



Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and young Thai digital natives: Exploring emotional effects through in-depth interviews and pictorial ethnography

Chulanee Thianthai^{a,b,*}, Patrapan Tamdee^{c,†}

^a *Sociology and Anthropology Department, Faculty of Political Science, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok 10330, Thailand*

^b *Center of Excellence for Science, Technology and Society, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok 10330, Thailand*

^c *Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kasetsart University, Bangkok 10900, Thailand*

Article Info

Article history:

Received 7 April 2023

Revised 17 August 2023

Accepted 4 September 2023

Available online 22 April 2024

Keywords:

emotion,
information and communications,
pictorial ethnography,
technology-human interaction,
Thai digital natives

Abstract

Technology seeps into every aspect of our lives and inevitably affects our emotional well-being. Among the most exposed to information and communications technology (ICT) are ‘young digital natives.’ This research aims to discover how Thai digital natives, ages 13–18, feel that online interaction impacted their emotional well-being. The researchers were able to recruit 204 young digital natives from Bangkok and Chiang Mai province for a survey questionnaire and out of this group, 96 students were selected for in-depth interview and 48 students joined in the pictorial ethnography activity. From the pictorial ethnography, the researchers showcase selected pictures drawn by junior high school students to visually deepen our understanding of how they experience emotions associated with the technological impacts on their lives. By analysis of in-depth interviews and eliciting stories through the use of these drawings, we assessed the impacts of technology on emotion, while aggregating these experiences into common themes. These include (1) a tension between a feeling of relaxation and anxiety from a feeling of time lost; (2) a fear of thinking or being perceived as different; (3) heightened feelings of satisfaction and frustration; (4) a yearning for friendship while enjoying being alone; (5) connectivity and emotional crowd mentality; and (6) a fear of initiating in-person interactions with the courage to initiate interactions online. These themes highlight how Thai digital natives who heavily use ICT technologies have changed their behaviors and their senses of ‘collectivity’ and ‘individuality’. The researchers argue that being aware of the sources of emotional changes as derived from the human-technological interface can help them better manage their physical, social, and emotional health and well-being, balancing a quality life both on-and-off screen.

© 2024 Kasetsart University.

* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: Chulanee00@hotmail.com (C. Thianthai).

† Co-first authors.

E-mail address: fsocpl@ku.ac.th (P. Tamdee).

Introduction

Innovations in internet technologies keep growing and developing with no end in sight. In the past, computers used to be bulky, but now the technology has advanced so much that they can fit in the palm of your hand in the form of smartphones. Furthermore, technology has evolved into smart technology that can be found everywhere including smart home appliances and smartwatches. The internet is now used to improve convenience in all areas of our lives. Technology and internet usage are not just about communication or accessing data, news, and entertainment, but have now expanded to new functions, such as in healthcare. This is evident by how the recent COVID-19 pandemic forced people to adapt to learning as well as communicating online, resulting in a vast number of everyday activities migrating to online formats. Consequently, Thailand has seen an overwhelming increase in smartphone usage every year. Statistics gathered by We Are Social (Khan, 2022) showed that 99 percent of the Thai population have mobile phones, among which 98.9 percent are smartphones. In addition, Thais also use other electronic devices, such as laptops and computers (48.5%) and smart watches (21.9%). Moreover, another report from DataReportal found that Thais spend on average nearly 9 hours per day on the internet, which shows that today's Thai society has truly entered the digital era (Kemp, 2022). Moreover, a report survey from Bangkok Post has indicated that Thailand is among the top ten for most social media users (Leesa-nguansuk, 2018).

Technology usage has become a part of our daily lives, and we are now spending more and more time using technology than in the past. This affects people of all ages, but especially the youth, who are at the age of interacting with technology all the time. This is especially true among the Thai digital natives who were born after 1980 and have grown up with technology. These digital natives own home computers, tablets, and smartphones with greater frequency. However, many young people, despite their digital native status, may not have had time to understand and be fully aware of the effects of their digital media usage on their mental health, particularly their feelings and emotional well-being. This is due to how they live in a fast-paced world of online media that has rendered the youth accustomed to having everything being readily available to the point that they find it difficult to realize or imagine what life would be like without technology. This can be seen through greater limitations on their patience (Thianthai et al., 2020). What young people face is popularly referred to as FOMO, or the Fear of Missing Out. They are afraid that they will not be up to date on what is

happening around them, or that they are not a part of current events and cannot show that they have information before anyone else. At the same time, privacy is receding as we leave digital footprints online. We cannot be sure whether we truly have privacy as other people can access and copy our footprints and share them with other parties. Furthermore, online anonymity can cause some youths to have less restraint, leading to what may be referred to as “keyboard thugs”—individuals who are emboldened through anonymity to write hate speech and cyberbully others (Thianthai, 2022). Youths who are not knowledgeable can easily fall prey in the online world, as we can see from the news, whether it be financial scams or online gambling (Boonlab & Mungkhamanee, 2019).

When using social media, young people exchange news and information across the digital and physical worlds all the time, which can lead to confusion, as people are pulled between these worlds and become trapped or attached to one particular sphere. This is due to the content and intimacy with people behind the monitor or parasocial interaction, whereby the youths feel attached to the characters or people online whom they do not know in the real world (Gleason et al., 2017). Furthermore, while social media allows us to create a new identity, online space, and physical space still always affect each other. Even though the internet can create greater convenience in our lives, using online media unsafely may sometimes affect mental health. A study has shown that youths who are online for more than 58 hours per week are more likely to experience social loneliness (Primack et al., 2017). Moreover, when we talk about online identity, we cannot overlook social comparison as humans tend to compare themselves to others. This is especially true online, where everyone tries to make their identity beautiful and show the good side of their lives to others. Social comparisons within a reasonable level encourage us to better ourselves, but excessive comparison may affect one's self-esteem and self-confidence, which directly affects our emotions. When youths are overconfident, this could lead to narcissism; however, low confidence that leads to pressure on oneself could lead to depression. Moreover, online interaction leads to a loss of intimacy and trust when person to person.

One's emotions are changed according to the social environment one lives in and their engagement with new inventions. When technology becomes a part of our lives it inevitably affects our emotional well-being. Emotions occur unconsciously and manifest through experience, thoughts, and beliefs (Wake Forest University, 2019). Each part of the world may interpret the emotional impacts of media differently. Nevertheless, the social values of people online will differ depending on their backgrounds,

namely, in the context of culture. Culture shapes and constrains our attitudes, concepts, perspectives, and thoughts when we use technology in our everyday lives. It also creates different forms of online space in each society, whether it be using technology for communication, such as social media, whereby each society uses social media in different ways. An example is the LINE application, a social media platform used for communicating via a chat room between two or more people. In Thailand, people widely use the application for both work and personal communications. This may lead to Thais having to change the form of communication they use and having to deal with the stress that can come from using technology that does not separate work from personal life. Or the emotions they have when they are tired from having to balance between work hours and personal time. In Japan, where LINE was developed, they may not be using LINE for work as much as Thais do while in other countries, applications with similar features, such as WeChat in China or WhatsApp in Europe, may be the cause of fewer problems from stress as they do not use the work applications as much either. This is because, culturally, the applications are not used for work purposes but mainly for personal communications, and so for work they may use applications, like Slack, specially developed for such purposes. In short, the format and type of activities that people engage in online are influenced by the values of a particular society. What is more, it cannot be denied that culture has a key role in determining the plausibility and patterns of technology usage and online expressions that differ from one society to another. This brings us back to how online interaction impacts the emotional well-being of the youth, which is why it is important to study how emotions are affected by the online world to find physical and social balance in everyday life.

Technology, Changes in Emotions, and What It means to Be Human in the Digital Era

Daniel Miller, a well-known Digital Anthropology theorist stated that “Rather than separating off the impact of digital technologies, a major contribution of anthropology has been through insight from holistic ethnography, which demonstrates that we can only understand new digital worlds in the context of wider social relations and practices. Rather than trying to adjudicate digital technologies as positive or negative, anthropology may also focus upon their inherent contradictions” (Miller, 2018). In studying humans in the digital era, he also indicated that once digital technology has entered a particular society, culture, or context, what it means to be human in that context can also change. Technology can

bring about both positive and negative impacts on human beings. However, the use of any given technology will have specific characteristics of the society in which it is being used, which will be unique to that context and different from others.

Furthermore, developments in digital technology can lead to new forms of surveillance and control. These developments could create fear and/or hope for people in any given context for any given group of people dependent on their relationship to that technology. Therefore, the study of human life in today’s society must necessarily take technological factors into account (Miller, 2018). Humans across time and space have been shaped by differing societal and cultural circumstances, which result in characteristics and behaviors that are specific to each context and reflect how people live their lives, how they think, as well as their beliefs, values, and practices. Consequently, one of the major factors that have affected the characteristics and behaviors of today’s generation is technology’s rapid and continual advancement, impacting how one lives one’s life and one’s interaction with others (Diener, 1996).

Anthony Giddens, one of Britain’s leading social theorists and public intellectuals, theorized modernity in the late modern era as a “runaway” world because we cannot return to old ways of living. Living in modern societies today means we have to make and re-make ourselves to cope with the changes buffeting us from all around (Jones, 2003). This process has continued into this era, with further and deeper exposure to faster technologies, creating even further complications with Giddens’s so-called “dilemma of self”, the various distinctive tensions and difficulties on the level of the self. As Giddens notes, there are four forms of dilemmas of self: (1) Unification versus fragmentation: modernity has a character that both fragments and unites. People have different ways of self-determination that are not necessarily determined by the same norms; (2) Powerlessness versus appropriation: the lifestyle options made available by modernity offer many opportunities for appropriation, but also generate an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness from the vast scale of technological connectivity; (3) Authority versus uncertainty: there are no determinant authorities in the modern world, but there are some organizations that may have the power to predict uncertainty (known as abstract or expert systems), and in which people confide in their knowledge to manage risk or uncertainty; (4) Personalized versus commodified experience: our personal choices in terms of appropriation are still influenced by standardized influences on consumption (Giddens, 1991). The researchers are using Giddens’s theories into the contradictions of modernity as a starting point to think about how individuals manage incongruities from the technological impacts on emotion in their personal and professional lives.

The dilemma of self in the late modern era can be linked to the impact of communication technology on how it can produce dilemmas of emotion and feeling. When looking at social companionship in today's world, we see that the new digital generation increasingly uses the internet to form various social relationships (Haythornthwaite & Wellman, 2002), as well as to maintain social relationships and create new forms of personal relationships (McKenna et al., 2002). The motivation to form friendships online may stem from youths' need for social support with the internet as the medium. Social connections or social relationships are a crucial factor in the developmental process of people of all ages, especially from adolescence to adulthood (Neel & Fuligni, 2013). Furthermore, they are also an important factor that affects adolescents' psychosocial well-being, namely, levels of anxiety, loneliness, and depression (Caplan, 2003).

Moreover, emotions are socially conditioned and emerge in practice in ways that can affect social relations, define identities, and exert control over human behaviors. Emotions are also associated with the mind, personal experiences, socialization, and culture, which do not have fixed rules, sometimes cannot be controlled, and are subjective, but reflect a condition of our humanity and make us distinctive from other living beings. Emotions are a construction of society and culture the output of the times. They are a part of the process of exercising power and creating one's identity. Societal and cultural norms and history have a major role in defining and giving value to emotions. Therefore, emotion is a "social practice", which forms a part of a social process that creates "myths" and has become an important mechanism in determining relationships and conditioning the behavior of people in society (Pattarakulvanit, 2007; Scheer, 2012).

An example of the emotional output that is a result of using technology can be seen in Tapscott's (2009) research, whereby "the need for speed" is the focal point of his work on the Net Generation. He states that the need for speed sometimes creates discontent when people see or are engaged in a process that takes a long time. He describes "the need for speed" as a distinct characteristic of digital natives. This is because digital natives live or have grown up in an environment that is surrounded by technology that can shorten the time of an activity or that can allow for the completion of certain tasks instantaneously. Digital natives, therefore, expect quick responses, as well as the feeling of being pressured as they know that other people, especially their digital native peers, also expect instant responses or actions. In summary, it can be seen that the change in technology does not only affect people's lifestyles but also the feelings and emotions of people in

today's society, especially among teenagers or digital natives who live with technology in all dimensions of life. However, these effects may take different forms across age groups or genders among populations as well.

Methodology

The data for this paper were collected as part of a research project titled "Understanding Thai Digital Natives' Characteristics, Behaviors, and Their Views of the Future", which was aimed at studying how Thai digital natives' daily technological interaction has shaped their generation's identity, attitudes, emotions, and behaviors. Data collection for this qualitative research started in June 2019, and data analysis ended in February 2020. The specific data used in this analysis of the digital technological impact on emotions were obtained from samples in Bangkok and Chiang Mai Province. These two cities were selected because Bangkok, the capital city of Thailand, is known for its density of technological availability and the ubiquity of engagement with technology, whereas Mueang Chiang Mai district also holds many high schools with well-received academic standing, representing young Thai digital natives' lifestyles in ways that might reveal some interesting similarities and differences from Bangkok's setting.

Participants

For survey research, the researchers were able to recruit 204 students, who at the time ranged from 13–18 years of age. The 104 informants from Bangkok were drawn from nine different public high schools and a university in inner Bangkok. The 100 informants that were recruited in Mueang Chiang Mai district were drawn from three public high schools and two private high schools, as well as a university. Participants' age ranges were divided into 2 groups: (1) The 13–15 years old junior high school students; and (2) The 16–18 aged years old senior high school and first-year university students. Both age groups belong to the Thai digital native generation. The criteria for school/university selection were based on academic reputation, technological density, location, diversity of the student body in terms of socio-economic status, and the fact that students at the institutions use Information and Communications Technology (ICT) on a daily basis. Since this research involved students aged under 18 years old, the researchers contacted the teachers, informing them of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and worked with teachers as intermediaries to identify appropriate informants. The details of this process were as follows: first, the teachers from

these institutions would help recruit a first set of students who are active with ICT, having demonstrated qualities such as utilizing social media applications on their smartphones, being helpful and knowledgeable regarding ICT equipment at school, and interacting with peers in chatrooms/forums through computers/iPad at recess or home. Later, snowball sampling was used to attract more individuals from the target group in which the informants, the young digital native themselves, referred to a friend who fit with the criteria—that is those who are within their age range, engaged themselves with ICT daily, are observant and articulate, and most importantly, are willing to share how they feel their generation has been impacted by these information and communication technologies. Through a survey screening questionnaire, data showed that the top ten social media platforms that they used at least 3 times per week were LINE, Facebook, Instagram, Messenger, YouTube, Twitter, Skype, Snapchat, WhatsApp, and WeChat. Out of all Informants, 12.9 percent reported being online 4–7 hours per day, 45.3 percent reported using social media 8–11 hours, 21.6 percent uses social media more than 12 hours, and only 20.3 percent reported using social media platforms less than 4 hours per day.

Data Collection

A total of 96 informants were selected in equal quantities across region, age, and gender groups. Those selected were also only those willing to participate in the in-depth interview technique sharing their feelings and emotions with respect to online experiences (Table 1). The researchers utilized in-depth interviewing techniques to capture how different dimensions of informants' emotions were impacted by technology. Examples of open-ended questions include: what types of ICT and social media do you use daily? What are some examples of positive and negative impacts on you or people you know? Do you think your use of technology affects your emotions? How so? Each of these interviews lasted for 30 minutes.

For informants within the 13–15 years old age group, the researchers began data collection with pictorial ethnography

as a medium for eliciting stories around their feelings associated with the impact of technology on their lives, particularly those of ICT. The researchers asked them to draw a picture identifying the characteristics of their (Digital Native) generation on a piece of paper. The process of drawing lasted for 30 minutes. They were then asked to tell the story of the image they drew. The researchers then followed up with open-ended questions on how they view those characteristics and/or behaviors associated with technology usage. Each interview lasted for 30 minutes. The drawing technique served as an effective tool in encouraging young adolescents to tell their stories, while also heightening their enthusiasm, leading to more fruitful discussion than would have been possible were the researchers to rely solely upon an in-depth interview technique. A total of 48 informants between the ages of 13–15 years old participated in drawing images.

The in-depth interview and pictorial ethnography techniques were conducted during after-school hours at school or in other places that the students preferred. Audiotape recordings were taken for every type of interview and all interviews were transcribed and each transcript was re-read at least three times. Drawn images were photographed with a digital camera at 600 dpi. Content analysis was applied to the transcripts of interviews, as well as transcripts of discussions based on the images, in order to identify emerging themes related to the research question of technological impacts on emotions. The images selected for presentation in this article are just a sampling of images that the researchers found to best represent the themes that were identified through comprehensive content analysis of the full range of data collected.

Regarding ethical protocol, the researchers explained the research objective to every informant before asking for their consent. For participants under 18 years of age, parental approval and a signed written consent form were required for them to participate. All informants were asked to give their permission to record the interview and/or to use any illustration they provided. They were informed that their participation would be anonymous and were made aware that they have the right to discontinue participation

Table 1 Number of cases divided by gender age group and setting

Region/Age Group	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
13–15 years			
Bangkok Junior High School Students	12	12	24
Chiang Mai Junior High School Students	12	12	24
16–18 years			
Bangkok Senior High School/ University Students	12	12	24
Chiang Mai Senior High School/ University Students	12	12	24
Total	48	48	96

at any time. Research ethics were approved by The Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Research Participants, Group 1, Chulalongkorn University, Thailand.

Results

Looking at the pictures that digital natives drew to reflect their emotions towards technology and from conversations about what they want to communicate through those pictures, we learned that there are varying emotions from using technology in daily lives. It is noteworthy that the emotions they have, despite stemming from similar activities related to technology, are more diverse than any one type of feeling or emotion. Many times, there is a dilemma of emotion, or multiple seemingly contradictory emotions occurring at the same time. The findings are as follows:

Many Thai digital natives in this study stated that they cannot control themselves as they are swallowed into the online community, whether it be control of the timing, amount of time spent, or managing other activities that require focus, such as reading books. Students mentioned a feeling of time being eaten away or in Thai กินเวลา (Figure 1). This was especially noted by secondary school students, many of whom said that while they are reading textbooks, if they pick up their phones to look at social media, they will not be able to finish reading as they had intended. Some even wondered whether they had attention deficiencies as they are unable to read or carry out an activity for a long time, and they cannot stop themselves from picking up their phones during those activities. Consequently, many Thai digital natives criticized themselves for changing as they never thought it would cause character changes such as inactiveness. Some even admitted that they have become lazier, and they look less “smart” in the eyes of others. Yet they feel they cannot



Figure 1 “Relaxation” but “pointlessness” from time being eaten away

reverse these character changes while they are using their phones or on the computer for a continuous period. Examples are when someone tells them to sit straight or that their necks are all bent from looking at their phones. Some young people feel that they have been sucked in by another world through their communication devices to the point that they forget about the real world that is moving forward, where they exist at a standstill beyond their control. This was reflected in an interview with a middle school student (aged 13–15), who told us about how they felt while using technology for entertainment: “When I’m using my phone, I don’t have the time to do anything else if I’m on it all day. As soon as I pick it up, I’m entertained, I scroll through Facebook, and YouTube. I’ve watched YouTube all day and all night, without doing anything else. My family has warned me about it.”

Informants reported that the more time spent on social media the more they felt a need to compare themselves to others (Figure 2). Social media use raised issues of self-evaluation, being afraid to think differently from others, and self-devaluation. In their terms, presenting one’s life to people from all walks of life in the public domain generates different feelings and emotions towards those people, from admiration and affection to being judged, pressured, compared, or jealous.

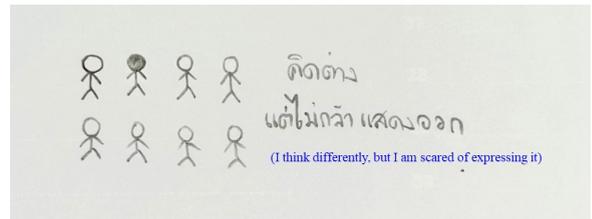


Figure 2 Self-comparison, questioning one’s self-worth, and fear of being different

Moreover, some will question “Why do I not have the same opportunities?”, even though those posting such things may not have intended to boast about it. This is no different from when little kids bring toys or new items that they like to school to show off to their friends, or the joy kids have of receiving a new toy from their family. However, the toys they bring may get lost or their friends will go home and cry to their parents wanting the same toy. Nevertheless, the difference is that showing off and boasting online is constant. People can see it at any time, and it gradually seeps into their feelings as they never thought would happen, creating emotions of “inferiority” or “worthlessness”. This not only stems from wants or desires but also includes comparing oneself with the person who posted to the point of devaluing oneself.

The online world allows us to share information with a wide audience. Some people find it freeing to be open about their personal lives to the public or their online friends without thinking about the negative consequences, or that they could be more discrete. Consequently, during the interview, many informants reported that they feel that they are receiving too many posts and information about other people that they do not need, as some only want to know about their friends or about some specific issues, not everything about that person’s life. This led them to feel awkward in getting to know too much about other people’s personal lives. However, due to the nature of sharing information freely via social media, it is unavoidable and so some people may not be able to resist such feelings and emotions.

The Thai digital natives in this study often use the word “low tolerance” or in Thai, ความอดทนต่ำ, to describe the need for speed characteristic, which is influenced or impacted by using technology to shorten the length of time of some of their daily activities (Figure 3). The resulting emotions are anxiety, impatience, and yearning, that can lead to behaviors of rushing everything if their goals are not immediately met. Examples of such activities are online shopping or texting and repetitive texting when there is not an immediate response. One high school student (ages 16–18) had this to say: “*Nowadays there is so much technology in our lives, so we don’t need to wait for anything or endure anything that is not necessary, turning us into impatient people.*” Similarly, a university student explained their emotions when they must wait for something: “*Impatient, need speed. I’m the same. When I shop online, I’m like ‘I have to have it’, I want to order it now and get it by tomorrow, I want to use it now.*”

As we can see, the need for speed of digital natives can be explained and connected using the term “low tolerance” or the emotion when seeing something take a long time or longer than expected, such as “*Whenever the net (internet)*

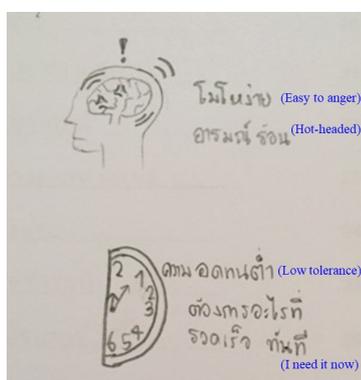


Figure 3 “Satisfaction” when things are as desired and “frustration” when things do not come immediately

is slow, I get frustrated.” This shows the influence that technology has in the daily lives of digital natives of all ages as technology enables procedures to be carried out in steps and clearly defines the timing of each step. Examples are online maps, which can estimate the amount of time it takes to travel from one destination to another; the speed of internet connectivity; money deposits and withdrawals; payments; access to information, or even ordering food and goods. More and more people choose to use these services online as everyone likes convenience, which is an element of the need for speed.

While the definition of face-to-face interaction has changed, the definition of a “friend” for digital natives has changed as well, especially for the new generation. The older generation of digital natives still yearn for opportunities to meet with their groups of friends on varying occasions. Regarding the new generation of digital natives in this study, though they seem to like being alone and eating alone, it does not mean that they do not want friends or do not have any friends (Figure 4). Their network of friends has not shrunk, but the need or yearning to meet and engage in activities face-to-face has lessened. This is especially true for those studying at the university level that have more freedom both in terms of time and space compared to high school students. Noticeably, a professor at the university level gave an example of how even when assigning a group research project, which aimed to foster teamwork and participation, approaches to teamwork had changed. Students tend to delegate tasks and work individually. Students do not need to leave their homes or meet at someone’s house to work on group projects as in the past. They can divide the work and do it separately by communicating online without having to get together. Similarly, an informant

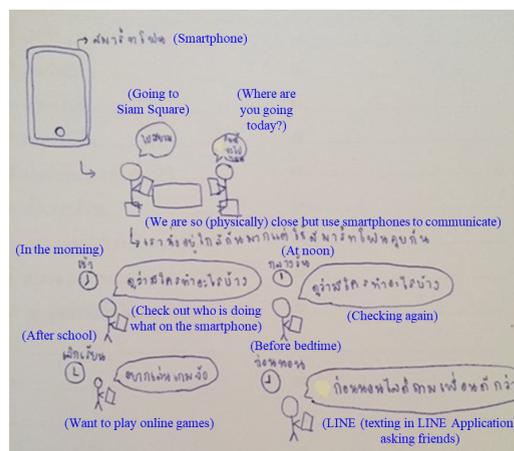


Figure 4 “Yearning” for a friend while “enjoying” being alone

mentioned how their Thai youth generation can eat in the cafeteria or sit on a bench in the building by themselves without needing a friend to accompany them. They can just stream a TV series using their phones or VDO call with a friend from another faculty while they eat alone in the cafeteria. Moreover, activities among a group of friends have also changed. In the past, they used to invite friends to play sports, now the new generation is inviting their friends to play online games such as ROV, which is very popular.

The young digital natives in the study often mentioned how the internet has broadened their view of the world and made them feel connected to happenings elsewhere (Figure 5). Being a part of the online community, they routinely check new online posts on a more than daily basis and join others in sharing their opinions and interests through online news, informal educational website forums, Pinterest, and beauty blogs, among others. The internet has allowed them to connect with others whom they may not need to introduce themselves to or establish relationships with to be a part of the engagement.

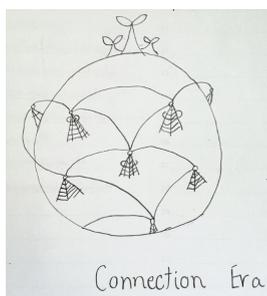


Figure 5 “Connectivity” without knowing one another and shared “hatred” and “rivalry” fueled through crowd mentality

Conversely, even though digital natives can easily turn strangers into new friends, conflict is also another aspect of online relationships. People can show hate and anger towards one another even when they do not know each other. Conflict is a sensitive issue that can easily be stimulated in today’s society. Some conflicts may seem trivial, but others can escalate and cause harm just as easily. This is partly because of the “anonymity” aspect of online communication, whereby people can conceal their true identity. They can create a new identity or even a fake identity. There are many instances where people create a fake identity for online use, such as when they want to show hatred towards others or things but do not want people to find out their identity. Thus, many people become “keyboard thugs” or in Thai *นักเลงคีย์บอร์ด*, hiding behind a fake identity.

The act of “phubbing” is when people ignore each other in favor of the other world on their mobile phones.

People interact face-to-face or are involved in the same situation less and less. One such example is when taking public transportation. Once people get in their vehicle, they immediately create their own space in a public setting by picking up their mobile phones (Figure 6). Public settings include settings where a “social group” becomes just a “group of people” as there is no interaction that would constitute a social group. This can be seen from our interviews. Nearly every participant discussed how when they are in a social group, whether it be family or friends, everyone is looking at their phones instead of interacting with each other. While starting a relationship with a new friend that was once a stranger online may seem easier, starting a relationship when face-to-face in society has become more difficult for many. One digital native said that they feel like they are starting to fear society as they are afraid to start talking to strangers that they need to interact with. Consequently, many people choose to pick up their phones or plug in their earphones as soon as they enter a public setting as a way of saying that they do not want to talk to anyone or that they want to immediately halt the interaction with people around them.

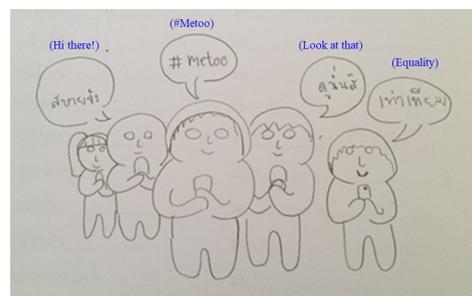


Figure 6 “Fear” of initiating in-person relationships, but “courage” to greet each other online

Even though social media allows people to initiate interaction quite easily, with many channels of communication, and enables people to make friends easily, when we consider the relationships formed, most of those relationships are superficial, distant, or even “shallow,” as people tend to only select a particular aspect of their life or activity when they communicate with each other. They are not able to get to know the real person well or intimately. Furthermore, the interaction is purely through the screen of their communication devices and may not lead to opportunities to engage in activities together or even to meet and talk in the physical world. The interactions are merely conversations online, so it seems that they have not formed a real relationship.

Nevertheless, not only do we use text or voice for online communication, but we can also show our emotions and desires through popular pictorial representations called

“stickers”, which previously were in the form of emoticons, to convey emotions and feelings. Though many people try to create and use these stickers for communication, many digital natives agree that communicating through texts or stickers cannot replace showing one’s emotions through tone of voice or facial expressions. Ultimately, the texts and stickers are interpreted by the receiver and such interpretations are based on different temperaments, which may or may not correspond to the intention of the sender. In many cases, this can lead to misunderstandings and in some cases, even conflict.

Moreover, the new generation of digital natives confesses that they often find themselves in a state of depression when they take in news and information related to death and loss online, as well as news of hardships in society. They feel very depressed even though it has not happened to them. In the past, they may have felt that these situations were beyond their understanding, and they never thought it could happen to them, but now they are worried that these situations are closer to home, causing them to feel depressed and paranoid in their everyday life. What is more, nowadays there is information spreading on how public figures suffer from depression to the point that some choose to take their own lives. Digital natives who have someone close or someone they know that has suffered from depression feel that online communication can stimulate depression as people can learn about each other quite easily, whether it be depressing news, news about people’s suffering, or even information about people who have better lives. Furthermore, communication technology has separated people from one another as they interact via networks, and each has personal space both online and in the physical world. Therefore, the opportunity for interaction has lessened, which is the main reason why people often do not notice that their family members or friends are suffering from depression alone until it is too late to do anything to help them. Additionally, technology has lessened the amount of time people spend or are willing to wait for something. This results in people not having to try or be disappointed, and eventually, they are not able to accept failure.

Discussion and conclusion

The dilemma of emotion and feeling is facilitated through the use of communication technology in many aspects of digital native life and society. In addition to the dilemma of self that has been occurring since the late modern era according to (Giddens, 1991), it can be seen that the dilemma of emotion and feeling remains a product of modernity in

this era as well. Today, technology plays a major role in shaping human behavior in society. People’s online behaviors have changed as technology develops, especially as options proliferate and people can be more selective of the media and content they choose to consume. Nowadays, human and ICT interaction can cause an individual to experience a range of emotions, resulting in tension around managing linkages across the online and physical worlds. An individual must embrace both worlds, which are essential in living their lives, namely, the physical world where they live and the online world that is flexible and allows them to explore and experience things that are not possible in the real world. Therefore, our results have shown that these Thai digital natives experience a simultaneous yet contradictory feeling of being receptive and closely connected to online happenings, while also confronting a sense of fragmentation from diminishing relationships with those close to them. There will always be a tendency for the two worlds to clash and compete for the attention of the individual. It seems that nowadays, the online world is more powerful and better able to attract people, which will cause an imbalance between the two worlds. In addition, the sense of powerlessness was heightened and expressed across a range of emotional forms, such as the feeling of being consumed by technology, questioning one’s self-worth, having anxiety and impatience from their inability to control time, and fearing judgment from others.

Cultural differences in using technology are linked to the effects technology has on people. Whether positive or negative, they relate to the processes of interpretation and values of society. For instance, the Thai culture is very collective, while social media allows people to form a community among a group of people, like Facebook or Twitter, and provide an opportunity for people to reinvent their identity or be anonymous. The collectiveness that occurs online is built on a community whereby no one knows the other’s true identity. It enables people to have the courage to act or express opinions that are not necessarily those of mainstream society. These opinions are open to the community’s support, which reflects the change in creating a movement within the community that is concise and can meaningfully impact society in a shorter time frame than in the physical world. Specifically, youths are influenced by the collective and are drawn in by the anonymity the online world offers leading to many phenomena that we see online. For example, the social trend of the online masses leans towards one end or another until there is conformity on a particular subject without the need to know the real people that agree with the trend. While people have individual experiences behind their screens,

they still show collectivist concerns, comparing themselves to others and worrying about how they appear to others online.

In conclusion, these phenomena occur from the influence that Thai digital natives, especially youths, get from a culture that is integrated with the online world, affecting their practices in using technology. Each person uses technology differently, as technology has disrupted the pace of our lives, causing an acceleration. This is especially true for the digital natives who cannot escape having to cope with these changes and disruptions in their perceptions. Furthermore, Thai digital natives must face the fact that everything online can affect them, causing them to think about what they have seen or learned all the time, even when they are offline. This effect may create both positive and negative emotions, even if the matter at hand has nothing to do with them personally. This phenomenon of persistent reflection and being aware of everything happening around them in the online world may impact the body and minds of digital natives in the real world. By recognizing how technology has impacted us, we can identify the origin of our emotions and figure out how best to deal with them. We are better able to acknowledge and manage our online space, with little impact from outside factors, unlike in the physical world. We can also find a suitable way for us to cope with the effects of technology. The body of knowledge and methods herein can be further developed to encourage more future in-depth studies, so that we can come together to create the digital world that we would like to see, resulting in a better way of life for us and society in the digital world.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgments

The researchers are deeply thankful to all the informants and schools that participated. We also thank Raksaya Aunsuntha and Tim Quinn for English language editing, as well as support from personnel within the Faculty of Political Science and the Center of Excellence for Science, Technology and Society at Chulalongkorn University. Most significantly, this research would not have been possible without funding from the National Research Council of Thailand's Spearhead Strategic Plan on Social Aspects of Khon Thai 4.0 (contract number: 2562/3–01).

References

- Boonlab, S., & Mungkhamanee, S. (2019). Online gambling: Nemesis or opportunity for Thai society. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3318119>
- Caplan, S. E. (2003). Preference for online social interaction. *Communication Research*, 30(6), 625–648. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093650203257842>
- Diener, E. (1996). Traits can be powerful, but are not enough: Lessons from subjective well-being. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 30(3), 389–399. <https://doi.org/10.1006/jrpe.1996.0027>
- Giddens, A. (1991). *Modernity and self-identity: Self and society in the late modern age*. Stanford University Press.
- Gleason, T. R., Theran, S. A., & Newberg, E. M. (2017). Parasocial interactions and relationships in early adolescence. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8, 255. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00255>
- Wellman, B., & Haythornthwaite, C. (2002). *The internet in everyday life*. Wiley. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470774298>
- Jones, P. (2003). *Introducing social theory*. Polity Press.
- Kemp, S. (2022). *Digital 2022: Thailand*. DataReportal. <https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-thailand>
- Khan, A. (2022, January 26). *Digital growth 2022: Another year of bumper growth*. We Are Social. <https://wearesocial.com/uk/blog/2022/01/digital-2022-another-year-of-bumper-growth-2/>
- Leesa-nguansuk, S. (2018, March). Thailand makes top 10 in social media use. *Bangkok Post*. <https://www.bangkokpost.com/business/1420086/thailand-makes-top-10-in-social-media-use>
- McKenna, K. Y. A., Green, A. S., & Gleason, M. E. J. (2002). Relationship formation on the internet: What's the big attraction? *Journal of Social Issues*, 58(1), 9–31. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4560.00246>
- Miller, D. (2018). Digital anthropology. In F. Stein (Ed.), *Cambridge Encyclopedia of Anthropology*. <https://doi.org/10.29164/18digital>
- Neel, C. G. O., & Fuligni, A. (2013). A Longitudinal study of school belonging and academic motivation across high school. *Child Development*, 84(2), 678–692. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8624.2012.01862.x>
- Pattarakulvanit, C. (2007). Feeling as a social practice. *Journal of Liberal Arts*, 7(1), 1–13. <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/liberalarts/article/view/12768> [in Thai]
- Primack, B. A., Shensa, A., Sidani, J. E., Whaitte, E. O., Lin, L. yi, Rosen, D., Colditz, J. B., Radovic, A., & Miller, E. (2017). Social media use and perceived social isolation among young adults in the U.S. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine*, 53(1), 1–8. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.amepre.2017.01.010>
- Scheer, M. (2012). Are emotions a kind of practice (and is that what makes them have a history)? A Bourdieuan approach to understanding emotion. *History and Theory*, 51(2), 193–220. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23277639>
- Tapscott, D. (2009). Grown up digital – how the net generation is changing your world. *Industrial and Commercial Training*, 41(2), 106–107. <https://doi.org/10.1108/00197850910939162>
- Thianthai, C. (2022). Thai digital natives' identification and experience of social media cyberhate patterns. *Journal of Language and Culture*, 41(1), 76–98. <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/JLC/article/view/262390/174472>
- Thianthai, C., Tamdee, P., Assavarak, P., Jiaviriyaboonya, P., & Pewnil T. (2020). *Understanding Thai digital natives' characteristics, behaviors, and their views of the future*. National Research Council of Thailand's Spearhead Strategic Plan on Social Aspects of Khon Thai 4.0. https://khonthai4-0.net/academies_knowledge_detail.php?id=3&sub_category_id=24&content_id=41
- Wake Forest University. (2019). *The difference between feelings and emotions*. <https://counseling.online.wfu.edu/blog/difference-feelings-emotions/>