Understanding How Students Interact With Technology For Knowledge-Sharing:
The Emergence of a New ‘Social’ Divide in France

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ABSTRACT
The context of this enquiry is the rapid evolution of Internet technology. The aim is to explore the extent to which young adults exchange information and share knowledge within the sphere of French higher education, public and private. The enquiry uses a two-phase approach: survey methodology followed by depth interviews to examine technology usage and preferences in the learning process - from a student perspective. An analysis of the data provides an insight into the culture of Internet usage in France; a widening chasm between students and tutors in the use of technology within communities of learners. The study focuses on the French higher education system; more research would be needed to compare cross-culturally. It is nevertheless instructive for tutors and academic managers within higher education to be aware of the findings to rethink the role of technology in learning and knowledge-sharing. This enquiry contributes to the body of literature on the evolution of Internet user behaviour and our understanding of contemporary trends.

KEYWORDS
Knowledge-Sharing, Pedagogy, Social Media, Technology, Young Adults Online

BACKGROUND
In France, the strategic vision and commitment of managers in higher education (particularly in the private sector) seems to be a vital condition for introducing new technology into teaching and learning. New technology will not be adopted unless the motivation and rational for using it is clearly communicated to tutors and support staff throughout the organisation. Tutors, especially, need to understand how (and why) new teaching methods can be integrated alongside the more traditional, face-to-face methods. By contrast, many of today’s students have a high level of digital skills; they are comfortable using the latest hi-tech devices to retrieve information and to share knowledge. As this enquiry will demonstrate, a new technological divide seems to be emerging between tutors and students. This trend is only partially explained by literature. The gap highlights the challenges of integrating new technology for learning and sharing knowledge.

INTRODUCTION
Rapid developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) over the last decade have resulted in a continually increasing use of technological devices for teaching and learning (Hyman, 2012). Tutors are coping with ‘disruptive change’ on a level that they have never experienced, in

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an attempt to master new approaches for transmitting knowledge such as the ‘flipped classroom’ where students prepare course materials prior to the class in order to use class time for interacting and applying the new knowledge (Green, 2015). Today’s students live in a totally connected world in which personal messages are spontaneously broadcast to vast numbers of viewers through Chat Apps, Instant Messaging, Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other social media. The proliferation of these technological devices in the classroom raises the ethical issue of how much the trend is being driven by the technology industry’s needs, rather than the students’ needs (Leonard, 2013). Furthermore, while students are comfortable divulging personal information online among peers, they are aware of the commercial value of their data and increasingly reticent about using geo-localisation apps (Lévy, Lancrey-Javal and Rey, 2014). This discernment seems to suggest that young Internet users are adept at compartmentalising digital tools.

Many tutors regard social media as an informal channel of communication whose role in higher education has yet to be defined (Draskovic, Caic and Kustrak, 2013). The dynamic evolution of ICT calls into question the extent to which technology could and should be integrated into the pedagogical approach today. Whether tutors have a preference for traditional or innovative pedagogy, they still need to be aware of the changing technology trends and user preferences, since the way in which individuals interact with technology is a constantly evolving process and tutors have a responsibility to understand how students engage (or not) with technology for learning and sharing knowledge.

This enquiry is set in the context of higher education in France, adding to the growing literature on Internet user behaviour in different cultures and linguistic communities - see Daly (2006), Amougou and Larson (2008), Denis-Rémis, Codou and Lebraty (2010). Given that today’s students are entering tomorrow’s workforce, the intention is to offer a broad overview of current Internet user behaviour among students for learning and knowledge-sharing, rather than to produce research in a narrow field or ‘silo’ of knowledge. The enquiry draws on literature from different fields including knowledge-sharing, consumer behaviour, cross-cultural understanding and technology adoption. The enquiry uses survey methodology and interviews to examine the issue of technology usage and preference. The focus is on the students’ perceptions, choice and usage of ICT for learning and knowledge-sharing. The authors draw attention to the pace of technological change and implications for policy makers regarding the use of electronic devices by students in higher education. The findings provide an thought-provoking insight into the culture of young Internet users, for example, in their choice of ICT for communicating with peers, comparing pre- and post- Erasmus experience. But, more importantly, the findings point to a widening chasm in the perception and use of ICT in higher education between students and tutors. This chasm cannot be explained by a ‘mere’ generational divide.

THE EVOLVING USE OF TECHNOLOGY

In a relatively short space of time, technological innovations have caused society to become more centred on knowledge, as a replacement for the production of goods (Smart, 1992). Much of the business world relies on finding, packaging and delivering information (Wresch, 1996). The focus is on optimizing knowledge-sharing processes, as a means of developing sustainable competitive advantage (Grillitsch, Müller-Stingl and Neumann, 2007; Arora, Owens and Khazanchi, 2010; Bilińska-Reformat and Sztangret, 2013). The existence of modern ICT prompted many researchers and practitioners to consider how best to integrate these technologies into educational contexts (Kroeker, 2000). The overarching themes in literature support the integration of ICT into teaching and learning mainly to prepare students for the world of work and on-the-job training (Rae, 2014) but also because ICT is thought to be cost-effective and efficient for sharing and managing knowledge (Löfström and Nevgi, 2008; Barsky and Catanach, 2011; Tempelaar et al., 2012). For the purpose of this enquiry, knowledge-sharing takes place through both information technology (the systems, networks and computers) and instructional technology (pedagogy, building communities of learners and collaborative learning between students). Thus the enquiry explores the views of students concerning information and
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