Experts' Consultation Meeting

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Youth, digitalisation and gender equality: qualitative research.

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Methodology of the study

- Qualitative research

- Interviews with experts in the field of digitalisation, youth and gender equality

- Focus group interviews with young people aged 15-18

- Pilot focus group in Denmark

- Final methodology implemented in 10 EU-MS (AT, EE, ES, FR, HU, IE, IT, PL, RO, SE).

Experts' interviews: Profile of experts

- Researchers working in the area of youth, ICT and gender equality;

- Practitioners working with young people in the areas of digital skills, political and civic participation, internet safety or similar areas (e.g. teachers, social workers, gender equality advocates, police, young leaders/activists, business representatives, etc.);

- Policy-makers.

Focus groups: Profile of participants

- between 15-18 years old

- must have active social media accounts and use them daily, generating content

- maximum of three participants come from the same school

General observations

- Young people aged 15-18 are well-acquainted users of digital technologies and claim their agency

- No strong gender differences in access to digital technologies

- Imbalanced public debate on digitalisation focussing mainly on risks

- Parents can act as enablers or barriers to the development of their children's digital competences

Opportunities of digital technologies –

Key findings

Learning opportunities

Digital technologies

- provide quick access to knowledge and information

    "…it is great to get information about different subjects instead of going to the library and lose time looking for the right book. These technologies facilitate life."

    "….it's quicker to google than to ask someone…."

- help to get a broader picture of the world

    "…You learn that much about other cultures, and other opinions…"

- support learning processes and open new career opportunities

    "Swedish kids are really good at English, but we didn't learn it at school but on the internet"

Learning opportunities cont.

Digital technologies

- support teachers

  "..and you never go into a class where the teacher doesn't use a computer at least once in the class."

- foster individualised as well as group learning

"If you have a really bad teacher and you don't learn anything, there is always another teacher in another school who is much better and who makes instructional videos. I use that a lot."

Participation opportunities

- New forms of participation

  "... about … petition. There have been quite a lot because of the government, against the plans that they have…. And I have signed some, one or two…. I know also others from my friends, who have done that, and I think that's also good, because you see how many have already voted and it gives you courage also to know that there are people"

- Socialisation potential of digital technologies and social media

  "It's practical, if you want to get to know people. And this works out really well on social networks."

  "… you use online to meet up and stuff like that. And it's good for people who are abroad in your family and stuff as well."

Participation opportunities cont.

- Development of friendships, offering and receiving support

  "..If I'm at home and feel sad, I might write to my friends and they give me support…also, if someone has a problem and they post it…it's a natural thing for me to help them…"

- Online discussions of politics

  "..politics and feminism. I think especially Instagram is exciting because you not only read through something but you also get into contact with other people and you can discuss things…"

Participation opportunities cont.

- Supporting social activism

  "…about 3 years ago my town got flooded and I used the internet to gather people together and like create a flood aid team and we used the local Facebook… So, …if you're going to take the internet away from people altogether what about if someone has this brainwave and they have no way to actually get it out there. It's in real time... like if I had to text everyone individually it just wouldn't have happened…"

- Getting things known, mobilise quickly and reaching a wider audience

  "Like the big youth dance celebration, it got cancelled because of bad weather. Then very quickly, on the same morning, an event was made through Facebook and everyone came to dance."

  [in the end thousands of young dancers joined the spontaneously organised event]

Other opportunities

- Digital technologies help finding identity and like-minded, breaking out of alienation and isolation

  "My online self is more expressive than my real person. Behind the screens, I feel more free to express myself. I am more shy in real life than online".

- Challenge norms and stereotypes and means to break free from societal bonds and power structures

  "You can create an image of yourself on the Internet like you'd want the other people to see you. If they didn't know you in real life, that's what you'd seem to them."

Other opportunities cont.

- Digital technologies can have an empowering effect

  "…some youtubers or bloggers post a lot of pep talk material, to help girls feel good about themselves."

- New possibilities for leisure and consumption

  "…it is easier for me to find, for example, shoes in the internet if I know what size I have, I do not have to … go shopping in this gallery where it's hot, and it is much easier for me to search through the internet, I have more options there and it is faster and easier to find."

Risks of digital technologies –

Key findings

Imbalanced positioning in relation to digital technologies

- Lack of digital competencies, inability to accurately assess online information

- Privacy risks

- Structural inequalities

- Stereotypical use of digital technology

Stereotypical self-presentation and body image online

- Problematic socialisation into stereotypical gender identities and roles

  "..if I post some photos I can seem to be 'not a good girl' but I want to seem like a girl who loves animals, cooking, smiling… I would never post photos that can ruin my reputation because I'm not shameless."

- Presence of impossible beauty standards

  "Often beauty ideals are spread, because a lot of stars are very thin, and they correspond to the plastic beauty ideal. And especially as a young girl, you are concerned, because women are really strongly influenced by beauty ideals. And if you see this every day, this can be very hard for someone, because you take them as role models…. And when you are already stuck in an illness, for instance anorexia, this can really be a trigger…"

Stereotypical self-presentation and body image online cont.

- Comparison to the apparently positive-only life of others causing dissatisfaction and stress

"I used to compare myself, then I realised that this is bad for me…. One of my friends always compares herself, and I see how bad it is for her, because she has very low self-esteem. I consciously don't compare myself to anybody."

- Receiving dangerous information about health

"There are blogs that especially focus on that, like for instance self-harming behaviour, they show that this is also 'romantic'. And I think this is very wrong and false information shared with young and more naïve people. And of course they just believe this, because if it's on the internet, it must be true…"

Online violence

- Hate speech and anonymous aggression

  "If I post something…I know that I will be attacked. Someone will call me an idiot. I won't be surprised if someone tells me I should die….We are all judgemental but some choose to express their judgments"..

- Cyber-harassment and bullying

  "..I feel more cautious on the net in particular when it comes to pictures or comments. Because people may judge you and insult you easier behind a screen than face-to-face…"

Online violence cont.

- Self-restriction due to fear of criticism, labelling and hateful comments

  "I'm too frightened to express my opinions online. I keep that to myself because I know that there will always be someone out there who won't like what I post…"

- Body shaming and slut shaming

  "..if a girl has affairs with many boys, there is immediately bad talk. But if a boy has affairs with many girls, they just think yes, he's a real player…"

- Gender differences in coping strategies

  "For a boy saying 'they make fun of me' – it's embarrassing."

Sexting

- Need to distinguish between sexual agency and non-consensual further sharing

"Everybody knows about sexting. But I respect people who do it because they are together or in love. They are free. However, I will not accept a sexting [message] from anybody. It can be used against me."

- Peer-pressure

"It's because the guys put pressure on other guys and then girls put pressure on other girls because they're like 'Oh we're doing this, why aren't you doing it?'"

- Victim-blaming

"Practically she did it to herself. Because, at 15 to send pictures like that, I don't find it normal. So, it's not ok, whatever the conditions."

Ways of making the internet a safer place suggested by focus group participants

- More relatable ways of education regarding digital competences moving past prohibitive and restrictive discourses

  "The internet users need to be educated, because I think that when you make the internet too safe, then it can become very restricted. You just need to educate people, raise awareness, that every action has a consequence and you need to think about what you're doing… like why am I doing this, who's going to see it, is it even necessary. If you can reasonably answer all of those questions, then go ahead…"

- More and better training for teachers

  "And teachers need to be better trained!...Today, you're smarter than your teacher. 90% of our teachers are incompetent when it comes to computers and the internet."

Ways of making the internet a safer place suggested by focus group participants cont.

- Education for responsibility and diversity

"It should become a standard for people to take into account that when they are on the internet, they are responsible for the things they say.."

- Parents taking up their key role

"Parents should monitor what children do online. I am not saying my mom should come check on me now that I am 18 because from …let's say 12, you can figure out what's good and bad. But…there are so many things today that a 5 year old can do wrong online."

Ways of making the internet a safer place suggested by focus group participants cont.

- Technical solutions

"The social media themselves, as companies, should revise aggressive profiles and control them. I am not saying they must check everything but if there is something suspicious."

- Young people taking the initiative themselves

"Everything you see, be it racist, anti-Semitic, anything, you should report it,…so that it is deleted as quickly as possible. But the problem is, on some sites like Facebook…it takes long until something is deleted. But, if the mass is big enough, and signals it, and there are like 20.000 reports in one hour, then someone must do something against it."

Ways of making the internet a safer place suggested by focus group participants cont.

- Listen to young people

  "..it's true that we are the future but they forbid us to express our opinion because they say 'they are young, they have other things to think about'…they don't take us seriously….if there's no one else on the other side listening to us, change is not possible…"

Thank you for your attention!

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