8 The digital generation

Representations of a generational digital divide

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Introduction

The idea of a "digital generation" and the role of information and communications technology (ICT) as perhaps the main signifier and determinant of young people's lives have been prominent in public discourse related to youth for several years. The label applied to the digital generation is often accompanied by concern about risks (Byron, 2008; Livingstone et al., 2018), such as those related to wellbeing and health (Goodyear et al., 2018; Mishna et al., 2010; OECD, 2018) and online safety and security (Dowdell & Bradley, 2010; Livingstone et al., 2018; Strasburger et al., 2010). Conversely, the advantages of digital technology and social media for children and young people, such as faster, more engaged learning, cognitive skills development, awareness of social issues, social interaction and inclusion, and civic participation and entertainment, are promoted (Poyntz & Pedri, 2018; Tapscott, 2008).

In this chapter, using the case of Norway, we ask how a "digital generation" can be identified. To investigate this question, we analyse Norwegian media reports between 2010 and 2020, mentioning the use of ICT by children and youth. In order to identify characteristics of the digital generation, we also use school-based survey data.

In the discussion, we will concentrate on the concept of "moral panic", which is a well-established research tradition within media representations of youth culture. Moral panic originally described both dramatic and dramatised public reactions to youth culture from the 1960s onwards (Young, 2008). Concern for children's and youths' digital media use and its harmful consequences parallel previous moral panic over youth culture regarding, e.g. clothes, music, political opinions, drug use, and sexuality. Common to earlier historical incidents and children's and youths' digital media use now is mass media's portrayal and accentuation of a generational divide.

The digital generation as a social generation

As discussed previously in the introduction, the concept of generation is disputed and variously applied in both popular and scientific literature. The

DOI: 10.4324/9781003129592-8

generation concept has been crucial for youth research's development and is still widely referenced to distinguish children from their parents, to label certain birth cohorts or as a more thorough analytical tool to understand social change.

Various generational labels are given to young people, portraying them as cohorts with specific traits (Pickard, 2019), including labels concerning their relation to digital media and technology, such as the *Nintendo generation* (Green & Bigum, 1993)*,* the *Playstation generation* (Broos & Roe, 2006)*,* the *net generation* (Tapscott, 1999), or even the *thumb generation.* More recently, scholars have coined labels like the *iPhone generation* and *iGen* for certain birth cohorts, linking their behaviour and traits to specific experiences with technology. One prominent example is Twenge's claim that "the complete dominance of smartphones among teens has had ripple effects across every area of iGeners' lives" (Twenge, 2017).

It has been argued that several of these generational labels lack rigorous scientific support, precision, and adequate theoretical grounding (Furlong, 2013). The age boundaries may be stretched to suit researchers' needs, illustrating how many of these concepts and labels are elastic, fuzzy generalisations (Pickard, 2019), lumping all young people together, overlooking intragenerational differences, and nourishing intergenerational conflicts by exaggerating possible generation gaps (Woodman, 2016).

The seminal work on generations by Karl Mannheim can be seen as an effort to distinguish the sociology of generations from such generalisations. Mannheim proposed a theory of social generations in his effort to understand how German youth contested ideas from their parents' generation and how the young generation became the source of new values and new political movements (Mannheim, 1952/2001). In Mannheim's understanding, two central elements form a social generation: each generation emerges in a particular site or location, and new generational locations emerge when the ways of life of the previous generation in the same culture are no longer valued or realistic. This implies that it is not necessarily sufficient to be born at the same time to be part of a generation. To be a social generation, a group needs to share important experiences and challenges.

One particular experience shared by most Norwegian youth born after the turn of the new millennium is smartphone access and use. The first iPhone was introduced in 2007, and by 2016 most Norwegian youth owned a smartphone (Medietilsynet, 2016, 2020), allowing them to connect to the internet and access social media. Whether this shared location and experience is enough to form a digital generation by Mannheim's standard is part of this chapter's discussion. Technological change affects everybody. However, the parents of today's youth did not have this particular experience during their formative years, which could potentially create a generation gap in the sense that adults' fear an escalating pace of social change and loss of continuity between young and old generations. The idea of a digital generation merely connects these fears and anxieties to technology (Buckingham, 2006), echoing theories of moral panic and mediated youth culture.

Moral panic and mediated youth culture

One way of viewing generational divisions and conflicts arises from the study of mass media representations of youth culture and the concept of moral panic. This state of panic describes societal reactions to manifestations of deviance from rules and behavioural norms perceived as necessary to uphold the boundaries of civilisation (Falkof, 2020). Although the seminal studies on moral panic are now approaching their 50th anniversary, the tales of young substance abusers (Young, 1971), mods and rockers (Cohen, 1972), and youth gang muggings (Hall et al., 1978) continue to influence scholarly discussions on mediated youth culture (Hier, 2019; Ingraham & Reeves, 2016; Wright, 2015).

Central to these studies is the perception of the "folk devil", the evil entity threatening what is commonly considered good and safe, denoting traditional folklore logic resulting in a kind of witch hunt. In the studies by Young (1971) and Cohen (1972), the folk devil was mediated through portrayals of youth culture as ethic (norm-breaking behaviour and actual crime) or aesthetic (clothes and music) threats (Young, 2008). What follows is public outrage (i.e. panic) to varying degrees, voiced by public officials, the police, civil society, and the audience, regularly mixed with media commentaries. The culmination of moral panic is the demand to "do something", usually directed at formal regulation and/or punishment to bring the folk devil back under social control (Hier, 2019).

From its origin in the 1970s, study of youth culture and in the sociology of deviance, the empirical labelling model(s) of moral panic spread to various fields in the 1990s, theorising the discursive perception of "the other" following gender, religion, and minority studies (Falkof, 2020; Wright, 2015). The concept of moral panic was then adopted by scholars of late modernity and the consequences of industrialisation, connecting media-driven panics to societal fears of terrorism, immigration, and environmental and ecological breakdown (Ungar, 2001). By the year 2000, the concept of "moral panic" appeared both diluted and diverted until the emergence of new digital platforms dominated by user-made content and activity renewed scholarly interest in the different aspects of mediated panic-related phenomena (Hier, 2019; Ingraham & Reeves, 2016).

Falkof (2020) calls for a revitalised approach to the study of public discourse, bearing the marks of Cohen's (1972) original definition of moral panic: a condition, episode, person, or groups of persons described as a threat to societal values or interests and this threat's nature presented in a stylised and stereotypical manner. Falkof (2020) further views moral panic as a specific genre, a way of relating to a given phenomenon by giving it a familiar design with well-known tropes and narrative patterns. Falkof here maintains the ideas of folk devils violating commonly shared beliefs of what constitutes a good society, the opposing actors representing what is good and moral, the stories' almost viral qualities as they spread through media and the demand that authorities should solve the perceived problem.

Staying true to the concept's social constructionist core, Falkof (2020) proposes an interdisciplinary framework as an analytic tool to explain discrepancies

between what is empirically real and what is represented as real about a phenomenon. In the following analysis, we, therefore, use the concept of moral panic to investigate how Norwegian media's representations of children's and young people's use of ICT are conceived and if there are objective reasons for a "panic". When we apply Falkof's framework to perceptions of the digital generation, the aim is to grasp from public discourse the stories told to make sense of insecurity over technological and possibly also social and cultural change. These stories or perceptions interpreted as sense-making efforts can serve to constitute collective identities and boundaries between themselves and others (Falkof 2020, pp. 228, 232), in our case, between generations. Three of Falkof's (2020, p. 235) analytical questions are particularly relevant to our current study, here slightly revised to match our research question:

- What is being presented about the digital generation? Has this phenomenon been recognised, has it been demonised, and what, if anything, does it stand for?
- Does the presentation of the digital generation draw on pre-existing narratives about risk and threat, and, if so, what are they, and how are their generic features repeated?
- How does the presentation of the digital generation intersect with anxieties that are particular to that context or time period, and in what ways is it a part of a broader discursive frame?

The underlying presumptions and principles for these operationalised research questions are elaborated and illustrated next.

Folk devils on the internet

The critical stage in a media-driven moral panic phenomenon is the labelling of good and evil, i.e. the distance between "us" and "them", bringing the so-called folk devil to life (Wright, 2015). This image identifies the scapegoat for what is perceived to be bad or immoral, commonly associated with dispossessed groups or subcultures (Ingraham & Reeves, 2016; Ungar, 2001). When distinct youth subcultures emerged in the 1960s, their challenge to moral and behavioural norms was further spurred on by this period's rapid social changes affecting both class boundaries and the parent-child relationship (Wright, 2015).

This underlying reliance on social change may also explain why moral panics tend to recur, often following a familiar pattern. New media technologies have their own place in moral panic studies, from 1950s agony over comic books, demonisation of television and video games in the 1980s to contemporary fear of cyberbullying, teenage sexting, and internet paedophilia scares (Falkof, 2020; Staksrud, 2013, 2020). George and Odgers (2015) add to this list media coverage and parental concern over adolescents' ICT use and social and health-related risks. They find fears that time spent on devices interferes with adolescents' ability to develop effective social and relationship skills, concerns that multitasking

on devices is impairing cognitive performance and claims that device usage is causing adolescents to lose sleep. These examples may illustrate how insecurity over rapid technological and social development is projected onto youths' changed leisure opportunities and habits, driven by what is novel and offering opportunities for the emergence of subcultures in a recurring pattern.

For folk devils to be revealed to the public, moral panic stories routinely evolve around the media's use of experts or moral entrepreneurs to frame the events and offer primary definitions of what is at stake (Ingraham & Reeves, 2016; Wright, 2015). As these experts and entrepreneurs produce authoritative images of social reality (Hier 2019), scholarly interest in moral panic has typically centred on what is real and what is presented to be real in such conflicts. An exaggerated threat or the disproportionality of a given problem serves to rouse emotions associated with an actual state of acute fear, legitimising calls for action (Wright, 2015). At this stage, the image of the folk devil or scapegoat allows the problem to be fixed by punishing or putting the evil under control by law, regulation, a ban, or improved security (Falkof, 2020).

However, digital spaces and the perceived dangers of letting children, especially, go online contrast with the traditional concept of moral panics, as the object of fear literally knows no borders. Even if internet crime can be punished under national law, calls for regulation and protection will quickly encounter an international jurisdictional void. Staksrud (2013; 2020) describes how media regulatory institutions in Scandinavia and Western welfare states transformed from the 1990s from regulating, censoring and banning visual images, language, and, above all, pornography to giving advice about age-based content suitability and online protection.

Staksrud (2013; 2020) links this transformation to global, technologically driven processes where welfare states' social institutions have undergone structural, sociological changes that severely affect the relationship between the individual and society. In essence, this relationship concerns the citizen's civil, political, and social rights, where the elevation of freedom to make one's own choices both liberates and excludes the individual from formerly defining social structures historically embedded in Western welfare states. The result is that individual children or their parents find themselves alone to make choices based on a mixture of consumerism and presumptive informed rationality. According to Staksrud (2013), this naturally calls for new welfare state solutions, including educational programmes for both children and parents. The school system, non-government organisations, and the technology platforms, along with renewed and thoroughly transformed regulatory institutions, all have a place in this new market of information.

Data and methods

In this chapter, we investigate trends in the discourse on youth and digital media over the last decade, following the smartphone's introduction to most of the Norwegian youth population, by analysing Norwegian media coverage from

2010, including 2020. To investigate whether these reported trends are rooted in actual experiences among youth, we apply data from Ungdata, the nationally representative school-based youth surveys. Ungdata includes responses from 630 000 youth aged 13–18 since 2010. Ungdata cover various aspects of young people's lives, e.g. relationships with parents and friends, leisure activities, health issues, local environment, wellbeing, and school issues. In addition, the surveys include questions on media and ICT use.

Media coverage analysis

To identify newspaper articles about the "digital generation", we applied the search words *"digital"* and *"children or youth"* (in Norwegian) to the Norwegian database A-tekst (now Retriever),[1] limiting our search to 2010–2020. As this search strategy yielded more than 13 000 results, we limited the search to a three-month period every year between 2010 and 2020 and rotated the periods by the quarter of the year. This reduced our net sample for analysis to 1124 hits while maintaining the prerequisites for a randomised and representative result. Our unit of analysis is the text excerpt containing the hit for our search string, meaning that two or more references in one newspaper issue (i.e. both paper and digital, or both the front page and the editorial) are registered as individual results. Also, press releases and items from national news agencies could be picked up and included in several newspapers, thus appearing more than once in our sample.

We copied the text excerpts (usually three to four sentences), the newspaper name, and the publication date into an Excel worksheet. We then read the excerpts and applied between one and three labels to each media story based on our understanding of the context where the keywords appeared. This expanded our net sample by 57 to a total of 1181 items (see Table 8.1). We omitted text excerpts with no

Table 8.1 Categories and samples of Norwegian newspaper reports 2010–2020 from the A-tekst/Retriever database

Category	*Content of newspaper reports*	*N*
Digital threats	Harassment including, bullying, sexting, online soliciting	433
	Physical or mental health issues related to digital use	60
Digital generation	Reflections on youths' use of digital devices in situations that were previously analogue, contrast with parents	234
Digitalisation in education	Digitalisation of educational institutions to improve student learning	214
	Digital or net-based games for leisure and/or educational purposes	36
Digital competence	The need for information, good conduct, or online protection	204
Total		1181

relevant relationship between “digital” and “children or youth”. We also excluded computer game reviews by adult professionals. In contrast, reports mentioning such games in relation to how youths spend their leisure time were included.

One recent typology of media stories about young people using ICT (George & Odgers, 2015) applies seven categories of parental worries. However, in our coding, it soon became evident that many news stories containing our search string did *not* mention risks. Therefore, broader categories were constructed through an inductive, bottom-up coding strategy (see Table 8.1).

In Table 8.1, our label “digital threats” overlaps with George and Odgers’ (2015) description of worries about whom adolescents are interacting with online and what kind of information they share, and fear that children will be victims of cyberbullying and online soliciting. Digital bullying or cyberbullying imply that harassment or aggressive behaviour between schoolchildren takes place using electronic technology (typically on social media), providing the potentially anonymous perpetrator(s) with broader, around-the-clock access to the victim, involving a wider audience and the possibility of humiliations persisting on a digital record forever (Milosevic, 2015). Digital bullying may or may not involve sexual harassment derived from what has popularly been termed “sexting”, meaning the sending, receiving, and forwarding of nude, semi-nude, or sexually explicit images, texts, or videos (Lee & Darcy, 2020; Van Ouytsel et al., 2015). Items in our category “digital threats” also correspond to what George and Odgers describe as interference with offline friendships, harming cognitive performance and loss of sleep.

A digital divide between parents and children is the essence of our category “digital generation”, supplemented by the digitalisation of education and gaming. Our category “digital competence”, however, includes both fears that young people’s online activities may leave a digital trace causing future problems and “competence” as a solution to this and the other digital risks. In the analysis, all the citations from Norwegian media were translated into English by the authors.

Ungdata

Ungdata is a large Norwegian database of school-based surveys that cover youths aged 13–18. Ungdata allows us to track developments and trends in ICT and media use among Norwegian youth. For this chapter, we apply data for the period 2010–2020. During this period, some of the questions and measurements have been changed, meaning that we have disrupted timelines for some variables. Other questions are asked for shorter periods or at single time points.

We present descriptive analyses of trends in different aspects of ICT use for all respondents, including total screen time, type of media used, digital bullying and exclusion, sexual harassment/sexting and parental involvement in, and knowledge of social media use among youth.

Screen time is measured for 2010–2020 by a question asking the respondents to estimate their total screen time outside school hours, including TV, PCs, tablets, and mobile phones.

Type of media is measured by a question asking the respondents to estimate how much time they spend every day on average using different kinds of media like TV, video games and books (2010–2020), mobile games and social media (2014–2020), and YouTube (2017–2020).

Digital bullying is measured variously in the different periods that Ungdata covers. For the first period (2010–2013), digital bullying is measured with two questions on whether the respondents have received "bullying messages" on their phones or while chatting on the internet. For the second period (2014–2016), it is measured by one question on whether the respondents experience bullying or threats from other youth via the internet or mobile phone. For the third period (2017–2019), it is measured by combining two questions on whether they have, during the last 12 months, ever been threatened via the internet or mobile phone and whether they have, during the last 12 months, ever been excluded by peers online. For the last period (2020), it is based on the following question: Are you bullied, threatened, or excluded online?

Sexual harassment is measured by a series of questions in the 2020 surveys. First, the respondents are asked whether they have sent nude pictures or sexual content to someone. Second, the respondents are asked whether they have received digital messages or images with sexual content from someone. Those who have received sexual content are asked whether they thought it was OK to receive these or not.

Parental involvement in young people's digital lives is measured with a series of questions from 2014 to 2020. First, the respondents are asked whether their parents have set limitations for their social media use. Second, the respondents are asked whether their parents know what social media platforms they use and what they know about their activities online. Third, the respondents are asked whether they hide some of their online activities from their parents.

Results

Following Falkof's (2020) framework, we first present the phenomenon "digital generation" based on the media articles from Table 8.1. We then present the perceived threats of digitalisation to this generation. Finally, we present the calls for solutions to this problem in the media coverage. To give an impression of proportionality, the media coverage is supplemented by the relevant results from Ungdata throughout the analysis.

Digital generation

Our category "digital generation" represents mostly positive or neutral news stories. We find descriptions of children and youths as "digital natives", often stating this as a fact:

> We now have the first generation of digital natives, meaning people who have grown up with the internet.
>
> (Aftenposten, 13 July 2016)

> Significant parts of young people’s everyday lives take place in digital arenas.
> (Adresseavisen, 5 October 2017)

Following statements like these, newspaper reports focus on various activities or services now becoming digital to accommodate young people’s needs and interests. Examples are internet shopping, movies, radio and other media services, school nurses, banking, and public information from authorities. Other stories relate to how previous analogue activities or events must evolve into digital spaces to attract the attention of children and youth, such as local libraries launching digital reading contests for children, digital youth clubs and museums introducing digital entertainment, and learning activities to attract families with children. A certain nostalgia marks these reports, reminiscing about how childhood was before the introduction of generally available digital devices. Some newspaper stories thus make a point about how theatre, storytelling, and reading aloud still attract children’s attention even in a digital age.

Most newspaper stories relating to digitalisation in education are about schools introducing digital devices like PCs, iPads, or tablets in learning situations:

> Today’s children are born into a digital world, and we respond to that, says principal NN.
> (Bergens Tidende, 11 August 2012)

> [The] internet and digital learning are about to revolutionise education.
> (Grimstad Arbeiderblad, 6 September 2016)

Digitalisation in schools is further related to the use of digital pedagogical tools in kindergartens, intended to stimulate basic language training for toddlers. In both sectors, significant results in terms of improved learning are expected. This optimism is particularly evident in the so-called gamification of mathematics, technology, and science in primary and secondary schools, using digital tools, apps, and contest-like modes of instruction on digital devices.

Disregarding this liberal access to digital devices in schools, newspaper reports in our sample also show that Norwegian 15-year-olds ranked just about average on the PISA test[2] on digital reading in 2015. Also, doubts about whether digital devices correlate with academic success are present in our sample. This doubt is expressed in criticism of teachers’ digital competence. Moreover, newspapers publish letters from parents wanting their children to have time off from screens when in school and report on schools banning students’ use of mobile phones during school hours to prevent digital bullying and stimulate face-to-face socialising during recess. Nevertheless, the overwhelming impression of media stories in this category is a drive for modernity, where digital developments in society are met with excitement and certain awe at the younger generation as compliant with this development.

As reported in the media, the digitalisation of young lives involves an increase in screen time both in and after school. Using Ungdata to track total screen time for Norwegian boys and girls aged 13–18 years for the period 2014–2020, we find that

youth spend more time in front of a screen in 2020 than they did six years prior. In 2014, 55% of the boys and 47% of the girls spent more than three hours a day in front of a screen every day outside school hours. In 2020, the number had risen to 62% for boys and 57% for girls. In parallel, the media landscape is rapidly changing and evolving with the introduction of new digital and social media. Time spent in front of a screen does not necessarily mean the same thing in 2020 as it did in 2010. Both the level of interaction with the screen and the content are changing.

Traditionally, youth have spent much of their spare time watching TV. However, this is no longer true, at least not the way it used to be. Whereas more than 20% of Norwegian youth spent more than two hours watching TV every day in 2010, this was true only for about 8% in 2020. The trend is similar for boys and girls, even if we observe a greater decline among girls than among boys. Knowing that greater numbers of youth spend an increasing total amount of time in front of a screen means that they have moved their attention towards other types of screens than the TV.

The greatest shift we observe in this period is the shift in attention towards social media. In 2014, nearly 25% of the boys and 43% of the girls spent more than two hours using social media every day outside school hours. In 2020, this applied to almost 40% of the boys and 65% of the girls.

In contrast to these trends, the number of youths spending time gaming is relatively constant. Boys dominate in this area. For the last decade, about 40% of boys have spent more than two hours everyday gaming on a console or a PC. In addition, about 14% of the boys spend more than two hours every day gaming on tablets or mobile phones. Even if many girls play games, they spend considerably less time gaming than boys of the same age.

The observations on Norwegian youth over ten years confirm the general assumptions in the media coverage on the digital generation. Young people spend an increasing amount of time in front of a screen, and the nature, content, and activities of this screen interaction are changing. Youth spend an increasing amount of time online.

Digital threats

Our category "digital threats" presents the risks involved in children's and adolescents' ICT use, as portrayed in media and reported in Ungdata. Two excerpts from our sample of newspaper articles state:

> Digital bullying is now becoming widespread in Rjukan. In the new app Ask .fm, young people no more than 12 years old are called cheap[3] and ugly.
>
> (Rjukan Arbeiderblad, 26 October 2013)

> Every day, thousands of children and young people experience bullying via mobile phones or the internet.
>
> (Raumnes, 14 September 2020)

In 2003, Medietilsynet, the Norwegian Media Authority,[4] launched its survey of children and media consumption. The subsequent biennial reports (2008–2020)

from Medietilsynet are frequently quoted sources on the prevalence of digital bullying in our newspaper sample, along with results from local Ungdata surveys throughout the period.

An academic commonly consulted by newspapers in the first half of the period under investigation is Elisabeth Staksrud, whose book *Children in the Online World: Risks, Regulations and Rights* (2013) has been highly influential in the Norwegian debate and policymaking on this subject. However, the sources most frequently referenced in the news stories on digital bullying in our sample are the private foundation Barnevakten (i.e. "The Babysitter"), established in 2000 to advise parents on children's use of media, and a campaign entitled "Bruk hue" (i.e. "Use your brain"). "Bruk hue" visited schools, public libraries, parent meetings, and other public arenas, promoting advice and warnings from Barnevakten representatives in conjunction with health professionals and Telenor, a major national supplier of digital content for children. A typical example in our material following this discourse is a local newspaper article reporting the previous night's public meeting visited by the "Bruk hue" campaign, informing parents about the risks of digital bullying and violence for children using digital platforms. The newspapers often refer to how institutions in the local community take a stand against digital bullying and encourage parents to do the same:

> Many young people live significant parts of their lives on social media, and digital bullying is on the rise. Now the school and the local police urge parents to learn more about their children's digital everyday lives.
>
> (Aust-Agder Blad, 19 November 2013)

The concept of digital bullying or cyberbullying is complex, as is the concept of traditional bullying (Englander, 2019). Cyberbullying may take several forms that are hard to grasp through surveys. However, most children and youths will know when they experience bullying and be able to report this when asked. The digital transformation of this threat implies a shift in arenas for exposure, from open bullying in school or other physical arenas to online forums, online platforms, and social media. This makes it harder for parents, teachers, and adults to monitor activities and potential threats. In addition, omnipresent social connectivity on smartphones makes it harder for victims to avoid bullying situations.

The questions used to capture digital bullying or violence in Ungdata have evolved during the observation period. The proportion of youth who have experienced digital bullying is thus not directly comparable across time. However, some important observations can be inferred from Figure 8.1. Experiences of online bullying and violence are relatively common. Digital bullying is more widespread in lower secondary schools than in upper secondary schools. There are no trends towards either an increase or a decrease within any of the observation periods, suggesting that the level of digital bullying is relatively constant over time, even if the use of social media, as well as total screen time, is rising.

Newspaper reports in our sample do not necessarily distinguish between sexual and non-sexual harassment when warning against young people's ICT use. It is important

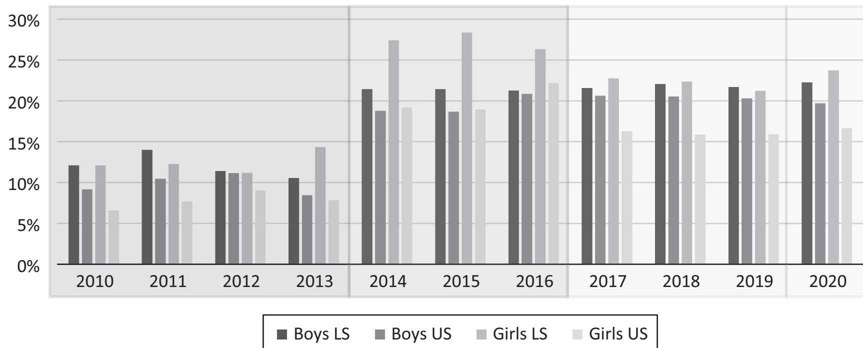

Figure 8.1 Percentages of Norwegian youth in lower (L) and upper (U) secondary schools (S) experiencing online bullying or violence 2010–2020. Period (P) 1 (2010–2013), n = 49 098. P2 (2014–2016), n = 178 623. P3 (2017–2019), n = 281 145. P4 (2020), n = 35 623.

to note that *sexting* (sending, receiving, or forwarding sexually explicit material) may take place between consenting partners and in an atmosphere of trust and/or flirtation, intimacy, and sexual exploration and may thus have a special value for teenagers using technology with which they are comfortable (Anastassiou, 2017). However, sexting may also be coercive, non-consensual, or be accessed or requested from children by adults, which obviously contrasts with the phenomenon's potential innocence. Possible consequences of cyberbullying and non-consensual sexting overlap with feelings of shame and low self-esteem, reputational damage, negative effects on school performance, social isolation, physical discomfort, self-inflicted harm, depression, and suicide (Lee & Darcy 2020; Milosevic, 2015). Notably, newspaper articles in our sample report on a theatre ensemble touring local schools with a play on digital bullying titled "Hengdeg" (i.e. "Go hang yourself").

As we can see from Figure 8.2, sexting is not uncommon for Norwegian youth. At the lower secondary school level, about 10% of boys and 12% of girls have sent nude pictures of themselves to someone. At the upper secondary level, more than one in five have done the same. Slightly more girls have shared nudes than boys. However, many more girls than boys felt some level of pressure to do so.

In many cases, youths are also at the receiving end of sexting. From Figure 8.2, we see that girls are slightly more exposed to this than boys, and it is more common among youths in upper secondary than in lower secondary school. More youths at lower than upper secondary school find it offensive, and whereas most girls who have received images with sexual content do not think it was OK, most boys do.

Digital competence

The call for digital competence in our sample of media reports may be seen as the older generation's main response to the threat of children being victims of digital

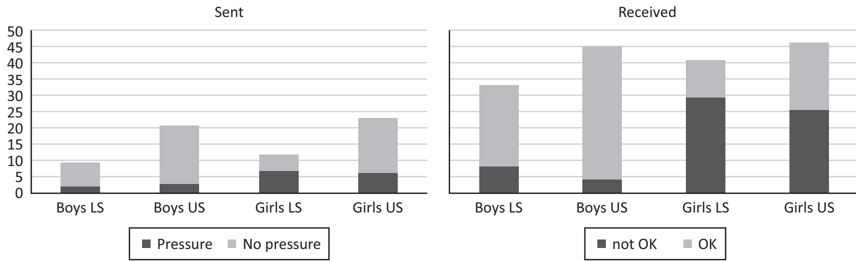

Figure 8.2 Percentages of Norwegian boys and girls in lower (L) and upper (U) secondary schools (S) who have sent (n = 14 262) or received (n = 14 154) digital sexual content, 2020.

bullying and reduced health. However, such competence is also the main response to schools' perceived shortcomings in delivering improved learning results. The two following citations are telling examples:

> Children often have good digital competence, but they may lack social competence. Do not be naive and trust your child never to be mean to anyone on the internet.
>
> (Sarpsborg Arbeiderblad, 16 October 2013)

> After the Millennium, theories emerged on how youths, being surrounded by digital tools, would learn to use them naturally. (…) Recent research shows that this is not the case: children will not automatically learn from technology how to use it in a good way.
>
> (Klassekampen, 8 February 2018)

Here, an important division in the concept of digital competence is displayed: even as children and young people will be more familiar with ICT than their parents and older generations, they may not be able to use it with moral responsibility. The former way of assessing "digital competence" is closely connected with our category "digital generation", where the use of digital devices is expected to prepare children for future working life and rapid technological development. The latter meaning of "digital competence" here relates directly to our category "digital threat". Children's and young people's immature understanding of formal rules of privacy and social norms of good conduct and moral and personal responsibility are described as the main problems behind these threats. In the newspaper reports, key solutions are emphasised as children and youth learning critical thinking and critical understanding of ICT, placing the responsibility both with parents and teachers:

> Adults should be present where children and young people live their digital lives.
>
> (Telemarksavisa, 25 February 2010)

> Digital competence is a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes (…). I believe the school has a major responsibility for educating our children in these respects.
>
> (Dagsavisen, 26 September 2016)

Again, the "Bruk hue" campaign and related measures directed at parents are given media coverage. By inviting parents to these meetings, the schools encourage parents to talk to children about ICT use, to ask what happens on the platforms the children engage with, and to generally be good role models and give their children a moral digital upbringing. The following excerpt from a local newspaper written by a primary school principal inviting parents to a meeting about bullying gives a good example of this joint responsibility:

> The talk will address what we as parents may do to develop our children's good digital judgement and social skills online.
>
> (Hadeland, 29 April 2019)

The media analyses thus identify parents' role in the online activities of the digital generation as important. Common advice presented in the media is to encourage parents to take an active part in the digital lives of the digital generation. One way of doing this is to set rules for their children's social media use or talk to them to gain insight into what their social media activities consist of. Another is to place the responsibility for digital competence on teachers and schools.

As we can see from Figure 8.3, there is a clear trend towards increasing percentages of Norwegian boys and girls subject to parents who set rules for their social media use. Nearly 50% of the girls in lower secondary education agree or strongly agree with a statement about having parents that set rules for their social media use. Youths in upper secondary education are less subject to similar rules than youths in lower secondary and girls more than boys.

Most Norwegian youths agree or strongly agree with a statement about having parents with knowledge about their social media activities. More girls than boys and a higher proportion of younger than older youth have parents with knowledge about which social media platforms they are using, who they are communicating with, and what types of interactions they are part of. We observe a trend towards an increasing number of youths with parents who are involved in their social media activities.

It seems that the observed increase in parental involvement in their children's social media activities is met with an increased need for seclusion amongst Norwegian youth. The number of youth who agree or strongly agree with a statement about hiding at least part of their activities on social media from their parents is on the rise, in particular for the youngest users.

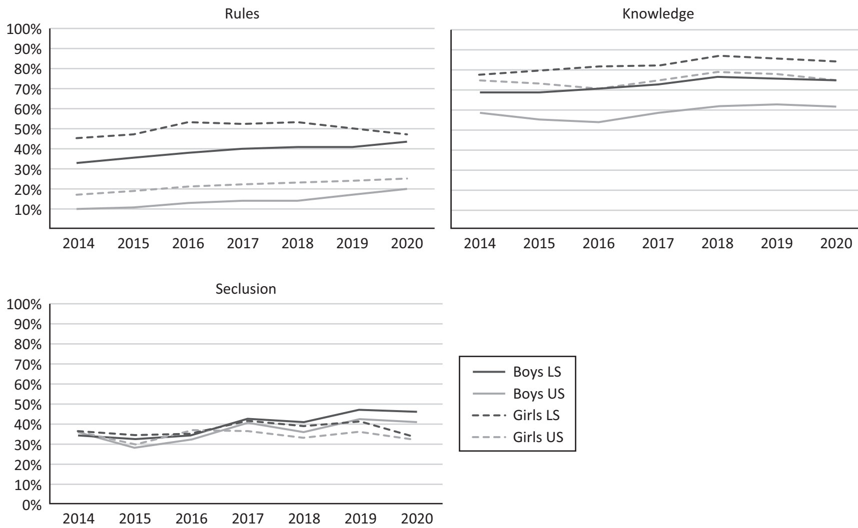

Figure 8.3 Percentages of Norwegian boys and girls in lower (L) and upper (U) secondary schools (S) with parents who have set rules for or have knowledge of their social media use or who hide some of their social media activities from their parents, 2014–2020, n = 169 212, 169 252, and 167 956, respectively.

Discussion

The perception of children's and youths' ICT use gathered from Norwegian newspaper articles from 2010 until 2020 is ambiguous, where this age group's ascendancy into a new technological reality is met with admiration, excitement, ambition, and fear. The "digital generation", a term used generously in newspaper articles, covers all these notions where something perceived as new clashes with something portrayed as old: the digital versus the analogue. As excitement rises from the modern world's general technological advancements, young people's seemingly natural engagement with this new reality is described with a certain awe. Naturally, this admiration spurs ambition, and young people are expected to be at the forefront of learning and general mastery of their digital environment.

However, as young people are expected to be technological pioneers, the possible dangers of them being insufficiently equipped upon entering uncharted digital territories also create distinct worry and alarm amongst adults, as represented by the newspapers. This worry increases with the perceived opaqueness of the digital platforms and spaces used by young people, where they can operate without parental supervision or even parents' knowledge (Staksrud, 2020). Ungdata shows that most young Norwegians have parents who know what kind of social media platforms they use and what kind of online activities they take

part in. Parents are also involved by setting rules for social media use and online activities. By observing trends from 2014 to 2020, we see an increase in parental involvement through increased knowledge amongst parents and a slight increase in the number of youths that are subject to rules regarding their use. Conversely, we observe a rising trend during the same period in the number of boys that hide parts of their social media activities from their parents.

The fear of threats to young people's safe internet use is both distinct and blurred in the newspaper stories. Digital bullying stands out as the most concrete and frequently mentioned problem, but digital bullying is entangled with a larger body of risks and misconduct generally stemming from the premise of young people being on their own on the internet, encountering things they are unequipped for or making bad choices. However, Ungdata shows that digital bullying, at least in terms of experiences of bullying, harassment, and/or exclusion, affects between 10 and 25% of the Norwegian youth population. As the consensus will be that bullying, including digital bullying, is bad, the real phenomenon may appear less overwhelming than indicated by the newspaper articles. However, this does not prevent digital bullying from being an overwhelming problem for young people being harassed (Milosevic, 2015). Sexting, by contrast, is more ambiguous in the adolescents' experiences recorded by Ungdata. About one in five Norwegian teenagers in upper secondary schools have shared nudes, and 84% of the boys and 72% of the girls did this without feeling pressured to do so. About 45% of the students in upper secondary schools have received digital sexual content, and 90% of the boys and 56% of the girls are "OK" with this. This aligns with previous research on sexting being an integrated part of young people's courting practices and explorations of sexual identity (Lee & Darcy, 2020), with a potential for non-consensual sharing and image-based sexual abuse (McGlynn & Rackley 2017).

Following the framework of a moral panic, Falkof (2020) asks what is being demonised in the media about young people's behaviour. In our case of the "digital generation", the answer is not totally clear, as the villains or folk devils are not only the individual bullies or the unknown people making or posting scary or threatening things on the websites or platforms being utilised by the children and youth. The problem is also the pitfalls of the technology itself, eliciting behaviour that one would perhaps abstain from in the analogue and commonly acknowledged more transparent world, i.e. being mean, malicious, criminal, or lewd. When Falkof (2020) consequently asks what this possible demonisation stands for, an answer would be lack of control and safety in a contemporary online world, contrasting with the offline world where children are perhaps more protected by rights and regulations than ever before (Staksrud, 2020).

This lack of control in digital spaces was first described in relation to so-called video nasties and console gaming in the 1980s (Staksrud, 2013). Interestingly, gaming takes up only a minor space in our sample of newspaper articles between 2010 and 2020, a finding that also surprised us. When gaming is mentioned in our sample, it is mostly about "gamification" of educational material and

opportunities, intended to make learning in school more interesting and palatable to the digital generation. If we ask, following Falkof (2020), whether the presentation of the digital generation might draw on pre-existing narratives about risk and threat, we see that the "video nasties" might very well be alive on social media. Here, we find a regular continuation of a pre-existing narrative bringing violence and pornography to the touch of younger children's fingertips, where previously these dangers took place in adolescents' dens in families where parents were presumed to be either absent or careless, i.e. unsuited for bringing up their children safely. The absence of parents is still portrayed as the main problem for children and youth encountering unwanted or possibly damaging experiences on the internet and may therefore constitute what Falkof (2020) has described as a broader discursive frame for panic over digital media.

Conclusion

If a generation can be identified by common experiences, children's and young people's widespread use of smartphones with built-in Wi-Fi might constitute such an experience. However, as adults all over the world acquired and adapted to smartphones at the same time, is this trait sufficient to acknowledge children and young people growing up with the internet as a distinct generation?

In this chapter, we have argued in the line of Staksrud (2013) that the surge in smartphone sales and use involving children being given direct access to the internet from their own handheld devices coincided with another similarly encompassing but less visible change concerning media regulation. All over Western Europe, institutions originally established to regulate, censor, and even ban visual images and media language expressions underwent a significant transformation towards giving advice on media content and user safety. This transformation, aligning with other welfare state institutions allowing for a broader range of individual choice, also meant that the responsibility for risks became individualised or, at least in part, removed from the same institutions. While today's children are left to make an almost indefinite range of their own choices in using digital devices online, their parents are expected to keep track of, regulate, educate on, and protect their children from online risk. This situation is in stark contrast to the parents' generation growing up in an era when state institutions for direct media regulation, with age limits and watershed rules for television broadcasting, still functioned. We suggest that this experience may actually be the real, defining common challenge distinguishing today's children and youth as the "digital generation".

A return to strict regulation of the new media landscape to protect children and young people from the harms we have described in this chapter seems to be the only consumer choice that is unavailable in the current situation. Here, other welfare state institutions have been forced to compensate. We see this compensation most typically in schools and even in kindergartens, where children are meant to be not only digitally adept but also digitally competent, meaning developing critical thinking about digital media. Again, this puts pressure on the older generation

of teachers, many of whom have not had the same experiences as young people using the internet, meaning that schools run the risk of lagging behind no matter what their digitalisation efforts are. Here, schools and parents are new allies but also possible antagonists in this new market of information, leaving room for new entrepreneurs and brokers of protection and advice, where some children may pay a high price for everybody's freedom on the internet.

Notes

1 A-tekst/Retriever is a Norwegian database covering print, online sources, broadcast, and social media https://www.retrievergroup.com/.
2 PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) standardised measuring of 15-year-olds' ability to use their reading, mathematics, and science knowledge. https://www.oecd.org/pisa/.
3 "Cheap" here denotes being sexually available and undiscriminating.
4 The Norwegian Media Authority (Medietilsynet): https://medietilsynet.no/en/about-medietilsynet/.

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