Research in Brief

Millennials’ Media Use: It Is a Matter of Time

Jacqueline Botterill, Marian Bredin, & Tim Dun
Brock University

ABSTRACT A transmedia diary tracked the media use of 388 Canadian university students, documenting the various ways they migrated across a range of devices and platforms as well as online and off-line sites during a typical day. The study suggests that media are used for entertainment, but also predominantly for socializing. The tendency to employ media for socializing is neither trivial nor alienating. It is a sign of a time when assembling sociality has become more challenging. Alan Warde’s theory of hypermodern times explains students’ dedication to “convenience technologies.” Media allow students to coordinate, stack, or shift their social interaction to better suit personal timetables. The analysis suggests that young people respond to new demands to socialize around the clock with escalating use of convenience technologies.

KEYWORDS Media diaries; Millennial generation; New media; Sociality; Time shifting

RÉSUMÉ Au moyen de carnets d’écoutes, les auteurs ont suivi l’utilisation des médias par 388 étudiants universitaires canadiens, recensant les diverses façons dont ceux-ci ont traversé une journée typique en recourant à maints dispositifs et plateformes pour visiter divers sites en ligne et hors ligne. Cette étude suggère que les étudiants, bien qu’ils cherchent à se divertir, utilisent surtout les médias pour socialiser. Leur recours aux médias à cette fin n’est ni triviale ni aliénante. Il reflète plutôt un environnement où il devient de plus en plus difficile de fixer des rendez-vous avec ses pairs. À cet égard, la théorie d’Alan Warde sur les temps hypermodernes contribue à expliquer l’engagement des étudiants avec leurs divers appareils. En effet, ces appareils permettent aux étudiants de coordonner, juxtaposer ou déplacer leurs interactions en fonction de leurs calendriers personnels. Cette analyse suggère que les jeunes répondent aux nouvelles exigences d’être disponibles tout le temps en augmentant leur recours aux technologies informatiques.

MOTS CLÉS Carnet d’écoute; Génération millénaire; Nouveaux médias; Socialité; Dénombre temporel

Jacqueline Botterill is Associate Professor in the Department of Communication, Popular Culture and Film at Brock University, 500 Glenridge Avenue, St. Catharines, ON, L2S 3A1. Email: jbotterill@brocku.ca. Marian Bredin is Associate Professor in the Department of Communication, Popular Culture and Film at Brock University, 500 Glenridge Avenue, St. Catharines, ON, L2S 3A1. Email: mbredin@brocku.ca. Tim Dun is Associate Professor in the Department of Communication, Popular Culture and Film at Brock University, 500 Glenridge Avenue, St. Catharines, ON, L2S 3A1. Email: tim.dun@brocku.ca.

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Defining millennials’ media use
Young adults’ dedication to digital technology is the subject of much debate and research interest, because youth are assumed to be barometers of broader shifts in the technological climate (Ofcom, 2013). Media researcher Amanda Lenhart and her colleagues (2010) note: “We often look to younger generations to see where technology use might be heading in the future” (p. 188). Their tendency to be early adopters of new technology leads Lenhart et al. (2010) to suggest that under-30s are the “vanguards of internet and wireless use” (p. 188). Many studies support this conclusion: the so-called millennial generation spends the most time using digital devices (e.g., computers, cell phones, and tablets). In a U.K. survey, forty percent of young respondents report that they would miss their cell phones most of all media—a level of technological attachment that distinguishes them from other groups (Ofcom, 2012). The growth of the wireless sector is often attributed to the affinity of 16-to-24-year-olds for interactive technologies as communication rather than information tools.

The question of why young adults use new media so intensively is answered in different ways. For the past 30 years, marketers of communication media have explained young people’s attachment as an embrace of the progressive potential that digital technology offers. An immensely successful 1984 commercial introduced the Apple Macintosh computer with a depiction of a bright, young, energetic, liberated woman hurling a sledgehammer at a screen broadcasting a male authority figure speaking in a monotone voice—a representation of a grey, monotonous media world. Ever since, advertising, public relations, and marketing spokespersons have circulated a vision of young digital artists, entrepreneurs, and hacktivists using media to creatively express themselves and explore novel ways to advance social innovation and justice. Audience researchers have had difficulty confirming this optimistic view of new technology in empirical studies. Digital Monets and Gandhis are as rare in this era as they were in non-digital times. The potential for global networks may be at the fingertips of young adults, but online socializing reinforces local peer groups instead of building international communities or active artistic and political networks (Buckingham, 2008, p. 14). Rather than commenting on political events, the majority of young adults chat with their friends; they read rather than write their own stories; they download rather than create and upload their own music (Giesler, 2006).

Socializing on new media platforms is much more ordinary than advertisers allow. Longtime youth media researcher David Buckingham (2008) stresses that young adults employ new digital media mostly for “mundane forms of communication and information retrieval” (p. 44). Mizuko Itō (2010) reports that young adults mainly “hang out,” “mess around,” and “geek out” online (p. 17). Throughout developed countries, studies confirm that the majority of young people’s online activity is spent in casual socialization: “Over half their time on computers is spent communicating with other people” (Ofcom, 2013, para. 7). In the U.S., 72 percent use social media (Lenhart, Madden, Smith, Purcell, Zickuhr, & Rainie, 2011). It is not easy to dismiss the importance of staying connected for the young. Close inspection by researchers reveals that these genres of experience are complex co-constructions with deep significance for the formation, reproduction, and adaptation of identities and culture (Lenhart et al.).
Young adults report that the connections they make through social media make them “feel good” (Madden, Lenhart, Cortesi, Gasser, Duggan, Smith, & Beaton, 2013, p. 185) more often than not.

Millennials build and partake in extensive digital social networks. Recent studies in both the U.S. and the U.K. have also found a widespread youthful interest in social media (Ofcom, 2012). In 2007, 30 percent of social network members accessed sites at least once a day; by 2010 this grew to 67 percent. Studies reported that on average, young people stayed in touch with 300 Facebook friends and followed 79 Twitter accounts (Lenhart et al., 2011). The 2014 Canadian-based Media Smarts survey of 5,000 students found a proliferation of mobile devices devoted almost entirely to social networking (Steeves, 2014). Acknowledging this increase in time spent “socializing,” Sherry Turkle (2012) wondered whether as Facebook friends grow, real friends diminish. New media, she argued, construct a space in which the young are alone together. Her interviewees reported that when social situations are really problematic or troubling, they turn to family members, not friends.

Other evidence suggests that the characterization of digital media bonds between young adults as weak and alienating may be a distortion in the way media are studied. Jay Gershuny (2003) advances the point by noting how methodology may shape disparate conclusions. Surveys employing unclear categories that are defined by researchers instead of participants, and that require participants to estimate the time and reason for media use long after it occurs, lack validity. Yet these studies consistently conclude that digital sociality is all encompassing and alienating. Media diary methods, in contrast, which construct categories with participants and enable the reporting of media activity closer to the time of use, reach different conclusions:

> When we do the measurements properly [by way of media diaries] in this way, the apparently negative effect of the web on sociability disappears. In fact ... some aspects of sociability may actually be enhanced by web-use (p. 24).

Researchers employing diaries find that talking remains the most common form of communication, and is highly valued (Baym, Zhang, & Lin, 2004; Mieczakowski & Clarkson, 2011). Media research that fails to measure face-to-face communication also tends to overestimate the reach and interest in media.

Whether members of the millennial generation are technological pioneers forging an artistic, revolutionary, globally cosmopolitan future, or whether they are digitally alienated from each other is a complex question that cannot be answered easily. But attending to trends in young people’s media use can help illuminate how this transitional cohort is navigating the media-saturated environment. Thus, our concern in this research project is to better understand the temporal patterns of media use in daily life, where an expansion of portable devices and traditional media compete for young people’s attention. While communication research tends to bifurcate online and off-line social networks, emerging audience research and everyday observation confirms that young adults construct their lives across them both. We argue that a transmedia research design is imperative to more fully capture the intricacies of contemporary communication environments.
Transmedia research: A novel perspective of millennial media use

Millennials’ media use is obscured by a lack of attention to transmedia. Major audience ratings services (e.g., Bureau of Broadcast Measurement and Nielsen) continue to focus on medium-specific data in analyzing the competition for audiences. The heightened attention to new media obscures the significant amounts of television that millennials continue to watch. Although the number of Canadians watching television on computers and mobile devices is increasing, “the national average number of hours spent in front of the television remains high and very stable. It increased slightly from 28 hours in 2009–2010 to 28.2 hours in 2011–2012” (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, 2012). In the U.K., 70 percent of the video watched is scheduled programming received on a living room television set in the evening. A transmedia perspective theorizes how small-screen activities occur side by side with traditional modes of television viewing and music programming. James Thickett, Director of Research for U.K. regulator Ofcom (2013), notes:

Our research shows that increasingly families are gathering in the living room to watch TV just as they were in the 1950s – but now delivered on bigger, wider and more sophisticated sets. Unlike the 1950s family, however, they are also doing their own thing. They are tweeting about a TV show, surfing the net or watching different content altogether on a tablet (para. 14).

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) new media project report on the changing broadcast market in Canada found Canadian trends similar to those of U.K. audiences. Canadians lived in what researchers called “digital homes” that included “television displays, home stereo components, media storage devices, personal video recorders, set top boxes, game consoles, computers, digital audio players, and other devices” (Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, 2008). Canadian millennials were more likely to engage with digital media than all other groups, with the exception of 12-to-19-year-olds.

The work of transmedia researchers is illuminating because it acknowledges that texts, narratives, stories, and promotion migrate across multiple media (Gray & Shockley, 2010; Jenkins, 2006). The Canadian Media Fund includes a transmedia toolkit to help Canadian media producers construct and market transmedia narratives. Still, to date, transmedia research has focused on the production and consumption of textual content. We are more interested in how and why young audiences migrate across and conjoin media devices and platforms in the performance of their daily lives. Our focus is on media uses and practices, not just texts.

Our work is based on approaches developed by international researchers. German researchers, Uwe Hasebrink and Jutta Popp (2006) were among the first to productively use the idea of “media repertoires” to trace how audiences employ multiple media in everyday life. Also inspiring are recent studies by the Pew Research Center in Washington, DC, that track how audiences construct themselves among an array of media devices. The U.K. media regulatory board, Ofcom, provides some of the most detailed studies of transmedia use. Employing a media diary method, U.K. researchers found that people on average engaged with some form of media seven hours a day. But measuring the growing amount of time spent using media was complicated by
the fact that many users employed more than one media device at a time. Computers attracted the greatest amount of concurrent media consumption (62%) and were frequently (37% of the time) used to coordinate the simultaneous reception of numerous media activities (Ofcom, 2013). Researchers reported: “The computer and the mobile phone are the two devices that tend to drive media multitasking as well as overall media consumption” (Ofcom, 2013, para. 14). This is the second implication of the transmedia paradigm—it pays attention to the growth of media multitasking, either concurrent or sequential.

Ofcom researchers suggested the need for new concepts to capture these changing transmedia practices. They measured media “meshing,” or situations in which people simultaneously use other devices to undertake media activity related to television programming (e.g., tweeting, texting, engaging in electronic voting, or searching for information about the show). Meshing was compared to media “stacking,” a practice in which other media were used to engage material unrelated to the television show. Within the entire population, media stacking was more common (59%) than meshing (25%); however, younger people engaged in significantly more media stacking, with 74 percent reporting using other media while watching television, and 44 percent engaging in media meshing. Young adults were the most likely to move between devices and use them simultaneously. The most common types of media stacking activity included “browsing internet, phone/voice/video, emailing, texting, social network—less common, shopping, music, watching AV on another device, reading” (Ofcom, 2013, para. 11).

Millennial media use: It is a matter of time
We view millennials as transmedia users who orchestrate multiple media activities and cultural forms on a number of devices at different moments of the day, sometimes simultaneously, to address a range of interests and routines. An obvious, yet profound point strikes us: the number of hours in a day has not changed, yet millennials appear to engage in more media experiences in time by stacking devices (Ofcom, 2013).

The work of British sociologist Alan Warde became a theoretical guide to analyze the data. Of his considerable œuvre, Warde’s 1999 article entitled “Convenience Food: Space and Timing,” which draws an essential link between time and convenience technologies, is key. Social research, popular press, and self-help literature commonly assert that developed societies are plagued with a time crisis. Warde agrees that time is an issue, but refuses to equate the feeling of time pressure with an actual loss of time. Relative to the past, the number of hours people work in and outside the home has decreased. People have more time; yet feel more time pressure than their historical counterparts. Warde unravels the time conundrum by focusing on a broad historical shift that fragmented the more widely shared social timetables of the past. To ground the present study, we include a brief summary of these historical developments.

For most of the twentieth century, the Fordist-inspired workday ran 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Monday to Friday. As Richard Sennett (2011) documents, people typically kept jobs longer. Shops tended to close on Sundays and holidays, for respite and in lingering homage to worship (Piore & Sabel, 1984). Although many subgroups were subject to different timetables, Warde asserts that the timing of work, shopping, and sleep was more collectively embedded. A common rhythm to the day made sociality
relatively easier. Time was also more taken for granted, less subject to reflection and the drive to maximize choice.

Around the 1970s a distinctive geopolitical economy emerged. Older alliances and economic strategies failed to produce growth for nations accustomed to it. In the U.S., U.K., and Canada a renewed economic liberalism emerged. By the 1980s, change was undertaken to increase productivity and profit (Bauman, 2000; Giddens, 1991; Lury, 2011). The preferred means to create economic growth included reduction of taxes and state provisions, privatization, low interest rates, and the marketing of debt and consumption. U.S. corporations cut costs by increased off-shore manufacturing. More flexible labour arrangements increased the numbers of those working at home, as freelancers, and on staggered work schedules (Harvey, 1989). These changes brought different expectations of availability, as workers had to be ready to network, seek new projects, and juggle potential opportunities at all times.

Martyn Lee (1993) notes how consumer culture was reborn in the 1990s. To increase commodity turnover and profit, a 24-hour, seven-day-a-week service infrastructure took shape. The spread of digital tagging of goods, telecommunication networks, and computer databases allowed commodities and consumers to be tracked in new ways. Businesses tapped foreign consumer markets and reached domestic markets with renewed vigour. The preferred tools included promotion and branding. All goods became stylized, heightening fashion cycles and compressing the time it took for goods to appear dated—and subsequently in need of change. Self-serve checkouts, bank machines, online shopping, and generous consumer credit collapsed the time between consumers’ intent to purchase and their ability to do so.

Warde (1999) focuses on how these changes in the systems of production and consumption fragmented time. The institutionalization of these changes called upon individuals to more fully reflect and maximize the productive use of their time. They inherited more personal responsibility over the timing of life. Thinking intently about time and its productive use causes stress, not lack of time itself. As personal timing replaced institutional timing, social alignment fragmented. For example, coordinating a Sunday family dinner became a challenge when one daughter was working at the mall from 4:00 p.m.–10:00 p.m., a son was watching prerecorded films at a friend’s house, dad, exhausted from a harried week, ordered takeaway food to buy some couch time, and mom refused to leave her desk until she caught up on work she missed Wednesday, when she took daughter number two to hockey camp. The desire to socialize remains; yet, it is more difficult to create, says Warde. Those with the greatest need to coordinate social time—the young and working women—also report the highest levels of time stress. They also multitask more and are particularly receptive to technology that helps them do so.

Warde argues that technology assumes a distinctive place in fragmented times. There are four aspects of Warde’s research that we feel can be applied to explore, and perhaps explain, our media diary study of millennials’ transmedia use. First, the link he draws between convenience technologies and time compression:

> Convenience increasingly involves appeal to a new way of conceptualising the manipulation and use of time. It speaks to the problem of living in a
social world where people in response to the feeling that they have insuffi-
cient time, set about trying to include more activities into the same
amount of time, by arranging or rearranging their sequence. This is about
timing rather than about time (p. 521).
Second, Warde’s concept of hypermodern time-shifting practices is directly relevant for
transmedia use, since it hypothesizes that technologies that permit reordering and
control of the sequence of communication or reception will be privileged. Warde notes,
for example, how email became preferred over voice telephone because email allows
users more control over the flow of conversation. The popularity of television recording
devices can be explained by the way in which they allowed audiences to time-shift the
television flow to better suit their own personal timetables: “It is the relaxation of con-
straints on the individual’s trajectory through time and space which is the principal
benefit of the hypermodern convenience item” (p. 521). Third, Warde speaks of tech-
nologies of discontinuity, using the example of how convenience foods allow for delay
and discontinuity through “modes of temporary storage” (p. 523), allowing for the in-
terruption of what would otherwise require a longer block of contiguous time. We will
query whether transmedia practices operate in similar ways. Are some media particu-
larly useful to storing, delaying, or allowing breaks in continuity?
Finally, Warde (1999) suggests that industrial imperatives of time management
have become personalized in the hypermodern era and relate to problems of social
synchronization (p. 524). Because people are not available for meals or socializing in
the right place at the right time, time is increasingly fragmented and they must “man-
age de-routinization.” We seek to tentatively explore whether a diary method can re-
veal anything about how young adults employ technology to construct social occasions
within a fragmented schedule of part-time work, studying, commuting, and multiple
social networks that are often in different locations.

Canadian transmedia research: Method
The study that follows provides a small-scale view of young Canadians’ transmedia
use. The empirical record of Canadian audiences is less clear than that of U.K. and U.S.
audiences. Canadian media audiences are relatively small in size, and their extensive
consumption of U.S. media products intertwines them into the U.S. media tracking
and marketing strategy. U.S. and U.K. audience data are frequently assumed to reflect
Canadians by default. So, too, can the distinctiveness of Canada be lost when applying
media theory developed elsewhere. We remain mindful that Warde’s theory of time
fragmentation may reflect U.K. and U.S. exceptionalism. The fragmentation of time
has been taken up unevenly. In France, meal times remain firmly in place. The Nordic
countries and Germany navigated late modern economic turmoil without cutting taxes
and social programs as severely as the U.K and the U.S, or similarly demanding higher
levels of labour flexibility. Workdays and employment tenure remain more stable in
these countries, with the troubling exception of migrant and immigrant workers, who
are frequently denied these labour rights. Thus, we consider the extent to which young
Canadians appear to be responding to time fragmentation in their media use. Are
young Canadians shaping distinctive transmedia habits to their U.S. and U.K. counter-
parts, and if so how? While extensive international comparisons are beyond the scope
of our preliminary analysis, our diary data provides an important benchmark for establishing the parameters of media use among Canadian millennials.

**Participants**

The participants in the study were undergraduate students from communication courses at a mid-sized university in Ontario. A total of 388 students completed diaries on two different dates, Wednesday, March 28, 2012, and Thursday, September 20, 2012. The majority (204) of participants were female. Male participants totalled 177, leaving seven who did not indicate their sex. The average age was 19.20 years (SD = 2.55), and most participants (76.8%) were between the ages of 18–20. No other demographic data were collected.

**Procedure**

To recruit volunteers, a trained undergraduate student visited large communication courses to describe the study and the data gathering process. The bulk of participants (354) were members of a required first-year course and received course credit in exchange for completing a diary. The remaining volunteers were in second-year or higher courses and did not receive credit for participating. However, all participants were entered into a random draw for a prize.

A pen-and-paper diary was designed to track young adults’ media use over one calendar day. Elizabeth Vandewater and Sook-Jung Lee (2009), in their review of time-use studies, laud the superiority of a diary method over the more common single recall questions, and even over tracking media use through technological monitors. We sought to limit the disruptive aspects of the instrument and minimize halo effect by adapting a diary developed by the Kaiser Family Foundation (2005). We subsequently tested the instrument with 100 undergraduate communication studies students and further refined the diary. To enhance the accuracy of participants’ input, we limited the time measuring to a single day.

The five-page diaries repeated the same five questions for each of the 32 half-hour periods through the day, from 8:00 am to midnight. We asked 1) What was your main media during this half hour? 2) Why were you using the main media? 3) Number of minutes you used the main media during this half hour? 4) What else were you doing? 5) Where were you? All items had closed responses, as described below. The instrument included a detachable consent form describing the study, the anonymity of the data, and outlining participants’ rights.

All student participants completed diaries on the same days, during two rounds of data collection, in March and September 2012. On both the March and September data collection dates, diaries were completed on a Wednesday while classes were in session. Research assistants collected completed diaries on the day after participants tracked their media use, separating a signed consent form with participant information from the diary itself. Thus, when we received the diaries, the data were anonymous. All data collection and analysis complied fully with expectations for ethical research.
**Data analysis**

Undergraduate research assistants entered diary data into a statistical program (SPSS). To eliminate errors, two different assistants entered the same data from a random sample of 10 percent of the diaries, and we reviewed these duplicate entries to find and correct mistakes.

**Findings**

*Daily patterns of use*

For many participants, media use began slowly after waking. As Figure 1 indicates, almost 50% of the sample responded “none” or no main media during the morning period. Participants experienced the period between 8:00 a.m. to roughly 11:00 a.m. as relatively quiet for media use—perhaps they slept in or eased into the day, limiting both their social contacts and their entertainment. But media use spiked dramatically in the late morning (11:00 a.m.), and remained high into the late evening hours, peaking at 9:00 p.m. Media use did not taper off, and did not calm in the evening as dramatically as the morning.

![Figure 1: Ranking of main media use during the day](image)

Overall, the most common main media uses reported were engaging with digital content—on mobile phones or computers—watching television, and listening to music. As Figure 1 demonstrates, mobile media were used consistently throughout the day. Computer use, in contrast, was concentrated in the late morning to early evening...
hours. Students appear to live within a compressed workday. Participants made time for television, but tended to watch it in the evening at home. Listening to music was also more common in the evening. Finding that university students read print material, an activity that consistently ranked sixth among 12 main media activities, was less surprising than their low levels of video and computer gaming. Once touted as a burgeoning aspect of the media industry, gaming failed to rank highly among participants’ main media activities.

*Transmedia traffic extends beyond traditional rush hour*

Participants are co-media users, with 92 percent of the sample reporting that they cycled or used at least two media during a 30-minute period. Some participants switched between as many as eight media devices in a 30-minute period. During dinnertime and into the evening, transmedia stacking activity continued but the numbers of devices reduced slightly. Media accompanied meal times, particularly lunch, and study time.

We also calculated the average number of secondary media undertaken with each of the 12 main media (see Figure 2). This analysis demonstrated that watching computer content, browsing the Web, and using social media conjoined with the largest number of other media activity, confirming the findings of U.K. researchers. Viewing computer content, browsing the Web, and engaging social media may allow easier integration with other activities than flow media, such as television, or immersive media (e.g., video games). Printed material appeared with, on average, two other media in a half-hour period, suggesting distracted reading. Computer gaming, which was cycled with the least number of other media, often links a player to other players, providing a platform for interactive socialization. Our analysis suggests that the need for cell phones may be displaced.

![Figure 2: Quantity of secondary media](image-url)
Those activities most likely to be cycled with main media include texting, talking, and social media—all social activities. Socializing was accorded the license to intrude, displace, augment, or supplement other activity, but only when users could control or manage the disruption. Warde’s (1999) theory would suggest that text messages are preferred because they can be picked up when convenient. Social media can be engaged when time allows and if more interesting activities are unavailable. Voice phone calls, in contrast, which demand immediate response and adherence to the caller’s timetable, ranked low among the secondary activities reported, as documented in Figure 3. Email may lack popularity for the opposite reason, in that it fails to allow for as rapid or time-compressed exchanges as texting.

Figure 3: Secondary tasks, by time of day

Transmedia: Where and why?
Media were utilized in different locations for different reasons. Overall, main media was devoted to entertainment, socializing, and education, more than for self-improvement, self-expression, or play. Media socializing was constant through the day. Media were more likely devoted to education in the mornings and afternoons and to entertainment in the evening.
Media are employed in numerous spaces, yet participants reported the lowest media use in the workplace. When used on paid work time, media were devoted to work-related activities such as learning or information gathering. As detailed in Figure 4, the most intensive media activity occurred in domestic spheres including bedrooms, other rooms of the home, and friends’ homes. Millennials also used media in public spaces. One-third of participants’ main media activity took place at the university. Students read and used computers to learn and gather information on campus. Participants reported an equal likelihood of using media devices at the university to pursue amusement and to socialize. Media accompanied participants during their commutes and into commercial spaces. Females spent more time using media in cafés, restaurants, and bars than men (99% for female vs. 64% for males) and did so most in the evening. While in public, media were used mostly for socializing.

![Figure 4: Media location, by time of day](image)

**Conclusion**

Our study found that young Canadian adults move across many devices during their day. Our analysis suggests that millennials use multiple media platforms to sequence and compress activities. Young people’s transmedia activities fill their waking hours. Millennials shaped a truncated workday, in which early morning media activity gave way to intensive transmedia activities from late morning into the evening.

Warde’s (1999) theory of hypermodern time encourages us to view these patterns in relation to a more general state of time fragmentation. *Time-shifting devices* allow
for more “autonomous organization of the personal schedule” (p. 522), reallocation of time, and reordering of sequential use of time. Our data show young adults making multiple uses of media in formerly constrained times and spaces, for example socializing or being entertained while at school or during paid work, studying while at home or in public spaces, and private online socializing in public social spaces. Transmedia allow for the reorganization of work/study/social life/entertainment around a fragmented set of personal schedules. Although media devices carried work into non-work environments, this was not reciprocated, as participants often avoided media use for entertainment and personal socializing while at work.

Like their U.K. and U.S. peers, Canadian young adults made time for television at home in the evening. Although television was primarily understood as a medium for entertainment, participants also said they employed it for socializing. A fuller exploration of where young people draw the line between entertainment and socializing might be instructive. Although speculative, perhaps the television programming that has thrived in the digital age—sporting events, awards shows, popular drama—has done so partially because of the sense of timing it enforces and socialization it facilitates. Live television gives audiences knowledge of the winners and plot twists as they happen. This time-sensitive information contributes to social or cultural capital by placing the timely individual in the know.

Technologies of discontinuity may help to explain the popularity of texting, mobile content, and social media found in our study. These media enable individuals to reschedule, suspend, or delay a response. Students may not be evading sociality, but shifting it to a more agreeable time. These devices also enable the arrangement of real-time connections across widely dispersed networks of friends and family, as other studies suggest (e.g., Baym et al., 2004). Participants’ interest in socialization surpassed their use of media for individualized pursuits such as self-expression, self-improvement, or competitive game play. The extensive use of social media by millennials is a symptom of the challenge of social synchronization in fragmented times. Because people are not available for meals or for socializing in the same place and hour, time is increasingly fragmented. Ironically, using personalized media to manage de-routinization further fragments social routines.

Panning back from this small study, several limitations come to light. Our participants were communication studies undergraduates, who may differ in meaningful ways from other millennials. Although the single-day diary has advantages, there may be unique aspects to the particular day that could affect the results. Further, Warde (1999) argues that social synchronization is more difficult for some groups than others. The very young, very old, and disadvantaged more frequently have to adhere to timetables set by others. The inability to manipulate time to maximum advantage has the potential to lead to marginalization in a competitive culture. Better-educated, wealthier groups have greater control over time fragmentation. The extent of time-space coordination difficulties “will be affected by social structural characteristics like household composition, particularly perhaps the presence of children, and employment obligations, and is likely to vary along lines of class, gender and ethnicity” (p. 526). Our data suggest that young adults may use transmedia practices to manage time for work,
school, family, social life, and leisure activities. We are observing relatively privileged university students, and not accounting for differences of ethnicity. Therefore, future research might want to extend the diary study to other social groups, non-students, families, members of minority communities, or older populations.

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