Exploring the effect of digital technologies on youth

EU-backed researchers have published a working paper on digital technology use across Europe. The paper reviews these technologies’ consequences on young people and their families.

Today’s children and teens increasingly connect with the world around them through their mobile devices. But what do they use these devices for, and how do the ongoing technological changes influence their everyday lives? Seeking to answer these questions, the EU-funded DigiGen project has published a working paper titled ICT usage across Europe – a literature review and an overview of existing data on information and communications technology (ICT) usage in Europe.

The paper has two main parts. The first section is a literature review focusing on digital technology use and its effect on family life, leisure time, education and civic participation. The second part provides an overview of databases related to ICTs and summarises the main strengths and weaknesses of the available data for analysing at-risk groups amongst children and young people.

Review on digital technology and its effect on individuals and families
The ways that families engage with ICTs, and the consequences of this engagement, are complex, according to the paper. While digital technologies offer unique opportunities, they can also give rise to online risks and challenges, such as exposure to harmful content or the infringement of privacy. “Hence, whether the overall impact on family life is positive or negative highly depends on the combination of digital behaviours families implement in their daily lives,” the authors explain.

Today, social media, gaming and other forms of digital communication play a big part in children and young people’s leisure time. There is a growing body of literature in this field, with interest focused on parents’ attitudes and responsiveness to ICT-related risks and the possible negative effects of ICT use on the well-being of children and teens.

The review also summarises the findings of previous literature on ICT use in schools and for educational purposes. The conclusion reached is that further research is needed “to determine the causal link between students’ socio-economic background or teachers’ digital preparedness and students’ level of digital competence.” In addition, studies to date have been inconclusive regarding aspects such as how gender may affect students’ computer skill levels.

ICT usage has further been found to increase young people’s civic participation and awareness of social issues, despite their decreasing engagement in mainstream politics. As explained in the paper, social media affects young people’s “norms, values, attitudes, and behaviours regarding democracy, power, politics, policymaking, social and political participation, both online and offline, and the organisation of economic, social and private life.”

**Overview of current ICT data**

The second section reviews 11 international databases and 45 national databases in the project partners’ countries. The data’s strengths and weaknesses are highlighted in terms of the availability and type of indicators and the lack of information on certain at-risk groups. Also discussed are topics that aren’t well covered by the data, the large heterogeneity in national databases and the fact that not all databases on ICT are open access.

Using the information gathered, the DigiGen working paper shows those aspects of digital technology use that require further research and gives recommendations that could improve future empirical analysis on ICT. The project ends in November 2022.

For more information, please see: [DigiGen project website](#)
Keywords
DigiGen, ICT, digital technology, young people, teens, children, youth

Related projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROJECT</th>
<th>DigiGen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="HORIZON 2020" /></td>
<td>THE IMPACT OF TECHNOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATIONS ON THE DIGITAL GENERATION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 August 2021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Related articles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NEWS</th>
<th>SCIENTIFIC ADVANCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Image" /></td>
<td>Bypassing age verification measures on social media apps is easy as pie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 February 2021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Last update: 10 November 2020
Record number: 423100


© European Union, 2021