Creating a Better Internet for All

Young people's experiences of online empowerment + online hate

Safer Internet Day

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Introduction from Will Gardner

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This Safer Internet Day the theme is **Play your part for a better internet** and we wanted to explore the role we all have in creating a kinder and more inclusive internet.

While it is encouraging to see that almost all young people believe no one should be targeted with online hate, and heartening to hear about the ways young people are using technology to take positive action online to empower each other and spread kindness, we were surprised and concerned to see that so many had been exposed to online hate in the last year.

Previous research into this area from the London School of Economics found that children's exposure to "websites where people publish hate messages that attack certain groups or individuals" rose from 13% of 11-16s in 2010 to 23% in 2013 (including 39% of 15-16 year olds).

Our research findings mark a significant rise again. While our research focuses on 13-18 year olds and is more wide-ranging than websites – exploring children's experiences on social media and games platforms too – it does suggest a trend that we cannot ignore.

It is a wake-up call for all of us to play our part in helping create a better internet for all, to ensure that everyone can benefit from the opportunities that technology provides for building mutual respect and dialogue, facilitating rights, and empowering everyone to be able to express themselves and be themselves – whoever they are.

The volume and range of support we've seen for this year's Safer Internet Day is truly inspiring. With activities taking place right across the UK and young people coming together to share their perspectives and ideas, Safer Internet Day is an opportunity for us all to stand together and show what kind of internet we want – where kindness is the norm and everyone is treated with respect.

Executive Summary

For Safer Internet Day 2016, 1,512 young people aged 13-18 years took part in an online survey conducted by ResearchBods to explore young people's attitudes, experiences and responses to positives and negatives online, particularly exploring the role of the internet in facilitating rights and promoting empowerment, while also potentially facilitating online hate.

The findings demonstrate both the positive and negative side of the internet, and the role that young people are playing in helping to create a kinder and more inclusive internet.

Young people want to see a kind and inclusive internet – and they are playing their part to help create that

Young people want a kind and inclusive internet: The majority of young people (94%) said that they believe no one should be targeted with online hate because of their gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender identity.

An estimated 2.1 million young people have taken positive action online in the last year to show support for targeted groups, with liking or sharing a positive post or page and changing their profile picture being the most popular forms of positive online action.

Young people's peer groups are on the whole very positive, supportive and inclusive: 93% said they had seen their friends posting things online that are supportive, kind or positive about a certain group, for example girls, LGBT people, disabled people or those of a certain race or religion, and more than a third (35%) said they see this kind of behaviour all or most of the time online.

The role of the internet in promoting rights – but also facilitating hate

The internet as a facilitator of both understanding and hatefulness: Young people recognise the positive ways the internet can help us to grow understanding and respect, with around 3 in 4 saying that the internet helps them understand different people's views and beliefs (76%). However, the majority (86%) also felt that the internet makes it easy for people to be mean.

Many young people are exposed to online hate – and it has a very real impact

The majority of young people have seen something hateful on the internet in the last year: 82% of 13-18 year old respondents said they have seen or heard something hateful about a certain group on the internet, with young people most likely to have seen online hate targeting a person or community on the grounds of religion, sexual orientation or race.

Online hate targets people or communities via the internet because of their gender, transgender identity, sexual orientation, disability, race, ethnicity, nationality or religion. It could be offensive, mean or threatening, and either targeted directly at a person or group, or generally shared online. In its most extreme form it can break the law and become a hate crime.

Young people are less likely to see their peers sharing online hate: 35% of 13-18 year old respondents said they had seen their friends posting offensive, mean or threatening things online about people of a certain group.

Offensive humour is particularly common among young people: Nearly 9 in 10 (89%) say they've seen people sharing funny things online that might be offensive to a certain group in the past year and almost three quarters (73%) say they've seen their friends do this. This is more prevalent amongst boys, with 78% having seen their friends sharing funny things that might be offensive, while only 69% of girls have seen this.

Young people are more likely to see online hate on the internet than in any other place: In total, 82% of young people have seen or heard something hateful on the internet, compared to 77% at school, 69% in other media and 54% face-to-face in other places.

1 in 4 young people said they have been targeted with online hate because of their gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, disability or transgender identity – rising to 38% of young people with disabilities.

Many young people are concerned and affected by online hate: Over a third (35%) of young people said that online hate is something they worry about. Young people who had been exposed to online hate reported feeling anger (37%), sadness (34%) and shock (30%) in response to it. While there were 1 in 5 (20%) young people who reported not feeling bothered by it, 1 in 25 (4%) reported feeling attacked or scared.

Online hate can have an impact on young people's freedom of expression: around 3 in 4 young people (74%) said that online hate makes them more careful about what they share online.

Empowering young people to take action over online hate

Young people do see counter speech in reaction to online hate: 84% have seen people responding to defend a certain group that is being targeted online, with more than a fifth (22%) saying they see this all or most of the time online.

However, ignoring online hate is the most common strategy among those who had been exposed to it: Most young people (55%) who had seen online hate said they just ignored it. This can sometimes be a positive strategy, particularly as what young people define as online hate may not always reach the threshold for breaking the law or breaking the terms of an online platform. However, it can often mean that behaviour goes unchallenged. Indeed, while more than two thirds (68%) of those who had witnessed online hate in the last year said they know how to report it to a social network, in practice just a fifth (20%) actually reported online hate to the social network, app, game or website where they saw it.

Many young people face barriers that prevent them from taking action: Among those who had been exposed to online hate in the last year, the majority (58%) said they wouldn't know when online hate breaks the law, and 45% said they would worry about standing up to online hate as they don't want to be targeted.

We need to empower young people with the knowledge, skills and confidence to ensure they are equipped to deal with online hate: Among those who had witnessed online hate, over a third (36%) said they would like more information about what to do about online hate, and the majority (75%) said that more needs to be done about online hate.