



Original Article

From TikTok to Talk Time: Bridging the Generation Gap in the Digital Age

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Abstract

The growing presence of digital media platforms has reshaped everyday communication, especially among younger generations. Short-form video applications such as TikTok now occupy a significant place in how adolescents and young adults entertain themselves, learn informally, and express their identities. While these platforms encourage creativity, global exposure, and easy access to information, their excessive and unguided use has gradually widened the communication gap between younger and older generations. Differences in digital habits, preferred modes of interaction, and attention patterns often result in reduced face-to-face communication, weaker emotional connections, and limited family engagement. This paper examines how short-form digital media influences intergenerational communication and discusses practical ways to shift passive screen engagement into meaningful talk time. The study follows a descriptive and analytical approach based on secondary data and a systematic review of existing literature. The findings suggest that balanced digital use, supported by conscious interpersonal interaction, can strengthen intergenerational relationships. The paper also highlights the shared responsibility of families, educators, and institutions in promoting healthy digital practices that foster dialogue, empathy, and mutual understanding across generations.

Keywords: Generation gap, TikTok, digital media, intergenerational communication, screen time, talk time

Introduction

The concept of the generation gap refers to the differences in attitudes, values, behaviours, and communication styles observed among individuals belonging to different age groups. Although such differences have always existed, they have become more visible and impactful in the digital age due to rapid technological development and widespread access to digital devices (Prensky, 2001). The integration of smartphones, affordable internet services, and social networking platforms into daily life has significantly altered how people communicate, share experiences, and maintain relationships. Younger generations, particularly Generation Z and Generation Alpha, are often described as digital natives because they have grown up surrounded by digital technologies. Platforms such as TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube are deeply embedded in their everyday routines, serving not only as entertainment tools but also as spaces for learning, self-expression, and social interaction (Rideout & Robb, 2018). These platforms offer quick information, visual engagement, and instant feedback, which align closely with the communication preferences of younger users.

In contrast, older generations generally place greater value on face-to-face interaction, extended conversations, and traditional forms of interpersonal communication that emphasise emotional depth and personal connection. This difference in communication styles and media habits often leads to misunderstandings, reduced interaction, and emotional distance within families and communities. TikTok, in particular, with its short-duration, visually stimulating, and algorithm-driven content, has a noticeable influence on attention span and communication behaviour among young users. While the platform promotes creativity and awareness, excessive use may gradually replace meaningful conversation with passive digital consumption. Against this background, the present study explores the role of short-form digital media in widening the generation gap and examines practical ways to transform screen-focused engagement into meaningful talk time that supports stronger intergenerational communication.

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Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the influence of short-form digital media on communication patterns among younger generations.
2. To analyse the causes and effects of the generation gap in the digital age.
3. To study the role of family and educational institutions in strengthening intergenerational communication.
4. To suggest practical strategies for converting excessive screen time into meaningful talk time.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design. The research is entirely based on **secondary data**, making it suitable for conceptual and behavioural analysis. Data were collected from academic journals, books, research articles, policy reports, and publications by national and international organisations related to digital media usage, screen time, and intergenerational communication. Informal observations of family interactions and classroom experiences were also considered to support the analysis.

The collected data were systematically reviewed, organised, and interpreted to identify recurring patterns, communication challenges, and behavioural changes arising from excessive digital media usage. Since the study focuses on understanding existing trends rather than measuring variables experimentally, the use of secondary data is both appropriate and sufficient.

Review of Literature

Several studies have examined the impact of digital media on children, adolescents, and family relationships. Ginsburg (2007) emphasised the importance of play, shared activities, and open communication in promoting healthy child development and strong parent–child bonds. The study highlights that reduced interpersonal interaction can negatively affect emotional and social development.

Prensky (2001) introduced the concepts of “digital natives” and “digital immigrants,” highlighting the communication divide between generations based on technological familiarity. This framework helps explain why younger individuals adapt quickly to digital platforms, while older adults may struggle to understand or accept new communication styles.

Twenge and Campbell (2018) found that increased screen exposure among adolescents is associated with lower psychological well-being, reduced emotional regulation, and social challenges. Other studies suggest that excessive use of short-form digital content may reduce attention span and patience for extended conversations.

However, researchers also argue that digital platforms themselves are not inherently harmful. When used constructively and in moderation, digital media can support learning, creativity, and even shared intergenerational experiences. The literature collectively indicates that balanced and mindful digital usage is essential for reducing the generation gap.

Impact of TikTok and Digital Media on the Generation Gap

1. Positive Impacts

Digital media platforms encourage creativity, self-expression, and access to global information. TikTok allows young users to experiment with content creation, storytelling, and digital skills. The platform also exposes users to diverse cultures, languages, and ideas, contributing to global awareness. When shared with family members, such platforms can become common points of interaction and discussion.

2. Negative Impacts

Despite its benefits, excessive dependence on short-form digital content can negatively affect communication behaviour. Constant exposure to fast-paced videos may reduce attention span and patience for long conversations. It often replaces face-to-face family interaction, leading to emotional distance and misunderstanding between digitally native youth and digitally adaptive elders. This imbalance contributes significantly to the widening generation gap.

From Screen Time to Talk Time: Bridging Strategies

1. **Digital Co-viewing:** Families can watch digital content together and discuss themes, messages, and values, turning passive viewing into active conversation.
2. **Scheduled Device-Free Time:** Allocating specific periods for device-free family interaction encourages meaningful communication.
3. **Intergenerational Learning:** Younger members can teach elders digital skills, while elders share life experiences and cultural values.
4. **Educational Interventions:** Schools and colleges can introduce communication-based activities, group discussions, and digital literacy programmes.
5. **Role of Educators:** Teachers can balance technology-based teaching with discussion-oriented and collaborative learning methods.

Role of Family and Educational Institutions

Families play a crucial role in modelling balanced digital behaviour. Parents and elders must demonstrate responsible technology use and prioritise open communication. Creating a supportive environment where young individuals feel heard and understood can significantly reduce communication barriers.

Educational institutions also play a vital role by promoting value-based education, collaborative learning, and emotional intelligence. Awareness programmes, workshops, and counselling sessions can help students and parents understand the importance of balancing digital engagement with interpersonal interaction.

Findings

The study reveals that excessive digital media usage reduces interpersonal communication and weakens emotional bonding. The generation gap observed in the digital age is largely behavioural and communicational rather than ideological. Balanced digital engagement enhances intergenerational relationships, while intentional talk time significantly improves understanding, empathy, and emotional connection.

Suggestions

- Encourage digital discipline rather than complete restriction.
- Promote regular family communication routines.
- Integrate media literacy and communication skills into academic curricula.
- Conduct awareness programmes for parents, educators, and students.

Conclusion

The shift from TikTok to talk time reflects the need to move beyond passive digital consumption toward more meaningful human interaction. The findings of this study indicate that technology itself is not the root cause of the generation gap; rather, the imbalance created by excessive and unregulated digital use contributes to communication challenges between generations. When screen time replaces conversation, emotional connection and mutual understanding tend to weaken.

However, the study also highlights that digital media can serve as a positive tool when used mindfully and in moderation. Balanced digital engagement, combined with intentional face-to-face interaction, has the potential to strengthen intergenerational relationships. Families, educators, and institutions play an important role in guiding responsible digital behaviour and creating spaces for open dialogue and shared experiences. By encouraging purposeful communication and digital awareness, it is possible to bridge the generation gap and promote emotional well-being, social harmony, and meaningful connection in the digital age.

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Conflicts of interest

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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