



# The evidence based approach in determining the service policy of libraries: The reality of digital hybrids

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## Abstract

Although they are non-profit making organisations, the main aim of libraries is to satisfy their customers, that is, the library users. This aim is achieved as long as the needs and expectations of the users are met. For this reason, the libraries must know their users very well and must provide a service which fulfils their needs and expectations. Therefore, rather than following fashionable or popular approaches which are discussed in the literature, libraries should carry out their own analyses and develop an evidence-based service policy for their users. In this study, it is stressed that the users of the library, who form one of the basic elements of the library, are not now necessarily divided into 2 distinct groups of “digital natives” and “digital immigrants”, as stated in the literature, but are, in fact, mostly “digital hybrids”. The study also examines how to user group of “digital hybrids” has an effect on the management procedures of the library and how this element affects the management of the other elements. The aims of this study are to demonstrate using an evidence-based approach, that university students in Turkey, like the university libraries which serve them, display hybrid patterns of behaviour in their approach to accessing information; and to emphasise that it is necessary, when providing service, to analyse the target group and to take an approach which is not opinion-based, but evidence-based.

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*Keywords:* Evidence-based approach, user needs and expectations, digital hybrids, digital natives, digital immigrants

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## 1. Introduction

While those assessing a library, in the real sense, assess the quality of the collection, the building in which it is housed, the program, the services provided and so on, in the age of the internet the terms used to assess libraries have changed. Now, not only the word “library” is used but also expressions such as information centre, electronic library, hybrid library and virtual library are used. These expressions not only show that the structure of the library collections has changed but also indicate the differences in the services.

When calculating the performance indicators of a library, when counting the in-going and out-going amounts or measuring the quality of the library services the basic value is “user satisfaction”. For this reason, this is one of the basic factors which has a direct effect on the formulation of the service policy of libraries.

As a result of the high expectations of the users, both in the management literature and in the field of librarianship, criteria for meeting these needs and even rules have been defined (Roswitha and Boekhorst, 1996; Roswitha and Boekhorst, 2007).

User satisfaction is the result of measuring to what extent the user is satisfied by the library services and sources provided. Among the criteria listed are personnel satisfaction, opening and closing hours of the library, being able to access the sources that they want and other similar criteria.

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It can be seen that the criteria which are obtained as a result of the evidence-based approach is a guide on the road to defining and developing a library service policy. In this process, the basic measure which the libraries need to take note of is user satisfaction. To provide user satisfaction is possible by getting to know the users well, in other words by analysing the users.

One of the difficulties faced by practical sciences like librarianship is that theory and practice do not match. The difference between theory and practice reflects the problems of a particular library. The evidence – based approach is used to solve the problems created by that difference.

The logic of the evidence-based approach, which is a relatively new concept in the literature is to find the most reliable evidence, to face up to the realities, and to apply these facts without taking notice of what others do or what is generally done (Lakos, 2007).

In fact the critical point of successful management is to bridge the gap between the literature and practical applications. However it is necessary to underline one point, namely, that it is necessary to combine the existing sources or evidence with the current situation of the library and to assess the practicality of the applications in the light of these factors. It would be a good idea to review the literature to get a few ideas but at the end of the day the first step to take is to ask the questions that help to analyse the present situation and reveal the problems.

In the study made by Prensky in 2001, individuals are classified and evaluated according to their technological abilities and skills into 2 groups as “digital natives” or “digital immigrants” and since this time the subject has continued to be discussed. According to Prensky, those born before 1980 should be classed as digital immigrants and those born after 1980 are classed as digital natives. However, in Turkey, it can be seen that those born after 1980, who are now university students do not behave exactly as digital natives. It can be observed that university students have a hybrid character like the university libraries which offer both printed materials and digital materials together at the same time (Kakırman Yıldız, 2012 a).

The result of this study show that, rather than the fashionable approaches in the literature, we need to consider the needs and expectations of the users; digital natives, digital immigrants or digital hybrids and to adopt an evidence-based approach to service policy development. In Prensky’s study, a line is drawn very definitely between digital natives and digital immigrants, whereas, in the process of changing from one state to another, during a process of change, so that people are not upset, it is necessary to effect change gradually.

Particularly in a practical science such as librarianship, no change can be implemented suddenly. There must always be a gentle transition phase. In fact, in our age we can see that the libraries are preserving printed material while at the same time digitalising materials. The library structures known as hybrid have emerged as a product of this transition phase.

Prensky’s distinction between digital natives and digital immigrants may seem right as is generally thought. However, according to Prensky, university students who are now 22 years old ought to be classed as digital natives. If a librarian who is developing a service policy only considers this information this will definitely result in important faults and problems in the service policy. For this reason, in formulating library service policy, it is recommended to adopt on evidence-based approach.

### *1.1. Aim of the Research Study*

The study aims to show that, as non-profit making organisations, libraries need to take account of the needs and expectations of users and that in defining their policy of providing service to users it is necessary to take an evidence-based approach. For this reason, the work done by Mark Prensky in 2001 has been chosen as an example to be examined here.

### *1.2. Identifying the Problems*

The age categories indicated by the terms digital native and digital immigrant need to be reconsidered and, like the libraries which supply the users with printed material as well as digital material at the same time, the library users are thought to be hybrids. The questions that need to be asked are as follows:

- 1- Which category does those who use both printed material and digital material belong to, digital natives or digital immigrants?
- 2- Is it possible for the service policy of libraries to be successful without using an evidence-based approach?
- 3- Is it right to take decisions about provision of library services without taking an evidence-based approach?

### *1.3. Hypothesis of the Research Study*

Starting out from the hypothesis “service policies which are developed from fashionable concepts from the literature without employing an evidence-based approach cannot ensure user-satisfaction in libraries”. It will be demonstrated that Prensky’s categorisation of those born after 1980 as digital natives is not a correct categorisation and the age-groupings of digital natives and digital immigrants will be redefined and it will be shown that, in parallel to the hybrid structures of libraries the user groups also have a hybrid structure and the use of the term “digital hybrids” will be proposed.

## **2. Related Works**

In this section, in order for the subject to be better understood, a little information was given about the terms evidence-based approach, digital natives, digital immigrants and digital hybrids, which are mentioned in the study.

### *2.1. What is the evidence-based approach?*

For an institution, this means that evidence, data and results are collected in systematic and controlled manner and this data is used in the process of formulating the service policy of that institution. The institution examines these findings using its own equipment and expertise, analyses and synthesis the results and evaluates the situation, the procedures and service results.

The evidence-based approach is quite a new concept in the literature of management. In fact, the idea is quite simple: to find the best evidence that can be found, to work on that evidence and then to meet the needs identified by the evidence without paying attention to what has been said or written before or to what is recommended by fashionable management gurus (Lakos, 2007).

Libraries generally know the importance of collecting and using data, both in the planning process and in the decision-making process but they tend not to make use of it in a systematic and effective way. This is because they are general trends of the market and, instead of working on evidence and drawing up a new roadmap, they try to apply one of the previously existing roadmaps to their own situation. However, as each institutional library has its own unique conditions and group of users, no fixed set of recommendations will exactly meet special conditions and needs of that library (Kakırman Yıldız, 2012 b).

For example, the user group of university libraries consist of university students, academics, administrative personnel and independent researchers from outside the institution. This is so in all over the world. However, no library exactly resembles another from the aspects of management structure, budget and user-profile. Consequently, even if the problems generally tend to be the same, a solution which fits one particular library may not necessarily fit another. This is because each library has its own special conditions and user group.

Evidence-based applications, which first began in the field of medicine, towards the end of the 1990s were increasingly applied to the fields of social science, human resources, business management and other similar disciplines. Practical sciences such as librarianship, the fundamental problem of which is the difference between theory and practice, attempt to bridge the gap by means of evidence-based applications (Booth, 2003).

It can be observed that many definitions of evidence-based applications have been made in the literature. The most generally known of these definitions in this definition by Booth (Booth and Brice, 2004a): data is collected from certain particular sources, a reliable and consistent model is developed using the available sources and decisions are made and applications applied using this model. Booth also states that in order to develop evidence-based applications it is necessary to collect the data using very detailed pre-prepared forms and surveys.

For the service policies of libraries to be evidence-based, each library has to know the user group it serves very well. This will make it easier to formulate a service policy to meet the needs and expectations of the users and because they take action based on their own reality, and not on fashionable concepts and trends, they will save time, money and labour.

In addition, a management focused on practical applications will bring out the knowledge and skills of the librarians facilitate the decision-making process and ensure the development of a good quality of service. In reality, librarians must learn to provide a service which is based on evidence, analysis and facts, instead of one based on culture and intuition.

## 2.2. Digital Hybrids and Their The Characteristics

Digital hybrids both resemble digital natives and also do not resemble the. These hybrids, while trying to make use of all the technological resources, nevertheless do not use them in the same effective and active manner as do the digital natives. It is known that there is almost no person left without a computer. Consequently, those who were born after the year 2000 were born surrounded by technology.

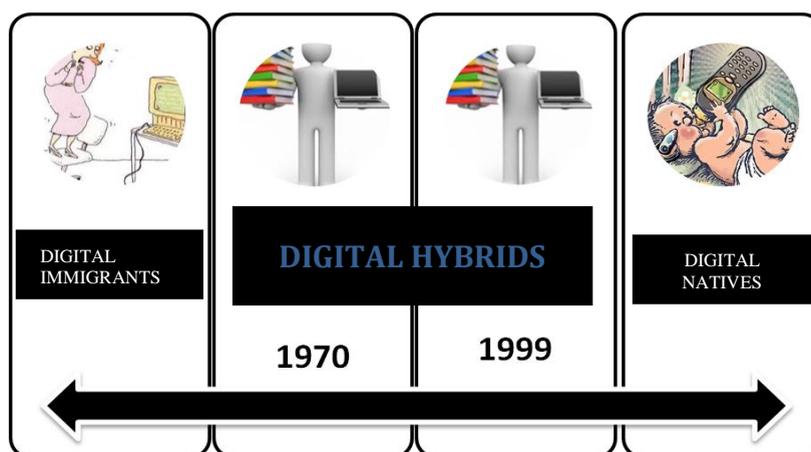


Figure 1. Digital immigrant to digital natives

In the literature, digital immigrants to learn, first look at print resources, and then search the Internet (Prensky, 2001a and 2001 b). The opposite is stated about the digital natives. Digital hybrids combine the behaviour of these two groups. In other words, the printed sources of digital technology are also extremely important for hybrids. Both are essential. However, Google is usually the first place they look.

The big gap between digital natives and digital immigrants, as mentioned in the work of Prensky, is very large. However, in order for such a large gap to exist, there is no need for the age difference to be very great or for the living environment to have changed radically. Also, it is not possible to draw a very definite dividing line. Thus the digital hybrids, who show that there is an intermediate phase linking these two extremes, are the group who are preparing themselves, or trying to prepare themselves, for the new age. Unlike the digital hybrids, the digital immigrants have not been able to get used to this change or, in other words, have remained on the other side of the chasm. The digital natives, on the other hand, have not had to get used to anything because they were born and grew up right in the middle of a ready-made technological environment. For this reason, the digital natives had no other alternative.

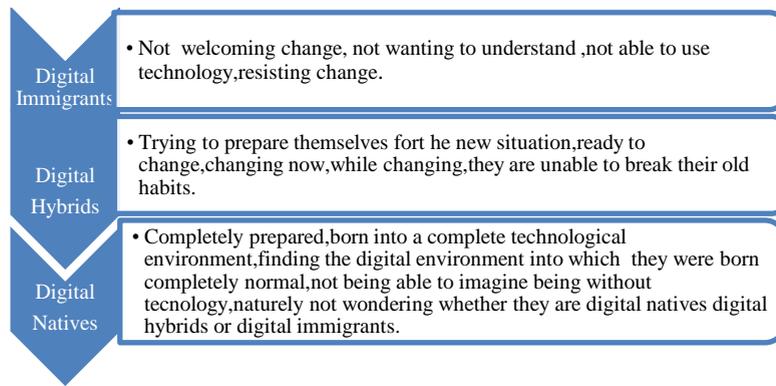


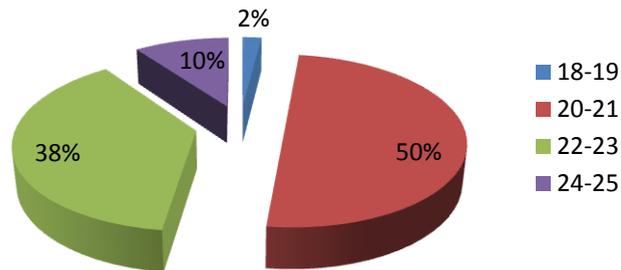
Figure 2. The characteristics of digital immigrants, digital hybrids and digital natives

### 3. The Interpretation of the Findings

In this part of the study, it will be determined, according to the results of the survey, if the students who participated in the study are digital natives, digital immigrant or digital hybrids and results or the survey will be interpreted.

#### 3.1. Are They Digital Natives / Digital Hybrids / Digital Immigrants? : Results Of The Survey And Interpretation

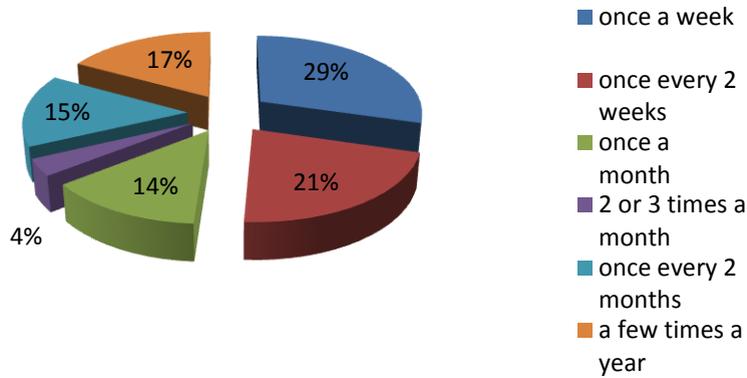
##### 3.1.1. Age Difference



Graphic 1.

Half of the students who participated in the survey were aged 20-21. Therefore, it can be said that on average they were born in 1991. Those aged 18 -19 (that is, those born in 1994) made up 4% and aged 24-25 made up 10% (those born 1987). Therefore the students participating in the survey were born between 1987 and 1994.

##### 3.1.2. How many times in the last year did you physically use the library? (physically go to the library)

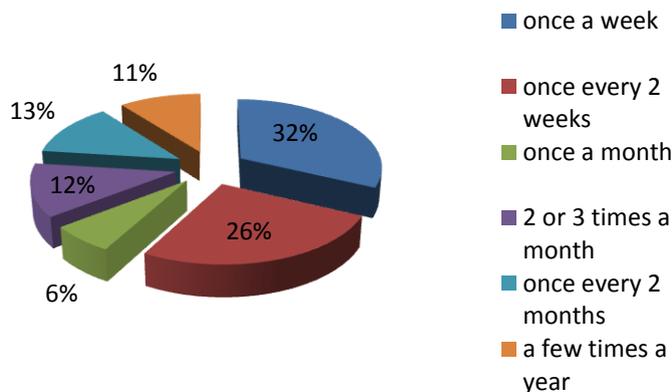


Graphic 2.

It was seen that those physically using the library were not at all few. In fact, 30 % of the students used the library once a week and 22 % used it once every 2 weeks. Therefore, it would be true to say that the students, on average, used the library once every 10 days. The number using the library a few times a year was quite high at 34. However, it would be wrong to assume that this means that they were using the digital environment. In fact, as we can see below, the number using the digital environment a few times a year was 21.

As the previous graph shows, those participating in the survey were born between 1991 and 1994. According to Prensky, a person born during this period should be a digital native. However, if we look at the results, we can see that they continued to physically use the library in some way.

### 3.1.3. How many times did you visit the library over the web to access information in the past year?

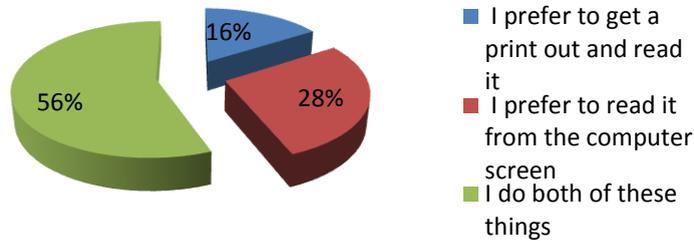


Graphic 3.

It is expected that digital natives will not use the library building. In other words, it is claimed that digital natives do not use the library building. In other words, it is claimed that digital natives do not use the library physically. However, according to the results above, we can see that there appears not to be much difference between the numbers using it digitally. In fact, while 32 % of the same group use the library physically. Also, while 26 % of the students use the digital library once every 2 weeks, 22% use it physically once every 2 weeks. Of course, when we look at the average results, use of the digital library is higher overall than use of the library physically.

In an environment which is changing in parallel with technological developments, it is natural for relatively easy digital use to be higher than relatively trouble some physical use. Nevertheless, these results are important from the point of view of demonstrating that the students display the behaviour patterns of digital hybrids.

### 3.1.4. When I access sources in the digital environment;



Graphic 4.

In the literature, it mentions that digital natives carry out searches in the electronic environment and can do several different things at the same time; the students who took part in the survey (answered the questionnaire) are in a situation which is similar to the situation of the libraries during the period when they were adapting to the process of digitalisation, and they display hybrid behaviour. The answers obtained in the survey suggest that the new generation are neither completely digital natives nor completely digital immigrants. a group of the students which we can describe as digital hybrids are both competent in technological knowledge and skills and also sometimes prefer traditional methods.

That 56% of the students who answered the questionnaire both access recorded information in the electronic environment and also like to receive it in printed form is a sign of this. At the same time, it is interesting to observe that 16% of the students prefer only to read printouts, while 28% exclusively prefer to read material in the digital environment.

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion

Particularly in university libraries, it should be stressed that to meet the information needs of students, academic staff and researchers more evidence-based studies are needed. For this reason, it is very important that there should be a culture of self-evaluation in libraries and that such a culture should be encouraged, both for the institutionalisation of the library personnel. If there is no culture of self-evaluation in a library, then the user-group will not be systematically analysed and if the users are not properly defined, their needs and expectations will not be met, which will create dissatisfaction among them.

Therefore, libraries should serve their user-groups according to their needs. If a university library which looks upon its users as digital natives in line with Prensky's theory has users who display hybrid behaviours, it will create a wrong service policy. For example, if a library categorises its users as digital natives in accordance with Prensky's ideas and creates a service policy in accordance with these ideas and doesn't correctly analyse the needs of the users the result will be a wrong service policy. On the other hand, if a study is conducted among the users and their profile is correctly known, it will be seen that the users are not completely "digital" or completely "native" but are, in fact "digital hybrids".

## 5. Conclusion

As well as in their collections, a hybrid structure is seen in the user groups of libraries. As can be seen from this study, the group of users born after 1990, the digital hybrid group, display patterns of behaviour which conform with the present structure of libraries. Actually this approach shows a parallel situation to the services provided by the libraries at present. In conclusion, the existing situation is that the libraries do not and can not offer a service which consist purely of printed material or purely of digital material. In consequence, we can say that the present state of the libraries reflects the characteristics of the user group at the present time.

In contrast to what is claimed by Prensky, it seems therefore that it would be more accurate to classify those born after the year 2000 as digital natives, rather than those born after 1980. In fact, it appears as if the children of the millennium could more accurately be described as such. Those born between 1970 and the year 1999 seem to be a group who, in spite of using electronic materials are not willing to give up using traditional printed materials. To be more exact, they are ones who are constitutionally used to doing so. For this reason, this period represents a period of transition and this user group lives their life as “digital hybrids”.

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