

# The Great Exchange: Gen Z's Switch from Smartphones to Flip Phones

## A Qualitative Phenomenological Analysis

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### AT A GLANCE

- The **first academic study** of its kind
- Lasted **four weeks**
- **10 volunteer** subjects (ages 18-26)
- **Qualitative** study
- Data collected via **interviews and diaries**
- **Four themes** + 13 subthemes emerged



Quote marks indicate  
direct quotes from subjects

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**RQ1** What is the experience of Generation Z who switches from smartphones to flip phones for four weeks?

**RQ2** What are Generation Z perceptions of mental health when using a flip phone instead of a smartphone for four weeks?

**RQ3** How do Generation Z individuals experience life without a smartphone in areas they consider salient to their mental health?

### DATA COLLECTION

**Individual Interviews** Each subject was interviewed individually twice (on Day 0 and Day 14) for 30-60 minutes.

**Diary Entries** Each subject submitted a diary entry with reflections at the end of each week.

**Focus Groups** Each subject participated in a focus group with four others on Day 28 for 90 minutes.

### FOUR EMERGENT THEMES AND 13 SUBTHEMES

1

#### Tools of Our Tools: The Power Shift from My Smartphone to Me

Subtheme 1 - Wrestling the Codependent Device: "It Needs to Go in a Box"

Subtheme 2 - From Autopilot to Autonomy: "There's a Power in Not Being on Your Phone"

Subtheme 3 - Putting Technology in Its Place: "It's Just a Piece of Plastic that I Can Call My Mom On"

2

#### Escaping the "Terrarium" to Find Freedom, Grounding, and Humanity

Subtheme 1 - Trapped in the Terrarium: "I'm the Thing that I'm Looking at 24/7"

Subtheme 2 - Escaping the Terrarium: Freedom - "Once You Make This Switch, You Feel Free"

Subtheme 3 - Escaping the Terrarium: Grounding - "I Can Breathe and It Doesn't Feel Heavy"

Subtheme 4 - Escaping the Terrarium: Humanity - "It's Like Relearning How to Be a Person"

3

#### More Connection Through Less Connection: Discovering the "True Warmth of Human Interaction"

Subtheme 1 - Embracing "Human Connection": "Actually Making Contact"

Subtheme 2 - Noticing the Walking Dead: "The Other People Are Zombies"

Subtheme 3 - Wanting Others to See "The Light": "If Only Everyone Else's Eyes Could Be Opened!"

4

#### Overwhelming Conveniences vs. Underwhelming Inconveniences: Searching for a Third Way

Subtheme 1 - Overwhelmed by Overaccess on a Smartphone: "A Leash to Everything Everywhere"

Subtheme 2 - Underwhelmed by Underaccess on a Flip Phone: "I Miss My Phone"

Subtheme 3 - The Goldilocks Search: Looking for a "Slightly Smarter Phone But Still a Pretty Dumb Phone"