How do people become digital natives media essay

Helsper and Eynon argue that ' breadth of use, experience, self-efficacy and education are just as, if not more, important than age in explaining how people become digital natives' (Helsper & Eynon, 2010). But first, we have to understand who can be classified as a " digital native."

The term was coined by Mark Prensky in his work, Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants, published in 2001. " Prensky described the generation of young people born since 1980 as ' digital natives' due to what he perceived as an innate confidence in using new technologies such as the internet, videogames, mobile telephony and all the other toys and tools of the digital age." (Selwyn, 2009)

A digital native is someone who was born around after 1980 and has grown up surrounded by devices such as cell phones and computers. Through interacting with these devices from an early age, they have a greater understanding of technology than a digital immigrant. A digital immigrant, on the other hand, is a person born before the introduction of digital technology and have learnt to adapt their lives around technology.

A digital native is unique because they have grown up with digital technologies. The exposure to these technologies from early in their lives has made these students native speakers of the digital language. A distinguishing characteristic that Marc Prensky points out is, " today's students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors." (Prensky, 2001)

A few key characteristics of digital natives are always online. By age 20, Dr. Urs Gasser from Harvard's Berman centre points out that, kids will have spent 20, 000 hours online -the same amount of time a professional piano player would have spent practicing. They tend to be very open about themselves online. It is said that 35% girls and 25% of boys write blogs. This usually works to be an advantage to HR sectors of various companies as they can Google a candidate with ease. They often experience work with community builders, and are responsive to intrinsic motivations.

However, a group of academics led by Sue Bennett of the University of Wollongong set out to debunk the whole idea of digital natives in 2008. They say that the idea that digital natives learn in a different manner can actually have diverse consequences in the field of education. (Monitor: The Next Generation Unplugged, 2010)

Being born in the digital age has had many significant impacts on fundamental features of human experience. They are " wired" differently. This affects the way they think and the way they learn. Unlike digital immigrants, digital natives don't have to print out email or other materials for later reading. They usually can read of the screen of the computer. If they want to show someone a website, for example, they just have to send the link to the person in question. Digital natives are concerned about doing things faster. For example, if a digital immigrant were to ask for the address of a five people in a set of people, they would take at least 15 minutes per person writing all the information. A digital native would however search for the facebook profile of the person which would take 15 minutes in total.

Brains have different developmental experiences and therefore develop differently. Also, people who experience different inputs from the culture that surrounds them, think differently. (Prensky, 2001) " Children raised with the computer " think differently from the rest of us. They develop hypertext minds. They leap around. It's as though their cognitive structures were parallel, not sequential." (Winn)

Digital natives crave instant responses for their actions as a result of their experiences. Traditional schooling does not cater for such characteristics. One study showed that students in class get to ask a question every 10 hours. (Prensky, 2001)

The digital divide is the gap between people with access to information technology and those with very limited or no access at all. It includes the imbalance both in physical access to technology and the resources and skills needed to effectively participate as a digital citizen.

Simply put, the digital divide is the empty space between the two armies, the space they come to do battle. One side of the arena are the digital natives and on the other side, the digital immigrants. There is a huge gap between the two as I pointed out earlier on in the essay.

Both generations (digital natives and digital immigrants) are forced to meet which commonly results in conflicting ideologies of digital technology. The everyday regime of life at work is becoming more technologically advanced with improved computers in offices, more complicated machinery in industry etc. With technology rapidly improving, it is getting harder and harder for digital immigrants to keep up.

But this is not something new. Neuroscientists everywhere tells us that the brain adapts itself to the technology we use. It is not just technology that alters our behaviour and habits. It actually changes the way our mind works, and alters the physical structure of our brain. Connections between neurons are created, strengthened, or diminished and severed based on interactions with the world. (davidweedmark). For e. g. take away technology from a teenager for a day and you will see the difference for yourself.

From both extremes there is a healthy middle ground. The availability of calculators should not mean that multiplication tables should not be memorized, but it does not imply that calculators should be banned. As Prensky pointed out, " there is no reason that a generation that can memorize over 100 Pokemon characters … can't learn the names, populations, capitals and relationships of all the 101 nations in the world." (Prensky, 2001)

Helsper and Eynon argue that ' breadth of use, experience, self-efficacy and education are just as, if not more, important than age in explaining how people become digital natives' (Helsper & Eynon, 2010). Personally, I agree with the statement. There are four factors that determine whether a person is digital native – Breadth of use, self-efficacy, education and age.

Breadth of use, as mentioned by Helsper and Eynon refers to the number of times a person uses the internet or any electronic source qualifies them to be that considered as a digital native.

As indicated by the graph below, there is an increasing trend in internet usage.

singapore internet. JPG

The impulse of a digital native to search for information would be going onto the internet, rather than newspapers or books. Unlike the digital immigrants, as defined by (Prensky, 2001) they are people who have lesser knowledge about the internet and the usage of it.

Experience, to determine whether a person is a digital native or not, is defined as " those who have been on the Internet the longest, while they might not have grown up with the Internet when young, they have been ' submerged' in it for the longest period of time" (Helsper & Eynon, 2010). It is right to say that those working in the Information Technology (IT) sector will be better off than those who are novices to computer software. The years of experience of these experts determines how good they are in IT. A young person who is below the age of 30 is considered digital native as they will be able to figure out the program easily. This is due to the fact that when digital natives come out into the world, most of the technologies have already been so advanced, some of which are computerised, therefore it is not surprising to know that these natives are already ' submerged' in the digital world.

Self-efficacy " refers to a person's belief that they can perform adequately in a situation." (Wood, Zeffane, Fromholtz, Wiesner, & Creed, 2010). Gender is a glaring is an example for self-efficacy. Many tend to have a perception that boys are better in Mathematics and Physics than girls. Due to this, the self-efficacy produced from boys will be higher; hence their thought processes are better. Likewise for self-efficacy in digital natives, as many perceive that young people, who are born after 1980, to be better at IT skills and

knowledge. This led to the increase in their (digital natives) self-efficacy, which also resulted in them being better than the older people digitally.

Education simply means the depth with which people are knowledgeable in technical skills and knowledge, and whether education can determine whether someone is a digital native. According to (Prensky, 2001), " the single biggest problem facing education today is that our Digital Immigrant instructors, who speak an outdated language (that of the pre-digital age), are struggling to teach a population that speaks an entirely new language."

Based on the arguments provided in this essay, it can be concluded that Helsper and Eynon's argument that " breadth of use, experience, self-efficacy and education are just as, if not more, important than age in explaining how people become digital natives" (Helsper & Eynon, 2010) holds water. All the factors mentioned are all equally important in defining digital natives. Breadth of use shows us the number of people who use internet on a daily basis. Experience is dependent on the duration one has worked with technology. A digital native is also determined by the self-efficaciousness they exhibit is towards modern technology such as computers and electronic devices. A strong educational background does not prove the existence of digital natives as many digital natives in this world are not well-educated. These factors are as important as age.