

Social networking: Gen Xers connect online as often as they socialize in person

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Young adults in Generation X are as likely to connect with friends, family and co-workers online as they are in person, according to a University of Michigan study.

In a typical month, adults in their late 30s report that they engaged in about 75 face-to-face contacts or conversations, compared to about 74 electronic contracts through personal emails or social media.

"Given the speed of [emerging technologies](#), it is likely that electronic contacts will continue to grow in the years ahead, eventually exceeding face-to-face interactions," says Jon D. Miller, author of the latest issue of The [Generation X](#) Report.

"But the [young adults](#) in Generation X are currently maintaining a healthy balance between personal and electronic [social networking](#)."

Miller directs the [Longitudinal Study](#) of American Youth (LSAY) at the U-M Institute for Social Research (ISR). The study has been funded by the National Science Foundation since 1986, and the current report includes responses from 3,027 Gen Xers interviewed in 2011.

According to Miller, studying Gen X social networks is important because these networks, sometimes referred to as "social capital," are a vital component of the quality of life.

"The size and composition of [personal networks](#) is both a reflection of

cumulative advantage over years and decades, and an indicator of the resources available to get ahead and deal with problems or challenges that may arise," says Miller.

In addition to finding a rough parity between personal and electronic networks, Miller found that young adults who completed bachelors or advanced degrees tended to have larger social networks. He also found that survey participants who did not complete high school relied more heavily on traditional personal networks, and less on electronic networking.

Somewhat surprisingly, males reported more personal contacts than females in the course of a typical month – 86 compared to 65. This difference reflects the larger number of hours men reported spending at work, according to Miller. Young women, on the other hand, were slightly more likely to visit family and friends, attend meetings in the community, and do volunteer work.

Overall, in the course of a typical month, participants reported visiting with family and friends eight times, getting together or having personal conversations with co-workers nearly 60 times, attending meetings of social or community groups four times, and engaging in about three hours of volunteer work.

Looking at electronic networking, females were slightly more active, initiating 76 contacts compared to 71 for males. Overall, in the course of a typical month, participants reported sending 39 non-work emails, using Facebook nearly 23 times, using Twitter four times, Skyping once, and sending digital pictures seven times.

"This is the first generation of Americans to reach adulthood at the beginning of the Electronic Era," says Miller. "So it's understandable that they should show a substantial mix of traditional and electronic

networking as they build and maintain the social capital that will help to carry them through their lives."

More information: Read or download a full copy of The Generation X Report at bit.ly/GenXWinter2013

Provided by University of Michigan

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