

SLOVAKIA NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES REPORT FOR EU KIDS ONLINE III. NETWORK

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Slovakia did not take part in EU Kids Online survey so the conclusions are based on the results from research on the topic of the adolescents using the Internet, which covers the sample of 13-16 year olds; with the average age of 14.25 years. The survey was done in 2010 as the EU Kids Online Survey. When comparing Slovak with the European results, by European we mean 25 EU countries of the EU Kids Online survey. We try to refer to the results of the similar age group of teenagers.

Usage

In 2006 Slovakia was significantly lagging behind other European countries in terms of Internet connectivity at home. Nowadays 84.5 % of respondents connect to the Internet from home which is nearly the same as the European average. A large number of teenagers go online from school (74.5 %), from their friends' (36.2 %) and Internet café (15 %). Comparing the approximately a quarter of European 13-16 year olds accessing the Internet via their mobile phone, we come to a conclusion that only 14.5 % of Slovak teenagers do so.

In 2010 more than three quarters (80.5 %) of Slovak teenagers connect to the Internet once or several times a day; this rose from 63 % in 2008. 95.7 % of teenagers connect at least several times a week. On one connection they spend on average 1-2 hours (31.8 %) or 2-3 hours (24.8 %). In these characteristics there is no difference between girls and boys, also the differences between the rural and urban areas are disappearing.

Activities

When it comes to "the ladder of opportunities" - quite a number of Slovak teenagers reach the level of interactive use for communication. Chatting is the most favourite online activity (77.2 %), 64.9 % of teenagers use email and spend time in Facebook activities (51.8%). Online communication with friends and family was the main thing they would miss when asked to imagine "world without the Internet".

They watch videos, Youtube (66.3 %), download music, movies, and software (63.7 %) and play games online (51.5%). Surprisingly only 51.8 % of Slovak teenagers say they use the Internet for schoolwork. As in other countries, small part of Slovak teenagers is involved in such creative activities as blogging (6.3 %) or creating/designing websites (8.6 %); respondents who spend time in these activities have significantly higher self-esteem than those who do not spend this time.

Social networking sites (SNS)

Compared with countries in EU Kids Online survey Slovak teenagers are rather excessive in usage of SNS. 79.5 % of teenagers (87 % of girls and 70.7 % of boys) have created their own profile, or a personal website or blog on the Internet. Large part of such profiles is nowadays included in SNS (mainly Facebook). 65.6 % of teenagers spend time in SNS activities on a daily basis. There are big gender differences in SNS usage. Facebook is not used at all by approximately twice as many boys as girls. Boys are also more moderate with regard to the time they spend on Facebook. Almost three fourths of girls spent 1 hour and more a day on Facebook whereas 56.2 % of boys do so.

Online risks. Risky opportunities

Their pastime and time spent with certain activities have a subsequent impact on what phenomena children encounter on the Internet and on how they perceive the Internet. The girls' most frequent activity on the Internet is chatting followed by downloading content, watching videos (e.g. on Youtube), and SNS activities. Boys mostly watch videos, play games, chat, and download content.

Slovak teenagers perceive the highest risks on the Internet profiles being hacked and online identity theft; misuse of personal information or pictures. Boys are specifically worried by computer viruses whereas girls by sexual harassment, online perversion, or even abuse or rape.

Online strangers

Teenagers most often communicate on the Internet with their friends from the offline world, in particular with schoolmates; they develop already existing relationships. However, besides this, 77.2% of teenagers have a friend whom they meet only online. 74.7% chat with online strangers. If we compare this with the European teenagers, we see much bigger prevalence of this risky activity. In a European survey roughly one from ten teenagers that met online made an offline contact, whereas approximately one fifth of Slovak teenagers did so.

Though transferring an online relationship to the offline one usually takes place upon recommendations of trusted persons and online stranger is thus perceived by youngsters as a sort of "the verified one".

Girls expressed fear and concerns about dating with strangers nearly twice often and pay more attention to verifying a contact before meeting offline, so they themselves are trying to lower the risk of this opportunity. Despite the concern they go to such meeting more often than boys. A good feeling regarding the meeting had approximately same number of girls and boys (68.2% of girls; 71.4% of boys). Girls mention more frequently that they were scared, had a strange feeling, and were ashamed or disappointed. This result still doesn't refer much about the harm; we do not know their coping strategies when facing this kind of negative experience.

Sexual Images and Pornography

Roughly 20% of European teenagers (13-16) say they have seen sexual images on any websites in past year. Slovakia is very high in number of teenagers seeing obviously sexual content – both intentionally and unintentionally. 41.2% of teenage boys say they watch pornography on the Internet at least sometimes. Only 5.7% of girls say so (which partly refers to a courage to admit that). 11% of girls and 36% of boys had already used the Internet to search for information on sex. In this way natural sexuality development is associated with their online activities.

In particular risk may be children who make unintentional contact with the sexual content. 21% of Slovak teenagers accidentally stumbled upon websites with content depicting nudity or sex while surfing the Internet, and 15% of teenagers met with pornography unintentionally. This negative phenomenon was in the discourse of teenagers perceived as bothering and annoying (mostly girls):

"...when there are various perverse websites popping out all of a sudden."; "I do not like there is pornography and disgusting information there."

Sexting

Seeing and receiving sexual messages is more common in Eastern European countries (Romania, the Czech Republic, Estonia) so it is among Slovak teenagers. Sexting is a frequent phenomenon on the Internet, mostly girls experience it and mention it as one of the Internet disadvantages: "A lot of people, mainly men, propose me perverse things". Sexual messages (taunts and comments) received 30 % of Slovak teenagers (37 % of girls, 22 % of boys), which seems to be above the European average 17 % of European 13-16 year olds did.

Mostly girls expressed complaints about sexting but in their discourse it seemed to be considered as ordinary online experience, as a kind of side-effect of their activities on chats and SNS. They cope with sexting usually by ignoring and they worry more about the younger girls, who "are vulnerable whereas they are already immune against it".

However, teenagers are not just in the passive role in sexting but often they are actively involved. Sexual talk and comments made at least sometimes 10 % of teenage girls and 22.7 % of boys.

9.6 % of them admit that they had published on the Internet pictures or videos showing them in sexy postures and 4.6 % did so with pictures showing them in underwear or with unveiled parts of body.

Such situations are for them a source of entertainment, they play with the risk, they make experiments - they test what reactions there will be to their behaviour.

Bullying

6 % of Slovak teenagers say they were cyberbullied. More often they say they encounter negative phenomena such as cursing and deriding (50%), gossiping, dissemination of false information (42.6%), getting sexual taunts and comments (30%), misusing the pictures or videos (15.5%), threatening (17%).

The difference between prevalence of cyberbullying and experiencing negative acts proves that it depends much on various factors, e.g. the frequency and individual perception of such negative acts as well as their coping and level of vulnerability.

Teenagers refer about themselves often being in active role in such behaviour and consider it as a "fun". They are not sensitive enough to distinguish between fun and bullying online and that shall be tackled by prevention.

Personal data protection

Slovak teenagers have fairly good awareness of the fact that it is necessary to protect own personal data on the Internet and many of them do so. Teenagers have mostly negative experience with misuse of their pictures and so they are concerned about the privacy of pictures when uploading them to the Internet. Merely 17.3 % of girls and 27.7 % of boys do not protect their pictures on the Internet at all, i.e. the pictures are publicly available. 60 % of girls and 40 % of boys keep them private for their friends and more than quarter have photo albums locked by passwords. Boys are less aware of the fact that they should protect themselves, or that they could be endangered by something. They spend less time in activities on SNS and online communication in general. As in other risky activities (e.g. meeting online

strangers) the awareness of risk seems to be linked with the frequency of the activity and with facing the risk that would form their cautiousness and preventive strategies.

Teenagers would want to have better possibilities to take control of their pictures and where and under what circumstances they should be published. They themselves ask for approval by others when publishing their pictures in 59.9% of cases. They are also not happy when someone publishes something without their approval in 61.1 % of cases.

62.7 % of Slovak teenagers have their email address placed in their Facebook profile and one from ten posts his/her phone number.

NATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Media education in schools

On the initiative of National centre of media literacy IMEC media education has been integrated into the education legislation in Slovakia. Children have been taught about Internet safety in schools since 2007/2008. Since then media education in primary and secondary schools has been compulsory, and may be provided in two ways:

- Media Education as a topic integrated into other subjects. This form of media education is compulsory for every school. It does so, however, very formally and inefficiently. Reason: lack of the teacher's knowledge about these issues.
- Media education as a separate subject on its own. In Slovakia there are very few schools that provide media education as a subject on its own. Reason: absence of qualified teachers. However, according to surveys schools are interested in this issue.

The government has partnered with corporate entities such as Microsoft to support and train teachers in order to enable them to utilize ICT effectively in the classroom and with academic sector to let teachers maintain the academic qualification in the subject of media education.

Internet safety awareness

Slovakia has its own Insafe Awareness Centre - Zodpovedne.sk - that is operated by NGO eSlovensko and co-financed by the EC Safer Internet Programme. It provides various educational and awareness raising materials matching the interest and level of understanding of children, parents and teachers. Its animated prevention stories Ovce.sk, aired on the national and regional TV channels, are targeting the group of preschool and school age children and gained the special recognition in the "Cities for Children Award". The stories go with the manual for teachers and parents available - free to download, so that children can obtain effective and age appropriate mediation even from less media literate adults.

In 2008 the Slovak Awareness Centre, in cooperation with the Slovak Committee for UNICEF, established the National Free Helpline Pomoc.sk with free phone line, online chat and e-mail service. People can receive advice about illegal and harmful content, harmful conduct and distressing experiences related to ICT use. In 2010 the National Hotline for Reporting Illegal Content and Conduct Online, Stopline.sk, was established. The Hotline tackles illegal content on the Internet that, under the Slovak legislation, represents the basis for criminal offences. Multi-stakeholder cooperation and significant PR support promotes events such as the Police Day, Safer Internet Day and Data Protection Day. Further corporate engagement in Internet security has been demonstrated by the Slovak mobile operators, which allows

the blocking of adult content on their portals including the third-party content, not just the one provided by the operators.

Despite of big amount of multi-stakeholder policy development in recent years, Slovakia would be probably considered as East-European country with “high use and high risk” because it is only the Internet newcomer with the delayed broadband Internet penetration and delayed Internet safety awareness campaigns. Children seem to be several steps ahead of their parents and teachers in their Internet usage and skills, which make the Internet safety more challenging. As Slovak children often unintentionally come across the inappropriate online content such as pornography, emphasis on technical tools seems to be reasonable, mainly for young children. Privacy settings, parental controls, reporting mechanisms should be designed in a user-friendly way and enabled appropriately to age as default settings. It is also essential to motivate parents to expand their knowledge about how to work with their children and set out the normative online behaviours. Education and promotion of the three kinds of literacy (digital, media and social) is essential for effective use of parental controls including other technical tools.