Student Pieces: A Changing Face for a Changing World

Jimmy Sengenberger
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By Jimmy Sengenberger

Each day, young people log on to Facebook, YouTube, e-mail, Skype and other online networking tools to communicate with people both near and afar. A growing number of students possess laptops and utilize them in the classroom, listen to iPods and MP3 players daily, communicate with peers largely through text messaging and engage in other technological activities that have revolutionized entertainment and communication alike. For no generation are technology and the Internet more prevalent and more critical to social and educational life than the Millennial generation, giving rise to a striking tension between the good and the bad elements of the changing face of technology.

During the recent Iranian protests, video and information traveled from the Middle East to the United States instantaneously. Essential to note is the primary age group of those who risked their lives for freedom and used technology as an asset to do so: the Millennial generation. This should not be surprising, as for many years, young people have been a driving force of political and social change, for better or worse. The massive fight for civil rights was led in part by a younger generation tired of oppression and lacking equality for an entire race of people.

Members of the Millennial generation lent significant manpower to the presidential campaigns of Barack Obama and Ron Paul. Today, elected officials and candidates reach out to young people through Facebook, YouTube and text messaging, the method now used by candidates to announce major decisions to supporters first. Similarly, I run a weekly online talk show via the Regis radio station, utilizing the Internet to lend my voice into the political debate, both on and off campus. Such methods tap into the soul of the Millennial generation in unprecedented ways, especially given the challenges associated with inspiring them to engage in civics.

Yet, quite positively, our leaders are using technology methods to reach them, connect with them and involve them in the process.

Despite the good perpetuated by technology, however, there exists a real tension. Many are justified in their concern that technology has resulted in distance and constrained intimacy in relationships; but there is an even greater tension than this. With the availability of social networking sites like Facebook and self-made video portals like YouTube, nearly anything can be posted with little concern for the appropriateness of the material.

Given, there are often site-established restrictions on content; however, many Millennials find themselves taking pictures of and filming questionable things that may involve sex, drugs and alcohol, which they then post on the net or send to their friends, thus losing entire control of the film. One’s life can be ruined by publishing something detrimental to his or her reputation, or by one person taking an image or film of another’s damaging situation and posting it online without regard for those who will be adversely affected—irrespective of the consequences. Privacy is no more.

The advent of the Internet has brought about a great many opportunities to connect and bring about social and political changes, breaking down barriers in oppressed nations like Iran and China, yet for young people in Western society, it has also opened the door to encouragement of destructive behavior. For many, to get a picture or video posted on the net in hopes of becoming a “famous YouTube sensation” and having the “most views” is desirable. And yet when used unwisely, as with the likes of former Miss Nevada Katie Rees, it has the potential to destroy a career or prevent one from taking off. It can damage relationships and disrupt lives. It is a tension of generational proportions that must be addressed—one which signals for us all that we are witnessing, quite clearly, a changing face for a changing world.

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