



MILLENNIALS: THE 'FACE' PARADOX THE WORLD OVER.

SOCIAL MEDIA – HOW HAS IT AFFECTED MILLENNIAL SOCIAL IDENTITY IN THE EAST AND THE WEST?

Social Media has changed the way we interact forever and Millennials are the first generation to be fully affected by it. While on the surface social media might seem only to be a unifying tool, it has created new social patterns and dynamics all over the world, spreading its grasping tentacles beyond just online. Most notably it has shifted philosophies on identity in the East and the West, affecting how Millennials perceive and value their identity aka 'face'.

'Face' refers to the way you self-identify based on how others might perceive you. In many Eastern cultures, such as Chinese, 'face' is a socio-cultural occurrence and historically determines one's sense of social status usually fuelling what we call 'face race' – you've got to keep up 'face' at any cost.

Nowadays, for Millennials in Asia, by providing a wider exposure to the information, social media became a platform for encouraging exploration and expressing individuality, facilitating a break out from the traditional understanding of 'face'. In the West, however, where keeping up with the Joneses was mostly a preoccupation of an older generation, openness and democracy of social media disseminates the concept of 'face' amongst Millennials with the speed of a tweeting, enslaving them with concerns over their social identities and status.

EAST: BREAKING THE 'FACE'

Historically, the Eastern concept of face was portraying a 'perfect' image of yourself – achieved in many cases by conforming to a set of rules and obligations usually determined by your family and society. 'Face' equalled social currency and for an individual it was a matter of honour to keep up his 'face' not just for themselves, but also their family and community. Taking a risk and getting off the beaten track could have resulted in shame

and losing 'face' should have been avoided at any cost.

Easy access to social media has challenged this rule by removing a strict interpretation of what gives one 'perfect' face. Social Media allows for more genuine and meaningful connections to happen, giving Millennials a chance to explore an alternative to conformity in a stimulating and encouraging environment.

< 'Face' used to be all about showing off how well you are doing, now it is more than that – having original thoughts and ideas, that's what earns respect, and not flashy cars or being a lawyer. >

For Millennials social media became synonymous with possibilities, offering opportunities far beyond just the obvious socialising. Every connection made can lead to a new opportunity socially, professionally or personally.

< 'You never know who will you meet – they can help your career, become your friend or you might even meet your future wife. And the more people you connect with, the more chances you get to meet somebody who can provide you with the opportunity.' >

Diversity on social media fights against the notion of the 'black sheep', showcasing that As someone looking back at these IMCs (but only just!) marketers need to treat millennials not as homogenous group but as distinct mindsets. What is relevant to a 20 year old, right now, is superfluous to old timers like me.

Our future is now in the hands of these *Imminent Millennial Citizens* – and it's looking bright.

there are likeminded people all around and in practice everything is possible if you put your mind to it. A 20 year-old in China who might be questioning becoming a lawyer (because that's what his family expects) can now find he is not alone – it's possible to follow a different path than the one of conformity and still achieve respect and high social status.

<Now you can see that if you have a talent and ambition you really can succeed in anything, look at Justin Bieber, or even Jay Chou – he came from nothing and he is the most successful singer and role model in China. He was a big inspiration for me and my decision to become a singer.>

In Asia, social media became a welcome breath of fresh air for Millennials, facilitating progress on different terms – it's no longer about just conformity. As a result it turns personal experiences and values into just as valued 'face' currency as money and success.

WEST: SAVING 'FACE'

In the West, as coming-of-age Millennials

try to find themselves in a world full of opportunities and without any virtual limitations given by their family and society, they turn to social media to help them find a centre of gravity for their identity. If in the East social media helps Millennials to find their voice; in the West it makes them look out for the loudest voice out there to join in, making social media a force of conformity. Instant access to the lives of others fuels a 'me-too' spirit and ignites fears of missing out – the more you see, the more you want and the sooner you need it too.

<You don't just post your stuff on Facebook, you also see what others do. That makes you less secure and can make you feel depressed if they have a better life than you do. It is hard to keep up – I've done a Great North Run and posted my picture online feeling very pleased with myself and then I checked my newsfeed and there were three other friends who've done some runs, two of whom had better time than I did. That made me feel rubbish.> The instant nature of social media has narrowed the definition of status for Western Millennials. Not just powered by competitiveness but also a strong need to fit in, it has changed the desire to be seen as 'the best' to 'the same as others but slightly better'.

<It is not enough to just have the latest iPhone, to keep up my image I have to constantly be seen in the right places before my friends can get there. If you see something in TimeOut – it is too late, I have to find 'cool' and get tagged there before anyone else does. In London it is a matter of time before things get discovered, so all I can do is be the first to do so.>

In the West, social media is becoming a force of restraint – quashing individuality & creating a preoccupation with projecting 'face'.

WEST & EAST: WHAT'S NEXT

The world over, Millennials are experiencing a transition to deeper and more diverse expressions of 'face', leading to a new take on identity. Having based this article on the research done for more than 20 brands globally targeting Millennials, we can see how social media and online interactions are starting to set the agenda and not just act as a social distraction.

With the ever growing social media presence in the Millennials' lives the 'face' paradox is set to get more radicalized in the coming years – freeing Asian youth from the constraints of conformity to embracing freedom of choice. Where there was never face to maintain before, Western youth will find themselves paralysed by the fear of losing their social status, voluntarily stripping themselves of a variety of personal diversity and choice.