The role of age in the digital divide

Age, and related roles, seem to be the first socio-demographic factor which relates to culture and that could explain the digital divide. Studying the Swiss digital divide, Friemel showed that only a quarter of the Swiss seniors are onliners, and that "for seniors older than 70 years, the relation between age and Internet use seems not to be linear but rather exponential" (Friemel 2014). However, more than the age effect, what seems to be relevant is the concept of generation as defined by Giddens (1991). According to him, "a generation is a distinct kinship cohort or order which sets the individual's life within a sequence of collective transitions", i.e. generations and related cultural practices are embedded in societal changes. Accordingly, generations now appear to be deeply organized around the technology uses. This led Marc Prensky to talk about digital natives and digital immigrants (Prensky 2001), terms which are now largely used among researchers but also in the media. The fact that young people are overrepresented in the total population as technology users has been widely acknowledged and researched (Bingham et al. 1999; Ólafsson et al. 2013). Not only do they have a higher access rate and a more regular use, but younger users also show a wider range of different uses. For instance they are found to be more active on some social media. Studying the digital divide on Twitter, Grant Blank (2016) showed that British and American Twitter users are generally younger, wealthier (and for the British, more educated) than the rest of the population, but also than the online population (Blank 2016). The reasons for massive adoption of technologies by young people are mainly cultural as they were born with it and their sociability relies partly, but in an essential way, on technologies and social media (boyd 2014). New generations were also found to adapt faster to new features and to adopt new technologies in general, as found in China during the transition between mobile phones and smartphones (Zhou et al. 2014). This generation gap was found for every country in the literature review and confirmed by the review conducted with project partners; even though in terms of access the gap is tightening, especially for the most widespread technologies such as Internet or mobile phones (and even smartphones). Few differences in this digital divide were found to depend on geographic areas. For instance, the Pew Research Centre (Pew Research Centre 2015) stated that "as with internet access, Millennials (ages 18 - 34) are more likely than older generations to own a smartphone in virtually every country surveyed (the lone exception being Ethiopia). And unlike Internet rates, the larger generational divides on smartphone ownership are found among European nations. For example, 85% of French 18 - 34 own a smartphone compared with 35% of French people who are 35 or older, a 50 percentage point difference. Similarly, gaps are found in Poland (+50) and Germany (+42)". The interest for studies about the uses of IT technologies by elderly citizens is more recent, which is partially due to a marketing interest. If elderly people are now increasingly using IT technologies, they still have a more restraint use of these tools. As van Deursen and van Dijk found: "the original digital divide of physical internet access has evolved into a divide that includes differences in skills to use the internet." (van Deursen & van Dijk 2011). These differences of uses amongst the "seniors" could be partly explained, according to Friemel (op. cit) by the pre-retirement computer use. This difference in use between different generations is harder to identify and document. Maria Scheiber takes the example of digital photography to show that elderly people use photography in an intensive way, at a level similar to younger people. The digital divide is,

therefore, far from simple and "the 'two worlds apart' assumption (young vs. elderly people) is too simplistic" (Paul & Stegbauer 2015). Other factors like gender roles or education still play an important role for adoption and use of technology.

Note: See source document for full reference.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: <u>Age-related roles</u>

Disaster Phases: <u>Prevention</u>, <u>Preparedness</u>, <u>Response</u>, <u>Recovery</u>, <u>All disaster phases</u>

Hazards: <u>Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations</u>, <u>Man-made intentional hazards</u>

Source

[Deliverable D3.1 "Cultural factors and technologies" (page 30)](#)