

The Information Behavior of a New Generation: Children and Teens in the 21st Century

Jamshid Beheshti and Andrew Large, eds. *The Information Behavior of a New Generation: Children and Teens in the 21st Century*. Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2013. 252 pp. \$55.00. Paper. ISBN: 9780810885943.

Beheshti and Large, who are both information science faculty at McGill University, help theological librarians examine the question, “Who will be the next generation of patrons to enter the theological libraries of North America?” Their edited volume contains eleven research chapters that address a variety of topics on the information lives of digital natives. These digital natives include Millennials, born between 1979 and 1993, and the Google Generation, those born since 1993 (238). A 2010 study shows that 75 percent of these teens own a cell phone, 79 percent have an iPod or other media device, 93 percent engage in online activities, and 73 percent are present on social media (185). The editors argue that researchers, including librarians, will need to understand and prepare for these users because “they will shortly become adults” (v). But just because these generations are very comfortable with technology does not mean that they are more capable of finding and using information.

The Information Behavior of a New Generation: Children and Teens in the 21st Century explores a variety of subjects, beginning with theoretical models and theories on information behavior. Because of Internet-based information systems that make more sources available to more students, younger children need to be taught a more sophisticated skill set that was once associated with university-level learning (18). In chapter three, the authors explore the level of information literacy among the new digital generations. They trace the history of information literacy standards (46-47) and dispel the belief that digital natives do not require help finding and using information. They conclude that “despite their reputation as digital wizards, research shows that young people, for the most part, are merely adequate when it comes to information seeking and use and, in fact, could use some guidance” (49). They also explore some of the problems that the digital generations have with plagiarism, searching for information, evaluating information, and producing final products.

Starting in chapter four, the authors address the everyday information behaviors of young people. This includes using mobile technologies, text-messaging, multi-tasking, using social media to find information and socialize, and analyzing information. They note that 73 percent of teens use social media on a regular basis, and that half of teens send fifty or more text messages a day (65-66). They explain that this generation wants rapid access to information, a large quantity of information sources, and aesthetically pleasing, easy-to-use interfaces. The information-seeking behavior shows that these generations value interpersonal sources, such as friends and parents, and they value online sources more than print resources (74-75). They also view library spaces very differently from their parents and grandparents. They see the library as a place for “hanging out, messing around, geeking out” (98). These students have a strong social view of information that will require libraries to rethink the study space as a place for isolated individuals needing quiet places to an area for group-based learning, multitasking, and socializing, including the use of mobile technologies.

From the system aspect, “the conventional view of individuals working in front of a personal computer may no longer be applicable in today’s fast-paced lifestyle, where mobile or handheld devices are used effortlessly

anytime and anywhere” (214). This explosion of tablet devices and smartphones will drive the development of apps and websites. The author of chapter ten also examines the impact of natural language on searches, including longer queries with more adjectives and verbs, frequent looping and backtracking search behavior, the challenge of spelling in keyword searching for these generations, and the need to develop experimental searching interfaces for these different searching behaviors. Other subjects addressed in this text are digital gaming, young adults with learning disabilities, and cyber-bullying.

Finally, in the last chapter, Beheshti and Large attempt to look into the future. They believe that informational professionals need to prepare for horizontal skimming done anywhere at any time through mobile technologies (237). They also argue that the information-seeking behavior of these generations creates content, for example, on Facebook or YouTube, which demonstrates a lifestyle grounded in collaboration and social production. This may be a potential paradigm shift that moves physical libraries from a warehouse of knowledge model to a learning lab model (214).

As theological libraries both at seminaries and universities prepare for the future, *The Information Behavior of a New Generation: Children and Teens in the 21st Century* and other texts of this nature provide valuable insights for both long-range and short-term planning. This text does not argue that brick-and-mortar libraries are a relic of the past; rather, it urges librarians to engage a variety of subjects that impact libraries across their physical and digital footprints, services and instruction, and collections. The topics in these chapters affect every aspect of library service, from acquisitions and cataloging to public services and instruction. This text provides ten different voices on various aspects of the theological library’s next generation of users, and an eleventh chapter that brings these voices into conversation on the future of information services.

This is a well-written text with a good index and well-developed bibliographies after each chapter. Readers do not need to approach this book as a text to read cover to cover; rather, readers should engage the table of contents and find the chapters that most impact their work areas. It is recommended for library directors and would make an excellent conversation starter for presentations with faculty and administration.

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