

**GENERATIONAL SOCIAL MEDIA: HOW SOCIAL
MEDIA INFLUENCES THE ONLINE AND IN-PERSON
RELATIONSHIPS OF GEN X, GEN Y AND GEN Z**

Honors Thesis

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Abstract

For my Honors thesis, I wanted to analyze the way Generations X, Y and Z interacted with social media and new technology and how it influences their online and social relationships. To study this, I researched previous works that discussed the relationships that each generation had with social media and new technology (such as Alexa and smartphones). After my research was complete, I created my hypothesis that Generation Z, the youngest generation, is the best equipped to navigate social media and technology and can build stronger relationships online but lack the social skills that the other generations have, making it harder to read in-person social cues. To find out if my hypothesis is correct, I conducted a series of interviews with members from each generation and I posted an online survey for my personal Facebook friends to take about the subject. I asked one person from each generation about their experiences using social media and if they noticed their social skills changing because of their use of social media. With these results, I hoped to find that Generation Z is the generation that uses social media the most and the have superior skills to navigate the online world, but they struggle to communicate efficiently in-person.

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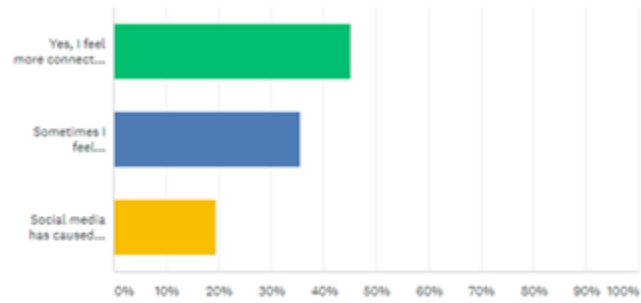
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Figures and Tables

Figure 1-page 25

Do you feel more or less connected to the people around you with social media?

Answered: 31 Skipped: 0



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Yes, I feel more connected with my friends and family because of social media	45.16% 14
▼ Sometimes I feel disconnect, but social media isn't completely to blame	35.48% 11
▼ Social media has caused greater disconnect to the people around me	19.35% 6
TOTAL	31

Introduction

Generational Social Media: How Social Media Influences the Online and In-Person Relationships of Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z

Social media was introduced over twenty years ago and has developed into one of the main ways the world communicates with everyone. The purpose of social media is to connect with friends and family around the world and share information and pictures via that website or app. In recent years, social media has taken off into the fast paced world and has adapted to changes, creating faster and easier ways to share information with friends and followers. There are currently three main generations who use social media apps and websites frequently and as a main source of communication. These three generations are Generation X, born 1965-1976, Generation Y, born 1977-1994, and Generation Z, born 1995-2010. Over the past decade, social media has become a major vehicle of communication and a platform for self-expression for people of all ages. “Some 88% of 18- to 29-year-olds indicate that they use any form of social media. That share falls to 78% among those ages 30 to 49, to 64% among those ages 50 to 64 and to 37% among Americans 65 and older” (Smith, Anderson, 2018). However, it is Generation Z, or Gen Z, who is the most prominent demographic on social media and can navigate the digital world with more skills than their older family members.

“Generation X’ers are trying to adapt, many have Facebook, a few have Instagram and/or Twitter, but sometimes it's a guessing game as to what they are doing, their IT Help Desk is their kids. This is completely not the case when it comes to Generation Z. Our world practically revolves around Facebook, Twitter, Instagram,

Snapchat, Pinterest, YouTube, Tumblr, and so many other social media platforms.

However, it's not just the time we spend using them that sets us apart, it's also HOW we use them." (Conveyance, 2019)

Even though Gen Z-ers are the ones who are able to navigate the online community better than their older siblings or parents, it also means that they are the ones who show a lack of traditional social skills that Gen X and Gen Y members are better at expressing. Gen Z-ers are more susceptible to social anxieties, communication issues, and feeling as if they are more isolated from their peers. "While face-to-face social connectedness is strongly associated with well-being, it's not clear what happens when those interactions happen virtually" (Hobson, 2017). The connecting factor could be that they are the generation who uses social media platforms to express their emotions and build connections, but all the while losing the in-person connections they need to function properly in society.

To test to see if this hypothesis was true, a series of interviews occurred with one member from each generation answering questions about how social media has affected or influenced the way they carry out their in-person and online relationships. In addition to the in-person interviews, an online survey was released on my personal Facebook account where anyone who was my "friend" could participate. The survey asked general questions about how social media has affected the three main generations. The goal was to see if Generation Z-ers are truly the best equipped to adapt to the ever-changing digital world and build relationships online but have greater difficulty building and maintaining relationships in the physical world.

Literature Review

Generation X and Social Media

Gen X, those who were born 1965-1976, are the prominent “older” generation that is active on social media. “Social networking use among internet users ages 50 and older has nearly doubled from 22% to 42% over the past year”(Madden, 2010). Many Gen X-ers use various forms of social media and digital communication to keep up with their friends and relatives; many of which are also part of Gen X or younger. It has been found that emailing stays the primary communication device that this generation uses, but many are using popular social networks to help maintain their connections even better (Madden, 2010).

About 76% of Gen Xers spend the majority of their days on their smartphones using social media platforms or online shopping (Anderson, Perrin, 2017). The possible reasoning behind why so many Gen X-ers are using social media platforms is because many of their young family members are active online and they know that the easiest and most effective way to reach their loved ones is through social media platforms.

“There are few other spaces—online or offline—where tweens, teens, sandwich generation members, grandparents, friends and neighbors regularly intersect and communicate across the same network. Photos, videos and updates shared on a daily basis can provide a valuable connection to faraway family and friends who are tied together in a variety of ways. The children and grandchildren of older adults are documenting many aspects of their lives through social media, and these are also

becoming popular spaces for professional networking, continuing education, and political participation” (Madden, 2010).

This generation heavily utilize mobile internet connections, in 2016, mobile app users aged 35-40 used social media apps for an average of 80 hours per month (Gordon, 2014). In 2017, 80% of Gen Xers were on Facebook and Twitter but only half of them had active accounts (Bose, 2017). Facebook has been found to be the most popular and most used social media platform by Generation X. Facebook is the social network with the highest reach for Gen Xers with 84% of the generation being active on the platform in 2016 (Gordon, 2014). “If you look at statistics on Web use over the past two decades, you see that the average adult has spent more time online than the average kid” (Carr, 2011) The other social media network that this generation is often found on is Instagram, but Facebook is the platform that Gen Xers are found most frequently participating on.

Some trends that have been found with Gen X social media users is their consumption online news and videos. Many individuals in this generation claim that digital “fake news” is to blame for incivility of society and the credibility of the media. Often, many Gen Xers are quick to say that social media is ruining the youth and the view on a variety of topics including politics and climate change. However, a recent study has shown that older generations, such as Gen X, are guilty of spreading and sharing the most fake news out of all of the generations online. “11 percent of users older than 65 shared a hoax, while just 3 percent of users 18 to 29 did. Facebook users ages 65 and older shared more than twice as many fake news articles than the next-oldest age group of 45 to 65, and nearly seven times as many fake news articles as the

youngest age group (18 to 29)” (Newton, 2019). Fake news is just one of the worries that Gen Xers have for social media use, the bigger concern is the lack of social interactions off-screen that may occur with social media use.

Social media has been a useful tool for Generation X to communicate and contact family and friends whom they may have lost contact with over the years. However, many older people are beginning to see a change in the way they are interacting offline with social media influencing their conversations and their participation in off-screen interactions. Gen X has anxieties and fears that social media may be moving too fast for them to keep up with, but they are also concerned that their children and grandchildren are being negatively affected by social media. “Adults older than 30 reported lower well-being the more social media sites they log onto. Additionally, more social media for 30+ increased anxiety” (Banks, 2018).

Generation Xers feel as if technology and social media sites are consuming much of their children's and grandchildren's attention, and they are no longer able to “live in the moment” with them without Snapchatting or posting online. Social media, to older generations, is more of a convenience and not quite as a necessity as their younger generational cohorts view it. Gen X are more interested in using social media to converse online with friends, share family photos or possibly participate in political conversations in chat rooms or posts. However they believe they are able to “unplug” and carry-on in-person conversations and interactions with ease. Social media and advancing technologies have been part of the way society has been moving, so naturally older generations are willing to adapt to new trends and communication techniques to stay connected with the rest of the world. Putting aside their fears of fake

news and privacy issues, Generation X is still the generation that is using Facebook at a higher rate than the younger generations. Regardless of their feelings towards the younger generation's social media use and the effect it has on their face-to-face interactions, they are still present online and contributing to the changing social communication of the world.

Generation Y and Social Media Use

Generation Y, aka Millennials, are born 1977-1994 and are considered to be the original "digital natives" of the online world. Millennials are the ones who introduced creating digital works and publishing new mediums online to not only share information but to create their own original content and publish them in the digital sphere. "Most Generation Y users use social media to interact with others, and prefer social media to more traditional methods of communication. Users create content as well as consume it, unlike older generations who prefer to browse" (Bolten et. al, 2013). What separates this generation from the others is that Millennials were the ones who experimented with the possibilities of what the Internet and social media could do for them. "Social media users 18 to 34 years old are more likely than older age groups to prefer social media for interactions with acquaintances, friends and family. They are also more likely to value others' opinions in social media and to feel important when they provide feedback about the brands or products they use" (Bolten et al, 2013). However, with this extensive use of social media and technology to get ahead in life and navigate the world around, Millennials have been seen as the narcissistic and egotistical generation...Excessive use of technology and social media has also caused

them rely on the Internet and technology to support their social interactions and also aid them in social spheres. However, they still carry the important skills of face-to-face communication, so they are not completely lost. Often times, they look down on Generation Z as the generation who is completely reliant on technology and social media, while their own generation is able to balance both forms of communication. Nonetheless, through creative, social and professional use, Millennials helped pave the way for social media trends and Internet culture.

When the first social networking sites were introduced in the late 1990's, Millennials were in middle school or high school, making them the youngest consumers of new wave media of the time. As time went on, social media became an important aspect of socializing with their peers and building relationships online were just as crucial to building relationships in person. Nowadays, Millennials are the mid-twenties to early -thirty year olds who have changed the way that social media is consumed and used in both professional and personal realms. When it comes to a social media platform, Millennials are open to using almost all of the popular ones; Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Snapchat. Even though Facebook is seen as a "dying" platform to Millennials and Generation Z, Millennials see the professional use of Facebook. Considering how "everyone" has a Facebook account, employers can utilize this social media platform to look at applicant's' personal pages and see whether they are the right fit for the company. Facebook no longer is a place for posting pictures of parties or tailgates for Millennials, it's seen as a "hip" LinkedIn where you can be both professional and personal without crossing too deeply into either sphere. " Social networks such as Facebook can boost young people's social capital because their

identities are shaped by what they share about themselves and, in turn, what others share and say about them” (BOLTON, R.N. ... et al, 2013). Millennials seem to use Facebook as more of a platform to keep updated on news and events happening globally or locally, in addition to just keeping up with their friends. “Fully 57 percent of Millennials who get news from Facebook do so at least once a day (including 44 percent who say at least several times a day)” (American Press Institute, 2015). Facebook may dominate the way Generations X and Y obtain information and keep up with friends, but Millennials branch out into other social media platforms and typically don’t stick to just one.

As fun as harmlessly posting online can be, recent studies show that Millennials are susceptible to social media addictions and increased cases of narcissism. “Social media is a big deal for them; it is a lifeline to the outside world. The harm lies in their change in behaviour. Their addiction means spending increasing amount of time online to produce the same pleasurable effect, and it means social media is the main activity they engage in above all others” (Rao, 2017). Social media has not only transformed into a tool for Millennials to express themselves, but it also has become the center of many of their lives. Feeling the need to be connected to their mobile devices to keep up with what is happening in world, to their friends, or to just participate in a trend has come to dominate the lives of many Millennials. In order to feel fulfilled by their online communities, some extreme cases of social media addiction in Millennials have caused sleep deprivation, depression, anxiety and also narcissistic qualities. “A recent study found higher narcissism (an exaggerated self-image of intelligence, academic reputation or attractiveness) in millennial college students, compared with previous

generations. This does not bode well for a society where self-reflection is key to making informed and balanced decisions” (Rao, 2017). Not only are Generation Y the generation who first began to show signs of social media addiction, but their long-term use of these platforms have led to serious changes within society and has created the foundation for Generation Z to learn from/ follow. “There is evidence of negative long-term consequences for society arising from Gen Y’s social media use, such as a deterioration of civic engagement, a loss of privacy and public safety, and an increase in cyber-crime. Gen Y’s use of social media may be leading to changes in social norms and behavior at the societal level in domains such as civic and political engagement, privacy and public safety”(BOLTON, R.N. ... et al, 2013). Millennials, being the oldest “digital natives” have been the so called “guinea pigs” for what social media can do for society. Naturally, with all new things introduced to society, there will be negative aspects that affect users; unfortunately for Millennials, they were the first generation to really get the full-blown effects of social media use, making their behavior the subject of serious criticism.

Millennials are often the generation that is judged by Generation X for being lazy, self-absorbed or just on their phones more than being unplugged. This may be an unfair assumption and judgement to make of them. There are cases for the Millennial generation that exemplify signs of social media addiction, but they are not as bad as their younger generational cohorts. Millennials are the generation who expanded upon the platforms that were introduced to them when they were young adults. They began experimenting with posts, YouTube videos and online trends. They bridged the gaps between brands and the public by actively engaging with brand’s social media pages,

and they were the generation to set the stage for their younger siblings to openly share and have their voices heard on platforms where everyone can speak their mind.

Millennials, being raised by Generation X, are still able to communicate in-person and hold face-to-face conversations for extensive periods of time. They do, however, feel the effect of social media use and the addictive behaviors that come with long-term social media usage. “Although people may be aware of the potential dangers of social-network participation (such as stalking or cyber bullying), they have little control over access to their information on social networks” (BOLTON, R.N. ... et al, 2013).

Generation X and Y are still able to catch themselves falling into the negative pattern behavior of social media use, but Generation Z grew up so involved with social media and technology that they don't understand the potential downsides of not reflecting or taking time away from the ever changing mobile technology formats and Internet trends.

Generation Z and Social Media

The youngest of the three main generations who use social media are Generation Z. Born 1995-2010, Generation Z has been the most involved with social media and the most technologically advanced generation that has faced this society yet. As young generations go, they are the ones who are experiencing everything new, fast paced and at better qualities than the generations before them. Generation Z has influenced digital marketing, online communication and social media trends for the modern times. They do not look to their older siblings in Gen Y or their parents in Gen X for any technological advice; in fact, it is the older generations who turn to Gen Zers for all

their digital needs. Gen Zers use social media in ways that surpass just creating fun content; they view social media as a way to make political and environmental changes, bring social issues to light and represent those who are underrepresented. Social media, to them, is more than just communication. They combine creativity and social change and use platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube to have their young voices heard. But, the oldest members of this generation are only turning 24 this year, making the majority of this generation teenagers or children. Excessive use and exposure to social media and technology on young minds has resulted in serious psychological side effects, making this generation more susceptible to social anxieties and anti-social tendencies. As social creatures, human beings are meant to interact with others on a face-to-face basis to build connections and physical and emotional relationships. Generation Z challenges this fundamental human characteristic by limiting their interactions to the physical world and focusing their attention on their digital ones. This makes them unable to build and maintain in-person relationships at the levels of their previous generations, but advanced in their knowledge of social media trends and technology habits.

Generation Z is noticeably different from Generation X and Millennials through various characteristics. One important one is the ways they have been exposed to new technology and the Internet while growing up. For Gen Xers and Baby Boomers, TV was the medium that influenced conversations and gave a very stationary view of the world to the viewers. As the Internet has evolved, it provides a multi-faceted view of the world to anyone who logs onto their Facebook or Instagram, and the user is able to hear from people who may have similar, different or new views on a variety of topics.

“ The Boomers are the TV Generation who are defined by their relationship to the medium, just as children of the Boom Echo are the Net Generation...TV is a passive medium whereas the net is active; TV “dumbs down” its users whereas the Net raises their intelligence; TV broadcasts a singular view of the world, while the Net is democratic and interactive; TV isolates while the Net builds communities. Just as TV is the antithesis of the Net, so the TV Generation is the antithesis of the Net Generation” (Buckingham, D., & Willett, R. (Eds.). (2013).

Essentially, Gen Zers view themselves as being more open to different ways of life, they are not quick to judge other people’s behavior online; the online world has a place for everyone. They view older generations as more conservative and unwilling to accept others, or they just “don’t get” social media. Millennials may have been the ones to introduce and develop social media platforms, but since they were in such formative stages, their full potential wasn’t even considered. Generation Z, however, grasped onto new technology and the Internet from birth and helped morph the way it is used and perceived. “The Net generation is ‘hungry for expression, discovery and their own self-development’: they are savvy, self-reliant, analytical, articulate, creative, inquisitive, accepting of diversity and socially conscious...These generational differences are seen to be produced by technology, rather than a product social, historical or cultural forces” (Buckingham, D., & Willett, R. (Eds.), 2013).

Gen Zers were quite literally born into the technology we use today. It takes less time for them to learn the latest updates and they seem to navigate online trends and patterns with ease. They are quick to adopt and then dismiss anything that is trending

and make way for the next new thing before the paint has even dried. “Sure, millennials were digital; their teenage years were defined by iPods and MySpace. But Generation Z is the first generation to be raised in the era of smartphones. Many do not remember a time before social media. ‘We are the first true digital natives,’ said Hannah Payne, an 18- year- old U.C.L.A. student and lifestyle blogger. ‘I can almost simultaneously create a document, edit it, post a photo on Instagram and talk on the phone, all from the user- friendly interface of my iPhone.’ Generation Z takes in information instantaneously,” she said, “And loses interest just as fast.” (Williams, 2015). What truly sets this generation apart from the others is how they studied their Millennial peers and adapted their online ways to be better and faster.

Digital privacy is one thing that Gen Zers are equipped and well-versed in. Yes, many Gen Zers are in middle school or high school currently, but they know all the privacy settings and loopholes to avoid getting their information stolen or having their profiles seen by unwanted viewers. That is why Gen Zers use Snapchat the most out of all the generations; the appeal of a disappearing image or text makes communication faster and supposedly safer (at least on the surface). “While the millennial generation infamously pioneered the Facebook beer-bong selfie, many in Generation Z have embraced later, anonymous social media platforms like Secret or Whisper, as well as Snapchat, where any incriminating images disappear almost instantly, said Dan Gould, a trend consultant for Sparks & Honey, an advertising agency in New York. ‘As far as privacy, they are aware of their personal brand, and have seen older Gen Y-ers screw up by posting too openly,’ Mr. Gould said” (Williams, 2015). Digital privacy isn’t the only thing that Gen Zers have perfected from Gen Y, they also are more aware of the

way their digital actions affect their futures. Being raised by Generation X, the generation that was considered the “latch-key kids”, and watching their Millennial siblings become affected by the economic recession in 2004, many Gen Zers are driven and focused on making the most of the tools they have to represent themselves as individuals and create a solid foundation for their futures. “Put it all together — the privacy, the caution, the focus on sensible careers — and Generation Z starts to look less like the brash millennials and more like their grandparents” (Williams, 2015).

The social media networks that Gen Zers use are actually a lot more condensed than what others may believe. Since Gen Z are focused on what they want and are more particular about what the post, the list of social media networks most frequently used is summed down to Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube. “Generation Z spend longer each day on social media than Millennials (nearly 3 hours, vs 2 hours 39 mins), they actually choose to use less social media platforms/apps than their older counterparts (7 vs 8)...YouTube attracts by far the biggest Gen Z contingent. Elsewhere, they’re slightly less likely than Millennials to be Facebooking or Tweeting, but more likely to be Instagramming and Snapchating” (Young, 2018). As seen by their choices in multimedia consumption, the kids of Gen Z have a serious memory retention problem and increasing cases of antisocial tendencies.

“The Net delivers precisely the kind of sensory and cognitive stimuli- repetitive, intensive, interactive, addictive-that have been shown to result in strong and rapid alterations in brain circuits and functions” (Carr, 2011). Social media apps and networks are formatted in a linear view so that users are endlessly scrolling until they reach a post they recognize, then they refresh the page and they start the process all over

again. Generation Z, being the youngest and most impressionable group have become accustomed to this way of viewing materials and their brains have become “hardwired” differently because of it. Generation Z’s minds have been studied to have a smaller attention span than those of the older generations; this is because of how rapidly trends and technology move in our society. Everything is constantly changing, and young minds are beginning to mimic the technology around them. Short term memory storage and attention are serious signs of social media addiction and dependence within Generation Z. “The brains of Generation Z’s have become wired to sophisticated, complex visual imagery. As a result, the part of the brain responsible for visual ability is far more developed, making visual forms of learning more effective. Auditory learning (lecture and discussion) is very strongly disliked by this age group. Interactive games, collaborative projects, advance organizers, challenges, and anything that they can try and see are appreciated” (Rothman,2016).

Not only are their brains actually formed differently, but the level of social dependency that Gen Z has to social media has become an area of major concern. This generation values a different type of social affirmation in the form of digital praise and “likes”. Most of their peers are active online and they are no longer seeking physical validation in face-to-face conversations, but rather are seeking to be the most followed or liked page on their social media platforms. The internet provides its users with instant “positive reinforcements” in the forms of likes and follows, making the experience addictive and the users want to have the constant high of validity and appreciation in digital spaces (Carr, 2011). Just like in face-to-face interactions, the

fight for attention among peers can become violent and result into cyberbullying, stalking, and the development of social anxieties and intense fears of not fitting in.

“Relational aggression, or ‘the demand for power,’ happens when teenagers feel the need to compete for ‘likes’ online. For example, a teen might want to copy trends followed by popular Instagram models or comedians in order to receive the same amount of ‘likes’ or attention as popular person. Teens may feel the need to copy others who are ‘internet famous’ because they may already feel bad about themselves, or have low self-esteem, and want to be just as popular as the other person in order to become ‘happier’ or more satisfied with themselves (KBaily, 2017).

Gen Zers are using social media stars and influencers to be the role models for their online behaviors and the way they present themselves to an internet community. The obsession with their online lives creates distaste for forming in-person relationships. When technology caters to you never needing to leave your home, you receive instant gratification from your online community for your posts and the brands that you follow offer online sales and promotions; why would anyone want to leave their house again? Well, in-person connections and relationships are fundamental to healthy social development within children and young adults. Even though the world is seemingly turning digital, we are still human beings and the need for physical connections is just as necessary as it was in the past. Humans need to develop abilities to use and recognize non-verbal and verbal cues such as eye contact, body language, tone of voice to be able to navigate real world conversations and to be able to read into how the other person may be feeling (New York Behavioral Health, 2019). “These non-verbal, affective cues are much stronger when it comes to communicating in person vs. digital. So when

children use digital communication extensively, it can curtail the face-to-face experiences necessary for them to develop and master important social skills” (New York Behavioral Health, 2019).

Generation Z may be the generation that has mastered the art of online posting and social media networking, but they are the generation who is falling behind on building interpersonal relationships away from a screen. Their obsession with their posts and the attention they receive from an online world takes away valuable time away from experiences in the physical world, often leaving them unequipped to understand the dynamics and protocols for typical human interactions. Social media is a tool that has helped many people from multiple generations express themselves and connect with people from all over the world. It has been the gateway to creativity and political power as well as a place to escape the insanity of the world around us. Generation Z was born into the world of fast paced digital technology and used the tools given to them to advance their digital communication to levels that Generations X and Y never believed possible. The downside of excessive use of social media, as excessive use of anything goes, is social media addiction and the literal rewiring of their minds. This research helps prove that Generation Z has developed more digital skills and social media excellence than the generations before them, but their over exposure to the medium has caused them to be less experienced and less confident in situations involving interpersonal communication both professionally and socially.

Methodology

Participants

For my research, I conducted two forms of data collection; an online survey and in-person interviews. For the online survey, Survey Monkey was used and I shared the link to the survey on my personal Facebook account, inviting anyone who saw the invitation to participate. There were 31 participants all above the age of 18. Because I knew that I had a wide range of followers that varied from Generations X-Z, I believed that if I shared the survey on Facebook, I would likely obtain responses from each generation. For my in-person interviews, I selected people whom I knew were active online and fit within Generations X-Z. I interviewed one person from each generation; all of the participants agreed to the interviews willingly and were over the age of 18.

Materials

I used Survey Monkey (surveymonkey.com) and I titled the survey “Generational Social Media” and I created 10 questions for participants to answer. In addition to my online survey, I interviewed three people: each representing a different generation: Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z. I was not able to interview each of the three people in-person, as hoped (due to scheduling), so I used Facebook’s video chatting option to conduct my Gen Z and Gen Y interviews. The Gen X interview was done in person.

Procedure

The link to my survey was posted on my Facebook on February 17th, 2019 and was up until March 8th, 2019. Before clicking on the link to the survey, participants could read

the disclosure statement that was posted with the link ensuring that they were doing this survey willingly and that their identity would not be known. The survey consisted of ten questions that ranged from description boxes to multiple choices. The survey began by asking participants what generations they belong to; so that I would be able to categorize the responses into the three generations and determine whether the effects of social media were consistent with my prior research. It took 3-5 minutes for each participant to complete the online survey. There were 31 participants and the survey was available for a two week period.

For my in-person interviews, two were conducted via Facebook Messenger and the other was done in person. I informed the participants of the study that I was working on and explained to them how I believed that they could provide some useful insight from the perspective of their generation. I also reaffirmed that their identities would not be needed for this research and that all I would need was the year they were born. No personal questions that could reveal who they were would be asked. I had originally intended to meet with the interviewees in-person, but scheduling wouldn't allow, so my interviews with the Generation Y and Generation Z participants were done via Facebook video chat. Before each interview, I presented the disclosure form to read and be signed (two were electronically signed them). The disclosure form ensured them that their identity would be kept anonymous for this study and that their answers would be used purely for the purpose of my study and nothing more. The interviews were comprised of 14 questions and differed slightly for each generation. The majority of the questions were identical for each of the three people. To record their answers, I wrote down what the Gen Y and Gen Z participants said on paper while the Gen X

participant's answers were recorded on my phone so that I could take notes later. To further ensure that their answers were secure, after I finished my notes on the interviews I deleted the voice recording. Since the Gen Y and Gen Z interviews were recorded on paper, I only kept the notes to complete this research. All of the participants were aware of this. Once the interviews were over, I thanked them for participating and reminded them that none of their answers would be tied back to their personal identity and that their answers were used as a snapshot of their generation's view on social media.

Results

Survey-Monkey

There were 10 questions in the survey that participants were asked to answer. The questions were multiple choice and description box answers. Question one asked: "What Generation do you belong to?" 10% answered Gen X (3 people), 12.67% answered Gen Y (5 people) and then 73% answered Gen Z (22 people). From there, Question two asked: What Social Media Platform do you use the most? (Select All that Apply. The options that were available were Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat and Other. No Gen X participants chose Facebook (even though they were taking the survey via Facebook) Twitter or Snapchat. Only one Gen X participant chose the Other option and the Instagram option. For Gen Y participants, 3 chose Facebook, 1 chose Twitter, 5 chose Instagram, 2 chose Snapchat and 1 chose Other. Gen Z participants had a larger amount using the social media listed; 19 chose Facebook, 9 chose Twitter, 17 chose Instagram, 18 chose Snapchat and 2 chose Other.

Question three asked for a descriptive answer from the participants. The question asked “Does using social media make you feel pressured to check your accounts often or post often?” Of the 31 responses, the majority of them from across the generations had similar answers. For example, a Gen Z participant said “Yes. I do not like to be ‘inactive’, I feel like I’m missing out/not participating in interacting with people”. Another Gen Z participant said, “I don’t feel pressured, but I feel like extensive exposure and immersion has made it a natural reaction, almost like a tic. Most times I don’t even realize I am doing it”. A Gen Y participant answered saying “No pressure to post or check, but I do go on when I am bored”. One Gen Xer responded saying “Yes, I want to keep up with my friends and family who are far away from me”. Question four asked participants “How many hours a day do you use social media for personal use(Sharing music, posting, streaming videos, texting/DMing)?” The options that they could select were 1 hour or less, 2-3 hours, 4-6 hours, 6-8 hours or 9 plus hours. Of these options, 2 Gen Xers selected 1 hour or less for their social media usage. For Gen Y participants, 5 selected 2-3 hours of social media usage for their daily amount. As for Gen Z: 2 said 1 hour or less, 9 said 2-3 hours, 8 said 4-6 hours, 3 said 6-8 hours and only 1 said 9 plus hours.

Question five was another that required a descriptive answer from the participants. The question asked: “Do you notice any difference in social skills (face-to-face talking) between Gen X, Gen Y or Gen Z?” If so, please describe your observations in a few words. The Gen Z participants had the few answers that claimed they did not see much of a difference in social skills, but the majority of respondents saw both positive and negative differences in social skills. One Gen Z respondent

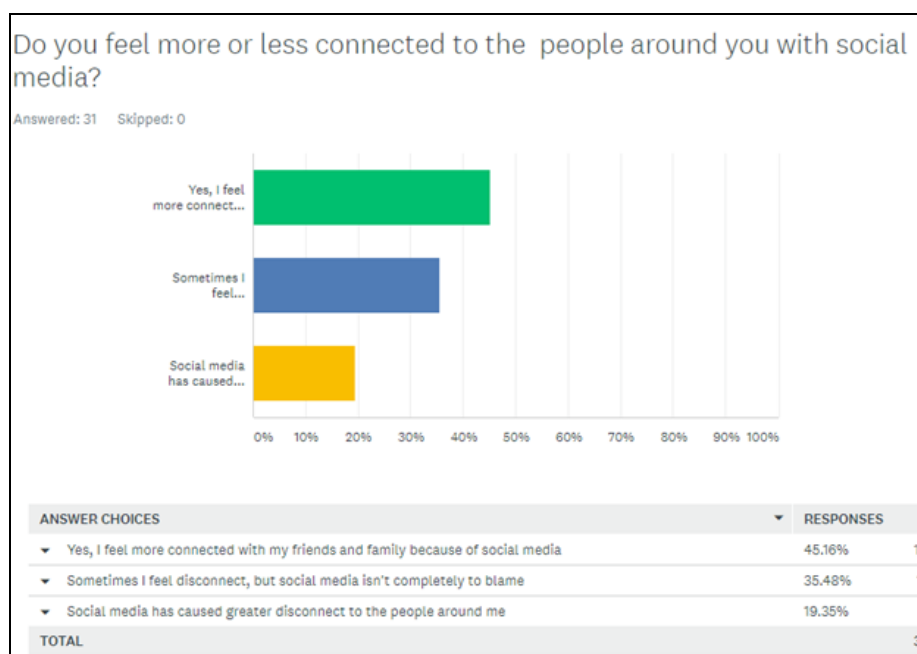
answered, “I definitely believe that Gen Z has a harder time having face-to-face conversations due to the fact that we have our faces in our phones all day long and have the ability to edit our conversations before they even happen”. On a similar note, another Gen Zer responded saying, “Younger crowds tend to have a harder time interacting in public. If they don’t have somebody they know to interact with, they’ll stare at their phone. They aren’t comfortable with just existing”. As mentioned before, a few Gen Zers were able to see a positive difference in social interactions within the generations. One such respondent answered that their interactions actually improved. They replied, “no impairment and actually MORE helpful in the sense that because I can follow certain pages or hear announcements in real time on certain subjects, I can connect better with peers and professors and those around me”. For Gen Y, the responses were more on the negative effective of social skills due to increased use of social media. A Gen Y participant answered, “The younger generation has almost no individuals with ‘the gift of gab.’ Social media gives people a time buffer to think about what they want to say, and even delete and re-attempt. This does not exist in live interpersonal conversations”. Another response from this generation was, “The younger generation (gen z) are glued to their phones and lack social skills IRL from my observations. Gen X and most of Gen Y are much more comfortable with IRL interactions/eye contact, etc with the exceptions of those with social anxiety”. Gen X participants had similar responses as Gen Y for this question. A response from this generation was “People sometimes seem hesitant to talk about new events in their life because they already mentioned it online. In some cases people seem less interested in speaking face to face than in media”.

Question six asked “Do you see any concern for the direction of social media? If so, what are they?” Again, much like question five, there were a variety of responses from Gen Z regarding social media usage. Many believed that social media was more of a negative when used over a long period of time, and that the information that is put on these platforms should not be trusted. The concern for online safety came into play for one Gen Z respondent saying “Kids are using social media at younger and younger ages and I think cyberbullying is still a big issue there”. Another response echoed their concern for the younger individuals of their generation by saying “Possibly with how younger kids see influencers online and try to model their actions and personalities off of them”. Many of Gen Z’s responses were reflective on the youth and how online advertisements and influencers can cause a negative effect on younger people’s minds. Another Gen Zer responded adding, “Too often people immediately believe what is posted online as actual fact when in truth it may not be. People tend to seek the ‘easy’ way to a spotlight using social media to get their point or message out to masses even if not rooted in fact or politically or socially correct”. As for Gen Y, they were concerned with digital privacy and for Gen Z. “I think too much of a good thing can always get unhealthy... if used properly social media can be wonderful as a tool, however most children are not made aware of limits, pressure to compare, etc” another response from Gen Y was, “I think it will cause a lot of social anxieties and hypersensitivities with people not able to regulate healthy reactions to live interpersonal interactions due to less volume of exposure”. Gen X participants had similar responses to Gen Y, one answering “Yes other generations are addicted and find it hard to let go of their device’s and constantly check the different platforms”

Questions seven and eight had a common theme of asking participants on how their social interactions have been affected by social media. Question seven asked “Do you believe that social media plays a role in the way we interact with each other in-person?” While question eight asked “Do you see social media having any effect on the social interactions, positive or negative, of Gen X, Y and Z?” Again, following a similar theme to the other answers given by Gen Z, they had a varying range of positive and negative things to say about social media and social interactions. A Gen Z participant noticed how they relied heavily on social media in their lives by answering question seven with, “I notice myself bringing up things I see on social media a lot and I wonder what I would talk about if I didn't have this conversational crutch”. Another Gen Zer answered question seven by saying “Somewhat, I think it may be hard to interact in person with someone who you follow on social media because there's not much to ask them about in person if they are the type to post everything online”. Many Gen Zers answered question eight with the same tone as question seven. They believed that people within their generation relied heavily on social media to carry on their lives and eventually become wrapped up in the digital persona they put on and begin to detach from reality. Naturally, not everyone in Gen Z had those feelings, one response from Gen Z that felt indifferent on question seven answered “It may play somewhat of a role in how we interact with each other in person. It may affect the way in which we interact but it also sometimes may help us interact with certain people if they have similar interests”. For Gen Y, a participant answered question seven saying, “I feel like it has increased the amount of people who suffer from social anxiety issues or at least worsened those issues with those who already had them”. Another in that generation

responded to question eight by saying “They aren’t realist views and interactions. They can often lack depth or reality because your social media account is what you choose to display about yourself. In real life you just are and have to be accountable for what you put out there face to face”. Gen X participants were essentially equivalent to Gen Y’s responses.

Question nine asked participants “Do you feel more or less connected to the people around you with social media?” The options for question nine included: Yes, I feel more connected with my friends and family because of social media, Sometimes I feel disconnect, but social media isn't completely to blame, and Social media has caused greater disconnect to the people around me. Figure 1 displays the results for this question from the general 31 participants.



{Figure 1}

45.16% of participants answered option one, 35.48% of participants answered option two and 19.35% of participants chose option three. Of these results, 11 Gen Z participants and

1 Gen Y participant chose option one; 1 Gen X participant, 5 Gen Y participants and 5 Gen X participants chose option two; 2 Gen X, 1 Gen Y and 5 Gen Z participants chose option three.

Question ten asked participants: “Are you overwhelmed with how often you engage in social media? Or do you think it is just part of the way we are evolving as a society? Please discuss”. For Gen Z responses, many admitted to feeling somewhat overwhelmed only because they have become used to wanting to avoid FOMO (Fear Of Missing Out). One Gen Zer responded saying “I think social media is becoming part of the way we are evolving and it's now a necessary part of how we interact with our world. However, I still think that we need moderation with it because it can get overwhelming with the variety of platforms available and the immense amount of info we take in with social media every day”. Another responded saying “Yeah, I think I check my twitter and Instagram too much, and end up getting to self-aware of what I post and get in a toxic loop where I think TOO much about it and trying to come off as cool or funny. I should probably log off”. Gen Y responses were in similar nature, with one response being “think social media is becoming part of the way we are evolving and it's now a necessary part of how we interact with our world. However, I still think that we need moderation with it because it can get overwhelming with the variety of platforms available and the immense amount of info we take in with social media every day: Gen Xers who participated also seemed to agree with their younger participants by adding “I am not pressured to use social media so I still have control, others I feel have lost some control as they feel they need to react or interact in an immediate time or face the aggression of someone posting and not getting an immediate response or immediate satisfaction”. Another Gen X

participant noted that they personally were not affected by social media in this way but, “definitely an evolving situation and one for me that takes away from being connected, it has its place but should not be the first thing you do or search for. It’s become a constant in most lives”.

In-Person Interviews

For these interviews, each participant was asked 14 questions, beginning with year they were born. My Gen X interviewee was born in 1965, my Gen Y interviewee was born in 1993 and my Gen Z interviewee was born in 1996. When asked if social media has affected them in anyway, the Gen X participant said that they felt as if they wanted to keep up with the “lingo” of the online space, and has noticed that online trends are popping up on TV shows. The Gen Y participant answered saying how they felt they were somewhat “tied to social media, always checking it constantly and if I post a picture I have to make sure I look my best and that even the background looks nice”. The Gen Z participant responded saying that they haven’t noticed much of change since being on social media accounts. These responses are slightly different from my hypothesis because instead of the Gen Z participant feeling affected, it was the older generations who felt more affected.

When asked if they preferred talking to people online or in-person, the participants all had very similar answers. The Gen X participant said that when it came to everyday communication, they preferred to speak to people in-person or speaking directly via a phone call. But, when it came to reaching out to family who are far away or busy, they used texting or DMing to contact them. The Gen Y and Gen Z participants both said that

it varied for them as well, only ever using online means for reaching out to people who are not in their direct contact list, but they both said they preferred to speak to people in person. A quote from the Gen Z participant also contradicted my hypothesis when they said, “I prefer to talk to people in person, because I feel like emotion is a big part of conversation and emotion can get interpreted wrongly easily through DMS. I enjoy making eye contact and seeing the other person’s face”. This is problematic to my hypothesis because I proposed that Gen Zers would be less comfortable with in-person conversations and interactions, but this particular participant felt as if they worked better in-person because of a history of being misunderstood via text.

Another question I asked the participants was how they believed their generation was perceived by the others. The Gen X participant responded by saying that they believed younger people thought their generation couldn’t “keep up” with the changes of the digital world, but they wanted to mention that they personally felt they were able to stay “with it”. For Gen Y, the participant answered saying older generations must think that Millennials are “so far into their phones they don’t what reality is”. This participant went on to say, “but really it’s just that we’re adapting to how the world is changing and those who aren’t want to criticize it. I also feel that people group the younger generation, Gen Z, into the millennial category, so if there are certain negative trends going on at the time with Gen Z, people look negatively towards millennials as well”. My Gen Z participant answered this question by saying that older generations, including the not-so-much older Millennials, might think that Gen Zers hate communicating outside of their phones. To them, as a server at a restaurant, they are essentially forced out of that stereotype and have use verbal skills to carry out their job, that is why they believe that

Gen Zers aren't all lost. They did, however, mention that they have only seen the "older" Gen Zers (those in their early twenties) are the ones who have the better in-person social skills, while the younger end of the Gen Z spectrum (those who are in high school or middle school) are the ones who have a harder time carrying out the in-person conversations.

To finish off the interviews, I asked each participant if they had any concerns for the younger generation regarding social media trends. The Gen X participant responded saying, "I think that young people are wrapped up in trying to be perfect online and start to believe the lies they see on Instagram. Not everything you see is real and even though kids might say 'yeah, I know', I see them falling into the same pattern of comparison". On a similar note, the Gen Y participant answered saying that they were concerned about Internet trends and how they can become dangerous and addictive for younger kids. The participant also noted on how these trends can result in cyberbullying just to make it on "prank accounts" and embarrass their friends. Their concern was that these kids will cause future problems for themselves when they go to apply for jobs because their digital footprint will be one where there is a lot of incriminated material. For the Gen Z participant, they answered saying:

"Body dysmorphia is a huge concern that I have for my generation, as well as mindlessly believing everything that is read. There are too Photoshop images that cycles through social media, so it's hard to decipher what is real. It can often lead to people thinking they're not good enough. Also, misinformed articles are often cycled throughout social media, and people believe it without doing research themselves. I see a

lot of people sharing fake articles from 4 years ago, thinking its real and relative to today”.

A common concern that was shared among all three generations was how social media influences the way that we perceive reality.

Discussion

After looking back on the results from my online survey, I can safely say that my hypothesis was proven correct for many aspects. For starters, 73% of the participants were Gen Zers, proving that they are the ones who are most active on social media (as the survey was released on my personal Facebook account). My hypothesis was also proven correct because when asked if social media makes them feel pressured to check or post online, the majority of Gen Z participants responded saying that they have an almost “natural” reaction to check their social media accounts, even when they don’t really want to. Referring back to the Gen Zer who directly said, “I don’t even notice when I am doing it”, it goes on to prove my hypothesis that Gen Zers are being subconsciously influenced through overexposure to social media. However, this was not the definitive consensus amongst all Gen Z participants, as few responded by saying that they had little to no interest in posting, but mostly just to keep up with friends. This is with any research; it is not a “one size fits all” hypothesis, but rather a broader look into how social media has influenced Gen Zers and the other generations.

Gen X and Gen Y participants for the online survey answered in terms that were reflective to what my literature review had suggested. The older generations were more concerned that the younger generations were not spending enough time in “the real

world” and were becoming more consumed with their digital personas. Many of the Gen X and Gen Y participants used social media as a way to keep up with family or to follow the news, they did not feel an excessive need to check their profiles or post often.

However, many of the Gen Y participants were able to see that, again, that not everyone who is in Gen Z is “addicted” to their phones; to them it was more teenagers and middle-school aged Gen Zers, as the oldest of the generation are exiting college and have grown up with the same developing technology and platforms as many of the Millennials.

For the in-person interviews, my Gen Z participant was on the “exception to the hypothesis” side, as they were born in 1996 (making them 23 years old). As an older Gen Zer, they saw how social media had influenced them when they were younger, noting on how they felt the need to post more frequently when they were in high school. But as an adult, they felt that their digital presence was a less active one than when they were younger. They mentioned how social media had personally influenced them to begin exercising, as they were following many fitness and diet inspired Instagram accounts. Due to their social media following, this participant felt inspired and lost up to 90 pounds. However, they did mention that they have their fears for the younger side of Gen Z and the dangers that Instagram can do to young minds. Specifically, they stated how body dysmorphia has become increasingly more common for younger people online, as photo-editing tools have also become more common for online trends. This also mirrored the concerns that the Gen X and Gen Y participants had when asked about their concerns for the younger generations and social media.

It is clear that Gen Zers are the true digital natives of the modern age. They have been able to adapt and recreate the digital landscape of society and have the older

generations bow to their will online. Even so, after reviewing my results from my survey and interview, combined with my previous research, it is clear that young Gen Zers have a noticeable deficit when it comes to in-person interactions. They feel as if they are able to perfect their conversations via text and can make themselves appear flawless by editing their images online. This then creates a social blockage when attempting to break into the real world and navigate social relationships off screen. Gen X and Gen Y are able to find balance for social media and digital technologies, as they were raised with limited access to them. As time goes on, there will be more development in this field where more studies can be done to further explore the true affects social media and technology on Gen X, Gen Y and Gen Z.

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Appendix

Below are the in- person interview questions that were asked to the Generation X, Generation Y and Generation Z participants.

Questions for Gen X

1. What year were you born?
2. How has social media and technology affected you?
3. What social media platform do you use the most and why?
4. How often are you online and using social media each day?
5. How old were you when you made your first social media profile? What profile was it for?
6. Do you feel “left behind” with technology? (Is it updating to quickly for you to process it?)
7. Do you feel as if there is a generational gap that is produced from technology and social media? Why or why not?
8. How do you feel about the younger generations? Are they more equipped to handle the future or are they the ones who are falling behind?
9. What do you think a common misconception is of your generation with regards to social media and technology?
10. Has social media affected the way you interact with people online and in-person? Why or why not?
11. What is one thing that you think is a benefit to social media? Negative?
12. Do you prefer to talk to people in person or through technology/ through social media DMs? Why or why not?
13. Do you believe that social media can be addictive? Why or why not? Has this ever happened to you?
14. Do you have any concerns for the younger generation regarding social media and technology?

Questions for Gen Y

1. What year were you born?
2. How has social media and technology affected you?
3. What social media platform do you use the most and why?
4. How often are you online and using social media each day?
5. How old were you when you made your first social media profile? What profile was it for?
6. Does being called a Millennial have any negative connotations to you? If so, what are they to you?
7. What do you think a common misconception is of your generation with regards to social media and technology?
8. How do you feel about the younger generation and the older generations with regards to social media and technology?
9. Does social media and technology have a large part in your everyday life?
10. What are (if any) the benefits of social media? Negative?
11. Has social media affected the way you interact with people online and in-person?
12. Do you prefer to talk to people in person or through technology/ through social media DMs? Why or why not?
13. Do you believe that social media can be addictive? Why or why not? Has this ever happened to you?
14. Do you have any concerns for the younger and older generations regarding social media and technology?

Questions for Gen Z

1. What year were you born?
2. What social media do you use the most and why?
3. How often do you check your phone or tablet for notifications from social media or for texts from your friends?
4. Has social media affected the way you interact with people online and in-person? If so, how?

5. Do you think that older generations should be more open to the way we use online communication? Why or why not?
6. How old were you when you made your first social media profile? What profile was it for?
7. Do you feel pressured to post things to make you look more “positive” for likes and comments? (Do you post things in a certain way to make your followers see you in a certain way?)
8. Does it matter to you if people want to follow or like the photos/profiles that you create? Why or why not? Has it ever mattered to you before now?
9. Do you find yourself being one way online and another way in-reality?
10. Do you prefer to talk to people in person or through technology/ through social media DMs? Why or why not?
11. Do you, or any of your friends, look up to “internet famous” people? Who, how and why?
12. How do you think your generation is perceived by the older generations?
13. Is there any benefits to social media and technology? Negative?
14. What is one concern that you have for your generation regarding social media and technology?