NEWS LESSON

Is the Generation Gap Smaller Than We Think?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Which supposed fact about a generation do you find least convincing?
2. When is age a useful explanation for behaviour, and when is it a lazy one?
3. Do generation labels help people understand change, or mainly help media create simple stories?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**durably**	☐	A	thrown away or ignored as not useful
2	**shorthand**	☐	B	a quick way of saying something that leaves out detail
3	**discarded**	☐	C	moved up to a more important position or role
4	**universal**	☐	D	easy to guess in advance
5	**predictable**	☐	E	opinions about events, such as in newspapers
6	**permitted**	☐	F	allowed
7	**commentary**	☐	G	in a way that lasts a long time
8	**promoted**	☐	H	true or found everywhere

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Age can shape experience, but neat generational stories often mix together life stage, historical change and stereotype.

1 Few explanations are as satisfying, or as lazy, as a generation. Someone books a meeting that could have been a message, or sends a message that should have been a meeting, and the disagreement is filed under a birth year. The label arrives before anybody has asked what the other person was actually trying to do.

2 The raw differences are not imagined. Eurostat reported in April 2026 that 89.3% of EU residents aged 16 to 29 had used social networks during 2025, against 67.3% of the population aged 16 to 74. That is a substantial gap in how two groups organise their communication, and it would be strange if it left no mark on their expectations of one another.

3 The difficulty begins when a measured behaviour is promoted into a personality. Survey researchers distinguish between three forces that are easy to confuse. Age effects reflect where somebody stands in life, and they move with the person. Period effects reach everyone at once, as a pandemic or a new platform does. Only a genuine cohort effect belongs durably to those born in a particular stretch of years, and isolating one requires data that most commentary never consults.

4 A 2020 evidence review by the US National Academies reached an unglamorous conclusion: popular generational categories tend to blur age, career stage, historical context and individual experience, and they are not a sound basis for workforce decisions. The labels survive anyway, partly because they are convenient and partly because they sell.

5 What they conceal is the size of the variation inside each group. Any birth cohort contains people separated by income, education, city, health and temperament, and those differences are usually larger than the average gap between one cohort and the next. A statement that begins with the average and ends with an individual has quietly discarded almost everything that made the individual predictable.

6 They also travel badly. The vocabulary of boomers and millennials was built around North American history, and it quietly assumes that a given decade felt the same everywhere. A reader in Kyiv, Seville or Buenos Aires may recognise the words without recognising the experience they are supposed to describe, which is a reasonable warning against treating any of it as universal.

7 The cost of the shorthand is measurable. A 2023 European survey found 45% of respondents considered age discrimination widespread and 52% identified age as the characteristic most likely to count against a job candidate, a perception that penalises the very young alongside the old. A category invented to describe people ends up deciding what they are permitted to be.

8 Perhaps the gap feels wide partly because we narrate it so constantly. The habit of explaining a disagreement by cohort makes each side expect less of the other, and expectations have a way of arranging the evidence to suit themselves. It is easy to overgeneralise from one irritating colleague to an entire decade of births. The alternative is slower and almost always more accurate: ask the person in front of you what they need, and let the answer be about them.

Sources: Eurostat, 89% of young people in the EU used social networks in 2025. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The writer would agree that a person's birth year tells you little about their income or health. (T) (F) (NG)
2. The writer treats the Eurostat figures as proof that generational stereotypes are accurate. (T) (F) (NG)
3. The National Academies review recommended replacing generational categories with age bands. (T) (F) (NG)
4. The article would classify the effect of a new platform used by every age group as a period effect, not a cohort effect. (T) (F) (NG)
5. The article suggests generational labels last mainly because strong evidence supports them. (T) (F) (NG)

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

blur	conceal	Isolating	narrate	penalises	temperament	unglamorous	variation

1. The team's findings were _____ , but they proved reliable.
2. A confident tone can _____ how thin the evidence actually is.
3. Headlines often _____ the line between correlation and cause.
4. A rule that _____ part-time workers for taking leave was struck down.
5. _____ the effect of diet from that of exercise requires a carefully controlled study.
6. Siblings raised in the same house often differ sharply in _____ .

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. Researchers were _____ to draw firm conclusions from a single survey. (RELUCTANCE)
2. The sample was too small to be _____ of the whole population. (REPRESENT)
3. Oversimplified explanations are often _____ attractive because they are quick. (DECEIVE)
4. Her _____ to accept simple labels annoyed her colleagues. (WILLING)
5. The study highlighted the _____ of generalising from a single decade. (RELIABLE)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Check the grammar after the gap and the logic between the ideas: concession, contrast or result.

accordingly	albeit	conversely	insofar	notwithstanding	thereby	whereas

1. The gap is real, _____ smaller than the headlines suggest.
2. _____ the popularity of the labels, the evidence for them is thin.
3. Marketing teams treat the cohort as uniform, _____ sociologists stress its internal variety.
4. Some argue that labels simplify debate. _____ , they may simply make people expect less of one another.
5. The sample was small; _____ , its conclusions should be treated with caution.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. Why are generational stereotypes attractive even when the evidence is weak?
2. Could constant talk about a generation gap make the gap feel wider than it is?
3. Which matters more in shaping a person: age, country, money, education or individual character?

9 Role-play: planning a weekend away

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the grandmother

You want to plan a family weekend away. You prefer to phone people and talk. Ask your grandson to join a call tonight. Listen to his reasons and agree on a way to plan.

Student B · the grandson

You prefer to send one message to the group chat. Explain why this works for you. Say what you don't like about long phone calls, then look for a fair solution.

Useful phrases

I'd rather talk on the phone, if that's okay.
I didn't mean to upset you.
It's quicker for me to send a message.
Let's try it your way first.
How would you prefer to arrange this?
Could we do both, a message and then a call?

Afterwards, tell the class: what did you agree, and was the compromise fair to both sides?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 G · 2 B · 3 A · 4 H · 5 D · 6 F · 7 E · 8 C

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 unglamorous · 2 conceal · 3 blur · 4 penalises · 5 Isolating · 6 temperament

6 Word forms

1 reluctant · 2 representative · 3 deceptively · 4 unwillingness · 5 unreliability

7 Language focus

1 albeit · 2 Notwithstanding · 3 whereas · 4 Conversely · 5 accordingly

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