GENERATIONAL USE OF NEW MEDIA
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Generational Use of New Media

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Editors

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David Kurt Herold is a lecturer in Sociology at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, where he leads a multi-faculty project to establish a virtual campus for the university in the 3D online world Second Life. For the past 15 years, he has worked on the culture and society of the People’s Republic of China, with a specialisation in online China. His work has focused on online vigilantism, citizen activism online, virtual encounters between Chinese and non-Chinese, and online community building. As part of his teaching, he has also conducted research into online education, and into the ICT skills of university students, which has led to an interest in wider questions about Human-Computer interactions and the place of ICTs in human societies. He has presented at numerous conferences and published a number of journal articles and book chapters, and has co-edited several special issues in journals and a book on online China.

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Giuseppe Lugano is the ICT Science Officer at the COST Office in Brussels. He manages 24 scientific projects on technology and society, which involve thousands of senior and young researchers from all European countries and beyond. Giuseppe received a Master’s degree in computer science from the University of Bologna (Italy) and a PhD in cognitive science from the University of Jyväskylä (Finland). He is author of the book Comunicazione Mobile (Ed. Cierre, 2007). His research focuses on the conceptual design of technologies and services empowering digital communities to promote more sustainable futures. He has worked for ICT companies like TeliaSonera and Nokia, collaborated on educational technology projects with several NGOs and published viewpoints on ICT and Society as a freelance journalist for the Helsinki Times. More at http://mobspace.cosix.it
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Günther Schreder received his diploma in psychology from the University of Vienna and has been working as a freelance scientist since 2004. His major projects involved research on eye-movement analysis for the Austrian Road Safety Board. He is an associate member of the Research Center KnowComm at Danube University Krems in Austria and is currently working in the fields of information design and human-computer interaction.

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Introduction

Eugène Loos, Leslie Haddon and Enid Mante-Meijer

Younger and Older Generations Living in a Multimedia Landscape

As inhabitants of a multimedia landscape⁴ we are increasingly being confronted with new digital roadways intended to lead us to a range of new possibilities. The well-trodden paths, the traditional routes via the old media, cannot so easily lead us to these new destinations. The question is whether all generations are able to appreciate and find these new routes, use them and use them safely – if they wish to. All citizens, including young and old, should at least be entitled to have access to this new realm of online and multimedia possibilities so that they will be able to participate more fully in societies in which these technologies and facilities are increasingly prevalent and increasingly confronting us in our everyday lives. However, ‘entitlement’ and ‘access’ do not in themselves guarantee that users can or choose to engage with them.

In fact, both younger and older generations are only too often regarded as being homogenous entities. It is essential that we recognise the differences and the similarities between younger and older people using new media such as websites, but we also have to pay attention to the various sub-populations, especially within the broader group of senior citizens. Individual differences increase as people age. This is termed ‘aged heterogeneity’ by Dannefer (1988: 360); see also Chapter 5 by Hagberg, Chapter 6 by Chisnell and Redish, Chapter 7 by Schreder et al. and Chapter 10 by Loos and Mante-Meijer in this volume).

What we require is insight into and research on the role of new media in the lives of both diverse younger people and for various groups of older people (such as males/females, those with higher and lower levels of education and a different degree of internet experience). The volume Generational Use of New Media offers insights in this respect by presenting the results of research on the way in which both younger and older generations use new media, for example, when searching for information about products and services that may be beneficial to them – or, indeed, which they sometimes need in order to survive in our information society.

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⁴ Hagberg (2004: 163) argues we all live, literally and metaphorically, in a technological landscape. See also Loos (2010), Chapter 5 by Hagberg and Chapter 10 by Loos and Mante-Meijer in this volume.
Generational Use of New Media

Generations: A Multifaceted Notion

Before we elaborate the topic of this volume it is important to explain what we understand by ‘generation’. This notion is often used in two different ways, underlying distinct concepts:

1. Generation as a period in the life course, for example being an adolescent or being retired.
2. Generation as a grouping of cohorts, to indicate all individuals born between specific years, for example the baby boomers, born in time interval after World War II, and the digital generation, who grew up during the years when digital media were introduced.

Sometimes ‘generation’ refers to both concepts, for example if we discuss the question if the current older generation (for example retired people, born before the end of World War II) can be considered as ‘digital immigrants’ and the younger generation (adolescents, born these last decades) as ‘digital natives’. But if we discuss whether the problem of the older generation not using new media will go away by itself as time passes, the distinction between generation as a period in the life course and a grouping of cohorts makes sense. In that case generation should not be considered as a grouping of cohorts who will ‘die away’ in a near future but as a period in the life course (Loos, 2010: 16; Sourbati, 2010: 115). In the course of history there will be always a new old generation that has difficulties of coping with an emerging new technology. De Haan and Adrichem (2010: 105–106) illustrate this general point more specifically by providing a concrete example from the possibilities being made available via mobile technologies:

This [kind of] information is increasingly coupled to locations, and with the help of the global positioning system (GPS) and digital maps we can now determine exactly where we are and to see what our surroundings have to offer. For example, it is possible to see where your husband is, where the nearest cafe is and to find visitors’ reviews of that cafe, or where the theatres are, find out what is playing and check the reviews. We are increasingly surrounded by

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3 It was Prensky (2001) who coined the terms ‘digital natives’ (the younger generation who grew up in a digital world and capable of using new media without any problem) and ‘digital immigrants’ (the older generation who, with much effort can learn to use digital media up to a certain point). See Schulmeister (2008) and Bennett et al. (2010) for a critical review of Prensky’s rigid division and his lack of empirical evidence to support this.

4 See also Von Bredow et al. (2010) for more examples.
information and no longer surf the net but live in the web (Van ’t Hof, Daemen and Van Est, 2010). (...) It may confidently be expected that, again, the same groups will take the lead and that again, senior citizens, those with a low level of education and the inactive part of the population will move far more slowly towards a life in the web. [translation]

Let us finally have a look at the various labels that have been invented to describe younger and older generations’ (non) use of new media in order to appreciate how society perceives online activities by younger and older generations. Table I.1 shows us clearly that there are no specific labels for younger generations not being able to and/or willing to use new media. At first sight this may sound logically, but in Chapter 4 Herold shows us that ‘existence of technology does not automatically lead to a proficiency of its users – even if the users grew up with it’ (see also part III of this volume). While there are many labels characterising younger generations using new media, we found only one label for older generations’ activities on the web (silver surfers5) and two labels for the older generational non-users (digital immigrants and non-liners6).

Digital Divide or Digital Spectrum?

The research for this volume has been conducted in different countries (EU, Hong Kong and USA) by international experts. Some of them were part of the COST 298 Action.7 Others are national experts on the use of new media by younger and/or older people. The idea of assembling this volume emerged from discussions and research papers in the strand “The future in young and old hands: Towards an inclusive broadband society” at a COST 298 conference in Copenhagen, 13–15 May 2009.

One key question to be addressed is how we can ensure that digital information about services and products is presented through new media in such a way that this remains accessible to and usable by various age groups. There are various assumptions about the degrees to which younger and older people are more or less willing to use, or are capable of using, new media in order to gain access to the information that can help them to participate in a broadband society. Some researchers argue that there is a widening ‘digital divide’ between younger users of new media and older non-users (e.g. Prensky, 2001; see also Chapter 8 by

7 From 2006 to 2010 COST 298 “Participating in the Broadband Society” (http://www.cost298.org/) was a network of European researchers from telecommunication departments, universities and operators together with independent consultants that collaborated in cross-disciplinary groups to analyse social dimensions of people’s relationships to information and communication technologies. The editors of this volume were members of this network.
Table I.1 Denominations for younger and older people (not) using new media

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<th>Denomination for younger generations using new media</th>
<th>Denomination for younger generations not being able and/or willing to using new media</th>
<th>Denomination for older generations using new media</th>
<th>Denomination for older generations (not) being able to and/or willing to use new media</th>
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<td>Nintendo generation (Green and Bigum, 1993)</td>
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<td>Playstation generation (Blair, 2004)</td>
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<td>Screen generation (Rivoltella, 2006)</td>
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<td>Thumb generation&lt;sup&gt;10&lt;/sup&gt; (Brooke, 2002)</td>
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<td>Web generation (Hartmann, 2003)</td>
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<sup>8</sup> ‘Over the past couple of years Silver Surfer news have featured regularly in Ofcom’s [ ] Media Literacy Bulletins published on line at: www.ofcom.org.uk/advice/media_literacy/medlitpub/bulletins (see, for example, issues 7, 9 and 10).’ Sourbati (2010: 110)

<sup>9</sup> ‘The University College London (UCL) CIBER group will be conducting a study for the JISC and the British Library to investigate how the Google generation searches for information and the implications for the country’s major research collections.’ http://www.jisc.ac.uk/whatwedo/programmes/resourcediscovery/googlegen.aspx

<sup>10</sup> ‘Young people who have apparently developed a new dexterity in their thumbs as their use of game consoles and mobile phones.’ Buckingham and Willett (2006: 1)
Lugano and Pettonen). Others think that the situation is better characterised by the notion of a ‘digital spectrum’, with people using new media to varying degrees depending on factors such as age, life events, gender and education (e.g. Lenhart and Horrigan, 2003; see also Chapter 10 by Loos and Mante-Meijer).

How can we guarantee that the digital information presented through new media such as websites is accessible to, usable by and useful for different age groups so they all can continue to have access to the digital information about the services and products that can benefit them in our information society? On the one hand we need insight into which factors are facilitating access to and use of websites. Chapter 6 by Chisnell and Redish, and Chapter 10 by Loos and Mante-Meijer address this point. On the other hand we need to know if older people use new media differently than younger people. This is discussed in Part III of this volume. And, drawing on debates relating to ‘digital divide’, what is the nature of their various skills in using new media, from more operational ones to formal, information, and strategic searching skills? This question is answered in Chapter 9 by Van Deursen.

Outline of the Three-Part Volume

This volume focuses on how do new media fit into the lives of younger and older generations, or not, and indeed what makes various new media interesting for or attractive to the younger and older generations. The first part of this volume deals with young people using new media. Leslie Haddon, Joke Bauwens and Gustavo Cardoso, Rita Espanha and Tiago Lapa report the results of studies focused on the way children in families use new media. These studies range from parent relations with young children (Haddon), through the influence of peer culture on morality (Bauwens) to parental control and autonomy of children (Cardoso, Espanha and Lapa). David Herold examines the information literacy of students. In the second part Erik-Jan Hagberg, Dana Chisnell and Janice (Ginny) Redish, Günther Schreder, Karin Siebenhandl, Eva Mayr and Michael Smuc provide us with insights into older people’s experiences with such media, focussing on barrier free information. In the third part Giuseppe Lugano and Peter Peltonen, Alexander van Deursen, and Eugène Loos and Enid Mante-Meijer contrast the way younger people use new media with the way older people proceed.

In order to get a better understanding of what is really going on Generational Use of New Media presents results of literature reviews and empirical studies in this field conducted in the EU, Hong Kong and the USA, that contain theoretical reflections on these societal practices and practical implications for the use of new media by children in family life and the enhancement of an inclusive society where older people also can make use of new media. All the literature reviews and empirical

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11 See Van Ingen et al. (2007: 14) on the ‘digital divide’, according to them a term coined in 1995 by two journalists, Jonathan Webber and Amy Harmin of the LA Times, after which Al Gore further popularized the term in May 1996.
# Table I.2 Chapter overview

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studies are carried out from a user perspective\textsuperscript{12}, focusing on the everyday life\textsuperscript{13} of the younger and older generations inhabiting the multimedia landscape.

Finally, Table I.3 presents an overview of the way the literature reviews and empirical studies have been set up.

Table I.3  Overview set up literature reviews and empirical studies

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<td>10.</td>
<td>Younger vs older users</td>
<td>The Netherlands</td>
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<td>to find information</td>
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\textsuperscript{12} See also COST 298 (http://www.cost298.org/) and Haddon et al. (2005).

\textsuperscript{13} For a theoretical discussion on the notion of ‘everyday life’ we refer to Schutz and Luckman (1983), De Certeau et al. (1984), Highmore (2002) and Sheringham (2006). For a discussion of the relevance of this notion for media and technology use we refer to Bakardjieva (2005), Haddon et al. (2005) and Hartman (2008).
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