

Familial Communication in the Era of Digital Media: Connecting with Family through Technology

Prof. Anthony Kong

School of Design

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University



Anthony Kong

- Assistant Professor in Entertainment Arts and Design Engineering, School of Design, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University
- Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts (RSA)
- Chairman of Design Education Council, Hong Kong Designers Association (HKDA)
- Secretary of IEEE Hong Kong Section, Computer Society Chapter
- Research: Design for Hospitality, Digital Entertainment, e-Learning, Sports Technology, Cultural Art Technology



**POLYU
DES'GN**

Introduction & Significance

- Digital communication is a dominant mode for maintaining family ties in the 21st century (Baym, 2015).
- Pandemic conditions accelerated mediated communication adoption across all age groups (Burholt et al., 2020).
- However, a digital generational divide persists, influencing emotional connection, understanding, and participation.



Communication By Design



OBJECT

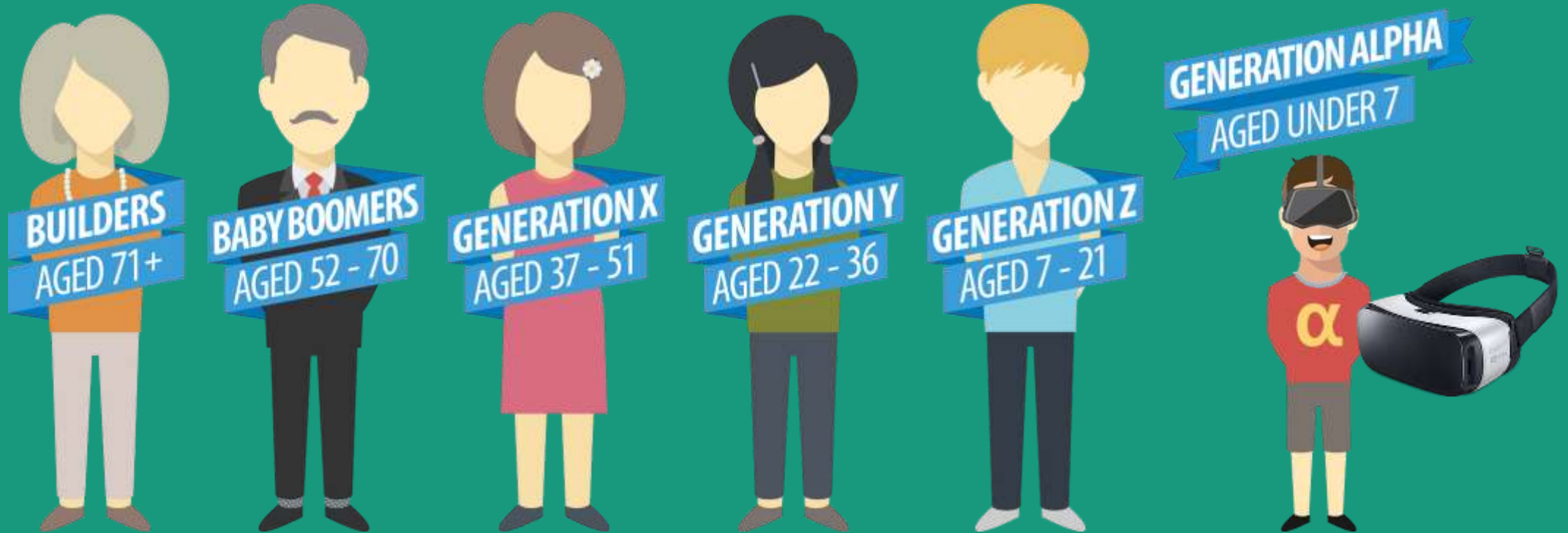


COMMUNICATION



ECOSYSTEM

Information Communication Technology Among Generations



Generational Communication Patterns

- Elderly: Phone calls, SMS, occasional video calls;
Low–Moderate digital comfort;
Barriers: fear, memory decline, interface complexity
- Young Adults: Messaging apps, video conferencing;
High digital comfort;
Barriers: multitasking, short attention span
- Children: Social media, gaming chats;
Very High digital comfort;
Barriers: reduced nonverbal skills, overexposure



Digital Media and Child Development

- Early exposure (e.g., video calls) supports speech development, heritage language acquisition, and emotional bonding (Vallotton & Ayoub, 2011; The Guardian, 2024).
- Visual and auditory cues in digital tools may promote sensory learning in children aged 0–3.





Emotional Nuance in Mediated Communication

- Computer-mediated communication (CMC) lacks certain paralinguistic cues (tone, gesture), risking misinterpretation (Walther, 2011).
- 'Phubbing' — prioritizing a device over interpersonal engagement — can reduce perceived intimacy in family interactions (Roberts & David, 2016).

Distraction Beyond Screens

- Distraction during parent–child interactions (digital or non-digital) disrupts emotional attunement and conversational flow (Radesky et al., 2015).
- It is the inattention, not solely the device, that undermines quality interaction.





Digital Literacy and Inclusion

- Elderly individuals report increased life satisfaction through digital contact but face barriers in adoption (HelpAge India, 2024).
- Effective strategies include hands-on, personalized digital training (O'Dwyer et al., 2025).



Designing for Intergenerational Engagement

- AR storytelling tools enable collaborative narrative sharing between grandparents and grandchildren (Zhao et al., 2023).
- Design implications: emotional resonance, simplicity, low learning curve.



請翻到下一頁
Please flip to the next page

開關記憶之書



Enhance family relationships by design?





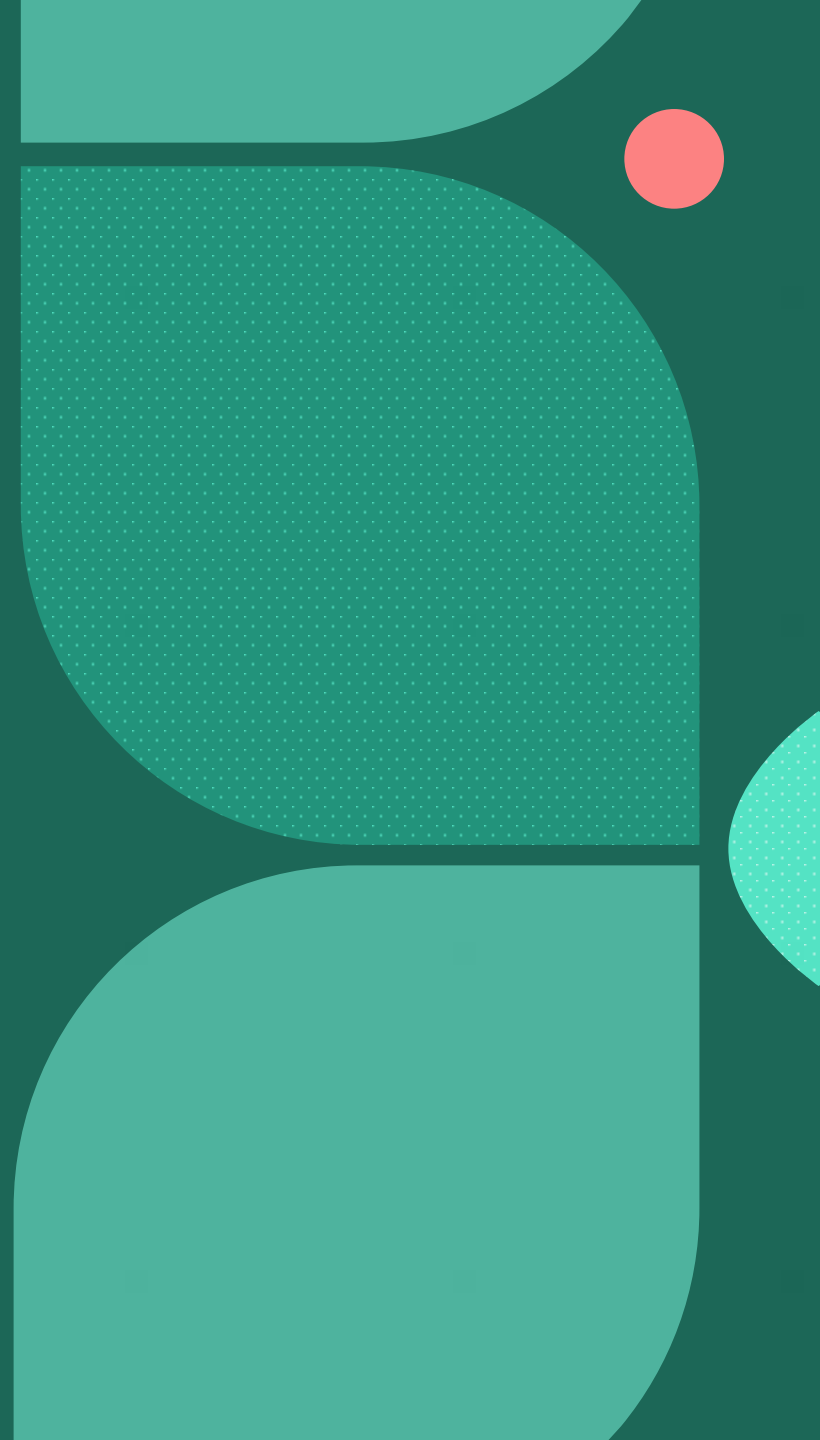
Societal & Psychological Implications

- Older adults: mediated contact reduces loneliness but does not fully replace face-to-face connection (Burholt et al., 2019).
- Youth: excessive media multitasking linked to reduced wellbeing, sleep disturbance, and internalizing symptoms (Scott et al., 2019).



Strategies to Bridge the Digital Divide

- Digital literacy programs for seniors — small group, experiential learning.
- Mindful technology use for youth — balance between online and offline family interaction.
- Inclusive technology design — culturally sensitive, accessible, and emotionally rich.



The background is a solid teal color. It features several abstract decorative elements: a small red circle in the top-left corner; a teal shape with a white dot pattern in the top-left; a large teal shape with a white dot pattern in the top-right; a teal circle and a smaller teal circle in the middle-right; and a teal shape with a white dot pattern in the bottom-left.

Conclusion

Technology is not inherently alienating — design, intention, and literacy determine its impact on familial connection. Bridging the digital generational divide requires coordinated interdisciplinary action.