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The 'Digital Native' Myth and Marketing Simulation Success

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ABSTRACT

Simulations are increasingly popular as a method of teaching in business colleges as educators move away from passive learning towards more active/experiential learning (Young, Klemz, & Murphy, 2003). Simulations are designed to replicate real world experiences and have been shown to increase students' enthusiasm, interest and involvement, and help them to connect theory to practice. Business course simulations are predominantly computer based online programs that allow students to make discipline specific decisions for a hypothetical company.

The generation born roughly between 1980 and 1994 has been characterised as 'digital natives' (Prensky, 2001a) or the 'Net generation' (Tapscott, 1998) because of their familiarity with and reliance on, information and communication technology (ICT). Prensky described the generation of young people as 'digital natives' due to what he perceived as "an innate confidence in using new technologies" (Prensky, 2001a, p. 1). While it is commonly known that younger generations have grown up in a world where technology is an integrated part of their lives, not all students are computer confident. The concept of 'digital natives' is based on the major assumption that young people possess advanced understanding of and skills in information technologies and the idea has been accepted in education with limited critical reflection. Although many students use a wide range of technologies in their daily lives, "there are clearly areas where the use of, and familiarity with, technology-based tools is far from universal" (Kennedy, T., Churchward, & Gray, 2006, p. 8). A 2009 literature review showed that young people's engagements with digital technologies are varied and often minimal (Selwyn, 2009). Brown and Czerniewicz (2010) found that only 12% of the students in the 'digital native' group met the criteria defined by Prensky. Research by Margaryan et al. (2011) did not find support for the claims regarding students having superior digital abilities and stronger desires to adopt technology for knowledge creation and sharing. Research by Kvavik, Caruso and Morgan (2004) indicated that a significant proportion of students had lower level skills than that expected of 'digital natives'. "Educators therefore cannot presume that all young students are "digital natives" who have confidence in using technology to support and enhance their learning" (Margaryan et al., 2011, p. 22).

While research indicates a portion of young individuals are highly competent with technology and rely on it for information gathering and communication it also highlights there is a significant number of young people who do not have the access to, or skills in, technology. Therefore, the focus on technically proficient students results in a neglect of those less interested and less able (Bennett et al., 2008). This research examines the impact computer confidence has on simulation success. Particularly it asks the question, does computer confidence impact students' performance in simulations? Young peoples' abilities to access technology remains strongly influenced by socio-economic status, as well as gender, and geography (Golding, 2000). Factors such as age, gender, nationality, race, and previous work experience will also be examined to investigate their moderating effects.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Melanie Eva Bruce has a Ph.D. from Southern Cross University, Australia. She is currently an Assistant Professor at the University of Tennessee at Martin where she is developing her research in the areas of identity and consumption, social media, consumer behavior and simulation pedagogy.

