

# Digital technology and generation z



When speaking about the current generation, most people call its members “Generation Z.” Generation Z’s beginnings are much disputed, some arguing that the generation began in the mid-1990s, whereas others might go so far as to push the boundary as late as 2001. Either way, most use the dates to signify a leap in major technology, in addition to the end of the millennials, Gen Z’s predecessor.

Most describe Generation Z as more technologically able than other generations and very accepting of other cultures and traditions. Some of these traits can be traced back to some very influential events, such as the rise of technology, mass shootings, and the 9/11 Terrorist Attacks. These events created a way of life for Generation Z that could not be changed nor can the blame be placed upon them for creating it. The criticism that Gen Z receives is unfair for the most part, since they are only living in the world that was created for them by the previous generations.

Among many other things, Generation Z as a group are described as “digital natives,” and are the first generation to grow up knowing *only* the age of technology and not anything before it. Bloomberg states that, “Gen Z’ers have never known a non-digital world.” Both Generation X and the Millennials lived most or all their childhoods without having portable technology at their fingertips as this generation does. They did not have phones, portable computers, or digital cameras. Camera film and landlines were the norm. Planning was required to talk on the phone and texting was nonexistent. For millennials, Instant Messaging, or “IM’ing,” was common towards the end of the era, but was not nearly as accessible as instant messaging is today. Some might say that anyone today can choose to not

use technology, and so Generation Z isn't necessarily a "special generation," but they'd be wrong. Sure, it's possible to not look at a screen for a day, but every single average member of Generation Z knows what a cell phone looks like; it is impossible to not know. Today's world is entirely technologically driven, so it is impossible to live like generations before, even *if* one decides to not look at screens or other forms of modern technology because they'll already have lived with it there and will always have knowledge of its existence.

Yet another characteristic of Generation Z is their cultural acceptance. The members of Gen Z are, "Characterized as techsavvy... and tolerant of diverse cultures" (Tudományegyetem 2). Due to the constant interconnectedness of Generation Z and the technology they grew up around, cultural background and traditions are not as "foreign" as they once were. Anybody can log onto the internet and study a culture or chat with someone of that culture. Before, a culture was something that was celebrated locally, or that people learned about as a far away occurrence, creating the illusion that people who are far away are different from us in such a way that "They" are not compatible with "Us." Generation Z has, "Crossed the global, social and socio-economical borders more than ever" (Tudományegyetem 4). The ideation that Generation Z is more interconnected than ever is not a newfound idea. In fact, it is one of the most defining traits of the generation, and some articles go so far as to say that it is the way this generation should be described. However, there is argument that people have always connected around the world through communication devices such as the telegraph, pen pals, and other forms of

older information relay. This, although making some sense as an argument, fails to take into account the time required to send and receive these correspondences. If sending a letter overseas, one might have to wait months for a reply, whereas texting or email can get a response within moments.

In addition to experiencing technology, Generation Z has experienced many events that have had a lasting impact on the way they carry themselves and see the world. Most prominent in America is the mass shooting epidemic, and more specifically the Marjory Stoneman Douglass High school shooting, which opened doors for Generation Z's teen activism for justice and gun control. In addition, they were, although they probably do not remember it, alive for the Plane Bombing commonly known as 9/11. This set up an entirely different way of life in terms of security, racism, and the treatment of different people in politics.

**DIFFERENT TRANSITION?** Gunshots, muffled sobbing, shattering glass. Those are the sounds that Generation Z associates with schools nowadays. The country's influx of mass and school shootings has skyrocketed in recent years; since the Sandy Hook elementary shooting in December of 2012, 2, 032 mass shootings have happened according to Vox. com. One shooting that most definitely shook the core of Generation Z was the Marjory Stoneman Douglass High School Shooting. This generation of students rose up from schools all around the country in order to bring awareness to this tragedy and ensured that the public knew the MSD shooting would not be forgotten, and action will be taken to prevent any more shootings from happening.

What made this so important, in truth, is the fact that the victims could speak up this time. Most major school shootings that had previously been so heavily covered by the media were controlled, censored, and steered by parents, administrators, or the media. This time, the victims spoke up and made sure they'd be heard. In addition, MSD had a sky-high death toll at 17, and according to Education Week, "Of the 35 people who died this year, 27 were killed in the mass shootings at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Fla, and Santa Fe High School in Santa Fe, Texas." Not only was Stoneman Douglass one of 24 school shootings, but it accounted for over a third of all School-shooting deaths in 2018. This massive loss of life spurred Generation Z into action, sending members into a frenzy of unapologetic activism and strong opinions on gun control.

Another tragedy that helped create Generation Z was the Attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001. 9/11 was an act of terrorism in which four airplanes were hijacked by an Islamic terrorist group called al-Qaeda, who proceeded to fly the aforementioned planes into important American monuments; most well-known were the Twin Towers in New York. This tragedy shaped security as well as the racism that happens in America. Before this time, the "racist light" was still on black people due to desegregation only happening a few decades before. As soon as 9/11 happened, all attention was on people from the middle east. As a writer from KQED. com so eloquently writes, additional security measures in airports are, "Sometimes infringing on privacy rights and, in many instances, increasing scrutiny of minority travelers, particularly those of Middle Eastern descent" (Green III Paragraph 5.) Although the argument could be made that it is of popular opinion in the Middle East that the U. S. A. is a bad country and so we, as a country, should, in turn, dislike the Middle East as well, the fact arises that al-Qaeda is an extremist terrorist group and does not represent what the average Islamic or Muslim person believes, nor does it represent the ideals of any country. This idea that flying is a dangerous activity, and that anyone could kill anyone at any time is drilled into Generation Z'ers heads everywhere, all the time. They are forced to live this idea in everyday places like schools and airports, where people should feel safe.

Although criticism is something every person must go through, Generation Z is judged far too harshly due to things that they cannot control. For instance, Generation Z did not invent all the technology they use today; the generation before them did, but Gen Z is still criticized. In addition, Gen Z did not ask to have these tools as millennials did-they were given those tools and then were expected not to use them, because using them would be appearing to be "addicted" to their phones. Another invalid criticism of Generation Z is that they do not like socializing in person because they have their phones. This can be proven wrong in Danah Boyd's book: It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens, where it is said that based off o interviews an surveys from teens that they love to leave the house and go out, but can't due to possible hurdles such as parental boundaries or lack of transportation. So, teens use phones to keep in contact with the very friends that they cannot go see as much as they'd like. However, there are some valid criticisms on Generation Z, like that the members are very opinionated. Some might find this trait a downfall due to the possibility of people with different opinions butting heads, especially in the workplace, but that very trait an also be seen as the idea that Gen Z'ers are willing to fight for what they believe in.

Moreover, according to Bloomberg, Generation Z, "Will comprise 32 percent of the global population of 7. 7 billion in 2019... based on Bloomberg analysis of United Nations data." This data is based on Generation Z beginning in the year 2001. This means that the Baby Boomers, formerly the generation that had the most members ever, will be dethroned by the world's teens and

young adults. This fact carries further implications than what meets the eye, though. This means that the power of democracy will soon be in the hands of Gen Z, and that will bring about a major shift in ideas, laws, and most other aspects of life. Even now, Generation Z is still bringing major shifts through their activism and outspokenness.

**In summation, Generation Z is a techsavvy, more accepting generation than those passed. All the major events experienced by Generation Z such as technology, mass shootings, and terrorist attacks helped to shape Generation Z into all that it is today. Without technology, Gen Z would not be nearly as connected as they are today. Without the mass shootings Gen Z would be less cautious and possibly less forceful in their activism. 9/11 reshaped the world's sense of security, and so Generation Z, having been born into it, has not lived without the idea that anyone can kill them at any time. Although these events may not be positive, they created a strong and impressive generation that will live and learn as years progress. The overly-harsh criticism of Gen Z for things they were not responsible for will not deter their aptitude for self-expression and technology. These events made Generation Z who they are, in all their mostly-unfairly-criticized glory.**

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