

Chapter 9

The Roles of Digital Literacy in Social Life of Youth

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ABSTRACT

This chapter contains findings related to social aspects of digital activities of youth. Computers, mobile devices, and the internet are increasingly used in everyday social practices of youth, requiring competencies that are largely still not being taught in schools. To thrive in the digital era, youth need to competently use digital tools and define, access, understand, evaluate, create, and communicate digital information. Being able to develop perceptions of, and respect for, social norms and values for functioning in the digital world, without compromising one's own privacy, safety, or integrity is also important. After addressing the social prospects of information and communication technology (ICT) use among youth, this chapter describes their online behavior through the paradoxical nature of the internet (i.e., providing opportunities for social development vs. introducing risks). Educators and youth services are advised to consider these factors in designing flexible, innovative, and inclusive programs for young people that use ICT.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains updated findings related to social aspects of digital activities of youth (Martinovic, Freiman, Lekule, & Yang, 2014). Computers, mobile devices, and the Internet are increasingly used in everyday social practices of youth. Recent statistics reveal that in September 2015, there were 1.01 billion daily active users and on average 894 million mobile daily active users of Facebook (Facebook, 2015). To be successful in school, work, and in socializing, youth need to competently use digital tools and define, access, understand, create, and communicate digital information. Being able to evaluate digital information, develop perceptions of, and respect for, social norms and values for functioning in the digital world, without compromising one's own privacy, safety, or integrity is also important. The competencies and skills that new generations require to be successful in the digital era are largely still not being taught in schools. Results of this chapter will provide the following:

- Address the social prospects of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) use among youth;
- Describe the online behavior of young people through the paradoxical nature of the Internet that provides opportunities for social development but introduces risks;
- Inform educators and youth services about which factors to consider in designing flexible, innovative, and inclusive programs for young people to enable them to successfully function in the era of the Internet, new media, and computer technologies.

BACKGROUND

In the past 15 years or so, ICTs became increasingly accessible in most countries. The ICTs like personal computers, cell phones, and the Internet can be used for both in-school and out-of-school activities, and are particularly suitable for connecting individuals and communities globally (Beetham, McGill, & Littlejohn, 2009). Using these tools appropriately so that one can live, learn, and work in a digital society, is broadly defined as being digitally literate (Beetham, 2010). However, by and large, these competencies and skills are not being taught in schools (Martinovic, Freiman, & Karadag, 2011). For example, Jenkins (2006) finds that youth are not taught how to participate in social online practices (e.g., in information sharing and collaboration) despite dangers for unskilled users, whereas some authors (Martinovic & Magliaro, 2007; Noveck, 2000) emphasize importance of understanding a paradoxical nature of the Internet, where one can be confronted with limitless information, while obtaining less knowledge; where access is relatively cheap, but the environment is increasingly commercialized; and where communities do form, but atomization prevails.

Livingstone (2008) describes the dichotomy of optimistic and pessimistic opinions coming from academics and media on how ICTs affect young people:

- Optimists emphasize the new opportunities for self-expression, sociability, community engagement, creativity, and new literacies. They envision change in social dynamics, with youth involvement in the co-creation of innovative and counter-consumerist cultures both locally and globally. Public policy makers and educators see opportunities for engagement in collaborative learning

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