

# Generational Perceptions

John Arnold, Matthew Biren, Ashley Nelson, Sasha Sarkkinen, Jane Wilson

Faculty Advisor: Mary Hoffman, Ph.D.

Department of Communication and Journalism ☆ University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire



## Abstract:

Research shows that intergenerational communication is becoming increasingly more difficult in the workplace. There is evidence that other generations hold negative perceptions of Generation Y (1982-2000), but no specific information on how these perceptions are formed (Reynolds, Bush, & Geist, 2008). Some scholars have suggested that these perceptions may be due in part to technology use (Reynolds et al., 2008; Van Dyke, Haynes, & Ferguson-Mitchell, 2007). Generation Y is the first generation that had access to all forms of electronic communication including instant messaging, texting, and email (Poindexter, 2005). Our study examined whether the communication channels and message characteristics used by Generation Y have an effect on the perceptions Baby Boomers (1946-1964) form of them and their own perceptions of themselves. At the conclusion of this research we expect to describe how Baby Boomers and members of Generation Y perceive a range of communication behaviors commonly associated with Generation Y.

## Introduction:

- There are notable differences among communication patterns of Generation Y and members of the Baby Boomer generation (McKenzie & Cannon, 1998).
- The communication differences are directly correlated to technology use, especially text messaging and email (Simons, 2010).
- Generation Y communicates more informally than other generations (Erickson, 2008).
- The communication gap between generations can lead to miscommunication in the workplace (Dominiack, 2007).

## Research Questions:

- RQ1: How do members of the Baby Boomer generation perceive individuals who enact communication behaviors generally associated to Generation Y?  
 RQ2: How do members of Generation Y perceive individuals who enact communication behaviors generally associated to their own generation?

## Methods:

- Data were gathered through the use of surveys targeting members of the relevant generation in the workforce.
- The survey included sample mediated messages that were evaluated using semantic differential scales.
- Participants were asked to read sample mediated messages and evaluate the sender using a seven point semantic differential scale.
- Six additional questions gathered demographic data and information on technology use.

## Participants:

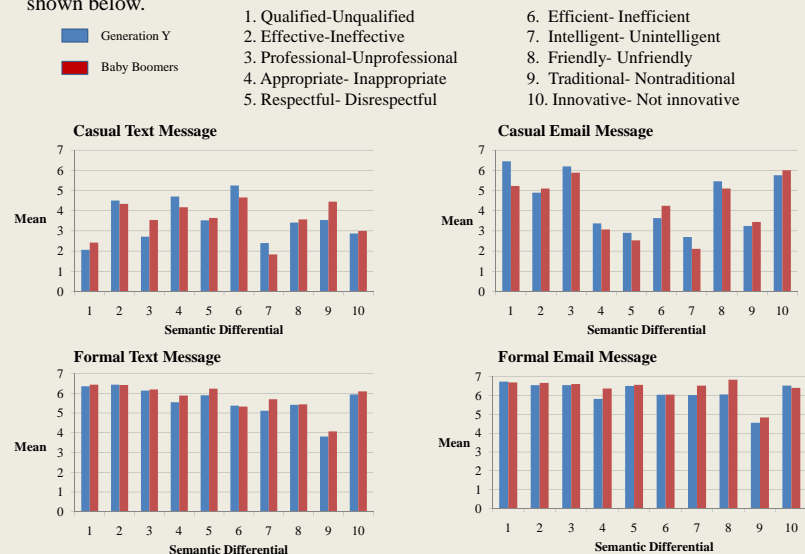
The survey was administered to 45 Baby Boomers born between 1946-1964 and 133 members of Generation Y born between 1982-2000 throughout the Midwest.

## References:

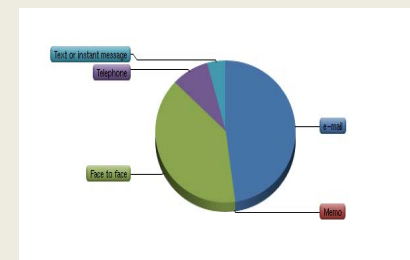
- Dominiack, M. (2007). 'Millennials' defying the old models. *Television Week*, 26(19), 68-70.  
 Erickson, T., & (2008). *Plugged in: The Generation Y Guide to Thriving at Work*. Boston: Harvard Business Press.  
 McKenzie, A. & Cannon, D. (1998). Across the ages. *Communication World*, 15, 21-26.  
 Poindexter, K. (2008). Passing the torch but not just yet. *The Public Manager*, 37(2), 11-14.  
 Reynolds, L., Bush, E., & Geist, R. (2008). The gen y imperative. *Communication World*, 25(3), 19-22.  
 Simons, N. (2010, January/February). Leveraging generational work styles to meet business objectives. *Information Management Journal*, 44, 28-33.  
 Van Dyke, M.A., Haynes, C., & Ferguson-Mitchell, J. (2007) Bridging the divide: a public relations perspective on intergenerational communication. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 52(4), 19-23.

## Results:

No differences were discovered in generational perceptions of these communication behaviors. Perceptions of both generations were more strongly influenced by message content than by message channel. Each groups' responses to the four types of messages are shown below.



What method of work-related communication do you prefer?



## Implications:

- The content of the message rather than the channel associated with the message affects how generations perceive communication practices generally associated with Generation Y.
- The study was limited by the number of responses from members of the Baby Boomer Generation. Additional responses may have fostered more information.
- The use of email technology to administer the survey limited participation to individuals with access to technology, which may have had an impact on findings.
- Future research should ask similar questions of members of Generation X. Additional data from this group would allow researchers to identify additional viewpoints on how people perceive communication behaviors associated with Generation Y.

Funding for this poster was provided by UWEC Differential Tuition.