Del@ktighetens digitalisering: Om identitetsskapande aktiviteter på internet bland unga med intellektuell funktionsnedsättning

Engl. transl.: The digitalization of p@rticipation – identity formation activities on the Internet among young people with intellectual disability

# Keywords

* Participation
* Internet
* social network sites
* intellectual disability

# Details

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* Internet usage, practices and engagement
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* Risks and harms
* Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities

## Sample

Young people with ID (n=27), parents of young people with ID (n=22), and professionals in special schools (n=17)

## Implications For Parents About

Parenting guidance / support

## Implications For Educators About

Other

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Stepping up awareness and empowerment

## Implications For Stakeholders About

## Other Stakeholder Implication

How support can be arranged in order to empower young people with ID to participate on the Internet

# Abstract

Although research on young people and the Internet is a growing field, there are few studies that illustrate conditions for young people with intellectual disabilities (ID). Previous studies have shown that young people with ID are worried about being marginalized, and that many in fact are lonelier than other young people. Social networking sites might be of vital importance as a space for exploring alternative and less stigmatized identities.

This project aimed to describe and analyse how young people (age 16-20) with a mild ID interact and participate on the Internet. More precisely, drawing upon the perspectives of young people with ID, parents, and school staff, we have studied self-presentations, social relations, and participation within different kinds of Internet communities. Hence, the goal of the project was to generate knowledge concerning these complex processes, which could be useful for the involved adults, who support and help young people with ID in their Internet use. The project comprised qualitative interviews with young people with ID (n=27), parents of young people with ID (n=22), and professionals in special schools (n=17). The transcribed interviews were analysed, using a thematic content analysis. The project has been granted ethical approval by the Ethical Board of West Sweden (Dnr 048-15).

A prominent finding in the study concerned the young informants being well aware of both the risks and opportunities in using Internet and Social Networking Sites. Consequently, the more they interacted with non-disabled peers, the more they experienced negative consequences of Internet use. One conclusion was that these circumstances lead to downsizing rather than upsizing Internet use, and as prolongation, less participation on Social Networking Sites.

Although the Internet can be a 'free-zone' where the young person can develop social bonds and construct their identity away from adult oversight, parents and professionals are highly present. Young people mostly feel confident and also in no need of support. Professionals and parents do consider the Internet an arena for positive opportunities, but also with risks. The professionals seemed to be more worried about the risks than the parents who state that the opportunities outweigh the disadvantages. For parents, the real risk is described as the risk of loneliness and social isolation. That parents consider the Internet to be an arena for relationships is an interesting change compared to previous research where both parents and professionals were worried about the risks of abuse, etc. Overall,6the young people with ID are described as a more heterogeneous group by both parents and professionals, compared to previous research. The experiences of the informants are discussed in a conceptual framework of social identity, participation, positive risk-taking, sexuality, and emancipation.

A comparative analysis of the results shows how social participation is negotiated and constructed dialectically between young people with and without ID, but also between the young people in the study and adults in their imme-diate surroundings. By applying an intersectional perspective to issues about identity formation and risk-taking on the Internet, a more relational under-standing of the problems and opportunities of digital participation can be made visible. A relational understanding of getting into difficulties implies that risk and vulnerability do not always have to depend on the disability but on contextual conditions and other co-varying factors.

Considering young people's need for autonomy, it is of great importance that parents and professionals reflect upon the ways that support can be arranged in order to empower young people with ID to participate on the Internet. Providing support for positive risk-taking on the Internet means that adults, together with young people, reflect on how possible risks can be managed rather than how risk can be avoided.

# Outcome

A prominent finding in the study concerned the young informants being well aware of both the risks and opportunities in using Internet and Social Networking Sites. Consequently, the more they interacted with non-disabled peers, the more they experienced negative consequences of Internet use. One conclusion was that these circumstances lead to downsizing rather than upsizing Internet use, and as prolongation, less participation on Social Networking Sites.... Although the Internet can be a 'free-zone' where the young person can develop social bonds and construct their identity away from adult oversight, parents and professionals are highly present. Young people mostly feel confident and also in no need of support. Professionals and parents do consider the Internet an arena for positive opportunities, but also with risks. The professionals seemed to be more worried about the risks than the parents who state that the opportunities outweigh the disadvantages.... A comparative analysis of the results shows how social participation is negotiated and constructed dialectically between young people with and without ID, but also between the young people in the study and adults in their immediate surroundings. By applying an intersectional perspective to issues about identity formation and risk-taking on the Internet, a more relational understanding of the problems and opportunities of digital participation can be made visible. A relational understanding of getting into difficulties implies that risk and vulnerability do not always have to depend on the disability but on contextual conditions and other co-varying factors." (Authors, 5-6)