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Finalist

Short Essay Category

2018 Emerging Writers Contest

Millennials Are Killing This, This, and This – Or Are They?

Millennials are killing department stores, casual dining chains, beer, gyms, and even napkins, according to many business owners across America, and the Baby Boomer generation agrees. Business Insider retail reporter Kate Taylor summarizes the thoughts of most Baby Boomers in her article “Psychologically Scarred Millennials” when she suggests that “millennials' preferences are killing dozens of industries.” However, can millennials truly be blamed for the decline of certain American industries? Chief executive Phillip Clarke argues otherwise, crediting the disappearance of businesses to their inability to adapt to new tastes in his article “Companies will only survive if they adapt quickly and stay in tune with their customers’ changing habits.” Both articles acknowledge the decline of industries, but Clarke’s stance is clear and logical, while Taylor’s is based mostly on unsupported claims and bitter accusations. However, when looked at together, both articles present an idea that could not be deduced by looking at each article alone. The analysis of both “Psychologically Scarred Millennials” and “Companies will only survive if they adapt quickly and stay in tune with their customers’ changing habits” proposes the idea that companies are dying not due to millennials, but to competition in a free market society, suggesting that society’s real problem lies within capitalism.

From napkins to diamonds to home improvement stores, millennials are being held responsible for the decline of many industries. In her article, “Psychologically Scarred Millennials,” Kate Taylor lists these and sixteen additional industries that many older generations believe millennials are responsible for killing. Taylor gives a short description of the decline in each listed industry as an explanation as to why millennials can be blamed. However, many of the claims made are unsupported theories or unrelated statistics. For example, Taylor uses a quote from Buffalo Wild Wings CEO Sally Smith that says, “millennial consumers are more attracted than their elders to cooking at home, ordering delivery from restaurants, and eating quickly, in fast-casual or quick-serve restaurants.” However, neither Taylor nor Smith cite the evidence from which this conclusion was gathered. With no support for the argument, readers can only assume it is a baseless claim, subtracting from Taylor’s credibility. Taylor also writes that “beer penetration fell 1% from 2016 to 2017 in the US market,” but the statistic itself is not limited to millennial consumption of beer, so there is no way to know if the generation alone is responsible for this decline. Taylor’s article continues down the list of industries that millennials have supposedly killed, but very few of the reasons are supported logically or with evidence. Taylor’s use of simple data showing a decline in golf or light yogurt cannot be attributed to millennials without more specific evidence and statistics. One part of Taylor’s intended audience is older generations who are already convinced that millennials are the cause of the decline in many industries. To them, the lack of evidence will not matter as the article confirms their preexisting beliefs. However, people who do not have underlying presumptions will not be persuaded by this article due to the absence of logic. As a whole, Taylor’s article is empty, lacking the logic and credibility needed to make a convincing argument for half of her audience.

Where Kate Taylor's article fails, Phillip Clarke's succeeds. Both authors recognize the changing tastes of the millennial generation and how much they differ from previous generations, but Clarke takes this information in a more logical direction. In his informative article "Companies will only survive if they adapt quickly," Clarke states that the changing tastes of millennials is "probably the biggest generational change in consumer behavior since the 1960s." He suggests that, similar to those in the sixties, modern companies will have to adapt to these new behaviors in consumption if they want to remain in business, and those that do not will eventually fade away. Here, Clarke has built the foundation to a convincing argument with logic, referencing similar situations in the past to predict potential events in the near future. He then builds credibility by describing the approach his own company, Tesco, takes in attracting new millennial customers, but not losing older ones, which is by considering millennial's wants without presumption. Clarke is a part of the older generation that forms his audience. While the overall tone of his argument is academic, Clarke includes hints of a more casual tone at appropriate points in his article to better connect to his audience. In comparison to Taylor's article, Clarke's article is full of logic and credibility, as Clarke does not write anything that cannot be backed with data. His use examples, facts, and logical reasoning throughout his article strongly develop the central point of his argument and adds a persuasive element that Taylor's article lacks.

However, despite all their differences, the two articles analyzed together propose a more complex idea. While Taylor's shallow article blames the millennial generation for the decline of many once-loved industries, Clarke's article puts forth the convincing argument that these businesses are failing simply because they are neglecting the new tastes and preferences of millennials. In other words, Clarke suggests that the competitive aspect of a free market society

is the force leading to the downfall of said businesses. In a capitalist society, consumer behavior dictates which businesses are successful and which are not, as consumers will only buy things they like and want. When consumers no longer like and want certain products, businesses can either change in accordance to consumers' new interests, or disappear. This economic freedom of businesses and consumers to decide what they want to produce and buy, respectively, is the root of capitalism. It is the reason America is considered one of the most free countries in the world. When "Psychologically Scarred Millennials" and "Companies will only survive if they adapt quickly" are analyzed together, it becomes apparent that millennials are being blamed for the inherent competitive nature of capitalism. If business owners are upset by the fact that their businesses are declining, they do not have a problem with millennials; their real problem lies in the heart of capitalism itself. When blaming millennials for the avoidable death of their various industries, business owners are criticizing the very system that once allowed them to be successful. Rather than placing the blame on the millennial generation and taking no action, business owners should investigate and strive to understand the economic system they have been operating in for years, as it has become the true cause of their despair. Then, they will be able to decide if there is a problem to fix, or if they simply need to conform.

Work Cited

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