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Article Highlights


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We welcome & encourage your feedback and suggestions.

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True or False: The Information Age Generations are the most disengaged, apathetic generation of citizens in Canadian history?

Multiple Choice:

What percentage of 15-34 year-olds donate to charity annually?

- a) 41%
- b) 51%
- c) 61%
- d) 71%

How much do 15-34 year-olds donate annually?

- a) one million dollars
- b) \$300 million
- c) \$600 million
- d) one billion dollars

The answers to these questions are embedded in the text below...read on.

Canadian youth and young adults are not as disconnected and disinterested in civil society as the prevailing view may suggest. According to a recent study by D-Code and the Canadian Centre for Philanthropy that examined young people (16-34 year olds) and their patterns of civic engagement, young people are participating in civil society in a variety of ways and degrees. IAGs want to be involved, but they expect different forms of engagement than do older Canadians.

Participation, in fact, is something that may be 'hard wired' among Canada's Information Age Generations. The Information Age Generations (IAG) grew up alongside, and in many cases drove, the transformation of customer-driven technology, consumerism, and the participatory workplace. Young people have developed a desire - perhaps even an expectation - to participate. They participate in the workplace flattening hierarchies. They interact with the media: they spot the hype, focus on the function, and customize media to meet their needs. Their choice as consumers is staggering, and they know the power of their dollar. Their vote determines the outcome of reality TV shows, as seen by the millions casting their vote this past week on Canadian Idol. And, more importantly - and surprising to some - they participate as citizens.

The Citizen Re:Generation study broadens the discussion of civic engagement to include the effects of societal trends (what we call Information Age influences) on the patterns of civic engagement as well as the many avenues in which young people engage (the 'modes' of engagement). Rather than the uni-dimensional approach to civic engagement that is often captured in the media and popular consciousness ("I vote, therefore I'm an active citizen"; or "I don't volunteer, therefore I'm not an active citizen"), Citizen Re:Generation explores a more integrated understanding of civic engagement.

By looking at the interrelated modes of engagement and the influences that drive engagement in these modes, the Study paints a more holistic picture of young citizens. Seventy-one percent of the Information Age Generations contributed a total of \$1 billion in 2000 to charities. Many volunteer in community organizations and a resounding majority (82%) volunteer in

informal ways. Many participate in social and recreational activities. Their need to participate may translate into activist tendencies. IAGs don't see any disconnect between being concerned about themselves and being concerned about society. Why should they? They carry the highest debt of any generation before them. The expectation of lifetime employment at one company is long over - and the reality of government cutbacks has hit them hard. Yet, they donate to charities. They volunteer. They organize and advocate for change. They care about issues. To IAGs self-interest and altruism can coexist.

The context for civic activity is changing rapidly, as increasing social needs combine with limited government resources to demand greater contributions of time, money, and services from individuals. At the same time, societal trends are influencing the way citizens interact and connect with the state and community organizations. Citizen Re:Generation looked at this group and how they relate to society's systems and structures, their values and behaviours compared to older cohorts, and their understanding of citizenship. We sought to understand whether young Canadians connect with traditional social and political institutions, or are creating new ones.

Summary of key conclusions and hypotheses:

- * Most IAGs participate in civic activities in some way
 - 71% of IAGs donated to charities in 2000
 - 27% IAGs volunteer, compared to 42% of Baby Boomers
 - Many IAGs are engaged in activism as a form of political expression
 - There is a positive correlation between early life experiences and civic engagement.
 - Social and recreational participation is a significant form of engagement for IAGs

- * Self-interest and altruism can co-exist with IAGs
 - Benefit to themselves and the cause drives IAGs volunteer activities
 - Successful organizations recognize and support IAGs desire to get something back from their participation in social causes
 - Social entrepreneurs are blurring the lines between doing business and doing good - they can do both

- * IAGs are often treated as a homogeneous group, but evidence suggest diversity affects participation
 - IAGs are the most diverse generation in Canadian history; yet, research often groups young people together without recognizing differences based on colour, gender, sexual orientation, region, class, culture, or physical ability.

- * There are many barriers to broader and deeper participation of IAGs
 - Lack of legitimacy of non-traditional forms of political expression (i.e. activism)
 - Lack of role models and representation in traditional political process
 - Class, race, and gender inequalities that affect engagement

- * IAGs show a strong expectation to participate and have an impact
 - Participation is more about doing (starting organizations, sitting on grant-making boards, fundraising, boycotting, demonstrating, and volunteering) than being a member of an organization.

- * IAGs have the potential to be more fully engaged and active citizens, with the support of all sectors.
 - With some exceptions, civil society organizations are not keeping pace with the changes of the Information Age.
 - Civic engagement is a shared responsibility among the sectors and individuals.

So back to the first question. True or False? The Information Age Generations are the most disengaged, apathetic generations of citizens in

Canadian History.

FALSE.

But this is just a start. Over the next few months, D-Brief will focus on different modes of engagement and information age influences to start filling out the picture of how young people think and act about citizenship. Citizen Re:Generation combined a literature review of over 200 sources with case studies and secondary data analysis. D-Brief readers are getting a sneak peak at the study before it is released to the general public in October.

Next edition: Volunteerism.

If you would like more information about the topic discussed above, please contact us at info@d-code.com