

iGeneration and Handwritten Communication : A study of Gen Z or post-millennials' Propensity towards Handwritten Communication

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Abstract: *iGeneration, the post-millennial children, typically born between mid-1990s to mid-2000, called by various terms or monikers such as Gen Z or post-millennials, are the digital age children who have grown up with internet, smartphones, notepads and other digital conveniences. They take to gadgets and techs in a manner which baffles older generation. Google is their biggest teacher and whatsapp their most preferred social adda. This is the generation which prefers to tap the key board rather than wield a pen to express themselves. One would assume that for this generation a mouse or keyboard (electronic communication) is mightier than a pen (tradition communication medium) and the preferred medium for expression.*

On the other hand, our pedagogy, specially our examination evaluation system relies heavily on handwritten examination – something one would assume that iGeneration would not be comfortable with.

This paper tries to find out iGeneration's aptitude towards and proclivity for the handwritten communication, especially in the context of academic setting.

Specifically, this present paper aims to find out (a) the millennial's attitude towards handwritten communication (b) millennial's ability for handwritten communication vis-à-vis digital formats or electronic communication (c) the implications of the findings on pedagogy and academic assessment by way of handwritten examination/evaluation.

Key Words: *iGeneration, Electronic communication, Handwritten communication, Pedagogy, Examination Evaluation, Students' Aptitude.*

1. INTRODUCTION:

There has been a tectonic shift in the way keyboard, laptops and mobile phones have increasingly occupied our communication space. Even within the classroom, there is an ever growing use of electronic or digital communication substituting and even replacing the traditional form of mediums such as paper books. Assignments are mailed too. But when it comes to final examination, we still heavily rely on conducting the evaluation process through handwritten medium.

Are we being fair to a generation which has grown up with electronic communication, digital conveniences, gadgets to assess them via handwritten examination.

More importantly, does iGeneration feel comfortable being evaluated on the basis of handwritten examination?

Together with this, should we start worrying, even for the sake of nostalgia that the art and love for handwritten communication will soon be dead? Are post-millennials ready to give up writing altogether? What would be the impact of a lost art on human or individual development?

The study tries to find out answers to the above questions...

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

Encyclopedia Britannica¹ defines handwriting as, "writing with the hand as distinguished from print." It points out that writing is a "form peculiar to each person."

Professor Richard Nordquist² defines handwriting as writing done by hand with a pen, pencil, stylus or another instrument.

¹ <https://www.britannica.com/topic/handwriting>

² Professor Richard Nordquist has a Ph.D. in English and rhetoric and is professor emeritus at Armstrong State University. He is the author of two college grammar and composition textbooks.

Rejean Plamondon and S.N. Srihari³ have called handwriting a skill that is personal to an individual Dr Rose A Heavens⁴ explains handwriting as a “distinctive form of written communication used by individuals. Hand writing skills have always been prominent as the primary means of communication in the private and public sector.” Author Marilyn Jager Adams⁵ explains the importance of handwriting skills in the overall education of the students. He says, “writing aids in letter recognition the most reliable predictor of future reading success.”

Handwriting skills have also been associated with the development of analytical thinking and use of intelligible language. J. Richard Gentry, Ph.D., and Steve Graham, Ed.D in their white paper on *Creating Better Readers and Writers. The Importance of Direct, Systematic Spelling and Handwriting Instruction in Improving Academic Performance (2010)* describe how “handwriting skills have been directly linked with the “high-order thinking skills including problem solving and analytic thinking of the students’ ability to put thoughts on paper using intelligible language”.

It is said that human beings developed writing as early as 35000 BCE⁶ in the form of cave paintings which depicted the day to day life of the Cro-Magnon Man (c. 50,000-30,000 BCE). The pictures in the caves reflect the life style of the people and hence have been categorized as a language.

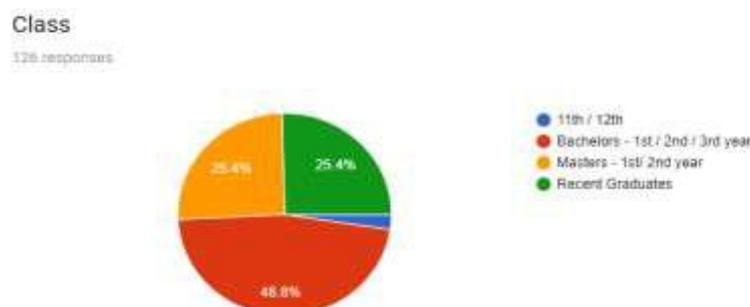
However, written language emerged in 3500-3000 BCE invented by Sumer from southern Mesopotamia. It came to be defined as cuneiform.

3. METHOD:

A survey of multiple choice questions was introduced to more than 126 students across 17 government and private universities, six colleges and 15 government and private Institutes ranging from courses like Journalism & Mass Communication, Medical, Social Sciences, Languages, Home Sciences, Home Economic etc. Out of 126 responses collected, 53.2 % came from female students and 46 % from male students out of which 46.8 % students were those who were pursuing Bachelors degree, 25.4 were Masters, graduates and 25.4 % were recent graduates. All the respondents were between the age group of 17-25. The duration of the research lasted for two weeks.

Following questions were put before the respondents:

- When it comes to articulating or expressing your views or writing answers in an examination paper how comfortable are you with writing?
- If asked to express your views on a topic/issue what kind of writing you would prefer?
- Do you have fear of writing?
- If asked to express your views through writing what would be your preferred tool/mode of writing expression?
- Do you think your examination performance could improve if you were allowed to answer examination papers on computers but without the help of internet connections or features such as thesaurus, spell check etc?
- Do you think your examination performance could improve if you were allowed to answer examination papers on computers with assistance features such as thesaurus, spell check etc?
- Do you think digital conveniences (computers, internet, social media) has contributed in decline of the writing skills among youth of your age/generation?
- Do you think or believe that decline in writing skills could impact one’s intellectual growth?



³ Plamondon Rejean, Srihari N. Sargur (2000): *On-Line and Off-Line Handwriting Recognition: A Comprehensive Survey*. IEEE Transactions on Pattern Analysis and Machine Intelligence. Vol22. (1).

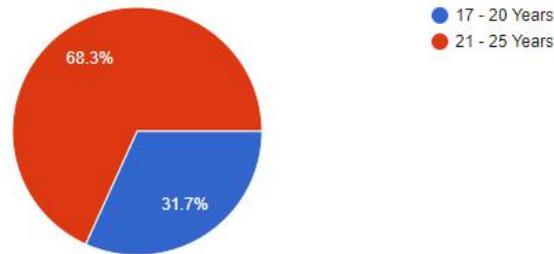
⁴ Heavens. A Rose (2015): *The Decline of Handwriting And The Effectiveness of The Handwritten Communication: A Grounded Theory Study*. MI. ProQuest.

⁵ Adams Jager Marilyn (1994): *Beginning to Read: Thinking and Learning about Print*. A Bradford Book. The MIT Press.

⁶ Mark J Joshua (2011): *Writing*. Ancient History Encyclopedia. Retrieved from <https://www.ancient.eu/writing/>

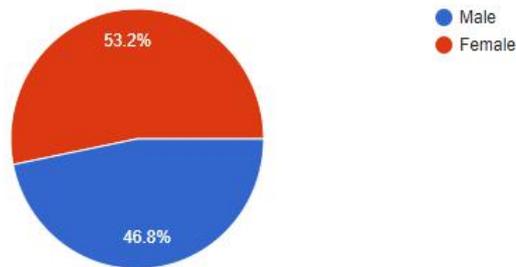
Age

126 responses



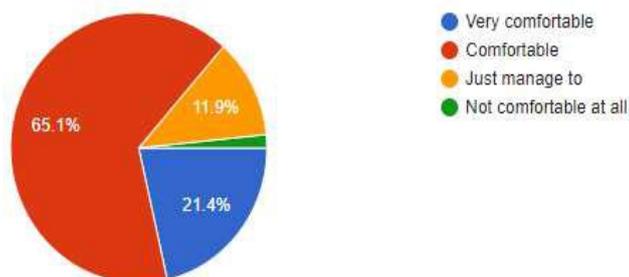
Gender

126 responses



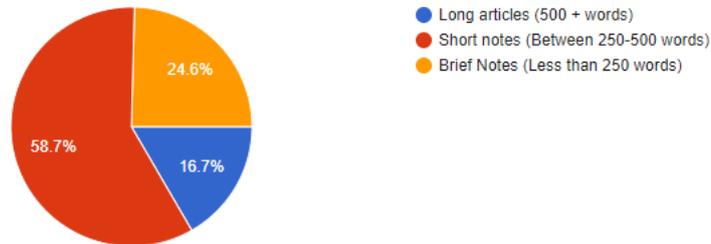
1) When it comes to articulating or expressing your views or writing answers in an examination paper, how comfortable are you with writing?

126 responses



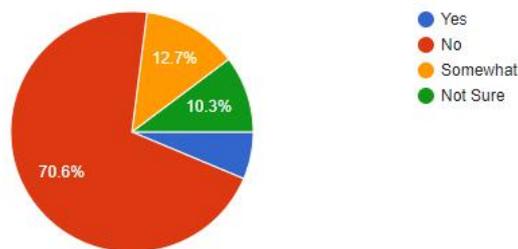
2) If asked to express your views on a topic /issue, what kind of writing would you prefer?

126 responses



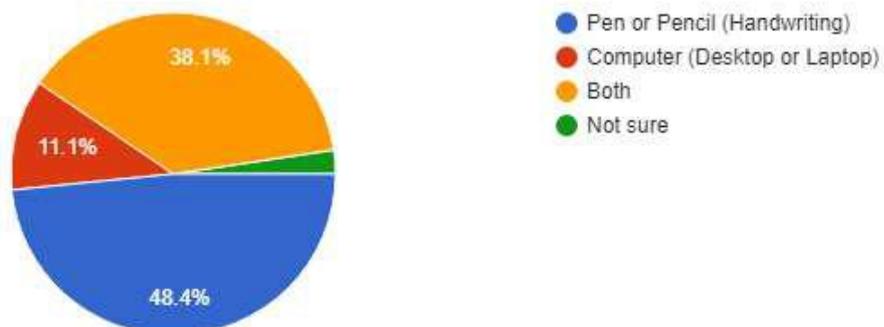
3) Do you have fear of writing?

126 responses



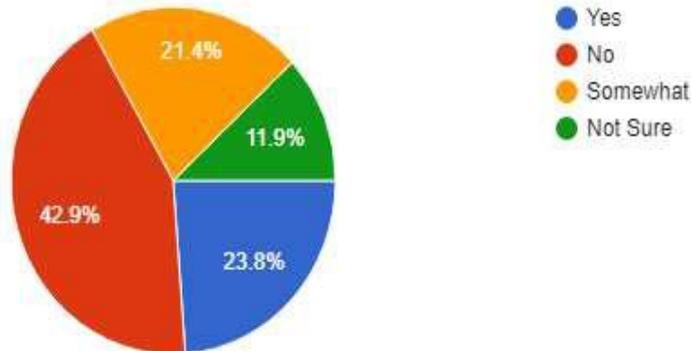
4) If asked to express your views though writing, what would be your preferred tool/mode of writing expression?

126 responses



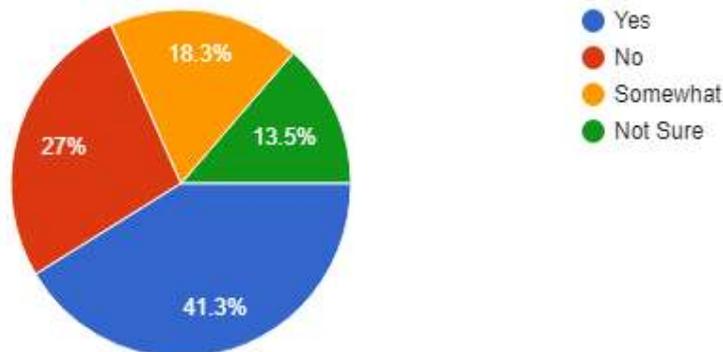
5) Do you think your examination performance could improve if you were allowed to answer examination papers ...s such as thesaurus, spell check etc?

126 responses



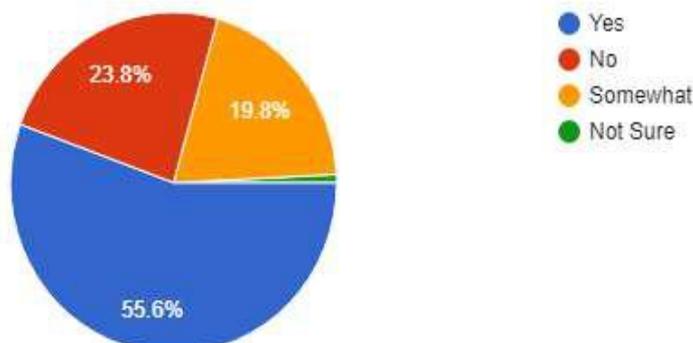
6) Do you think your examination performance would improve if allowed to answer examination questions on comp...s such as thesaurus,spell check etc?

126 responses



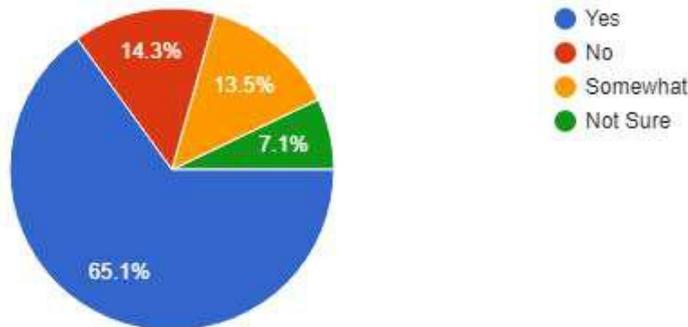
7) Do you think digital conveniences (computers, internet, social media) has contributed to decline in writing skill...ong the youths of your age/generation?

126 responses



8) Do you think or believe that decline in writing skills could impact one's intellectual growth?

126 responses



4. ANALYSIS:

The analysis of the survey clearly indicates that the Gen Z, who is so much hooked to digital gadgets still feels that handwriting is a skill which is essential to their intellectual growth and wellbeing – something they do not fear. 70.6 % believed that handwriting was essential. Only 6.5 % felt to the contrary.

5. FINDINGS:

The findings have been quite unexpected, much of a revelation and significant.

Though, at the outset, one has to mention that sample size is relatively small to speak for the entire set of iGeneration India. Yet, the assumption that handwriting is a declining or dying art has been nullified by the majority of the (55.6%) of the respondents and that the digital conveniences have largely contributed in the decline of writing skills. Surprisingly, 65.1% respondents also said that decline in hand writing skills may impact their intellectual growth too.

While 65.1% of the respondents endorsed the view that during examination, articulation, expression of views are best done through hand writing. In fact, 21.4% said that they were very comfortable in writing examinations. However, 58.7% were in favour of writing short notes (between 250-500 words) against 24.6% who preferred brief notes and only 16.7% were in favour of writing long notes (500+words).

Further probing, almost 48.4% of the respondents said that they preferred to express their views through pen or pencil against 38.1% who felt that they would be comfortable in using both computer as well written communication. Interestingly, when asked whether lack of handwriting skills could impair one's intellectual growth, a resounding 65.1% of the respondents believe that it could lead to intellectual regression.

Going by the data collected on whether students performance would improve if they were allowed to answer their examination on computer but without the help of internet or spell check facility, 42.9 % said 'no' and only 23.8 % responded in 'yes'.

On the other hand 46.7 % feel that that their performance in the examination would improve if they were allowed to write their exams with the help of thesaurus and spell check against 27%.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS:

Further, to majority of students so used to digital communication, handwriting provides satisfaction.

During examination, overwhelming number still prefer handwritten medium as it gives them space to think, explore and write to their satisfaction. They feel that digital technology has its limitations. During exams, they may not be able to think and respond with the help of digital technology as they would do otherwise. However, they all admitted that handwriting was fading and needs to be preserved, revived, encouraged in order to develop readership and learning and intellectual growth.

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