Digital voices: Progressing children's rights to be heard through social and digital media

# Details

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English

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## Type

Report and working paper

## Topics

* Digital and socio-cultural environment
* Wellbeing
* Social mediation

## Sample

A number of methods were used to carry out this research; a comprehensive survey of
academic and policy literature; we spoke to a diverse group of children and young people
aged 6 to 17 and we spoke to stakeholders from relevant government departments, public
bodies, industry, and civil society. There were 10 Focus group discussion which involved over 50 children from 6 to 17 year-old; 4 workshop consultations with over hundred children (15- 17 year-old) across the country and 10 interview with stakeholders.

## Implications For Educators About

Digital citizenship

## Implications For Policy Makers About

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Other

# Abstract

This research, undertaken by Technological
University Dublin, on behalf of the Ombudsman
for Children’s Office (OCO), investigates the
opportunities that exist to mobilise social and
digital media to ensure children are heard by
public policy makers, decision-makers and
service providers. It looks at the barriers to
mobilising social and digital media and how
the barriers can be overcome. It also highlights
good practice of where social and digital media
have been used effectively to allow children
and young people to be heard by public bodies.
Digital Voices: Progressing children’s right to be
heard through social and digital media makes
recommendations on how to support children
and young people to express their views and
to be heard by public bodies in Ireland through
social and digital media.
This research involved a literature review, a
consultation with children on how their right
to be heard might be advanced in and through
the digital environment, and engagement with
professional stakeholders working in the public,
private and NGO sectors.
The research was conducted over the course
of 2019 and 2020. While the majority took
place before the global COVID-19 pandemic,
the turn to digital media because of social
distancing measures and stay-at-home
orders has underlined just how central digital
technologies are to the functioning of society.

# Outcome

Literature Review
• Research shows that children are immersed in the digital environment. This offers opportunities to harness this enthusiasm for further creative and civic activities.
• Only limited numbers of children are attaining higher levels of civic engagement activities using digital technologies.
• The range of attitudinal, systemic and technological barriers to participation that exist in offline participation need to be examined online as well.
• Existing participation mechanisms have made only limited use of social and digital media.
• All levels of the participatory space (informational, communication, deliberative) need to be incorporated into the digital domain.
• A comprehensive rights-based framework building on Article 12 of the UNCRC is needed to support children in the digital environment.
• Practice in the area of digital youth work and e-participation can provide useful guidance for harnessing digital technologies to support children and young people’s involvement in public decision-making.
• Digital citizenship offers particular potential to develop the skills, values, attitudes and knowledge needed to support children’s progression on the ladder of digital opportunities.
Consultations with Children
• Children expressed how they enjoy a wide range of benefits through social and digital media, and especially appreciate its “Communication” and “Information” functions.
• Children are confident about their ability to express themselves despite challenges and believe the Internet is a good place for children and young people’s voices to be heard.
• All children are particularly cognisant of the barriers and challenges in the digital environment. Cyberbullying and unwanted communications are identified as particular challenges and inhibitors to their ability to avail of more opportunities online.
• Children enjoy the functionality of being connected through digital technologies and extending their horizons for communication and learning.
• Children want to see a range of improvements to their digital experience, with more attention given to safety, respect for privacy, higher quality information, training and supports.
• Government leadership in this area is welcomed but more can be done to fulfil children’s right to be heard through digital technologies.
• Children would like to see the establishment of a dedicated space where children and young people could express their views, safely and securely.
Professional Stakeholder Perspectives
• Professional stakeholders acknowledge that digital spaces are particularly important for children.
• It is important to listen to, discuss with and learn from children within the context of their lived experience.
• The ability to both engage and empower children and young people through social and digital media offers powerful potential for children’s participation.
• Safety concerns are key in considering any form of digital implementation but this should not be an excuse for not examining the positive potential of social and digital media.
• It is important to balance risks and opportunities and to manage the many safety issues that may compromise the participation process.
• The particular affordances of digital technologies offer potential to enhance children’s participation but require training and support.
• Social media platforms are a great way to reach and engage young people but their application to participation practice is limited.
• The State has a role in delineating and defending children’s rights in the digital environment.
• To be effective, participation must be meaningful and therefore all dimensions of the participation model, connecting different rights, should be taken into account when building digital participation opportunities.
Conclusions
Drawing on the findings, the report sets out principles for successful digital participation, advocating the use of social and digital media to build children and young people’s participation in public decision-making, and to develop approaches using blended methods to harness the potential of the technology. All dimensions of participation, fully informed by child rights principles, need to be addressed in the digital development and underpinned by the necessary training and support.
Finally, the following action points are presented as a basis for mobilising social and digital media to progress the realisation of children’s right to be heard in the context of public decision-making processes affecting them.
1. Convene a Digital Participation Expert Group drawing from relevant expertise across the public sector, academia, youth organisations from industry to distil best practice and to develop new policies on how social and digital media may be used in public decision-making affecting children.
2. Develop a Charter for Children and Young People’s Digital Participation to underpin the rights-based nature of children’s participation in public decision-making on matters affecting them.
3. Develop a Digital Participation Toolkit to support take-up of best digital participatory practice and the fostering of digital citizenship across a range of settings.
4. Establish a dedicated Digital Participation Space or platform that can be shared by relevant actors and public agencies for children and young people’s digital participation in public decision-making.