Youth in the Information Society - Young People Reflect on Power Structures, Potentials and Risks in Web 2.0

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In Web 2.0 opinions are debated, personal contacts are cultivated and communities are formed. People work, study and enter into (purchase) contracts. Activities in Web 2.0 are caught in the conflict between the possibility of taking part in social processes and the loss of control over personal data. Participation in the information and knowledge society depends essentially on being integrated in and understanding the developing network structures (Castells, 2010).

While Germany has produced a number of studies examining the nature and duration of internet use by young people, there is a lack of studies addressing the reflections of young people on power structures, potentials and risks of activities in Web 2.0. The present research paper focuses on this aspect - how do young people reflect on the society experienced online and their involvement in it?

A qualitative study was conducted to explore this question. The framework for the survey was formed by grounded theory. Nine young Germans were questioned, in each case in a problem-centred interview. The evaluation of the interviews displayed type formation. In accordance with the Frame Selection Model by Esser (2005) diverging reference to society in the framing of activities within Web 2.0 determines differing modes of behaviour. As a result of the evaluation, three types of attitudes to Web 2.0 were identified: "Web 2.0 serves exclusively as a supplement for real relationships", "Web 2.0 is ambivalent under social aspects", and "Web 2.0 is instrumentalised by actors for criminal or value-creating purposes". It also became clear in the evaluation that the development of these attitudes to Web 2.0 was partly dependent on the orientation knowledge the young people had acquired at school or via other individuals. From the media education point of view, the results of the study indicate a desideratum for refining the orientation knowledge concerning Web 2.0 on a broader basis to strengthen the opportunities of young people for social participation, and not to limit teaching simply to "safe" dealing with Web 2.0.

References

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