

Tweetin' 'bout my generation

Our online lives are important in this golden age of connectivity, but sometimes we need to take a break from our multi-screen existence



By [George Wood](#), Deputy Muse Editor (2012/13)

Sunday 7 July 2013

We are, as 21st century consumers, obsessive about connectivity. In a tech-driven society, almost every aspect of our life must be wired to the world, from our mobile phones to our computers to anything with an internet connection.

This kind of consumer culture is what Google uses to gauge the success of YouTube. "Generation C", or Gen C for short, describes people bound by a common, expressive state, transcending traditional barriers of age and location. Gen C are those who "care deeply about creation, curation, connection and community". But given how certain scientific studies (and our mothers) like to preach the dangers of being glued to our screens 24/7, perhaps Gen C is better off referring to crack. Are we really "addicted" to the online world?

Online connection is something we as students can take for granted. Gen C applies to anyone with a certain mindset, but usually includes those who grew up "digitally native" to the internet. In our academic lives, the internet has become a primary research tool. In our social lives, the internet heralds a new platform for networking and media.

But Gen C is not about being tech-savvy, hence why it's such a big thing for social networking enterprises. We don't need to know all the ins and outs of a computer to use Facebook and Twitter. Instead, Gen C is about how we shape our lives around a multi-screen, online existence.

For Google, obviously this is a good thing. Gen C places a higher value on social convergence and interconnectivity; they want to be able to interact with what they consume, and share this content with like-minded consumers. Video viewers of Gen C will watch more of YouTube than television, simply because it's a far more networked way of passing time. Though they won't put aside an hour to watch YouTube clips like they would with a TV programme, they'll spend the equivalent time exploring YouTube's ever-growing expanse of videos to find content that can be shared and suited to their immediate needs.

In one way, Gen C are the pioneers of a creative paradise. There are just so many tweets, videos and blog posts being created everyday by normal individuals, like ourselves. No longer are we conformed to one-way consumption; it is easier than ever to contribute to this melting pot of ideas and content, and go on to share this with others. This notion is appealing: it fulfils a sense of self-importance, since creating and sharing content online stretches beyond our "offline" lives.

But this paradise comes at a cost of switching-off. The way that social media and networking has thrived means we are faced with the stress of living a metropolitan life. Whether it's a Facebook notification, a live score update or a news story, we are fixated on our screens for information.

My family sometimes mention the way I use my laptop, mobile and TV at the same time, doubting how I

can pay attention all three at once. It's not so much the length of time spent online that's the issue - though time can become a problem, we have perfectly valid reasons for our online dependencies. We need the internet for work and keeping in contact with people we can't otherwise socialise with. The problem lies in that when we become wired in such a way, reality in comparison seems too slow.

We crave for our devices, needing a quick distraction or info-fix. I'm hesitant to use the word "addiction" - I'm no psychologist but taking it to describe the behaviour of so many internet-users seems to undermine more compulsive disorders, namely drug addictions. Yet spending too much of our lives online can lead to health problems like sleep deprivation, and issues in socialising with people in real-life when they're not on the same technologically alert, high-frequency buzz. Google mentions that 91% of Gen C sleeps next to a smartphone. This is not something we should be proud of.

Everyone needs time out to relax. The companies of social media and technology may claim that their products make living more efficient, but in reality they add more stress to our lives. Sometimes it's just better to focus on one distraction in life than a hundred, and ideally one not emitting from a screen. Without the pressures of university, take this summer as a chance to break away from your devices. We may live in a new age of connectivity, but that doesn't mean everything has to be connected. Not every sight needs to be put up on Instagram or Facebook, not every thought needs to be tweeted. Just #enjoythemoment.



One comment

Sam Hickford

7 Jul '13 at 3:55 pm

I agree - the best way to get information about the world is to actually go out and physically see it. Smartphones will never transcend real-life experience. I see people on their smartphones all the time in situations where there is so much to see and do and I think, 'Why are you on your smartphone, checking your Facebook notifications, when the world is physically in front of you?' Yet maybe I am just prematurely old.

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