Fuelling Creativity, Access to Knowledge and the Public Domain: Looking at the Case of Digital Natives

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Background

– Digital Natives Project: [www.digitalnative.org](http://www.digitalnative.org)
– Multidisciplinary research initiative led by the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Univ. and the Research Center for Information Law, Univ. of St. Gallen
– Core questions: How do Digital Natives use digital technology, what are the promises and challenges associated with these uses, and what can we (as parents, peers, teachers, society, …) do about it
– Digital Natives = population of young people born after 1980, with access to (broadband) technologies, the skills necessary to use this technology in creative ways, and a shared culture how they interact with information, technology, and each other
Observation 1

Research on youth and digital technology illustrates both the promises and challenges when it comes to creativity in the networked public sphere.
Promises and Challenges

- Promises:
  - Enables Digital Natives to express themselves - and (through creativity) to be heard
  - Enhances cultural, civic, and economic participation

- Challenges:
  - Only small percentage of generation born after 1980 are Digital Natives; huge divide between digital haves and have nots
  - Regional divide: Digital divide as a persistent problem, esp. access to broadband Internet
  - Participation gap: Divide even within wealthy countries, where most kids can access technology itself, but where huge divides between children who have skills to use it effectively and those who do not exist

- Need to organize interplay between physical and logical layer policies on the one hand and education on the other
Observation 2

Case of Digital Natives shows how all stakeholders must act in concert to encourage creativity of Internet users and manage the challenges associated with it. Governments can play an important role, beyond sound IP policy (e.g. access to content, formal education).
Overcoming the Participation Gap

– Access is key
  • It’s not only about providing (limited) Internet time, but also access to platforms
  • E.g. social sites: often viewed as negative influences, but must be understood for their benefits (relationship building, creativity, engagement)

– Media and information literacy is crucial
  • Technical skills: how digital technologies can be used in creative ways for expression
  • Navigation skills:
    - Educating children about copyright and its limits, esp. fair use and public domain
    - But also: Building the ability to critically evaluate information access via a broad range of digital technologies

– Culture matters
  • Social motivators key when it comes to creativity online
  • Create culture of participation and appreciation of creative activities
Observation 3

“Creativity” in the networked public sphere is not only about new forms of user-created content (e.g. mash-ups), but also – and more importantly – about the skills gained through these interactions.
Creations, Creativity, and Skills

- Critics:
  - User-created content is greatly overrated
  - Lack of quality (often trivial content)

- Digital Natives Research:
  - Only small fraction creates artistic video clips, mash-ups, spoof ads, adds to Wikipedia, etc.
  - “Creativity” often simply means creating a new personal profile on, e.g., Facebook or posting a line on twitter.com
  - Distinguish between “creation” and “creativity” (creativity usually required for voice to be heard)

- However, point is:
  - Creativity online – from policy perspective – is not only about quality of creation, but skills gained through active participation
  - Skills vital to become an informed, active citizens in today’s world
Further Information

Visit [www.digitalnative.org](http://www.digitalnative.org)