DIGITAL YOUTH: RE-THINKING IDEALS OF DIGITAL IMPERATIVES AND IMAGINARIES

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we scrutinize the digital imperative of the practices and ideals of digital everyday life of Finnish youth born in 2005-2006 by dismantling the promises of digital youth. Our paper focuses on digital belonging and engagements in young people's everyday lives. We ask what these engagements tell us about the ideals of digital citizenship and agency of young people and how these ideals shape the understandings of the use of digital environments. To achieve these objectives, we draw on both qualitative and quantitative research material to analyze their interpretations of the use of digital technologies and their meanings. Our research reveals that it is important to elaborate on how digitalization is accessed, understood, and used. How youth shape their techno-social and techno-cultural configurations needs to be visible at the societal, structural, and life-course levels.

KEYWORDS

Youth, Digital Ideals, Technological Imperatives, Finland

1. INTRODUCTION

Digital societies are developed around the ideology of technological imperatives (Talsi & Tuuva-Hongisto, 2009) and socio-technical imaginaries (Jasanoff & Kim, 2009). In Finland, the national-level research on digitalization has followed these rationalities and leaned on a strong belief in them. Digital technologies have been kept apart from social structures and processes and positioned as a neutral good (Halford & Savage, 2010). For example, this logic is visible and evident in an unquestioning push toward the digitalization of significant services, education, and political participation. Furthermore, digitalization has been seen to provide equal opportunities for social and societal participation, especially among young people as "digital natives" and "cyber-children" (Holloway & Valentine, 2003; Prensky, 2001; Tapscott, 2008). Young people today are seen as a generation who find and adopt digital services first, and as

such, the youth-cultural meaning of digitalization is significant (Ito et al., 2010; Yalçın-İncik & İncik, 2022).

As digitalization strengthens, the use of various technologies and related literacies is practically essential. Furthermore, a variety of cultural and social structures, discourses, and practices guide people to use these technologies. Such a necessity can be called a *technological imperative*, by which we mean the social and cultural pressure to exploit key technologies that have become a significant part of society and its ideology (Talsi & Tuuva-Hongisto, 2009).

One of the key arguments for digitalization in various political debates is attached to the promise of equality of technology (Jasanoff & Kim, 2015; Boyd, 2014). However, in critical reviews, digitalization is one more potential twist in the intersectional skein of a wide range of inequalities (see Helsper, 2021). The hope is that by strengthening everyone's digital participation, we will reach a situation where the promises of digitalization can be fulfilled and thus combat the potential threat of inequality.

The aim of this article is to dismantle the digital imperative of youth. To do this, we examine the practices and ideals of the digital everyday life of Finnish youth born in 2005-2006 in Finland. Our paper focuses on the different digital engagements in young people's everyday lives and what these engagements tell us about the ideals of digital citizenship and agency of young people. We ask, how do these ideals shape the understandings of the use of digital technologies? We draw on qualitative and quantitative data to analyze young people's interpretations of digital technologies and their meanings to achieve these objectives. Young people's lives today are imbued with various kinds of uncertainties. However, everyday experiences and experiential knowledge can be seen as a resource for coping with these uncertainties (Baillergeau & Duyvendak, 2016).

Our article begins with a short introduction to the discourses around digital natives and digital citizenship, then we present our research material, methods, ethical considerations and discuss our empirical findings. We conclude by summarizing the sifting ideals of digital youth.

2. THE PROMISES OF DIGITAL NATIVES

The discourse of the "digital generation" is precisely an attempt to construct the object of which it purports to speak. It represents not a description of what children or young people are but a set of imperatives about who they should be or what they need to become. To some extent, it does describe a minority of young people who are actively using different technologies for social, educational, and creative purposes. Yet, it seems very likely that most of these are already privileged in other areas of their lives. Their use of technology is supported by their access to other forms of social and cultural capital (Buckingham, 2008).

''Digital citizenship'' is the ability to participate in society online. The Internet has the potential to benefit society as a whole and facilitate the membership and participation of individuals within society (Mossberger et al., 2007). The networked, participatory potential of this new technology has been touted as creating new possibilities for civic learning and action. It provides a form of "networked citizenship" that is more inclusive and participatory than the past's passive, dutiful citizenship. Such arguments are frequently applied to the so-called digital generation of young people, who are apparently developing new forms of global political consciousness and activity because of their use of new media (Banaji & Buckingham, 2013; Tapscott, 2008). Far from dumbing down and disengaging young people, new media are viewed

as politically and personally empowering: they enable young people to become the agents or authors of civic action rather than merely the objects of adult interventions (Banaji & Buckingham, 2013).

At the same time, if terms such as "digital youth" are taken to an extreme and analyzed in homogenous terms, people may assume that all kids of a certain age are equally knowledgeable about and willing to use all types of digital tools. Yet, studies show that young people engage with technologies in very different ways, ranging from the social to the intensely geeked-out (Ito et al., 2010). In addition, not all young people have the same access to technologized media. Scholars have observed "participation gaps" (Jenkins et al., 2006), which often exhibit familiar socio-cultural inequities based on sex, gender, ethnicity, and class (Lange, 2014).

Despite the aforementioned tendencies to universalize and idealize participation, there is increasing acknowledgment that youth's digital participation is both enabled and constrained by their particular social positions (Boyd, 2014). There is a broad "access rainbow" that patterns how young people engage with digital culture (Literat et al., 2018). It partially reflects their physical access to technological resources and how cultural capital and expectations influence forms of participation. Furthermore, the sense of belonging in digital society is a multifaceted experience characterized by feelings of welcome, acceptance, and security within a community or a group. A sense of belonging plays a crucial role in identity building and the well-being of young people while fostering a sense of connection and purpose within a larger collective (Helsper, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2006).

Young people in different life situations and ages live vastly different digital lives, and not all young people have the same access to or even interest in digital participation. They have different interests; they learn different things even if they live in similar environments and have similar tools. Therefore, digital participation and belonging are intertwined with multiple levels of agency, practices, intensities, and contexts (See Figure 1; also Literat et al., 2018; Tuuva-Hongisto et al., 2022).

The digital agency of young people in digital environments manifests itself in dissimilar roles and ways of acting: as a gamer, an active agent, a refuser, a listener, a spectator, a networker, an influencer, an entrepreneur, and so on. Young people's everyday practices on the Internet can also be very differentiated and oriented in diverse ways. Young people can do a wide range of everyday things online, without thinking of them as "digital practices". For example, young people take photos, listen to music or audiobooks, watch the news, communicate with friends and family, chat, browse, play games, and more. In other words, they use digital devices for a wide variety of purposes and things.

Young people's intensity in different digital environments varies widely, and some may be very engaged in their online communities, or they may control their own use to an extremely limited and limited extent. For example, young people's screen time varies widely: some may have their digital devices on and off for almost 24 hours a day, while others may only be on their digital devices for half an hour a day. This has a major impact on young people's experience of digital belonging.

Digital inclusion also has different contexts, both online and offline. Where and how young people physically live their adolescence, their living environment, place of growing up, and socio-cultural character shape how they are in digital environments. On the other hand, the digital environments in which young people spend their time also create different contexts of belonging - whether Snapchat, TikTok, or Discord are the context of digital participation, they shape quite different digital landscapes for young people to operate in.

3. RESEARCH MATERIAL AND METHODS

3.1 Data Collection

The analysis is based on data collected in two phases in 2021 and 2022 from different parts of Finland. The target group is young people in the last grade of Finnish basic education, about 15 years old. The ninth graders were chosen as a target group because they are at the start of their transition years for their life courses concerning education and growing up, approaching emerging adulthood in economically and socio-culturally different environments. We interviewed 28 young people, asking them, for instance, what meanings they give to digitalization in their daily lives and what role different digital devices and environments play in it.

A total of 418 young people completed our online survey during 2021 and 2022 (see Table 1). The quantitative data contextualizes and backgrounds the analysis we present in the article by rendering and structuring the research field and the digital youth under review in general. The questions asked in the online survey concerned the use and experiences of young people's various digital devices and environments. The survey also included some background information questions on, among other things, the respondent's gender, hobbies, family composition and livelihood, the level of education of parents, their place of residence, the use of public transport, and the distance of numerous services essential to young people from the young person's home. Our participants live in three different landscapes of opportunities in Finland: in growing regiopolis, in stagnating smaller towns with industrial backgrounds, and in sleepy villages.

The qualitative data consists of 28 thematic individual or pair interviews and two focus group interviews with six participants. We have conducted online observations and written fieldwork diaries of how these young people use digital media in their everyday lives. Our data collection was organized simultaneously with the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic and as face-to-face meetings with youth were canceled due to various restrictions. We utilized digital ethnography, and our interviews and observations were conducted online (about digital ethnography, see Korjonen-Kuusipuro, Tuuva-Hongisto & Berg, 2022). The qualitative data includes the following themes and contents: young people's digital agencies, digital everyday practices, and meanings of places and contexts both online and offline (and the entanglements of these two). We discussed, for example, what kinds of online activities young people have and what kinds of daily rhythms they have.

Further, we discussed how belonging to groups and friendships are formed online and what kind of pressures acting online has created. We asked our participants to choose and show us some of their online posts, and we also asked who they follow online. We wanted to know what would change if they had the power to modify online worlds.

Table 1. Participants, according to gender

	Female (N)	Male (N)	Non-binary/do not want to say (N)	All together (N)
Questionnaire respondents	222	175	10/11	418
Interviewees	14	13	1	28

3.2 Analysis

Our analysis in this article focuses on qualitative data, and it follows reflective thematic content analysis, carried out in a dialogic relationship with our research-based understanding of the effects of digitalization on young people's lives (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Our research is an ethnographic study, which means that it is based on first-hand (participant) observation of (online/offline) social practices, and it has a special focus on everyday lives, choices, and their meanings (Beuving, 2020). Central to ethnography is the so-called 'thick description' and writing about people, understanding the field of study and its historical and social contexts, conceptualizing and theorizing cultural phenomena based on fieldwork, and reflecting on the research process and knowledge production. The role and interaction of the researcher with the participants is essential (Geertz, 1973; Gusterson, 2008).

At the beginning of the data classification, two researchers encoded the transcribed interview data in a data-driven manner in the NVivo programme. We then reflected on the coding together and deepened our analysis by theming the material based on broader common themes and discussed the classification done with the entire research group. The names used in interview citations are pseudonyms to protect the privacy of the interviewees.

The analysis of the ideals of digital youth is conducted through analytical frame of digital participation (cf. Literat, 2018) and the dimensions of digital belonging: agency, practices, intensities and contexts (see Figure 1; also Tuuva-Hongisto et al., 2022). In this article, we focus on the restrictions of the use of digitalization that our interlocutors constantly produced in the interviews. They framed their use through the idea of controlling screen time and picturing an ideal way of using digital devices and applications.

- The ability to act; diverse roles in digital landscapes
- e.g. active users, consumers, refusers, gamers

- Different intensities will lead to different outcomes for youth.
- e.g. self control, parental control, restrictions

AGENCY   INTENSITIES

PRACTICES   CONTEXT

- Digital participation as a sociocultural practice
- e.g. posting, chatting, gaming, coding, watching

- The physical, technological, and social contexts of youth digital participation
- e.g. physical locations, virtual locations, different youth cultures

Figure 1. The analytic framework of this study is a modified version of the Digital participation framework by Literat et al. 2018

The analysis we present in this article is part of the research project Capturing Digital Social Inequality – Young Digi-Native's Asymmetrical Agencies Within Socio-Technical Imperatives and Imaginaries (DEQUAL, 2020–2024), funded by the Academy of Finland. The project is based on the idea of how physical places and environments in which different material structures open up to young people and where socio-cultural and youth-cultural opportunities are different and unequal.

3.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethical permission for the project was granted by the Ethical Committee of the South-Eastern University of Applied Sciences (decision 28.1.2021). The study has followed the principles of good scientific practice and general ethical guidelines of the Finnish Advisory Board on Research Integrity (TENK), and the special ethical principles of youth research.

The privacy statement and consent for the research were sent to participants beforehand by e-mail. Later in the interviews, it became clear that not all had read these before the interview. Therefore, the consent and privacy statements were reviewed orally at the beginning of the interviews, and the young people were asked again if they wanted to participate in the study. We told our participants that even though we use direct quotations, individuals cannot be identified because we will use pseudonyms and placenames, and other possible identifiers will be removed. Our participants had a chance to ask questions about the research project during the interviews.

4. TECHNO-SOCIAL HIERARCHIES AND AFFECTS

4.1 Capable Youth

Young people have a wide range of digital devices and skills at their disposal, and their technical identity varies a lot (Lange, 2014). This is true for the young people who participated in our research: for instance, almost all (96 %) of the youth who responded to the online questionnaire have smartphones at their disposal. According to the questionnaire data, the next most common digital devices used by young people are a traditional personal computer (66 %) and a game console (47 %). In the questionnaire, we asked youth to take a stand on allegations concerning, for example, the respondent's digital skills. Most young people (90 %) somewhat or completely agreed with the statement, 'I have sufficiently good skills to use different digital devices and services.' Only a few respondents (4 %) somewhat or completely disagreed with the statement. (Haverinen et al., 2023) (See Figure 2).
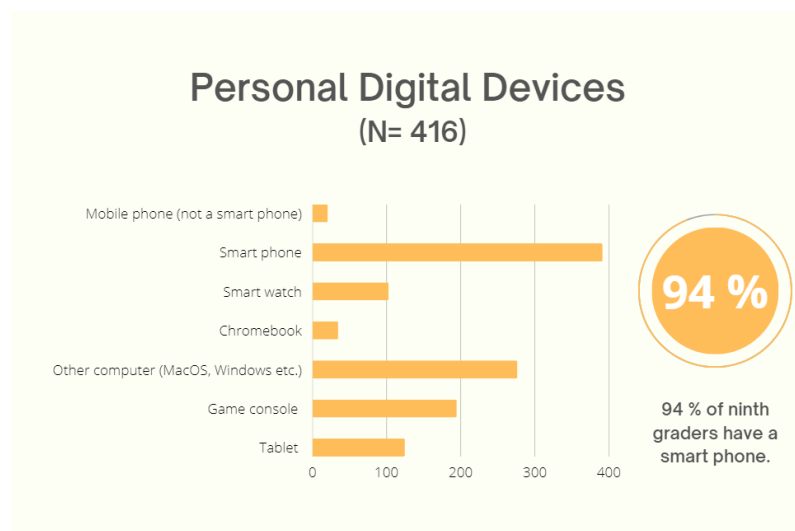

Figure 2. Finnish ninth graders who participated in our study had a vast variety of digital devices at their disposal

Based on our quantitative data, young people generally have access to a comprehensive and diverse range of devices and applications that enable digital everyday life, ' hanging out,' and other communication with friends. The most important online environments, according to our online questionnaire were Snapchat (86.6 %), TikTok (79.4 %), Instagram (79.1 %) and YouTube (75.4 %), WhatsApp (73 %). The questionnaire results communicate relatively diverse digital competences, skills, and habits and the broader importance of digital communication and togetherness in young people's lives. (See also, e.g., Ito et al., 2009; Livingstone, 2010).

Although the digital uses and skills were very mundane, engagement in online participation varied. The individual differences in digital participation, in its agencies and diverse roles, practices (playing, hanging, chatting, following), intensities with diversified engagement, screen times, control, and online and offline contexts were huge.

Some of my friends are more on Instagram, some less, some use less Snap, and some more, I belong to those who do not post anything on TikTok, I really just look at others' posts. I post on Instagram when I feel like it. So, there are people who post daily to TikTok and weekly something on Instagram. (Eelis)

Well, in general, when I use Twitter and Discord, so, in general, it is that if I've decided to do something content or something else, then it is just that I'm alone talking in a Discord call with myself and waiting for someone to coincidentally join there to discuss something nice with me. Or then I play or record a new song or something, and then I just read all the updates and react to people's things, and then everyone gets the feeling that you care about those who are watching. There will not be a feeling that you are not interested, but that you are interested in the way that someone puts on Twitter: "Oh my god I watched this yesterday and it was really nice and put that nice nice nice that you liked and such". Then it creates a kind of feeling that they also remain interested in your life and lifestyle. (Lotta)

We interpreted these discussions as examples of youth sharing their techno-social and techno-cultural configurations (See also Lange 2014, p. 24). Young people form different hierarchies and groups online, and these hierarchies can affect their social interaction and identity. It is important to note that these techno-social hierarchies can be very subjective and temporary. They can vary between different digital platforms and change rapidly with new trends and phenomena. Moreover, hierarchies can affect young people's sense of belonging, self-esteem, and social well-being, so it is important to look at them critically and to support young people in maintaining a balanced online life.

4.2 Missing Joy, Difficult Shame

Our research revealed that young people did not necessarily feel joy in their everyday use of digital devices, nor did they mention skills learned online. On the contrary, they often seemed ashamed and felt guilty for using too many digital devices and platforms. A feeling of shame is one of the primary negative affects. In our analysis, we interpreted that shame was strongly connected to the social ideal of digital youth. Shame is intense and painful, and when we feel shame, we think we have done something that we feel is bad and that something needs to be hidden. According to our interpretation, young people felt shame in situations where young people felt they had failed to live up to the social ideal. In this way shame was strongly connected to the moral developments and reproduction of social norms. (See also Ahmed 2004).

Sometimes, during the weekend, if you take the phone and just stay on the couch and just watch YouTube videos, you get the feeling that you haven't done or reached anything. On the other hand, if you get out in the morning, go training, or do something else useful, you realize that you are more energetic than you have done something. The feeling that you have done something. (Juhani)

It is interesting how young people repeatedly told us they need and want to do something "useful." Hanging out online did not seem useful, but when the interviewer asked what this might be, our participants often could not tell what they meant, or they mentioned, for example, that cleaning your room or wardrobe would be a good option, as well as going out. This was encapsulated by one participant who said: "I have a feeling that I use a phone or computer all the time, and my life is being wasted," while another argued how addictive digital devices were: "They are very addictive and take time from other important stuff."

My parents stress that you should prefer spending your time doing something useful, doing something. Just like I use much time in coding, coding is my hobby. So instead of just watching something, do something. Do something instead of being passive. (Tuuli)

And there's going to be shouting, like: you're on that phone again, all this time, you're always on the phone, that's all you're ever going to do. (Emilia)

Well, I use my phone quite a lot. I don't want to, but you become addicted, and it's not easy to get rid of. (Sofia)

What is notable is the way our qualitative research material emerges the experience of overuse of digital communication devices described by the youth themselves. However, they seem to be unable to define the limits of proper use more specifically – or what would be normal use, if such even exists: *'Well, I can't, actually, say what would be a proper time limit [in being on the phone]. But... I feel that I might use the phone a bit too much'* (Julia). As a result, the overriding feeling these young people have is that no matter what their actual screen time is – even if it is very minimal – they always spend a little too much time online, especially with their smartphones. Within this pattern, we can recognize excuses for breaking something defined and recognized as morally wanted and demanding. In this, the discursive attitude climate obtrudes into the accounts around digitalization of the young ones' time use – showing that they are aware of the moral concern around their digital life contents. The blame is toned with expectations of more conventional everyday activities and references where 'being on the phone' is seen as an irritative practice of doing nothing (Haverinen et al., 2023; about doing nothing, see Ehn & Löfgren, 2010).

Affects and emotions are connected to cultural meaning-making (Rinne & Olsson, 2020, 311−312) and can be seen as ways we actively engage in the world (Jaggar, 1989, p. 159). Affects can also be seen as critical links between micro and macro levels of social reality and as the glue binding people together and generating connections to larger social and cultural structures (Turner and Stets, 2005). Seen this way, questions like what affects and emotions do and how affects are attached to certain bodies, things, and events, but not others, are critical (Ahmed, 2004).

Hence, our research data contain not only youth's self-blaming but also efforts to locate oneself on the morally correct side of the line. In the interviews, young people's control over their own screen time and pursuit to keep it within certain limits of undefined normalcy became often justified by comparing how much time other young people or people 'in general' spend on different digital devices (cf. Salasuo, 2021). The data contains many references to 'someone else': someone who uses a smartphone or plays with a computer more than themselves. In this shift, the young participants were also able to position themselves within suitable limits. In their

reflections on time use, young people monitor and regulate not only their own but also their peers' use of digital media. (Haverinen et al. 2023.)

Yes, I kind of envy people who can be apart from that phone for a really long time. But I could probably, too, but I just have to make that change (laughs). (Helmi)

Most of our participants had the idea of using digital devices too much or spending too much time in different digital environments, even becoming addicted somehow. They also compared and were envious of those who seemed more controlled and disciplined than them.

4.3 Scarce, Disciplined and Controlled

The ninth graders had a very clear idea of what kind of use of digital devices and applications was appropriate. They constantly referred to the time used on smartphones. They controlled or wanted to control the used time with digital devices, especially on the phone. Especially those who had very limited screen time also had very goal-oriented hobbies and their leisure time consisted of their special interests. They used digital media for school tasks, reading news, and following current affairs. They said they did not post on social media; they were strict with their privacy; they did not have online friends and were not actively communicating on any other channels. They used YouTube only to follow their own special tubers (usually connected to their hobbies), and they were following these mainly for learning purposes. They were heading to elite high schools and lived in a big city. This seems to illustrate a kind of ideal of today's digital youth: scarce, disciplined, and controlled.

Matias is an example of what we call an "ideal digital youth," a disciplined, goal-oriented, and media-literate person. For him, digital technologies are mostly for useful and educational purposes, he also follows news and current affairs, and his screen time is very limited.

And then at school. No. Not that much on the network. Of course, messaging and for this, but [...] Not really that much. I am one of the less using [social media]. I'm not that active there. The whole screen time is about an hour and a half. A while ago, I kept a diary of my weekly training activities, amounts, and such. In addition to soccer training, I spent about 30 hours a week in body maintenance and other sports. (Matias)

Matias wants to focus on school, and he is heading to an elite high school after the ninth grade. His hobbies are very goal-oriented: he plays football and his plans include studying medicine or economics – or being a professional football player. His digital agency is controlled, passive, and conscious, mostly for educational and targeted purposes. His digital practices are connected to studying, following news and current affairs, and his hobbies: Matias uses social media platforms to look at videos connected to football or other activities he wants to learn more about. The intensity of his use is very limited: in the interview, he stresses that he does not have time to be on the phone or hang out online. He estimates his screen time is around one hour and a half. The contexts of his digital participation are mostly YouTube and Instagram. Matias lives in the growing city center, where he thinks he has all the possible opportunities for his future. The ideal of digital youth seems to be in motion: it is no longer connected to the potential of digitalization, its uses, and its skills. Thus, the discourse has shifted towards overuse, addictive, and problematic use of digital devices, especially smartphones. The ninth graders commented

on controlling their use; the idea of the freedom of mobile devices places new burdens and responsibilities on people and causes greater emotional stress (Livingstone, 2010). We can also see how the "ethos of excellence" increasingly guides the content and practices of many children's and young people's leisure activities (Berg & Salasuo, 2017).

The ethos of excellence is connected to the promise of a good life model that hard work, diligence, and doing your best will be rewarded, at least at some point. Lauren Berlant (2011), a scholar of culture and politics, described this phenomenon by using the concept of cruel optimism. Cruel optimism requires citizens who focus on middle-class well-life goals that are not in the least possible or realistic for them.

5. CONCLUSIONS: SHIFTING IDEALS OF DIGITAL YOUTH

Today, self-control has become a sign of being a good citizen; we must wage an endless battle to achieve the seemingly natural ideal norms of the elite and the stars. A failed and bad person is presented as unable to take care of himself and fulfill these expectations of an ideal life dictated by no one but shared by everyone. Interestingly, in a society that emphasizes freedom, we live amid so many silent but compelling norms and rules. (Jakonen, 2020, pp. 233-234).

In our study, we interpreted shame over the everyday use of digital devices, especially smartphones. When looking deeper into these tensions of controlling the use, we could interpret that young people felt shame and guilt for using too many digital devices and platforms were very visible, and there was also the envy of other peers who seemed to be succeeding in controlling their screen time. Even though these feelings were "produced" in the context of the interviews, it was still surprising for us researchers how much shame was connected to the digital every day.

The feelings of shame and guilt also echo moral panic (Cohen 1972; Buckingham, 2008), where young people's ways of using digital devices are considered a threat to a disciplined society. Furthermore, there seems to be evidence of demonizing talk around digitalization: if you are not aware, controlled, and disciplined, you will probably be addicted, spend your time idly, and learn nothing. We are not denying that disadvantages such as addictive behavior exist, but our data illustrates how young people seem to think online activities are a waste of time. However, these ideas and feelings were "produced" in the context of the interviews, and those who participated in our study may have talked to the researchers in a way they think adults want to hear about their digital everyday lives. We also noted how shame was not connected to a lack of skills or trendy devices but clearly to a lack of control over their usage of digital devices and services.

Idealistic statements about digital culture starkly contrast to how young people's digital lives are pathologized in mainstream media, where parents are taught to fear what young people might encounter if they spend too much time online. Medical authorities urged parents to move the computer out of their teen's bedrooms and into publicly visible spaces to see if greater parental oversight might diminish their likelihood of mischief, cyberbullying, illegal downloads, violent gaming, or porn consumption. At the time, it was as if there were only two ways to perceive the Web: a space of personal freedom and enlightenment or a space of darkness and risk (James, 2014).

These debates typically attribute an extraordinary power to technology and account for its role in highly deterministic terms: technology is seen to produce social change, irrespective of how and by whom it is used. Young people as emblems of the future are predictably invoked on both sides of this debate: they are at the same time "digital natives," whose facility with technology is creating new forms of social and cultural participation (Prensky, 2001), and the "dumbest generation," stupefied and terminally distracted by the flickering screen (Bauerlein, 2009). Such arguments tend merely to replay the binary logic that has historically characterized responses to all new technologies: either technology will liberate us, or it will enslave us; either it will expand our potential, or it will reduce us; either it will revitalize our social and cultural life, or it will take us all to hell (Banaji & Buckingham, 2013).

Danah Boyd (2014, p. 15) states that much of the fear and anxiety surrounding young people's use of digital media stems from misunderstanding or dashed hopes. Often, what emerges from people's confusion utopian and dystopian rhetoric. Sometimes, misunderstandings result in moral panic. In other cases, such as the dystopian notion that teens are addicted to social media or the utopian idea that technology will solve inequality, the focus on technology simply obscures other dynamics at play. Both extremes depend on a form of technological determinism. Utopian and dystopian views assume that technologies possess intrinsic powers that affect all people in all situations in the same way.

Our research reveals that it is important to elaborate on how digitalization is accessed, understood, and used and how it is culturally constructed. Furthermore, the dynamics of everyday life – how people make sense of it and navigate its socio-technical contours are important (Webster et al. 2020). To understand the dynamic dimensions of the sense of belonging to the digital society, understanding feelings, emotions, and affects is vital. They can be analyzed as hotspots showing us socially and culturally meaningful issues that need our attention (MacLure, 2013; Ahmed, 2004). Methodologically, understanding everyday experiences and reading emotions and affects from research material is demanding. Therefore, diverse ways of exploring affect all need to be discussed further, particularly concerning digitalization, affects such as shame, joy or envy, and youth cultures. We hope the avenues opened in this paper will lead to additional research on the topic.

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