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The Birth of Generation 'C' – Better Connected and Trusting in "People Like Me"

“‘Web 2.0’ is the era when people have come to realise that it's not the software that enables the Web that matters so much as the services that are delivered over the Web” (Bray 2005).

“We like this new marketplace much better. In fact, we are creating it” (Loche et al 1999)

Consumers are rapidly shifting from traditional media; “turning away from television, radio and newspapers, in favour of online services” (Martin 2006), and “using broadband Internet more and traditional media less” (Meyer 2006). A survey of Americans revealed that 69% consider their computer more entertaining than their TV (Deloitte 2008).

The most noticeable declines have been witnessed in the age groups with the highest Internet consumption, the 16-24 year olds, who “on average [were watching] television for one hour less per day than the average television viewer” (Martin 2006), and spending 21 minutes more time online per week than other life-stages (Ofcom 2006). Consumers have integrated the Internet so much into their daily routines that they are finding it harder to survive without access; trendwatching.com coined the term ‘Online Oxygen’ to describe the “depth of their cravings” (Strauss *et al* 2006, p176).

The Generation ‘C’ in the heading has been ascribed many meanings, which are continually growing, displaying the new media consumer qualities, including ‘community’, ‘co-creator’, ‘creativity’, ‘connected’, ‘cash’, ‘conversation’ etc (Trendwatching 2008). The extent of on-line sharing and publishing has increased as technological innovations have removed the previous barriers, with the “proliferation of digital cameras [and video equipment]”

(Universal McCann 2008, p48) giving everyone the opportunity to record and report. Cheaper technology allows everyone to contribute to the Internet, whilst increasing access to editorial software is aiding consumers' creative urges, within a user-friendly environment (Trendwatching 2008). The media world has moved from a top-down to a bottom-up role with "the emergence of the 'citizen journalist', with consumers leading the news agenda" (Smith 2006, p7).

Whilst the television (TV) was created to bring people together, it has in fact brought about more isolation as people locate to their own rooms to watch their own set (Weber 2007, p9). The Internet via 'Web 2.0' technologies has, in contrast, "through the dialogue it encourages, [brought] people together [again]" (Weber 2007, p9). 30% of broadband users find that they keep in touch and socialise more with friends and family, and, as a result, 32% are more likely to do things on the spur of the moment, for example meeting friends or going out (Intel 2008). Being an 'access medium', the Internet differs strongly from past technologies that have been mostly "broadcast-driven" such as TV, radio, magazines, and newspapers (Steinbock 2000, p81), by giving full control to what the consumer chooses to view - "I choose what I want to see, I access it from different locations and I can speak back to it" (Steinbock 2000, p81). This "has given consumers a voice" (Nielson 2007) and a venue "where their collective voices can be heard, shared and researched" (Nielson 2007); freed from the "constraints of physical channels of communication and distribution" (Stone *et al* 2000, p28).

Via the linkages of the Internet, consumers now have the opportunities to "communicate their opinions" (Emarketer 2008c) about products and services to the Internet population, and anyone and everyone can have a voice (Bennett 2008). This has resulted in increasing

amounts of trust being put in “people like me” (Stern & Wakabayashi 2007, pp6-7); according to the Edelman Trust Barometer, a ‘person like me’ “shares... common interests... and holds similar political beliefs” (Edelman 2008). Consumers feel ‘people like themselves’ are a more credible source of information than academics, doctors and healthcare specialists, and CEOs of companies (Emarketer 2008c); boosting the importance and credibility of word of mouth (Edelman 2008, p6). This increased trust has resulted in the Internet fast becoming the “first port of call... when trying to learn about something new” (Dutton & Helsper 2007, p4). In searching for information the Internet has become the first place consumers turn (Dutton & Helsper 2007, p24), increasing from 19% in 2002 to 37% in 2006; whilst 30% in 2006, versus 14% in 2002, refer to the Internet first before making a purchase (Mintel 2007). In another Mintel survey (Mintel 2006b), 37% of people believed they were better informed generally and found they researched things more as a result of the Internet.

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