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# Net generation or Digital Natives: Is there a distinct new generation entering university?

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### Abstract

This article reports key findings from the first phase of a research project investigating Net generation age students as they encounter e-learning at five universities in England. We take a critical view of the idea of a distinct generation which has been described using various terms including Net generation and Digital Natives and explore age related differences amongst first year university students. The article draws on evidence from a survey of first year undergraduates studying a range of pure and applied subjects. Overall we found a complex picture amongst first-year students with the sample population appearing to be a collection of minorities. These included a small minority that made little use of some technologies and larger minorities that made extensive use of new technologies. Often the use of new technology was in ways that did not fully correspond with the expectations that arise from the Net generation and Digital Natives theses. The article concludes that whilst there are strong age related variations amongst the

sample it is far to simplistic to describe young first-year students born after 1983 as a single generation. The authors find that the generation is not homogenous in its use and appreciation of new technologies and that there are significant variations amongst students that lie within the Net generation age band.



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## Keywords

Computer-mediated communication; Cooperative/collaborative learning; Distributed learning environments; Pedagogical issues; Post-secondary education

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