

Chapter 12

Predicting the Participation in Information Society

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ABSTRACT

The approach in this chapter is to recognize what is said to be important regarding the feeling of participation in the information society. The perceived feeling of participation is assumed to be an important indicator for young people's online experiences. In previous research, digital skills and other related concepts such as self-efficacy and a relationship with technology are shown to be important in order to be able to participate in the information society. In this case, there is an exploration into the amount that social factors, digital skills, self-efficacy and a relationship with technology are able to explain the variance in perceived feelings regarding participation. It has been determined that education, self-efficacy, instrumental computer skills, information skills and strategic skills can explain 22 percent of the variance in the perceived feeling of participation. This implies that young people themselves might define other factors as being more important with regards to participation in the information society.

INTRODUCTION

15 years have passed since the start of use of the internet within Swedish society (Findahl, 2009). At the outset, only a few, technologically interested people, engaged with the internet. As time has passed more and more people have adopted

it and today 83 percent of Swedish people use it. The majority (85 percent) of those who do not use the internet are 60 or over (Findahl, 2009). Because the internet has become highly adopted in the industrialized part of the world, the focus has shifted from the classical 'digital divide' in explaining the divide between those who have and those who do not have access to the internet to a more explorative focus on social divides (Peter

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60960-206-2.ch012

& Valkenburg, 2006). With respect to the digital divide, the importance of digital literacy has been discussed where an attempt has been made to explain what it is that is important to know regarding the use of information and communication technology in order to not become disadvantaged within the information society (Hargittai, 2005; Livingstone, Bober, & Helsper, 2005; Van Dijk & Hacker, 2003). As stated previously, it is the elderly people in Sweden who pose the highest risk of not being a part of the information society. Young people's involvement in the information society is on the other hand taken for granted since very few are non-users. However, in the case of digital literacy, previous studies have shown that it is not necessarily the young who have the highest digital skills (Duimel & deHaan, 2009). In accordance with Duimel & de Haan (2009), some of the results from my previous study have indicated that young people (12-16 years) tend to rate their competence in using computers as fairly or very high which does not entirely correspond to the rates scored in the so called internet skills (Zimic, 2009). I had come to the conclusion that it was probable that it had not proved possible to measure their skills in using the internet. Often, when measuring digital skills, the focus lies on the "instrumental skills" – what people know in relation to operating hardware and software when using both the internet and a computer. The question then becomes what skills are expected from people in order to participate in the information society? In this chapter the concept of digital skills by van Dijk and Hacker (2003) has been used because they measured different levels of skills which are defined to be important in order to participate in the information society. The questions representing the different digital skills in this chapter are not identical to the original model for digital skills (van Deursen & van Dijk, 2009; Van Dijk & Hacker, 2003) so they can be viewed more as indicators of digital skills rather than the actual skills. The questions are used as an inspiration to

explore young people's perceived feeling of participation in order to answer the general research questions – 1) which skills do young people think are important for participation? and 2) who are those at risk of being disadvantaged because of the lack of skills?

The aim is not to explain how young people participate online but the focus is rather on young people's perceived feelings of participation within the information society. It provides us with important information concerning young people's online experience and what participation in the information society could mean to them because the feeling of participation is assumed to be consensually related to actual participation. Peoples' perceived participation affects how much they actually participate online and the actual participation affects how they perceive their participation. It is important to investigate how young people perceive their feelings of participation because there are many stereotypical images regarding young people's internet usage (Tapscott, 1998; Tapscott & Dawsonera, 2009). Being active online does not however necessarily have to mean participating in a way that is expected of citizens in the information society. In accordance with other studies which have critically explored the notion of 'Net geners' (S. Bennett, Maton, & Kervin, 2008; Cheong, 2008; Facer & Furlong, 2001; Livingstone & Helsper, 2007; Sherry & Fielden, 2005) this study explores what is said to be important for participation online by placing the focus on the perspective of young people. The approach is to recognize what is said to be important regarding being a part of the information society by linking the social factors, digital skills, self-efficacy in using computers and attitude towards using new technology (relation with technology) in order to explore how much they affect the feeling of participation in the information society.

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