The Digital Age: Bridging the Communication Gap Between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants

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Abstract

The global explosion of the rudiments of Information and Communications Technology (ICT) and the appeal it enjoys among the young presents a huge challenge to folks of yester years. An erstwhile analog method of acquiring information and sharing same has continued to linger in the heads and hearts of those who belong to the older generation which unsurprisingly irritates the youth of today. This study "The Digital Age: Bridging the Communication Gap between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants" employed the qualitative method to access the seeming clash between what Marc Prensky designates as "Digital Natives" and "Digital Immigrants" by adopting a proposed *Digitus Nativo-Immigrantes ICT Theory* as theoretical framework. The researcher discovered the challenge of being media-savvy, language and content barrier and generational difference as clogs in the wheel of progress in terms of finding a nexus between "digital natives" and "digital immigrants." It proposed being in touch with modern technology, creation of balance regarding language and content as well as attempting to bridge the general gap between the two groups as possible ways out of the seeming quagmire. The paper concluded that with the right methods and disposition, it is possible to bridge the lacuna between "Digital Natives" and "Digital Immigrants" in the classroom and beyond.
Keywords: Age; Communication; Digital; Immigrants; Natives.

1. Introduction

Our world today has evolved a fascinating culture of digitalization in almost all its facets. The movement from an erstwhile analog culture to a digital switch off Dyikuk and Chinda (2017) as far as electronics and other gadgets are concerned, is trendy and catches the fancy of young people. It would seem that if one does not fall in line with this change, he or she is "old school" and would soon pay for it in terms of using the social media or other electronic devices. This change has a boomerang effect in the way older folks relate with their children and vice versa in the society.

With economic advances the global appeal for what Information and Communication Technology (ICT) offers has become irresistible (Harindranath, 2008). The change in accessing and sharing information from the classroom to the bedroom further discloses the dynamics of the 21st century. The fashionable way in which Tablets are gradually replacing both notebooks and textbooks speaks volume about the time under review. The use of computers which has ushered in concepts like, e-library, e-technology and e-learning apparently leaves everyone who is not computer-savvy in the dark room of the 19th century. The phenomenon has heralded the "e-Learning Revolution" (Galagan, 2000).

The digital age comes with the advancement of e-governance through policy creation, service development with the aid of ICT and steering multi-sectoral relations in a non-hierarchical way (Islam and Ehsan, 2012) is often built on the foundations of accountability and transparency, building consensus, ensuring the freedom of expression and thought, easy access to information gathering and sharing, creation of open-door policy and the creation of an informed populace who are able to match with other citizens of the world through speaking the same language of digitalization (Collin, 2015; Edwards, 2015). This is possible if both parents and teachers are able to hear and communicate with their children or pupils in a way that they understand and can reciprocate.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Today, change in times and seasons affects the way people think act and including accessing information. The analog systems of the past having fulfilled their purposes are seemingly left in the heads of the older generation. Nowadays, kids can only view older computers in museums or old photos. Often times, while the young laugh at older technologies and wonder why those things were used, the old relish them beyond imagining and conclude that their days were better.

This brings us to the seeming rift between what Prensky designates as "Digital Natives" and "Digital Immigrants." It should be noted that the challenge of being media-savvy, language and content barrier as well as generational difference poses a threat to striking a balance between "Digital Natives" and "Digital Immigrants" in the school environment and the larger society.

According to Prensky, the problem with education today is that today's students have changed radically because they are no longer the people our educational system was designed to teach. The scholar blames the development on the arrival of digital technology towards the end of the 20th century which he notes is marked as a "singularity" that

is, a dramatic twist in the flow of generational change (Cultural Reader, 2013). He suggests that "today's students think and process information fundamentally differently from their predecessors" (Cultural Reader, 2013) noting that these changes may be found in the very way in which the brain of the new generation functions which often leads to a drastic change.

Since to a large extent Digital Immigrants learn to adapt to their new environment while retaining an "accent," Prensky argues that the problem with 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," (Cultural Reader, 2013) thereby creating a cross-generational conflict. Meanwhile, digital natives enjoy receiving information very fast, parallel processing, multi-tasking activities, place propriety on graphics rather than text, network, relish fast and easy gratification, digital immigrants are perplexed because all these things are foreign to them which creates serious tension and poses problems in education today (Cultural Reader, 2013).

Prensky contends that the assumption that learners are the same as they ever were is no longer tenable because unfortunately, traditional education cannot meet the needs and inclinations of the new Digital Immigrants on the one hand and on the other, Digital Natives are not likely to go back to traditional ways of thinking and learning (Cultural Reader, 2013); no thanks to various developments in the digital society.

1.2. Aim and Method of the Study

This study aims at:
1. Highlighting the impact of the digital age amongst older and younger people in society.
2. X-raying the dynamics of Prensky's concept of Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants.
3. Advancing reasons for the seeming clash between young and old people in the overall learning process and in the society.
4. Attempting to create a nexus between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants in terms of appreciating the good things which ICT offers.
5. Establishing a rapport between the two generations aimed at enhancing learning and creating harmony in society.

The paper adopts the qualitative method of study which highlights the views of authors about the subject of discussion with a view to accessing the situation so as to contribute to knowledge by making useful recommendations. It also hopes to make an informed opinion and stimulate further research about bridging the communication gap between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants in the digital age.

2. Conceptual Explication

2.1. The Digital Age

In this paper, Digital Age is understood as the 21st Century with all its avalanche of digitally advanced opportunities of Information and Communication Technologies. It comprises of all the concepts and implementations of e-technology particularly e-learning and e-library which affects the way in which the old and the young communicate with one another and relate in either in the school environment or larger society.

2.2. Communication Gap

The phrase "communication gap" is viewed here as barriers to effective communication which includes, generational difference, difference in language, thought and expression and difference in contents of education. It also refers to all clogs in the wheel of communicating messages and information efficiently in the learning environment.

2.3. Digital Natives

In this paper, we shall conceive Digital Natives as those who are so fascinated with new technology because they were born into the digital world and so always adopt it in their lives. They are children of the jet age who hear and speak the language of the modern world. They also manipulate the computer and other such devices with dexterity and much fun as it is their second nature. Prensky observes that this new generation of high technology usage are regarded as Digital Natives because "Our students today are all 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet" (Cultural Reader, 2013).

2.4. Digital Immigrants

Digital Immigrants are all those who were not born into the digital age but become fascinated by and adopted most aspects of the new technology (Prensky, 2001) applying it in their day to day lives. Those who fall under this category are those who were born before the advent of the Internet. Because the Internet was created not in their age, they are referred to as Digital Immigrants. All those born before the beginning of the digital era are referred to as Digital Immigrants (Cultural Reader, 2013). In the words of Coutts (2015), these are "those born prior to the widespread dissemination of digital technologies" (2015).

2.5. Theoretical Framework

As a fitting theoretical framework for this study, the paper adopts what this author proposes as *Digitus Nativo-Immigrantes ICT theory*. From the Latin etymology of digital native/immigrants, this framework attempts an incorporation of older techniques of learning into the digital culture of the young. It is a dialogue with the past in

modern terms which seeks to engage erstwhile techniques with the use of modern tools. The *Digitus Nativo-Immigrantes ICT theory* hopes to engage old fellows and young folks in appreciating a modern culture which does not break structural conventions but attempts to key into the dynamics of the modern world initiated by the Internet towards the end of 20th century through the 21st century with its attendant good of information-sharing, fostering relationships, enhancing commerce and scholarship as well as various advancements (Dyikuk, 2017).

Being an ICT-friendly theory, it intends to incorporate the seeming complex systems and structures of yester years into computer and video games for the purposes of teaching and learning. It argues that just as the iPads and other Tablets are handy tools on the home front, it is incumbent on contemporary teachers to unlearn the analog habits of the past so as to be in touch with the language of the new world. This ICT theory seeks to also make allowance for the young to be part of developing their curriculum so as to engage them fully in an art they are best suited for.

The *Digitus Nativo-Immigrantes ICT theory* also highlights the indispensable role of the Internet and computer-related devices for the 21st century classroom. It notes that the demands of the new age urge both the young and the old to sing in the same choir. It, however, stresses that there is bound to be difference in pitch due to gender and individual differences, socio-cultural factors, deficit in infrastructure such as the Internet and the preference for self-styled use of ICT with the resultant effect of resisting traditional or standardized teaching methodologies.

3. Literature Review
3.1. Prensky's Digital Natives/Digital Immigrants Narrative

In his famous seminal theses, *Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants,* Marc Prensky makes a distinction between the young and the old. In making this distinction, Prensky opines that the most useful designation he has found for young people is that they are, *Digital Natives.* The author goes ahead to refer to those "who were not born into the digital world but have, at some later point in our lives, become fascinated by and adopted many or most aspects of the new technology" as *Digital Immigrants* (Prensky, 2001).

It is important to understand the background for such comparison. The assessment is born out of the desire to bridge a gap in learning and education between the old, who are teachers, and the young who are students. This is why the scholar noted that "our students today are all 'native speakers' of the digital language of computers, video games and the Internet" who "can't understand what the Immigrants are saying" (Prensky, 2001). In no time, it becomes obvious to the Digital Natives that they are been thought by a population of heavily accented, unintelligible foreigners.

The author also stressed that while the "digital native accent" is seen in such things as surfing the Internet for information, older folks who were "socialized" differently from their children are busy learning a new language in what could be described as a "digital immigrant accent" – a herculean task indeed. The task is herculean because of barrier in thought pattern and generational difference. "This accent is seen in their propensity to utilise digital technology after trying other methods, of falling back on old ways of completing tasks and of relying on the habits from a pre-digital age" (Coutts, 2015).

Prensky surmised that "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." The challenge of the 21st century does not only lie in the problem of "language" as the scholar suggests - it is the problem of time, age, culture and change. It becomes a huge a huge challenge to speak to the young in the language of modern times if the teachers are not at home with the demands of time and culture.

3.2. Contemporary Implication of the Digital Natives/Digital Immigrants Designation

As time passes, older folks may always feel shortchanged by the electronic-brain or sensations of the young on the one hand - On the other hand, kids may be impatient with those who are supposed to pass on civilization to them. The Latin adage, *Nemo dat quod non habit* – You cannot give what you don't have (Sinha, 2014), readily comes to mind. It behooves governments, educators and all those who are saddled with the responsibility of training the young to go the *digital way*.

There is hardly any white-collar job today that does not demand a basic knowledge of computer. It is most likely that employers would ask prospective job seekers for mobile-phone numbers and email accounts. What this implies is that the stakes are high regarding being in touch with the signs of the time. Reading the signs of time is crucial to a changing world (Dyikuk, 2017).

The rate race of a competitive world occasioned by consumerism resulting in the effects of globalization has further brought about rural/urban migration and the craze for white-collar jobs has forced many Immigrants to adjust with the current times.

Accordingly, having a Facebook account, Twitter handle or WhatsApp application on your phone is no longer a luxury. It is no longer about being trendy – it is about time. The world has changed and so must we. What needs to be observed here is that must employers would rather ask for phone numbers and emails of potential applicants so as to reach them after a successful job interview. Nowadays, it is common for workers in an organisation to create a WhatsApp group chat or Facebook Account for reaching out to their members.

The new language of digital culture may at first be complicated for our Digital Immigrants. Dyikuk conceives Digital Culture as "the contemporary explosion of Information and Communication Technologies and how they affect the gathering and processing of information as well as human interactions, worldviews, beliefs and opinions" (p. 045). What is needful is, our crop of Digital Natives have a duty to patiently update older folks in the art of the digital culture while patiently taking lectures about life and educational pursuit from them. In the long run,

boycotting classes or lectures because you've got a knack for operating smart phones, electronics and other such devices or because you are an internet freak would be the peak of deception. This is because recent studies have shown that from middle school to colleges, cell phones have adverse effects on student's achievement which is purported to outweigh their potential as a learning tool (Barnwell, 2016). What this means is that educationists ought to search for a solution to the Immigrants/Natives puzzle occasioned by digital explosion.

3.3. The Digital Immigrants/Natives Puzzle: A Critique

Prensky suggests that to bridge the gap between the two pilgrims, teachers of today need to:
- Learn the language of the natives so as to speed up instruction and provide random access.
- Look at a new way of looking at content namely, "legacy content" which consists of traditional subjects such as reading, writing, and local thinking - "future content" is "digital and technological," and it includes subjects, like "software, hardware, robotics, nanotechnology and genomics" as well as " ethics, politics, sociology, languages and other related fields.
- Use edutainment as an allurement for digital natives to keep them on tract (VanSlyke, 2003).

Prensky's propositions have come under criticism by some scholars for hasty conclusion. One of such scholars is VanSlyke (2003) who opined that not all student's of today fall into Prensky's definition of digital natives because not everybody is exposed to the use of the internet. According to the scholar, Prensky overemphasized the differences between his two groups and de-emphasized the similarities. He also does not agree that digital natives have to speak a new language in order to be effective teachers.

In his analysis of college students and what their behaviour and attitudes mean for their institutions titled: *Conflicting Realities: Bridging the gap between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants,* Arthur Levine (cited in (CAO, 2014)) says, five differences stand out between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants namely:
- They are the first generation of digital natives
- Technology makes these students more connected, yet more isolated
- Today's students are more immature and dependent and they fell entitled
- They are products of the worst economy since they feel great depression
- They are more diverse and more global in orientation.

In critiquing Prensky further, scholars like Coutts argue "that Digital Natives do not all experience or value technology in the same ways" (2015). Prensky comes from a world that is dominated by speed games and MTV, but that is not the case for all natives. The gender question in terms of usability of "fast-twitch" games also remains. The author further notes that there is also the aspect of "a counter culture emerging against pervasive technology that is not in the service of individual needs" (Coutts, 2015). This is because a student who may be excited in chatting with friends on social media may not express the same excitement when asked to use the same device for research or an assignment. Citing an example with Natives who have returned to be university lecturers having been taught by Immigrants, Coutts makes the point that "As with all individuals the differences between new graduates has more to do with their individuality than with their membership of a particular group or more importantly their birthday" (2015).

Importantly too, it is observed that Digital Natives "may in some cases have skills required to learn new tools but they combine that skill with impoverished models for thinking and inquiring that prevent them from using their digital skills in meaningful ways. They rely on instant gratification from game play but lack the required grit and resilience to move forward when this is lacking" (Coutts, 2015). As such, they still require being taught on how to learn and use digital tools for learning.

Coutts calls the assumption that Digital Immigrants are slow in learning or accepting new technology an "oversimplification." The expert surmises that: "The reality is that it is not one's age which determines one's level of engagement with technology but one's disposition towards it. Some of the most successful integrators of technology I have encountered are (in my politest voice) 'older members' of the profession" (2015).

Highlighting another pitfall in Prensky's thesis, another scholar stressed that not all technology-assisted learning fits the Digital Native/Immigrants stereotype because educators today around the world use many discussion fora and mailing lists which are not necessarily flashy or fast-paced but facilitate discourse, learning and teaching. He notes that pretty soon, some colleagues from the generation of the Digital Natives are likely to join such communities and will be able to succeed without necessarily engaging with flashy animations or videos (VanSlyke, 2003).

It is crucial to note that while VanSlyke appreciates Prensky's advice on what can be done to keep tap with the culture of the Digital Natives, the author (VanSlyke, 2003) emphasizes that since good teaching involves improving students' ability to learn critical thinking, recognize the diversity of learners' abilities and needs and create awareness about both the complexity of the learning process and the need to adjust to different situations, the point must be made that: "Human teachers do not always accomplish all of these tasks at once, or any one of them consistently. Even so, there has yet to be a computer program that can come even close to replicating what a human teacher does on a daily basis. Rather than focusing on the development of computer applications that teach, I am in favor of creating better tools for teachers, and then helping teachers become better users of the tools" (2003).

The aspect of overgeneralization of his assumptions about the two parties is once again brought to the fore: "While it appears that the Digital Natives, on average, grew up reading less and engaging with digital media more, this does not mean that they are illiterate or unresponsive to traditional forms of teaching and learning. Like many observers of other cultures, Prensky overgeneralizes his description of the Digital Native and then draws dramatic conclusions from those generalizations" (VanSlyke, 2003).

3.4. Finding a Nexus Between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants

In an attempt to find a nexus between Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants, Prensky proposes adapting the traditional method of learning into the curriculum of the Digital Natives in both content and methodology. For this to be achieved, the scholar insists that there has to be a blend between what he describes as "legacy content" which has to do with important things like reading, writing, mathematics and logic and "future content" which revolves around digital and technological issues. As it were, the proposal here is a rethinking on what and how to teach children effectively in the modern world. A combination of the "legacy content" and "future content" may well suit the needs of digital natives and provide a leverage for teachers, most of whom are Digital Immigrants, to cope with the new demands of teaching pupils (Cultural Reader, 2013).

Scholars like Levine proposed that Digital Natives should:

- See the need for an education that develops skill, critical thinking, creativity and the ability to learn continuously;
- Make technology to supplement and not replace face-to-face interaction;
- Develop a deep, global multicultural understanding because the world is shrinking;
- Ensure that institutions need to prepare students for practical career services that include internships;
- Give students a general orientation that focuses on the human heritage, natural environment, man-made institutions and individuals roles as well as shared responsibility since we have a shared culture and live in a shared world (Arthur Levine, cited in CAO (2014).

4. Recommendations and Conclusion

4.1. Recommendations

4.1.1. Creation of New Content and Language

To bridge the gap between Digital Immigrants and Digital Natives, Prensky argues for the creation of a new content and language in tandem with new technology. This is necessary because of the change in the education needs of students today. To achieve success in teaching and learning today, a new content and technique needs to be developed to enable digital immigrants meet the needs of globalization and teaching in an ITC world. This appears to be one of the sustainable ways of meeting the needs of a learning which successfully meets the desires and aspirations of digital natives (Meyer, 2013). For this to be come true, teachers must ensure a "major translation and change of methodology or curriculum."

4.1.2. Change in Thinking Pattern

As has been observed earlier, the generational gap between Immigrants and Natives has to do with thinking pattern. This is why Prensky notes that "if Digital Immigrant educators really want to reach Digital Natives- i.e. all their students- they will have to change – [so as] to be thinking about how to teach both Legacy and Future content in the language of the Digital Natives" (Meyer, 2013). It is possible for the Immigrants to adapt to new ways of thinking in order to reach the Natives otherwise the former will still be stocked in old patterns of thought. To evolve a new language of teaching, there has to be compromise which involves teachers creating a "new thinking" (Meyer, 2013).

4.1.3. Involving the Young in Creating Their Curriculum

To strike a generational gap between immigrants and natives, the latter ought to be involved in establishing their curriculum, developing their new language and solving the puzzle of accent, technology use and knowledge to meet with the demands of contemporary learning so as to catch up with their peers around the globe.

4.1.4. Emphasize Critical Thinking and Research Skills

It is apparent that in today's electronic society, both Digital Immigrants and Natives are daily bombarded with vast volumes of information, which calls for an even greater emphasis on critical thinking and research skills - That is, the very sort of "legacy content" which teachers have focused on since classical times. This does not mean discarding the Internet which is a primary medium of this emerging culture (VanSlyke, 2003). Amidst the Immigrants/Natives puzzle, the all important need for blending emerging developments in ICT with critical thinking and research skills can never be overemphasized.

4.1.5. Cultural Assimilation

There is a great need for cultural assimilation if the seeming tension between the two is to be bridged. It is clear that "cultural assimilation rarely entails a wholesale abandonment of previous customs or practices; rather, it typically involves a flexible process of negotiation and adaptation, wherein certain elements of both cultures are retained in a new combination with one another" (VanSlyke, 2003). What this entails is that we have to be at home with the emerging trend that teachers must seek to understand the learning styles of their students.

4.1.6. Multi-Dimensional Approach

This paper favours the prospects of e-learning. To be sure, the future of e-learning entails growth in synchronous learning, prevalence of blended solutions, improved technology and access and integration of information provision, performance support, peer collaboration and training (Wanberg and Brown, 2003).

Table-1. A Juxtaposition of Digital Natives and Digital Immigrants

	Digital Natives	Digital Immigrants
1.	They are media savvy	They find media use difficult
2.	They are fast with ICT enhanced learning	They are slow in using the tools of ICT
4.	They find it easy to blend both old and modern techniques	They are often buried in the past regarding digital learning
5.	They understand and speak the modern language of the jet age	They find the language of the modern age rather strange
6.	They are quick to experiment with new things	They would rather insist on old methodologies

Author's views

Table-2. Essentials of Digitus Nativo-Immigrantes ICT Theory

1.	**This theory attempts to adopt older techniques of learning into the digital culture of the young**
2.	It is a dialogue with the past in modern terms which seeks to engage erstwhile techniques with the use of modern tools
3.	The *Digitus Nativo-Immigrantes ICT theory* intends to engage old fellows and young folks in appreciating the modern culture
4.	The modern culture this theory argues for does not break structural conventions but attempts to key into the dynamics of the modern world initiated by the Internet towards the end of 20th century
5.	It favours the 21st century with its attendant good of information-sharing, fostering relationships, enhancing commerce and scholarship as well as various advancements
6.	It is an ICT-friendly theory which seeks to incorporate the seeming complex systems and structures of yester years into computer and video games for the purposes of teaching and learning

Author's views

Table-3. Veritable Ways of Bridging the Natives/Immigrants Dichotomy

1.	**Creation of a new content and language**
2.	Necessitating change in the thinking pattern of both Natives and Immigrants
3.	Ensuring the young are involved in creating their own curriculum
4.	Emphasizing critical thinking and research skills in the education sector
5.	Ensuring cultural assimilation of requisite ideas
6.	Insisting on a multi-dimensional approach to education

Author's views

4.2. Conclusion

As a way of wrapping up, it is essential to note some limitations of the *Digitus Nativo-Immigrantes ICT theory.* The theory presumes that both students and teachers are excited about new technology. It also creates the impression that only modern technology can bridge the generational space between Immigrants and Natives by oversimplifying the matter. Notwithstanding this critique, it is worth noting that the theory provides a platform for embracing modern technology and using same for intellectual discourse beyond the classroom in a digital culture. "In a digital culture, a sea of opportunities is opened thanks to *multimediality* (the use of various media) and its tools" (Dyikuk, 2017). This makes for good youth citizenship and participation (Collin, 2015).

The significant contribution of Prensky to "the reality of how our supposedly Digital Natives or Immigrants engage with technology and learning" (Coutts, 2015) cannot be diminished. That point made, we must also appreciate the fact that Prensky's summation has "evolved to better serve our needs and understandings of how people born after the internet, learn with and think about, technology" (Coutts, 2015). "Clearly there is much room for ongoing learning and the construction of a pedagogy with technology at its core is yet to become a natural part of teacher training programmes" (Coutts, 2015). What this means is that there has to be a blend of both "Legacy content" and "future content." Beyond this summation is that fact that Prensky's seminal essay "reveals a more complex landscape than a simple dichotomy allows for. A richer subcultural analysis is required where individual narratives of technology's meanings may be revealed" (Coutts, 2015).

It is a given that the participation of Digital Natives in digital affairs is part of their daily lives (Edwards, 2015). While they have a lot of grounds, there is a lot they can learn from Digital Immigrants – Each group can enrich the other. Chilcott (2012), surmises that, "the digital immigrants and the digital natives need to start talking in the same accents." Interestingly, Zukowski (2012) would ask: "How often do we approach our religious education and catechetical instruction with a 11th or 20th century educational mentality for the 21st century students before us?" This indeed, is a question, begging for an answer from secular and religious scholars, educators, parents and indeed all of everyone.

It has been argued that if we want the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to have a real impact on the next decade, digitalization must gain more traction on our discussions (De, 2015). There may never be a time that the world would face-out Digital Immigrants except the much talked about SDGs are achieved. Until such a time, the younger generation must never forget that the digital age itself is evolving. The technological advancement that has made our parents and teachers Digital Immigrants today may make us heir apparent tomorrow. As such, while we enjoy our "Digital Home" today, we should not forget that the future is pregnant with technologies we know little or nothing about.

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