

Generation Y

Always connected and interlinked in a vibrant
exciting world?

Af Anne-Katharina Weilenmann

"To arrive at the edge of the world's knowledge, seek out the most complex and sophisticated minds, put them in a room together, and have them ask each other the questions they are asking themselves". (Website "Edge": <http://www.edge.org>)

Abstract

Artiklen tager sit udgangspunkt i de ændringer i sociale miljøer digital teknologi og udviklingen af de sociale medier har skabt. Den fokuserer på de unge digitalt indfødte generationer - generation Y - og deres veje til information og dannelse i en situation, hvor mængden af information er overvældende stor. Hvad betyder disse ændringer for unge, hvordan forholder de sig til de enorme informations- og datamængder? Hvordan kan bibliotekarer støtte de udfordringer generationen står overfor? Artiklen introducerer og diskuterer den nyere forskningslitteratur på feltet og den konkluderer, at bibliotekarer kann skabe inspirerende fysiske og virtuelle miljøer, hvor informationsbehov knyttet til læring, arbejde og fritid kan eksistere side om side. Bibliotekarer kan bane vej for et system, der understøtter udveksling, dialog og idéudvikling på tværs.

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Introduction

In the 21st century new technologies and fascinating gadgets are dominating our daily life more than ever. Augmented reality, wearable computing, Quantified Self¹, big data - with the emergence of such important phenomena, the "Internet of Things" (Anderson & Rainie, 2014) will soon be a reality. We are living in a very exciting and vibrant world.

In one minute Internet users send more than 200 million emails; every 60 seconds more than four million queries are sent to Google; on Facebook, users are sharing nearly 2.5 million posts (Morrison, 2014). The modern citizen of today is always on and connected to different people and devices. The new formula is "24/7/365 x 360", 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days in the year and a 360° panorama (Kühne, 2011), multichannel communication at your fingertips; ubiquitous services are the great momentum of tomorrow. Mobility, accessibility at any time, immediacy, cause overwhelming impressions and feelings, which leads to a "present shock" (Rushkoff, 2013). In his latest book Rushkoff argues that in the digital world we are not able to concentrate on a single thing, and describes this phenomenon as *digi-phrenia* - digitally provoked mental chaos.

What do all these developments mean for young people, how can they cope with the huge amount of information and data? How can librarians support Generation Y to meet its challenges?

Literature Review

To the scene, it is worth to have a look at the various definitions describing the new generation. Early in 1996, Barry Barlow and Douglas Rushkoff looked at the behavior of young people in the digital environment (Boyd, 2014). They defined them as "natives", acting in a carefree and smart manner. Prensky (Prensky, 2001) too discussed the notion of natives and immigrants very vastly. But there are critical voices concerning these views. White and Le Cornu (White & Le Cornu, 2011) coined the terms "digital visitors" and "digital residents". In their opinion using the Internet is not a question of demography and age (digital natives - young people, digital immigrants - older people), rather it depends on motivation and habits. The digital visitor takes a pragmatic approach, he sees the Internet as a unique working tool: "...Visitors understand the Web as akin to an untidy garden tool shed. They have defined a goal or task and go into the shed to select an appropriate tool which they use to attain their goal. Task over, the tool is returned to the shed." (White & Le Cornu, 2011). Instead, for the digital resident the Internet means a vast space where it is possible to linger: "Residents, on the other hand, see the Web as a place, perhaps like a park or a building in which there are clusters of friends and colleagues whom they can approach and with whom they can share information about their life and work." (White & Le Cornu, 2011).

The expression "digital" implies a shift toward a new thinking, there is a further component to be added to the cultural beliefs of the society: bits and bytes, sophisticated algorithms are the new determinants. Information behavior, searching and discovering, are essential questions, especially concerning the education of young people.

The bibliography on this topic is vast. Beheshti and Large et al. (Beheshti & Lange, 2013) came up with a comprehensive introduction to the information behavior of Generation Y. They give a broad overview of attitudes and everyday life information behavior, including online social networking, digital libraries, gaming and virtual environments, considering also topics like cyber-bullying.

Librarians are teaching information literacy as a core competence; but is the actual concept still working today, in the always connected environment of the

21st century? The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) has recognized a need for action and has revised the "Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education". Essential points in the draft are the view of information literacy as an iterative process, the holistic approach to information fluency, and the student as content creator (Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL), 2014).

The evolving Web 2.0 raises the question of an enhancement of information literacy skills. Knowledge about additional tools and services and how to use them is indispensable. With the growth of Social Media you can find not only a huge amount of information, but you also have to judge every snippet about the reliability of its content (Farkas, 2011). Rheingold even goes a step further and demands a social media literacy: "I focus on five social media literacies: Attention, Participation, Collaboration, Network awareness, Critical consumption." (Rheingold, 2010). Librarians should teach a supplementary literacy, the "social information literacy".

The lifestyle and working habits of Generation Y

Young people nowadays are living in a highly complex world, a world of great hurry and overwhelming challenges. They are always on, connected to their friends, the smartphone seems to be their "Holy Grail". The Cisco Connected World Technology Report shows that for 90% of these young people checking the smartphone belongs to the morning routine (Cisco Connected World Technology Report, 2012). Technology has a great influence on daily tasks, strange expressions are enriching our vocabulary, new lifestyles are emerging. "Today, people don't simply replicate offline activities online; rather, they create and engage in new mobile and social behaviors." (Oblinger, 2014). Thus, you will observe students who "Instagrammed their selfies and Snapchatted their campus farewells before Ubering to the airport." (Oblinger, 2014). But is this the real picture that we can draw of Generation Y?

There are two sides to be considered: One the one hand, technology dominates everyday life, to say with a student: "You think of technology as a tool,"... "We think of it as a foundation; it underlies everything we do." (Prensky, 2013). On the other hand, young people are looking after real friendship, experiences in the real world. "Most teens are not com-

pelled by gadgetry as such -they are compelled by friendship. The gadgets are interesting to them primarily as a means to a social end." (Boyd, 2014).

The modern workplace of the Millennials is always changing; they are working everywhere and whenever they want. They do not wish to have rigid work schedules, they want to have great flexibility concerning the working hours (one day you are working only two hours, the other day there are 10 hours to perform). To be inspired, they choose an environment suitable to the ongoing tasks (Bund, 2014). Today's young people are very engaged, motivated to fulfill interesting jobs, they are self-determined: "...the quest for meaningful work that makes a difference has become a core Millennial trait." (Shore, 2012). To get there we should give young people the opportunity to realize their ideas, to discover new ways and to go beyond the boundaries to get things done.

Shaping the future

Reflecting on the past to shape the future - how can librarians bring innovative library services into the focus of teens, how can librarians best support them? The vision is to create an inspiring learning environment, where creativity and curiosity can grow, to foster critical thinking beyond Google and Wikipedia, to design a working and recreational space, where students can find a suitable balance between input and output, connected and interlinked with reference librarians - what I would call an "Engagement Zone".

This "Engagement Zone" consists of one big room, like a circle, with three layers: a physical layer, a virtual layer and a combination of the physical and virtual layer into a third layer, the "physical-virtual" layer, a sort of upper sphere. The physical level marks the "Engagement Zone" itself. Each wall of the room performs a special function to evoke three tasks: learning, teaching and leisure. In this way, students will remember that there is a seamless integration and a flow between learning/working and recreation. The learning edge is dedicated to all learning activities, including the whole bandwidth of library services (printed and electronic collections, networked infrastructures, a service to lend out tablets and to charge smartphones...). In the teaching edge we would find a collection of the most important reference works and computer stations to search elec-

tronic databases. In this section students will have the possibility to make appointments with a personal coach at any time during the opening hours of the library. The third layer symbolizes recreation and leisure, an environment where you can relax and slow down, with comfortable chairs, headphones for listening to music and a community corner. The virtual level (as browser app, virtual web application) is designed as a copy of the physical level; in this virtual environment students can find the same services as in a real library. To facilitate communication, there is a chat service (Weilenmann, 2012).

Imagine a new world, where physical and virtual spaces are connected and melted; augmented reality will give us the possibility to put additional meanings and functions to real objects in our environment: students could get descriptions, definitions of the places where they meet and spend every day. In such a setting the local library could play an important role. Real objects are not only "enhanced" and "augmented", they are interlinked to suitable books and other media, interlinked to all relevant information provided by the library. In this way librarians can use augmented reality as a good marketing instrument and show the ubiquitous presence of all their services.

Conclusion

Technological innovations are evolving rapidly and are shaping the future; speed, simultaneity, and multitasking are dominating our daily actions. The boundaries between reality and virtuality are disappearing. Will these developments continue? What will be the next great challenge?

All these hypes and trends will reach a critical stage, there will be a "slow down"; slowness will be the new movement, to raise the awareness of new values (Poirier, 2014). Less is more. Humans should not be controlled by technical instruments and gadgets, humans should use different tools as facilitators for everyday tasks.

Librarians can create great knowledge spaces, inspiring physical and virtual environments where learning, working and leisure can exist side by side, where young people can meet and slow down. Librarians are paving the way for a networked and connected system where each part interacts with each other, a system where smart ideas can grow.

Notes

1. "Quantified Self" is a movement initiated by Kevin Kelly and Gary Wolf; now it is an international collaboration of users and makers of self-tracking tools. URL: <http://quantifiedself.com/> (20.09.2014).

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