Colloquy Council of Europe/ERYICA: "Bridging the gap"

Input on the changing social environment of young people in the digital age

Patrick Daniels - YouthNet - Paper – September 2010

Introduction

We live in an information society[1], due in no small way to the growth of access and use of the web and digital networks across Europe. If young people are to be able to play their part as active citizens in our respective European societies, it's vital that they be literate and skilled in these digital networked technologies that are making the information society a reality today. When the European Commission announced in May 2010 its new Digital Agenda[2] for 2010-20, it signalled that digital literacy and skills would be key.

One of the results of this emerging social reality that's resulted from ever expanding digital networks, is the growing importance of the idea of digital citizenship. Young people's sense of citizenship is often pulled in different directions. It can open up new opportunities that today's young people's parents and grandparents never had, but it also presents new risks. Young people risk exclusion given the increasingly dependence on the web for access to services and resources they're entitled to. At the same time, the web can empower young people to get more involved in society, presenting all kinds of opportunities to exercise their democratic rights as citizens.

In truth, it's a complex picture. What's clear is that digital networks mean we need to profoundly reassess our rights and responsibilities as citizens. But to do this, citizens need to be better informed and educated about their rights, and have a more rounded understanding of their responsibilities as citizens.

Youth information workers can play a critical role in this process. They can help to ensure that the new generation better understands this new kind of digital citizenship: where what they do online can have consequences for themselves, their peers and their communities. Youth information workers can help young people access the benefits of the information society and play an active and productive part in helping to make the information society an inclusive reality for all. There is a profound link today between our vibrancy as democratic societies on the one hand, and on the other, how each citizen understands how they are connected to their fellow citizens, both offline and increasingly online.

We're becoming more aware of ourselves as digital citizens in this information society. Being digitally literate means young people learning how to maximise their opportunities online, while at the same time successfully developing the resilience necessary to overcome the

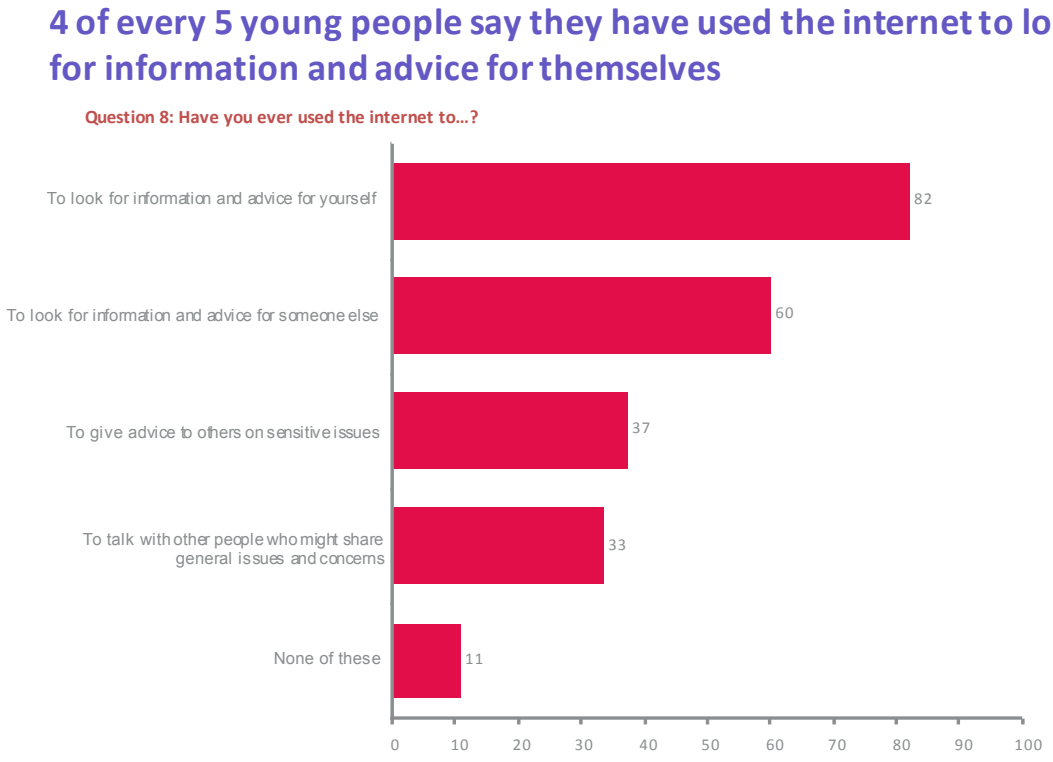
[1] Information Society is a broad term that the European Commission uses- for example: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/index_en.htm - for debate and discussion about the term see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Information_society

[2] More information: http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/digital-agenda/index_en.htm

associated risks. This paper will consider the most recent developments in how young people use the web and consider how they can safely access the quality information they need to be fully literate digital citizens in today's information society.

Increasing usage and access to online technology

Figure 1: "Have you ever used the internet to…?" Source: The Futures Company/YouthNet Survey 2009[3]



A discussion of digital citizenship needs to start by acknowledging the ever increasing usage of online digital technologies by young people across Europe. According to the Eurostat survey in 2009, 73% of young people (aged 16-24) used the internet on average daily or almost every day. In just a few years, the percentage of households across Europe with internet access has increased from 54% in 2007 to 68% in 2010[4].

[3] For more information about the survey see references at end of this document, p.17. You can download full report here: http://www.youthnet.org/mediaandcampaigns/pressreleases/hybrid-lives

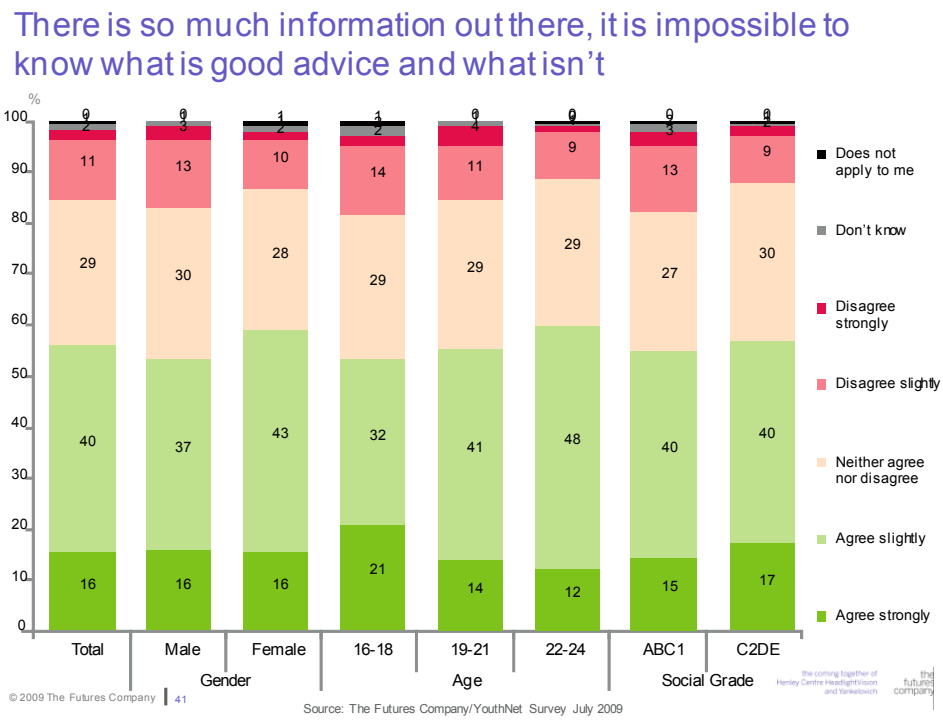
[4] Internet access and use in 2009 - Eurostat http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=STAT/09/176&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en and see also Internet Usage in European Union http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats9.htm#eu

As access and usage of the internet have increased, so has the web's social significance. The last few years have seen a huge expansion of: generalist social networks; content-based platforms where users can watch or upload content; work or professional networks; micro-blogging networks; and virtual environments. There were 41.7 million regular users of social networking sites in 2008 in Europe. This is projected to go up to 107.4 million regular users of social networking sites by the end of 2012 in Europe[5].

The way young people access support and information is also changing. A report 'Young people's needs in a digital age' undertaken by Michael Hulme of the Institute for Advanced Studies, Lancaster University[6], looked at how young people in the UK use the web for information and support. Four in five (82%) said they had used the internet to look for advice and information for themselves and 60% had for other people (see figure 1). 37% said that they would use the internet to give advice to others on sensitive issues.

Information overload

Figure 2: Question asked as part of The Futures Company/YouthNet Survey 2009



[5] Europe's Information Society - Thematic Portal - European Commission - Facts & figures about social networking http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/social_networking/facts/index_en.htm

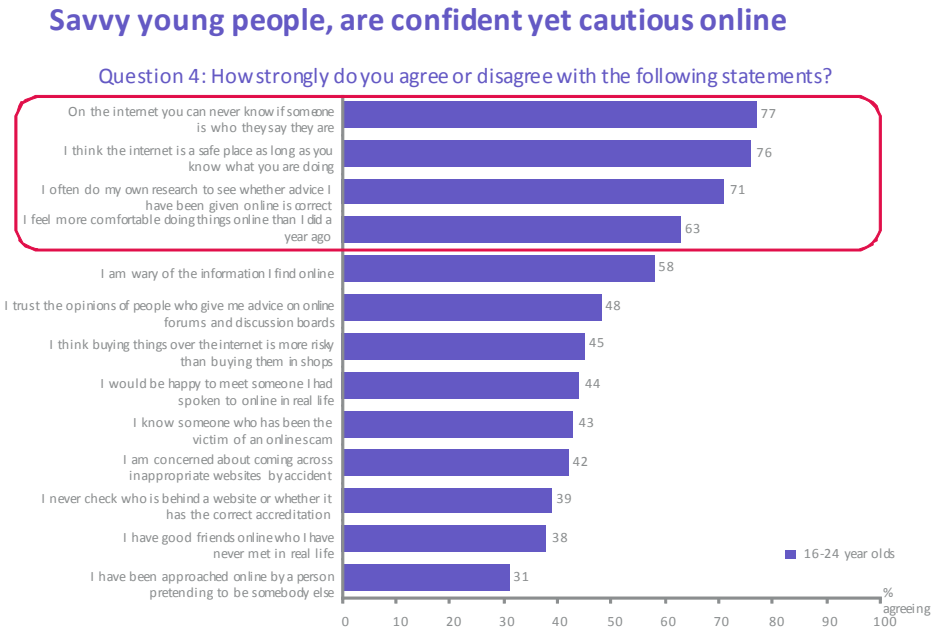
[6] New report reveals young people's 'hybrid lives' - YouthNet http://www.youthnet.org/mediaandcampaigns/pressreleases/hybrid-lives

Chief among the challenges that young people face accessing information online is the risk of information overload. That is, there's so much information available via the web to any person seeking advice, that it can make it hard to find the good quality information without having a decent standard of understanding of how search engines and other search tools work. Psychological effects like stress, anxiety, depression, low motivation and sometimes even panic are identified as potential consequences. Behavioural studies also show that the more options that are available, the harder it is to make an effective decision. John Palfrey and Urs Gasser, in their book 'Born Digital', combine the issue of the over abundance of information with the growing multitasking required to process information from an increasing number of sources. Writers such as Nicholas Carr, the author of the article, 'Is Google Making Us Stupid?' suggest that the nature of information as delivered via the web, is contributing to a change in the way human cognition works. Such views are controversial. However, there is agreement that the solution, at least part, is that the quality of information produced so that it is more easily digestible and accessible is ever more important.

Risks and opportunities

Fundamentally, the starting point for safe online youth information strategy is to ensure there's quality information and support available on the web that's relevant and engages young people. It's clear that in the absence of youth information resources, it's more likely that young people will turn to negative or problematic spaces on the web in search of the information and support they need to tackle the issues affecting them.

Figure 3: Question asked as part of The Futures Company/YouthNet Survey 2009



The digital era brings incredible opportunities to share information and open up access to new networks of support for young people across Europe. At the same time, there are emergent risks associated with how young people are use the web.

Youth information strategy that takes into account how young people use the web must go beyond the production and delivery of quality information, and work to engage and facilitate the safe use of the web. The challenge, ultimately, is to equip young people with the skills and experience they need to provide for their own resilience and wellbeing online, where they can learn about the risks and opportunities associated with their online behaviour.

Discussion of the role of quality youth information has a tendency to make two very different assumptions. Either young people need to be instructed and their use of the web closely controlled by adults. Or it's an area where adults can only play a very limited role because their perspective as newcomers to the digital age is so far removed from that of young people today. This issue of young people as 'digital natives' is something we'll return to later in this paper. Research shows that young people demonstrate a high level of awareness of many of the issues in staying safe while accessing the information they need (see figure 3). However, much more research needs be done in this area. Trained individuals, such as youth information workers, can offer additional support for young people who currently largely rely on self-taught strategies when seeking advice and information online, and help make this a fundamental part of what it means to be a digital citizen.

So when we talk about online opportunities and risks for young people, what exactly are we referring to? The first EU Kids Online project (2006-9) funded by the EC's Safer Internet Programme[7], described them as follows:

Online Opportunities	**Online Risks**
Access to global information	Illegal content
Educational resources	Paedophiles, grooming, strangers
Social networking for old/new friends	Extreme or sexual violence
Entertainment, games and fun	Other harmful or offensive content
User-generated content creation	Racist/hate material/activities
Civic or political participation	Advertising/commercial persuasion
Privacy for expression of identity	Biased/misinformation (advice, health)
Community involvement/activism	Exploitation of personal information
Technological expertise and literacy	Cyberbullying, stalking, harassment
Career advancement or employment	Gambling, financial scams
Personal/health/sexual advice	Self-harm (suicide, anorexia, etc)
Specialist groups and fan forums	Invasions/abuse of privacy

[7] Livingstone, S, and Haddon, L (2009) EU Kids Online: Final report. LSE, London: EU Kids Online (EC Safer Internet Plus Programme Deliverable D6.5) http://www2.lse.ac.uk/media%40lse/research/EUKidsOnline/EU%2520Kids%2520I/Reports/EUKidsOnlineFinalReport.pdf

Shared experiences with distant others	Illegal activities (hacking, downloading)

The project classified these risks and opportunities in a way that helps to compare and contrast these different forms. The project's coordinators Leslie Haddon and Sonia Livingstone suggest that online risks and opportunities can be thought about in the following terms:

- **Content (young person as recipient)** - risks and opportunities may come with one-to-many or mass communication that takes place on the web. This might include both useful information or problematic material that young people find by browsing.
- **Contact (young person as participant)** - with the interactive and dynamic web, there are risks and opportunities associated with the social nature of so many online behaviours where contact is made with others, particularly peers.
- **Conduct (young person as actor)** - the web enables young people to initiate actions that can positively or negatively affect on the lives of other young people.

Figure 4: Table taken from Livingstone, S, and Haddon, L (2009) EU Kids Online: Final report. LSE, London: EU Kids Online (EC Safer Internet Plus Programme Deliverable D6.5)

		Content: Child as recipient	Contact: Child as participant	Conduct: Child as actor
OPPORTUNITIES	Education learning and digital literacy	Educational resources	Contact with others who share one's interests	Self-initiated or collaborative learning
	Participation and civic engagement	Global information	Exchange among interest groups	Concrete forms of civic engagement
	Creativity and self-expression	Diversity of resources	Being invited/ inspired to create or participate	User-generated content creation
	Identity and social connection	Advice (personal/ health/ sexual etc)	Social networking, shared experiences with others	Expression of identity
RISKS	Commercial	Advertising, spam, sponsorship	Tracking/ harvesting personal information	Gambling, illegal downloads, hacking
	Aggressive	Violent/ gruesome/ hateful content	Being bullied, harassed or stalked	Bullying or harassing another
	Sexual	Pornographic/harmful sexual content	Meeting strangers, being groomed	Creating/ uploading pornographic material
	Values	Racist, biased info/ advice (eg, drugs)	Self-harm, unwelcome persuasion	Providing advice eg, suicide/ pro-anorexia

Table 2: A classification of online opportunities and risks for children

This form of classification has been designed for the purposes of research, but it's also useful for developing new forms of good practice in online safety. It helps to demonstrate the different ways the web can be positive or negative. Take the issue of self-harm as an example of how a risk might manifest itself across the three different categories:

1. Young people might be affected by this issue as **recipients** by browsing and viewing images of self harm on the web unintentionally.
2. Young people might be exposed to this risk as **participants**, actively seeking out content on the web, not fully understanding how it will trigger feelings of wanting to self harm.
3. Young people may be **actors** bringing about this risk to others by uploading, sharing images of self harm on the web or detailing their own personal experience of self harm.

Media influence on public perceptions of online risks and opportunities that affect young people

The degree to which the media influences research and the development of good practice is a contentious issue. When online safety issues are covered in the media, the tone often tends to emphasise the risks and raises the sense of public anxiety, rather than the opportunities.

When the EU Kids Online project conducted a content analysis of press coverage of young people and the internet in 14 EU countries, considerable variation in themes and style of reporting was found. It revealed that in countries where internet use among children and young people was relatively high, the media coverage seemed to play a key role in highlighting safety issues.

In all countries the clear majority of media coverage of young people and the internet was "concerned with risks rather than opportunities: nearly two-thirds of all stories (64%) referred to risks, whereas less than a fifth (18%) referred to opportunities". The focus of media interest was either in content risks (mainly pornography) or conduct risks (mainly bullying), with less coverage of contact risks. The risks associated with commercialisation and the web for young people, such as advertising and marketing, got relatively little media coverage. It should be noted, the researchers found a lot of variation within this broad trend between the member states.

Range of risks in Europe

EU Kids Online project found in its comparative analysis of research across Europe that the following risks (directly quoted from the report) showed the highest level of incidence:

1. Giving out personal information is the most common risk. It seems that around half of online teens do this, with considerable cross-national variation (13% to 91%)
2. Seeing pornography is the second most common risk at around 4 in 10 across Europe, but again there is considerable cross-national variation (25% - 71%)
3. Seeing violent or hateful content is the third most common risk experienced by approximately one third of teens. Apart from the exceptional figure of 90% in Ireland there was actually a fair degree of consistency across countries.

4. Being bullied/harassed/stalked was next. Generally around 1 in 5 or 6 teenagers online experienced his, though there is also a group of high risk countries in this respect (Poland, perhaps Estonia) and one low risk country (Belgium).
5. Receiving unwanted sexual comments followed. While only around 1 in 10 teenagers in one group of countries experience this (Germany, Ireland, Portugal) closer to 1 in 4 teenagers did so in Iceland and Norway (1 in 6 in Sweden), rising to 1 in 3 in the UK and 1 in 2 in Poland.
6. Meeting a online contact offline is the least common but, arguably, most dangerous risk. In fact, here there is considerable consistency in the figures across Europe with around 8% (1 in 12) online teenagers going to such meetings. The exceptions are Poland (23%) and, especially, the Czech Republic (65%).

One way to approach gauging risk is to rank it by frequency (level of incidence) and degree of danger (level of harm). For example, as stated above, seeing pornographic, hateful or violent content are the second and third most common risks. However, the level of harm associated with both risks remains controversial because researching the subject presents all sorts of ethical challenges, and the evidence that does exist is inconclusive. In addition, cultural values influence the degree of perceived harm that content risks pose. Safety assessments should take these factors into account when framing safety strategy.

The risk of sexual offending online

In the United States, the 2008 report[8] of the Internet Safety Technical Task Force (ISTTF)[9] led by the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard University looked into the safety issues related to sexual predation. It reviewed work in the field of online safety both in Europe and the United States, and took evidence and advice from a range of stakeholders and experts in the field. In terms of their conclusions, they underlined that sexual predation on minors by adults (a contact risk), both online and offline, does remain a concern.

They concluded that research found that "cases of sexual predation typically involved post-pubescent youth who were aware that they were meeting an adult male for the purpose of engaging in sexual activity". They called for more research into the activities of sex offenders on social networking sites and other online communities.

They also noted that young people reported "sexual solicitation of minors by minors more frequently, but these incidents, too, are understudied, underreported to law enforcement, and not part of most conversations about online safety". The report picked up an apparent overemphasis on contact risks, combined with a degree of overlooking conduct risks.

[8] Enhancing Child Safety & Online Technologies: Final report of the Internet Safety Technical Taskforce: To the Multi-State Working Group on Social Networking of State Attorneys General of the United States
http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/sites/cyber.law.harvard.edu/files/ISTTF_Final_Report.pdf
[9] Enhancing child safety and online technologies
http://cyber.law.harvard.edu/pubrelease/isttf/

One of the key points to come out of the ISTTF report was the importance of education in digital literacy and digital citizenship. Much of the risky online behaviour faced by and carried out by young people, is often not criminal activity in the first instance and can be tackled by structures other than law enforcement authorities.

Young people as actors and participants on the web

The report came back to conduct and content risks. It found that "bullying and harassment, most often by peers, were the most frequent threats that minors face, both online and offline". In terms of receiving or viewing problematic content the report found that although "unwanted exposure to pornography does occur online... those most likely to be exposed are those seeking it out, such as older male minors". In addition, it called for more research into problematic content that young people create themselves. It seems clear that a broad approach to safety that considers young people as digital citizens, should involve helping young people to understand the risks that behaviours such as bullying, to themselves, to others around them and to their communities.

The report found that the risk profile of young people online can vary on account of a range of factors. Not all young people are equally at risk. The ISTTF report found that those who are "most at risk often engage in risky behaviours and have difficulties in other parts of their lives. The psychosocial makeup and family dynamics surrounding particular minors are better predictors of risk, than the use of specific media or technologies".

Security and safety

Typically, a big part of the online safe information discussion is spent looking at the use of technology to keep young people safe and secure. For example, the sound use of anti-virus software, regularly updating software and encouraging the use of secure passwords are all important technical aspects of online safety. But they all need to be implemented by people. In fact, increasingly security issues like 'phishing' and other social engineering techniques exploit online behaviour and the social applications of technology for illicit purposes.

Security policies not focused on safety can often have the unintended consequence of disempowering the very young people it sets out to protect. With tech-centric approaches to safety, methods such as filters or locking down systems to restrict access to websites can give a false sense of security. These systems are the technical equivalent of the school fence. There are good reasons for putting up a school fence, but particularly as young people grow older the physical barrier is not enough. There comes a point when it's clearly better to engage the young person's mind and talk through the pros and cons of how they behave, rather than short-circuiting the discussion with a technical device (be it a web filter or a perimeter fence).

An evaluation of the safe use of information technology by Ofsted[10], the official body for standards in education in the UK found that online safety was outstanding where schools

[10] The safe use of new technologies - Ofsted - 2009

used 'managed' systems. The 'managed' systems had "fewer inaccessible sites than 'locked down' systems", so they required "pupils to take responsibility themselves for using new technologies safely". In contrast, Ofsted found that schools with 'locked down' systems were less effective as they left pupils more vulnerable. These pupils were found to be less able to stay safe in situations outside the school where they had to use systems that weren't locked down.

A safe online information strategy should consider how it can improve the digital literacy of the young people it seeks to reach and support. Media literacy has focused on making young people comfortable and competent with traditional media. It's also been about helping to develop critical thinking about sources and content. Now online digital media is more interactive, and digital literacy includes learning how to share, upload and create your own content. In the same way, a digital citizenship approach extends a young person's learning to improving respect for self, others and the wider community.

A safe online information strategy that focuses on technology is problematic because the rapid pace of innovation in technology means the goal posts are constantly shifting. For example, while technology and online behaviour changes as the web becomes more social (web 2.0), research, particularly in Europe, has been slow to move beyond the basic concerns of access and degree of use of the web.

The answer is to consider online safety more broadly to move beyond the technology. Thinking about online safety has developed beyond the rather one dimensional focus on physical safety and the panic about contact risks such as predator danger. Connect Safely[11], based in the US, sets out what it calls online safety 3.0. It seeks to raise awareness of the range of different issues that may affect a young person's safe experience online.

- Physical safety – freedom from physical harm
- Psychological safety – freedom from cruelty, harassment, and exposure to potentially disturbing material
- Reputational and legal safety – freedom from unwanted social, academic, professional, and legal consequences that could affect you for a lifetime
- Identity, property, and community safety – freedom from theft of identity and property and attacks against networks and online communities at local, national, and international levels.

Connect Safely lays down the challenge to start thinking about online safety in terms of how these risks can affect young people's freedom as digital citizens. Instead of thinking about the subject in the negative, i.e. avoiding risks, it's about helping young people to explore their freedoms as digital citizens.

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http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/Ofsted-home/Publications-and-research/Browse-all-by/Documents-by-type/Thematic-reports/The-safe-use-of-new-technologies

[11] Connect Safely - Online safety 3.0 - empowering and protecting youth http://www.connectsafely.org/Commentaries-Staff/online-safety-30-empowering-and-protecting-youth.html

Digital citizenship: towards an understanding of young people's behaviour online

For the last decade, the discussion of digital citizenship and young people's use of digital technology has been coloured by the debate about a new generation of 'digital natives'. Arguably, this nexus between emergent technology and young people has been played out in popular culture for decades. The stereotype of the teen hacker, obsessive gamer or whizz kid is deeply embedded in many Western societies. Neil Selwyn puts it like this: the "perceptions of omnipotent young computer users have been instrumental in shaping public expectations and fears concerning technology and society"[12].

In 2001, Marc Prensky wrote an article called "Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants"[13]. In it he described students as representing the first generation to "have spent their entire lives surrounded by and using computers, video games, digital music players, video cams, cell phones, and all the other toys and tools of the digital age". Prensky used this digital natives tag to denote a new generation of young people as distinct from previous generations because they had grown up surrounded and immersed in digital technology. The argument, often put by Prensky and others since, is that those who've used such technologies from a young age have a natural fluency and that those who've learnt to use them later on in their lives don't have.

There's now a growing body of literature that gravitates to this theme bracketing young people and their online behaviour under this idea of the 'digital native'. Examples of this are books such as the aforementioned, "Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives" by John Palfrey and Urs Gasser[14]; "Grown Up Digital" by Don Tapscott[15]; "Educating the Net Generation", edited by Diana G. Oblinger and James L. Oblinger[16]. Though different terms are used like 'net generation' and 'millennials' to refer to this cohort, they are effectively variations of this notion of 'digital natives'.

Critics of the term 'digital natives' point out it's a problematic way of understanding young people's behaviour online. It's essentially a blanket term for a generation, and doesn't account for the enormous range of differences and complexities observed in how young people use the web today. Such behaviour can be affected by many kinds of factors, such as standard of living, parental support, interest in technology, etc. As research into the

[12] The digital native – myth and reality - Neil Selwyn - Institute of Education – University of London – 2009 http://www.scribd.com/doc/9775892/Digital-Native

[13] Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants -- A New Way To Look At Ourselves and Our Kids -- From On the Horizon (MCB University Press, Vol. 9 No. 5, October 2001) http://www.marcprensky.com/writing/Prensky%20-%20Digital%20Natives,%20Digital%20Immigrants%20-%20Part1.pdf

[14] "Born Digital: Understanding the First Generation of Digital Natives" by John Palfrey and Urs Gasser http://borndigitalbook.com/

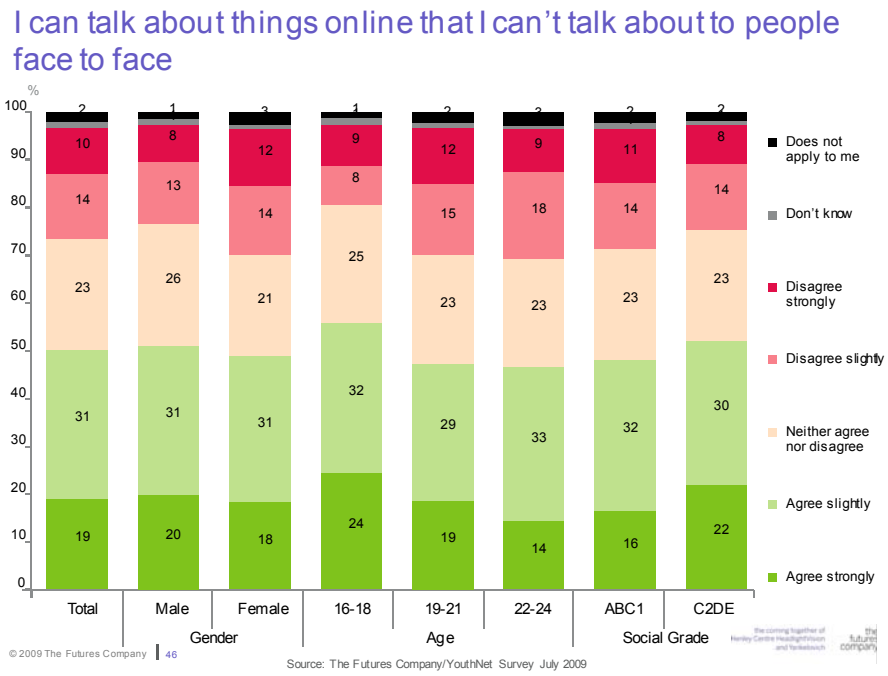
[15] Grown Up Digital by Don Tapscott http://dontapscott.com/books/grown-up-digital/

[16] Educating the Net Generation, edited by Diana G. Oblinger and James L. Oblinger http://www.educause.edu/educatingthenetgen

basis for the term 'digital natives' conducted in the UK about new students concluded: "The new generation of students show significant age related differences but the generation is not homogenous nor is it articulating a single clear set of demands".

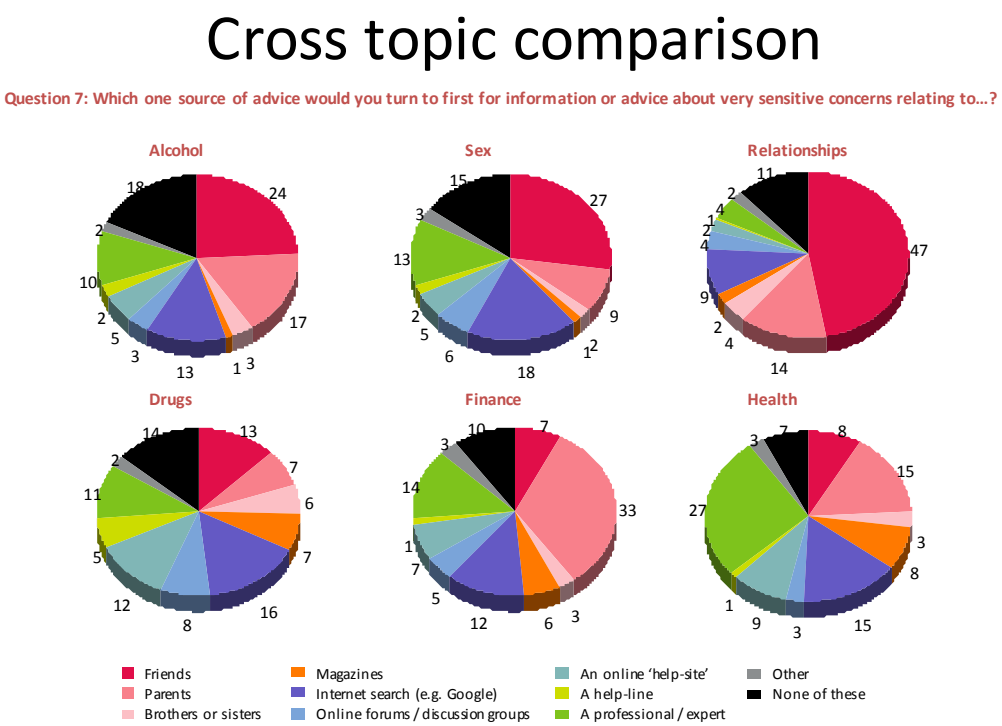
Another cautionary note often sounded is that the concept comes across as divisive, tending to draw an arbitrary line of separation between different generations, classifying the younger generation as 'digital natives' and the older generation as 'digital immigrants'. There's a paradox lying at the heart of this debate because it suggests that each person is fixed by their birth into one generation or another. It's a deterministic vision of society divided that ironically implores non-natives to change and act more like the natives do. As a result, it's an idea that runs the risk of overstating the gap between the generations.

Figure 5: Question asked as part of The Futures Company/YouthNet Survey 2009



When asked the question (figure 5) whether they were conscious of differences in how they behaved on and offline, it's interesting to look closely at the data. For instance, when YouthNet conducted its survey of 16-24 year olds in the UK it found a noticeable difference across the age categories. 16-18 year olds were the most likely to say that there were things they could talk about online, that they couldn't face-to-face (56%). While 22-24 year olds were the least likely age category to do so (47%). This kind of finding demonstrates the importance of looking at how young people of different ages behave online.

Figure 6: "Which one source of advice would you turn to first for information or advice about very sensitive concerns relating to… ?"; The Futures Company/YouthNet Survey 2009



In addition, it's important to take into account how young people behave online dependent on the kind of issue that's concerning them. For example, for issues regarding their relationships (see figure 6) young people are far more likely to turn to friends (47%) and then family (18%). Where as for finance issues, young people are more likely to turn to family, specifically parents (33%), rather than friends (7%) and a little more likely to try to access information via internet search, an online forum or help-site (24%). Issues such as sex (29%), health (27%), and drugs (36%) were issues where young people are more likely to use the web.

Educators, advice workers, youth workers and others despite often being of a different generation to those they support, can play a critical role teaching, mentoring and guiding young people on issues of online safety in information provision. They need to be wary of building their online safety practice based on a one-size-fits-all approach.

As Connect Safely argue:

> *"When people see themselves as community stakeholders – citizens – they behave as citizens because they tend to care about the well-being of the community itself and the individual and collective behaviours that affect it. So what psychologists call "social norming" happens – community members model good behaviours for each other, which is usually much more persuasive than rules or top-down efforts to*

> *control. Aggressive behaviour is mitigated when youth receive training in citizenship, ethics, empathy, and new media literacy in the process of using social media and technologies as participants in a community of learners, and the results are empowerment as well as safety"[17].*

Trained workers supporting young people shouldn't ignore the issue of online safety with young people on account of their technical expertise, perceived or otherwise. Instead, the effectiveness of safe online information strategies depends on building a sound understanding and relationship with the young people it aims to reach and their role and responsibility as digital citizens.

Mediated publics: the online environment

One of the biggest shifts that's taking place online is the concept of the mediated public space. It goes beyond a simplistic divide between private and public spheres of social behaviour. With the growth of the social web through spaces such as social networking sites, we've seen the increase in how new technology mediates contact between individuals. In other words, digital literacy is not just about access to online services and resources, it's what permits young people today to develop socially and as citizens.

As a result, our conception of digital citizenship is changing dramatically: how we should behave together; how we can avoid harming others; and, the new opportunities we have to support each other, are all part of this new mix.

What it means to be public and private in this new digitally networked world is changing rapidly. As danah boyd puts it, "we lack the language, social norms, and structures to handle it"[18]. boyd highlights four elements that together make these mediated publics radically different to offline social interactions:

- Persistence- what young people say and share can remain online indefinitely.
- Searchability- today's young people can be found in "their hangouts with the flick of a few keystrokes".
- Replicability- you can copy digital content perfectly which can lead to issues around authenticity and understanding the original context in which content was made.
- Invisible audiences- in mediated publics, "not only are lurkers invisible, but persistence, searchability, and replicability introduce audiences that were never present at the time the content was originally made".

[17] Jones, Chris; Ramanau, Ruslan; Cross, Simon and Healing, Graham (2010). Net generation or Digital Natives: Is there a distinct new generation entering university? Computers and Education, 54(3), pp. 722–732. http://oro.open.ac.uk/19890/2/8CECE8C9.pdf

[18] boyd, danah. 2007. "Social Network Sites: Public, Private, or What?" Knowledge Tree 13, May. http://kt.flexiblelearning.net.au/tkt2007/?page_id=28

Persistence, searchability, replicability and invisible audiences all serve to make mediated publics very different to the environments in which social interactions have taken place in before. In addition, John Suler adds the idea from psychology of the online disinhibition effect which influences the way young people behave online. He talks about ideas like:

- You Don't Know Me (dissociative anonymity)
- You Can't See Me (invisibility)
- See You Later (asynchronicity)
- It's All in My Head (solipsistic introjection)
- It's Just a Game (dissociative imagination)
- We're Equals (minimizing authority)[19]

These all become factors that mean young people naturally find it harder to judge the level of risk they are taking, and the potential benefit they may attain. Any approach to providing youth information safely therefore has to discuss and talk through with the young people concerned how they understand the mediated publics online they are present and active in. It's not possible to simply lay down the rules of safety because this online environment is new and emergent. Long lasting and effective online information provision needs to be built together with the young people through collaboration and discussion it intends to support.

Key aspects for providing quality youth information online safely

To understand digital citizenship and to build effective online safety strategies, we need to consider (these build on the elements of online safety 3.0 identified by Connect Safely[20]):

- Exploration of issues in digital citizenship needs to be relevant and engaging to the young people it's targeted at. This means reaching out and taking part in the spaces where young people are active online. It's about setting issues of online safety and information into a broader context that relates to the young person's life as a digital citizen.
- Young people are participants in the development of strategy by youth information workers to support them. Young people are agents of change and should be seen as part of the solution, not as part of the problem or as potential victims that just need protecting and controlling. For example, 'locking down' or filtering access to the web can disempower and thwart participation if used too heavy handedly.
- Helping young people to learn to use critical thinking as part of their digital literacy, is both about what they consume and produce on the web. Promoting a sense of digital citizenship is vital where young people can learn more about the significance and dynamics of the communities they're part of both on and offline.

[19] The Online Disinhibition Effect - Suler, J. (2004). CyberPsychology and Behavior, 7, 321-326 http://www-usr.rider.edu/~suler/psycyber/disinhibit.html

[20] Connect Safely - Online safety 3.0 - empowering and protecting youth http://www.connectsafely.org/Commentaries-Staff/online-safety-30-empowering-and-protecting-youth.html

- Safe youth information strategy needs to be balanced so that it includes the young person's behaviour both on and offline and looks at the range of risks and opportunities: content, contact and conduct appropriately.
- The web is an emergent social environment so it's important to factor in the concept of the mediated public and the common psychological influences on young people's behaviour online when looking at the development of young people's sense of social norms.
- Safe youth information online is a global issue affecting the provision of support and advice for young people on all kinds of different topics.
- Young people's familiarity with new technology as so-called 'digital natives' should not mean be confused with their need to be supported in how they approach the online safety of themselves and their peers.

Socializing, getting to know others, forming social bonds and learning about social norms are all key aspects of growing up. Understanding the social potential of the web is key to understanding how young people behave online and bridging the gap to maximise the opportunities and minimise the risks. It comes back to focusing on positive outcomes through engagement, rather than simply aiming to avoid risk through controlling young people's online behaviour.

In this the web is simply replicating what happens offline, if slightly altered through the mirror of persistence, searchability, replicability and contexts in flux. As such, we have to accept the questions that come with this new online territory. Ultimately, for safe online information messages and support to be effective, those working with young people must not lose sight of the fact that they are in an ongoing conversation about what it means to be a digital citizen in today's Europe.

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