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Using *Qualtrics* Web-based Research Survey Software for Undergraduate Research Projects in a Social-psychological Aspects of Clothing Course with Millennials

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Key words: Millennials, social-psychological aspects, technology

Background. University classrooms are populated by Millennials and generational theory offers insights on teaching them (Strauss & Howe, 2000; Wilson & Gerber, 2008). Generational theory holds that students learn best when faculty consider and adapt to salient characteristics of students' generation. Since today's freshmen were typically born in 1994, they grew up being Internet savvy. Millennials expect the world to be customizable and dynamic in terms of access to information (Sweeney, 2006). They expect communication and information to be accessible on-demand, which translates to facility with learning management systems that can be easily accessed for information posted online. Other traits of Millennials that impact college educators are that they expect more choices, they like experiential learning which provides feedback about what does and does not work, they are engaged in active learning, and they like to do things at their convenience (Sweeney, 2006). They are collaborative, group-oriented, and rely on peers for learning opportunities (McNeill, 2011; Strauss & Howe, 2000; Sweeney, 2006). Millennials are generally good students, are busy 24/7, have developed the ability to concentrate and multi-task (Strauss & Howe, 2000), and learn by doing, not by following directions (Sweeney, 2006).

While Millennials use technology and expect it from professors, faculty have not always embraced it. However, the 2012 ECAR Undergraduate Technology Survey shows that professors are now using more technology than in 2010 and students are eager for even more (Kolowich, 2012); 65% of students surveyed rated their professors as effective in the use of technology. As a way to (a) incorporate more technology into the classroom and (b) meet the educational needs of Millennials, students in an upper level UG Social-psych course were given the opportunity to use *Qualtrics* web-based survey software for a class project.

Description of teaching strategy. To leverage Millennials' willingness to collaborate and desire for active and experiential learning, groups of students are required to plan, develop, execute a group research project, and write it up; the course satisfies a university discovery learning requirement. Previously, some groups created research instruments using *Survey Monkey* or *Google.docs*, which are limited by length of instrument or security of data. While workable and preferable to paper instruments that have to be coded and entered, I decided to introduce the class to *Qualtrics*. Universities subscribe to *Qualtrics* for a fee and provide the software to faculty and students, who can freely create accounts and use its features which are exceptional; UG students can create professional instruments or experiments using the software.

To prepare students for using the software, I used class time to introduce *Qualtrics*; I prepared a presentation on its features which was also posted on the course website. Most student groups that used *Qualtrics* did so to conduct experiments; they uploaded visuals that varied the independent variable (usually an appearance manipulation, or an online shopping website manipulation) in their research.

Disadvantages. This was not a smooth experience because students typically have not used the software previously. There was a fair amount of trial and error. Some had trouble learning to upload images, probably because Millennials do not like to read and follow instructions. Students were encouraged to include me and other group members as owners of the research sites, so any of us could edit if there were difficulties (which there often were). To facilitate a positive research experience, I met with each of the student groups multiple times, sometimes during class and in my office. I had many emails about specific tasks; in some things the students were more software savvy than I, but not always.

Advantages. There are many advantages to using *Qualtrics*. *Qualtrics* has an online help feature, which responds to questions overnight. Other advantages to using *Qualtrics* are that data are entered by the research participants who receive a URL to the research site, logon, and complete the survey or dependent measures; there is no limit to the number of items in a survey, or to the number of stimuli students can upload for experiments. The researchers do not need to code the data. They can download data into an Excel file or analyze it within *Qualtrics*, which can perform *t*-tests and other simple analyses. Students like presenting statistical results in their final presentations because it makes their research more similar to what they have read for the course. Also it is easy for students to take screen shots of their stimuli or survey and include these in their research presentations. Usually there was at least one group member who fairly quickly learned to use the software and taught the others in the group.

The project works for several reasons: Millennials like having choices (about research strategy), they like the experiential active learning aspect of completing the project through which they learn what does and does not work, *Qualtrics* is convenient for them because they can go online anytime, and they like working in groups. Finally, the fact that the project is group-based also suits Millennials because they rely on peers for learning. The one thing I will do differently in the future is to provide a few research questions or hypotheses for students to select from because it was quite difficult for them to develop substantive ones in their groups, which is not too surprising since graduate students often have the same problem.

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