

The cohort I like to call the "Re-Generation" began to take shape around 2008. Individuals at the formative ages of 11 to 13, those born after about 1995, were part of a substantively different world than the one that had shaped 11 to 13 year olds over the preceding fifteen or so years. In an earlier post, I discussed the impact the Global Financial Crisis had on the formation of this new generation.

Technology, of course, has also been a powerful influence on the Re-Generation, so much so that Bill Gates proposed that we call this next wave Generation I, for Internet. Gates has used the term to refer to children born after 1994, describing them as the first generation to grow up with the Internet.

With due respect, most who study the generations would say that Generation Y (those born from 1980 to 1995) was our first generation of Digital Natives — unconsciously competent users of both computers and of the Internet. The World Wide Web, the advancement that more than any other popularized the Internet, started in 1993, just as the oldest Y's were turning 13, in their prime stage of influence.

But that's not to say that the Re-Generation hasn't been shaped by a major technology leap forward: in their case, they are the first unconscious participants in an era when everyone has access to everything, everywhere, at every time. This is the generation of mobile technology, wireless communication, and clouds of constant content.

Mobile technology. Fifteen years ago, most home computers weren't even linked to the Internet. Today, our computers are both linked and, in many cases, mobile. With more than five billion mobile users worldwide and a massive global network, small mobile devices with significant computing power have become a routine part of day-to-day life for people of all ages. The combination of a smartphone's intuitive interface and thousands of apps for iPhones and Androids aimed at young children has fast made it a child's favorite plaything. And as the smartphone market continues to explode, more parents are passing their phones to their offspring as tools to educate or gadgets to pacify.

- Two-thirds of 4- to 7-year-olds have used an iPhone or iPod

- 6% of 2- to 5-year-olds have their own smartphone

- 50% of 11 year olds have own cell phone

- 10% of households with children aged 6-12 have iPads (compared with only 3% of other households); 35% of these households with young children plan to buy some brand of tablet computer in the next year

- 72% of the 100 top-selling education apps in Apple's iTunes App store this year were aimed at preschoolers and those in elementary school

- One of the first products aimed at putting an iPhone into a baby's hands (Fisher-Price's oversize case, providing coverage against drools and tantrums, while doubling as a rattle), rapidly sold out on Amazon; the three apps designed for the case have been downloaded more than 700,000 times

Wireless communication. In November 2001, U.S. wireless service providers began to connect their networks for text messaging, allowing subscribers on different networks to exchange text messages. Since then, the number of text messages in the United States has grown astronomically to over 7 billion messages sent every month. One of the biggest behavioral traits of the Re-Generation is a preference for texting over talking.

- Kids 11 to 14 spend, on average, 73 minutes a day texting

- The average teen sends more than 50 texts a day

Sherry Turkle, director of MIT's Initiative on Technology and Self and author of *Alone Together*, has spent years studying the psychological effects of texting on teens. "Kids have told me that they almost don't know what they are feeling until they put it in a text."

Cloud Computing . . . and Unlimited Access to Content. The last fifteen years have seen an explosion of technologies and applications that have given us easy access to content in multiple forms: Google (1998), iTunes (2001), Wikipedia (2002), Facebook (2004), YouTube (2005), and Twitter (2006) are just a small sample of technologies that found their way into our vocabularies and day-to-day lives. Add cloud computing to this proliferation of content and resources and content become accessible — anytime, anywhere. Many applications that were previously expensive or unavailable are now free to anyone with a web browser.

For members of the Re-Generation, access to unlimited content and endless activities and games is a fact of life.

- Over 25% of 2-5 year olds and over 40% of 6-8 year olds use the Internet

- 88% of 6-8 year olds use the Internet to play games; 37%, to get help with homework; 25% to get the "inside scoop" on what interests them; and 22% to read and write email

- 90% of tweens (10-12) play online games

- Younger children spend over 10 hours a week playing video games

- The amount of time all kids spend online daily has tripled in the past 10 years

And, in many cases, kids are media multitasking, packing an average of 8.5 hours' worth of media into 6.5 hours a day.

- 26% of young people are using one medium while they are doing something else media-related at the same time

Legions of physicians and academics will be studying the implications of all this technology on children's brains and thinking skills for years to come — often with sharp disagreement on the dangers and benefits. My interest is how swimming in this digital soup has shaped the young generation's view of the world. What assumptions have they formed? Four themes emerge:

A pervasive sense of connection: Connectivity is the basic assumption and natural fabric of everyday life for the Re-Generation. Technology connections are how people meet, express ideas, define identities, and understand each other. Older generations have, for the most part, used technology to improve productivity — to do things we've always done, faster, easier, more cheaply. For the Re-Generation, being wired is a way of life.

Options (not obligations): Because technology is so intimately intertwined with the Re-Gen's sense of self, they control it in a way that older individuals often don't. While Boomers or X'ers may feel obligated to respond to the technology, the Re-Gen's use the technology with choice - on their own schedule, at their own pace.

Anonymity and the ability to hide: By connecting through technology, Re-Gens reduce the need to connect face-to-face. Many have friends they've never met with whom they interact regularly. This creates a strange sense of anonymity — they can be everywhere if they choose to post or, depending on their preference, nowhere. Physical appearances can be replaced with avatars. The alarming epidemic of childhood obesity may be related to this generation's ability to hide.

Confidence and control . . . to be an initiator, designer, problem-solver: This is a generation that is used to asking big questions — and is confident of finding answers. Will the water run out? How many children travel to school in a sustainable way? Are cities a good idea? Let's check the Internet. They have had the experience of digging deeply into a burning question because they have access to a mountain of information.

Over this year, as I continue my research on the Re-Generation, I'll share influences and impressions, clustered by major theme. As I do, I'd love to hear from you — stories about the young people you encounter and the influences and priorities they hold.

Fuente: HBR Blog Network, by Tammy Erickson