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DTC 101

Examples of the Digital Divide

For my project, 5 people were interviewed: my mother (age 46), my two younger sisters (ages 15 and 12), my father (age 51), and my grandfather (age 80). They were asked three questions: How often do you use the Internet and/or social media? How good are you at using the Internet? Finally, what do you use the Internet for? As answers were given, evidence emerged of a digital divide, not in how well people used new technologies, but in what they used the new technologies for.

According to Pew Internet, 83 percent of 18-29 year olds use social media during their time on the Internet ([www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org)). This same demographic typically spends 3.8 hours per day using social media, as stated by the Marketing Charts website ([www.marketingcharts.com](http://www.marketingcharts.com)). The two youngest to be interviewed, Hanna, age 15, and Emma, age 12, kept in line with these findings. Hanna is a freshman in high school. She spends at least 1 hour per day on Facebook. She usually posts 1 or more updates, and adds pictures of herself at sporting events or playing with the family dog. The rest of the time she spends on the Internets is spent doing homework, usually research. She is good at using search engines to find websites that contain the information she needs, and she is comfortable using Microsoft Word. However, she does not know anything about programming. If the computer encounters a virus, or experiences any other type of problem, she is quite helpless (Hanna).

Emma, age 12, also spends most of her computer time on social media, as many as two hours per day. She likes to engage her friends in long online conversations, making use of both Facebook and Skype. She uses the computer for homework far less than her older sister, and is less inclined to post pictures. She is also largely unable to program (Emma). Both sisters are exemplified in Program or be Programmed. The new generation was raised on the new technologies society currently possess: cell phones, e-mail, Facebook, etc. However, the new generation uses the technologies without understanding them or having any semblance of control over them. They are a “society that looked at the Internet as a path towards highly articulated connections and new methods of creating meaning”, and instead “finding itself disconnected, denied deep thinking, and drained of values” (Rushkoff, 16). They are not using the Internet; they are being used by it, basing their communications and lives around it without fully bending it to their will. Hanna and Emma, by not truly taking control of the Internet, are ultimately at its mercy.

The older interviewees proved slightly more internet savvy. Rhonda Walton, age 47, usually employs the computer to grade papers. She also uses social media. Pew Internet shows that most people in the 29-51 age group use the social media for three hours every day ([www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org)), but Rhonda only uses it for one. She is also capable of fixing minor computer problems, such as frozen screens, and knows how to contact help when the problem is beyond her knowledge (Rhonda). Richard, 51, is digitally literate enough to create his own online business. He created a website to sell merchandise, and established contact with an overseas partner. He also set up a site to advertise the sale of his house. He does not use social media at all, and rarely surfs the internet for entertainment (Richard).

The last to be interviewed was Harold, age 81. He is the oldest of all interviewed. Only 32% of people 65+ who use the Internet apply social media, and Harold is one of them ([www.marketingcharts.com](http://www.marketingcharts.com)). However, he only checks his Facebook profile around once a month. Most of the time he spends on the internet is spent tinkering with his business website. Though he needed some help making it, he has since taken on maintenance of the site on his own, and keeps it up to date about the goings-on at the lodge he runs. He sometimes needs help when his computer encounters an error, but rarely runs into such problems (Harold).

The older people interviewed, despite having lived around computers for a shorter amount of time, still knew how to use them better than the younger subjects. According to Pew Internet, younger age groups spend more time creating websites than older groups, with 19% (teenagers) and 20% (young adults), compared to 9% (middle-aged, 60+) ([www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org)). However, this did not show in the research. The relationship of the last two generations to the internet is more complex than the statistics show. In a world where people must be on the grid to be noticed, an internet presence is required. Otherwise, they can do nothing. “We must learn how to make software, or become software” (Rushkoff, 134). Richard and Harold would not be able to work without knowing how to use the internet. There is a digital divide, but it is not so much one where the young manipulate the old for fun; it is one where the old fight to be noticed while the young are trapped in a sphere of pleasure.

Works Cited

[www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org)

[www.marketingresearch.com](http://www.marketingresearch.com)

Rushkoff, Douglas. *Program or be Programmed*. Berkeley, CA: Soft Skull Press, 2010.

Hanna Walton, 4/2/13

Emma Walton, 4/3/13

Rhonda Walton, 4/10/13

Richard Walton, 4/6/13

Harold Walton, 4/7/13