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Civic Web

European Union, Framework 6



Young People, the Internet and Civic Participation

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Funder

European Union, Framework
6

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Turkey

FOCUS

The potential contribution of the internet to promoting civic and political participation among young people (15-25).

- 'Civic' sites produced by government, NGOs, activist groups, social networks, individuals... locally, nationally and internationally.

- The Producers and Users of these sites



Context

European Union, Framework 6

- The 'democratic deficit' - young people's apathy about politics and civil society...or new forms of politics and civic engagement?
- Re-engaging youth: providing different opportunities to participate in public life.
- The potential of new media: 'networked citizenship' or just cyber-hype? *The role of websites in civic/political organisations*
- How does online participation relate to offline participation - and what *counts* as 'civic participation' in the first place? *Clicking on an online petition or poll? Liberating animals from testing labs? Voting in elections? Is rightwing activism civic?*

METHODS

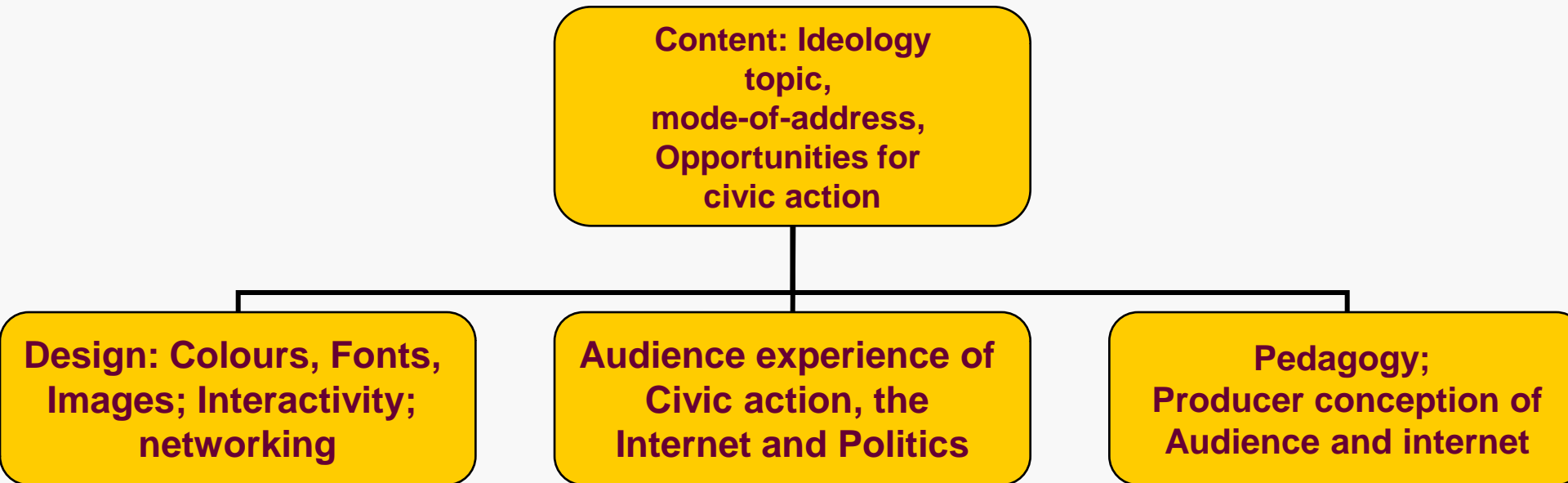
Overlapping User Surveys of 15-25 age (approx. 400 users per country) and Focus Groups (approx. 50 participants per country, 2-4 hours each)

Producer Interviews (12-15 in-depth per country, 1-4 hours each)

Textual analysis: national surveys (80 sites per country) and in-depth case-studies of youth oriented civic websites (6-8 per country)

- Qualitative situated discourse analysis of the interview data**
- Multimodal semiotic analysis of websites**
- Contextualised analysis of statistical findings**
- Nationally situated accounts of civic traditions and political histories**

Theories explored through a triangular approach



Common-sense assumptions about young people, politics and the internet?

- ‘Despite active interest in and engagement with a variety of issues, many **young people are “turned off” to adult politics** by dislike of party structures, the style of debate, and the formality of communication. Nevertheless, studies of how **young people** use media (e.g., Livingstone & Bovill, 1999) show that they **have very broad media literacy.**’
- ‘The U.K. government’s consultation paper on a policy for electronic democracy (United Kingdom Cabinet Office, 2002) stresses the need to better engage young people and highlights that **more than 80% of 16- to 24-year-olds have accessed the Internet at sometime.** There is an opportunity to build on young people’s generally strong uptake of the Internet as a medium for entertainment and learning and **use this as a lever for democratic involvement.**’

(Macintosh et al, 2003: 44-45)

Put two dissimilar people or objects next to each other... something will surely rub off...

Three strands of thought about civic spaces for youth online (and their failure to engage)

- In principle young people love the internet but the poor design of civic spaces online is off-putting – so include youth in the design process (for instance, Macintosh et al, 2003)
- Young people love web 2.0 social networking etc but un-interactive tools on civic websites don't have the same pull as online games etc. ergo – more interactive tools equals more civic engagement (for instance, Montgomery and Gotleib-Robbles, 2006)
- Young people do amazing, creative things with the internet and digital culture when uncensored and fully funded - but too 'thin' democracy in civic organisations puts them off: ergo government funded, uncensored, creative, adventurous, horizontal and vertical communicative spaces needed (for instance, Coleman, 2008)

UK Youth Civic Sites

Our Civicweb survey found that out of **10** interactive tools on youth civic sites (blogs, wikis, forums, share-it, write stories, pod-casts, real-time chat, video-upload, post comments, make avatars etc.) most civic websites in the UK sample of 80, have an average of 2.8 such tools **and many have fewer.**



BUT - would having all these tools on all the sites increase sustained civic participation by youth substantially?

Unicef Youth Voice

YOUTHVOICE unicef

Home About us Latest news Rights Reality check Do something Play

LATEST NEWS

Gwyneth stars in UNICEF video for Mother's Day

JUNIOR 8
What would you say to world leaders about global issues? Enter the JS competition for a chance to take your ideas to the G8 Summit in Japan.

BUZZ OFF
The Buzz Off Art Contest

Tell Mosquito alarms to BUZZ OFF!

SHOWCOMOTION
Young People's Film Festival

Youth Voice teams up with Showcomotion festival

DO SOMETHING

Support UNICEF's Unite for Children, Unite Against AIDS campaign.

VOLUNTEER WITH US

Want to make your voice heard? Become a UNICEF UK Youth

Get yourself to Geneva competition

TAKE ACTION

Lend a hand to help babies be **BORN FREE**.

Check out the **new-look play section!**

Young mums: A look at the Women's Centre.

Join Youth Voice

Search

Jargon Buster

Contact us

UNICEF Youth Voice provides a platform for children and young people, who want to create a world fit for children. Youth Voice is a chance for children and young people to speak up for children who don't have the chance to speak up for themselves. Any view or opinion expressed on these pages is not necessarily that of UNICEF. In order to represent a genuine expression of children's views and experiences, UNICEF does not seek to influence the content of any quiet, real-life stories or articles which come directly from children or young people.

Pictures, photo-diaries, some video, information packs, a few games, two volunteers and three parttime in youth team, justifies funding to parent organisation

Appeals to generalised sense of 'youth' solidarity, wish for 'empowerment'; timeless fight against poverty, notions of global citizenship, wish to 'make the world better' and fight for the rights of others

Speaks with the consistent, quasi-institutional voice of Global British charity, but in a hip, friendly, inviting style – actions constrained by parent organisation ethos

Muslim youth.net

muslimyouth.net

HOME GUIDANCE COMMUNITY
CAMPAIGN INTERNET COUNSELLING
EVENTS SUPPORT SERVICES

Wednesday 18 April 2008 Username Password Forgot? Register Now Search

GUIDANCEZONE

Fear and Loathing...
Addictive
Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream is a novel by Hunter S. Thompson, who was a journalist.

In loving memory of Zubair
Paranormalist
Reading with one common goal

Media Manipulation
Culture, Heritage and Society
Media Manipulation: A Guide to the Media

Reelhood - What's it all about??
Citizenship and Identity
Introducing the new campaign

Seeking 'Redemption'
Culture, Heritage and Society
Seeking 'Redemption': A Journey to the Heart of the American Dream

The First Lady of Hip Hop
Culture, Heritage and Society
Introducing the new campaign

Crisis Open Christmas 2007
Citizenship and Identity
How can we all succeed with Crisis at Christmas

OVER 2000 DAYS OF INJUSTICE!
Citizenship and Identity
Over 2000 Days of Injustice: A Journey to the Heart of the American Dream

Beat Bullying
Discrimination and Bullying
Beat Bullying: A Journey to the Heart of the American Dream

CAMPAIGNZONE

Meet the Rainbow Collective
Rainbow Collective
Meet the Rainbow Collective: A Journey to the Heart of the American Dream

What it means to be me...
One young Muslim's story of how he found his faith and how you can too!

Issues facing Muslim Youth
Agree? Disagree? Let us know!

Rights - An International perspective
Losing children's rights across the globe

COMMUNITYZONE

THE COMPETITION
Win a signed copy of 'Unimagined' by Imran Ahmad
Read on for how to win a signed copy of this funny and engaging read about a young British Muslim coming of age...

THE POLL
Would you ever donate organs?
• Never, I would like to be buried whole as I was born.
• Maybe, if I knew it could go to a family member or friend.
• Definitely I would like to use myself to ease somebody else's suffering.

NEWS

Spain dig yields ancient European
Scientists have discovered the oldest human remains in Western Europe. [Read More](#)

Heathrow's T5 open to passengers
Heathrow's new Terminal 5 has opened to the public as British Airways begins operating from the building. [Read More](#)

Banned Indian group's leader held
Police in the Indian state of Madhya Pradesh have arrested the leader of the banned militant group Students' Islamic Movement of India (SIm). [Read More](#)

Obama a distant cousin of Bush

- Forums, discussion boards, chat-rooms, user generated articles, 70 dedicated volunteers, user-moderators, small youth team, searches for funding each year

- Appeals to the personal social concerns of a specific segment of the population at a specific historical moment when western mass media have assumed some commonality between them; complicates mass media discourses, challenges community rhetoric

- speaks with multiple contradictory voices, some conservative, some liberal, some radical, some secular-cultural, some religious, mostly youth but some adult, some humorous, some serious, some angry, some moderate

An example of case-study findings

MuslimYouth.net

- appeals to audience via a long-term emotional investment in debating their own community, identity and social issues.
- **The emotion/politics of the site grow organically out of the concerns of users;**
- multiple and sustained opportunities for volunteering in offline and online civic action and debate
- **Users are motivated by**
- **seeing their ideas on screen, getting responses, being allowed to swear and write in own style and express own politics/concerns without censorship or fear of reprisal; also by being invited to volunteer on the site or helpline for young Muslims, getting training, meeting other young people from diverse backgrounds, etc.**

Unicef Youth Voice

appeals to its audience via 'quick', child-friendly and easily understood images, visual links, videos of its work, games, a few opportunities for one-off offline participation and volunteering

The generalised sense of injustice, empowerment, citizenship does not seem to motivate sustained, long-term participation

except where users are already engaged and/or wishful of having a career in charities/NGO sector. The team hopes to address this.

General findings

- Most young people are not drawn to **civic websites** just because they have interactive features or social networking features. Simple websites can be seen as ‘fit to purpose’ if the subject-matter is appealing via key **local/global issues** or **identity issues**.
- Users of civic youth sites are **motivated** by a complex mixture of **historical, social, interactive, technological, discursive, pedagogic and ideological features**
- **more democratic spaces** usually need more sustained and creative and time input from producer organisations – on or offline – hence **sustained funding**, which is often not available or factored in

Selected Conclusions

- If the content of a civic space online does not appeal to young people then the expectation that technology will keep them coming back to a site is misplaced. **Civic discussions often take place on websites which are not explicitly civic (music/games/football)**
- **Offline and Online are connected:** Young People are interested in being addressed with **respect** in tone, content, design and **opportunities** (but no compulsion) for sustained contribution online but also offline.
- **Active citizenship online needs to be satisfying** both emotionally and intellectually otherwise young people or adults are likely to disengage: one of the key motivating factors is ***who is listening when one participates and the kind of response one gets***

I leave you with a question from a 20 year old woman in Manchester UK:

‘Do governments in Europe, and the EU really want young people to become active critical citizens, publicly questioning the news on television, jamming university websites to protest against fees, demonstrating in the streets for Iraqi rights or chaining ourselves to airfield barriers to protest global warming?

Or do they just want “good little citizens” who go to school everyday and then take any work that’s offered us, however dull, without complaint? Do they want us to think - “we have the vote - there’s nothing more we can ask of democracy?” Please, ask them!

THANK YOU FOR LISTENING!