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To cite this article: Elza Venter (2017) Bridging the communication gap between Generation Y and the Baby Boomer generation, International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 22:4, 497-507, DOI: [10.1080/02673843.2016.1267022](https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2016.1267022)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2016.1267022>



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Published online: 05 Jan 2017.



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Bridging the communication gap between Generation Y and the Baby Boomer generation

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ABSTRACT

Interpersonal communication has changed since the inception of the internet. Face-to-face communication moved to computer-mediated communication (CMC). CMC users are mostly younger people such as Generation Y. They are comfortable with using digital interactive technologies for communication. The Baby Boomer generation, on the other hand, values face-to-face communication. The different ways of communication causes conflict between these two generations. The research question is: 'How can the generational communication gap between the Baby Boomer generation and Generation Y be closed in order to allow them to have meaningful interpersonal communication?' The research was done through a literature review within the cues-filtered-out approach, using the social presence theory. The conclusion is that the meaning of messages is often compromised in CMC because of the lack of nonverbal cues and social presence, however rather than not communicating, people should communicate via digital media to meet some of their relational needs.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 18 November 2016

Accepted 28 November 2016

KEYWORDS

Generation Y; Baby Boomer generation; face-to-face communication; computer-mediated communication; verbal communication; nonverbal communication

Introduction

Communication is fundamental to human existence. Stewart (2002a, pp. 6–9, 35) stresses the notion that there is a link between quality of communication and quality of life. Human potential develops through close, supportive and interpersonal communication. Human beings are in essence relational thus in need of contact with other human beings. During interpersonal communication people make contact with others as persons, thus reinforcing their own humanness. Mutual communication means recognizing another human being's humanness in a world shared together. Meaningful interpersonal communication looks at how two people interact as a dyad treating each other as unique individuals who are irreplaceable. In other words they have an impact on each other's lives (Adler, Rosenfeld, & Proctor 2010 in Turnbull, 2010, p. 6).

Whether one speaks of written or spoken communication; verbal or nonverbal communication; face-to-face or digital communication, the process of communication involves humans making meaning together (Stewart, 2002b, p. 17). Face-to-face interactions allow people to communicate verbally and nonverbally – with spoken and body language. Communication does not, however, only occur face-to-face – telephone conversations, text or instant messages and participation on social networks suggest a personal connection with another person (Solomon & Theiss, 2013, p. 6), although more through verbal cues.

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The way people communicate interpersonally has changed through the ages. People used to communicate face-to-face or by writing letters. The latter was a slow process of communication, and because transport was a problem people could not communicate face-to-face every day seeing that they lived far apart. Only a limited number of people could be contacted in the mentioned ways. With the advent of telephonic communication, it became easier to contact more people more quickly (Nosko et al., 2013, p. 1). The development of transport systems and urbanization improved the opportunities for face-to-face communication, because people lived in closer proximity to each other and could reach each other more easily. However, computer-mediated communication (CMC) changed the way people communicated even more – through the inception of the internet in general and of social networks in particular people have gained the ability to be in constant contact with others, quickly and easily.

The definition of interpersonal communication has thus changed because of the development of digital tools and technologies. Each technology changes how people communicate or interact (Duck & McMahan, 2009, p. 236). All technologies, however, have the notion of social interactions and connection in mind, but different generations use different technologies to communicate and they are not always appreciative of ways of communication different from what they are used to – this is especially true of communication between Generation Y and the Baby Boomer generation because Generation Y is the first digital generation and the Baby Boomers mostly use face-to-face communication. Generation Y comprises late adolescence and early adulthood, whilst the Baby Boomers are the parents, employers or lecturers and teachers of Generation Y. It is of the utmost importance that these two generations maintain good channels of communication because their paths are often interlinked and the two generations can give meaning to each other's lives. Unfortunately, these two generations regularly find themselves engaged in conflict due to generational differences, especially when it comes to the use of communication technologies.

Generation Y (born post 1980) is the first generation of so-called 'digital natives' who have grown up with highly interactive digital communication tools. Members of this generation often spend hours communicating with various people via the internet using, for instance, social media tools, mobile phones, Skype and instant messaging. The Baby Boomer generation on the other hand values face-to-face communication. They will send e-mails or phone another person if they cannot walk or drive to that person, but they will seldom resort to only instant messaging to fill their interpersonal communication needs. According to Glass (2007, p. 100) differences, especially in their choice of communication media, can cause conflict between the two generations. The majority of Baby Boomers have a problem with the way Generation Y uses technology for work, play and studies, while Generation Y sees Baby Boomers as being resistant to new technology and change. It can thus be a challenge to get messages across in a meaningful way between these two generations. A lack of communication – or misunderstanding in communication – can have a direct bearing on a person's well-being. This phenomenon, specifically as it pertains to interpersonal communication between the Baby Boomer generation and Generation Y, is addressed here alongside a study of the literature available on the topic.

The main research question to try to alleviate the problem identified in the preceding discussion is: 'How can the generational communication gap between the Baby Boomer generation and Generation Y be closed in order to allow them to have meaningful interpersonal communication?' The research was done through a literature review within the cues-filtered-out approach, using the social presence theory. The premise of the author, who is a Baby Boomer, is that CMC often lacks enough appropriate non-verbal communication cues, preventing effective conveyance of emotions and attitudes to CMC messages, thus compromising the meaning of messages (see Lo, 2008). The lack of social presence also adds to the issue of meaningful communication between generations.

The concept 'Generation'

Urbain, Gonzalez, and Le Gall-Ely (2013, p. 159) summarize the definitions of the concept 'generation' by Jaworski and Sauer (1985) and Ladwein, Carton, and Sevin (2009) by setting out the different approaches mentioned by these authors, namely: '(i) a demographic approach (an entire group of people of the same

age group), (ii) a genealogical and family oriented approach (parent/children), (iii) a historical approach (the average time for a person to become autonomous and inserted), and (iv) a sociological approach ('generational cohort' or groups of individuals that share a number of practices and representations because they are approximately the same age and have lived during the same period). The sociological approach is endorsed in this article because it highlights generational characteristics in terms of values and attitudes. This approach is in line with the definition of Edmund and Turner (2002, p. 7) who see a generation as 'an age cohort that comes to have social significance by virtue of consuming itself as cultural identity'. The different generations, as indicated by various authors (e.g. Bush et al., 2004; Kim et al., 2009; Noble & Schewe, 2003; Noble et al., 2004; Rindfleisch, 1994; Wolberg & Pokrywczynski, 2001), are (i) the Silent Generation; (ii) the Baby Boomers; (iii) Generation X; (iv) Generation Y; and (v) Generation Z (see Urbain et al., 2013, p. 161). This research focuses on the Baby Boomer Generation and Generation Y.

Helsper and Enyon (2009) and Koutropoulos (2011, p. 526) contend that not every single person born within a specific timeframe portrays generic generational characteristics – for instance, the context of upbringing, historical background and socio-economic status of individuals play an important role. It is important to have knowledge of a person's exposure to and experience of digital technologies before, for instance defining that person as a 'digital native' or 'digital immigrant' (see Prensky, 2001). 'The idea of generational characteristics is an approximate one, and people do not always fit neatly into such defined categories' (Helyer & Lee, 2012, p. 568). In this research context, Generation Y and the Baby Boomer generation are the preferred terms and their characteristics are used in a generic way. The focus, however, is on the way they communicate and not on all the general characteristics of the specific generation. These generations have unique ways of communicating – Baby Boomers have mastered the use of some digital devices, but are not comfortable using only CMC for interpersonal communication, while Generation Y is totally comfortable with CMC (Krohn, 2004, p. 326). Consequently there are generational communication gaps, especially in the way the generations communicate interpersonally. Generation gaps will affect and interrupt the quality and meaningfulness of communication between generations (see Heng & Yazdanifard, 2013, p. 837) if each of the generations does not come to an understanding of the other generation's ways of communicating. This understanding of each other is important for employers, teachers and parents all of whom are engaged in various relationships with younger generations, but it is also important for the younger generations to understand the older generations so that meaningful relations can be established and maintained.

Baby Boomer generation and communication

Members of the Baby Boomer generation were born more or less between 1946 and 1964. This generation spans an extended period in time and the experiences of people within this generation vary. Baby Boomers were born when the telephone and television were the major technological contributions to households (Walmsley, 2011, p. 25). Prensky (2001) calls this generation 'digital immigrants' because 'digital' is their second language and they need to learn this language to communicate with the 'digital natives' – but some struggle to adapt to this new environment and keep their 'digital immigrant accent'. They will, for instance, print out e-mails and documents to be edited; they will read the manual instead of using the internet to learn a new programme hands-on; and they will call people into their offices to show them an interesting web site, instead of sending them the URL.

Baby Boomers are very competitive, because of their large numbers and they excel, especially in work situations. They find it difficult, however, to continue excelling, because of career pressure from younger generations and their lack of technological knowledge (Glass, 2007, p. 100). The Baby Boomers are seen as loyal, committed and reliable, but they also expect loyalty from others around them – at work as employers and employees, at home as parents and in school as teachers. They respect hierarchy and authority and expect respect from others, especially from the younger generations (Helyer & Lee, 2012, p. 568; Heng & Yazdanifard, 2013, p. 837). This generation has a strong work ethic. Their career is of utmost importance to them and they believe in stability, sometimes staying in one career and using opportunities within this one career during their life time (Helyer & Lee, 2012, p. 568).

The Baby Boomers often have little appreciation for the new skills of Generation Y. They are used to learning 'step-by-step, one thing at a time, individually, and above all, seriously', in contrast with the multi-tasking, multi-media, fun way of learning adopted by Generation Y (Prensky, 2001). Baby Boomers prefer autonomy and a work ethic that differs from Generation Y's sense of collaboration (Helyer & Lee, 2012, p. 568).

Baby Boomers communicate mostly using face-to-face communication, telephone conversations and e-mail. They will seldom use blogs, wikis, social networking sites and texting or instant messaging in more formal situations, such as in the work context (Heng & Yazdanifard, 2013, p. 838). They rely on face-to-face communication where body language and non-verbal cues are important (Walmsley, 2011, p. 25). Older generations are making more and more use of CMC, but mostly through e-mails or short messages on mobile phones. Gradually, however, they are moving towards using other social and digital media (Turnbull, 2010, p. 7), but many of the older members of this generation are still uncomfortable with CMC.

Generation Y and communication

Generation Y was born between 1980 and more or less 2000 (Hartman & McCambridge, 2011, p. 22; Liu, Pasman, Stappers, & Taal-Fokker, 2012, p. 697). Some authors call them millennials (Howe & Strauss, 2000). Other authors describe this generation using concepts such as digital natives (Prensky, 2001), the net generation (Tapscott, 1998), the web generation (Hartmann, 2003) or the Google generation (see Helsper & Enyon, 2009, p. 1). Members of Generation Y are digital natives because they have grown up experiencing digital technology and have known it all their lives. Prensky (2001) coined the concept 'digital natives' because this generation are 'native speakers of the digital language of computers, video games and the internet'. This generation spans 20 years and its older members use a combination of face-to-face communication and CMC, whilst its younger members use mainly electronic and digital technologies for interpersonal communication. They embrace new and innovative technologies and are often called 'tech-savvy multi-taskers' (Eckleberry-Hunt & Tucciarone, 2011, p. 458; Krohn, 2004, p. 325; Lui, 2012, p. 349). The techno-centricity of this generation puts the emphasis on the individual, but they also need group interaction, especially in view of their need for constant feedback. Generation Y grew up with overprotective parents ('helicopter parents') who continually assured them of how special they are. Support from others in their lives is thus very important to them (Eckleberry-Hunt & Tucciarone, 2011, p. 458; Feiertag & Berge, 2008, p. 458). Because of parents and teachers giving this generation, all the affirmation they need for success, they often have feelings of entitlement and desire recognition for their achievements. They will challenge people in authority if they think they can make a valuable contribution and are not getting the recognition they presume they deserve. On the other hand, however, they want a balance between their work/studies and personal life and thus focus less intensely than Baby Boomers on one life goal (Reilly, 2012, p. 4).

According to Prensky (2001), the brain structures of the digital generation have changed due to their never-ending exposure to technologies and, as a result, they think and process information differently from previous generations. These young people are used to receiving information quickly. They get instant gratification and rewards through networking different internet sites simultaneously – thus using parallel processing and multi-tasking. 'This generation is accustomed to instantaneous hypertext, downloaded music, communication via cell phone and text messaging, and information from laptops [or iPods and tablets]'. Graphics are often more important to them than text, and reading is therefore not that important to this generation (Black, 2010, p. 95; Prensky, 2001).

Generation Y has its own way of interaction which differs from previous generations. This generation likes to have constant connections with family and friends at any time and from any place via various digital devices and on social networks (Black, 2010, p. 94). They are, for instance, connected via cell phones, blogs, Facebook or YouTube (Black, 2010, p. 95); they have personalized home pages; they download their favourite songs on iPods or computers, and share these with friends on social network sites or mobile phones. They take digital photographs with smart phones, e-mail the pictures

to friends, send them to their Flickr accounts or put them on Facebook within minutes (Lui, 2012, p. 349). Based on these abilities, Liu (2012, pp. 349–351) identifies six interaction qualities of Generation Y's communication, namely

Instant – The interaction is experienced as immediate, spontaneous and on the spot.

Playful – The interaction is experienced as engaging, enjoyable and challenging.

Collaborative – The interaction is experienced as supportive, unifying and shared.

Expressive – The interaction is experienced as open, free, and animated.

Responsive – The interaction is experienced as alert, quick and reactive.

Flexible – The interaction is experienced as adaptable, accommodating and adjustable.

Hartman and McCambridge (2011, p. 22) describe Generation Y as technologically sophisticated multi-taskers capable of making significant contributions where they study, work or play, but with a communication deficiency. They have used cell phones, pagers, computers, personal electronic entertainment and social media all of their lives, yet their use of constant, informal, technology-based connectedness does not mean adequate communication skills, especially interpersonal communication skills (Hartman & McCambridge, 2011, pp. 24, 25).

While many members of this generation are good conversationalists, they are known for 'communicating by electronic means as much as or perhaps even more than face-to-face interactions' (Walmsley, 2011, p. 26). They use digital communication and social networks as their preferred means of communication. The size of the audience they communicate with matters to most of them – meaning that they try to connect to as many people or groups of people as possible. Many of these online friendships, however, focus on the '... self, constant expectations of speaking to an audience, and sharing of personal, even intimate information ... [because of] the distance and relative safety digital technology affords' (Joinson, 2008 in Miller, 2013, p. 95). Black (2010, p. 96) contends that, although Generation Y has many online friendships cross-country and internationally, these friendships are often superficial. Members of this generation seem to regularly compete for numbers in online friendships. Unfortunately the ease of forming friendships also makes it easy to write off friends online without any face-to-face communication. There often is a lack of 'online manners and responsibility as well as an insensitivity and even cruelty to others' (Black, 2010, p. 96). Notwithstanding the mentioned problems, Generation Y communicates well through electronic and digital media, but they sometimes struggle with effective face-to-face communication (Heng & Yazdanifard, 2013, p. 838). They lack the ability to communicate effectively, because of mainly using CMC without traditional nonverbal cues (Feiertag & Berge, 2008, pp. 461, 462).

Face-to-face vs. digital/CMC

A major difference between face-to-face communication and CMC is the lack of physical presence, as well as the 'traditional nonverbal dimensions of human communication such as facial expressions, gestures, body positions, personal distance, vocal variety, and eye contact' (Krohn, 2004, p. 322) in CMC.

Stewart and Logan (2002, pp. 117–138), Nichol and Watson (2000, p. 138) discuss verbal and nonverbal communication as intertwined concepts: two sides of the same communication coin. According to Duck and McMahan (2009, p. 53) '... nonverbal communication is an essential relational element of all interaction, and you cannot have interactions without nonverbal communication; nor can you have interactions without the relational messages that nonverbal communication sends'. Nonverbal communication helps to explain verbal communication; it determines social impressions and affects the emotional climate of a conversation (Bente & Krämer, 2011, p. 176). It includes messages without actual words and consists of both intentional and unintentional messages. Both verbal and nonverbal communication make use of symbols, but verbal communication uses language, whilst nonverbal communication uses all other symbolic activity apart from language (Duck & McMahan, 2009, pp. 54–57).

Face-to-face communication consists of verbal and non-verbal cues. The goal of non-verbal communication is to convey emotional messages and that of verbal communication mostly to convey ideas (Lo, 2008, p. 595). According to Trevino, Daft, and Lengel (1990 in Sherblom, 2010, p. 499) face-to-face communication, consisting of verbal and nonverbal communication, is the richest medium of communication for conveyance of personal emotion, synchronous feedback, multiple simultaneous verbal and non-verbal social cues as well as variety of language and inflection. Face-to-face communication is the best way to make decisions, solve problems and for relational development.

A good communicator will show attentive listening, interpersonal concern, emotional expressiveness, confidence and composure, which are very difficult to attain in CMC (Sherblom, 2010, pp. 497, 478, 504) where nonverbal communication is mostly done through verbal descriptions, avatars, emoticons or using Skype- or video-mediated communication. CMC is seen as a leaner medium of communication than face-to-face communication because it conveys limited information, nonverbal cues and feedback. It is seen as more appropriate for unequivocal communication (Sherblom, 2010, p. 499).

Many studies on CMC researched by Turnbull (2010, p. 6) indicate that without tone, posture, gestures, or facial expressions, there is a lack of richness in communication. Such communication is more impersonal and can lead to loneliness and isolation. People spend a lot of time on the Internet, but less time talking directly to others, either face-to-face or on the phone. Messages on the Internet are often hard to interpret, especially when irony and humour are used, and misunderstandings can arise as a consequence of this. The relative lack of nonverbal cues to convey people's feelings often leads to these misunderstandings and negatively influences the identity of the communicators and the meaning of their messages (Sherblom, 2010, pp. 497, 478). According to Sherblom's (2010, p. 500) literature study, CMC reduces, modifies, and eliminates many vocal and physical cues and this restricts the communication of social information about a specific person. Moreover it also generates an amorphous impression and reduces social presence.

The cues-filtered-out approach and social presence theory claim that mediated communication often lacks nonverbal cues and it causes problems with the conveyance of the emotions and attitudes of the sender of a digital message. 'The social presence indicates a communicator's subjective sense about the salience of an interaction partner. Because CMC lacks nonverbal cues ... the social presence of CMC is lower, so senders cannot freely choose the "mood of message" ... CMC lacks nonverbal cues to convey socially oriented conversations, causing receivers to misunderstand the actual intent of the sender resulting in conflicts' (cues-filtered-out approach) (Lo, 2008, p. 595). Social presence is very important for social-emotional communication and an understanding of another person. Yamada (2009 in Sherblom, 2010, p. 500) defines social presence as '... the salience of psychological proximity, immediacy, intimacy, and familiarity experienced with the other person, communication, and relationship'. The social presence theory indicates that nonverbal cues are used in communication to create a sense of the 'other' and with it creating warmth, friendliness, and satisfaction with the interaction (Lo, 2008, p. 595; Walther, 2011, p. 19).

Online social presence indicates the 'degree of feeling, perception, and reaction of being connected' via CMC to another human being without physical presence (Yen & Tu, 2008, p. 297). Although online communicators have learnt to use emoticons to assist them in conveying emotions or attitudes, the problem remains because it is merely a visual representation of the emotion felt at the time (Lo, 2008, p. 595). Emoticons are abstractions of facial expressions of emotions and convey basic emotions such as joy and sadness – often combined with appropriate wording (Yuasa, Saito, & Mukawa, 2011, p. 17) – but social presence is absent. Nonverbal communication is unintentional and is often more believable than verbal communication where contradictions appear during the communication process. Emoticons are intentional, therefore one would question their real effectiveness, although in combination with words, emoticons can be effective (Krohn, 2004, p. 322; Yuasa et al., 2011, p. 17). According to the Channel Expansion Theory users of CMC try to eliminate the negative effects of not having nonverbal communication in its original sense by developing and accumulating communicative strategies such as emoticons as an accommodation (Lo, 2008, p. 595).

Emoticons, however, 'constitute very basic symbolic communications via electronic media' which is very different from 'emotional speech or facial expressions', thus 'emoticons can be considered as a means of verbal and nonverbal communication characterized by a simple form of emotional enhancement' (Yuasa et al., 2011, p. 22).

Apart from emoticons, users of mainly CMC resort to using other means of communication such as for instance video conferencing or Skype – where the people in communication can see and hear each other. The use of these forums for online communication gives a sense of presence, but using a screen in communication and mostly having a person sitting relatively still in front of it, does influence the fluency of the process (see Bitti & Garotti, 2011, pp. 83–92). Two elements that can be problematic with video communication are the 'two-dimensionality of the screen and its viewing frame, "the prisoner of the window" effect' (Nichol & Watson, 2000, p. 138). The video screen provides a two dimensional display of the communicators, normally without perfect resolution, thus influencing the image seen on the screen. The communicators in video-mediated communication cannot use all the dimensions of nonverbal communication (e.g. olfactory and kinaesthetic sensory information) (Nichol & Watson, 2000, p. 138; Parkinson & Lea, 2011, pp. 102–109), and thus the quality of communication is weaker. 'Direct eye-to-eye contact is replaced by screen-focused gaze, and the spatial relationship between bodies is apparent rather than real' (Nichol & Watson, 2000, p. 138). Avatars are also used to enhance CMC, but this may have negative socio-emotional effects, because of the lack of real movement and facial expressions for example a conversation can be interpreted as portraying a negative attitude, without the participants realizing that the lack of nonverbal communication is due to technical restrictions (Bente & Krämer, 2011, p. 183).

According to Srivastava (2012, p. 12) and Duck and McMahan (2009, p. 243) social networking services are online services, platforms or sites focusing on the building of social networks or social relations among people. It connects existing social networks in a digital way, but also allows for new networks and relationships with people around the globe. It, therefore, gives the option of a large number of connection points world-wide. Guy (2012, p. 4) refers to Liu's research (2010) where respondents indicate that the four main reasons for using social media tools are for social engagement (85%); direct communication (56%); speed of feedback/results (48%) and for relationship building (47%). The respondents realize the importance of communication and relationship building, but does the use of mainly digital technologies convey the message, attitude and emotions of the sender sufficiently, clearly and truthfully?

According to Sherblom's (2010, pp. 500, 501) research, CMC often results in de-individuation of a person, because of the lack of social cues, overemphasis of textual cues and relative visual anonymity, resulting in stereotyping and conformance to group norms and identity. The communicator often presents him/herself in such a way as to optimize self-presentation and to facilitate socially desirable relationships using socially common identity cues of gender, physical appearance and physical ability. Communicators can edit responses, review message content and construct messages strategically to present a desirable self-image. All of this means that inhibitions are reduced during communication and this often facilitates indiscriminate self-disclosure. The relative anonymity in CMC prolongs decision-making and can increase the potential for interpersonal deception and antisocial communication (Sherblom, 2010, p. 505).

On the positive side, anxious and introverted people communicate with more ease through CMC than they would in face-to-face communication and this enhances interpersonal interaction and relational social presence, especially when using written interactive media (High & Caplan 2009 in Sherblom, 2010, pp. 504, 505). Communicators using CMC will feel less inhibited, and freer to disagree and to confront others. People using CMC to communicate often experience positive feelings of psychological well-being and interpersonal closeness (Sherblom, 2010, pp. 505, 506).

'As people gain experience with CMC they learn to verbalize social information, engage in social interaction and achieve a sense of social presence and competence' (Sherblom, 2010, p. 504).

Bridging the communication gap between the Baby Boomer generation and Generation Y

As seen in the preceding discussion, Generation Y and the Baby Boomer generation differ in the way they communicate interpersonally. Generation Y makes more use of CMC and the Baby Boomers use face-to-face communication. The difference in communication media has the potential for conflict and misunderstanding between the generations causing a generational communication gap.

But, despite all the generic characteristics and differences between Generations Y and the Baby Boomers, there are similarities – for instance, both generations value regard for what they do. Both generations also know that they need to keep up with technological changes in order to make a success of their work and studies, but they differ in the way they apply these changes. Both generations are human beings with their own personalities and values, notwithstanding generational differences. The multi-generational community should rather be valued for diversity than focusing on the differences. ‘Stereotyping and rigid categories are not useful’ (Helyer & Lee, 2012, pp. 569, 574) for meaningful communication between generations.

The key to effective communication is open-mindedness on the part of both Generation Y and the Baby Boomers. Generation Y should not consider Baby Boomers as totally ignorant about technology and CMC and Baby Boomers should regard Generation Y as presenting an opportunity to learn, not as a threat. The different generations should try to see each other as unique individuals and should treat each other with respect, notwithstanding their differences. Generational differences cannot be changed, but members of different generations can try to understand each other and validate each other's values. Each generation can learn from the other. Baby Boomers are, for instance, ‘experienced, skilled and knowledgeable’ and Generation Y brings their knowledge of technology and their creativity to the table. The different generations must accept that each generation has its inherent strengths and weaknesses. Understanding, respect and open-mindedness will lead to meaningful communication where generations can motivate each other and bring out the best in each other (Heng & Yazdanifard, 2013, p. 839; Walmsley, 2011, p. 256). If the different generations acknowledge that they can learn from each other, there will be a more positive culture where people respect each other (Walmsley, 2011, p. 26). Baby Boomers will, however, have to adapt more than Generation Y and they will have to learn to communicate in the digital language of Generation Y, although this does not mean giving up what is important in their lives (Prensky, 2001).

Based on the analysis of the literature and implications for practice, the researcher wants to focus on what each generation can do to make inter-generational communication more meaningful.

The Baby Boomers will enhance their communication with Generation Y by doing the following:

- Baby Boomers should respect the members of Generation Y and their ways of communicating and living. Although Baby Boomers may sometimes consider members of Generation Y as shallow and playful and not as committed to what is considered as important in life, meaningful conversations with members of Generation Y create the opportunity to learn from them, resulting in acknowledgement of Generations Y's need for guidance and mentoring from the older generation.
- Baby Boomers should be more open to contributions and ideas from Generation Y by learning about new technologies and devices to lessen the digital divide. If Baby Boomers want a good relationship with Generation Y, they should increase their knowledge of technology and CMC (Joshi, 2012). They need to start speaking the ‘digital language’ of the younger generation to make conversations more meaningful.
- If Baby Boomers embrace technology and digital communication, they will be able to strike up a more meaningful relationship with members of Generation Y. Though Baby Boomers prefer face-to-face; telephone and e-mail conversations, they need to appreciate that members of Generation Y are not as keen on these forms of communication. It does not, however, mean that they do not care about the messages from the older generation.

- Over-protective Baby Boomers need to give members of Generation Y more independence and not take responsibility and accountability away from them – they cannot expect young people to function independently if they are not given the opportunity to do so.
- The Baby Boomers are very competitive and often disregard their own emotional well-being, which will for instance influence the emotional well-being of younger generations at home, school and work. More face-to-face communication opportunities should be created between the different generations to raise Generation Y's awareness of emotions like empathy and kindness. Guidance should be given on how to communicate constructively through CMC to avoid online cruelty, abuse and bullying.
- Family time without the presence of digital devices is important to build relationships and to learn to meaningfully communicate in face-to-face situations with appropriate nonverbal cues.

Generation Y can also do their part to enhance meaningful communication with the Baby Boomer generation by doing the following:

- As for members of Generation Y, it is apparent that they should have empathy with Baby Boomers' unfamiliarity with digital communication devices, and of their preference for face-to-face communication (Joshi, 2012). They should have more patience with Baby Boomers when sharing technological know-how and support and encourage their use of technology.
- Though members of Generation Y generally have self-confidence and will stand firm in what they believe, they should approach their relationships with Baby Boomers in a positive way and accept guidance and advice.
- Generation Y could teach the older generations to have more fun in life and assist them to review their work vs. personal life balance. Because Baby Boomers are competitive and want to reach the highest accolades in their one specific job, they often neglect their personal well-being and family commitments. Generation Y, on the other hand, makes time for friends and family even though they communicate digitally more often than face-to-face.
- Members of Generation Y communicate often, but they use quick and easy ways that may compromise quality personal communication. Young people often sit together, texting each other, instead of communicating face-to-face. They should make more time to have meaningful face-to-face conversations with friends and family. Hartman and McCambridge (2011, pp. 25, 26, 28) emphasize the importance of the 'development of communication skills, especially interpersonal communication skills' for Generation Y, because of their over reliance on their technological skills.

All generations agree that having digital devices and means to communicate when it is convenient, notwithstanding time or place, is a big advantage of CMC. Parents and children for instance communicate more often with each other via digital means when face-to-face communication time is not viable (Turnbull, 2010, p. 7). The younger generation should make older generations aware of the fact that they do care even when communicating more often via CMC than through face-to-face communication, but they also have to realize that physical presence is important for meaningful relationships especially with the older generations.

The challenge with meaningful conversations on digital devices still lies in the inability to use non-verbal communication in its traditional sense and in the lack of the physical presence of another human being during the communication process. In Turnbull's study (2010, p. 10) both generations indicate that they feel that without face-to-face communication with verbal and nonverbal cues, they miss out on many aspects of interpersonal communication.

Conclusion

Face-to-face communication remains the ideal way of communicating for all generations, but unfortunately it involves planning and it is time consuming. In today's world, this seems to become more and more difficult. Real face-to-face communication seems to be more probable over weekends and

holidays and people have therefore learned to use other means of communication in their daily lives (Turnbull, 2010, p. 9). Rather than not communicating because of lack of time and space, people could communicate via digital media to meet some of their relational needs and to enhance meaningful relations between generations.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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