ANALYZING ECHO BOOMER BUSINESS STUDENTS AND HOW THEY LEARN: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY

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ABSTRACT

The popular media have increasingly been reporting on the generation currently coming of age labeled alternatively as Echo-Boomers (children of Baby Boomers), Generation Y, Millenials, and the Net Generation (Quinion 1999; Layman 2004; cbsnews.com 2005). This generation, born between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s is proving to be quite different from the previous Generation X and their Baby Boomer parents in enough ways as to require distinctive handling during many aspects of their lives, e.g. product marketing, shopping, supervision in the classroom, and overseeing their performance in the workplace (Smith, Clurman, and Wood 2005). Echo-Boomers have drawn the attention of marketers because they make up 27.5 percent of the population and have an annual purchasing power of $100 billion (NPD Insights 2004).

Generation Y (aka echo boomers) students are 60 million strong. According to the CBS magazine/news show, *60 Minutes*, Echo Boomers are used to home computers and 500-channel television sets. They are great at multitasking, though their schedules have been controlled by their parents. More than a third of them are non-white. They have a reputation for being team players, not overachievers (Wolburg and Pokrywczynski 2001).

This paper profiles the characteristics of samples of Echo Boomers, who attend public universities on the east coast and on the west coast. It analyzes to what extent these students, who represent a lower economic strata and multiple cultures, possess the characteristics that are most frequently ascribed to Generation Y. It tries to relate the degree to which identification with Echo Boomer values affects their attitudes towards learning activities and assessment methods.

Surveys were administered to a total of 321 students enrolled in five sections of business classes at a state university in southern California and five sections of business classes at a state university in central Connecticut. Half of the sample (50.0%) consisted of females. About 76% were born in the United States. The sample was quite diverse with 28.2% identifying themselves as Asian, 4.7% as Black American or African, 52.0% as Caucasian/European, and 13.2% as Hispanic (Caribbean, Mexico, Central America, Brazil, South America and Other Hispanic).

The survey instrument measured values, degree of participation in typical echo boomer activities, how much the students felt they learned from the a variety of classroom activities and how well each of the following assessment tools measured their class performance: quizzes, midterms, team projects, individual term projects, attendance, class participation, homework.

Results in this study show that the Echo Boomers in the samples conformed to some typical values like "confusing input with output" and "lacking the need to benchmark against their peers." They did not conform to other stereotypes like "believing that it was very important to fit in." Moreover, there seemed to be a lot of variance in the opinions they expressed, suggesting perhaps that a subset of Echo Boomers may be heavily influencing the popular stereotypes which abound. In contrast to the literature, these students did not feel they had short attention spans. They believed that traditional, more passive, teaching methods (e.g., live lectures) were preferable to more active pedagogies. These college Echo Boomers did not evaluate technology-based activities or group activities so positively either.

Based on this research not all Echo Boomers are created equal as the literature and media try to suggest. Differences occur even in what might be expected to be a relatively more homogenous subgroup like college business students.

Perhaps Echo Boomers, who come from diverse ethnic populations, may not fit the stereotypical mold. Yes they may be more wired and oriented to the internet. However, they may be more traditionally oriented when it comes to learning and assessment.

References Available on Request