

The Next Generation : or Game Over ?

disastrous personal outcomes.

Do you have a lap-top or mobile phone? Do you start to get edgy if you haven't switched it on and had a look at the screen recently? We have come to expect to have a screen in front of us in our aircraft seat because we have grown used to seeing it there. And I argue that that is exactly what has happened with young people...just because they play computer games and access social networking sites more than we might, it doesn't mean they are addicts or time-wasters. They have spent all their lives with screens. They feel comfortable and 'at home' with screens.

Effects on Children

No news item number one. The Internet, and its variations, is here to stay. No news item number two. For Generation Y, a television set or computer screen or mobile phone screen has been with them since they were born. This was not so for my generation. When I was a child, the only screen in town was at the cinema. No television...one radio station, one newspaper. What a media deprived childhood!

The effects on children accessing television and new media has been a subject of debate for years. An American study on children's screen interaction found that 8 to 18 year olds spend nearly four hours a day in front of a television screen and almost two extra hours (outside school) on the

computer and playing video games. That's six hours a day. No surprise for any parents in this room, I'm sure.

The University of Chicago has also come up with some research, the findings of which are "complicated and contradictory but, overall, television viewing is not all bad." Ah, at last some positive news! The paper also concluded that "we find strong evidence against the view that childhood television viewing harms the cognitive or educational development of pre-schoolers."

The study has concluded that many children begin watching television at an early age - often less than 12 months. And, the same study found that if children watch programmes with significant violent content, they are more likely to show increases in aggressive behaviour. Big surprise?

Media Literacy

So, to conclude...it's all rather confusing, isn't it? Of course, there is no doubt that some young people are more obsessed with computer-based technology than others. Some to a worrying degree when they lock themselves away in their rooms and spend hours on the keyboard. And, of course, we are all concerned about the nasty side of the Internet and the horrors to be found there...such as pornography and so on. And there is no doubt that you cannot inject experience and wisdom into young people - as the saying



goes, 'it's hard to put an old head on young shoulders'. Which is why schools should teach media and information literacy. To give students an overview of the cyber-world and what lurks there. How to interpret and consume critically. How to sort fact from fiction.

There is more good than bad about cyberspace...and computer technology has been shown to be a powerful force as a self-instructional educational tool. The Internet holds the potential to continue to bring our world closer together in peace. Young people hold the key to the way the new media will evolve and be consumed. So, is it "game on...or game over?" The game has just begun...

■ Martin Hadlow

Associate Professor
School of Journalism and
Communication,
University of Queensland
Brisbane, Australia

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New Media and Game On ...

New Media and the Next Generation is a subject which brings with it a lot of emotional baggage, primarily because so many people, especially parents, have fixed opinions on the matter...and often they feel powerless, fearful and worried because they don't really understand new technologies and they can't really appreciate why young people seem so obsessed with on-line social networking or playing computer games or texting on mobile phones. "How do they know so many people? What are they all talking to each other about?"

Some of the prejudices commonly held in the community about young people and the way they consume media are "should exposure [to new media] trigger moral panic?", or "how should parents deal with this 'addiction'?"

New Toys, New Ideas

Let me play devil's advocate... I ask what 'addiction'? I ask what 'moral panic'? I ask "is it game on... or game over?" Has the cyberspace train already left the station and are we are simply trying to find out where it has gone? Do we have a chance to influence the way in which this generation, or the next, uses (or understands) the new media?

From the outset, I urge you not to be alarmed. Young people are not a new species. They have been around before. Most of us here were young people once. Today's young people are not much different to us

when we were younger. I meet them every day at my university and they are impressionable, enthusiastic, excited, well-meaning, altruistic. It's just that they have new toys, and new toys bring new ideas, and new ideas bring new ways of doing things, and new ways of doing things bring change...and change is hard for many of us to grasp.

As with many discussions about young people, computers, television and screen literacy, the subject of *New Media and the Next Generation* is one which has its own share of 'good news, bad news and no news'. Let's put some perspective into the way we approach the topic.

Screen Age

But, before talking about the so-called 'addiction' of young people to computer screens, let me give you some other news. It's not just young people who enjoy watching screens and playing computer games. I invite you to walk through the casino you will see thousands of people happily watching screens as they gamble away their hard-earned cash. Yes, the poker machines, or slot machines, with their brightly coloured screens and enticing noises. And there is not one person there under 18 years of age. It doesn't 'trigger moral panic' in me to see grown-up people sitting in front of those screens and handing over money in a global financial crisis, but it does fill me with a sense of amazement.

Let me give you some more news. This week, the International Herald Tribune newspaper had this headline: Cellphone becomes 'center of life'. In South Korea, you can leave the wallet at home- but not the mobile. The article tells us that the use of mobile devices is so widespread that at any given time 'you will see South Koreans of all ages sitting in subways and buses engrossed in watching a television soap opera on hand-held devices, very often their mobile phones. They talk on the phone and, at the same time, read comic books on its screen.' Note...people 'of all ages.'

And some news from today's Internet. A Russian investment company has bought a \$200m stake in the on-line company Facebook. This values the company at \$10 billion. In other words, a global platform which describes itself as 'sharing and connecting', is now worth more than the GDP of some countries. And Facebook is probably something most adults in this room know little about. But for Generation Y, it's a way of life. It's a way of being part of a global consensus, almost a global culture...a way of sharing and being noticed. Gen Y is very concerned about how it is perceived by its peers...this generation wants to be accepted and to be part of something. Facebook lets them interact globally. Used properly, it's a fascinating tool. However, bad postings on Facebook can have repercussions, including potentially