quickly these participants expected a response via email from the service provider, most answered anywhere from one to three days. If a response was obtained within twenty-four hours, 22 year-old Trent considered it “good customer service.” The relational element appeared here as well, especially regarding concerns that this medium may not produce a situation where the participant is “talking to someone specific”, and that an automated response “doesn’t make me feel better...like I’m unimportant to the company.” Julia felt she would get a generic response—“I don’t feel like they do that as much anymore as they use to just because they write out those generic responses these days and if they have a real problem they will contact us again and it’s frustrated as a customer because especially if you’re paying for it they should fix it and you should feel like they care.” The participant’s personal effect on a customer service representative was also considered, explained by 25 year-old Martha, “I like

emailing a company because it's a way for me to complain without making someone feel bad." Even with the concern that their email may not be responded to, Millennials felt that if their emailed complaint was addressed and the situation solved, they would be highly satisfied due to the convenience of voicing the complaint.

#### *Contact via Face-to-Face*

Face to face interactions were the next preference for voicing their complaints for reasons concerning relational elements. Participants agreed that face to face communication with a company would produce a quick and positive result because a human interaction allowed for each person involved in the conversation to see non-verbal cues and emotions. This group of Millennials felt that if they made an effort to complain face to face, the company would understand their complaint is important, and hence the human interaction would result in making them harder to ignore. Twenty two year old Julia said, "If you're face to face with someone, you're more apt ...to get the problem solved. They really can't get out of it if you're face to face." "It's just more of a mental thing on their part...you being in person it just makes their attitude different," explained 16 year old Steven. Trent describes the "personal care" relationship element as "minus the quick and easy, it's probably the easiest thing to do. You can go in there and let them see how frustrated you are, or you can see, how they are, I just think the personal touch...especially when you're complaining about stuff or whatever, it's just, you can tell that they actually care." Millennials had high expectations that this mode of complaining would result in their complaints being handled and their satisfaction with the result remaining high as well.



### *Contact via Live Chat*

The medium of a live chat instant messaging feature was discussed in this study in efforts to understand how this technology was used and viewed among this group of Millennials. Participants, overall, were not fully trusting of this new media.

Relational aspects regarding this technology consisted of the participants not strongly feeling that they could tell a customer service representative “actually cares about my problem” or is “being sarcastic”, or even that the complaint “isn’t an important issue” because the quick text nature of the technology makes it “hard to figure out what they’re thinking.” Thomas says, “I don’t know if there was like a breakdown in communication sometimes their responses are scripted. Sometimes I wonder, I think they are.”

Many participants appreciated the casual interaction being similar to sending text messages to their friends, and the discussion feeling “more like a conversation than like in an email”. When asked if she had used a live chat feature, Kim said, “Not with a service or company or anything, but like with friends, like instant messaging and Facebook.” These participants equated live chat as a casual conversation, similar to those they would have with friends. However, as a whole this group’s participants were not fully convinced live chat features would lead to a positive result. Holly explained that it would be hard for her to condense her complaint down into paragraphs of appropriate length for instant messaging. Although seen as a quick and casual interaction with a service provider, participants were hesitant regarding specific characteristics of this technology and its ability to result in a satisfactory handling of their complaint.

Participants were weary of the safety and truthfulness of customer service representatives using this technology. Thomas explained it by saying he believed they may even try to sell him something versus offer a solution to his complaint. Ross explained, “I would not want to put any personal information out over it. I would not want to give account numbers, you know things like that, that are kinda sensitive. Just cause it is easier for people to put viruses and things on your computers you know key logging programs, where they look at your keys and say oh we are going ...to wipe you out. It’s harder for the phone, you are pretty safe.”

If participants did overcome their lack of trust with the medium and voiced their complaint using live chat, participants felt they would be satisfied with the result because the interaction was “instantaneous” and “convenient.” Julia says, “That kind of thing is instantaneous...just that you know someone, the other person is listening I guess.”

#### *Contact via Written Letter*

Finally, the voicing of a complaint through writing and sending a postal letter was found by Millennials to be an unreliable means for issuing a complaint. Participants felt the writing of a letter was a very formal manner of communication, and even though companies and Millennials themselves could keep it on file for reference and proof that communication with the company was initiated, most felt the letter would either never reach the company or if it did, it would be too easy to ignore and a response would not be given. Relational elements mentioned for this complaint medium refer to the issue of being ignored by companies. Steven explains, “a lot of people these days write it off,

things like that, I don't know they just don't seem to value things like that as much.” Participants had a low belief that their complaint would be handled by the company if they voiced their complaints in this manner. However, on the small chance a company would handle their complaint, this group of Millennials would be highly satisfied with the result particularly because their expectations were not high for this medium to produce a result, and secondly because as Steven said, “writing me back would take the most effort on their part” resulting in him feeling satisfied his complaint was taken seriously and handled.

Although participants were asked to discuss additional media used in their complaint behaviors, few topics were added. Three participants mentioned their awareness of third party complaint websites and forums; although they would read what others posted as negative complaints regarding service providers, they all stated they have never posted complaints themselves on sites such as those.

The next chapter will discuss how these findings answer the research questions presented for this study.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research project was to examine the Millennial Generation's complaint behaviors in regards to whom they complain to, how they complain, and why they complain in particular ways. The general population's technology use, consumer service expectations, and complaint behaviors were discussed. Then, an examination of the Millennial Generation's technology uses, service quality expectations in their roles as consumers, and implications for their complaint behaviors was presented. The study utilized a qualitative methodology approach in order to identify this cohort's complaint behaviors and understand the reasons as to how and why Millennials choose to voice complaints in certain ways. The findings showed interesting, and to some extent unexpected, patterns. This chapter will present a summary of these findings.

#### **Summary of Results**

The results of this study will be summarized in regards to the research questions that formed the study.

#### ***Results-To Whom Do Millennials Complain***

Q1: To whom do Millennials complain, specifically does this cohort complain directly to service providers? If not, do Millennials complain indirectly to friends, family, or other third parties?

#### ***Complain Indirectly to Friends and Family***

This group of Millennials is found most often to complain first only to friends and family. Emotions concerning the complaint are discussed with these familiar others,

and a decision to voice the complaint directly to the company often results from these conversations. Complaining to third parties such as better business bureaus or complaint websites not affiliated with a service provider are not found to be behaviors of this group of Millennials. In situations where the complaint was not with a service provider, but instead a problem with a friend, participants still ask other friends for their advice on how to handle the situation before issuing the complaint directly to the friend in question.

### ***Results-How Do Millennials Voice Complaints***

Q2: How do Millennials voice complaints, specifically which technologies do Millennials use to complain and what is the practice for using these technologies in issuing complaints?

#### *Indirect Complaint to Friends and Family*

This cohort voices complaints in different manners specific whom they complain to. When complaining to friends or family about a situation with a service provider, this group of Millennials discusses the issue using the same format they deem appropriate for conversations with friends—face to face communication. If geographical distance prevents face to face discussions, participants use cell phones to call their friends and parents to ask for their advice on the situation.

#### *Non-confrontational versus Confrontational Complaint Behaviors*

If the complaint regards a situation with a friend, this cohort either voices complaints in a non-confrontational or confrontational manner, depending on the situation's context. Non-confrontational actions consist of not discussing the issue at all,

complaining in a small amount to other friends within the social group then terminating the discussion, or making a joke about the issue. Confrontational actions consist of this group of Millennials presenting the issue to their friend as a discussion, in either a face-to-face interaction or using a technology such as instant messaging to discuss the issue.

#### *Direct Complaint to Company*

When voicing a complaint directly to a service provider, this generation will call, send an email, or issue the complaint in a face-to-face discussion. Calling the company is a first preference among this group of Millennials for contacting the company, with face to face interactions and emailing following as popular choices.

#### *Lack of Complaint Issuance to General Public*

This group of Millennials was not found to complain via Internet outlets to unknown others of the general public. Such outlets that are not utilized by participants are complaint websites, contacting a large social network group with motivation to spread negative word-of-mouth, or the sending of mass emails.

#### ***Results-Why Do Millennials Choose to Complain in Particular Ways***

Q3: Why do Millennials choose to complain in particular ways, specifically why do Millennials choose to either voice complaints as a public or private action and what reasons do Millennials give for choosing to complain to certain entities?

#### *Relational Aspects*

Relational components, including their need to reflect on their complaint and their concern for possibly hurting others and also their want to hear advice on the issue, are reasons Millennials choose to discuss a complaint in private to friends or parents

first. Their need to discuss their emotions causes Millennials complain to their friends because they feel these relationships are more casual. This finding is expected it is generally understood that youth in this age range typically ask their friends for advice first. Even though peer influence is important during these formative years, this group of Millennials was found to count on the asking of advice from their friends as a permanent filter for handling their emotions. In a case where the Millennial has a complaint with a friend, they appreciate a face to face discussion of the issue with the friend again because of their need to see and discuss emotions (here through non-verbal cues).

Behaviors regarding Millennials voicing of complaints to companies are determined by the relational aspects of wanting a personal interaction and the issue of time and convenience for the Millennial. Therefore, Millennials will call and have face to face discussions with companies in order to achieve the relational aspects they need, such as a personal interaction and being able to see and hear the representative's feelings. The Internet-based technology complaint media of sending emails or discussions via live chat did not satisfy Millennials' need for relational components since any non-verbal cues or human compassion cannot be easily understood with these media.

#### *Convenience and Quickness of Response*

However, this cohort did appreciate the convenience of complaining via email and live chat and expected these media would assist in a quick response to their complaint. Although the casual nature, quick response and convenience of live chat are appreciated, Millennials' most often will not use the tool due to a lack of trust in the

company's motives and actions regarding handling complaints in this manner. In the case however that Millennials would use these tools, relational aspects related to these media may be overlooked by this generation for the sake of its convenience for them.

Finally, sending a postal letter as a mode of voicing their complaint is not seen by Millennials as convenient, an efficient use of their time, or helpful towards their complaint being resolved. Concerns for the letter even reaching the company, and not being lost in the mail, were high. Therefore, this generation does not consider this mode of complaining to be effective in regards to any of their needs and were not found to use this media.

### **Implications**

Results of this study address much of the theories and issues discussed in current literature. Theoretical findings show that while the equity theory and technology readiness model were not supported, other media and social theories such as the media niche and richness theories and social exchange theory were supported. Practical implications from this study support the need for companies to understand and learn about the new Millennial consumers. Although this cohort is not currently active in terms of travel, they are about to enter a stage in their life when they will become active travel decision makers, hence making them important for travel marketers to recognize and understand.



## ***Theoretical Implications***

### *Equity Theory*

The indirect complaint behavior of this group of Millennials does not support the equity theory proposed by Furlong (1993) because their motivation for not issuing a complaint with the company is not due to a low expectation or an unsatisfactory result. Instead, their choice to complain to friends first is motivated by a need to check their emotions regarding the complaint and verify whether it is worthy of issuing to the company. Another reason participants provided in this study for not voicing their complaints was because of the negative effect they believe it may have on others involved in the situation, such as employees.

### *Media Niche Theory*

This cohort's first preference for complaining directly to the company via phone calls or face-to-face interactions emphasizes convenience, but also the need for high-context conversations important for the building of relationships. The gratification that can be derived from social conversations seems to be important to Millennials and they therefore choose complaint media that support their need for relationship building.

### *Media Richness Theory*

Findings of this study support the media richness theory (Daft and Lengel, 1986) showing that this cohort has a need for media that offers a) transmit multiple cues, b) offer immediacy of feedback, c) provide language variety, and d) allow for a personal focus of the medium. The transmitting of multiple cues, including vocal cues, immediacy of feedback, and personal focus can be best derived from a phone call, which

this group of Millennials chose as their first medium used when issuing a complaint directly to the company. Face-to-face interactions, another top preference of participants, offer multiple cues including vocal and non-verbal, as well as a language variety, immediacy of feedback, and personal focus. Also, when choosing media to talk with friends and family, these participants again prefer rich media that allow for personal emotion to be understood. Thus, it seems that media richness theory can explain the media choices of the Millennial Generation very well.

#### *Technology Readiness Model*

Participants in this study were found to be technologically advanced in regards to their daily use of the Internet and cell phones. However, even though these technologies were used in maintaining social relationships, this group did not use the same technologies to discuss complaints indirectly with friends or when directly complaining to the company. Therefore, the technology readiness model was not supported by participants in this study because even though they were technologically advanced, the technologies did not meet their requirements as discussed in the media niche and richness theories.

#### *Social Exchange Theory*

This group of Millennials was found to value the outcome, procedure, and interpersonal treatment when issuing their complaint directly to the company (Yuksel, 2008). Relational aspects of the exchange were of most importance to these Millennials feeling satisfied with the outcome of their complaint. However, the convenience and quickness of response of the procedure as a whole were also important but could be

somewhat overlooked if the relational, interpersonal treatment of the exchange was satisfactory. Because this group of Millennials defined complaining to the company with regards to having a problem solved, the outcome was also of importance to this group. However, if the interpersonal treatment during the exchange was not satisfactory, their dissatisfaction with the overall outcome was lessened as a result.

### *Generations*

#### **Millennials' Similarities with Other Generations**

Like other consumer needs found by previous research, Millennials have a need for a personal relationship to exist between themselves and service providers. Their satisfaction as consumers is a result of this personalized relationship, involving such matters as a building of trust and customer-employee rapport with the company (Hennig-Thurau et al., 2006) as well as individualized solutions to their complaints (Schenck, 2009). Interestingly, although Millennials have been labeled as being extremely impatient (Sweeney, 2006), they are not alone in this intolerance for delays, wait times, or responses to their complaints which researchers have found is a frustration for many consumers (Underhill, 2000, Williams et al., 2000).

#### **Millennials' Differences with Other Generations**

However, Millennials were found to portray their own, unique complaint behaviors and their reasons for these behaviors varied from those previously described in consumer complaint behavior research. Millennials' appreciation for peer recommendations and their respect of their friends' opinions lead this cohort to often voice their complaints to friends before contacting the company. Therefore, Millennials

discuss their complaints with their friends not purely in efforts to spread negative word-of-mouth, but instead to discuss their emotions regarding the complaint and obtain advice on the next appropriate step to take in either voicing or not voicing the complaint to the service provider.

#### *Internet Use in Complaint Behavior*

Regarding the assumption that Millennials will voice complaints using Internet-based media such as social networking sites or instant messaging (Prensky, 2001; DeBard, 2004, Howe & Strauss, 2007), this study presented findings that Millennials instead appreciate the voicing of complaints in person with their friends, but do not typically use the Internet to spread negative word-of-mouth to unknown others or voice a complaint to a company. Interestingly, this cohort did not choose to voice complaints to companies using Internet-based technologies, and instead called the company or issued the complaint in a face-to-face interaction because they value the relational context associated with these media and feel companies will take their complaint seriously if these media are used.

These actions and beliefs may be the result of companies not yet advancing their processes regarding the issuing of complaints to include new Internet-based media, a problem already recognized by many industry officials (Alcatel-lucent, 2008).

Millennials may need time be shown proven results regarding issuing complaints with new media before accepting these as adequate media to use in voicing their complaints; however, because this generation is comprised of “digital natives” and adopt new

technologies quickly (Prensky, 2001), the Millennials may quickly acquire trust in using new media to voice complaints as it becomes available (Parasuraman, 2000).

### ***Practical Implications***

A strategy to create a level of comfort with the company and providing quick results to complaints issued may induce more direct actions by Millennials regarding complaining to the company. This is important to companies because although Millennials may not be the largest age group within the U.S., comprising 26% of the total population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000), they currently spend \$56 million of their parents' money and furthermore influence their parents' spending decisions (US Census Bureau, 2008). Therefore, the implications for sales will only continue to grow as Millennials enter the workforce and earn a larger disposable income. Companies will need, and should want, this market intelligence so they may understand the consumer behaviors of this generation and be able to resolve issues and respond effectively to complaints.

### ***Create Comfortable, Personal Relationships with Millennial Consumers***

Because Millennials associate the need for formality in relationships with persons they perceive to be an authority, they consequently remove their emotions from any discussion with the company. In these cases, Millennials will discuss their emotions regarding the situation with their friends in efforts to obtain advice on how to handle the issue. This may result in the Millennials and their friends harboring negative views of the company without a complaint being issued. Situations such as these leave service providers without any knowledge that these views of their company may exist or being

spread to others. However, in situations where Millennials will voice their complaint to the perceived authority figure, they believe face to face communications or emails are the appropriate methods of communication. Because emails have not been shown to be an effective method of issuing complaints and incidentally have caused many consumers to become more angry towards a company (Mattila and Mount, 2003; Williams et al., 2000), instituting new media may be helpful in maintaining customer satisfaction.

First, service providers must create ways to encourage Millennials to discuss their complaints directly with the company. In order to draw this generation to issue complaints directly to the company and maintain customer satisfaction, service providers may need to create a more casual relationship with their consumers and provide new media outlets for issuing complaints that are regularly maintained and safe for private information to be discussed. This casual relationship may include being open to the “teen-talk and netlingo” often used by Millennials in their text message and email conversations with friends, and yet often blamed for supposedly negative impacts on standard or ‘traditional’ ways of communicating (Thurlow & Brown, 2003). This is important because if the relationship between companies and Millennials does not change to be more similar to that of a peer friendship, Millennials may relinquish directly complaining to companies. Companies will then be left with little feedback to assist in customer service and satisfaction. Therefore, a strong need for creating a trusting, casual relationship with Millennials exists.

### *Offer Casual Media Outlets and Acceptance of Casual Language*

New media such as live chat and social networking sites where complaints may be issued through comments written to the company's fan profile page should be provided by the company for Millennials to issue complaints. Service providers should first build a confidence with the Millennials that these methods of complaining *are* trustworthy. Marketing these technologies to Millennials by using their language in slogans promoting the company's inclusion of the technology may help Millennials feel more comfortable using the technologies in their communication with companies and assist in a first-line building of trust and rapport. Acceptance of "netlingo" should be clear in the marketing efforts of the company, so that Millennials will understand the company is accepting of this casual language.

### *Promotion Using New Media Outlets*

Promotion efforts and complaint management can be incorporated on social networking websites as well. Because Millennials use these sites daily, service providers can use this outlet as a means to illustrate their company's comfort in using the tools, and language, that Millennials use. Feedback can also be obtained through a social networking site, by companies having a "fan page", where Millennials can add themselves as a fan to the service provider's page. Complaints can be written as a comment to the profile. The profile must be read at the least on an hourly basis by customer representatives, and the Millennials' comments be redressed. Typically, this redress can be performed by the representative commenting back to the Millennial either on the profile page of the company or by sending a private message. In regards to

promotion, this page acts as a profile for the company, listing new information about upcoming products or events.

#### *Improvements to Service Provider-Customer Encounter*

Concerning the actual service provider-customer encounter, every action should be taken to ensure a friendly nature and quick response from customer representatives answering complaints via these media. This is impertinent to this generation's building of trust and rapport with companies. Again, casual language should be used by the customer representative.

#### *Implications for Travel and Tourism*

Although Millennials may not travel in large amounts, as found by this study's participants, they will become active travelers in the near future because they are entering the workforce and beginning to earn larger disposable incomes. Because customer satisfaction is paramount but hard to achieve in tourism, this cohort's travel decision-making and complaint behaviors will need to be understood.

Because this generation has an important need for quick responses, customer representatives will need to be prepared to reply quickly to inquiries or complaints. Due to the international aspect of tourism, companies may need to provide representatives that can speak multiple languages so that quick responses may be offered. Tourism involves geographic and cultural distances as well, making it hard for tourism providers to offer direct conversations with their Millennial customers.

These findings should raise concerns among tourism providers of how they will deal with the needs and possible complaints of this generation. The results of this study



did not discuss travel complaints specifically because this group of Millennials do not plan their own travel and instead are at the age where family vacations and group trips are common. However, because this generation is advancing in age, entering the workforce, and becoming active consumers their travel issues including complaints and indirect spreading of word-of-mouth to friends and family will increasingly become important in the near future.

### **Limitations and Direction for Future Study**

#### ***Limitations***

A limitation regarding the sample lies in the recruiting method used for the study. The snowball recruiting method used to gather participants resulted in a sample consisting of mostly high school and college age Millennials that lived in the Central Texas region of the United States. Therefore, because participants all derive from a specific geographical area, the transferability of the study may be reduced in regards to findings explaining each member of the Millennial Generation's complaint behaviors.

Another limitation of the study involves the time period in which data was collected. Because new cell phone and computer-based technologies, such as the iPhone, were introduced in the market during the study, their popularity began to grow just as the study was being completed. The researcher would have liked to incorporate questions into the interviews regarding how these new technologies are used and if they in any way influenced a change in complaint behaviors of this generation. However, it is the hope of the researcher that future research will expand on how new technologies and their popularity among Millennials influence this generation's complaint behaviors.

### ***Future Research***

Additional future research that may increase the understanding of Millennials and their complaint behaviors could be a quantitative methodology study, where a large sample is surveyed to gain additional perspectives on what issues may illicit Millennials to complain directly a company, or which new media technologies will most likely be used as they advance in popularity and are adopted by this generation as normal modes of communication. Experimental studies may also assist in the understanding of this topic. Experiments could be designed by using a group of Millennials where they are given a complaint and told to voice this complaint to the company. Media choices offered would be a cell phone equipped with calling and Internet-browsing and email capabilities, and a computer equipped with Internet-based media such as the company's website (which offers a live-chat feature, and a link with contact information listing phone numbers and email addresses for the company). Results would show how Millennials actually would react when needing to voice a complaint, and which media they would use to do so, as opposed to this study where Millennials were asked what media they have used or would use in a situation.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion, this study has attempted to discover and explain the complaint behaviors of the Millennial Generation. Based on the research findings, Millennials appear to have a unique view on issuing complaints to companies, as well as a need for a relationship and human interaction to exist with service providers. Their overall technology use was not found to necessarily tie into how they use these technologies to

complain. A need for instant gratification was found, although technologies that offer instant gratification were not always chosen as a first medium used to issue a complaint. Maintaining good relationships seems to be more important to this cohort. Overall Millennials appear to have a concern for others when deciding whether to directly issue a complaint, resulting in them possibly not complaining because of their care for the people involved and even being forgiving in nature to the company. Further research is needed to continue the exploration into this generation's consumer and complaint behaviors as they begin to earn and spend a larger disposable income, and simply advance in age with the possibility that their behaviors may change as their roles in life evolve.

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## APPENDIX

## RECRUITMENT EMAIL SCRIPT TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

Hello,

My name is Brittany Philmon and I am a graduate student at Texas A&M University. I am conducting a study to understand how the Millennial Generation voices their complaints. The Millennial Generation is composed of those who were born between the years 1982-2000, and you are part of this age group.

I am contacting you because another study participant who thought you might want to participate in this research gave your name to me.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you were born between 1982-2000 and are part of the Millennial Generation.

The study consists of a **one-time interview** that will last **one hour**.

I have attached an information sheet to this email that explains more about the study for you to read before agreeing to participate.

If you are under the age of 18, your parent will need to sign a consent form for you to participate before we begin the interview. **I have attached a parent permission form to this email-please have your parent read over and sign the form then bring it with you when we meet for the interview.**

With your parent's approval, I can meet with you at a public area such as a coffee house or public park, or at yours or your parents' home.

You do not have to participate. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time and no one will be upset.

Please respond to me with an email saying you would, or would not, like to participate in this study. You may email me at [bphilmon@corps.tamu.edu](mailto:bphilmon@corps.tamu.edu).

Thank you for considering participating!

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