Millennials and the Retirement Crisis

Insights Into How Communications Can Provide Solutions

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Executive Summary

There is a retirement crisis in this country. Many factors including a growing population and a decrease in the classic retirement benefits that many Americans have grown used to have contributed to a growing situation where many people will be financially unprepared when they get to retirement. The most at-risk population for this crisis is the Millennial generation, those who have the most amount of time left until retirement.

This article seeks to examine the literature about best practices in retirement communications, but also connect that literature to research on communications targeted to Millennials. The author found that research into the topic of retirement communications and Millennials was underdeveloped, so he conducted two sets of original research to answer two research questions: “how can positive retirement savings behaviors be best elicited through communication?,” and “how can retirement plan providers best communicate positive retirement savings behaviors to Millennials in particular?”

This research found evidence that Millennials respond to messages and communications channels differently than people in older generations. Results include that Millennials appear to value opportunities to gain information in a face-to-face setting and trust word-of-mouth recommendations more so than traditional communications. The results also point to the burden that many Millennials feel about the overabundance of choices involved with retirement planning and seek direction and advice wherever they can find it.

About the author

Joshua Anderson is a strategic communications professional with more than ten years of experience in employee benefits communication, particularly in the area of retirement planning. He has also worked as a professional photographer for the last seven years which has given him an interest in and passion for the effectiveness of visual media in communications. Along with his wife and son, Joshua lives in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Introduction

The days of working thirty years for a company and then relying on a generous pension benefit to supply the majority of your income needs for the rest of your life are gone. Americans can no longer passively trust that their financial needs will be taken care of for them in retirement from either an employer or the government. We have never had to be more responsible for planning for and funding our own retirement savings than we are now (Lee, 2011). Willis (2008) puts it best when she writes "households today must make more of their own decisions in every personal-finance arena, from credit to insurance to retirement planning. Although defined-benefit pension plans once covered many workers, most retirement plans today, if offered at all, are defined-contribution plans, requiring individuals to decide how much to save and how to invest" (p. 200). Retirement planning has become an active effort for all Americans, and many people are not prepared for that task.

We’re approaching what Lee (2011) calls a “perfect storm” that endangers the retirement health of all Americans. Not only is the population living longer—which only increases the amount of replacement income one needs in retirement—but many Americans are convinced they’re not saving enough (Helman et al., 2015). The unfortunate fact is that Americans, on average, are woefully unprepared for retirement. As of 2015, only 61% of American workers were currently saving for retirement and 57% of those who had saved reported having $25,000 or less in investments excluding their home or pension plans (Helman et al., 2015).

This situation presents a great opportunity for professionals and institutions to step in and help people better prepare for a safe and secure retirement. This article seeks to examine what theories are prevalent in the fields of retirement plan communications in general, but also seeks to connect that knowledge to Millennial marketing to see if there are possible areas of connection. By virtue of the many decades until they retire and their growing wealth, Millennials have a significant potential to save enough to live comfortably in retirement. However, there doesn’t seem to be much of a focus on Millennials preparing for retirement in the academic literature or the retirement industry, and that may be causing retirement providers to miss opportunities to enable this generation to be successful in the future.

To examine to what extent communication professionals can help Millennials better prepare for retirement, this article seeks to answer two questions:

- R1: How can positive retirement savings behaviors be best elicited through communication?

- R2: How can retirement plan providers best communicate positive retirement savings behaviors to Millennials?

These questions are related, but they're directed at different issues. The first question is meant to investigate to what extent communication can play a role in changing behavior, especially within the context of an often overwhelming decision-making process like planning for retirement. The second question is meant to investigate what communication channels, messages, or approaches resonate with Millennial consumers in particular. Retirement communications have been understandably directed principally toward Baby Boomers in the last few decades, and younger consumers may respond differently to appeals and messages than their predecessors.

Literature Review

Retirement Plan Communications

Key institutions in the retirement industry—government agencies, financial service providers, and employers—have tried to come together towards a solution to the retirement problem (Lee, 2011). In 2006, the federal government passed the Pension Protection Act (PPA) that made it substantially easier for employers to offer more user-friendly retirement plans that resulted in more favorable savings conditions over the long-term (Weiner, 2008). Employers could now offer features such as automatic enrollment, automatic asset allocation, and even financial advice products without running afoul of federal laws (Weiner, 2008). In addition, Lee (2011) states that the Federal Trade Commission and the Securities and Exchange Commission have stepped up efforts to ensure that “financial companies provide accurate and sufficient information [and] communicate with their customers in an optimal way to improve consumer decision-making and to enhance customer well-being” (p. 392).

As individually-driven defined contribution plans have become more prevalent, consumer advocates, government officials, and other public policy officials have expressed concerns that retirement planning is too difficult. Echoing those concerns, Lee (2011) argues that “consumers cannot adequately navigate the financial marketplace. Research has also confirmed a public concern over consumer vulnerability and product harmfulness in the financial marketplace and has identified potential explanations as to why consumers fail to adequately save and invest” (p. 395). Consumers are burdened by the sheer volume of choices they’re offered and that presents a challenge, especially for those who are less financially sophisticated (Lee, 2011). Furthermore, research has even shown that consumers who lack financial literacy may “behave non-rationally when confronted by complex or unfamiliar financial information” (Lee, 2011 p. 395).

There have historically been two connected but different approaches to solving the retirement crisis: the structural approach and the communication approach. The structural approach is the effort by government officials and plan providers to actually change the architecture of the plans and conditions under which people save (Weiner, 2008). That could mean an increased company contribution, increased tax benefits, the addition of defaults that make saving and proper asset allocation automatic, or other features. The merits of a structural approach are many, but are outside the scope of this article.

More relevant to this discussion, there is also the communication approach which has become prominent since concerns have arisen that consumers' financial expertise has not increased with the demands of the growing complexity of the marketplace and options (Lee, 2011; Willis, 2008). The communication approach puts an emphasis on changing both the consumers' knowledge and their perceptions (Weiner, 2008). Weiner (2008) says that knowledge is primarily changed through education campaigns, usually on the part of retirement plan service providers. He argues that perception can be addressed through persuasion, which could include creating new norms or enhance the perceived benefits of savings for one's retirement (2008). However, Weiner says that "despite some successes, the impact of past employee educational programs on participation and contribution rates has been disappointing" (2008, p. 138).

A wide variety of psychological models (such as the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behavior among others) hold that a person's intention to save for retirement is directly tied to the likelihood that the person will act on that behavior (Weiner, 2008). It would then hold that an agent wishing to elicit that savings action would target the underlying intention. Weiner argues that an agent can affect intention by changing a person's perceptions about: (1) their perceived ability to save, (2) the short and long-term benefits associating with saving, (3) their hopes and concerns about the future, (4) the costs of saving (2008).

By challenging and changing many of these constructs, communicators can increase the likelihood that a person will adopt more positive savings behaviors. Targeting one's perceived ability to save involves both a functional and a communicative aspect. Many people are objectively correct that their ability to save for retirement is low—they may have competing budgetary priorities or they may not have access to a retirement plan at all. But many people don't realize how strong their financial ability to save actually is. Likewise, communicators can also work to increase the perceived benefit that having enough money for retirement would have on a person's life (Weiner, 2008).

Elaboration Likelihood Model

A prominent model that appears in many studies of retirement communications is the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM. The ELM, first proposed by Richard E. Petty and John T. Cacioppo, is a particularly useful model to understand how people react to choices and make decisions in reaction to exposure to persuasive communications (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Petty and Cacioppo (1986) first developed the ELM framework to confront the "surprisingly little agreement concerning if, when, and how the traditional source, message, recipient, and channel variables affected attitude change" in communication research in the 1970s (p. 2). The authors argue that the ELM provides communication researchers and practitioners a 'fairly comprehensive framework for organizing, categorizing, and understanding the basic processes underlying the effectiveness of persuasive communications" (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 3).

The ELM is primarily concerned with the extent to which individuals consider persuasive messages. When confronted with a persuasive message, people give varying amounts of mental energy (elaboration) to evaluating and choosing how to act on that message (Gallo et al., 2016). The amount of elaboration an individual gives to a message varies on a continuum of low to high. Gallo, et al. (2016) argue, “the position along this continuum is determined by considering people’s motivation and ability to process the message presented to them. The concept of ‘motivation’ in the ELM consists in personal relevance of the issue, while ‘ability’ refers to resources and skill to understand and attend to a message” (p. 3). The amount of ability and motivation a person has to consider a message will determine what Petty and Cacioppo (1986) call the “route of persuasion” they take (p. 3).

People who take the “central” route of persuasion are those who are motivated and able to give “careful and thoughtful consideration of the true merits of the information presented in support” of the communication (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 3). People who take the “peripheral” route of persuasion are those who don’t consider the merits of the message but rather follow a ‘cue’ (such as a trusted friend’s suggestion) to accept or reject a message (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986).

Petty and Cacioppo (1986) developed several postulates that form the basis of the ELM. First, people are motivated to hold correct attitudes, but the amount to which they’re willing or able to consider and judge messages will vary based on the person and the situation. For example, two different people confronted with a retirement planning communication may have two different reactions. The first person, who is growing concerned about their lack of financial preparedness for retirement, has the time and attention to consider the message as well as the financial and knowledge resources to be able to understand and react to the message will process the message more than a person who is rushed and dealing with financial difficulties. Either person may still accept or reject the message, but as Gallo et al. (2016) argue, “it is reasonable to assume that if someone makes a decision through a central route, their changed attitude is relatively enduring, resistant to counter persuasion, and predictive of behaviour (p. 2). In contrast, Gallo et al. (2016) argue that “if a decision process is based on superficial elements, external context, or momentary feelings, then it is likely that the resultant peripheral attitude is relatively temporary, susceptible to counter persuasion, and not predictive of behaviour. (p. 2).

The Tyranny of Choice

Another relevant ELM postulate is Petty and Cacioppo’s assertion that “as motivation and/or ability to process arguments is decreased, peripheral cues become relatively more important determinants of persuasion” (Petty & Cacioppo, 1986, p. 5). A person’s ability to process a message has a ceiling. Barry Schwartz (2004), a scholar of the psychology of consumer choice, writes in his book *The Paradox of Choice* that choice is good, but there is a point where too many choices starts to cause negative effects. He writes, “as the number grows further, the negatives escalate until we become overloaded. At this point, choice no longer liberates, but debilitates. It might even be said to tyrannize” (Schwartz, 2004, p. 2). The problem, Schwartz (2008) argues, is that the more choices we have, the more effort we have to put into making a good decision which thus reduces our ability to do so. As the ELM demonstrates, this burden of choice can push us into the peripheral path of persuasion, causing us to make a quick decision or perhaps no decision at all.

The arena of financial planning, and specifically retirement planning, is infamous for this overabundance of choice. As Willis (2008) writes, "Americans today are drowning in financial choices and detailed information about every one of them. Too many choices and too much information can be as harmful as too few and too little." (pp. 228-229). Willis (2008) further argues that:

> "Because the costs of complete information search and choice processing are high, consumers frequently do not even attempt to use a rational decisionmaking strategy. For example, increasing the number of retirement investment fund choices in a defined-contribution plan can overwhelm employees, pushing some to move their allocations away from stock funds to low-risk, low-return options and paralyzing others to the point that they are less likely to participate in the plan at all" (229).

Advertising

Research has shown that advertising (specifically advertising on the part of the retirement provider directly to consumers) can have a moderating effect on people's attitudes and behaviors towards saving for retirement (Lee, 2011). As Lee writes, "research has indicated that financial services advertising can increase the likelihood of an individual to choose an appropriate financial plan by informing consumers of the consequences of inappropriate retirement management” (Lee, 2011 p. 392). Advertising can positively affect a person’s knowledge and perceptions, but retirement firms have to be careful not to unwittingly influence consumers in a negative way. Financial advertising has been shown to lead to biased choices, especially for consumers with lower financial literacy (Lee, 2011). As the ELM would predict, these less financially literate consumers, when faced with a high-stakes decision process like planning for retirement, can use communications from their financial provider as a judgemental cue, whether the action they take ends up being objectively positive or not (Lee, 2011).

Financial advertising can be classified into two categories: informational or transformational. Informational advertising is providing factual data that the receiver can use to make decisions (Dey et al., 2015). Typically such information could be related to fees, risk vs. value, and historical performance. Transformational advertising is rooted more in eliciting motivation based on emotional appeals (Dey et al., 2015). As foundational as this may seem, this distinction in financial advertising strategies has not received much scholarly attention (Dey et al., 2015). However, Dey (2015) argues that studies have indicated that investors with higher financial literacy prefer informational advertising.

Millennial Communications

Of particular interest to this review is an examination of the retirement communications towards members of the Millennial generation. Over 78 million people in the United States can be classified as Millennial (those born between 1982 and 2000), and they outnumber even the Baby Boomer generation (Moore, 2012). The topic of Millennial communication is relevant to the study of retirement plan communications since Millennials use different tools and respond to different messages than their Gen X or Boomer predecessors.

One of the channels that is widely known to appeal to Millennials is interactive digital media. As Smith defines the term, digital marketing is “the practice of promoting products and services using digital distribution channels via computers, mobile phones, smart phones, or other digital devices” (Smith, 2012 p. 86). Digital marketing is the most promising communication channel to reach Millennials, but as of 2010, only 13% of all advertising revenue was dedicated towards digital channels (Smith, 2012)

Moore found that, compared to other generations, Millennials are more active at integrating technologies into their daily lives (2012). Millennials use their mobile device as well as the internet to connect to retailers or brands, but, contrary to widespread belief, they do not engage in social networking to the degree that Baby Boomers and Generation X report (Moore, 2012).

A predominant theory used by scholars to understand and distinguish interactive digital media usage—especially among younger consumers—is the uses and gratifications theory (UGT) (Moore, 2012). According to Moore (2012), UGT “assumes that individuals select and use media in a goal-directed manner to achieve a level of desired gratification, therefore different types of media are perceived as unique by individuals and must compete for their attention” (p. 437). Millennials have been shown to use digital media for mood enhancement and experiential learning, but are less likely to engage in final purchase actions using the medium than Boomers or Gen X (Moore, 2012). Furthermore, Millennials are more likely to develop negative attitudes towards messages if they recognize that they are the targets of persuasion (Moore, 2012).

An important marketing driver among Millennials is word-of-mouth (WOM) recommendations. Compared to Gen X and Boomers, Millennials rely more on their peers to determine the merits of products or services (Smith, 2012). Despite the fact that WOM has the potential to reach hundreds of thousands of people, companies have yet to invest serious resources in encouraging it (Smith, 2012). Companies are understandably nervous about encouraging reviews and other WOM channels since the perception is that those conversations can easily degenerate into chaos, but research has indicated that companies who do encourage WOM see positive results (Smith, 2012).

Ethical marketing is another subject matter that is frequently brought up in discussions about Millennial buying behavior. As Bucic (2012) states, “Millennials are distinctive in terms of their perspective, motivations, decision-making rationales and value drivers” (p. 114). This generation has been found to value so-called “ethical consumption” and that behavior is growing (Bucic, 2012). Many companies have begun to intentionally market to these behaviors through (1) cause-related marketing, (2) socially-responsible business practices, (3) corporate social marketing, and (4) corporate cause promotion (Bucic, 2012). These strategies have worked since

Millennials have demonstrated that they prefer to buy products and services from companies that help people, communities, and the environment (Smith, 2012).

Primary Research

Methodology

To help answer the research questions, the author conducted two pieces of original research; in-depth interviews with industry experts and a focus group of Millennials preparing for retirement. Three interviews with subject matter experts were held to gain a better understanding of current communications practices in the retirement industry and what they see as opportunities for the future. All of the experts chose that their names and their organizations be kept anonymous and shall be henceforth referred to as Experts A, B, and C. Both Experts A and C were interviewed via telephone and the author transcribed notes on a computer as they spoke. The interview with Expert B was conducted in person and the author transcribed notes as they spoke. Full transcripts for the interviews are available in the Appendix.

The focus group was comprised of six Millennial participants between the ages of 24 and 34 to share their opinions, thoughts, and experiences regarding retirement planning. The age range of this focus group reflects Millennials who have had at least a chance of working a few years post-college and participating in an employer-sponsored retirement plan. The focus group was organized and administered by the author, Josh Anderson. The focus group conversation was recorded and an audio file was sent to a transcription service to be transcribed. The author then reviewed the transcript to ensure the transcription was correct. A full transcript for the focus group is available in the Appendix.

Expert Interview Results

Expert A is a client experience manager for a large nationwide retirement plan recordkeeper that provides services to thousands of companies and millions of retirement plan participants (henceforth referred to simply as “participants”). Expert A has been in charge of developing retirement plan education curriculum and related communication strategies for the past ten years. Expert A’s team often travels to provide in-person financial education for their clients’ employees. Expert B is the senior director of total compensation (which includes retirement benefits) for a large public employer with over 24,000 employees. In addition, Expert B has been in a top management role as a retirement plan sponsor for the past fifteen years. Expert C is the development and operations lead for a small faith-based financial services start-up company that focuses almost entirely on the Millennial generation. Expert C’s company is an offshoot of a larger nationwide financial services company that decided it needed to develop more relationships with Millennials.

Expert B says that a lot has changed in the last decade for what employers expect retirement plan recordkeepers to provide in the past decade. That the term “recordkeeper” is used to still refer to these providers is indicative of how much has changed. It used to be that employers would hire a financial institution to set up the infrastructure for a retirement plan and those institutions would provide all of the structural elements such as mutual fund investment options and the means to enroll or take distributions. They would then keep track of all the necessary information to make sure plan participants had what they were supposed to have. Now the role of a plan provider is far more expansive and includes consulting on and developing communications.

Expert B noted that when he initially began in his plan sponsor role it was almost unthinkable for employers to allow their providers to offer any sort of education let alone guidance or advice. He said “if you were in those board rooms 15 years ago and you said to the retirement committee that you thought we should be providing education to help people learn how to handle their retirement plans, you would’ve been laughed out of the room. It was viewed as too much of a risk.” Expert B said that that frame of thinking relates to how older generations are used to treating retirement plans. He said “it used to be you got a pension plan, maybe a stock purchase plan, and, of course, social security. Something like a 401(k) was a nice add-on, but it definitely didn’t make up most of your savings. It was worth some attention, but not much.” He continued to say that plan sponsors took a long time to change their approach to helping their employees prepare for retirement, but it’s getting better.

Expert B noted that positive changes in how employers think about their role were encouraged by public policy changes. He said “when the tax laws changed in 2002, that really started to prompt employers to think more differently about guidance and general education. They were still nervous about creeping into financial planning, but you started seeing the beginnings of education meetings and the sort. Employers started hiring out firms to conduct general education as long as they didn't solicit, but there wasn't a huge impact with that in my opinion. It just wasn't very engaging and I'm not sure what difference it made, if at all."

To meet the present demands of helping retirement plan participants be successful in managing admittedly complicated financial instruments, Expert A says that his team has had to innovate and develop new ways of engaging people. His company has begun incorporating adult learning theory and techniques into the way they conduct their in-person and digital workshops. He said that he and his team cannot simply provide all the key information and hope that participants understand it and act on it; they have to create an environment where participants feel encouraged to engage in dialogue and ask questions. He said, "we have to create more of an experience to educate everyone, instead of just classroom style, we're trying to get more dialogue and activity from the participants."

One technique that Expert A's company has started to implement is panel discussions. Before one of his team of retirement education specialists arrives at their client's workplace, they ask the client to nominate some of their employees to serve on the panel. These employees are not pre-screened and are expected to freely describe what kind of financial problems they're struggling with and how their experience has been trying to save for retirement. Expert A said that these kind of panel discussions have had a lot of success, especially with Millennial audiences. He said "[the panels] are a great way for them to have a dialogue about what they're struggling with and dealing with. When they hear that, they're able to make better decisions."

When the experts were asked what communications channels were most utilized and which ones were more successful, the responses were surprising. There has been a move toward more digital channels, but the change hasn't been swift. Expert B said "there's been a real evolution of thought. Employers are still trapped in how older generations have communicated—newsletters, mailings to home, magazines, workshops—all of those have value, but a lot of people in our employment don't have the time to dedicate to learning everything. So I think the challenge going forward is meeting them in their own space at the right time." Expert A said that as a provider his team has been working to break out more into the digital and social media space. He said "we have a YouTube channel and had some prominent money managers put some good information out there, we had a panel of boomers—actual people—put their stories out there. It got a lot of hits, but it's still met with 'is this organic or is this just marketing from the big bank?'"

Expert C, who works outside the plan provider environment in a direct-to-consumer capacity, says that his company gets a lot of feedback and reactions from current and potential customers wanting to know if the company actually lives out the values it claims to have. Expert C's company values simplicity, not only in what products they offer, but also in advocating simple living. He says they've built relationships with like-minded customers who want to reject consumerism and value experiences over things. Expert C feels that these types of shared values attract customers who may have otherwise not paid for their services.

Expert A was asked about informational vs. emotional appeal communication approaches since the literature indicated that both approaches have value. He said that he thought that the effectiveness of either approaches ultimately mattered on the recipient. He said “I’m financially literate, so I am much more interested in hearing information about past return or about fees; that’s what I would respond to best. However, there are plenty of people out there who react better when you paint them a picture of sorts of what life can look like in retirement if you save properly, and that’s going to be more effective for them.” Expert A was asked about financial literacy and if he thought it was essential for someone to be able to successfully prepare for retirement or could the whole process be automatized somehow. He replied “[financial literacy] is absolutely essential. Even if enrollment or asset allocation is automatized, you will still have to know how to manage your money and you have know what your credit score is, or where to go for resources. If you don’t know how to take care of your nest egg, you’re going to get in trouble.”

Experts A and B were asked about whether or not plan providers are shifting their attention to Millennials. Expert A said that the retirement industry has shifted most of their attention to that generation. He said “they’re just coming into the workforce and we need to get them saving enough. They’re probably not going to have social security, at least to the level that people do now. Older folks had pension plans and had stock purchase plans - that system couldn’t sustain itself, but that generation was better positioned to retire.” Expert B thought that Millennials should be getting the most attention, but are currently not. He said “Millennials are not going to have the same resources like defined benefit plans, stock purchase plans, like older generations.”

Expert B said that it was “his charter” at his organization to shift the focus to younger generations. He continued “I was looking at the demographics and 26% are Millennials and 25% are Gen X and we have to be ready for that.”

The experts were asked what they perceived were the biggest barriers people face when trying to plan for retirement. Expert A said that the problem wasn’t necessarily that plans were too complicated to understand, it was that “people just have so many competing priorities - kids, education, unexpected costs, health care, you get sick or disabled, but also taking care of aging parents. Those priorities erode away the ability to create that nest egg.” Expert B agreed that the problem was mostly budgetary. He said “they have circumstances where they can’t think of retirement like budgeting, getting rid of student debt.” He also attributed a lot of the problems to misguided expectations of what retirement will ultimately look like. He said “retirement has been mid to late-sixties, and a lot of people think about that equation, and they include social security. Our life expectancy is a lot longer, the benefits won’t be as rich. We can’t use those older equations.” Expert C said that people themselves create the biggest barriers to having enough money at retirement and that it’s a matter of priorities. He said “what we see time and time again is that people know the broad things they should be doing and they get in their own way. They choose to buy a bigger house than they need, or a newer car—living outside of their means. Those things tend to take more of a priority. A lot of other marketing companies are doing a great job at painting what success is.”

When asked what kinds of message resonate with Millennials to get them to think about the future and plan accordingly, Expert C said that time in life may have more to do with receptivity to messages than anything else. He said “we’ve actually found that it’s really hard to focus on those longer-term decisions until you get older and build a family. I think it becomes a lot more real at that point.”

Since Expert C’s company is one of the few directly marketing to Millennial customers, he had a lot to say about digital marketing and what works with speaking effectively to Millennial audiences. He said that although his company is a financial services company, in many ways it has become a content company as well. The company’s website has the slogan “your source for financial balance” on the front page and offers articles and resources on such topics as debt, marriage, and spending. Expert C says that “our goal is to be curators of the best financial advice, the best products.” In just the last year, they’ve built their email newsletter from 20,000 to 500,000 subscribers by offering “something of value for their contact.” He said “we offer tips on when to buy a home, when to start a family. We’ve gotten a lot of traction on simple living—how do you reject consumerism as much as possible but build a life around experiences? We focus on a lot on how do you focus on generosity and stewardship? It’s part of our niche.” For those efforts, the company has seen an increase in customers seeking out paid financial advice or products.

Expert C commented on whether the common trope that Millennials want to develop a personal relationship with the brands they use has any level of truth. He said that certain brands call out qualities that are important to people. He noted that wearing Warby Parker eyeglasses can signal stylishness to one peers, or that wearing Toms footwear can convey one’s social awareness. Expert C said that his company is trying to emphasize qualities like financial balance, valuing family, and meaningful life experiences. He believes that customers who are more likely to value simplicity and contentedness are more likely to buy their products and services than someone who is simply looking for a vehicle for financial gain.

However that shared affinity for similar values doesn't necessarily translate to a desire to interact with a live person. Expert C says that his company is not completely digital. While a customer can obtain a lot of preliminary information completely online, if they want professional financial advice or a financial product, they will have to have "at least one conversation" with a representative over the phone, if not more. He said "clients want to do research on their own, access unbiased information on their own, but they also want someone to be there if they want extra validation and assistance." However, Expert C says that they've heard from some Millennial customers that they'd prefer an advice or financial service product that can be completely accomplished online.

Focus Group Results

The participants were first asked to reflect on their own ideas of what retirement would look like for them. Some of the participants were optimistic, but also cautious about what their future lives will look like. A participant expressed uncertainty but also that he's "always thought of [retirement] as awesome. I'll get to go travel a little bit more, for longer periods of time. Financially I should be in a good position at that point." He said that he hopes that his finances are in a state that he would not "have to worry about it," but that he may have to find casual employment in retirement for that to be the case.

Other participants found it difficult to conceive of their future life. A participant said "it just feels so abstract and so far away. I never thought about it until my dad retired like two or three months ago. Now I'm starting to consider the tangible, what would my life be like? I've always thought about it from 'like, I need to save money.' But I've never actually put myself in the scenario what would that look like for me." Similarly, another participant admitted she's not at all sure what retirement will look like but that she's saving money right now "because I know it's the right thing to do." Another participant admitted that he hasn't thought of or planned for retirement at all yet. He said "I don't know when it will happen. I don't know what I would do. I just haven't thought about it, it's never been a concern for me."

The participants who responded to the first question admitted that their thoughts and visions of their future retirement lives were rooted in the examples they've seen of their parents or grandparents in retirement. One participant told a story of her grandparents taking her and her siblings on trips and she said that "when I envision retirement that's what I want to see in myself as well. I want to be able to do the things I don't get to do while I'm at work."

When asked how their retirement would look in comparison to their parents' retirement, five out of six participants agreed that their parents have it better than they will in retirement. One participant said "I'm so cynical that [a recession] is just going to happen again or something worse is going to happen. Or we're going to blow up social security entirely. I just feel really cynical."

All the participants expressed a lower than medium level of confidence that their lives in retirement will be financially secure. There were many reasons expressed for that doubt. One participant expressed frustration that the instructions for how to have a safe and secure retirement are too vague. She said "I think the hard part is what is enough? Everything I ever hear about is "you're not saving enough" and I'm saving everything I can! I don't know but then you always hear but it's very personal to your needs. Then I don't have any clue if it's enough." On a similar note, another participant admitted that the difficulty of conceptualizing what retirement would look like in several decades is one of the factors that affects how confident she is.

Another trend in the conversation of confidence in the future was that many participants expressed general worry about the future, especially since the Great Recession. A participant said "I'm so unclear about the future. I would hate to have what happened to a lot of our parent's generation, where they lost all of their pensions and 401(k)s. It's very ever-present in my mind that whatever I put away I should have a separate IRA, that that is different from my job. I'm making sure I have some sort of backup plan." Some participants expressed that the difficulty of envisioning what retirement will look like is connected to feeling like they're not adequately preparing for the future currently. One participant remarked that he's not taking what he feels are the proper steps to preparing for retirement because "I don't even picture it."

The most common issue cited by the participants as the biggest barrier to retirement is the confusion over the multiple decisions one needs to make for retirement. One participant said “I feel like there’s simultaneously not enough [information] and too much. You hear someone will be like ‘just invest it’ but you’re like ‘that could mean a hundred different things! Are you saying I need an IRA or a 401(k) or do I go pick some stocks I think are cool or do I do mutual funds? So you hear all these terms, I have no idea how they apply to me individually.” Another participant expressed her frustration by telling an anecdote about having a certain amount of money to save but bouncing the amount between IRA accounts at different banks because she was never fully sure where she should invest her money. Another participant said the retirement process “[is] not simple. It doesn’t feel like there’s any rules.”

Another barrier most of the participants mentioned was that they’re struggling to find money to direct towards retirement. One participant said “I don’t think I have enough money to do what I want now.” Another participant agreed with her and said “I'm on the same page. I don't know where, what to invest in that will give me a good return. My dad's always telling me ‘well you should do this and that and the other thing.’ That worked for his generation and it's not working for ours. I feel like that's my biggest barrier. Know where to invest. Without a lot of risk.”

The participants were asked how they hear about retirement issues, whether about their specific plans or about broader topics. One participant enthusiastically told about how she had recently seen a 20-minute video by the HBO personality John Oliver that was about the retirement industry and how it preys on people with high fees. She said that the video, which recommended people move their investments into passively-managed funds with lower fees, was so influential that she rebalanced her IRA investments. Another participant mentioned that he had learned a lot about retirement topics from Suze Orman, a financial expert who is frequently on television.

These participants noted that listening to experts break down the topic and offer specific advice was more influential than the information they got from their employer. The same participant that cited Suze Orman as influential said “I find [information I get from my employer] challenging because it consistently tries to distance itself from making any official recommendations because they don't want to be liable for it if it's out of their control. When asked to specifically think about their employer as a source of retirement information, many of the participants expressed frustration. One participant said “I've had three jobs in two years. Every place I've been, you get on board, you have your first day and you get a big packet of paper. They're like ‘go register, go sign up for this.’ You're like ‘alright at some point I guess I'll read through the 75 pages that don't tell me anything.’”

One participant cited examples of retirement communication channels that she had found beneficial in the past. She said “[a former employer] had a speaker come in every three months to our workplace with a different topic. Once was him talking about social security, I didn't know you get a benefit and you get part of your spouse’s and you can defer it. It'll grow if you don't take it out right away. All of that was super helpful. It was a combo of they just made it super easy and super clear. I think that's the best rather than stacks of papers, good luck.” The participant also noted that her previous retirement plan's website was very simple and easy to use. She said "they actually gave me applicable steps. 'Here's the checklist of things you haven't done yet," great! I loved that."

The participants were asked how they make decisions regarding their retirement savings behaviors. With regard to contribution rate, many of the participants said that they generally contributed up to the company match, although it's worth noting that the participants referred to this as "free money." When asked if anyone had ever used a retirement savings calculator to see if their current savings were projected to be enough, some admitted that they had but that the results were disappointing. One participant said of the results "wait, if I retire when I'm 65 and I'm hoping I live until 95, how am I going to live on that amount of money for 30 years?"

A remarkable and noteworthy moment happened during the discussion of retirement savings calculators. One of the participants mentioned that she has never herself sought out doing a calculation, but that representatives of her bank had reached out to tell her that her IRA at the time had an innappropriate asset allocation for her age bracket. She said "I felt like [the bank representatives] really cared about what I should be doing and what I can afford and what that will mean for my future." After she told the group about her experiences, every other participant requested and wrote down the name of the bank because they were impressed that an institution would provide such a service.

The participants said that with regard to investments, they don't typically do research on their own to decide what to invest in. A couple participants mentioned that they used pre-allocated lifepath funds that start with a relatively aggressive investment mix but gradually grow more conservative as the investment holder ages. Other mentioned that they relied on their parents or other experts to guide their investment decisions. The participants were asked if they would use an investment guidance service if it were available in their plan, either for free or with cost. All of the participants agreed that they would consider such a service.

The participants were asked about their preferred method of communication for hearing about retirement plan options at work. Many of the participants noted that email is not a preferred way to receive information. One participant said “No, I get too many emails and I already ignore them all.” There was also discussion about how they often do not pay attention to mailed communications since they mistake them for junk mail. One piece of mailed information that a couple participants found helpful is the quarterly statement. One participant said of the statement, “that's the only thing that I actually look at and consciously read and take note of. If there was some way to get more information in there. Education opportunities.” The participants reacted most negatively to phone communications.

The participants all expressed a desire for more in-person and one-on-one interactions to learn more about their retirement. Many of the participants answered yes when asked if they were more likely to pay attention to a person—whether their supervisor, an HR representative, a co-worker—over another form of communication. Many of the participants who work at the same employer noted that there is financial classes available from time to time, but that they're frequently disappointed to learn that those classes fill up quickly and become unavailable.

One theme that all the participants were very unified on was that they didn't want to receive superfluous information from their employer about plan design or plan options, they only wanted to hear about what was relevant to them individually. When asked if he was satisfied with how his employer communicated his retirement options, the participant said "I don't feel like it's great. For me, I liked [another participant's] point about having a checklist. I feel it's almost an [industry problem] where instead of really thinking about what information people need we just put all of the information out there. I don't really need to know about the fifteen different types of retirement accounts every different service group gets. I just need to know what mine is." Another participant echoed the sentiment when she said "The biggest barrier with retirement stuff for me is always 'okay you just gave me too much.' I can't process it so I'm going to do nothing and put it away in my drawer until someday. When is this someday that I'm going to want to look at it? I don't know. Just tell me what I need to do give me three paths. Give me a Buzzfeed quiz. 'If this then you go do this.' Just help me, make it tangible."

Discussion

The literature, expert interviews, and focus group results all help to answer the research questions and point to possible best practices for retirement communications practitioners. In regards to the first research question, "how can positive retirement savings behaviors be best elicited through communication?," this work uncovered some insights:

- Institutions such as employers and retirement plan providers are taking communication seriously as an approach to better prepare people for retirement. Progress has been slow, but there may be support from top leaders to prioritize developing more innovative communication approaches in the near future.
- The Elaboration Likelihood Model holds that people are much more likely to process persuasive message if they're motivated to do so and they have the ability to do so. Although some research has found that financial literacy education has had disappointing results, it may provide people a necessary foundation for processing otherwise complex financial messages in the future.
- People rely on communications from their retirement plan providers to make decisions about their savings behavior and providers should take this responsibility seriously. Because many people rely on judgemental cues from communications to inform their decisions, plan providers should be careful not to emphasize plan features or options that would be inappropriate for an individual.
- It ultimately depends on the message recipient whether informational or emotional messaging approaches resonate best, but research indicates that informational approaches are more effective.
- A person's intention to save for retirement has a direct connection with their likelihood to act on that behavior. Communicators can influence intention by

targeting a person's perceived ability to save for retirement as well as outlining both the short and the long-term benefits of doing so.

For the second research question, "how can retirement plan providers best communicate positive retirement savings behaviors to Millennials?," this paper also points us to some key insights:

- Plan providers and employer sponsors are increasingly focusing their attentions on enabling Millennials to save more through communication and plan structural changes.
- Millennials desire an environment where dialogue can authentically occur and questions are welcome. Every single participant in the focus group said that they were much more likely to pay attention to messages that come from people they know or face-to-face discussion.
- Millennials react positively to organizations and messages that that emphasize socially responsible business practices. This may not be a linear line to draw in the retirement industry, but as Expert C's organization has shown, emphasizing values such as simple living, gratitude, and giving can attract like-minded consumers and create opportunities to reach younger people.
- Millennials are burdened by the sheer number of choices and information overload that come with retirement planning. All of the experts interviewed said that they thought the biggest barrier to a healthy retirement balance was budgetary priorities, but most of the Millennials in the focus group disagreed. They said that they're constantly frustrated by their inability to make what they

perceive are right decisions when it comes to retirement planning. This situation is predicted by the Elaboration Likelihood Model. These participants may have had the motivation to plan for retirement, but their ability to do so is hampered by an overwhelming amount of choices.

- Relatedly, the focus group participants said they want direction with planning for retirement, and will find it wherever they can, including from parents and personalities in the media. While there are obviously regulatory concerns, plan providers would be wise to provide some sort of financial advice tool or product to help plan participants make better choices.
- With regard to communication channels, all of the focus group participants agreed that word-of-mouth was their preferred way of hearing about retirement planning. They said that email and mailed printed materials do not resonate with them and are often overlooked. Plan providers should seek to develop opportunities where plan participants can find education and talk to someone in real time about their concerns. As Expert A mentioned, panel discussions with their colleagues have been very successful in fostering important discussions in his clients' workplaces about how best to prepare for retirement. When organized at the local level, these discussions can continue long after the moderator has left.
- Millennials are dealing with many competing budgetary priorities. Campaigns to address those concerns alongside retirement planning may serve as a way to better enable Millennials to prioritize long-term goals.

Limitations and Further Research Implications

While the interviews in this study were conducted with high-level experts in the relevant field of study, their opinions and experiences cannot be used to produce generalizable results for organizations or practitioners. The same is true of the focus group results. While insightful, focus groups should not be used in and of themselves to inform future strategy.

However, this article does point to possible future research projects. Since many models of persuasive communications hold that intentions lay at the foundation of behavior, future researchers should seek to survey their populations about their perceived norms around retirement planning, abilities to save for retirement, and benefits of saving. Knowing these factors can better help practitioners understand what to emphasize in communications so that messages resonate better and elicit a desired behavioral change.

Further research is also necessary into connections between information overload and retirement planning. The focus group participants were very vocal about their frustration with the overabundance of options for retirement planning. The literature reviewed in this article pointed to the possibility that this overload of options can actually prove harmful to the long-term savings behaviors of individuals. There is currently no body of research that the author is aware of that draws the link between the overabundance of financial choices and its effect on savings behavior.

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Appendix

Expert A Questions:

What is your position?

Client Experience Manager - It’s becoming a position more around adult learning theory, we have to create more of an experience to educate everyone, instead of just classroom style, we’re trying to get more dialogue and activity from the participants.

If a company came to you and asked you for the best way to communicate their retirement plan to their employees, what would you say?

Maybe it’s self-serving, but in-person meetings make such a difference. When I first started you got a packet and that’s it, 30 fund fact sheets, but what are you supposed to do with that? Now you can get someone who can physically come to you and give you resources and enable you to ask questions. The best way is to have interaction with the subject matter expert, but to have it in an experiential environment

However, it’s so hard because it’s such a small amount of people we can serve. We saw 70,000 participants last year out of millions, so it’s a bit of a drop in the bucket.

What channels do you use to communicate with plan participants?

On-site meetings, website, brainsharks (recorded webinars), global webinars where any participant from any company can tune in, social media, YouTube, Twitter, email of course, trigger-based communications, mailings, print, postings on the company intranet.

Which of those channels do you think is most effective?

On-site, it’s so much more personal and you might learn more than you were seeking. With other communications you’re really limited to what that channel is referencing in that message.

What trends or changes have you noticed in the last few years regarding how retirement plan participants want to receive information?

They want it to be experiential. One of the things we've consistently heard is "I want something applicable to my situation and where I am," more personalized, more targeted, not to a broad group.

One of the things we've done differently is there's a shift towards millennials and gen X, and one of the things we do is a panel groups. It's like having the educator work as a talk show host and involves a panel of real employees. They're a great way for them to have a dialogue about what they're struggling with and dealing with. When they hear that, they're able to make better decisions.

We have the supporting information in the deck already with these panels, it's a great way for them to have a dialogue about what they're struggling with and dealing with. When they hear that, they're able to make better decisions.

You want to have individuals in front of them that they recognize, it's people they know and trust. It's opens up the conversation and the conversation can continue after you're gone.

Do you think that plan education helps people develop more positive savings behavior?

Yes, absolutely.

Do you think that retirement plan participants react more positively to informational messages or emotional messages?

It depends. I'm financially literate, so I am much more interested in hearing information about past return or about fees; that's what I would respond to best. However, there are plenty of people out there who react better when you paint them a picture of sorts of what life can look like in retirement if you save properly, and that's going to be more effective for them.

How important do you think financial literacy is for someone trying to save enough for retirement?

It's absolutely essential. Even if enrollment or asset allocation is automatized, you will still have to know how to manage your money and you have know what your credit score is, or where to go for resources. If you don't know how to take care of your nest egg, you're going to get in trouble.

PPA has had positive effects, it's gotten them started, but there's still a huge need for financial literacy. Even with tools like target date fund, appropriate allocation, there is still a big gap that people need to fill.

What do you think are the biggest barriers to people having enough money to retire?

People just have so many competing priorities - kids, education, unexpected costs, health care, you get sick or disabled, but also taking care of aging parents. Those priorities erode away the ability to create that nest egg. Plus there's always the the materialistic side - gotta have the latest and greatest.

What generation - baby boomers, gen x, or Millennials, do you think the retirement industry pays most attention to?

Right now it's Millennials, they're just coming into the workforce and we need to get them saving enough. They're probably not going to have social security, at least to the level that people do now. Older folks had pension plans and had stock purchase plans - that system couldn't sustain itself, but that generation was better positioned to retire.

Do you feel that trust (in [your institution], in banks, in the finance system) is an issue you need to address?

Absolutely, all the time - what I'd point out you can give a retirement presentation, but if they have an opinion of you as a "banker" it's going to dilute the message - it doesn't matter if we have anything to do with that.

Do you think people have more or less confidence that they'll have enough money to retire than 10 years ago?

More confident now since the recession - there's been some healing and there's been tangible improvement in their balances since then. People are no longer seeing a 30-40 percent loss. If you held tight during the recession, which not everyone did, you would see a lot of recover from that point.

Has [your institution] made efforts in the past few years to introduce services or information to social media?

We have a YouTube channel and had some prominent money managers put some good information out there, we had a panel of boomers—actual people—put their stories out there. It got a lot of hits, but it's still met with 'is this organic or is this just marketing from the big bank?' We've had virtual events for Millennials - we had some some chat rooms to encourage participation.

What kinds of concerns do younger employees have that you don't see in other generations?

One of the things is what's my immediate next step? Where are you going to help me get to next? 2 years. 4 years. What's my plan?

Have you seen an increase in requests for responsibly-sourced investment options?

Not at all and we've always had them. Socially responsible funds, and we promote them, but we didn't hear a lot of requests for them.

Do you think that saving for retirement is becoming easier or harder for people? Why?

Easier in how we've built it with structural changes , but harder from the practical side, there are competing priorities - health care, housing, financial responsibilities. That burden gets in the way of you trying to save. There's not enough of a liveable wage.

Expert B Questions

What's your position?

Senior of Total Compensation, initial year of employee benefits. I've been in charge of retirement plans for about 15 years.

What do you think the role of the plan sponsor is?

It's changed over the years, when I first got into it there was a feeling that you were creating adverse liability by giving *any* education.

If you were in those board rooms 15 years ago and you said to the retirement committee that you thought we should be providing education to help people learn how to handle their retirement plans, you would've been laughed out of the room. It was viewed as too much of a risk. It used to be you got a pension plan, maybe a stock purchase plan, and, of course, social security. Something like a 401(k) was a nice add-on, but it definitely didn't make up most of your savings. It was worth some attention, but not much.

When the tax laws changed in 2002 that really started to prompt employers to think more differently about guidance and general education. They were still nervous about creeping into financial planning, but you started seeing the beginnings of education meetings and the sort. Employers started hiring out firms to conduct general education as long as they didn't solicit, but there wasn't a huge impact with that in my opinion. It just wasn't very engaging and I'm not sure what difference it made if at all.

2008-2012 all of a sudden automated enrollment, opt-out, you started to see plans have financial planning services at a certain age or income level.

There's been a real evolution of thought. Employers are still trapped in how older generations have communicated—newsletters, mailings to home, magazines, workshops—all of those have value, but a lot of people in our employment don't have the time to dedicate to learning everything. So I think the challenge going forward is meeting them in their own space at the right time.

Do you feel an obligation provide resources to enable as many as you can people to retire?

I'm looking at it from a total compensation approach, what on a daily basis makes someone think this is a great place to work, the total compensation equation has to be something where they say I can be resilient to this when things are going great.

When you have the retirement plans we have - the state pension and other plans are rich and generous - we're obligated to make sure employees understand. I think there's a moral obligation to have them understand, what's their life going to be as they get older? We have to show people what their benefit would be and what the value of these plans are for them. There's' probably even a legal obligation - you're probably even creating a legal liability by *not* doing enough education.

What's the worst thing that companies can do to hinder their employees to prepare for retirement?

Retirement has been mid to late-sixties, and a lot of people think about that equation, and they include social security. Our life expectancy is a lot longer, the benefits won't be as rich. We can't use those older equations.

You still need to focus on the important things, but you also have to help people rethink retirement and what it'd look like. Are you conveying a proper view of what retirement will look like. It has to become more holistic. But that's going to be a hard conversation, because people see what their parents and grandparents had.

The recession is still a trauma and they may still be skeptical.

Do you foresee that this organization will make plan changes that cater specifically to younger employees? (education offerings, more digital channels, plan design)

I sure hope so, that's my charter here. II was looking at the demographics and 26% are Millennials and 25% are Gen X and we have to be ready for that. They have circumstances where they can't think of retirement like budgeting, getting rid of student debt.

All sorts of applications and technologies to simplify message and put it in channels that people will use (like mobile) to connect people to their benefits - there's a tradeoff on data security about how much people want to volunteer to their employers

We need to start looking at those ingredients and seeing what the future was.

Do you think that saving for retirement is becoming easier or harder for people? Why?

Harder, a lot of things have happened. There were people retiring at 55, our profit sharing plan allowed them to earn more retired than they were as an employee. That doesn't happen anymore

Suspension of employer contributions, DBs are no longer a thing.

Even if you get to the full match, you're not saving enough.

I don't diminish anyone's reasons for not saving for retirement - bill stress, daycare, it's pretty hard to value retirement. You rationalize that you have a lot time so it's not a priority.

Millennials are not going to have the same resources like defined benefit plans, stock purchase plans, like older generations. There are things employers can do to provide points of contact and make the retirement conversation simpler so they don't have to spend time.

Expert C Interview Transcript

Tell me about your company. You're a financial services company that is focused almost exclusively on Millennials, is that right?

A lot of the financial industry is focused on the pre-retired or retired audience. With typical financial services, it's obvious that advisors would want to work with people who have a lot of assets. Thrivent looked at the state of growth of demographics, the challenges for the business, and realized we're not growing as fast as we want to. The second realization was that as a Christian organization, we have a mission to serve not just the wealthy. So it makes financial and missional sense that we would focus on this.

So the market is better now than when we began in 2009, but there are still a lot of challenges. It's the same old story of spending habits, people can't even think about retirement.

We've done a lot of research with our personas and we've made a decision that we're focusing on the young family. Part of that was realizing that until you're settled down, you don't really get a sense of what's at stake, what's real. We can still educate people who are not at that stage, but we focus on the stage when people are ready to get serious.

We've switched now to digital-first approach. Our clients want to do research on their own, access unbiased information on their own, but they also want someone to be there if they want extra validation and assistance. Honestly we've become a content company - we offer a lot of free information through blogs and e-books, but we've coupled that with the opportunity to talk to an advisor for further help.

How do you make material that can be so complex and dry appealing and understandable to your audience?

It builds into our guiding principles, we value simplicity of communication but also simplicity of what we choose to offer. It's very unlikely you'll see us offer an overwhelming amount of investment options. Inaction is the norm because of the paralyzation of choices. Our goal is to be curators of the best financial advice, the best products. That may mean that some may say that "you don't have what I need" and that's fine.

You can see this with disruptive savings vehicles, they're all trying to hack behavioral stuff. Acorn is rounding off every purchase. They're trying to trick human nature.

What kind of messages resonate to get Millennials to think about the future and plan accordingly? Is that different than older generations?

We've actually found that it's really hard to focus on those longer-term decisions until you start to get older and build a family. I think it becomes a lot more real at that point.

What digital marketing channels are more successful with Millennial consumers than Gen X or Boomers?

We've gone with a broad swath of digital marketing approaches. Email marketing has been important; we've focused on building a subscriber base - 20,000 subscribers to 500,000 in the last year. We've been offering something of value for their contact.

We offer tips on when to buy a home, when to start a family. We've gotten a lot of traction on simple living - how do you reject consumerism as much as possible but build a life around experiences?

We focus on a lot on how do you focus on generosity and stewardship? It's part of our niche.

We've also invested a lot in display advertising on targeted websites where we think our future customers are - Pinterest and Instagram are big for us. We're developing video that's shareable but also working with other christian media organizations

Of those channels, do you think that Millennials are using those to just gather information, or are they using them to act on decisions as well?

We haven't found the silver bullet, we're in start-up mode. When we connect, we connect on our faith and values. The skepticism exists, but it's mitigated by a common value system that we both share.

What efforts do you make to encourage Millennials to share their opinions about your products with their peer groups? Is that even a goal?

Word-of-mouth is an incredibly big deal and the digital version of that is reviews. We're moving there, but there's a lot of regulatory hurdles.

Do you think there is a reluctance for Millennials to engage with messages if it's obvious that those messages are trying to persuade them in some way?

There is also a lot of "tell me how [your values] are true," so we have to live it out, not just say it.

To what level is it true that Millennial consumers want to develop a "personal relationship" with your brands?

Well, we're not a completely digital company. Our customers still have to have at least a conversation over the phone, if not more. However, we're finding out that customers want to do everything completely digitally, but they still want to trust that we're acting in their best interest too. So they don't necessarily want or need the face-to-face interaction to establish trust.

Other brands call out things that are important to people, things they want to be associated with. For instance, Warby Parker conveys a certain style, Toms conveys a social good. We're trying to emphasize a life and financial balance and family and meaningful life experiences. We are for those people, maybe not for everyone. We want to be associated with simplicity and contentedness.

What do you think is the biggest barriers that Millennials are facing to having enough money at retirement?

Themselves - what we see time and time again is that people know the broad things they should be doing and they get in their own way. They choose to buy a bigger house than they need, or a newer car - living outside of their means. Those things tend to take more of a priority. A lot of other marketing companies are doing a great job at painting what success is.

Focus Group Discussion Guide

Introductory Comments

Thank you all for joining me this afternoon. I appreciate your time and look forward to your feedback on your experiences with retirement planning. My goal with this focus group is to better understand how Millennials think about retirement, how they determine what actions to take when saving for retirement, and what role employers can play in making the process easier. Please openly share all of your feedback and opinions. It's important that everyone has a chance to share their thoughts and it's okay if you disagree with one another. We hope to have a very open, free flowing conversation. Because we will discuss financial topics, I would ask that you refrain from using specific numbers for either your personal income or your retirement balance. Our discussion will last about one hour. I will have a recorder in the middle of the table so that I can ensure an accurate report. It's important to note that all records of this conversation will be kept private and confidential. Your name will not be associated with anything you say today. Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Feel free to not participate, not answer a question, or withdraw at any time. If you have any questions about this study you may contact my advisor, Steve Wehrenberg at (612) 625-6383.

Discussion guide

1. What are your expectations for your retirement? When do you think you will retire? What do you think life in retirement will look like?
2. How confident are you about having enough money to retire on someday?
3. Do you feel that you're taking the necessary steps right now to have enough money to retire on? Why or why not?
4. What is the biggest barrier you experience to saving enough money for retirement?
5. How have you heard about how to plan for retirement? (options could include word-of- mouth from friends and family members, information from an employer, advertisements, etc.).
6. In your own words, tell me what you know about the retirement options available to you through your employer.
7. Describe your journey in signing up or getting information for your retirement plan through your employer. Was it easy? Frustrating? Describe why.
8. Describe how you decide how much to contribute to your retirement plan.
9. Describe how you choose which investments to pick for your retirement plan.

10. What are your preferred ways to hear about your retirement options at work?
11. Do you think your employer has done a sufficient job at communicating your retirement options to you? What could they do better?

Focus Group Transcription

Moderator: The first question is pretty open ended. How do you imagine retirement? What do you think about when you think about what your life is going to look like in retirement? What does that look like to you? What are you going to do? When is it going to happen?

Participant 1: I've always thought of retirement as the ability to not do what I'm currently doing. Enjoy free time a little bit more. That's kind of a tricky question. I don't know. I've always thought of it as awesome. I'll get to go travel a little bit more, for longer periods of time. Financially I should be in a good position at that point.In terms of having money set aside and being financially comfortable and not having to worry about it. I've also thought of it like maybe I'll do a little side job or something.

Moderator: What age do you have in your mind for that?

Participant 1: 65 would be awesome. I'm pretty much assuming I'm working until 70 or something. Maybe I'm overestimating but I've also kind of thought of it too like maybe in my late fifties, sixties I'll just work part time or something [crosstalk] officially retire but do something different but keep working for a little.

Moderator: Okay, anybody else?

Participant 4: I can go. I have some really great role models for retirement. My grandparents and parents. My grandparents retired a while ago but my parents just retired. They've been traveling, they kind of exactly have what Phillip said, they were in Ireland for two months just because they could. I have all these visions of being able to do those kinds of things. My grandparents also took us on lots of trips. They were very supportive financially. So when I envision retirement that's what I want to see in myself as well. I want to be able to do the things I don't get to do while I'm at work. Realistically I'm concerned a lot about financial stability of our future and I am also in the same page of I just don't know when I'll be able to retire. 65 would be great my parents retired at 60 and they are really lucky. We'll have to see how things go with our economy and with social security.

Participant 3: Really interesting. So I'm probably the youngest person in here and my parents therefore are probably the youngest. My dad at like 52 just retired but it's a weird his company left so he retired but he gets a year of severance. My mom who's a similar age is like “I'd like to retire in the next three years.” It's just a really interesting, my dad worked for the same company for his whole career and that's something that I am not probably going to do but I don't know. It feels like what happened to my parents is probably not what's going to happen to me. So it's weird for me to think about my dad's retiring at sub-55 but I'm not in the same boat but I don't know what that means.

Moderator: Participant 5, have you thought about retirement?

Participant 6: I don't know when it will happen. I don't know what I would do. I just haven't thought about it, it's never been a concern for me.

Participant 2: I feel similar. It just feels so abstract and so far away. I never thought about it until my dad retired like two or three months ago. Now I'm starting to consider the tangible, what would my life be like? I've always thought about it from like, I need to save money. But I've never actually put myself in the scenario what would that look like for me. No idea.

Participant 6: I feel the same way. I just assume that ... I guess I haven't thought about it. I put money away because I know it's the right thing to do and not really being conscious what I'm doing it for…

Moderator: You're not visualizing it.

Participant 6: Yeah, I'm not be strategic about it. I'm just like, okay this is what they recommend. So this is what I'm going to do and hopefully it'll be an out in forty years.

Moderator: On the same theme, how confident are you that you're going to have enough money to retire, whatever that means to you.

Participant 1: I would be a step below confident. I'm somewhat confident.

Participant 2: I agree. I think the hard part is what is enough? Everything I ever hear about is “you're not saving enough” and I'm saving everything I can! I don't know but then also then you always hear but it's very personal to your needs. Then I don't have any clue if it's enough. I'm saving so maybe a five on the scale of one through ten.

Participant 3: I would have to say a five to six. Because I'm so unclear about the future. I would hate to have what happened to a lot of our parent's generation.

Where they lost all of their pensions and 401(k)'s. It's very ever-present in my mind that whatever I put away because I should have a separate IRA, that that is different from my job. I'm making sure I have some sort of backup plan. Again it's…

Participant 2: That's smart.

Participant 3: …But I don't know what's enough. How much can I afford to even put in those?

Moderator: This is kind of the same question but a little bit different. Do you feel that you're taking the necessary steps to adequately plan for that point in life?

Participant 5: No, because I don't even picture it.

Participant 6: I don't think I'm taking the right steps. I'm doing something but I don't think it's probably the [inaudible]

Participant 2: Yeah I would say…

Participant 6: Non-confident about the steps I'm doing.

Participant 4: I feel a little more [confident] cause I feel like I've learned about it recently and have started paying a little more attention. Part of that is I've had a number of different jobs. I went from having one 401(k) with one employer for a lot of years and that's just what I did. Then every time I've moved jobs I've had to think about it again. Oh, you don't offer a match. Okay maybe I need to do an IRA. I think every year I get better at it, I learn more. I hope that helps.

Moderator: Open ended question: What's the biggest barrier that you have to saving enough money for retirement? What is standing in your way the most?

Participant 6: I don't think I have enough money to do what I want *now*.

Moderator: It's a budget issue?

Participant 6: I think for me that's part of it. I think the second part is I have no idea. I have this much money I want to save, but where the hell do I put that?! I have a savings account but realistically that's probably not the best place for it. I also have an IRA somewhere that I don't- it's a bank in [an outside state] because I moved and it's just like… then it was a two year and now it's done but I can't switch it because it lapsed in a time where I could switch banks. So I have thought ‘this is the money, this percent of my salary I will save.’ I don't have any idea where putting it is, in fact I know where I'm putting it is not where I should be putting it. Because it's in a savings account in a bank that earns like point zero interest.

Participant 3: I'm on the same page. I don't know where, what to invest in that will give me a good return. My dad's always telling me ‘well you should do this and that and the other thing.’ That worked for his generation and it's not working for ours. I feel like that's my biggest barrier. Know where to invest. Without a lot of risk.

Participant 2: I feel like there's simultaneously not enough info and too much. You hear someone will be like ‘just invest it’ but you're like [laughter] that could mean like a hundred different things! Are you saying I need an IRA or a 401(k) or do I go pick some stocks I think are cool or do I do mutual funds? So you hear all these terms, I have no idea how they apply to me individually. No clue what that means for me seven years out of college, working. What does that mean for me, not for someone about to retire. I have no idea.

Participant 6: It's not simple. It doesn't feel like there's any rules. There's too many options but as we're talking I'm wondering even if we were educated more about what our options were and what are some smart choices, I'm not sure [that means] that I would change my behavior.

Moderator: Why's that? Your behavior in the sense of what you're investing in or how much you invest or all the above.

Participant 6: Yeah, all the above. I don't know because again it is such an abstract thing. I don't what I'm going to be like when I'm 65 or 70. I have no clue what that's going to look like. I know this is how much I make. This is what I can afford to put aside. That's simple and that's what I'm going to do and I'm going to cross my fingers.

Moderator: Anything else from this side of the table? Biggest barrier?

Participant 5: Just doing any sort of research on it. I don't think about it ever so never want to look into it. That's my biggest barrier.

Moderator: I feel this theme has been coming up. Do you feel that your lot in retirement is going to be better or worse or about the same as your parents?

Participant 6: I don't think I'll ever have what my parents have.

Participant 5: I think I will be better. My parents haven't retired. I guess we'll see.

Participant 2: I feel maybe and maybe it was I graduated from college at the worst part of the recession looking for a job. I'm so cynical that it's just going to happen again or something worse is going to happen. Or we're going to blow up social security entirely. I just feel really cynical. I think you were saying that too.

Participant 6: It was in the worst possible time to graduate. It's affected me ever since.

Moderator: How have you heard about how to plan for retirement? Where do those messages come from?

Participant 3: I'm dying to share one because I just saw it, that video John Oliver did. Did you see that? That was the most enlightening retirement thing I've seen. It was like [employer] when I worked there, people come in and talk. One of my other jobs did and it was pretty helpful. Just him telling me to go find low fee mutual mutual funds. I literally went into my IRA and re-balanced it after I saw that. That was so helpful. Kind of sucks that it had to be like a random video on the internet.

Participant 1: I get a lot of stuff from [my employer] since I work here. I find that information challenging because it consistently tries to distance itself from making any official recommendations because they don't want to be liable for it if it's out of their control. A lot of my information and recommendation on that actually came from Suze Orman. Because when I first started before I got married and had been working at [my employer] for a few years. I was trying to figure out what I should do because I started out at an agency and didn't have any savings or anything there and I knew I needed to get started. I was trying to find information on it and I wasn't about to go to any bank's website or anything to get that. She was a notable personality that I just listened to.

Moderator: Participant 5, what do you choose to ignore?

Participant 5: My last job I worked for [employer]. We did a lot of email stuff for banks and they had always had retirement articles in there. I would skim them sometimes but I think the only thing I ever saw was to start young. That's why I tried to do and that's pretty much all I've done. Just started the basic stuff.

Moderator: Five of the six of you work for [the same employer]. Do you feel like [employer] is a source for information? Is it the [retirement plan] providers themselves? Would you go to HR or would you go to [your employer's] website in general looking for information?

Participant 6: I would say that there's a couple of seminars [that I've tried to go to], but they always book up pretty quickly. That's where I would go. I don't want to read about it I want to hear someone talk about it. To be in the room, be able to ask questions if I am unclear about something. I'm a tactile learner, I need to be in a physical space with somebody. To answer your question before my trust was in my parents because they did it and they know how to do it. Through the bank that I have my IRA set up with. Those are the resources that I go to. But I would love to be able to have a counselor here [at my employer] I could really talk to about how to work on that.

Moderator: In-person retirement education, is that something that would appeal to you? What do you think about that?

Participant 5: I think that'd be helpful. I mean I'm not going to trust some random article I find online. I'm going to assume the person that's talking to me, their actual voice knows what they're talking about. That would be helpful.

Participant 3: I think it would be helpful too. For me it's like when you have an advisor in college and you go and you already know all the classes you're going to take because you read about them. I want to be there, I want to have that information when I talk to this person and say this is what I know and this is how much I make and this is how much I'd like to save. I need some information I can't go into that and not know anything that I need to know. Because then they can't even help me.

Moderator: So tell me about what you're aware of right now about what your employer offers for retirement plans. Not necessarily if it's good or bad, but more like how much does your employer give you? What are the benefits? Talk a little bit about that.

Participant 3: Yeah, I don't know a lot. I've actually specifically gone to the old website and the new website actually and looked at the stuff. Because it's something that I should know more about and I know that and I've had this weird life transition of switching jobs three times in the last year and a half and moving states. This is something I need to pay attention to.
I know we have options. I don't really know what they are. I know that something is happening without me doing anything which I really appreciate. There are these additional optional options, I think there are two or maybe three other additional options. There's this chart which I would love if it helped me but I can't figure it out. Or there was with this is what this offers, and this is what this doesn't, and I don't know. I looked at it like three times and every time I'm like okay I'm going to go know. Because I can't choose what's best for me maybe it's because I don't

know the jargon that's being used. Those company names [of the investments] don't really mean anything to me. I know they're options and I know that *something* is happening, which is great. I would love to pick one of those additional [plans]. Haven't been able to get over that hurdle of…

Participant 5: Which one.

Participant 3: Right.

Participant 4: Yeah. Pretty much word for word what she said. I know I did look at a match. I know that we have one, I know that's really great. I was looking into it at one point if there's a way to increase how much that match could be or if I could maximize it in some way. I couldn't figure that out. I keep meaning to go back.

Moderator: So you have looked?

Participant 4: I have looked.

Moderator: You've tried a few times?

Participant 4: When I first started at [employer] It was because my dad was like what kind of retirement plans do they have? Okay! So I did tell them what are automatically opted into and I would like to be able to maximize resources [employer] can offer. Haven't really gone in to see what that could be.

Participant 1: I have read a lot of different materials and info from [employer]. I did when I started here. Was pretty ... I tried to get all the information I could. When I started I actually found out that because of my incoming salary or the category of position I had or something I actually didn't get the match or the retirement account until three years in. Which at the time was super frustrating so I opened an outside account.

There were other people who were making slightly more than me who got it right away but I had to wait three years because of my-anyways, that's beside the point. I learned what I could from that information and then took would I could from it.

Moderator: Participant 5?

Participant 5: Basically whatever I was automatically enrolled into, I don't think they asked that. I don't know if it's because I don't care that much right now or that I don't know how long I'll be working here. That's the other big thing.

Moderator: Somewhat similar, now. This could be any other past employers that you've had as well as your current one. Describe your journey in signing up and/ or getting information for retirement plans through your employer?

Participant 4: I've had three jobs in two years. Every place I've been, you get on board, you have your first day and you get a big packet of paper. They're like 'go register, go sign up for this.' You're like 'alright at some point I guess I'll read through the 75 pages that don't tell me anything.' Then I think finally I get paranoid and I finally do it and set it up every time. Once place I wasn't eligible for six months, and I was eligible for the match. It was like 'well I'm not motivated at all to do this because I'm watching myself put this teeny tiny little pile every month in.' The last agency I worked at we had I think Fidelity, is that the name of one?

Moderator: Yeah.

Participant 4: That was my favorite one because their website was super easy to use. I felt they actually gave me applicable steps. Here's the checklist of things you haven't done yet, great! I loved that. Then they had a speaker come in every three months to our workplace with a different topic. Once was him talking about social security, I didn't know you get a benefit and you get part of your spouse's and you can defer it. It'll grow if you don't take it out right away. All of that was super helpful. It was a combo of they just made is super easy and super clear. I think that's the best rather than stacks of papers, good luck.

Moderator: Anybody else remember what happened?

Participant 3: Well my job prior to moving it was one of those you had to sign up for it things but you only had one option. It was like here's your option. Sign up or don't sign up. That's great but it's not great at the same time. Because I was like this is the website I go to. This is my employer, check box. This is my option. I still have it somehow. It's a mix of stocks and I don't even remember what company it was through. It still exists even though I don't work there. It was this cookie cutter thing. When I started I signed up immediately because I was like this is easy. This is my option I am signing up I am saving for retirement I don't really know what it's doing for me but I signed up.

Whereas when I came to [my current employer] there's all these options as no one gives you that you should sign up. Because something is happening and then if you want other things to happen they can and then there's all this stuff. Which is great for someone who is really informed but that's not me. It's very different, with my experiences have been very different in both.

Participant 1: I don't really remember having to do anything. I think when I first started and I was looking into it and I talked to someone here that basically said when you hit the date that you can start participating in it, it automatically starts. You're doing it regardless, at that point I was just like okay. Watch my pay stub in three years and see what happens. That was just when it actually happened I don't remember doing very much.

Participant 6: I don't remember.

Moderator: Has anybody reached out since to follow up?

Participant 6: No. We also have to consider the size of our institution. I don't expect personalized calls.

Moderator: Two things that one really has to do to have a retirement plan. One is save money. The other one is invest that money somewhere. Two parts of the same question. First is how do you decide how much you're going to save for retirement? How do you make that decision?

Participant 2: I defaulted to whatever the match was wherever I was. I was like okay, it just makes sense to have that be my minimum it they're going to give me free money. I think I have programs where you could set it up where every six months it would automatically increase the percent up to whatever the max was. I think every six months to a year I tried to and I would go in and play with it if I'm like no, that's was too much.

Participant 6: That's what I've always done. Whatever the match is.

Participant 1: Yeah I did the same.

Participant 2: What Suze [Orman] told you.

Participant 1: Don't throw away free money. And start doing it as soon as you can because it compounds. I just tried to put a little bit extra away every month in an IRA. It's super hard early on because it's like what makes more sense? Fifty bucks a month in a savings account or the credit card that I've got X number of dollars on at twenty percent interest that I needed to use because I don't make enough money. So it's hard for me anyway.

Moderator: Sub question to this question. Has anybody ever taken a look, gone to a calculator or anything like that to try to figure out what you're

saving and what that means in the future? A compound interest calculator?

Participant 4: No but my IRA guys did that for me. When I first off with my IRA again my Dad-such a great guy-I graduated from college and he immediately set up my IRA. He's like 'I just want you to put twenty-five dollars in this a month. And just do it automatically.'

Participant 6: Every month?

Participant 4: Yeah, a month. I think I can hack that, sure. It was super conservative funds but they handle the trading whatever. At some point I called them because I wanted to up my IRA because I got hired at [my current employers]. Just to fifty dollars a month. They went through whole excellent spiel about why I shouldn't be investing in conservative funds at this time in my life. They did this whole calculator thing. I mean I was on that phone…

Participant 2: Who's your bank?

Participant 3: Right, can I sign up?

Participant 4: USAA, they have good customer service.

Participant 6: I think they have good reputation for Millennials.

Participant 2: USAA

Participant 4: They recently were only military and they're [laughter]. They've opened their doors up to everybody just recently. I was on the phone with them for an hour, they did this whole calculation. If you continue saving this amount of money and we do these things. You'll have this amount just in this IRA alone so you can retire at this age for this much money and we recommend that every couple of years you increase it even just by twenty-five dollars until at some point you feel comfortable putting a certain amount away. They laid it all out for me and I felt so happy and safe about that. Whether that as much as it helped I'm still not super confident with my future. I felt like they really cared about what I should be doing and what I can afford and what that will mean for my future. They were really great.

Participant 1: I've done the calculators and things. Frequently find them less impressive than I hope they would be. When I look at them I'm like 'really that's what I'm going to have when I'm 65?

Moderator: **Less impressive as in you don't believe them?**

Participant 1: I'm just like wait if I retire when I'm 65 and I'm hoping I live until 95 how am I going to live on that amount of money for 30 years?

Participant 2: That same great give me a rating but then whatever I had at [former employer] gave you red, yellow, green. I was always yellow, I was like then pay me more. I can't put anymore away so I don't know. It's almost depressing to use them.

Moderator: **Going over to the investment side. How do you choose which investments to put your money in?**

Participant 6: I at my first employer I didn't know this was happening until two years ago. I'd left there and then four years later I found out that I had stock, in that company. Only reason is because I got a statement and I make two dollars dividends a year. I'm like well [laughter] I don't even know how to change it so I'll keep it and hope that the company does well.

Moderator: **Anybody else?**

Participant 2: I don't make those decisions because I don't know what to invest in. Stocks, I would love to invest and get some dividends. My parents they would have thousands of dollars coming in in dividends every year. I'm like how do you do that? How do you know what to do about that? I still haven't really quite figured that out. It's terrifying.

Participant 4: Normally I do "lifepath" funds because they've had that everywhere I've had a 401K and that seems pretty easy. Now after I saw the John Oliver now in my IRA I've personally gone in and reallocated into really low fee mutual funds. Seriously that episode was amazing for me.

Participant 1: I would love to do that but I'm so confused I do the same, I don't know what I did it's like twenty, forty or something. Whatever targeting fund. I basically default to the lifepath ones I guess since I'm young and people say you should do the more high risk ones. Do some of those and I just follow what the recommendation is from I think I have T. Rowe Price or something from them.

I would love to be able to go in and do more active thinking through what the breakdown of what my portfolio is. Really I don't have the time to do that right now and it seems to be doing all right.

Participant 5: I have no investments and I never look at it.

Moderator: Okay, sub question to that. It seems like a lot of you are really happy when somebody else tells you what to do. I know from my experience working with a lot of employers with retirement plans that a lot of times plans will actually have some sort of a service, whether free or available for a fee, where somebody either over the phone or in-person comes and tells you what to do. If something like that were available would you use it? What are the cost / benefit calculations that you would do for something like that?

Participant 2: Is it available [at the current employer]?

Participant 3: No.

Participant 2: If someone said they did it and liked it I would. I think if it was on a piece of paper, I'd ignore it like most other things. But if a friend was like I did this and it was really helpful. I think I probably would.

Participant 6: Yeah. I'd be more [inaudible] to do it that way.

Moderator: For the record another person is agreeing.

Participant 1: I'm shaking my head agreeing.

Participant 3: It's like that financial planning thing that is happening. I would really like to do that and I just haven't taken the time to do it yet. Because it requires me to reach out and schedule an appointment either in my work day when I'm busy. Or in my non-workday when I'm busy. I think those are great resources but I think they have to come to you if you want a large portion of people to use that.

Moderator: What's your preferred method of communication to hear about your retirement plan. Your retirement option through work.

Participant 2: Snapchat. [laughter]

Moderator: Is that a real answer?

Participant 2: I'm kidding.

Moderator: You get messages through email, phone calls, mail at home, mail at work. What are you guys most likely to pay attention to?

Participant 6: Is this for services or about resources?

Moderator: All of the above.

Participant 1: The thing that I always pay attention to is the report every quarter or whatever I get.

Moderator: The statement.

Participant 1: Yeah, the statement. That's the only thing that I actually look at and consciously read and take note of. If there was some way to get more information in there. Education opportunities.

Participant 3: I was going to say I don't get that.

Participant 2: I don't get a report or quarterly.
Participant 1: Of course I was like maybe email would be good. No I get too many emails and I already ignore them all. Separate sort of mailers, I've gotten those too. They get too, they're too promotional.

Participant 6: They get mixed in with my cable offers.

Participant 1: Yeah. You don't information like that to feel really sales-y. At least I don't. I don't know.

Participant 5: I don't want it to be in the phone. Because if someone calls me I'm just assuming it's a scam.

Moderator: I feel that would be a generational shift.

Participant 4: I'm was trying to sign up for a couple of seminars I can't remember if they came from [our HR department]

Participant 6: Probably.

Participant 4: There was a list of events that financial planning.

Participant 6: There's only thirty people that even get to go to that.

Participant 4: I would really love to go because that's an event you can choose all these different great things you can go and learn more about. I guess for that reason email would be fine. I would like to be face to face with a person.

Moderator: What about from either somebody in your office or a manager or supervisor? Whether it be an HR representative. Somebody who's the liaison you could say. Would you be more or less willing to pay attention if somebody you knew actually came up to you and was like there's some financial advising seminars happening next week,

you should go. I'm going. That sort of thing. Are you going to pay attention to that more than an email, a mailer?

Participant 4: Yeah.

Participant 1: Yeah.

Participant 3: Yeah.

Moderator: Last question and we're done. Do you think that your employer currently or past has done a good job at communicating how best to plan for your retirement? Why or why not?

Participant 4: I would say no. There were way more concerns when I started off. To make sure that I was getting immediate resources HR wise. Something that was in the future. For them, for me. It was 'did you get your parking pass or are you feeling comfortable in your new job.' That was what HR was concerned with.

Participant 2: Where? Here?

Participant 1: I would say similar. I don't feel like it's great. For me, I liked your point about having a checklist. I feel it's almost an [industry problem] where instead of really thinking about what information people need we just put all of the information out there. I don't really need to know about the fifteen different types retirement accounts every different service group gets. I just need to know what mine is. It's hard sometimes and this was five years ago.

Moderator: Does anybody disagree or agree with that sentiment that you don't want to see everyone's options and all the different types of information out there. You just want to see what's appropriate for you?

Participant 4: Yes.

Participant 2: The biggest barrier with retirement stuff for me is always okay you just gave me too much. I can't process it so I'm going to do nothing and put it away in my drawer and someday. When is this someday that I'm going to want to look at it, I don't know. Just tell me what I need to do give me three paths. Give me a Buzzfeed quiz. If this then you go do this. Just help me, make it tangible.

Participant 6: That's true. I'm thinking when you enter a new work place and you get your benefits. All your health, your dental, whatever. It seems like it's easy to say I want this health plan is going to work for me. Then you get to the retirement and it's like WHOA! I have no idea. What's the minimum? Got it.

Moderator: Does anybody have any additional comments?

Participant 5: I'm going to learn more about retirement after this.

Moderator: Okay [laughter] that's good.

Participant 2: I was going to say. I think part of it is nobody our generation talks about this in never conversation. I've never had a normal talk with a friend about retirement. This taught me a lot. USAA bank, I mean.

Participant 4: We have notes.

Moderator: Interaction. Word of mouth that's important.

Participant 2: I guess.

Participant 3: Yeah.

Participant 1: It's not a frequent topic of conversation.

Participant 6: But it's different to talk amongst your friends like that. Than to have some I don't know. To bring up conversation with some representative from a company. It's almost like the communications need to be more grass-root. Like I heard from a friend, from a friend, from a friend. That this worked for them or that this is good.

Moderator: When all this talk about hearing from friends what to do. Do you ever get concerned that they have no idea what they're talking about?

Participant 6: I don't think that. You must say you're not telling me what to do. Go look it up for yourself.

Participant 2: I didn't learn that from friends I learned that from my dad who I trust. Explicitly with retirement.

Participant 6: Yeah it doesn't mean just because a friend says something just doesn't mean I'm going to do that. It's 'let me look into that option.'

Participant 3: It gives you broader awareness, what people are doing. You might be like that's absolutely not what I do, great. You think about, it is a different source of info. If me and my friends are texting all day if one of them was like do any of you have an IRA that would be so interesting. [laughter] I don't know we don't talk about that. Maybe I would learn something.

Moderator: Maybe Snapchat is appropriate then.

Participant 4: I think in our generation. Graduating in that time and seeing a lot of my parent's friends who were younger especially really bad. Hosed the economic crash. They had to put off retirement for a couple of years. Fortunately, my parents were really smart about a lot of their investments and they also own rental properties and all this other stuff they were able make income from. It's something we don't want to talk about it because we're terrified what the future is.

Participant 6: It's easier not to talk about it.

Participant 4: I've got to get through today.

Participant 2: Yeah. With my friend group it's not a topic of conversation. Anytime money comes up, everybody gets really quiet. They don't want to talk about.

Moderator: OK, thanks everyone.