Leaders' Perspective of Millennial Employees in the Central & Eastern European Advertising Industry*

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Abstract

This study focuses on leaders' perception of their Millennial employees in advertising agencies within Central and Eastern Europe. Millennials are popularly associated with laziness, entitlement and narcissism, which can seemingly manifest in undesired attitudes to work.

A qualitative research, based on semi-structured interviews with leaders in advertising agencies provided rich data to confront the perceived stereotypes from their perspective. Young individuals in advertising are predominantly well-informed and ambitious, benefiting from their technological savvy as digital natives. In this self-selected group their work informs the lifestyle, and success seems to be manifested through social media rather than the display of material goods. The study challenges simplified stereotypes and contributes to under-researched segments of Millennials in the advertising industry and CEE.

Introduction

Millennials as a generational cohort have been considered a specific phenomenon, which was frequently portrayed based on speculations and lack of understanding (Thompson/Gregory 2012). When they reached their employment age and entered the workforce, they were confronted with a working environment different from their perceived values, beliefs and habits. Their supervisors, reflecting on their own values and behaviour, generally considered them unmotivated, entitled and lacking any kind of loyalty and gratitude towards their employers (Reed 2014 a, Stewart et al 2017).

The advertising industry has been using generational cohorts as a tool for market segmentation in their marketing communications strategies, and simplification has been encouraged to distinguish one generational cohort from another. When addressing their own talent workforce in the advertising industry as a generational cohort, the managers in advertising agencies need to change their perspective from broad generalizations to specific questions about their young employees perceived differences in values, attitudes and behaviour. The purpose of this research was to study the Millennials as a talent workforce in this industry, not as the target audience of marketing activities, from the perspective of their leaders.

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The research addresses perceived specifics of the Generation Y in the Central & Eastern European advertising industry in order to understand their motives and behaviour. While the extant body of research into this generational cohort focuses on their differences and their self-perception, there is a knowledge gap in understanding how their supervisors at work, the advertising agency leaders, perceive their idiosyncrasies and how these affect their own management actions. The study analyses rich text responses from the leadership informants and juxtaposes the findings with the extant knowledge about the Generation Y at large in a social constructionist paradigm, aiming to contribute to the generational leadership studies in the region and the industry.

Literature review

Karl Mannheim (1923, 1952), one of the founders of modern sociology, defines a generational cohort, (subsequently abbreviated to generation for brevity), as a group of people, programmed by shared experiences while growing up. Individuals are defined as members of a generation by common memories of important events, common values, expectations and heroes, combined with similarities in parenting styles and educational systems in a geographic collocation (Ryder 1965, Schewe et al 2000, Parry/Urwin 2017).

For the generational cohort which is the subject of research in this study, the most influential common memories of events in the CEE during their formative years in the 1990's and onwards include reunification of Germany and its subsequent optimism, the rapid introduction of market economy across the former Eastern Europe and free access to digital content via Napster as positive impressions, and the Balkan wars, 9/11 and the increase of terrorism as negative memories of the period (Corvi/Bigi/Ng 2007, Macky/Gardner/Forsyth 2008).

In the Western world during the last decades generations have been studied within the context of the socioeconomic development and their specific attitudes towards work, family and their own roles in society (Deal 2007, Van den Bergh/De Wulf 2017). The concept of a generation plays an important role in understanding the difference of the cohort and physical age, according to Parry and Urwin (2011). The cohort characteristics should not be interpreted verbatim; the physical age alone does not qualify an individual as a cohort member, it can vary depending on other factors from the socio-economic environment (Stewart et al. 2017).

The currently youngest generation in the workforce, most commonly referred to as the Generation Y or Millennials, is defined as a cohort of generations born broadly between 1984 and 2000, marked by a distinguished set of behavioural characteristics which inform their value systems and beliefs differently from the preceding Generation X or the Baby Boomer generation (Rossi 2007, Wolfe 2009, Gentry et al. 2011, Zemke et al. 2013, Ng/McGinnis Johnson 2015).

First definitions and descriptions of this emerging generations were based on generational overview by Strauss and Howe (1991), followed by their designation as Millennials (2000). Their other common designator, the Generation Y, is derived from their succession to the Generation X (Coupland 1991), and they are both used equivalently and interchangeably, together with some less broadly publicised monikers, hinting at their specific characteristics, elaborated below.

The Millennials are accurately captured in the definition of digital natives (Prensky 2001). They have been brought up from early childhood with access to online sources, digital gadgets and instantaneous feedback. As such, their notion of the world is connected with digital lifestyle; in contrast to members of older generations, the digital immigrants, who had to learn the use and benefits of the digital world.

Generational descriptions in literature are often generalised to the level of universal stereotypes; differences and salient characteristics are exaggerated for easier differentiation of one generation from the other. However, the 'identification problem' makes it difficult to isolate age, period and generation from each other's intertwined influence (Yang/Land 2008). Many distinguishing characteristics of the cohort, such as different attitudes to work, uses of technology and even general lifestyles can be explained by the period and society changes rather than as the generation change (Deal/Altman/Rogelberg 2010). Levinson (2010) noted that an important external factor determining the behaviour of this generation is changes in family structure (more single parent families, older parents due to delayed childbearing, etc.). Kowske, Rasch and Wiley (2010) examined the attitudes towards work and found generational differences that cannot be attributed to the generation change alone.

Four common negative stereotypes portray Millennials as unmanageable employees: according to Thompson and Gregory (2012) they lack loyalty (60 % of them do not plan to stay with the same employer throughout their career, according to Pew Research 2012 and Deloitte 2016); they are needy, as demonstrated by expecting immediate and frequent feedback; they are entitled, as a result of positive reinforcement and excessive attention when growing up; and they are casual, which shows in their desire for informal work space, relaxed attitude and lack of respect (Reed 2014 a).

A condensed, quintessentially sounding description of the Millennials as »Lazy. Entitled. Narcissistic. « appeared on the cover of Time magazine (Stein 2013), which subsequently resonated in several academic and popular references to this generation (Johnson 2014). Reed (2014:15) points at the magazine and its references to the worst traits of the cohort, which were interpreted as 'poor work habits, lack of initiative, unrealistic expectations, and low respect for authority.'

Harvey (2010a/b) offers a comparison of entitlement-mindedness across generational cohorts, thus suggesting that the unusually high level of entitlement is associated with the Generation Y's inflated self-perception and unrealistic expectations which can lead to leadership challenges, requiring supervisors to thus modify their leadership styles in the work environment (Thompson/Gregory 2012, Laird/Harvey/Lancaster 2015).

Closely connected to entitlement, Twenge (2014) notes the roots of this sense to be in the generation's mantra "you can be anything you want to be" which has been given as encouragement and motivation to the generation's members since their early childhood. Twenge's moniker 'Generation Me' (also the title of her book, 2014) stresses the self-centered nature of their perspective, boosted by the over-caring parents, recognition-friendly educational system and other stimuli of the young people's self-esteem. While having realized their personal growth opportunities, the Baby Boomer parents kept signalling to their children how unique and special they are from their very beginnings. However, when confronted with reality, the Generation Y children are unable to repeat a great leap of their parents, thus their expectations need to be reduced (Twenge ibid, Ng et al. 2010).

Alsop (2013) proposes the 'Trophy generation' descriptor of the generation, suggesting that just being there in a non-competitive and non-discriminating situation makes the young individuals eligible for a reward (a trophy). He describes the Millennials as a polarized generation, as perceived by their employers and the society at large: highly optimistic, intelligent and informed, committed to making the world a better place on the positive side; and in need of permanent guidance, with inflated expectations and work/life balance skewed toward the latter on the negative side of their characteristics. Their attitude to work seems to be polarized as well: they expect rapid successive promotions, or they leave right away. They expect constant feedback and appraisals of their performance to reflect on their work (Thompson/Weissmann 2012, Brightenburg et al. 2018).

Contrasting the prevailing stereotyping perception of the Millennials and the related leadership challenges at work, Ferri-Reed (2014:15) observes the opposite trend that 'Millennial employees are indeed challenging managers to step up their games', thus raising the proverbial bar themselves and stimulating the change in managerial action. She proposes that managers can effectively engage their Millennial employees by transforming their workplace culture, encouraging open communication and providing open and sincere feedback (ibid).

A substantial increase in the Generation Y surveys seems to be available in comparison to researching the previous generations, mostly due to their availability in online research and decreased cost of such research. However, with the multitude of research projects available for review, there are broad discrepancies in their findings and even more so in interpretations thereof.

Following the first global research about Millennials and their attitude to technology (Telefonica Global Millennial Survey 2013), which proved a strong influence of mobile technology on their lifestyle and confirmed this generation as true 'digital natives', other subsequent large-scale surveys confirm their technological dexterity and the increasing bond of this generation to digital communications, while relativising other aspects of the perceived stereotypes about the Generation Y, such as employer loyalty, lack of motivation for work or attitude to money and material possessions, (Ipsos Mori Survey 2017, Manpower 2020 Vision) on large global samples.

The Ypulse research (Coates 2014a/b) offers a comparison of individual values between the members of Generations Y and X. Their research suggests a substantial shift in values from Generation X at their younger age (twenties, early thirties) which revolved around hedonism, expressed in ownership of material goods, fame and popularity, adrenaline buzz and consumption of intoxicants; to a more low-key profile of the Generation Y. According to their research, Generation Y members rank these manifestations far lower than their predecessors, while appreciating personal integrity and authenticity.

Deloitte has been actively researching the professional and business attitudes of Millennials every year since their first global research in 2012. In their 2014 survey report high expectations and demands of their employers are accentuated. In subsequent biannual global researches these expectations are elaborated into the Millennials' increasing care about the world around them and the need for the companies they work for to reciprocate their concerns and ambitions. Their shared values need to match the organisational culture; or they part with the employer in search for a better harmonisation of values. The Deloitte 2016 survey offers another insight interesting for the focus of this paper: emerging markets indicate the lowest loyalty of Millennial employees to their current organisations, and the 2018 report presents a further deterioration of loyalty on the global scale. According to Deloitte research reports, an evident gap in value perception between corporations and young individuals seems to be widening, thus further alienating the Millennials' engagement with their corporate employers.

Another Deloitte survey, specifically conducted in the CEE countries (2017), generally confirms the global observations, and it additionally emphasises a desire for rapid career advancement, combined with high, even unrealistic expectations for initial salaries at the young talents' first jobs. Concurrently, it also confirms a demand for shared values between a Millennial employee and the organisation they work for.

Research about Millennials' attitudes to work in the CEE region is scarce in comparison to other regions. In a rare exception, Pinzaru et al. (2016) propose the Millennials require public recognition, instant and positive feedback and a flexible working schedule with an emphasis on their work/life balance.

Search for pertinent research about Millennials and their relation to work with focus on the CEE region produces a number of smaller-scale research projects conducted with various research objectives in mind. Examples of such research include Bakanauskiene et al. (2016) in Lithuania, Mendryk (2015) and Stankiewicz/Lychmus (2017) in Poland, Rasca (2017) in Romania, Zupan et al. (2108) in Slovenia, and Pyöriä et al. (2017) in Finland. As a whole, these pieces of research confirm and contribute to broader and more general findings of larger-scale research projects, but collectively they indicate a small, yet noticeable lag in generational cohort formation and transfer of social trends from more sophisticated North American and Western European markets.

Additionally, a bias towards social trend phenomena originating in North American seems to be apparent in interpretation of the Millennials as a cohort. This bias has a lesser significance in our group of interest, the Millennials in the advertising industry of the CEE region, due to its inherent globalised nature and orientation.

Addressing the stereotypical presentations of the Generation Y, present in scholarly and popular literature, Rosa and Hastings argue that negative impressions far outweigh the positive ones (2017: 922). They warn that the prevailing portrayals of the generation often originate from a mix of popular and business sources, not grounded in empirical research, yet they have been "commonly accepted" and broadly publicised (Becton et al. 2014:15). They suggest that the stereotypes, created by individuals outside of a group, can lead towards curbing, thus reinforcing exaggerated traits and generating negative attitudes and reactions.

These prevailingly negative presentations have also informed first impressions of the Generation Y of our research informants and impacted the subjects of study, the Millennials in advertising agencies themselves.

Research methodology

The research focused on complex, rich understanding of the studied phenomena and eliciting descriptive and explanatory answers to the formulated research question called for a qualitative inquiry and research design which includes the voices of participants and the reflexivity of the researcher (Cresswell 2007:37). Claims are substantiated with rich informant quotes, and credibility is demonstrated through rigorous discipline in data acquisition and processing. Inductive approach leads towards levels of abstraction, supported by clarity, brevity and impeccable ethics throughout the research process (Denzin & Lincoln 2005).

The underlying conceptual framework is based on social constructionist epistemology which creates meaning and understanding shared by the people within the social group (Slife/Williams 1995:78). As a postmodern view it does not of-

fer finite and absolute answers, thus allowing for ambiguity and a multitude of explanations (Clarke 2005:32). The core of postmodern thinking is defined as "the doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal claim as the right or the privileged norm of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism suspects all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural and political struggles....It opens standard methods to inquiry and introduces new methods, which are also, then, subject to critique" (Richardson/Adams 2005: 961).

In contrast to building a theory and thus providing an explanation of the phenomena, as stipulated under the positivistic epistemological paradigm, the postmodern perspective on research applied in this research endeavours to provide understanding with possible multiple alternatives (Slife and Williams, 1995). The social constructionist paradigm, as one of the postmodern philosophical approaches, thus assumes multiple realities and provisional truth (Charmaz, 2006). Flyvbjerg (2012, 2016) reminds us in support of social constructionism that in social science research, unlike in natural sciences, producing explanations and predictions cannot apply, thus we cannot aspire to build universal theories; researchers can uncover context-specific knowledge. This view is supported also by Rosa and Hastings (2017) in their research of Millennial stereotypes, in a subject closely linked to our subject of research interest. They propose the social constructionist paradigm as a suitable approach offering multiple interpretation possibilities in analysing rich text content.

Such a research framework generally favours an open-minded approach, by starting from data in the field rather than a literature-based theory or hypotheses set to be tested. Based on grounded theory approach (Glaser 1978, Strauss 1987, Glaser 1992) and modified by the social constructionist perspective, Charmaz proposes that "grounded theory serves as a way to learn about the worlds we study and a method for developing theories to understand them. [We are] part of the world we study and the data we collect. We construct our grounded theories through our past and present involvements and interactions with people, perspectives and research practices" (2006:10).

The decision for grounded theory informed and influenced all other research design decisions, as the process called for adaptation to its specific requirements, such as data-first approach, the sampling technique and the interview protocol design. Research design parameters were specified prior to engaging in data collection, according to Easterby-Smith et al. (2008:102).

The subject of research were members of the Generation Y in advertising agencies in the European Union, with a closer focus on the newer economies of the CEE markets, from the perspective of their senior supervisors (creative directors, managing directors and other executive functions), who represented the main source of data for this research. Data was collected through personal semi-

structured interviews, which were subsequently transcribed and analysed for rich text content following the grounded theory methodological principles.

Theoretical concept building followed an inductive approach to analysis with deductive verification of concepts, adhering to a proposal by Eisenhardt et al. (2007: 25) for the theory-building process to occur via recursive cycling among the case data, emerging theory, and at a later stage, extant literature.

Preparation and execution of data collection followed Cresswell's data collection circle (2007:118), which started with identifying and locating qualified informants and gaining personal rapport and access to them. The researcher's own long-standing involvement in the advertising industry management was instrumental in identifying the most qualified, reputable and eloquent individuals, and more importantly, obtaining their agreement to participate in this research.

In sample construction, a combination of convenience, purposive and maximum variation sampling theoretical methodologies (Creswell 2007, Charmaz 2006) were applied.

The sample consisted of senior leaders managing or supervising advertising agencies in the CEE, and their job descriptions varied in creative, strategic and client service executive functions. In line with the extant management structure the informants were mostly in their forties with some minor deviations up and down. Male informants slightly prevailed in the sample, although gender did not generate any significant difference in opinion. The sample was constructed as to result in controlled variety sampling, thus applying general conceptual guidelines for a variety of informants and their contextual backgrounds but without defining quantitative sample sizes.

Primarily the informants were invited to participate based on their professional acquaintance, reputation and extended experience in the advertising industry, as previously known by the researcher, and secondarily following a grid of criteria for a maximised controlled variety:

- their agency size (large or small) and type (full-service agency, creative boutique, a digital / specialized agency),
- agency affiliation: offices of multinational networks or independent agencies,
- national /ethnic background,
- professional role (position) of the informant (creative director, client service or managing director, strategist/professional specialist).

This was in order to provide a multitude of perceptional perspectives among the informants. Age and gender were not decisive criteria in the sample selection due to the relatively balanced structure of the advertising industry in the region. The final sample consisted of 16 informants, with a slight male dominance and the age span from 30 to 52 years, who act as supervisors to young employees in

advertising agencies across the European Union, with an accentuated presence in the CEE region.

Semi-structured interviews were executed in individual face-to-face meetings, mostly at the informants' workplaces or professional conferences. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Before the content analysis, all transcripts were anonymised and informants were given pseudonyms for subsequent reference. Information directly indicating their business affiliation was removed in accordance with strict principles of research ethics (Easterby-Smith et al. 2008).

Rich data assembled from transcripts was processed in a series of initial coding and formation of tentative categories, followed by subsequent cycles of clustering and forming tentative conceptual categories of meaning, as proposed by Charmaz (2006). The cycles were repeated until integrated concepts of meaning started to emerge. Inductive theory building thus occurred through recursive cycling among data, emerging theory and extant literature (Eisenhardt & Graebner 2007), following interpretive theorising methodological foundation (Charmaz 2006). Dedoose software was used for some of the analysis, while most coding occurred manually.

Trustworthiness of qualitative research, rooted in social constructionist epistemology, was assured by adhering to criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability, which according to Guba (1981) and Shenton (2004) enhance the imminent criteria of internal and external validity, generalisability, reliability and objectivity. Strategies for enhancing internal validity: triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, participatory research and disclosure of researcher bias (Merriam 1998, as in Ebneyamini & Moghadam 2018: 4) were meticulously followed throughout the process. The validity of emerging insights was continuously verified through triangulation of collected data and external information. Additionally, according to Flyvbjerg (2016: 20), thorough local acquaintance and proximity of the researcher support validity of small N-qualitative research. (Disclosure: the researcher has been a long-time member of the advertising industry and has personally known most of the informants prior to the research).

Findings & discussion

The general characteristics of the Millennial generation, according to the informants in this research, bear significant similarities to the proposals in the literature: they are well-informed, impatient, ambitious in their own right, and devoid of any loyalty.

In open discussion within the interviews, the informants described their opinions and perceptions of the Generation Y with similar meaning, yet with less of the

keywords of the stereotypical descriptions found in literature and the media at large. As marketing communications experts, most informants were well acquainted with what the popular and academic literature says about them, due to the references to the Millennials as a specific market segment. Initially during the interviews, the interviewer deliberately avoided mentioning the keywords Millennials or Generation Y, in order to get unassociated and unbiased responses. Interestingly, as soon as one of the keywords came up, in several cases the informants' responses changed as to include the media stereotypes, including the *'Lazy. Entitled. Narcissistic.'* theme. Therefore, in the rich text analysis special attention was given to these association-related responses as not to overpower the spontaneous descriptions of the informants' own experience and perceptions.

A well-informed generation is fearless

From the perspective of senior management in the industry, Millennials are seen as being more informed, more sophisticated in their specific and general knowledge. Better formal education and above all, facilitated access to online information, has left a significant impact on them. Senior informants agree that the access to information is crucial in defining the generation's values and behaviour. These ideas lead to opinions such as a willingness to experiment.

Generation Y has been brought up by encouraging independent thinking and experimenting, according to Richard (executive creative director, 49 years):

> *Definitely this generation… had quite a permissive upbringing, their creativity and independent thinking were encouraged. Not nihilistic resistance, but the impulse not to simply follow, right, that's a quality, not a weakness. The social climate but also climate in companies; all right, an agency is not a typical company, but the climate has changed. Strict hierarchies are loosening and it's a fact that informal authorities are becoming stronger and are considered more often, and the formal authorities are on the decline. I think this generation has many qualities, confidence and intuition, courage, all these qualities that were rare 20 years ago, only few had them.*

> *This new generation, they are fearless about tackling certain tasks which might actually demand a lot of courage and determination... They are personally engaged, they like to do things that are creative, they like to do something. Lack of experience for them is not a weakness…. It enables them to discover things you could not come up with. They have a kind of courage, and wide perception, and they are curious about creativity in diverse areas. It shows in designers also experimenting with photography, also experimenting with sculpture; that the people studying comparative literature also write poetry and experiment in the kitchen. It's a symptom of the same mind set – why not try something? I think it's cool.*

Mario (partner and creative director, 41 years) emphasises better education, easier access to information and thus the more informed choices the Millennials can make:

> *The younger generation is much more educated and much more willing to think about projects 360…. They understand that they have a much wider picture of communication. What also changed is that… I was educated when, if you wanted to know what's going on in the international graphic design scene, you had to sit on a plane, go to London, go to a bookshop and buy two*

tons of books and carry them home. That was when I was a first-year student. Today they know everything sitting from their home and they understand that they can reach the whole world from their bedroom. They are very aware of that and they're using that in their daily business. That's why they have a [wider] perspective.

Lisa (senior copywriter, 50 years) agrees with both previous excerpts about courage and better information available to the young generation:

[They are] more mature and aware of the global questions. I think we were more naïve… We didn't have the same amount of information availability. They're quite brave in [asking] questions.

The informants agree that more information available to the young generation from their early age makes them more mature and self-confident, which results in their eagerness to move forward at a faster pace than their established peers and leaders would approve. Technical savviness and related skills seem to be the salient distinguishing characteristic of this generation, just as argued by Bannon et al. (2010) and confirmed by Deloitte and Ipsos Mori surveys (2016–2018).

Generation Y is the first generation that has been brought up in the presence of digital media since early childhood, if not since birth. Mobile phones, and even more the smartphone technology, seem as to be designed with this generation in mind. They have co-created this technology just as the technology has also co-created them. They adopted the internet early on, thus they are used to communication online. They know how to search for information, and they are used to very rapid response through digital communication. Their status of *digital natives*, as proposed by Prensky earlier on (2001), is fully confirmed and expanded in its validity throughout the research. The awareness of their technological supremacy enhances the young generation's feeling of self-confidence, which can in some instances negatively impact the perceived respect and authority of the seniors. It enables them to confidently negotiate the terms under which they work, thus confirming the correlation between information and confident behaviour, as previously proposed by Ng et al. (2010).

Using the digital sources of information, which are updated more frequently than the classic printed sources, provides yet another advantage for the generation which is comfortable in digital retrieval of information. In comparison to the analog dissemination, ideas spread much faster and the sourcing of information comes from a geographically and culturally much larger pool of information. The young generation has learned not to just consume the information, but to provide feedback and their own contribution in the process of engaging with the source, thus further enhancing the available information online. Access to information and awareness about it meaningfully impacts the Millennials' interaction in their work environment, with their superiors and peers alike.

Several of the informants in this research emphasised the overall higher level of education of the Millennials compared to previous generations. Better education

can be a result of the overall advancement of the society, improved teaching methods, but most importantly for the theme of this research, due to easier access to information and to the know-how of operationalising this information. Millennials learn on their own, as suggested by Prensky (2008), seemingly habitually, and build their self-confidence along the way.

Ambition meets lack of patience

There is a general consensus among the informants that the expected rate of change is increasing. The underlying reasons, as suggested in the previous subsection, are attributed to high expectations and the ambitious nature of the young generation, to their lack of patience or to the changes in the society at large. Anthony (head of digital, 40 years) proposes the combination of high expectations and lack of patience from his example:

I don't want to sound old, but everybody who works with the younger generation has the same feeling that indeed, they are expecting quite a lot. Or definitively, too much from the start. As in, what they'll get. At the same time, they have too big expectations on the time it will take to evolve. Literally, I've got a junior UX* [*user experience = application interface] guy who after six or seven months came to me and said: isn't it about time that we dropped the junior? I was like, I don't think so; we can do another two years easily. And I'll be a bit blunt, but essentially you got to understand that's actually quite a stupid idea.

Peter (co-founder and pan-European director, 45 years) reminds us of an overall increase in the life dynamics:

Speed has increased in our lives. They are very young people… they are extremely impatient. They want things to happen quickly, to happen now, and if it doesn't happen now, they'll find a solution and they'll either run away or do something else – which is okay, I'm not saying it's good or bad.

However, not all informants agreed with these general opinions. Contrary to the opinions of the previous two informants, Thomas (CEE region account director, 47 years) believes that lack of patience is not inherent with Millennials alone:

Impatience is not an exclusive characteristic of the Generation Y. Good young people are always impatient. I've worked with some people, friends of mine, and they were always impatient and were always told to wait, you're not ready la-di-da, and you notice it more when you're in a senior position. I think that's true of any good young person. I don't think that's a generation X or Y thing.

This suggests that characteristics such as 'impatience' are not reducible to a generational quality. One of the rare pieces of Millennial research, conducted in the Central & Eastern Europe around the same time period as our research, supports this insight by juxtaposing the Millennial lack of patience with the rate of the fast-paced information society (Pinzaru et al. 2016). As demonstrated with most informants, the high ambitions and the dynamics of the current lifestyle are closely interconnected and need to be discussed in the broader context of the situation, which is a proposal shared by Deal et al. (2010).

The perceived visible impatience of the Millennials can be delineated into three directions: the first argument is the usual generation gap, where the older generation typically perceives the younger eagerness to prove themselves and lack of real-life experience as expressed impatience, sometimes even lack of good judgement and respect. The second clarification acknowledges the dynamics of the Generation Y information exchange and communication online – they are used to quick turnaround and almost immediate response, which they expect from their work situation as well. The third tentative explanation of the perceived impatience is rooted in the permissive upbringing of the generation: they are used to getting what they want and being in focus of their family environment, hence the 'Generation Me' synonym introduced by Twenge (2014). Due to their less authoritarian culture of upbringing the Millennials feel less inhibited to express their disagreement with the situation, which is also the underlying argument for the next general characteristic of the Generation Y: lack of respect for authority.

Lack of respect seemingly disqualifies positional authority as a legitimate managerial behaviour. Combined with the apparent impatience and desire for rapid advancement it calls for adaptations in grounded leadership action, as proposed by Ferri-Reed (2014, 2015) Thompson /Gregory (2012) and is reflected in another colourful excerpt at the end of this paper (Mario's opinion about hiding their black Audi, p. 154).

Work informs their lifestyle

Narrowing the discussion about Generation Y from the broad observations of their relationship to work, the informants point out the distinction between this young generation and the previous generations in the advertising industry. The high level of self-confidence, combined with absence of loyalty, which again connects to the perceived ambition and demand for rapid change, were the key proposals of the informants.

Increased self-confidence and their lack of loyalty suggest that the Millennials eagerly follow their ambitions without hesitation and fear of changing the status quo. Thomas supports this observation of the young generation, equally drawing a parallel to his own experience:

> There's a greater expectation that they'll have multiple careers, that they would change and do something else. Whereas when we started, broadly you were going to be doing a similar thing. I think there's probably a greater acceptance that you do this for a bit, then you might go and travel… There's more flexibility. Whether that's forced because of the economic situation or that's just the way people live.

Easily bored, or sometimes forced to change by the circumstances, the Millennials are expected to enter multiple careers through their work life period, or even engage in 'portfolio careers', running several careers simultaneously.

The informants differ in their own views on work/life balance from their observation of their younger employees. They perceive their own generation's "work hard, play hard" motto not addressing the young generation. In their opinion the Millennials want to have it all, but without investing the necessary effort and sacrifice at work; unless their socio-economic necessity forces them to make a trade-off between gain and personal leisure. This observation is in agreement with the difference of generational values at work, as studied by Pyöriä (2017). Also Anderson et al. (2017) remind us that the absence of centrality of work in their value systems is a broad and general observation about the Millennial generation.

Interestingly, Anthony notes a perceived dichotomy between their desires and the willingness to work for their fulfilment:

> *The youngsters have realized they can do pretty much anything they want... It translates to the fact that they want it all… At a certain point of time you come into reality of a business or a reality of living and making money. Although they have a strong feeling of what needs to be done or what they can achieve or get, I'm not convinced that they're willing to put the hours in. It seems they're much more aware of that fact that there needs to be a good split between personal time and work time.*

Within the context of this dichotomy, Anthony proposes the '*fear of missing out*' as a factor which determines the young generation's ambition to be active on both sides of the clichéd work/life dichotomy:

> *We'll say that the youngsters have … Fear of missing out. Why is it the fear? We old guys call it the fear of missing out. The youngsters don't know this fear of missing out. They probably call it getting as much as we can. It is because we are thinking differently and we look at this negatively.*

The informants notice specifics of the lifestyle, lived by the Generation Y in the advertising industry. It is reflected in the overlapping of work-related and private-related contacts and relationships, thus forming a defined group of people connected in their physical proximity and in shared interests, causing a fluidity of work and personal activities. Thomas speaks about the lifestyle choice from his perspective:

> *Q.: Do they feel overworked or exploited at the beginning of their careers?*
>
> *A bit. But I think that's a conscious choice. They knew what they were getting into, they put up with it. They've done enough career guidance, whereas we didn't have career guidance. Career guidance now is much better; do you want to be this or that; the upside is this, the downside is this. I think they know that. It becomes hard for them to compare if they then share it with lawyers or accountants, those people are also working just as hard but they're earning twice as much or three times as much, or bankers ten times as much. That's the hard time.*
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> *Q.: But it's a deliberate choice when they enter the industry.*
>
> *I don't think it comes as a surprise, unless they're very naïve. The people who want to do well know that when you have to put in the hours you [do it] pretty much without question.*

Some of the informants who are creative directors in high-profile agencies reject the discussion of a work/life balance, emphasising that in order to succeed young people have to focus on work only. Mario expects a full commitment from his employees:

> *At the beginning [of your career], there's complete misbalance. If you want to do something good, you have to have this… first push. Of course there will be time for other things later on, for family and everything else, but if you want to be first class in our business, it's like first class sports or arts or… you have to be f…ing 100 percent dedicated. It's not something that you can do 8 hours per day. I know some of the best people in our business, who never finished any school connected to this business, but they were 100 percent focused. There's not a lot of people like that.*

Centrality of work, life revolving around the work priorities and ambitions, as reflected in the previous excerpt, is a relevant requirement associated with the advertising industry and depicted in several comments of our informants. It is in stark contrast to the prevailing opinions about the Generation Y desire for a balance of work and leisurely life (Pinzaru et al. 2016, Anderson et al. 2017), explainable through the self-selection of individuals into the ambitious environment of advertising agencies.

The overlapping lifestyle of the young generation in the advertising industry negates even the last traces of the work/life balance as known previously, replacing it with a more integrated permanent interaction with like-minded people living a similar lifestyle. Blurred or non-existent division between the work and the personal life, contacts and interests, enhanced by people working and socialising in the same circles, bonds the individual into an ever more similar lifestyle and value system, which turns them into advertising tribe members. Choice of a profession is probably the most influential aspect of one's later lifestyle, because the occupation and the resulting workplace frame the individual's possibilities, while the professional requirements also affect choices about the personal lifestyle.

One of the most common general observations about the Generation Y is about their relaxed attitude to work. In their prevailing attitude, work is not a rationale unto itself, but rather a necessity to earn their own economic independence. With many hobbies, social interests and obligations a prototypical Millennial keeps their agenda busy, and preferably other interests should not be arranged around work obligations but the other way around.

The Millennials, according to Gillaspie (2015), **"*believe in life, not in work-life balance".*** They want to manage their lifestyle to accommodate friends and family, their hobbies and interests and their professional /business goals.

Work-life integration for them means combining their career path to include their hobbies, special interests and beliefs. This observation has three practical implications: a) the Millennials expect their employers to match their beliefs and

values (Ipsos Mori 2017), as they do not want to work against their principles; b) Millennials are keen to convert their personal interests into entrepreneurial opportunities as side jobs or startups, as Richard has observed in his excerpt; c) social media, which the Millennials are major proponents of, blurs the distinction between work and private sphere, thus reinforcing the notion of integration in their lifestyle.

Work for the Millennials, according to the opinions of their supervisors, occupies a different role in their lives, which makes the traditional work/life balance concept an anachronism. The observation concurs with Thompson and Gregory (2012) who redefine the Millennial definition of work from a place to go to a thing to do, signalling a notion of flexibility and a shift in perception.

Combining the new possibilities in ICT remote access, remote work opportunities and living at home with parents for convenience sake, the Millennials develop new models of combining work, hobbies or other interests and private life. The question of traditional work/life balance, as evident from their excerpts and discussed in the subsequent section, to them becomes a non-issue with blurred lines and overlapping time, space and dedication.

The initial comparison of time spent at work location and away from it has lost its relevance with most contemporary work, because the intellectual work does not necessarily require an assigned workspace and equipment. It has become obsolete with advancement in computerization and telecommunications, which allow for easy exchange of information and instantaneous communication from virtually any location. The time and location presence criteria have therefore been modified, wherever possible replaced by the criteria of the total work accomplished or the results achieved. In the advertising industry, where idea generation and problem solving are not dependent on working-hours or location, the initial work-life balance concept presents an anachronism. Instead, our research confirms the tendency towards an integrated lifestyle, proposed as work/life fusion by Haeger and Lingham (2014).

Success does not manifest itself through material goods

When entering the advertising industry, the young people vary broadly in their expectations about their career. While some newcomers to the industry have had previous information about the nature of work, its challenges and requirements, some expect that they are entering a version of Hollywood, as cleverly described by a local creative director (Bagola 2015): "Advertising is Hollywood in Twitter format," and they have naïve idealistic perception of the industry, as vividly suggested by Mario:

Young kids when they come out of school they don't know where the money comes from. They want to do theatre posters, and they think that advertising is some kind of prostitution. If you

want to talk to them you have to hide away your big black Audi, and approach them on a beaten bicycle, to be one of them.

This excerpt hints that material status symbols may not be the preferred expression of one's status and success within the observed group of young advertising talent. A broader view on the Generation Y perception of values, not limited to the individuals in the advertising industry, suggests that showing one's success to their peers may have changed from goods to experiences. Kevin (creative director, 42 years) addressed this idea directly:

Success for the young generation means freedom and independence, not the possession of material goods. Their success is shown through the social media, by showing their lifestyle and the fact that they are not slaves of the system. What they do, where they go, who they hang out with – independence and freedom are indicators of success, as they proudly show off in their social media posts.

While this opinion may oversimplify and generalise their attitude, it is further supported by the opinions of numerous researchers (Cook 2013, Doster 2013, Hammer 2015) and popular media. It is in agreement with the perceived trade-off of material possessions for personal experiences (Siegel/Wang 2018) and it is often used as an underlying explanation for the rise of the sharing economy, post-consumerist attitudes and, finally, for the exponential growth of self-illustration in social media. Conceptually, all these phenomena can be linked to a broader field of the current socio-technological changes, expressed through the modern Zeitgeist.

Conclusion

Many researchers report negative perceptions of the Generation Y (Tapscott 2009, Thompson/Gregory 2012, Stewart et al 2017), referring mostly to the broad general cohort of the Millennials as not motivated, or even following the well-publicised quintessence "Lazy. Entitled. Narcissistic" (Stein 2014). Our research contrasts and challenges these impressions with more positive ones. The managers interviewed in the scope of this research predominantly perceive their Millennial co-workers as ambitious, driven, albeit an impatient group of self-selected individuals who are well aligned with the fast pace of technological advancement and change.

The research offers several relevant and practical implications for both groups of the professional audience, the managers and their Millennial employees. The Millennials are presented with their depiction as seen from their supervisors' perspective, which can be instrumental for their future actions and behaviour now as young employees and later in their career when they advance to become supervisors themselves. They can combat the embedded stereotypes, avoid negative perception and contribute to a more effective culture in their work environment.

The management community is reminded to adapt their perception and assessment of their Generation Y talent to a broader context, avoid stereotypical judgement and consider adapting their own leadership action to accommodate the young people's idiosyncrasies. Earning their authority through grounded action instead of relying on positional authority, providing frequent and personal feedback and maintaining open trust-inspiring culture have become frequent recommendations for good managerial practice, not uniquely associated with this research; this paper only reiterates their importance.

The academic contribution of this research consists principally of filling a gap in under-researched areas of advertising industry leadership and Central & Eastern European generational research.

In addition to its geographic and professional focus, this study contributes to providing a rare managerial perspective onto perception of their own young talent. Most research about the Millennials as a specific generational cohort has been carried out in quantitative large-scale surveys, looking for generalisations across the sample. Often stereotypes and generalisations based on North American findings are cited as valid, thus ignoring cultural, social and economic specifics of the region. Our research has focused on a professional niche of the advertising industry in Europe and even more tightly in the so-called New Europe, the countries with a relatively young market economy. Finally, the research provides a scholarly insight into the working environment of the advertising industry.

The findings of this research are, as common in qualitative research and argued in the methodology section, not generalisable towards the broader population, and represent a snapshot of impressions in a given period and location. Additional research could therefore help to integrate a broader context, illustrating the mutual perception between the current leaders and the emerging workforce of Millennials. A comparative study in a different geographic or professional segment could offer a solid platform for analytical comparison, highlighting the idiosyncrasy of both.

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Appendix 1: List of Informants Characteristics

Job Title	Age	Gender	Nationality	Level of Education	Agency Status
Executive Creative Director	47	M	Slovenian	University degree	Branch office
CEO /Regional Director	45	F	Slovenian	Master's degree	Branch office
Creative Director /Partner	40	M	Croatian	University degree	Independent
Head of Planning Dept.	40	M	Swedish	Master's degree	Independent
Account Manager	50	F	Swedish	University degree	Independent
Strategy Director /Partner	43	M	Estonian	Master's degree	Affiliate
Regional Creative Director, Partner	43	M	Romanian	MBA	Branch office
Cofounder, Brand Director Europe	45	M	German	University degree	HQ
Group Creative Director	39	M	English	University degree	Branch office
Group Creative Director	29	F	Romanian	University degree	Branch office
Head of Digital	40	M	Belgian	Master's degree	Branch office
Chief Creative Officer	30	M	Brazilian	Professional degree	Branch office
Management Supervisor	36	M	German	University degree	Branch office
Creative Director	45	M	German	PhD	Branch office
Director Strategic Business Development	45	M	English	University degree	Branch office
Worldwide Account Director	51	M	English	University degree	HQ

Note to Level of Education:
University degree = Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science or equivalent;
Master's degree = Master of Arts, Master of Science or equivalent