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Do They Adapt or Collapse? Digital Immigrants to Digital Communication Technology during the Pandemic of Covid-19

Mohd Yusof Zulkefli*, Ahmad Farid Abdul Fuad,Mohd Nor Azren Kamarudin***, Nathasha Diyana Zulkifly****, Abdul Hamid Saifuddin*****

*Department of Liberal Communication,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450, Shah Alam, Selangor
E-mail: yusszulk1901@gmail.com

**STEM Foundation Centre, Universiti Malaysia Terengganu,
21030 Kuala Nerus, Terengganu
E-mail: farid@umt.edu.my

***Centre for Languages & Foundation Studies,
Universiti Sultan Azlan Shah, Bukit Chandan,
33000 Kuala Kangsar, Perak
E-mail: azrenkamarudin@usas.edu.my

****Business School, Victoria University,
70/104 Ballarat Rd, Footscray VIC 3011, Australia
E-mail: nathashadiyanazulkifly@gmail.com

*****Department of Liberal Communication,
Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450, Shah Alam, Selangor
E-mail: ahamid0328@uitm.edu.my

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ABSTRACT

Communication has permanently been embedded into our life. The pandemic's temporary erasure of daily communication and interaction has somehow posited people in danger of ostracization, missing out and, ultimately, loneliness. The COVID-19 pandemic was characterised by unprecedented development and the use of digital technologies. The global crisis brought on by the coronavirus pandemic has pushed us further into a digital world, and changes in behaviour are likely to have lasting effects when the economy starts to pick up. The recent experience with COVID-19 shows that the transition to these extraordinary circumstances is far from smooth. More specifically, digital immigrants to ICTs are even more disadvantaged than before. In many cases, the lifeline provided by technologies is only available to those able to access them. Compared to the digital natives, digital immigrants may suffer combined during this transitional digital phase of life and work. Henceforth, this concept paper will thoroughly explain the relationship between social distance and both excellent and negative markers of wellbeing while looking at the nature of digital social interac-

tion through a series of updated literature about technology use among digital immigrants during the pandemic. In addition, the literature review will explain that confidence and competence are vital for learning new things compared to individuals who have not been exposed to technology. Furthermore, the psychological aspect of adopting technologies, which affects the adoption of linked technologies, includes user experience indefinitely. Finally, this concept paper will fill a gap in the literature by exploring the effects of COVID-19 digitalisation on communication and digital immigrants' ongoing technology usage behaviours.

Keywords: *digital immigrants, digital communication, technology, COVID-19*

INTRODUCTION

Communication is one of the essential parts of the human being. It may be in the form of verbal, nonverbal, visual, or written. With rapid modernisation, digital technologies have become necessary tools in navigating daily communication. Currently, communication can be carried out or continued on any electronic device using all sorts of applications. Amid COVID-19, the role of digital communications technology has increased tremendously since many countries implemented safety measures like self-isolation and quarantine to detain and lessen the COVID–19 effects on other countries in the world (World Health Organization, 2021). The pandemic has taken its toll on many issues, especially physical movement. When the first lockdown was implemented, there were a substantial number of internet users worldwide (Kemp, 2020). Digital users from various backgrounds had to turn to digital communication technology in providing their services such as in healthcare, education, work, and others (Vargo et al., 2020).

Lockdown and movement control order somehow may harm people. It may trigger negative feelings such as anxiety, boredom, and loneliness (Panteli et al., 2022). Still, in the meantime, using digital technology during the COVID-19 pandemic has helped users control their boredom and loneliness and increase their sense of belongingness (Gabbiadini et al., 2020). Digital communication technology has played a significant role not only in keeping the world functioning but also in keeping communication in human life. While digital Immigrants mean a person who learns to use a computer at some stage during their adult life and is not exposed to digital technology at an early age (Cut, 2017). Digital immigrants tend to process information slowly compared to digital natives. Moreover, compared to digital natives, they enjoy multi-tasking, while digital immigrants prefer to work on one task simultaneously. There are a few categories of digital immigrants: avoiders who will avoid anything related to modern technologies and oppose using the internet. At the same time, minimalists are unwillingly forced to use technology, but they prefer to use hardcopy documents (Ch'ng, 2019).

Digital immigrants may learn how to use digital technology from their surroundings. There are also cases where they know from their child how to use modern devices. In

some cases, their children may guide their parents using innovative technology such as apps, tablets, and smartphones (Nelissen, 2018). It shows that digital immigrants are interested in learning how to use one new device, and it is easier to ask for help from their own family members. But interactivity online shows that digital immigrants' acceptance of using unique products and attitudes are not always positive compared to digital natives (Kirk et al., 2015). It may occur because they were not raised in a modern environment, like using the internet at an early stage of their life. Hence, it may be hard for the digital immigrant to believe in something without physically touching it.

Issue

Before the pandemic, online communication platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams were not widely known to many Malaysians. It is the only exception for a small group of people working remotely and needing to collaborate with their teams from different locales (Zainal & Saimin, 2021). On the other hand, communication technology also affected working mode as it has changed from physical to virtual. Hence many people, especially the digital immigrants' group, rely on online communication platforms to conduct all activities in operating business activities and teaching and learning processes. According to Schiffrin and Koc-Michalska (2021), communication through communication technologies is less effective than face-to-face communication. It unexpectedly led to misunderstandings and unexpected responses within a touch (Hamam, 2020). Although communication technologies are developing rapidly and have become the most influential media in everyone's life, especially during the Movement Control Order period, it has also caused inconvenience. Especially to the digital immigrants' group, as they need to unlearn and relearn many things so that they may maintain their productivity in their work or business.

There are many significant impacts of using communication technologies during MCO. It may be positive or negative. As digital immigrants, they are facing many challenges in dealing with outsiders by using communication technologies for working or business purposes. Online platforms quickly replace traditional face-to-face communication. It relies on communication technologies during this pandemic (Imarzooq et al., 2020). According to Nguyen (2020) and DeFilippis et al. (2020), the heavy use of communication technologies among digital immigrants is unprecedented. Therefore, it is difficult for them to adopt because it is too sudden and will cause communication challenges with outsiders using communication technologies during the MCO period. Due to that, this study aims to explore the experience of digital immigrants in using communication technology during the Movement Control Order (MCO). The narrative of their experience is essential to find out how they adapt and adapt themselves in the most challenging time.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Movement Control Order

On March 18, 2022, the Malaysian government implemented the Movement Control Order (MCO) to combat the COVID-19 pandemic. All Malaysians were instructed primarily to stay indoors, and the prohibition of mass gatherings was imposed to restrict the spread of cases in the country (Nordin, 2020). The enforcement of the order was tightened progressively, requiring the closure of all businesses, employees to work from home (WFH), students and educators to Online Teaching Learning (OTL). Social distancing sets new challenges to remain socially connected and opportunities to communicate, which changed people's use of digital communication methods.

In times of Covid-19, any communication is crucial, and technology acceptance is obligatory. One of the sectors that were deeply impacted during MCO was the tertiary education sector in Malaysia. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Malaysia's government enforced OTL on March 2020 and caught all educators and students by surprise. They were forced to learn from home, despite limited equipment depending on their economic background, while the educators struggled to adapt to the modern technology evolution in their work industry.

This is one of the significant impacts of people being overused or forced to use these communication technologies during MCO because an article from UNICEF also stated that more than 130 countries around the world have been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and digital communication technology has become an important tool for adults and children in learning, entertainment and social interaction, indirectly causing them to spend time in the digital space and thus the negative effect of over-reliance on digital communication platforms (Winther, 2020). Besides, governments are also encouraging people to make full use of digital technology in response to the Covid-19 pandemic (UNESCO, 2020), it's more aggravate people need to use the technology to meet the needs of communication because they need to rely on technology to acquire workplace and learning support, so the problem of excessive reliance on technology for communication will appear (Dwivedi & Khanvilkar, 2020).

Technology plays an indispensable role during the pandemic, as many business activities rely on technology platforms to communicate with employees or consumer without face-to-face meetings or interactions. Also, research shows that about 75% of companies around the world now prefer digital communication over face-to-face communication because of safety, speed and convenience (Davis & Toney, 2020). The ratio of consumers and employees interacting with the company during the pandemic was 60% online and 40% offline (Mulcahy, 2020). These two data points suggest that to keep economic activity going, the impact of over-reliance on technology for communication is inevitable and may even evolve into a new trend for

companies to communicate with employees or consumers through technology platforms. However, a big question is that, do the digital immigrant able to adapt and adjust with the new environment? And how about the productivity?

Digital Immigrants & Digital Natives

According to Cut (2017), digital natives are generally born after the 1980s, and they are comfortable in the digital age because they grew up using technology. Nevertheless, digital immigrants are born before the 1980s, and they are fearful about using technology. Digital immigrants are the older crew, and they were not raised in a digital environment. Therefore, the term digital immigrant primarily applies to individuals born before the spread of digital technology and who were not exposed to it early. Digital natives are the opposite of digital immigrants. They have been interacting with technology from childhood.

In order to deliver communication effectively, acceptance of technology evolution is determined by digital nativity and computer self-efficacy. Based on previous research, digital natives and digital immigrants tend to be mutually exclusive cohorts and generational boundaries (Barrot et al., 2022). The digital natives are the new generation of young people that grows up with technology while digital immigrants are those who may lack of competency in technology compared to digital natives (Zhao, 2022). The two characteristics that are commonly used to define the difference between digital native and digital immigrants are age and accessibility. Although year of birth varies, to categorise the two generational boundaries, research suggests the cut-off date is between the end of 1970s to the end of 1990s (Barrot et al., 2022).

Despite digital transformation literature revealing a variety of mechanism of how the pandemic of COVID-19 transform digitalisation of the world. The literature lacks insight about how digital immigrant must adapt to the new practice of digital technologies with little ubiquitous computing and the internet. This study aims to fill the void in the literature by investigating the impact of COVID-19 digitalisation on communication and digital immigrant's technology continuous use behaviour from the transformation.

The Importance of Digital Communication Technology

Today's communication technology constantly evolves how we interact with each other with more communication options than ever. This complex field of new digital methods has superseded all other forms of technology for different purposes from personal, business or even education. The new internet norms have had a revolutionary impact on communication in further usage from email to social networking, which allowed us to stay in contact regardless of time and location with anyone (Hasin & Nasir, 2021). The evolutions in technology and science also impacted how socie-

ty works, especially in communication. On top of that, the growing digitally integrated era also leads to technologies kept in everyone's hands. Mobile networks keep promises with the much faster data download, upload speeds, comprehensive coverage, and stable connections year by year for consumer essentials. From different perspectives, these benefits bring about significant improvements in communication, such as video calls (Jain, et al., 2018) in the change of traditional face-to-face contact. It also has drastically changed how businesses are conducted, whereby technology has increased the flow of communication within the workplace. It includes email, voicemail, videoconferences, instant messages or even the Intranet, especially with more people working remotely in current days.

On the marketing side, the offline world would employ a traditional communications mix that included public relations. However, online marketing communication is run in digital media channels, including social media (Kaur, 2017). Email marketing or social networks are not just beneficial in collecting a wealth of information about consumers. However, digital communication is applied to encourage a positive perception of a business profile or organisation to generate favourable written or response content. face-to-face contact. It also has drastically changed how businesses are conducted, whereby technology has increased the flow of communication within the workplace. It includes email, voicemail, videoconferences, instant messages or even the Intranet, especially with more people working remotely in current days. On the marketing side, the offline world would employ a traditional communications mix that included public relations. However, online marketing communication is run in digital media channels, including social media (Kaur, 2017). Email marketing or social networks are not just beneficial in collecting a wealth of information about consumers. However, digital communication is applied to encourage a positive perception of a business profile or organisation to generate favourable written or response content.

Massive devices with almost no limitation enable devices to exchange information autonomously without human intervention, including additional features such as multi-media (Alkhazaali et al., 2017). The use of animation or even video through different apps and messenger platforms, more than just audio or text, is interesting from an innovation point of view. Thus, messages have become more prosperous and more interactive. It is just a matter of channel choices of individual communication preferences. In many ways, digital communication is becoming a part of the current lifestyle with diverse channels available, especially when the world continues to move into the digital space. Cyberspace communication has become an inseparable part of our lives, even in how we receive information. However, the fast growth of digital communication also created a problem of information overload and information is easily communicated faster than an individual can process. It has gained so much popularity that most communication processes are performed in the digital domain (Ramola, 2014).

Therefore, inherently ruining interpersonal communication such as messages are not translated very well; leading to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. From a distinct perspective, it is still helpful as an instructional medium in the education sector by improving student quality of learning and research activity, enriching their learning experience, including sharing ideas, information, and building connections. Computer-mediated communication is convenient by giving students access to meaningful information with global connectivity (Al-Rahmi et al., 2020) to enrich the teaching-learning process (Hasin & Nasir, 2021). Nonetheless, with a widely open door of information, technology in communication allows flexibility in receiving information too and sometimes lesser cost involved, as mentioned by Hasin and Nasir (2021).

Digital Divide during the Pandemic

Generally, the Covid-19 pandemic has thrown sharp relief into two disturbing trends from decades ago. First, many older adults, known as digital immigrants, find themselves socially isolated as the population ages, often with life-threatening consequences. Second, digital immigrants have lagged behind the rest of the population in having the means and ability to access the internet. The convergence of these two issues, each bad enough pre-pandemic, has created a situation where many digital immigrants who comply with the shelter-in-place orders may find themselves completely shut off from the rest of the world. Of course, their productivity at work is doubted.

The global pandemic has accelerated the uptake by pushing societies to embrace digitalisation. They were making it not solely important in consumerism and entertainment but speeding up the global transition in many areas, including communication. Due to movement restrictions, more people are increasingly utilising technology to connect and manage their daily lives remotely (Aminudin et al., 2021). Government agencies and private institutions are also shifting to online services and transactions. However, Roese (2021) stated that many rural and low-income communities, including those in large urban areas, still lack reliable and affordable access, revealing just how far behind many are on digital uptake. Moreover, inequalities in digital readiness have hampered the ability of some people to take advantage of technologies even though many sectors have moved their operations online to limit physical interaction. Differences in digital access also left a community behind academically, involving internet data, devices and internet connectivity needed for remote learning (Azubuike et al., 2021). Thus, the digital divide leads to an equitable society as a gap of frequency and diversity which includes less communication with others for dealing with the situation or even getting social network support. This disparity of the digital divide may result in a more significant impact, such as uneven economic development and wealth. Primarily when most business activities are run remotely too.

Infrastructure, which includes access and connectivity, is the keyword in being skilful in ICTs other than the hardware alone. The confidence and ability to handle technology are essential to learning something new compared to those not exposed to it. User experience is part of the psychological factor in adopting ICT, which influences the adaptation of related technology (Varallyai et al., 2015). As part and parcel of modern culture, the digital world is changing people's lifestyles by providing entertainment and giving access to information in improving health, education at any time, and economic aspects. The digital divide is an emotional problem with the continuous development of information technologies. The emergence of innovative technologies and digital skills improves the capability to break out of the cycle of poverty and empower themselves. As stated by Chetty et al. (2017), technology experience leads to immediate adoption and improves efficiency.

CONCLUSION

In summary, communication technology brings us many benefits during this Movement Control Order (MCO), such as enabling us to communicate with each other for work or study purposes even though we are far apart. It is known as a global village, which McLuhan claimed to refer to as the new form of social organisation that would inevitably emerge as instantaneous electronic media that tie the entire world into one great social, political, and cultural system through the internet connection Azubuike, Adegboye & Quadri (2021). However, digital immigrant groups sometimes need to adapt to the situations. From the other perspective of digital immigrants, it can be understood that they have tried to utilise communication technology by communicating with their colleagues or client non-face-to-face communication as it helps prevent the worsening of Covid-19 cases during MCO.

Nevertheless, during the MCO, it was an excellent period for the digital immigrant group to explore new things which had never been imagined by them earlier. In order to prepare an effective e-learning environment, even for those digital immigrants or elderly groups, it is noted that their ability to learn is not as weak as the younger ones. On the contrary, they have a unique way of learning from the experiences accumulated during their younger age.

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