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The technological age: Are we in control of it, or does it have control of us?

Author: Taylor Meckley
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Byline: Taylor Meckley

Technology is affecting the way we interact with each other more than ever before, but the question remains whether this is beneficial or harmful to our relationships.

The way Generation Z interacts differs greatly from just about any other previous generation. We are more connected, and yet more disengaged with each other than ever before. This paradox presents us with both advantages and disadvantages.

The connectedness we feel is artificial -- yet so real. Through the internet, groups we are forming, people are uniting for common causes, and we are communicating across various platforms at lightning speed.

Is this a good thing? Or is it changing the way we interact for the worse and not the better?

The worry plaguing the minds of many is the idea that the internet is leading to "group think." This is the concept that individuals are no longer thinking for themselves, but simply agree with the rest of society for fear of being outcasted.

Thinking in this way can be particularly dangerous for adolescents who are growing up with a million voices clamoring for their attention on a daily basis.

Irving L Janis' book, "Victims of Groupthink," described this issue all the way back in the 1970s, long before the internet age we are currently in. She described the issue of groupthink as "a deterioration of mental efficiency, reality testing and moral judgment that results from in-group pressures."

The "in-group pressures" she refers to originally referenced small groups of people, but in the ever growing internet age, it is clear to see that this mentality is being adopted by Gen Z.

Endless amounts of news and information is now in the hands of youths and adolescents, and we are more susceptible than ever before to false news and fast spreading gossip. The way we interact with each other is changing every day, and it seems that sometimes the connectedness we feel through social media can take away from the connectedness we experience in real life.

There are a multitude of group pressures that come from being involved in any sort of social media group or platform. Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr all have subgroups that have formed out of these platforms, and these subgroups are allowing people to lose aspects of their individuality.

Many argue that this "connectedness" is a positive thing, as it can bring people together for common causes, and can create activists out of everyday people. For example, there has recently been a large movement over climate change. This issue facing our world today has been greatly affected by the powers of social media, as groups of people have gathered to support efforts to attack climate change more aggressively.

A Wired article by Sanjana Varghese recently discussed how kids from more than 119 countries were able to band together and organize one of the "world's largest climate protests" by harnessing the power of social media.

These children spread the word through the internet, but rather than going the traditional route and using massive Facebook groups to spread their message, "youth activists made several Instagram and Facebook accounts, tailored to the events in their area that would help them persuade the people they knew."

Many worry that the downside to this method of sharing ideas is creating an echo chamber, meaning the ideas shared on these forums and platforms are just regurgitations of previously stated ideas. The BBC's David Robson reported that many are conflicted as to whether or not echo chambers truly exist in online communities, or if they are simply a myth. People end up in a sort of online bubble, only reading articles and stories that align with their already established beliefs.

"The World Wide Web may be approaching its 30th birthday, but we still have a lot to learn about the best ways to navigate the online environment," Robson said.

Generation Z is growing up with the world in the palm of their hands, and although there are many instances of the internet inflicting harm on children and adolescents, there are situations where the opposite is actually taking place.

Social media is giving a voice to those who would otherwise not have one, and if harnessed properly, access to the internet can change the world for the better.

Along with this power, however, comes a heavy responsibility to use our platforms wisely -- for the bettering of ourselves, others and society as a whole. Finding ways to limit our social media use and encourage ourselves and others to find ways to connect offline, could allow the "age of the internet" to prevail without the fear that it will lead to the demise of our individuality.

Taylor Meckley

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