

Understanding the Digital Mindset

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Today, technology is all around us. Everywhere we go, we see people on their smartphones, tablets, laptops, and even handheld gaming devices. Youth, especially, are digitally connected and are born into the digital world. In 1999, most adolescents used a computer for about 27 minutes each day; by 2004, their time increased to 62 minutes a day (Roberts, Henriksen, & Foehr, 2009). Also calculate in their Internet time where 73% of adolescents went on the Internet in 2000, but by 2007, the numbers increased to 93% (Roberts, Henriksen, & Foehr, 2009). These numbers also increased globally. Between 2000 and 2008, the number of people going on the Internet almost tripled, increasing by 290% worldwide (Tapscott, 2009). Internet and technology affect everyone, and each person adapts to it differently. People from the older generation may have difficulties using today's technology, whereas the younger generation takes to it like ducks on water.

Tapscott (2009) came up with a generation group called the "Net Generation" or "Net Gen" for short. He breaks it down by putting those born between January 1977 and December 1997 as the Net Generation, and he calls those born between January 1998 and the present as "Generation Next" or "Generation Z." Many youth today fall under Net Gen or Generation Next, and Tapscott says that these youth are growing up digitally, and their mindset is different from the people from previous generations. That does not mean that the older generation is not tech-savvy. There are those who can be just as tech-savvy or more from Generation X (those born between Net Gen and Baby Boomer) or the Baby Boomer era. In fact, Australian MySpace users between 46 and 64 (the Baby Boomers) had more online friends than the average Generation X users, and this detail shows that those who are into today's technology can also be called

Generation C, also known as "The Connected Collective," which means that Gen C is not about the ages of the people, but the collective mindset of digital natives ("FED," 2010).

Whether we call them Net Gen or Generation Next or even the Digital Generation, some people say that today's youth think differently from previous generations. Taking television as an example, most Baby Boomers and Generation X folks are passive viewers, but those from Net Gen and later on are active viewers (Tapscott, 2009). Many young people use the television as "background music" as they read a book, play a game on their handheld devices, fiddle around with their tablets, and even listen to music from their portable music devices. In fact, an average of 77% of Internet users from twelve countries state that they will choose the Internet over television (Tapscott, 2009). These young people who grew up with the Internet enjoy it more than the television simply for the fact that it allows them to be an active viewer.

This active view set fits the concept of Web 2.0. According to O'Reilly and Battelle (2009), "Web 2.0 is all about harnessing collective intelligence applications to manage, understand, and respond to massive amounts of user-generated data in real time." This definition of Web 2.0 is what drives today's Internet and technology. To further define this concept, Web 2.0 can be broken down into the three Cs: Create, Collaborate, and Communicate. Digital users have plenty of opportunities to create something like a blog, a website, a digital collage, a movie, and many other projects that fall under other mediums. These types of projects allow collaboration with their friends and peers. For solo projects, people can get feedback by communicating and getting feedback from their audiences.

Tapscott (2009) addresses the three Cs of Web 2.0 intensively with his "Eight Net Generation Norms." He originally compiled the list for those part of the Net Generation, but

these can also fit the previously mentioned Generation C. Many of these norms fit the digital world, but norms also carry over into people's life offline. The eight norms are:

- 1) Freedom: Net Gens value the freedom of choice in what they do online or offline.
- 2) Customization: Have you seen people customizing and personalizing their belongings? From their bedrooms, to their computer wallpapers, to gadget's covers and cases, to their own webpages and social media profiles, if these Net Gens can customize something, they will do it.
- 3) Scrutinize: The world, especially those involved in marketing, need to understand that today's young people will study the products they are using closely, and they will give feedback.
- 4) Corporate Integrity and Openness: Along with giving feedback after scrutinizing something, Net Gens seek corporate integrity and openness for not only their products, but also for researching potential workplaces.
- 5) Entertainment and Play: Many Net Gens are aware that there is more than one route in life and achieving goals. For example, Net Gens will check Facebook during work hours, but they will also make up their time for doing work at home. They like to be flexible with what is available to them.
- 6) Collaboration and Relationship: Massively multiplayer role-playing games (MMORPGs) and social media networks are popular with the Net Gens because they can easily collaborate and form relationship with people as they communicate online or offline.
- 7) Speed: Because of high-speed networks being readily available, Net Gens value speed not only in technology, but also in everyday function -- hence the term "instant gratification" becoming a trend.

- 8) Innovation: Lastly, Net Gens are all about innovations. They like companies that take innovative routes, and they themselves are innovators, too. A famous example is Mark Zuckerberg and his team who created Facebook.

These eight norms and the three Cs are a product of today's technological world. To understand youth and those who grew up in the digital age, it is important to recognize their digital mindset.

These mindsets are different, more flexible and not as stringent compared to previous generations. The Net Gen's way of thinking also extends to schools. Youth today are also learning differently, so educators need to come up with new learning methods that would not have been possible in the past (DeGennaro, 2008). The Net Gens are flexible, and educators need to be just as flexible if they integrate technology into their lesson plans because glitches will always happen (Hayes, 2007). The idea of flexibility can even extend to other parts of positive youth development.

In the past, youth development focused on the deficit-models, and they concentrated on the problems of youth and their risky behaviors. Now, youth development professionals are encouraging assets-based approaches and encouraging youth to take the initiative for their own development and community (Witt & Caldwell, 2005). Youth who display characteristics of the eight norms or the three Cs should be called upon to play upon their strengths. Programs can be created to incorporate more technology and digital media for youth to get involved. After-school centers or teen centers can utilize current technological trends (such as Facebook, Twitter, or Tumblr) to draw more interested youth into their programs. In fact, communities (schools, families, and third-party organizations like Boys and Girls Club of America) can get together to encourage youth to play to their strengths.

Many people have raised concerns about the new technology being a concern to young people, and there are some negative aspects about technology that we cannot ignore. However, these concerns over technology and media are nothing new. In the 1930s, radios and films were considered to be the Big Bad; in the 1950s and 1960s, television and rock n' roll became many people's concerns; in the 1980s and 1990s, video games on multiple consoles became an issue; finally in the current times, Internet and computers are getting the blame for many things ranging from youth educational problems to health issues (Wartella & Jennings, 2000). However, unlike many of the passive-based media like listening to radios or watching movies and television, today's technology can be used in a diverse way. It is important that the world understands that on a home, school, or community level. Technology can be manipulated to help people grow, and showing youth how to understand and utilize today's technology is a task that requires everyone's participation.

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