Differences between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants in Contextual Use

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Abstract

Digital immigrants and digital natives characterize the differences between users according to their level of comfort in technology use: Digital immigrants are those who were not born into the digital world and started using technology in their adult lives; and digital natives are those who have grown up in a digital world and are able to use technology in fluent and sophisticated ways (Prensky 2001). Increasing research show that digital natives' use of technology significantly differs from digital immigrants, particularly so for ubiquitous technologies (Baham et al. 2023; Vodanovich et al. 2010). This is understandable due to also how people change in biological and psychological ways with age (Glisky 2007). This change also reflects on their ability to interact with mobile technologies. For example, it was found that older people had difficulties with too small design elements (e.g., buttons) due to reduced vision or joint problems, and too complicated menus due to declined cognitive abilities (Kurniawan 2008). Yet, there is still a lack of knowledge on how digital natives' ubiquitous technology use differs from digital immigrants in varying contextual situations-particularly so for social and physical contexts. However, context-of-use plays an important role in the use of ubiquitous technologies and can affect users' perceived benefits and concerns (Breward et al. 2017; Köse 2024). Therefore, the research question of this study is: To what extent do perceived use differ in physical and social contexts between digital natives and digital immigrants? To answer this research question, differences in mobile social media use in social and physical contextual situations will be compared between digital natives and digital immigrants. Mobile social media was chosen as the topic of the study because they are the most downloaded and used mobile applications (e.g., Ceci 2022). The results of this research can provide design implications for mobile social media and other mobile applications considering the user groups that differ age- and generation-wise.

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