

FACT SHEET 7

ACTIVE PARTICIPATION





ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND RISKS

Active online participation and the use of social networks allow users to have their own voice and to comment “in public” on certain issues. This immediate exposure may be gratifying to some and yet cause problems for others who do not follow mainstream views.

Social networks can provide broader influence on policy outcomes, and yet if an extremist viewpoint is taken up by the majority, either via a politician with a large social media following or because of targeted advertising on social media platforms, this may put democratic processes at risk.

Transparency and accountability may be sidestepped when active participation is led by trolls or others with negative online influence.



IDEAS FOR CLASSROOM WORK

Ask the students to examine a recent or current local election and follow the politicians and parties. Have them identify the negative and positive messages that were used in active online participation, and analyse the veracity of the messages.

Have students select a social media platform and analyse the motivations that push people to join that platform. Identify how users share content and data and how they otherwise engage with others in the community. Have students list some of the best practices and some of the behaviour to avoid. Get students to discuss whether they:

- ▶ always read every article they share;
- ▶ always read all other comments before posting theirs;
- ▶ bother reading all responses to their comments before responding again.

Online interactions are not easy to manage. It is akin to millions of people speaking at the same time and trying to listen to millions of articles and comments at the same time. This is why offline interactions and exchanges where people can share ideas and debate in a non-chaotic manner will remain important for the foreseeable future.

Pick up the newspaper of the day, whether online or in print format, and locate some of the top news items. Create a hashtag for those items, if one is not already associated with the story. Have the students search the hashtag across as many different platforms as possible. Ask students with second or third languages, to include the hashtag search in another language. Examine the different types and forms of expression and participation on the different platforms. What themes can be identified? What themes may be missing?

Read through the European Commission’s “Good practice in the youth field – Encouraging the participation of young people with fewer opportunities” (<http://bit.ly/2PrCsTL>). Ask students to list ways that they can improve participation in their youth communities.



GOOD PRACTICE/LIVING DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

■ The informed and active participation of all citizens in the digital environment depends on the development of digital citizenship skills. With the widespread use of the internet, and the ease at which people in different communities can access information, active participation is linked closely to the respect of digital rights and responsibilities and digital citizenship, in general.

■ Determine whether students or the local community has a cause that needs support. Once the theme is decided, have the students research crowdfunding and the best ways to raise donations for a charitable cause or event. The final project should be a crowdsourcing plan that could be viable for that cause or event.

■ Consider looking at the Academy of Central European Schools projects and schools: <https://keep.eu/projects/17532/Academy-of-Central-European-EN/>. Discuss which projects provide the biggest chance for active participation by the students. Invite the students to create their own project for their school or submit a project to ACES.



FURTHER INFORMATION

■ The Council of Europe has materials relevant to this fact sheet in the Internet literacy handbook; please see ILH [Fact sheet 1](#), “Getting connected”; [Fact sheet 10](#), “Searching for information”; and [Fact sheet 11](#), “Finding quality information on the Web”.

■ Council of Europe, Human Rights for Internet Users, available at: www.coe.int/en/web/internet-users-rights/guide.

■ EU Youth Manifesto Youth Manifesto is an online “declaration” by European youth on how to participate and make the internet better: <http://paneuyouth.eu/2015/07/24/youth-manifesto-publication/>.

■ The EU Youth Strategy is available at: https://ec.europa.eu/youth/policy/youth-strategy/civil-society_en.