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2016-05

Granholm , C 2016 , ' Blended Lives : ICT Talk among Vulnerable Young People in Finland ' , Young , vol. 24 , no. 2 , pp. 85-101 . <https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308815613188>

<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/231818>

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1103308815613188>

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Blended Lives: ICT talk among vulnerable young people in Finland

Camilla Granholm

Abstract

This article presents a qualitative study of ICT use among Finnish young people attending training programs for youth outside employment and education. The data comes from six focus group interviews and three individual interviews, as well as a single focus group interview with involved supervisors. The data was analyzed using McQuail's (1983) theory regarding the motives for individual media use. The results show that the young people use ICT primarily for entertainment, but their use is diverse. Young people choose the tools and dimensions for interaction that best fulfills their needs, blending together ingredients from both online and offline sources. Unlike previous research, young people in this study stated that they prefer talking to someone face-to-face about severe (health-related or emotional) problems. If social and youth services want to meet young people on their own terms both online and offline services are needed.

Key words: ICT use, young people, outside employment and education, entertainment, social media

Introduction

Smartphones and tablet computers have made the internet available everywhere. We spend more time online and mix together ingredients from both the online and offline. We move between these two dimensions and are often simultaneously present in both (Stald 2008). We are in fact, living blended lives (e.g. life-mix in Turkle 2011, 157-162).

Mobile communication and internet use are especially important for young people. In Finland, 89% of young people aged 16-24 use the internet several times a day, and among young adults aged 25-34 this rises to 90% (Official Statistics of Finland 2014). Smartphones are common among young

Finns and 80% of youth aged 16-24 and 81% of young adults aged 25-34 use a smartphone (Official Statistics of Finland 2013). Mobile communication is connected with belonging to certain social communities, to the construction of social identity, and to self-representation in relation to others (Oksama and Turtiainen 2004).

Some researchers stress the positive effects of this ICT-development, claiming that the generation born and raised with computers, mobile phones and the internet has developed an inherent confidence in using and applying new technologies and devices (Prensky 2001; Tapscott 1998). Others underline the potential dangers and threats to young peoples' safety and wellbeing that new technologies may present (Livingstone et al. 2011; Carr 2011). In an Australian literature review, Collin et al. (2011) claim that both research and media have in recent years over-emphasized the challenges and risks ICT can pose for young people. The review concludes that by focusing more on the benefits ICT may offer youth, some of the challenges may be overcome.

This article presents a qualitative study of ICT use among a group of young people outside employment and education, participating in two training programs in the Helsinki area of Finland. The study was conducted in co-operation with the professional supervisors for the training programs. During initial discussions about the research and later in group interviews, supervisors expressed a severe concern regarding the use of ICT among their young clients. The supervisors perceived this ICT use as excessive and entertainment-oriented. The main aim of this study is therefore to give voice to the young, and examine how they use ICT and what kind of needs does their ICT use fulfill? The results of the study are summarized as implications for practice in youth and social work, and also for research among marginalized young people.

ICT use among vulnerable and marginalized young people

In the Nordic countries, education is considered as one of the key components in building an equal and inclusive society (Arnesen & Lundahl 2006). Education plays a crucial role in adolescents' lives and their orientation to the future (Lindfors et al. 2012). Young people who are outside employment and education can be considered as falling into a "participation gap", as they are not involved in the activities in which their peers in general are (Cranmer 2010), and this implies a risk of exclusion.

In contemporary societies, the internet is significant for social inclusion (e.g. Steyaert and Gould 2009; Van Deursen et al. 2015). According to recent research, education seems to be one of the most determining factors affecting internet and ICT literacy (van Deursen et al, 2011; 2015). This means that (young) people without education are at risk of further exclusion if they lack the skills to fully participate in virtual discussions and make use of virtual services compared to their educated peers. Besides education, different institutional and society-level structures which frame young peoples' lives affect the way youth explores the internet. Recent research (Liu 2011) on the ICT use among Chinese youth shows that young people in China use the internet almost exclusively for entertainment, either as a toy or as a virtual world to provide an escape from life off-line. Using media in an escapist way is common among youth all over the world. Young people use media for viewing images of people's lives both similar to and different from their own. This can be interpreted as escapism, but can also be understood as a means of identity formation (Cranmer 2010; Lim et al. 2013; Oksama and Turtiainen 2004; Sihvonen 2015).

Media use among young people is heterogeneous and there are youth who choose to live without media (Barbosa Neves et al. 2015; Westlund and Bjur 2014). Research on ICT use by vulnerable and marginalized groups of young people shows that ICT use by these youths is, as with youths in general, diverse (Campos and Simões 2014; Cranmer 2010). In her study of thirteen 12-15 year olds who had been temporarily or permanently excluded from school, Cranmer (2010) found that these young people used ICT - like their peers attending school - for entertainment and keeping in touch with friends and people close to them,. Some participants in the study also sought online support in difficult situations such as illness, personal loss or family breakdown. In a study on juvenile delinquents and youths-at-risk aged 13-18, Lim et al. (2013) found that Facebook was an important tool for socializing with peers among youth placed under curfew. The respondents in the research emphasized the importance of peer support and affirmation. Some youth engaged in promoting and seeking endorsement for their illegal activities, whilst others actively avoided engaging with their formal criminal friends online.

Recent research among young people in the US who suffer from mental health problems shows that seeking information online, for example on medication and diagnosis is common. Such information was used to be better prepared for mental health visits. According to the research, young people with mental health problems use the internet to commune with others suffering from the same kinds of difficulties (Gowen 2013.) However, in a study on ICT use among Norwegian disabled youth, Söderström (2009) found that unlike the youth with mental health problems, the participants in her

study did not seek social support from online groups or disability-related networks and stressed features other than disability in their online interactions with peers. ICT was utilized to ease feelings of loneliness, to escape their identification as disabled, and to interact and display an identity as an ordinary youth. So, young people in vulnerable positions due to mental or physical problems can be seen to use ICT for finding information that helps explain their current situation, and also to seek acceptance and community with peers or youth in general.

Social categories such as ethnicity, gender and class may also cause a risk of being marginalized. These categories not only influence access to technology, but also affect how it is used. Wildermuth and Dalsgaard (2006) explored media use among youth in Recife, Brazil. They found that due to a lower education level and cultural socialization, lower-class youth are less critical and not able to exploit media in the same manner as their more-privileged peers. For disadvantaged youth, media was merely a window through which they could peek into the lives of ordinary young people and a way of escaping everyday problems. In a study by Campos and Simões (2014), for Portuguese Afro-descendant youth engaged in rap music, ICT was seen as much more than a tool for escaping everyday life. By creating and sharing digital content, these young people used ICT as a tool for empowerment and participation. Thus, socially-marginalized youth engaged in specific cultural circuits may benefit from ICT use differently than socially disadvantaged youth in general, underlining the fact that ICT use amongst vulnerable youth is divergent.

Previous research shows that ICT offers vulnerable young people information and social support that can enhance their ability to cope with their difficulties in life. ICT can also function as an arena for socializing and social integration, and for reflecting on their identities both in relation to peers in similar situations and to peers living under ordinary circumstances.

My research contributes a Finnish perspective to research regarding ICT use among vulnerable youth. Finnish young people outside education and employment have been the subject of previous research as they are considered at risk of becoming economically and socially marginalized (Rinne and Järvinen 2011; Vanttaja and Järvinen 2006). Nevertheless, there is a lack of research considering the use of ICT and digital inclusion among this group. Finland is a country with a high rate of internet access among young people, and it is therefore important to study how this group of young people who experience an offline participation gap make use of and engage through ICT.

Uses and gratification as tools for analysis

The review of research on media use among youth presented above, indicates that young people are independent actors making their own choices considering which available media they use, and how. Some even chose not to use media at all, therefore I decided to adopt a uses and gratification approach as a tool for the analysis of the data in this study. The theory suggests that users actively choose to use media which satisfies their personal needs and wishes, or fulfills other individual motives (Blumler and Katz 1974). In their presentation of the action/motivation perspective of uses and gratification theory, McQuail and Gurevitch (1974, 295) emphasize the importance of “adopting a general scientific open-mindedness” when studying the motives behind media use. They also stress that media users “act of free choice” in order to gain some benefits, or “to be or do what he wishes”. The supervisors of the training programs in this study claimed that their young clients used media (ICT) mostly for entertainment. Regardless of this, I wanted to explore how the young themselves perceive and talk about their motives for media use. According to McQuail’s typology of individual motives for media use (1983), the four main motives for using media and communication technologies are: (1) information, (2) personal identity, (3) entertainment, and (4) integration and social interaction (Table 1). McQuail includes entertainment as one of the main motives for individual media use and therefore I chose this specific typology as a framework for my analysis, where my aim was to specifically explore my respondents’ entertainment oriented media use, among other usage types.

Table 1 The main motives for using media and communication technologies

Information

- Finding out about immediate surroundings, society and the world
- Seeking advice on practical matters
- Satisfying curiosity
- Learning

Personal Identity

- Reinforcement of personal values
- Finding models of behavior
- Identifying with valued others
- Gaining insight into oneself

Integration and Social Interaction

- Gaining insight into the circumstances of others
- Gaining sense of belonging
- Finding basis for conversation
- Substitute for real-life companionship
- Connection with family, friends and society

Entertainment

- Escaping from problems
- Relaxation
- Cultural and aesthetic enjoyment
- Filling time
- Emotional release
- Sexual arousal

Source: Kilian, Hennigs and Langner (2012) referring to McQuail (1993) and Meyen (2004)

The research setting

I collected the data in two training programs for young people aged 16-26, who were outside education and employment in the Helsinki area (Helsinki, Espoo, Vantaa, Kauniainen and Kirkkonummi). The research was planned and conducted in co-operation with the supervisors for the programs, and with the consent of the programs' managing director. The professional supervisors for the programs have degrees in education and social sciences, and had previous experience of working with young people in schools as either special education teachers or counselors.

The first training program offers low-threshold activities, four days a week, from 10 am to 2 pm. Participation in the program is optional, and the purpose is to offer social support and meaningful daytime activities for youth who have dropped out of school or working life. Some of the participants in this program are outside employment and education due to health or mental health problems, and others lack motivation or social skills. The program aims to enhance their basic everyday skills and emphasizes social skills. Underlining the focus on social skills, the two professional supervisors for the program are called 'social coaches'. The young people attending the program survive either on social benefits or have no income at all.

The second program is considered as a labor market policy measure, and participants are entitled to unemployment benefits when participating in the activities five days per week. Although the young people attending this program also experience difficulties in life, they are already planning their next steps and are actively looking for a study place or a job. The two professionals supervising this program are a qualified teacher and a social worker, and are called 'job coaches'.

I started each interview by informing and reminding the participants about the purpose of my research and how the data was going to be used and analyzed. Each participant was asked for written consent. The program supervisors made a few requests about the conduct of the interviews, one of which was not to touch upon the participants' personal problems. This request had a certain impact on the topics that could be discussed. Other requests concerned specific topics the

supervisors wanted to include in the interviews, for example questions about internet addiction and online bullying.

The names in the excerpts are fabricated. Specific places or people mentioned by the youth are left out to protect the anonymity of participants.

The respondents

The interviews were carried out as part of the daily activities during the programs. The group configuration varied according to which of the young people were present when the interviews took place. Eleven¹ young people aged 18-26 participated in the interviews - seven females and four males. A group interview was also conducted with the four supervisors. Table 2 gives more information on interview participation.

Table 2 The data collection.

	Group interview 1	Group interview 2	Group interview 3	Individual interviews
Training program 1	5 women, 1 man	4 women, 2 men	4 women, 1 man	2 women, 1 man
Training program 2	1 woman, 2 men	1 woman, 1 man	2 women, 1 man	
Supervisors	2 women, 2 men			

Eleven (11) young adults and four (4) supervisors were interviewed, in the constellations presented above.

All of the participants had finished a compulsory nine years of primary education. None of the participants were currently in education, and had either never started or dropped out of further education.

Interviews

The data was collected in January-April 2014. Three separate interview sessions were conducted with the youth present at each training program. I expected that the young people who were close in age would inspire and encourage each other to discuss different perspectives of their ICT use, and therefore I decided to interview them in a group setting (Tracy 2013, 167). As Tracy (2013, 173)

points out, group interviews are hard to plan and it is not easy to predict the behaviors of participants. In this study, the participants were less talkative and some stayed silent during the sessions, even when addressed directly. To enrich the data, three of the participants were interviewed individually. The supervisors of the training programs asked for volunteers for individual interviews, and two women and one man ended up as respondents. The four supervisors of the programs were interviewed as a separate group, one time only.

The first interview session focused on the history of ICT use, and we discussed the use of ICT in the participants' childhood and early youth. The participants drew a timeline noting ICT related events such as when they got their first mobile phone, their first e-mail address and first computer. I used these timelines to clarify what was said during the interviews when analyzing the data. In the second session we discussed the daily use of ICT; how much time was spent online and the purpose of the ICT use— e.g. for entertainment or for performing everyday tasks. The third session focused on the future. In this discussion, themes like difficult situations in life and the opportunities and threats associated with ICT use were touched upon. We also discussed what life would be like without the internet. The aim of conducting the interviews in three different sessions (each focusing on ICT use at different points in the participants' lives), was to give participants a chance to reflect on the developments in ICT that had occurred during their lifetime. It involved making them reflect on these developments in general and on how they had affected their individual ICT use over time, extending even to consider the use and meaning they saw for ICT in the future. The group interviews ended up taking between 40-70 minutes, and individual interviews took about 20 minutes each. I recorded the group interviews on video and audiotaped the individual interviews. I transcribed the interviews, ending up with 99 pages of text data in total.

Findings

The data was analyzed using qualitative content analysis (Tuomi & Sarajärvi 2011). The data was first coded, focusing on what youth themselves had said about how and for what purposes they used ICT. The codes were then merged and divided into four categories according to McQuail's (1983) typology. The results of the study are presented below, divided into four sections: (1) information, (2) personal identity, (3) entertainment, and (4) integration and social interaction. The analysis of the interviews with the youths is presented interlaced with the analysis of the interview which took place with the supervisors.

Information

ICT is seen as an important source of information with practical uses for the young people in this study. They used online services or mobile apps when checking weather forecasts, maps and routes, or when finding schedules for public transportation. The young people mentioned banking and contacting authorities such as the tax office or Kela (the Social Insurance Institution of Finland) as practical matters to which they preferred attending to online.

The young people were asked to reflect on how they would seek advice in a situation where they felt physically ill or were in some kind of emotional distress (for example fighting with parents or friends, or feeling lonely). The participants answered that their actions would depend on how severe the symptoms of the illness or distress would be. In cases of severe illness, they would prefer talking to someone either face-to-face or on the phone. In less severe cases of illness, participants would use the internet to look for answers, or call the official health information number and ask for help. In a situation involving emotional stress or a disagreement with someone close, participants preferred to discuss the situation face-to-face with the person involved or with a friend. These results are surprising, as previous research (Granholt 2010; Johnsen et al. 2002; Ybarra and Eaton 2005) shows that many (young) people feel it is easier to share and discuss difficult situations and problems in their lives using technology. Clearly, people still have needs that they prefer to fill without using media intervention.

When talking about how they would tackle loneliness, a few participants mentioned online forums that offer peer support. These participants expressed that they wanted more online hotlines, especially services with professionals available to answer messages. This is to be taken seriously, as it highlights the need for increasing the professionally supervised online services which are currently available for youth.

Both youth and supervisors agreed that following news and keeping up to date with what was going on locally or more globally (as McQuail (1983) puts it “finding out about immediate surroundings, society and the world”), was less important for the young people in this study. A few of the young people mentioned having the habit of glancing through a daily newspaper either online or in paper format. Some read the news now and then, but none of the youth participants listened to news on the radio or watched news on TV. In the interview with the supervisors, they discussed the fact that even though many of the young people attending the training programs are online “all the time”, they have difficulties finding sensible information and seem unaware of what was going on in the world:

Eva: *Or that they are online that much, but don't know what, for example, is on the news.*

Tom and Mike: *No, they don't.*

Eva: *So, I don't really know what they do when they are surfing, but the world around them seems to pass them by, wars and natural disasters and presidential elections, everything just passes them by or in a way doesn't reach them. It feels like some kind of escapism, they look for entertainment sites, it should be fun and nice and easygoing, that's what's tempting.*

Maria: *If it's boring or a little bit strenuous...*

Eva: *...then you don't go there again.*

Preferring online information seeking with aims other than keeping up-to-date with daily news is seen to reflect the news habits of youth in general (e.g. Spurgeon et al. 2012). When discussing the positive features of ICT use with the supervisors, they mentioned accessing information for learning purposes. Some young people used their smartphones to look things up and to learn more about the topics discussed in the daily activities of the program. Looking up information for the purpose of satisfying curiosity and learning can also be considered as entertainment, as the following excerpt from the individual interview with Elisa shows:

Researcher: *Do you feel that you use the internet as entertainment or as a utility?*

Elisa: *Well, maybe to me it's entertaining in a way to learn new things, so it's both.*

Researcher: *Yes, so it's a blend of entertainment and utility.*

Elisa: *Yeah.*

This finding points out that ICT use among young people is diverse in many ways, and that it can satisfy several needs at once (Herring 2008; Lee 2005; Westlund and Bjur 2014).

Personal Identity

The young respondents were not working or attending school at the time of the interviews.

Therefore they did not belong to communities where most of their peers would spend a considerable amount of time each day. However, they still needed to gain reinforcement for their personal values, to find behavioral models, and to identify with and gain insight into others. In this context, it could be seen that in one way or another, participants used entertainment (such as movies, film clips, TV series, music, blogs, pictures and social media) as a source of building materials for their personal

identities. Yet, there are young people who choose to actively stay outside and minimize their use of ICT and (social) media. It is important to be aware of this group, as they fulfill their needs for personal identity differently from their peers, and therefore challenge the typology presented by McQuail (1983).

The different features of media often blend together. Among the phenomena discussed during the interviews, social media can probably be seen to fit all four features considering personal identity (see Table 1), as shown in the following excerpt:

Ida: *Tumblr. I like.*

Researcher: *What is it about Tumblr...*

Anna: *It's just, I don't know, people just put up a lot of pictures there.*

Ida: *And then I think it's kind of less of those hate messages and stuff. Well, of course you can find them everywhere but most of the people I follow or talk to are very open-minded and have the same values as I have. I don't know, it's just my kind of people there.*

These respondents talk about reinforcing their values by following and talking to people who they feel they share values with. By following, talking to and looking at pictures posted by online acquaintances, they also find out how other young people look, what they do and how they act. In other words, the young people in this study, like youth in general, use ICT to look for new models of behavior and people to identify with (Boyd 2008; Wildermuth & Dalsgaard 2006). One of the young women states that she finds “her kind of people” on Tumblr, which infers that she has been reflecting on what kind of person she is and what kind of person she wants to be.

Not all the participants used social media. There were a few who wanted to purposely live their lives without it and minimize the use of ICT in everyday communication. One of the main considerations they mentioned as an argument for their decision was that everything we do online is monitored, and they didn't want to leave any digital trace:

Researcher: *Have you been on FB, Instagram, Twitter, Tumblr or something like that today?*

Elisa: *No, I don't do any of those at all.*

Researcher: *Yes, I remember you were saying something like that during the group interview. Is it a deliberate choice?*

Eliza: *Yeah, I've never had any of those.*

Researcher: *How is it with your friends, do you talk a lot about things that happen on Facebook or the like?*

Jacob: *Social media is cancer.*

Nicke: *I think it's fucking vain, I am rarely on the computer and the net. I want to leave as small an internet footprint as possible. People don't get that if you write something on Facebook then fucking anybody can read what you have done there, and where you live, and what you do during the day. One can stalk you so damn easily, and they can use it against you. I'm not going along with that...*

This is in line with the findings by Westlund and Bjur (2014) and contradicts the assumptions that all young people are deeply involved with social media. A disassociation from social media could be interpreted as a way for young people to define themselves. By distancing themselves from social media (and those who use social media) they draw their personal lines, protect their private lives, and reinforce their personal values.

In the interviews with the supervisors, the connection of media use to identity was also touched upon. The supervisors viewed that shy people could use social media as a tool for finding models of behavior. They took Facebook as an example and cases where young people who were very shy in person, posted a lot of pictures of themselves and updated their status with, for example, how much weight they had lost. They also reflected on how getting 'likes' on Facebook affects these types of people, and how it can become a vicious circle, or spiral, where the young people disclose more and more, in order to get more and more likes:

Eva: *... And then you might get hooked on getting those 'likes' and when you lose a few more kilos you get some more 'likes', and then you get some more 'likes' ... The more you tell and disclose and the less clothes you wear, the more 'likes' you get... [...] But particularly for a person who is quite lonely and doesn't have very many social connections, a person like that might get the reinforcement directly on Facebook, instantly, which they don't get face-to-face from other people because they have nobody close.*

This way of using ICT to obtain reinforcement and as models for self-destructive behavior has been previously discussed by researchers. Online websites, blogs and discussion groups where

participants support and encourage each other's eating disorders are examples of self-destructive online behavior, and have been studied by academics for over a decade (for example Giles 2006; Figueras Bates 2014). It is important for social work professionals to be aware of these types of negative online behavior.

Integration and Social Interaction

Almost all of the young people interviewed used ICT to keep in touch with friends. For some, social media, Skyping, texting or using instant messaging applications were a way of socializing. For others, ICT was a tool for setting up a meeting face-to-face. Some preferred calling friends and the way the young people contacted their friends depended both on the friend and the urgency of the matter:

Ida: It depends on which friend. I use WhatsApp with some, and text messages with others, Kik with a third one, and some I like to call.

Researcher: Does anybody call their friends?

Ida: I do, sometimes. If it's like that I want to call and ask 'Do you want to meet' then I call, but if I have a general question, I text. And sometimes texting feels like too much trouble, and then I just call.

Malin: I usually use the phone, try to set up a meeting face-to-face.

Researcher: Do you call or text?

Malin: I usually call.

Researcher: So you prefer meeting face-to-face?

Malin: Yes.

The young people who preferred calling or talking to people face-to-face were also the ones who stated that they felt insecure with their ICT skills. A lack of appropriate education (Van Deursen et al. 2014) and/or general illiteracy (Cranmer 2010) may provide an explanation for this, in that ICT and social media are still mostly based on communication through text which is challenging for those who have difficulties reading and writing.

Some use ICT as a substitute for real-life companionship when connecting with family and friends who live further away. ICT was also seen as necessary for keeping in touch and socializing with those closer to home. Earlier research has shown that young people use ICT mostly for socializing with people they know in person (Thulin and Vilhelmson 2007). When asked if they had made any

new acquaintances online, most respondents stated that they only socialized with people they knew face-to-face. One person had found new friends online, but was now socializing with those people offline too. This blended way of social interaction seems to be typical for young people, either socializing online with friends they have come to know offline, or in integrating friends they have made online as a part of their life offline.

The supervisors at the training programs use Facebook as a tool when interacting with clients. All four supervisors have professional Facebook profiles and they invite the training program participants to become Facebook friends. The supervisors mostly use Facebook as a tool for communication when other attempts to contact the young people fail. It is hard to just disappear on Facebook, as the platform shows when you are online:

Tom: Yeah, sometimes they don't answer the phone when we call but then when you send them a message on Facebook they can talk. It is easier somehow.

Maria: I was calling one of the youths, it was a few weeks ago and he didn't answer.

Tom was logged in on Facebook, saw that he was logged in at the same time and sent him a message saying 'Maria is calling now, please pick up the phone.' And I called and he picked up and all of this happened during three or four minutes.

Using Facebook at the training programs has also caused some ethical considerations to be raised among supervisors, as no official guidelines of how social media should be used in their work exist. One challenge is to decide what to do with young people who no longer participated in the programs. Should they just unfriend them or keep them among their friends? And if they keep them as friends, how should they consider any information they receive about their former clients' private lives? As they are former clients, supervisors have no authority to take action even if they discover that someone is falling off track. These problems are familiar to other social and welfare professionals who have let ICT creep in to their everyday practice without the considering the consequences (Mishna et al. 2012). Discussing ICT use with colleague and determining joint guidelines for practice could be one way to avoid confusion.

Entertainment

The young people stated that they used ICT mostly for entertainment. Listening to music and watching movies, TV-series and short video clips online was popular among all participants. Reading blogs, looking at pictures that other people had posted online and playing online games

were also activities which were mentioned. Most of the participants had a Facebook account. While these activities fit well into the entertainment category, they can also be interpreted as ways for young people to gain an insight into the circumstances of others, gain a sense of belonging, and to find a basis for conversation (McQuail 1983). The extensive use of ICT for entertainment purposes can also be considered as a tool for participation, and through their engagement with ICT entertainment platforms, participants stay up to date with what is happening in the field of youth culture. Thus, they can feel part of this culture, even though they may be currently outside the spheres of employment or education that would normally provide an arena for interaction with people their own age.

The supervisors at the programs were deeply concerned regarding what they considered to be an excessive entertainment focus of ICT use among their young clients. Research (e.g. Matzat and Sadowski 2011; van Deursen et al. 2011) shows that intense internet use does not improve digital skills in general. These young people are mostly familiar with the entertainment related features of the internet, but do not necessarily have the skills needed to access other content online. The supervisors also felt concern for the risks of becoming addicted to online games or social media, and even to the smartphone device itself. A few of the participants felt that they sometime spent more time online than planned, or started surfing when they actually had other things such as homework to do. Still, none of the participants in this study felt that they were addicted to ICT and they all thought they would easily be able to live without the internet or their phone for a period of time.

For the participants in this study, entertainment can be viewed as a sanctuary - a place where you can go and forget about the difficulties of everyday life, or in McQuail's (1987, 73) terms, "escaping from problems, relaxation, and cultural and aesthetic enjoyment". Many of the young people also talked about using ICT in terms of filling time:

Researcher: *Have you been on Facebook more than once (today)?*

Anna: *Yes, I have it on my phone so when you don't have anything to do it is easy to go in. I don't look at anything in particular, I'm just scrolling through.*

There are two types of ICT use that can be considered as filling time, to be found in the data. The first type is the filling of shorter gaps between activities or while on the move, for example by checking things on the smartphone while waiting for a bus. The other type is more of a way of

passing longer periods of time during nights or weekends. This involves checking things on the smartphone, going online using tablets or computers, and also using console games. Both types of filling time can involve elements of escaping problems, relaxation, or cultural and aesthetic enjoyment, however using ICT as an emotional release or for sexual arousal did not come up in the interviews.

Discussions

I have analyzed the ICT use of a vulnerable group of Finnish young people who participated in training programs for youth outside education and employment. The aim of the study was to give voice to these young people who had been described by the supervisors of their training programs as excessive, entertainment oriented users of ICT. Most of the young people in this study did indeed use ICT for entertainment, to watch movies and TV-series, to listen to music, and to play computer games. However previous research (e.g. Cranmer 2010; Wildermuth and Dalsgaard 2006) shows that these are common activities among marginalized youth who are seeking role models or who wish to keep abreast of the latest developments in youth culture. Both previous research as well as my own study indicates that ICT use for entertainment can be an inclusive experience for young people who are outside employment or education and who may lack daily ordinary interaction with peers.

According to the uses and gratification approach, people choose to fulfill their needs with a certain type of media, based on their previous experiences (Blumler and Katz 1974). This means that if people lack experience of a certain type of media, the probability that they will turn to it when they are in need is less likely. Furthermore, people have needs that they prefer to fill without using media. An example of this also provides the most important finding of this study: in contradiction to the results of earlier studies (e.g. Granholm 2010; Johnsen et al, 2002; Ybarra & Eaton 2005), the young people in this research wanted to talk to someone face-to-face in situations they felt were physically or emotionally severe. The young people in this study were already in contact with helping professionals. As such they had already taken the initial step for seeking help (possibly by seeking information online) and a network of people who could offer support had started to form around them. Even though ICT skills were not discussed in these interviews, another possible explanation could be that young people in this context lack the skills needed to find help online, perhaps because their ICT use is generally oriented towards entertainment. In less severe situations however, the young people stated that they could use the internet as a means to seek a solution to a problem and expressed a wish for more professionally supervised online hotline services. Thus, in

order to benefit from online content in a more versatile way, young people need to improve their ICT skills through education and training.

Most of the youth in this study were active users of social media, but some participants stated that they actively avoided it and choose other means for fulfilling their needs for social interaction. This media behavior indicates that media and ICT use among more marginalized young people is not homogenous (see also Herring 2008; Lee 2005; Westlund and Bjur 2014). Overall however, young people choose the tools and the dimension for interaction that best fulfilled their needs.

My research has the following implications for social and youth services: Youth and social work would benefit from applying an open-minded approach when providing services to young people. Adults working with youth need to be careful when making assumptions about ICT use among their clients. This aspect is of great importance, especially for professionals working with excluded or marginalized young people. No exaggerations should be made about either the risks and dangers, or the opportunities and benefits of ICT. It is important to keep in mind that not all young people choose to participate in the online dimension, and that there are particular situations in which the young prefer face-to-face interaction. The challenge for future social and youth services is to be present both online and offline, so providing easily accessible information and blended practices.

Future research

My qualitative study included eleven Finnish young people outside employment and education. In order to obtain a broader and more transferable picture of the phenomenon in future studies, a larger number of respondents is needed. Especially, the specific difficulties and problems which have led young people to drop out of education and the labor market need to be considered. A participatory methodology involving young people themselves is essential in research that aims at developing tools that could be used to support and prevent these youths from further marginalization.

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