

# **Internet generation should be encouraged to voice their opinion online**

## **Press release**

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There are increasing calls for children and young people to participate in the debates and decisions made concerning their well being, their education and their communities. Many hopes are now pinned on the internet as a means of increasing young people's participation.

But new research findings show that age, gender and social background are all playing a part in how much children are using the internet to voice their opinions or take part in civic or political activities.

The report, 'Active Participation or Just More Information? Young People's Take up of Opportunities to Act and Interact on the Internet', comes from the UK Children Go Online Project, based at the London School of Economics and Political Science.

Professor Sonia Livingstone and Dr Magdalena Bober from LSE's Department of Media and Communications examined whether using the internet draws young people into participation. They found that among 12-19 year olds who go online at least once a week:

- 54% have visited civic or political websites, such as charity, government, environmental and human rights sites or sites for improving conditions at school or work. However, most have only visited one type of such sites.
- The majority of young people use the internet for homework (90 per cent), email (72 per cent) and games (70 per cent).
- Girls, older age groups and middle class children visit a broader range of civic and political sites. For example, 31 per cent of girls have visited a charity site compared with 22 per cent of boys, 35 per cent of 16-19 year olds compared with 20 per cent of 12-15 year olds and twice as many middle class (34 per cent) as working class children (17 per cent).

Professor Livingstone said: "For young people to become more engaged with the civic potential of the internet, civic website owners need to ensure that young people get something back from these sites. Beyond receiving information, it is unclear what young people stand to gain having their say online. They wonder who is listening, what happens to their votes, or opinions and what will follow from their engagement. And young people certainly feel pessimistic about this."

The report offers three recommendations to producers of civic and political sites:

- Address the rather dull and worthy appearance of civic sites to ensure a youth-friendly appeal that does not undermine young people's desire to be seen as 'cool'.
- Develop a more genuinely interactive environment in which young people's contributions are responded to appropriately, offering clear benefits.
- Design links from popular entertainment sites to civic and political sites to counteract the tendency of entertainment sites to be 'sticky', keeping users on the site rather than encouraging their further exploration of the web.

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Notes for Editors:

- The survey *UK Children Go Online* presents findings from a national, in-home, face to face survey of 1,511 young people aged 9-19 and a written questionnaire to 906 of their parents.
- The research was funded by an Economic and Social Research Council grant under the 'e-Society' Programme, with co-funding from AOL, Childnet International, Citizens Online, the Broadcasting Standards Commission (BSC), the Independent Television Commission (ITC) and Ofcom.
- e-Society is the largest ever academic research programme to look at the impact of digital technologies on our society and institutions. For more information, see [www.london.edu/e-society](http://www.london.edu/e-society).
- To download the report free, go to [www.children-go-online.net](http://www.children-go-online.net).

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