

How you type with your smartphone can reveal your age – here's why it matters

February 22 2018, by Tom Page



Credit: Anastasia Shuraeva from Pexels

When computers hit the mainstream, the older guy in the office would always be sniggered at when bashing away on his [QWERTY keyboard](#), only using his two index fingers to type. To the amusement of his

younger, tech-savvy colleagues, he would almost look Neanderthal next to those who grew up with computers and used all their fingers on the keyboard quickly and fluently.

In offices around the world, after computers entered every part of our lives, it was indicative of how wide the generational gap had become in how people interacted with new, emerging technology.

But nothing stays still. Those young sniggerers, born at the dawn of the tech revolution, are now the ones who look old-fashioned when it comes to using mobile phone keyboards.

With the increasing popularity of touchscreen smartphones, there's increasing emphasis on ergonomics – and a growing interest in how older and younger users interact with their devices.

Indeed, a recent [experiment I undertook](#) yielded a very revealing observation. Younger users adopt a two-handed approach, using both thumbs to type, while older users cradle their phone in one hand and type with one finger.

New designs

If you're an ergonomic designer working on the next wave of smartphone tech, this is an important point to note as it will no doubt influence some of the basic parameters of your next [design](#). Because after all, products must meet the needs of the consumers who will buy them.

Other findings from the study are equally revealing. Users in the 18-25 age range promoted a positive attitude towards brands, but blamed technology for errors, in contrast to users in the 60-70 age range who blamed themselves for errors and were more focused on function than

the brand.

Taken together, these results suggest that interaction styles vary starkly between age groups. This work has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of the attitudes surrounding design that works for all users, the consideration of ergonomic issues and the preferred styles of interaction in relation to touchscreen phones.

Although designers have considered the interaction needs of users when designing touchscreen interfaces, there is still room for improvement in certain areas.

But one thing is clear: more focus needs to be made on the interaction of the QWERTY keyboard, alongside the sensitivity and responsiveness of touchscreens.

If the debate is to be moved forward, a better understanding of interaction styles among people needs to be developed by academia and industry. More work will need to be done to determine how experience, rather than age, affects the use of a [touchscreen](#). And a study to analyse the ease of navigation for users through different app processes would also be revealing.

It could be that we see the development of a layered approach to interface design, allowing the button size to increase to reduce user errors, and greater efforts made to ensure easier navigation.

Only then will we start to see designs produced which are more inclusive and meet the needs and attitudes of older generations, who are more excited at the prospect of using technology than their younger colleagues.

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