

Economy by the millennials

I. Discuss in pairs.

1. How often do you buy takeaway coffee? Where? How much is it?
2. Have you ever considered how much it costs per month?

II. What is *the avocado toast index*? Read the text to find out, then answer the questions about it.

If you're under 35, you're a millennial. Recent culinary trends suggest that, while reading this, you might have an overpriced latte in one hand, and a fancy piece of toast smothered with avocados in the other. And some suggest that you'd rather waste your money on an Instagrammable breakfast than make sensible investments like buying a house. Well, so says conventional grumpy wisdom, most recently articulated by Australian tycoon Tim Gurner, who made international headlines this month for blasting young home buyers for their spending habits.

The 35-year-old property developer told the Australian edition of *60 Minutes* that when he was saving for his first home, he "wasn't buying smashed avocado for \$19 and four coffees at \$4 each". He generated a flurry of debate, but also an interesting question: roughly how many pieces of avocado toast would it actually take to afford a home?

Adapted from <http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20170530-the-avocado-toast-index-how-many-breakfasts-to-buy-a-house>

1. What does the author suggest about the habits of the millennials? Do you agree?
2. What is 'an Instagrammable breakfast'? Do you know anyone who posts such things?

III. Look at the infographics below and discuss.

1. What would be the result (i.e. the number of coffees and years) in Poland?
2. Can you actually save up for a flat just by giving up meals in fancy restaurants?
3. Is the idea of saving this way more attractive in some places than in others?



<http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20170530-the-avocado-toast-index-how-many-breakfasts-to-buy-a-house>

IV. What are the millennials like in the workplace? Answer the following questions in pairs (write 1 or 2 words only), then watch the beginning of the TED talk and check your ideas.

1. What is the millennials' motto?
.....
2. What is the ideal career path for them?
.....
3. Who is NOT the role model for them (contrary to what people over 35 might think)?
.....
4. What do they expect from a job?
.....

Find the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VkVzIIVciE> (0-5:48)

V. Discuss.

1. Do you agree with the speaker? Why (not)?
2. What motivates you in your work?

VI. Listen to a part of the song and read the lyrics, then answer the questions.

1. What is it about? Why is it so popular?
2. How can it be connected with economy?
3. What can Spotify tell us about economy?

The club isn't the best place to find a lover
So the bar is where I go
Me and my friends at the table doing shots
Drinking fast and then we talk slow
Come over and start up a conversation with just me
And trust me I'll give it a chance now
Take my hand, stop, put Van the Man on the jukebox
And then we start to dance, and now I'm singing (...)

One week in we let the story begin
We're going out on our first date
You and me are thrifty, so go all you can eat
Fill up your bag and I fill up a plate
We talk for hours and hours about the sweet and the sour
And how your family is doing okay.

- Ed Sheeran, *Shape of You*

VII. Read the article on the next page and choose the best alternative title for it.

- a) Understanding the economy in a 21st century way.
- b) How Spotify algorithms can be used.
- c) What music can tell you about society.

(1) It is doubtful that Ed Sheeran and his song-writing partners were thinking about the global economy when writing these lyrics from the song *Shape of You*. However, as the most played song to date on music streaming service Spotify, researchers and policy makers are beginning to think it's data like this that can give a valuable insight into the mood – and therefore behaviour – of consumers. Andy Haldane, the Bank of England's chief economist, who is tasked with monitoring the country's economic data, says that if economists want to understand what is happening, they should focus on new areas of "big data" alongside more traditional sources.

(2) He claims that "it is estimated that 90% of all data ever created occurred in the past two years. A good chunk has come courtesy of social media. Capturing people's true sentiments and preferences is devilishly difficult. Traditional surveys of market participants or the general public tend to be biased in their sampling and framed in their responses. The BBC's economics editor Kamal Ahmed adds, "We ask people on a scale of one to 10 how do you feel about X, Y and Z, and that clashes with how people behave. Behavioural economics has come much more into the discipline of economics. Understanding how economies operate is much more about how we feel rather than what we think we are doing."

(3) This is where music choices come in. Researchers at Claremont Graduate University took data from 2000 to 2016 and were able to categorise songs by labels such as energy, danceability, loudness and valence (positivity or negativity) via Spotify Developer API, which creates algorithms in order to suggest songs, and personalised playlist to users. The results showed that the positivity and energy of the most popular songs has been falling since 2000, while the tempo and loudness has remained stable. Surprisingly, danceability seems to be on the up. They were also able to analyse song lyrics in order to categorise songs into eight sentiments: joy, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, surprise, trust and anticipation. In looking at the songs most popular during the difficult global financial crisis of 2008, they found that songs with lyrics associated with anticipation, disgust, sadness, fear and anger peaked in popularity from 2008 to 2009 and then began to fall after that date. According to the research, "these plots indicate that individuals are projecting their current states of mind into the music they choose to listen to."

(4) "And why stop at music?" asks Haldane. "People's tastes in books, TV and radio may also offer a window on their soul. So too might their taste in games." So, what can the music we stream and the pop cultural preference reveal about our consumer behaviour? The top three tunes in 2017 were Ed Sheeran's *Shape of You*, *Despacito* by Luis Fonsi featuring Daddy Yankee and Justin Bieber, and *Something Like This* by the Chainsmokers featuring Coldplay. Uptempo and poppy – does this mean the economy is in a good state given that science has found the reverse to be true, that we tend to listen to melancholy music when we are feeling sad?

(5) Kamal Ahmed says we cannot jump to conclusions just yet as the world is still changing at a rapid rate. He warns that the old adage that "correlation does not imply" remains. "Finding a correlation in a year may not be true in five years' time so you have to be very careful," he says. "You can almost find anything if you look hard enough because there are billions of bits of data produced every single day but it's important that we understand sentiment and about the economy in a slightly more 21st-Century way."

Adapted from: <http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20180508-what-can-spotify-tell-us-about-the-economy>

VIII. Answer the questions.

1. Why is the song *Shape of You* used as an example?
2. Why are the results of traditional surveys unreliable?
3. What are the two ways in which researchers categorise songs?
4. What were the dominant feelings in the most popular songs of 2008-2009? Why?
5. What else can be used as a reflection of the country's economy?
6. What does Kamal Ahmed think about using pop culture to analyse economy?

IX. Find the words or expressions in the text that match the following definitions.

- a) understanding the character of something (para. 1) -
- b) thanks to (para. 2) -
- c) interpreting, defining, describing (para. 2) -
- d) one-sided, partial, unfair, narrow (para. 2) -
- e) be growing, be increasing (para. 3) -
- f) reached the top (para. 3) -
- g) casting, throwing onto something (para. 3) -
- h) energetic, lively (para. 4) -
- i) form opinions hastily, without analysing all of the data (para. 5) -
- j) a saying, folk wisdom (para. 5) -

X. Use five of the words or expressions from ex. 9 to fill in the gaps in the following sentences.

- 1. Beyonce performed her new single with a bouncy, energy.
- 2. You should always remember the old – ‘Be careful what you wish for.’
- 3. Ernest Hemingway managed to the typical fears and anxieties of his times in his novels.
- 4. We could illustrate the talk with his music the AMC studio.
- 5. His report is so that we can’t use it as an objective source of information.

XI. Discuss in pairs.

Which song/TV show/game would you use to illustrate the economic situation this year? Why?

II. What is *the avocado toast index*? Read the text to find out, then answer the questions about it.

The avocado toast index – the calculation showing how much money people waste on fancy meals and how many years it would take to save that money in order to afford a deposit for a flat

1. What does the author suggest about the habits of the millennials? Do you agree?
Millennials like having fancy meals and are always seen with a takeaway coffee – both are a waste of money which could be better invested.
2. What is 'an Instagrammable breakfast'? Do you know anyone who posts such things?
It's a meal that looks so delicious that you take a picture of it and post it on your social media before taking the first bite.

III. Look at the infographics below and discuss.

1. What would be the result (i.e. the number of coffees and years) in Poland?
The result will be different depending on the coffee (e.g. Starbucks or Awitex?) and the city (different property prices). Just to simplify the calculation we can assume that:
 - an average coffee costs 10zł,
 - an average flat in Krakow costs 300,000zł
 - the deposit is typically 20% (=60,000zł)
 - $60,000 : (365 \text{ days} \times 10\text{zł}) = \underline{\underline{16.5 \text{ years}}}$
2. Can you actually save up for a flat just by giving up meals in fancy restaurants?
(Students' own answers.)
3. Is the idea of saving this way more attractive in some places than in others?
(Students' own answers.)

IV. What are the millennials like in the workplace? Answer the following questions in pairs (write 1 or 2 words only), then watch the beginning of the TED talk and check your ideas.

1. What is the millennials' motto?
YOLO (= You Only Live Once)
2. What is the ideal career path for them?
Own business // entrepreneur
3. Who is NOT the role model for them (contrary to what people over 35 might think)?
Mark Zuckerberg
4. What do they expect from a job?
Challenge

Find the video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-VkVzIIVciE> (0-5:48)

VII. Read the article on the next page and choose the best alternative title for it.

- a) Understanding the economy in a 21st century way.

VIII. Answer the questions.

1. Why is the song *Shape of You* used as an example?
Some economists think that analyzing pop culture (Ed Sheeran's song was the most popular one on Spotify ever) can help us understand the global economy.
2. Why are the results of traditional surveys unreliable?
They only show a limited number of responses, the answers are mostly imposed (yes/no, A/B/C/D etc) and people hardly ever tell the truth in them – they usually mention the thing they SHOULD do, not what they actually do.
3. What are the two ways in which researchers categorise songs?
*a) by their energy, danceability, loudness and valence
b) on the basis of the lyrics (joy, sadness, anger, fear, disgust, surprise, trust, anticipation)*
4. What were the dominant feelings in the most popular songs of 2008-2009? Why?
Rather negative ones: anticipation, sadness, disgust, fear and anger – because of the economic crisis.
5. What else can be used as a reflection of the country's economy?
Books, TV, radio, games.
6. What does Kamal Ahmed think about using pop culture to analyse economy?
We should be careful before we form any conclusions, as it is only a small portion of all the (economic) data.

IX. Find the words or expressions in the text that match the following definitions.

- a) understanding the character of something (para. 1) – insight into
- b) thanks to (para. 2) – courtesy of
- c) interpreting, defining, describing (para. 2) – capturing
- d) one-sided, partial, unfair, narrow (para. 2) – biased
- e) be growing, be increasing (para. 3) – be on the up
- f) reached the top (para. 3) – peaked
- g) casting, throwing onto something (para. 3) – projecting
- h) energetic, lively (para. 4) – poppy
- i) form opinions hastily, without analysing all of the data (para. 5) – jump to conclusions
- j) a saying, folk wisdom (para. 5) – adage

X. Use five of the words or expressions from ex. 9 to fill in the gaps in the following sentences.

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3. Ernest Hemingway managed to capture the typical fears and anxieties of his times in his novels.
4. We could illustrate the talk with his music courtesy of the AMC studio.
5. His report is so biased that we can't use it as an objective source of information.