

MASTER'S THESIS

Titel der Master Thesis / Title of the Master's Thesis

“Child Protection and Empowerment in the Digital Age – Children’s Rights and Realities from an Austrian Public Primary School’s Perspective”

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Angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien, 2019 / Vienna 2019

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt /
Postgraduate programme code as it appears on
the student record sheet:

A 992 884

Universitätslehrgang lt. Studienblatt /
Postgraduate programme as it appears on
the student record sheet:

Human Rights

Betreut von / Supervisor:

Dr. Helmut Sax

Abstract

Every third internet user worldwide is a child – the trend is rising. Children are active online at an ever earlier age using a growing number of different devices. This new environment poses unprecedented opportunities as well as often underestimated threats to the development of the youngest generation, and therefore, directly affects their rights. Appropriate answers must be found to protect children from any negative effects and at the same time empower children to fully enjoy the benefits of their increasing internet usage. It is time to evaluate to what extent such responses have been found so far, to what extent necessary conditions for the protection and empowerment of children have been adapted in light of the ongoing digitalisation and how efficient such measures currently are. To address these issues the Master's thesis at hand firstly provides a statistical overview of the internet usage of children aged six to nine, secondly analyses the current child protection and empowerment framework and its applicability online and thirdly assesses to what extent child protecting and empowering measures are achieving their objectives today – using the experienced realities of 26 children at one Austrian public primary school as examples. Based on the results of this research, a clear gap between the current children's rights framework and its actual implementation can be detected, which indicates a drastic need for further investigation.

Jede/r dritte Internetnutzende weltweit ist ein Kind, mit steigender Tendenz. Kinder sind in immer jüngerem Alter und mit einer wachsenden Anzahl von verschiedenen digitalen Geräten online aktiv. Diese neuen Rahmenbedingungen bieten sowohl beispiellose Chancen als auch oft unterschätzte Gefahren für die Entwicklung der jüngsten Generation und wirken sich daher direkt auf ihre Rechte aus. Die Suche nach angemessenen Lösungen, um Kinder vor den negativen Auswirkungen zu schützen und sie gleichzeitig in die Lage zu versetzen, die positiven Auswirkungen ihrer zunehmenden Internetnutzung voll auszuschöpfen, ist unausweichlich. Es ist also an der Zeit zu bewerten, inwieweit adäquate Lösungen gefunden wurden, inwieweit die Voraussetzungen für den Schutz und die Stärkung von Kindern in Hinblick auf die fortschreitende Digitalisierung angepasst

wurden und wie effizient solche neuerdings erarbeiteten Maßnahmen derzeit sind. Um entsprechende Antworten auf diese Fragen zu finden, gibt die vorliegende Masterarbeit zu allererst einen statistischen Überblick über die Internetnutzung von Kindern im Alter von sechs bis neun Jahren. Zudem analysiert sie den aktuellen Kinderschutz- und Ermächtigungsrahmen und seine Anwendbarkeit online und bewertet am Beispiel von 26 Kindern einer österreichischen Volksschule, inwieweit diese Mechanismen Kinder tatsächlich erreichen. Basierend auf den Ergebnissen dieser Forschung kann eine deutliche Lücke zwischen dem aktuellen theoretischen Kinderrechtsrahmen und seiner tatsächlichen Umsetzung festgestellt und eine dringende Notwendigkeit weiterer Forschungen und näherer Untersuchungen zum Thema aufgezeigt werden.

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List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

Council of Europe – CoE

Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU – EU CFR

European Convention on Human Rights – ECHR

European Union – EU

Digital Economy and Society Index – DESI

Information and Communication Technology – ICT

Non-governmental organisations – NGOs

Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography – OPSC

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development – OECD

Uniform Resource Locators – URLs

United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime – Palermo Protocol

United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child – UN CRC

1. Introduction

In some cases, societies are in the position to decide whether to follow a societal development or to decline it. Digitalisation, however, is no matter of choice. Cultural changes that come with new technologies are happening day by day, faster and faster, and there is no getting around it. Over the last decades the internet has seemingly become the most important infrastructure open to the broader public.¹ Its effects on our private and business lives are drastic and there is nothing we can do about it. The only possible way to escape social powerlessness is to take the plunge and properly react to current developments towards a digitalised world. Providing the right tools and essential knowledge to children seems to be an inevitable first step.

Today 3.5 billion people are using the internet.² Every third internet user worldwide is a child – the trend is rising. Children are active online at an ever earlier age using a growing number of different devices. The time they spend on the internet, playing online games or being active in social networks is increasing and all that frequently without supervision by grown-ups (see chapter 2).

These new framework conditions pose unprecedented opportunities as well as often underestimated threats to the development of the youngest generation, and therefore, directly affect the realisation of their rights, which in present and future ‘will depend on both their physical and virtual environment.’³ Thus, appropriate answers are needed to be found to protect children from the negative effects and at the same time empower children to fully enjoy the positive effects of their increasing internet usage on their physical and psychological well-being.⁴ At that, in order to enable children to make the most out of the

¹ J. Byrne and P. Burton, ‘Children as Internet users: how can evidence better inform policy debate?’, *Journal of Cyber Policy*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2017, p. 39.

² J. Byrne and P. Burton, 2017, p. 39.

³ J. Byrne and P. Burton, 2017, p. 40.

⁴ European Commission, ‘Creating a better Internet for Kids’, 23 August 2018, Available from <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/content/creating-better-internet-kids-0> (accessed 04 November 2018).

new possibilities the internet entails, a certain digital maturity and digital empowerment has to be facilitated and a safe and stimulating online environment for young people has to be provided – by diverse responsible actors and a number of different means.

Clearly, time has come to evaluate to what extent these necessary answers have been found so far, to what extent necessary pre-conditions for the protection and empowerment of children have been adapted in light of the ongoing digitalisation and how efficient such measures currently are. Thus, firstly the Master's thesis at hand is an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of the current child protection and empowerment framework regarding the internet usage of children aged six to nine, which includes all of their online activities and use of digital devices connected to the internet. Secondly, this work is based on the assumption that our current system of child protection and empowerment works like a funnel, where a lot of strategic and theoretical work is done on international and regional levels, whereas only parts of international and regional action plans are implemented on a national level and only a fractional amount of theoretical protection measures are actually trickling down to and can be enjoyed by children.

In order to answer that question and prove or disprove that assumption, an Austrian public primary school will be used as an example. This specific research subject was chosen for two reasons. Firstly, in contrast to children from the age of ten, six to nine-year-olds seem to be underrepresented in previous research on the subject. Secondly, the growing number of ever younger children using the internet indicates that finding answers to the effects of the internet for primary school children becomes increasingly relevant.



Figure 1: Child protection system interpreted as a funnel

1.1 Objectives and structure

In order to find an answer to the question of how efficient child protection and empowering mechanisms are today a theoretical foundation has to be elaborated. Therefore, the first part of this discourse aims at comprehensively describing the current web usage of children aged six to nine (see chapter 2). In a next step a focus is laid on its positive and negative consequences by summarising the most common and important threats as well as opportunities the internet usage of children entails (see chapter 3). Thereafter, the current child protection and empowering system must be reviewed for its applicability in the digital age by providing an overview on the international, European and Austrian institutions' current discussions, actions and standards on the safety of children in the context of their internet usage. Furthermore, a frame of reference and implementation requirements that derive from the preceding analysis of the state of discussion on this particular subject has to be portrayed (see chapter 4).

Once the theoretical foundation has been laid – and only then – it will be possible for us to measure the efficiency of child protection in the digital age by comparing the frame of reference and implementation requirements on the one hand and the actual reality experienced by a group of children aged six to nine in Austria on the other hand (see chapters 6 and 7). A discussion of the findings will enable the development of recommendations to further improve the current status and system of child protection and empowerment in the context of children's web usage in a last step (see chapter 8).

THEORETICAL PART

2. Initial situation and contextualisation

A first step to measure the efficiency of the current child protection and child empowerment system (see chapter 4) with regard to children's internet usage is to adequately portray the initial situation and impart a necessary basic knowledge. Hence, based on diverse studies the following chapters should illustrate the extent of children's internet usage today and also provide answers to the question of how children access and use the internet nowadays (see chapter 2.1). Throughout this process a specific focus will be laid on the web usage of Austrian children aged six to nine (see chapter 2.2).

2.1 Internet usage of children worldwide

Globally, children are currently active online at a similar rate as adults. At the same time children's tendency to use the internet increases with age. However, especially in developed countries – in comparison to developing and emerging countries – also the number of ever-younger internet users rises immensely, by now starting with kindergarten kids and preschool students.⁵ According to a series of interviews of more than a thousand children all around the world, over time the internet has become an 'inseparable part of their lives'. They have started to think of the internet as 'a human right, a necessity' to reach the aims of learning and being in touch with people.⁶ Thus, not only do children often use the web at an ever earlier age, but also the time they spend online is increasing.

In general, internet access for children is on the rise, especially with the emergence of smartphones. They enable children to enjoy online access in a 'more personal, more

⁵ S. Livingstone, J. Carr and J. Byrne, *One in Three: Internet Governance and Children's Rights*, Florence, UNICEF Office of Research, 2016, pp. 16-17.

⁶ S. Livingstone and M. Stoilova, 'How do children use the internet? We asked thousands of kids around the world', *The Conversation*, 02 November 2016, <https://theconversation.com/how-do-children-use-the-internet-we-asked-thousands-of-kids-around-the-world-67940>, (accessed 12 March 2019).

private and less supervised’⁷ way. Smartphones allow greater independence for children while using the internet,⁸ and children know that. An international study found that children are already prioritising accessing the internet at home and via mobile devices⁹ in order to send messages, talk to friends, watch video clips, play computer games, use social networks¹⁰, and also to learn something new.¹¹ Communication and entertainment through the internet are the benefits most appreciated amongst children.¹²

This tendency towards ever-younger internet consumers creates new challenges, as especially younger kids often do not have the necessary skills and knowledge to take full advantage of the new chances the internet provides and to stay safe from the risks that come with it.¹³ In particular, the share of younger children at high risk of internet addiction grows continuously.¹⁴ Notwithstanding, it is a fact that an appropriate and moderate internet usage benefits children’s psychological development, whereas both extreme web use as well as no web use can have negative consequences for children’s well-being.¹⁵ Nevertheless, most recent evidence shows that in general the impact of the length of time spent online on children’s well-being is very small. Despite all fast-moving changes towards a digitalised world the physical environment still mainly determines the development of our youngest generation,¹⁶ although the impact of the virtual environment must not be forgotten.

⁷ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Children in a Digital World: The State of the World’s Children 2017*, New York, UNICEF Office of Research, 2017, pp. 1-3.

⁸ Global Kids Online, ‘Making the internet safer for children: the global evidence’, globalkidsonline.net, 06 February 2018, <http://globalkidsonline.net/safer-internet-day-2018/>, (accessed 13 March 2019).

⁹ J. Byrne, D. Kardefelt-Winther, S. Livingstone et al., *Global Kids Online research synthesis, 2015–2016*. UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti and London School of Economics and Political Science, 2016, p. 4.

¹⁰ The Economist, ‘How children interact with digital media’, [economist.com](http://www.economist.com/special-report/2019/01/05/how-children-interact-with-digital-media), 03 January 2019, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2019/01/05/how-children-interact-with-digital-media>, (accessed 12 March 2019).

¹¹ J. Byrne, D. Kardefelt-Winther, S. Livingstone et al., 2016, p. 5.

¹² Global Kids Online, 2018.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ The Economist, ‘How children interact with digital media’, 2019.

¹⁵ Global Kids Online, 2018.

¹⁶ D. Kardefelt-Winther, ‘How does the time children spend using digital technology impact their mental well-being, social relationships and physical activity’, *The UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti*, 2017, p. 6, <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/pdf/Children-digital-technology-wellbeing.pdf>, (accessed 16 March 2019).

2.2 Internet usage of children aged six to nine in Austria

In Austria, too, children no longer want to imagine a life without the internet. Already in 2012 37 per cent of all six to ten-year-olds were regularly using YouTube and 15 per cent had their own profile on social networks, most of them on Facebook.¹⁷ In 2016 40 per cent of all six to ten-year-old Austrians were in possession of their own smartphone.¹⁸ Today, six to seven-year-olds in Austria own on average 1.8 digital devices and eight to nine-year-olds own 2.6 digital devices. Thus, in Austria children's internet consumption via computer, laptop, tablet or smartphone is continuously increasing and expected to gradually replace other media formats such as television, radio or newspapers.¹⁹

On average, mobile phone and smartphone use in Austria starts at six years and computer, laptop and tablet use at seven years. E-readers are used from the age of eight.²⁰ Nevertheless, despite this rising trend of the internet and the decrease of the consumption of other media formats, television still plays an important role in the media consumption of children in Austria, especially among the younger ones. TV and different types of music players are still the most important digital devices for six to seven years olds, whereas for eight to nine years olds TV, smartphone and tablet are the most popular gadgets.²¹ This indicates that the internet is becoming even more important from the age of eight.

Thus, in many cases already at these young ages children's digital knowledge is enormous. In general, Austrian children aged six to nine use their devices for communication and sending pictures, playing games, searching for pictures and videos on Google, watching videos on YouTube and creating and editing pictures. Thus, they

¹⁷ Education Group GmbH, 'Oö. Kinder-Medien-Studie 2018: Das Medienverhalten der 3- bis 10-Jährigen', www.edugroup.at, 2018, https://www.edugroup.at/fileadmin/DAM/Innovation/Forschung/Dateien/KinderMedienStudie_Zusfassung_2018.pdf, (accessed 12 March 2018).

¹⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ IP Österreich, 'Kinderstudie 2016: Kinder in ihrer digitalen Welt', ip-oesterreich.at, 27 June 2016, <https://ip.at/assets/Uploads/IP-Kinderstudie-2016.pdf>, (accessed 12 March 2019).

²¹ *ibid.*

have the digital skills to search and watch videos and movies on diverse provider platforms, they are able to operate at least one web-enabled device, they have the knowledge to choose their own programmes and to skip advertisements during watching videos.²² However, according to a recent study – Austrian children aged six to nine are not able to assess online purchases correctly, to evaluate online contents properly and to recognise product placements as such,²³ which implies a need for digital education at this very young age.

Nevertheless, in 2018 three-quarter of all Austrian children aged six to ten had access to the internet via diverse devices and that – in the majority of cases – even without supervision and in their own rooms.²⁴ Further, a survey conducted in Austria in 2016 showed that around 48 per cent of all Austrian parents surveyed had not made any arrangements with their children regarding the length and content of their mobile phone or smartphone use. 36.6 per cent of all parents also did not establish any rules regarding the computer usage of their children,²⁵ even though a defined and appropriate set of rules is considered to be important to empower and at the same time protect children online. This indicates that, '[s]ome parents lack the skills, knowledge, or awareness to mediate effectively their children's internet use.'²⁶ Thus, the internet seems to be omnipresent in Austria and children seem to be omnipresent on the internet, however, the awareness of the consequences and the importance of appropriately reacting to these developments has apparently not yet fully entered the consciousness of society.

At that, a certain vacuum evolves and makes it even harder to reach children on their online media behaviour, as children who face problems within their web usage do not consolidate with their parents or teachers but prefer to ask their peers or siblings for

²² Universität Wien (Institut für Soziologie), 'Digitale Medien im Volksschulalter', Saferinternet.at, 2018, https://www.saferinternet.at/fileadmin/redakteure/Footer/Presse/Infografik_SID_2018_web.pdf, (accessed 12 March 2019).

²³ *ibid.*

²⁴ Education Group GmbH, 2018.

²⁵ Statista: Das Statistik-Portal, 'Gibt es in Ihrer Familie Regeln bzw. Absprachen zur Nutzung der folgenden Medien?', 2016, <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/592237/umfrage/regeln-fuer-kinder-bei-der-mediennutzung-in-oesterreich/>, (accessed 12 March 2019).

²⁶ Global Kids Online, 2018.

advice or look for answers online.²⁷ Hence, appropriate answers are needed now, as developments are gradually becoming more uncontrollable.

3. Possible effects of the internet usage for children

Nowadays children – ‘the digital generation’ – are seen as both ‘in the vanguard’ and ‘at risk’.²⁸ Today seeing children become experts and confident learners in this new information society contrasts serious concern about the ‘loss of traditional skills, competencies and values’.²⁹ Therefore, as a next step towards evaluating the current child protection and empowerment mechanisms with regard to children’s web usage the possible effects of their internet usage have to be elaborated. The following chapter provides an overview on the societal challenges for children that come with the emergence of the internet (see chapter 3.1). After that, the risks and opportunities of an increased web usage for the individual child – as online content consumer, producer and communication partner³⁰ – will be explained (see chapter 3.2).

3.1 Societal effects

Beside the fact of an increasing internet access for children worldwide, evidence indicates a certain ‘digital divide’³¹ that comes with the most recent developments towards a digitalised world. Still not all children enjoy equal access to the so-called ‘internet of opportunities’.³² Social, cultural and economic differences in real life equally affect the

²⁷ Universität Wien (Institut für Soziologie), 2018.

²⁸ S. Livingstone, ‘Children’s use of the internet: Reflections on the emerging research agenda’, *New Media and Society*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2003, pp. 147-166.

²⁹ *ibid.*

³⁰ M. Hermida, ‘Chancen und Risiken im Internet’, *Universität Zürich*, 2014, https://www.psychologie.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:fffff-c0e5-c48b-0000-000014eb351a/Martin_Hermida_2014.pdf, (accessed 16 March 2019).

³¹ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2017, pp. 1-3.

³² Internet Society, ‘Preparing for an Internet of Opportunities’, [internetsociety.org](https://www.internetsociety.org/news/speeches/2017/preparing-internet-opportunities/), 21 November 2017, <https://www.internetsociety.org/news/speeches/2017/preparing-internet-opportunities/>, (accessed 13 March 2019).

virtual life of children and keep many children from benefitting of the chances the internet opens up.³³ Too many children are unconnected – with drastic effects for their present and future, as not only their social integration and education are affected but also their future job opportunities.³⁴

Mascheroni and Ólafsson, both leading experts on the societal effects of the mobile internet, proposed that ‘social inequalities intersect with divides in access and result in disparities in online activities.’³⁵ Disadvantaged children seem to remain disadvantaged online. Children with wealthier backgrounds enjoy better education towards a certain ‘digital maturity’³⁶ and are able to use a number of different devices, whereas poorer or more disadvantaged children do not have the possibility to improve their digital skills or find appropriate online content in their mother tongue. Hence, internet usage more and more becomes ‘part of the middle-class armoury for perpetuating social advantage’.³⁷ Well-off parents have the opportunity to adapt their children’s education towards new and digital circumstances through private classes, which poorer families cannot afford.

Furthermore, also amongst child internet users worldwide a digital gender gap can be observed,³⁸ which is estimated to be around 11 or 12 per cent – with a rising trend. Thus, a significantly higher number of children online are boys, while girls often and in many countries – mainly low-income countries – are left out.

At that, a certain division amongst younger and older children must be highlighted in this regard. Younger children ‘lack the digital skills of their older peers’ as well as ‘digital safety skills’.³⁹ They are neither able to assess whether information they find online is true, nor are they able to properly administer their privacy settings on diverse platforms

³³ Global Kids Online, 2018.

³⁴ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2017, p. 43.

³⁵ G. Mascheroni and K. Ólafsson, *The mobile internet: access, use, opportunities and divides among European children*, New Media and Society, 2015, pp. 25-32, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/3653/daa8b9151fc5cfde2e8f0582a00f61687eac.pdf> (accessed 13 March 2019).

³⁶ European Commission, 2018.

³⁷ The Economist, ‘How children interact with digital media’, 2019.

³⁸ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2017, pp. 1-3.

³⁹ J. Byrne, D. Kardefelt-Winther, S. Livingstone et al., 2016, p. 5.

used. However, children who have the opportunity to start using the internet earlier due to earlier access and availability enjoy greater independence and achieve longer online experience the older they get. An international study on *The mobile internet: access, use, opportunities and divides among European children* in 2015 showed that children who used the internet from an earlier age, thus, who are digital natives, are using the internet in more diverse ways and are more productive online than children who gained access to the internet at a later age.⁴⁰

Hence, the current manifestation of societal inequalities through the internet has been made clear. However, the consequences of this so-called ‘digital divide’ among children are more severe and widespread in developing and emerging countries than in industrialised states such as Austria⁴¹ – which does not mean that it does not exist at all in these states. Research indicates that also in high income countries, with modern technological infrastructures the social status of a child’s family has an impact on the level of protection and empowerment children experience online.⁴² However, it does not have to be this way.

Today, the emergence of digital devices and the world wide web can also be considered as the main driving force of change. Hence, the potential of the internet to ‘be transformative for the world’s most disadvantages and vulnerable children’⁴³ is there. The internet could open a door to the world, for those who would not even have dreamt of a window to the world without the internet. It could help them realise their potential to the maximum.⁴⁴ Social characteristics such as location, social background, ethnicities, disabilities, age and sexual orientation are invisible online. Thus, ‘greater online connectivity has opened new avenues for civic engagement, social inclusion and other opportunities, with the potential to break cycles of poverty and disadvantage’.⁴⁵ In the

⁴⁰ G. Mascheroni and K. Ólafsson, 2015, pp. 25-32.

⁴¹ Global Kids Online, 2018.

⁴² United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2017, p. 45.

⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ *ibid.*

light of this, only the burden of access – be it of technological or economic nature – could prevent developments in a right direction.

3.2 Individual effects

The understanding of the risks as well as opportunities of the internet for children is linked to a number of factors that are different from country to country. Even within single countries, opinions differ between diverse actors such as parents, educators and children depending on personal experiences and attitudes.⁴⁶ As Livingstone and Haddon put it,

complex solutions, involving multiple participants – curriculum designers, teacher training, local communities, children’s charities, public service broadcasters, industry partners and many more – are required if the benefits of the internet are to be more widely and fairly enjoyed.⁴⁷

‘Magic bullet’ solutions to neither online risks nor online opportunities for children are thus to be defined.⁴⁸ However, as a first step towards finding sustainable and efficient solutions a grid of classifications was developed by Livingstone and Haddon in 2009 to which the diverse country-specific online dangers and risks for children can be assigned.⁴⁹ According to them online risks for children are comprised as follows: 1) Commercial interests, 2) Aggression, 3) Sexuality and 4) Values and ideologies. Online opportunities for children can be categorised as follows: 1) Education and learning, 2) Participation and civic engagement, 3) Creativity and 4) Identity and social connectivity. Within these categories online risks and opportunities are further subdivided into risks and opportunities that are content-based for the child as recipient, contact-based for the child

⁴⁶ I. Paus-Hasebrink and C. Ortner, ‘Online-Risiken und –Chancen für Kinder und Jugendliche: Österreich im europäischen Vergleich’, *Universität Salzburg*, 2008, p. 11, https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Christina_Ortner/publication/292141362_Online-Risiken_und_-_Chancen_fur_Kinder_und_Jugendliche_Osterreich_im_europaischen_Vergleich_Bericht_zum_osterreich_ischen_EU_Kids_Online-Projekt/links/56aa011408ae7f592f0f0926/Online-Risiken-und-Chancen-fuer-Kinder-und-Jugend, (accessed 16 March 2019).

⁴⁷ S. Livingstone and L. Haddon, ‘Introduction’, in S. Livingstone and L. Haddon (eds.), *Kids Online: Opportunities and Risks for Children*, Bistol, The Policy Press, 2009, p. 3.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁹ I. Paus-Hasebrink and C. Ortner, 2008, pp. 15-16.

as participant and conduct-based for the child as actor.⁵⁰ Based on this model of classification the following chapters will provide an overview on the online risks and opportunities for children in Austria.

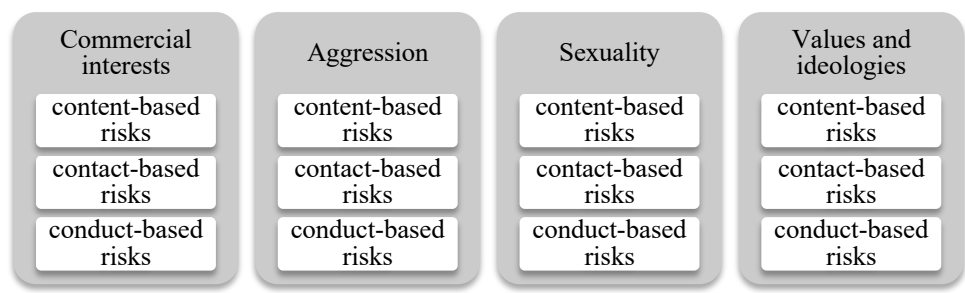


Figure 2: Classifying online risks for children⁵¹

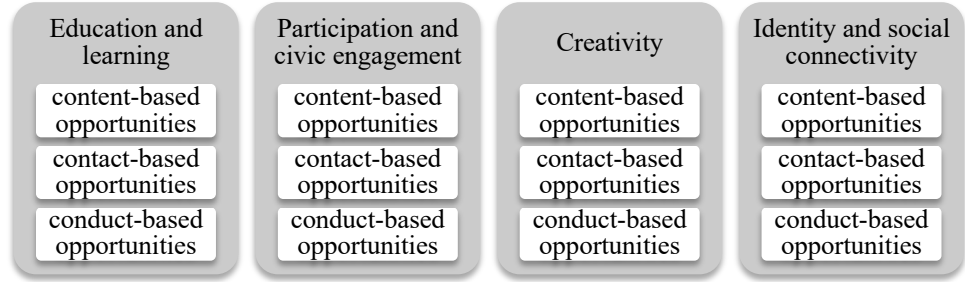


Figure 3: Classifying online opportunities for children⁵²

3.2.1 Risks

Primary school children use the internet in a lot of ways, they use it privately and, in many cases, also for schoolwork or homework. They are surrounded by the world wide web in diverse situations of their daily lives through an ever-growing number of digital devices used en masse – and there is no getting around it. Hence, with school enrolment online safety risks start to continually rise due to the fact that ‘school-age children are starting

⁵⁰ S. Livingstone and L. Haddon, 2009, p. 9.

⁵¹ *ibid.*

⁵² *ibid.*

to be independent online and might go online unsupervised'.⁵³ Therefore, it is essential to illustrate and explain the potential risks children are likely to face online in order to subsequently be able to assess the current child protection and empowerment mechanisms.

As outlined before the four classifications of online risks for children – commercial interests, aggression, sexuality and values and ideologies – are sub-categorised into risks for the child as a recipient that lay in the content children consume, into risks for the child as a participant that are based on the contacts they make online and into risks for the child as an actor that are rooted in their own conduct online (see chapter 3.2).⁵⁴ In other words, certain contents or commercials could upset children, certain online-users could harm children and certain online behaviours or cultures could endanger children and their online counterparts.^{55,56} The following pages will provide an overview on what that means in concrete.

Commercial interests

Online risks under this category are closely linked with financial harms and the violation of children's privacy,⁵⁷ and can occur in many different situations during children's internet use.

Firstly, advertisement and aggressive merchandising could influence children.⁵⁸ Children love to surf on sites that accompany their favourite television shows or are offered by companies whose products they prefer to use. Indeed, some of these websites offer added

⁵³ Raising Children Network (Australia) Limited, 'Internet safety: children 6-8 years', raisingchildren.net.au, 20 December 2018, <https://raisingchildren.net.au/school-age/play-media-technology/digital-safety/internet-safety-6-8-years>, (accessed 18 March 2019).

⁵⁴ S. Livingstone and L. Haddon, 2009, p. 9.

⁵⁵ Raising Children Network (Australia) Limited, 2018.

⁵⁶ J. Rowlinson, 'The Internet and Children: The Risks', safekids.co.uk, 08 May 2017, <http://www.safekids.co.uk/childreninternetrisks.html>, (accessed 18 March 2019).

⁵⁷ I. Paus-Hasebrink and C. Ortner, 2008, pp. 15-16.

⁵⁸ *ibid.*

value for children's education and also entertainment.⁵⁹ In many cases, however, the aim of such sites is to turn children into long-term buyers through aggressive marketing, branding, sweepstakes or raffles.⁶⁰ Seemingly 'free' ringtones, software or homework assistance could turn out to be hidden cost traps that are often hard to detect – even for adult online users. Another problem in this regard comes with online games that are free of charge at the first glance. Often in order to be able to continue playing, to unlock the next level or to gain virtual lives one has to pay⁶¹ – which for children often is hard to spot.⁶² Also accidental in-app-purchases are a widespread risk to which children are exposed online.⁶³

Secondly, children's shared personal information could be misused for commercial reasons. As children tend to be 'more trusting and vulnerable than adults, children could be tricked into doing so, being told by the stranger that "it's OK"'.⁶⁴ Children reveal a lot of information online – names, passwords, addresses, locations, personal interests and also information about their friends and family members⁶⁵ – which brings a range of new risks with it. Shared personal data can be used in order to specifically target and influence children towards certain decisions that are in line with the commercial interests of others.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ internet-abc, 'Welchen Gefahren sind Kinder im Internet ausgesetzt?', internet-abc.de, 15 March 2019, <https://www.internet-abc.de/eltern/familie-medien/gefahren-und-schutz-viren-mobbing-werbung-datenschutz/welchen-gefahren-sind-kinder-im-internet-ausgesetzt/>, (accessed 18 March 2019).

⁶⁰ American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, 'Internet Use In Children', aacap.org, October 2015, https://www.aacap.org/AACAP/families_and_Youth/facts_for_families/FFF-Guide/Children-Online-059.aspx, (accessed 18 March 2019).

⁶¹ internet-abc, 2019.

⁶² Get Safe Online, 'Paying for Games, Apps & Downloads', getsafeonline.org, 2019, <https://www.getsafeonline.org/safeguarding-children/paying-for-games-apps-downloads/>, (accessed 18 March 2018).

⁶³ Raising Children Network (Australia) Limited, 2018.

⁶⁴ Get Safe Online, 'Privacy and Identity Theft', getsafeonline.org, 2019, <https://www.getsafeonline.org/safeguarding-children/privacy-identity-theft/>, (accessed 18 March 2019).

⁶⁵ KIDSCAPE, 'Internet safety and online risk', kidscape.org, 2019, <https://www.kidscape.org.uk/advice/advice-for-parents-and-carers/internet-safety-and-online-risk/>, (accessed 18 March 2019).

⁶⁶ *ibid.*

Finally, children themselves could unknowingly infringe copyright or share commercial messages.⁶⁷ Concrete examples in this regard would be the copying of certain contents or also the illegal download of music, movies or files^{68, 69} – in both cases children often are simply not aware that they are doing something wrong.

Aggression

Online risks that can be assigned to this second category often lead to physical and psychological damage, fears and aggression.⁷⁰

First of all, the danger of aggressive contents needs to be outlined. Racist or other inflammatory content, real or simulated violence and images of cruelty to animals are unsuitable for children.⁷¹ Nevertheless, they can be found on the net.⁷² In many cases children do not even need to search for such violent contents. ‘Often children will stumble across it by chance [while using YouTube and other social networks]; disguised under seemingly innocent urls [(Uniform Resource Locators)], attachments, or even circulated on leading social media sites.’⁷³

However, not only aggressive content can be easily found online. Also, other internet users can be the source for harmful aggression online. The potential of children to connect with unpleasant, offensive or threatening users or to become victims of cyber bullying or cyber stalking cannot be excluded.⁷⁴ Cyber bullying and cyber stalking occurs in diverse variations ‘and is particularly damaging as the abuse is inescapable - it follows the target

⁶⁷ I. Paus-Hasebrink and C. Ortner, 2008, pp. 15-16.

⁶⁸ Get Safe Online, ‘Music, Movies and File Sharing’, [getsafeonline.org](https://www.getsafeonline.org/safeguarding-children/music-movies-file-sharing/), 2019, <https://www.getsafeonline.org/safeguarding-children/music-movies-file-sharing/>, (accessed 18 March 2019).

⁶⁹ Get Safe Online, ‘Copying & Cheating’, [getsafeonline.org](https://www.getsafeonline.org/safeguarding-children/copying-cheating/), 2019, <https://www.getsafeonline.org/safeguarding-children/copying-cheating/>, (accessed 18 March 2019).

⁷⁰ I. Paus-Hasebrink and C. Ortner, 2008, pp. 15-16.

⁷¹ Raising Children Network (Australia) Limited, 2018.

⁷² internet-abc, 2019.

⁷³ KIDSCAPE, 2019.

⁷⁴ J. Rowlinson, 2017.

everywhere'.⁷⁵ In that context it has to be highlighted that children do not only run the risk of becoming the victim of such practices but also to become the perpetrator.⁷⁶

Sexuality

Closely linked to the risks that come with the aggression of certain online actors towards children are sexually-based threats, which could lead to physical and psychological harms as well as sexual behavioural disorders.⁷⁷

There are thousands of websites with pornographic content that can be accessed without access restrictions, thus, also by adolescents and children. Irrespective of this, more and more nude photos or sexualised representations are circulating on the internet.⁷⁸ They are frequently uploaded and disseminated or shared by private individuals.⁷⁹ With this existing sexualisation of the internet even children do increasingly experience a certain 'pressure to display sexual behaviour online'.⁸⁰

Besides that, the connection with others can easily become a significant risk. With the emergence of 'social media, interactive gaming, and chat rooms' the practice of online-grooming, 'the [process] of an adult befriending a child with the intent to prepare them for sexual abuse',⁸¹ is on the rise.

Values and ideologies

Lastly, the risk of exposure to distorted realities that are conveyed through the internet must be illustrated. Misinformation or so-called fake news, biased world views or flawed

⁷⁵ KIDSCAPE, 2019.

⁷⁶ I. Paus-Hasebrink and C. Ortner, 2008, pp. 15-16.

⁷⁷ *ibid.*

⁷⁸ B. Berglund, 'Parents, Wake Up: The Hidden Dangers of the Internet', Mediaplanet, 2019, <http://www.futureofbusinessandtech.com/online-and-mobile-safety/parents-wake-up-the-hidden-dangers-online>, (accessed 18 March 2019).

⁷⁹ internet-abc, 2019.

⁸⁰ KIDSCAPE, 2019.

⁸¹ *ibid.*

ideals of beauty are just a few examples of what is circulated and communicated online⁸² – with drastic consequences for the well-being of children. Wrong or misleading values and ideologies get continuously intensified by children’s use of social media and can result in disorientation, identity crises or impact the socialisation process as such.

3.2.2 Opportunities

The continuing or even expanded social division between children from different social backgrounds, ages and genders (see chapter 3.1) and also the dangers of the web usage for our youngest generation have already been elaborated (see chapter 3.2.1). Hence, it is time to look at these new developments from another angle. The following paragraphs shall evaluate and describe the positive effects of the internet on children and the number of opportunities that are opening up with the rise of the digital, which by far outreach the risks as well as societal challenges⁸³ – at least theoretically. The potential for improvement and change is there; only it has to be used. ‘In a today’s world, the internet becomes not only a new playground but also a library a public space and a community’, which could be one of the reasons why a recent study found that children themselves are much more interested in the opportunities that digital devices and the internet bring than the risks that they are entailing.⁸⁴ Let us follow their lead, to be able to help them take their chances, as today ‘many children enjoy the internet but most do not climb far up the ladder of opportunities’.⁸⁵

As outlined above children’s opportunities online can be assigned to four categories: education and learning, participation and civic engagement, creativity and identity and

⁸² I. Paus-Hasebrink and C. Ortner, 2008, pp. 15-16.

⁸³ KIDSCAPE, 2019.

⁸⁴ J. Byrne and D. Kardefelt-Winther, ‘The internet of opportunities: what children say’, *UNICEF connect* [web blog], 01 November 2016, <https://blogs.unicef.org/evidence-for-action/the-internet-of-opportunities-what-children-say/>, (accessed 16 March 2019).

⁸⁵ S. Livingstone, G., Mascheroni, K. Ólafsson and L. Haddon, ‘Children’s online risks and opportunities: comparative findings from EU Kids Online and Net Children Go Mobile’, London: London School of Economics and Political Science, 2014, <http://netchildrengomobile.eu/ncgm/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/EU-Kids-Online-Net-Children-Go-Mobile-comparative-report.pdf> (accessed 16 March 2019).

social connectivity (see chapter 3.2). Within those categories the online chances for children can be divided into three sub-groups. They – just like the online risks – either result from the content children consume, the connections they make or the conduct they show online.⁸⁶

Education and learning

Digital connectivity and access to the internet can be seen as one of the most important game changers in education⁸⁷ – at home and at school. High quality educational content and information, such as textbooks, videos as well as tutorials and remote instructions on a wide range of topics are nowadays available at much lower prices than in the past and in many cases even for free. At that, the internet provides a number of tools and programmes that make learning more fun for children – which could increase pupils' motivation⁸⁸ – and this is not an assumption only. Just recently children confirmed during interviews that 'learning online was much easier and more fun than learning from standard textbooks'.⁸⁹ The web enables children to interact, exchange ideas and discuss with schoolmates and other children who are working on the same topic. Collaborative learning and helping each other is enabled and encouraged.⁹⁰ The pre-conditions for successful self-studying and self-improvement are set.

In addition, children have the opportunity to motivate others to work on a certain topic.⁹¹ They decide what they want to focus their learning on. Thus, they have the chance to become active members of the learning process. Also, within the school system new technologies and online programmes could achieve 'personalized learning', which could help 'students to learn at their own pace'.⁹²

⁸⁶ S. Livingstone and L. Haddon, 2009, p. 9.

⁸⁷ S. Livingstone, 2003, pp. 147-166.

⁸⁸ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2017, p. 14.

⁸⁹ J. Byrne and D. Kardefelt-Winther, 2016.

⁹⁰ I. Paus-Hasebrink and C. Ortner, 2008, pp. 15-16.

⁹¹ *ibid.*

⁹² United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2017, p. 14.

Participation and civic engagement

Participation and civic engagement are the most essential opportunities for children that come with the emergence of the internet, as ‘participation is one of the underlying principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, allowing children’s voices to be heard in matters that affect them’.⁹³

A first step towards such participation and civic engagement is information on relevant topics, which is provided online en masse.⁹⁴ Furthermore, through the internet children who normally do not have a voice, get to speak, to engage civically, to interact with each other and to express themselves. It levels out participation barriers such as location, and silencing attributes such as gender, age, disabilities and ethnicities.⁹⁵ Therefore, the internet has the potential to improve children’s participation. The big beneficiaries in the context of political and social participation, however, are clearly older children, which can be evidenced by the rather low number of young children on social networks as outlined in chapter 2. Nevertheless, nowadays access to and the use of the internet could be seen as the founding stone for successful economic participation in the future⁹⁶ – even for the youngest internet users. The internet enables them to get ready for the jobs of tomorrow in many ways, as today relevant skills can be learned from an early age and to a certain extent come naturally by using digital devices.⁹⁷

Creativity

Through the usage of the internet children become consumers, producers and communication partners.⁹⁸ Within every role they take over online, children’s creativity

⁹³ J. Byrne and D. Kardefelt-Winther, 2016.

⁹⁴ I. Paus-Hasebrink and C. Ortner, 2008, pp. 15-16.

⁹⁵ J. Byrne and D. Kardefelt-Winther, 2016.

⁹⁶ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2017, p. 28.

⁹⁷ Bundeszentrale für gesundheitliche Aufklärung, ‘Computer & Internet: virtuelle Welten’, kindergesundheit-info.de, 30 April 2015, <https://www.kindergesundheit-info.de/themen/medien/medienarten/computer-internet/>, (accessed 16 March 2019).

⁹⁸ M. Hermida, 2014.

can be expanded and improved. Interesting information and content online can inspire them. Diverse websites, programmes and tools encourage them to use and express their own creativity. Also the online interaction with others via diverse platforms and networks can improve their creative power,⁹⁹ as well does the consumption of inspiring movies, series or podcasts.¹⁰⁰ The fact that children in Austria preferably use their digital devices to edit pictures also proves the broad acceptance of the possibility to express their creative energy online among children (see chapter 2). Further, evidence shows that the right tools and the right programmes to encourage creative thinking and the creative handling of media could even stimulate learning processes such as language development.¹⁰¹

Identity and social connectivity

The internet improves connectivity and social inclusion among all children – despite their real-life burden of their gender, ethnicity, ability/disability or sexual identity.¹⁰² Today, a child's social circle – schoolmates, friends, relatives – is active online. Thus, an increased and appropriate web usage could have a positive impact on children's social relationships,¹⁰³ which are

stimulated by digital technology; they use it to enhance their existing relationships and stay in touch with friends, while those who have less social capital at the outset may use it to compensate for this and build positive relationships.¹⁰⁴

Communication services and platforms for the care and development of contacts give children the chance to develop socially in a virtual reality. Social networking and online

⁹⁹ I. Paus-Hasebrink and C. Ortner, 2008, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰⁰ A1 Telekom Austria AG, 'Kinderleicht und kindersicher online: Familienratgeber Internet, saferinternet.at, 2015, https://www.saferinternet.at/fileadmin/categorized/Materialien/A1_Familienratgeber.pdf, (accessed 17 March 2019).

¹⁰¹ Gutes Aufwachsen Mit Medien, 'Medien als Chance – kreative Medienarbeit in der Kita', gutes-aufwachsen-mit-medien.de, 15 December 2016, <https://www.gutes-aufwachsen-mit-medien.de/informieren/article.cfm/key.3265/aus.2/StartAt.1/page.1/cookie.2>, (accessed 16 March 2019).

¹⁰² United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2017, p. 30.

¹⁰³ S. Livingstone, 2003, pp. 147-166.

¹⁰⁴ D. Kardefelt-Winther, 2017, p. 7.

communities encourage children to become part of a contemporary youth culture, stay up-to-date and share important content – regardless of their location and social situation. Online guides, blogs and forums enable children to explore, expand and accept their own identity. It gives them space for self-expression and self-presentation.¹⁰⁵ Further, they get the chance to share their experiences with others, through so-called online-diaries alias blogs.¹⁰⁶ Hence, the positive potential of the internet for children’s identity and social connectivity is there and becomes more and more relevant the older they become.

4. Child protection and empowerment in the digital age

Today we are living in an era of change. Digitalisation and technologisation are constantly progressing. The internet surrounds all of us in every aspect of our daily lives, ‘children are now immersed in digital technology’.¹⁰⁷ Broad access to the internet and a number of various digital devices could enable ‘many girls and boys to achieve their rights to learn, express themselves and participate meaningfully in their communities’. At the same time a number of new threats and risks to the well-being of our youngest generations are ‘induced or facilitated by these very technologies that are meant to offer benefits’ (see chapter 3).¹⁰⁸

With all that it becomes clear that the circumstances for the realisation of children’s rights change continually. Online children appear to be even more invisible than offline and are still not recognised as a ‘substantial group’. Furthermore, the involvement of more and more actors online makes it increasingly difficult to identify those responsible for ensuring children’s rights. Moreover, the emergence of the internet leads to a number of ‘overlapping and clashing rights’ such as ‘child’s right to protection from harm versus

¹⁰⁵ I. Paus-Hasebrink and C. Ortner, pp. 15-16.

¹⁰⁶ A1 Telekom Austria AG, 2015.

¹⁰⁷ M. Hermida, 2014.

¹⁰⁸ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Child protection in the digital age: National responses to online child sexual abuse and exploitation in ASEAN Member States*, Bangkok, UNICEF EAPRO, 2016, p. 5., <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/1206/file>, (accessed 19 March 2019).

the child's right to participate', the 'child's right to protection versus adults' speech rights' or the 'child's right to information versus the parent's right to protect them'.¹⁰⁹ With all that, the protection and empowerment of children becomes more complex and abstract. That is why, new 'ways of promoting [...] opportunities while simultaneously preventing children from harm need to be developed rapidly'¹¹⁰ – or should have been developed already.

The next chapters will show to what extent the current child protection and empowerment system has been adapted to the new conditions. Livingstone and Haddon's 'analytic model of individual and country-level factors shaping the online activities of children'¹¹¹ from 2009 provides the methodological frame for this evaluation. Livingstone and Haddon differentiate two levels of analysis: the country level and the individual level. On the country level 1) the media environment, 2) Information and Communication Technology (ICT) regulations, 3) the public discourse, 4) attitudes and values and 5) the educational system play an imminent role with regard to online opportunities and online risks experienced by children. On the individual level societal characteristics are the determining factors, such as 1) age, 2) gender and 3) socio-economic status, 4) mediation by parents, teachers and peers and 5) individual access, usage and attitudes as well as skills.¹¹²

A special focus will be laid on the country level of analysis while the individual level of analysis will not play an important role within the following elaboration of the current frame of reference. In addition, based on Livingstone and Haddon's 'analytic model of individual and country-level factors shaping the online activities of children'¹¹³ two additional levels of analysis are newly introduced by the author of the Master's thesis at

¹⁰⁹ S. Livingstone, 'Children's rights in the digital environment: Challenges, tensions and opportunities', *blog.lse.ac.uk*, [web blog], 06 April 2016, https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/mediapolicyproject/files/2016/04/Livingstone-S_Shaping-the-rights-of-the-child-in-the-digital-age.pdf, (accessed 30 March 2019).

¹¹⁰ M. B. Nawaila, S. Kanbul and F. Ozdamli, 'A review on the rights of children in the digital age', *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 94, 2018, pp. 390-409.

¹¹¹ S. Livingstone and L. Haddon, 2009, p. 11.

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ *ibid.*

hand: the regional level and the international level. On both of these levels 1) the legal framework, 2) intergovernmental cooperation, 3) the engagement of the civil society and 4) the conduct of the private sector are defined as decisive factors for both the enjoyment of online opportunities and the reduction of certain online risks for children.

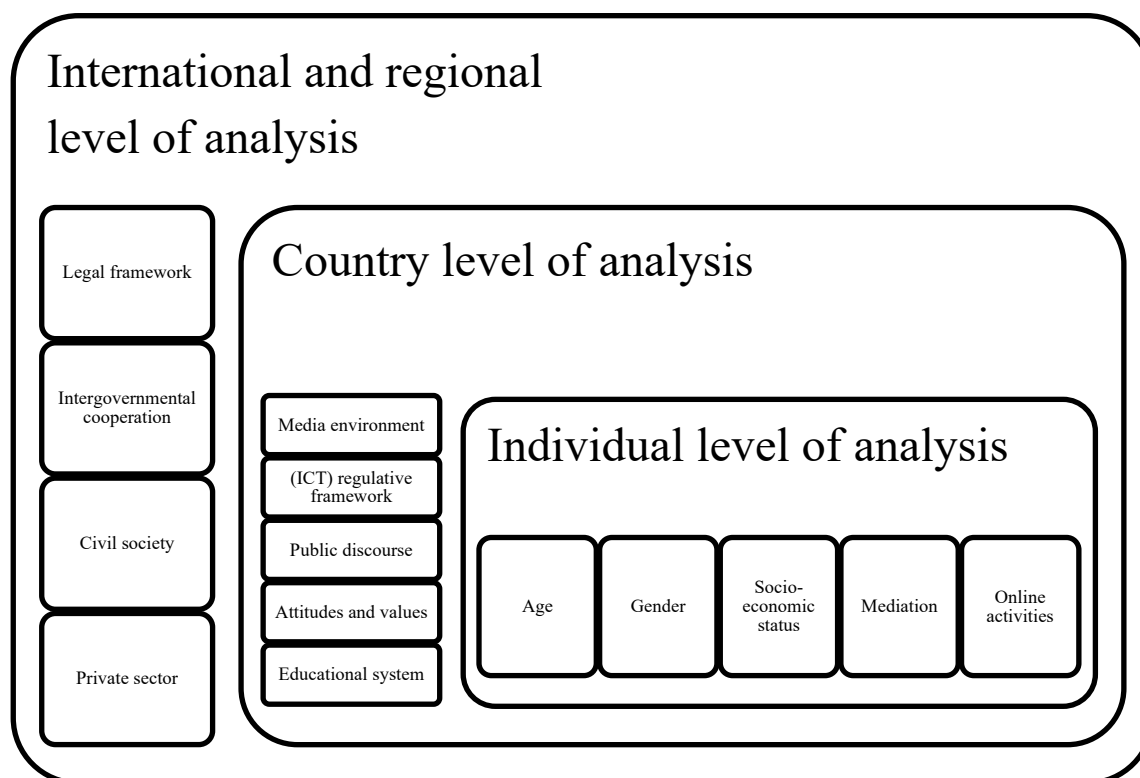


Figure 4: Analysing the experience of online risks and opportunities by children¹¹⁴

4.1 International framework

In 1989 the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN CRC) was enacted. Since then our world seems to have changed significantly. Technologisation and digitalisation have shifted every aspect of our societies' ways of interaction and living

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*

‘and with it the living environment of children’.¹¹⁵ In light of this, it is inevitable to take a closer look at how far the international child protection and empowering framework has been adapted towards those fundamental developments.

4.1.1 Legal framework

According to Livingstone and Bulger ‘[g]enerally, existing legislation is held to apply equally to the online domain, although in practice this can be difficult to implement’.¹¹⁶ However, the circumstances in which these rights are meant to be realised have changed and continue to change. For a long time children’s rights have been misunderstood as the obligation of adults to protect children while the essential part of empowering children seems to have been forgotten. While this is already problematic in the physical world, with the rise of the virtual world the importance of finding an appropriate balance between children’s rights to protection and their right to participation has reached new dimensions.¹¹⁷ Neither inaccessibility nor unlimited and unsupervised access to the internet for children will lead to a full realisation of their potential and rights.

This is exactly where the UN CRC comes in. The UN CRC ‘encompasses a broader range of rights than any other human rights treaty’¹¹⁸ and therefore, does not only provide a number of protecting rights but also a number of empowering rights, which appear to be especially important in the light of all the opportunities for children opened up online.¹¹⁹ The UN CRC is characterised by its unique understanding of ‘children as people with the right to express their opinion in matters that concern them, thus adding participation rights

¹¹⁵ childrens-rights.digital, ‘Child Protection and Children’s Rights in the Digital World’, *childrens-rights.digital*, [web blog], 2019, <https://childrens-rights.digital/einstieg/index.cfm/cookie.2>, (accessed 25 March 2019).

¹¹⁶ S. Livingstone and M. E. Bulger, *A Global Agenda for Children’s Rights in the Digital Age: Recommendations for Developing UNICEF’s Research Strategy*, Florence, UNICEF Office of Research – Innocenti, 2013, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ S. Livingstone and A. Third, ‘Children’s and young people’s rights in the digital age: An emerging agenda’, *new media and society*, vol. 19, no. 5, 2017, p. 662.

¹¹⁸ A. Third, D. Bellerose, U. Dawkins et al., *Children’s Rights in the Digital Age: A Download from Children Around the World*, Melbourne, Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, 2014, p. 16.

¹¹⁹ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Child Safety Online: Global challenges and strategies*, Florence, UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre, 2011, p. 10.

to those of protection and provision'.¹²⁰ At that, the UN CRC was drafted and enacted in order to make sure that states have the obligation to intervene as soon as those who are responsible for children's enjoyment of their rights – parents and caregivers – fail to protect and empower children in accordance with their rights. Hence, also in a digitalised world the far-reaching effect and significance of the UN CRC cannot be denied. At the same time the importance of the active engagement of the state in protecting and empowering children online becomes evident.

The basis of all child protection and empowerment measures online lays within Article 3 of the UN CRC.¹²¹ This article stipulates that '[i]n all actions concerning children [...] the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration', which could imply the essentiality of 'empowering children for self-protection in the digital world'.¹²²

Further, Article 17 of the UN CRC ensures children's access to mass media, thus, the internet further obliges all state parties to encourage media outlets to spread material and information beneficial for children with particular regard to the linguistic needs of children. At that, international cooperation in producing, exchanging and disseminating such material and information should be promoted and guidelines on the protection of children from harmful contents should be developed. Article 2 assures this access to mass media without any discrimination¹²³ and additionally protects children from new digital forms of discrimination such as cyber bullying or hate speech.¹²⁴

According to Article 13 of the UN CRC every child has the right to freedom of expression through any media of their own choice.¹²⁵ Also here, it is only a question of interpretation in order to make Article 13 applicable in a digital age, thus, online as well as offline. The internet entails an immense potential for children's enjoyment of their right to freedom

¹²⁰ A. Third, D. Bellerose, U. Dawkins et al., 2014, p. 16.

¹²¹ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 02 September 1990), Article 3.

¹²² [childrens-rights.digital](#), 2019.

¹²³ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 2.

¹²⁴ [childrens-rights.digital](#), 2019.

¹²⁵ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 13.

of expression. It enables children to access platforms of expression and interaction easier than any other media outlet and at the same time brings a new variety of risks, which must be countered.¹²⁶ The same is true for children's right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly, which is determined in Article 15 of the UN CRC.

Further, also with regard to children's right to play and recreation¹²⁷ 'the public sphere has expanded into the digital world', thus, 'the digital world must be designed as a safe and appropriate place for exercising this right'.¹²⁸ In this context, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child highlights '[a]ccess to the Internet and social media [a]s central to the realization of article 31 rights in the globalized environment'.¹²⁹

Another important element with regard to children's protection and empowerment online is Article 16 of the UN CRC, which protects children from 'arbitrary or unlawful interference with his or her privacy' and 'attacks on his or her honor and reputation',¹³⁰ which both stand in close connection with increasingly important online data protection.

Moreover, the importance of extending the protection of children from all forms of violence – as envisaged in Article 19 of the UN CRC – has to be highlighted in the light of the diverse kinds of risks the increasing internet usage of children brings. An important first step towards achieving this was made by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child in 2011 through explicitly identifying '[v]iolence in the mass media' and '[v]iolence through information and communication technologies' as forms of violence that are covered by Article 19 of the UN CRC.¹³¹

¹²⁶ [childrens-rights.digital](#), 2019.

¹²⁷ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 31.

¹²⁸ [childrens-rights.digital](#), 2019.

¹²⁹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 17 (2013) on the right of the child to rest, leisure, play, recreational activities, cultural life and the arts (art. 31), 17 April 2013, p. 14.

¹³⁰ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 16.

¹³¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General comment No. 13 (2011) on the right of the child to freedom of all forms of violence (art. 19), 18 April 2013, p. 11.

Article 28 recognises children's right to education, lays the foundation for equal educational opportunities for all children¹³² and thus, is strongly interlinked with children's access to the internet, their digital literacy and digital citizenship. Both digital literacy and digital citizenship provide 'children with a full portfolio of skills and knowledge that allows them to avoid online risks, maximise online opportunities and exercise their full rights in the digital world'.¹³³ Digital literacy is achieved if children are able to 1) access and operate online safely and effectively, 2) assess online content critically, 3) communicate safely and effectively and 4) create online contents. Digital citizenship is reached as soon as children have learned and implement 1) 'respectful and tolerant behaviour towards others' and 2) engage civically online.¹³⁴

As one can see the UN CRC provides a set of standards and guidance along its rights, which – after careful evaluation – can be interpreted as directly applicable to the online sphere.¹³⁵ At that, on an international level the UN CRC does not stand alone. Both the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography (OPSC) and the Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking against Persons, Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (Palermo Protocol) from 2000 'also serve as comprehensive examples of legal mechanisms that require governments to implement and ensure provision of services to assist child victims and their families'.¹³⁶ Moreover, a number of regional instruments complement this set of international standards (see chapter 4.2). However, also in this regard – as important as it is – the strengthening of child protection mechanisms is in the focus of all efforts, while empowering measures are of subordinated value.

Currently parents and caregivers as well as states seem to lack in skills and knowledge needed to realise and implement children's rights in the online world.¹³⁷ An international

¹³² United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 28.

¹³³ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2017, p. 38.

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2011, p. 10.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

¹³⁷ S. Livingstone and A. Third, p. 662.

study found ‘that, while cyber safety has achieved success in raising children’s awareness of the potential risks, it has not achieved the equivalent in relation to the opportunities digital media provides’.¹³⁸ Indeed, reducing online risks without impeding online opportunities is a complex task. Nevertheless, the aim of all responses in a digital world should be the encouragement of internet opportunities and at the same time the minimisation of internet risks for children,¹³⁹ especially in the light of ‘notable growth of both digital literacy and access’.¹⁴⁰ In other words, children need to be better prepared for their lives in an increasingly digitalised world. However, improving children’s digital knowledge and skills is not enough. It is at least equally important to inform parents, teachers and policy makers appropriately.¹⁴¹

4.1.2 Intergovernmental cooperation

The fundamental awareness of the importance of cooperation to protect and empower children worldwide exists. According to Article 4 of the UN CRC and the *Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child* intergovernmental cooperation as well as cooperation between states and UN agencies is inevitable and should be strongly encouraged.^{142, 143} This should enable to implement the UN CRC effectively and efficiently and eventually improve the environment – be it physical or virtual – of the youngest generation all around the world.¹⁴⁴

However, it can and must be transmitted to the digital world that such awareness alone will not be enough. The promotion and implementation of children’s rights in a digital age calls for a multi-stakeholder-approach and is therefore not only the responsibility of

¹³⁸ A. Third, D. Bellerose, U. Dawkins et al., 2014, p. 40.

¹³⁹ M. B. Nawaila, S. Kanbul and F. Ozdamli, ‘A review on the rights of children in the digital age’, *Children and Youth Services Review*, vol. 94, 2018, p. 393.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p. 394.

¹⁴¹ J. Byrne and D. Kardefelt-Winther.

¹⁴² United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), *Implementation Handbook for the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, Geneva, UNICEF Regional Office for Europe, 2007, p. 69.

¹⁴³ United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 4.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, Preamble.

governments and international organisations but also the private sector, civil society, caregivers and parents.¹⁴⁵

4.1.3 Civil society

Civil society plays a major role in implementing the UN CRC.¹⁴⁶ From the beginning non-governmental organisations were highly involved in preparing and developing the convention.¹⁴⁷ Civil society can hold states accountable for implementing and realising children's rights, can advocate for development towards a better future for all children through certain policies and laws as well as programmes and effective budgeting.¹⁴⁸ A *UNICEF Fact Sheet* even proposes the involvement of civil society and especially children themselves as one of the main guiding principles of implementing and promoting children's rights as outlined in the UN CRC.¹⁴⁹ With the ratification of the UN CRC

national governments officially commit to implementing the Convention on the Rights of the Child [and] every sector of society must become involved in implementation if child rights principles are to be effectively translated into reality.¹⁵⁰

Therefore, states should establish appropriate conditions for active civil society participation, should promote collaboration with and within civil society and should not interfere with the work of independent civil society organisations.¹⁵¹ Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) play the most important role in this regard, as they enjoy a 'formal

¹⁴⁵ WSIS Forum 2016, 'Global Kids Online – Children's Rights in the Digital Age', *itu.int*, 02-06 May 2016, <https://www.itu.int/net4/wsis/forum/2016/Agenda/Session/145>, (accessed 26 March 2019).

¹⁴⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'General comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights', 17 April 2013, CRC/C/GC/16, para 84.

¹⁴⁷ A. Third, D. Bellerose, U. Dawkins et al., 2014, p. 16.

¹⁴⁸ J. Grant and A. Dolk, 'Child Rights Governance: Safeguarding civil society space for children', *Save the Children*, 2016, p. 6, https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/sites/default/files/documents/safeguarding_civil_society_space_for_children_0.pdf, (accessed 30 March 2019).

¹⁴⁹ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 'Fact Sheet: Implementation guidelines for the Convention on the Rights of the Child', [unicef.org](https://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Implementation_guidelines.pdf), 19 May 2014, https://www.unicef.org/crc/files/Implementation_guidelines.pdf, (accessed 26 March 2019).

¹⁵⁰ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2014.

¹⁵¹ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 'General comment No. 16 (2013) on State obligations regarding the impact of the business sector on children's rights', 17 April 2013, CRC/C/GC/16, para 84.

role’ in the UN CRC’s reporting process, in monitoring and in advocacy on national levels.¹⁵² In this context a commentator describes that ‘NGOs operate in different legal, economic, social and political settings, which results in varied modalities of work and impacts’.¹⁵³ Also the important work of network NGO’s such as ECPAT has to be mentioned here. ECPAT coordinates and brings together the work of 109 member NGO’s in 96 countries aiming at ending ‘sexual exploitation of children through prostitution; trafficking; online and in the travel and tourism sector’.¹⁵⁴ However, also media enterprises, academia and the private sector are explicitly mentioned to be included in the process of protecting and empowering children¹⁵⁵ – online as well as offline.¹⁵⁶ As one can see, diverse actors are included in the process of protecting and empowering children in the physical as well as virtual world. The request for even more contributors seems to be rare. Consequently, children’s ideas and participation often seem to remain forgotten or subordinated – and that less in theory than in practice.

4.1.4 Private sector

Without doubt the role of the private sector within current child protecting and empowering systems is increasing with the emergence of the internet. Also, international awareness about the importance of collaboration and partnership with the ICT industry is raising continuously. It is the prevailing view that existing technology can be used for game changing responses to the increasing internet usage by children – with all its risks as well as opportunities. According to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child ‘[p]rivate companies offer technical and practical expertise which can assist lawmakers

¹⁵² United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2014.

¹⁵³ N. Vučković Šahović, ‘The Role of Civil Society in Implementing the General Measures of the Convention on the Rights of the Child’, *Innocenti Working Paper*, no. 18, 2010, p. iv. (accessed 26 March 2019).

¹⁵⁴ ECPAT International, ‘What we do’, [ecpat.org](https://www.ecpat.org/what-we-do/), 2016, <https://www.ecpat.org/what-we-do/>, (accessed 17 July 2019).

¹⁵⁵ United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF), 2014.

¹⁵⁶ UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, ‘Report of the 2014 Day of General Discussion: Digital media and children’s rights’, *ohchr.org*, 2014, p. 13, https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/CRC/Discussions/2014/DGD_report.pdf, (accessed 26 March 2019).

and practitioners to better understand [...] the complex and quickly changing online environment'.¹⁵⁷ At the same time, the private sector can enhance the online risks experienced by children, as 'the conduct of private companies is not always appropriate or even violates children's rights'.¹⁵⁸ In this respect, there is international agreement that also or especially in the private sector the UN CRC should be seen as the fundamental principle for all child-related actions.¹⁵⁹

However, also here the UN CRC does not stand alone. Since 2012 the UN CRC is supported by the *Children's Rights and Business Principles*, one of the first documents that shows that the linkage of children's rights and businesses goes way beyond child labour – as long assumed. According to the *Children's Rights and Business Principles* all business should not only 'ensure the protection and safety of children in all business activities and facilities' and 'ensure that products and services are safe, and seek to support children's rights through them' but also 'use marketing and advertising that respect and support children's rights',¹⁶⁰ which is all directly applicable to the online world.

In that respect, in 2015 the *Guidelines for Industry on Child Online Protection*, that directly approach ICT businesses, were established. They define five aspects of how the private sector can contribute to the implementation and promotion of children's rights. According to these principles the private sector has the responsibility of 1) 'integrating child rights considerations into all appropriate corporate policies and management processes', 2) 'developing standard processes to handle child sexual abuse material', 3) 'creating a safe and age-appropriate online environment', 4) 'educating children, parents and teachers about children's safety and their responsible use of ICTs' and 5) 'promoting

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UN Global Compact and Save the Children, *Children's Rights and Business Principles*, 2012, p. 11, https://www.unicef.org/indonesia/CHILD_RIGHTS_AND_BUSINESS_PRINCIPLES.pdf, (accessed 26 March 2019).

digital technology as a mode for increasing civic engagement'.¹⁶¹ Thus, these guidelines provide and suggest a useful framework for companies to consider the broad range of children's rights that are affected by children's internet usage.¹⁶²

4.2 European framework

Without any doubt also in a regional context it is broadly recognised that

the digital environment is complex and subject to rapid evolution, and is reshaping children's lives in many ways, resulting in opportunities for and risks to their well-being and enjoyment of human rights.¹⁶³

A certain awareness that these developments call for rapid and efficient responses seems to have reached Europe. Both the Council of Europe (CoE) and the European Union (EU) seem to be ready to work towards a safer and at the same time more empowering online environment for children. These institutions are eager to develop and already have developed new legal instruments, recommendations, strategies and measures to improve the safety and well-being of children in accordance with the 'full range of human rights'¹⁶⁴ enshrined in the UN CRC as well as the *European Convention on Human Rights* (ECHR) and the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU* (EU CFR).¹⁶⁵ Nevertheless, also here it is argued that so far actions in this regard have been 'reactive and fragmented' and characterised by a strong emphasis on the protection of children from online abuse as well as online over-use, while possible benefits of children's internet usage have often

¹⁶¹ UNICEF and ITU, *Guidelines for Industry on Child Online Protection*, 2015, p. 6, https://www.unicef.org/csr/files/COP_Guidelines_English.pdf, (accessed March 26 2019).

¹⁶² C. Nyst, 'Privacy, Protection of Personal Information and Reputation Rights', *UNICEF Discussion Paper Series: Children's Rights and Business in a Digital World*, March 2017, p. 20, https://www.unicef.org/csr/files/UNICEF_CRB_Digital_World_Series_PRIVACY.pdf, (accessed 26 March 2019).

¹⁶³ Council of Europe, *Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment*, 2018, p. 8, <https://rm.coe.int/guidelines-to-respect-protect-and-fulfil-the-rights-of-the-child-in-th/16808d881a>, (accessed 31 March 2019).

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁵ I. Katsarova, 'Protection of minors in the media environment: EU regulatory mechanisms', Library Briefing: Library of the European Parliament, 18 March 2013, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/bibliotheque/briefing/2013/130462/LDM_BRI\(2013\)130462_RE_V1_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/bibliotheque/briefing/2013/130462/LDM_BRI(2013)130462_RE_V1_EN.pdf), (accessed 31 March 2019).

remained overlooked.¹⁶⁶ Thus, a rights-based approach, which combines ‘digital literacy education with the principles of informed consent’,¹⁶⁷ is strongly suggested.¹⁶⁸

The following chapters provide an overview on the results of these essential regional elaborations and comprise a summary as well as an assessment of the most important European child empowerment and protection measures.

4.2.1 Legal framework

All legal considerations of the CoE and the EU to protect children – online as well as offline – are based on five principles deriving from the UN CRC. These are 1) the assessment of the ‘best interest of the child’, 2) the recognition of the ‘evolving capacities of the child’, 3) the obligation to respect, protect and fulfil children’s ‘right to non-discrimination’, 4) the acceptance and implementation of children’s ‘right to be heard’ and 5) the ‘duty to engage other stakeholders’.¹⁶⁹ Bearing these principles in mind a directional European framework on the safety and empowerment of children in their internet usage has been established. The CoE *Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment* from 2018 have supplemented and specified an already existing European online child protection framework containing the CoE *Strategy for the Rights of the Child* from 2016 and the *Internet Governance Strategy* from 2016 and the *Human Rights Guide to Internet Users* as an important practical tool from 2014.¹⁷⁰

While both the *Internet Governance Strategy* and the *Human Rights Guide to Internet*

¹⁶⁶ Child Rights International Network, ‘Briefing: Children’s rights in the digital age’, *CRIN*, [web blog], 2019, <https://home.crin.org/briefing-childrens-rights-in-the-digital-age>, (accessed 31 March 2019).

¹⁶⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ N. Muižnieks, ‘Human Rights Comment: Protecting children’s rights in the digital world: an ever-growing challenge’, *Council of Europe: Commissioner for Human Rights*, [web blog], 29 April 2014, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/commissioner/-/protecting-children-s-rights-in-the-digital-world-an-ever-growing-challen-1>, (accessed 31 March 2019).

¹⁶⁹ Council of Europe, 2018, pp. 12-13.

¹⁷⁰ *ibid.*, p. 5.

Users are certainly applicable to children but do not explicitly address them, in the *Strategy for the Rights of the Child* the strengthening of children's rights in a digital world was specifically taken into account for the first time.¹⁷¹ Besides equal opportunities, a life free from violence and child-friendly justice for as well as participation of all children, the rights of the child in the digital environment were determined as the fifth target pillar of the strategy valid from 2016 to 2021.¹⁷² The strategy calls on all CoE member States to enable children to use the internet creatively, critically and safely in order to experience all online opportunities to their fullest possible extent, while limiting the experience of online risks to their minimal possible extent. In particular, the 'participation of children in the digital environment' is encouraged in every respect, the 'protection of children in the digital environment' is demanded in light of the potential risks of the internet for children and the 'provision for children in the digital environment' is required as 'ICT and digital media have added a new dimension to children's right to education'.¹⁷³ Children's rights need to be respected – also in a digital world.

Working towards these ambitious principles outlined in the *Strategy for the Rights of the Child* the CoE mandated a group of experts to evaluate the consequences of the digitalisation for the realisation of children's rights and further to elaborate a set of recommendations on a child-oriented implementation. On the basis of international and regional legal documents a set of *Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment* – which present detailed instructions for all 47 CoE member States – was established in 2018.¹⁷⁴

From now on more than ever, '[g]overnments are recommended to review their legislation, policies and practices to ensure that these adequately address the full range of

¹⁷¹ J. Croll, 'Recommendation of the Council of Europe on children's rights in the digital environment', *childrens-rights.digital*, [web blog], 05 July 2018, <https://childrens-rights.digital/fokus/index.cfm/key.3382/cookie.2>, (accessed 31 March 2019).

¹⁷² Council of Europe, *Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021)*, 2016, pp. 10-21, <https://rm.coe.int/168066cff8>, (accessed 31 March 2019).

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p. 20.

¹⁷⁴ J. Croll, 2018.

the rights of the child'¹⁷⁵ including their digital rights. Firstly, a focus of state efforts must be laid on children's internet access, as this can have a significant impact on the realisation of children's human rights. Secondly, the consequences of the continuing digitalisation on children's 'right to freedom of expression and information' are highlighted as especially significant as the internet has the potential to intensify the realisation of this specific right. The internet enables children to be recipient but also creator and distributor of information. Thirdly, the same is considered true with regard to children's 'participation, right to engage in play and right to assembly and association'. Besides that, children's 'right to education' is highlighted as being especially affected by the internet – in a positive way. That is why the *Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment* proposes and encourages the improvement of children's 'digital literacy' or digital competences and skills through 'media and information literacies and digital citizenship education'.¹⁷⁶

Thus, a very strong focus of the *Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment* is laid on the empowerment of children online. However, as we have heard before, it all has its downsides and that is why it is additionally understood as crucial for states to implement measures that guarantee the appropriateness of online contents, contacts and conducts to children's age and maturity in accordance with their 'right to protection and safety'. Furthermore, with the emergence of the internet children's privacy and data protection is at stake.¹⁷⁷ Thus, the *Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment* suggest that

states should not prohibit in law or practice anonymity, pseudonymity or the usage of encryption technologies for children. Processing of personal data should only be possible with the explicit and informed consent of the children and/or their parents or legal representatives. Profiling of children to analyse or predict their personal preferences should be prohibited by law.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Council of Europe, 2018, pp. 13-23.

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 13-23.

¹⁷⁸ J. Croll, 2018.

As one can see with its *Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment* the CoE provides a ground-breaking international and European guiding document on the subject of how to find an appropriate balance between empowering and protecting children in a digital age.

Additionally, with regard to the internet usage of children the CoE does not stand alone. Already in 1999 the EU established the *Safer Internet Programme* in order to consider the ‘currently unknown future developments in the online environment’ and to create ‘a safer online environment’ through private regulatory interventions and self-regulatory solutions.¹⁷⁹ The *European framework for safer mobile use by young teenagers and children* from 2007, the *Safer Social Networking Principles* from 2009 and the *Coalition to Make the Internet a Better Place for Kids* from 2011 supplemented the *Safer Internet Programme* and are all three self-regulatory initiatives with the aim of meeting the specific needs of children online. These initiatives particularly strive to respond ‘to emerging challenges arising from the diverse ways in which young Europeans go online’ through encouraging the ICT industry to develop and implement child-oriented codes of conduct.¹⁸⁰

Moreover, in 2012 the European Commission of the EU established the *European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children*, which is based on four pillars. Firstly, according to these guidelines ‘high-quality content online for children and young people’ should be a top priority in implementing children’s rights in a digital age for the European Commission itself, the industry and EU member States. Secondly, it is considered essential to establish general awareness and empowerment in order to further promote children’s self-protection and self-responsibility online. Thirdly, ‘creating a safe environment for children online’ is demanded and finding a balance between limiting the risks and enhancing the benefits of the internet for children is recommended. Lastly, a

¹⁷⁹ I. Katsarova, 2013.

¹⁸⁰ Better Internet for Kids, ‘A Multistakeholder Approach’, *betterinternetforkids.eu*, [web blog], no date, <https://www.betterinternetforkids.eu/web/portal/policy/better-internet/policy-roadmap/multistakeholder-approach>, (accessed 31 March 2019).

special emphasis is laid on ‘fighting against child sexual abuse and child sexual exploitation’ through a number of different means.¹⁸¹

At that, since May 2018 the EU *General Data Protection Regulation* has become applicable for adults as well as children, which provides a set of policies that are specifically aimed at protecting and empowering children, who ‘need particular protection [...] because they may be less aware of the risks involved’ in their online behaviour and spread of information and personal data.¹⁸² In concrete, the EU General Data Protection Regulation inter alia regulates minimum ages for consent by children themselves, the consideration of children’s competences ‘to understand what they are agreeing to’ by organisations and companies and the responsibility of organisations and companies to identify and assess the risks and consequences of processing children’s data.¹⁸³

Bearing this broad European range of binding and non-binding legal documents and strategies in mind, it appears that a regional legal framework in order to protect and empower children online is set – at least on paper.

4.2.2 Intergovernmental cooperation

Also in a regional context the importance and necessity of cooperation and multi-stakeholder approaches is broadly recognised.^{184, 185} Diverse actors such as national

¹⁸¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children (2012), COM(12) 196, pp. 6-16.

¹⁸² Information Commissioner’s Office, ‘Consultation: Children and the GDPR guidance’, *ico.org.uk*, 28 February 2018, <https://ico.org.uk/media/about-the-ico/consultations/2172913/children-and-the-gdpr-consultation-guidance-20171221.pdf>, (accessed 31 March 2019).

¹⁸³ Information Commissioner’s Office, ‘Children and the GDPR’, *ico.org.uk*, 25 May 2018, <https://ico.org.uk/media/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/children-and-the-gdpr-1-0.pdf>, (accessed 17 July 2019).

¹⁸⁴ Council of Europe, 2018, p. 22.

¹⁸⁵ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children (2012), COM(12) 196, pp. 6-16.

states, intergovernmental organisations, NGO's, children's representatives, scientific institutions, business enterprises and most importantly children themselves will have to join their forces in order to be able to ensure children's rights online.¹⁸⁶ The CoE considers it essential for member States to

promote co-ordination with other State and non-State actors, within and beyond the Council of Europe, with regard to the standards and procedures which have an impact on the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms on the Internet.¹⁸⁷

Thus, states should not only cooperate with each other by 'applying relevant international and regional instruments and arrangements', 'support[ing] regional and international capacity-building efforts' and 'promoting standardisation of content classification and advisory labels among countries' but also by collaborating 'within relevant intergovernmental bodies, transnational networks and other international organisations'.¹⁸⁸

Besides that, also the European Commission calls on all EU member States to 'coordinate between themselves'¹⁸⁹ and to 'cooperate in line with their regulations in the field'¹⁹⁰ of online child protection and empowerment.

4.2.3 Civil Society

The cooperation and fostering of diverse civil society actors are strongly encouraged by Europe's main regional organisations. Especially the development and implementation of the CoE *Strategy for the Rights of the Child* as well as the *Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment* have been characterised by a

¹⁸⁶ Council of Europe, 2018, p. 22.

¹⁸⁷ Council of Europe, *Guide to Human Rights or Internet Users*, 2014, p. 2, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016804d5b31>, (accessed 31 March 2019).

¹⁸⁸ Council of Europe, 2018, pp. 29-30.

¹⁸⁹ COM(12) 196, 2012, p. 7.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p. 12.

strong involvement of civil society and also children themselves.¹⁹¹ However, the focus of the EU is laid on state cooperation with and support for the private sector in implementing children's rights online.¹⁹²

4.2.4 Private sector

Both, the CoE and the EU are convinced that only through close cooperation between states and the private sector they will be able to meet children's specific needs online, whereas both industry and member States are addressed as individual stakeholders with sometimes overlapping but different responsibilities.

This becomes especially clear when looking at the EU's *European Strategy for a Better Internet for Children*, which provides specific instructions for the 'industry' and 'member States'.¹⁹³ Many EU initiatives and strategies are based on the concept of industry 'self-regulation'. Within these strategies the EU only plays a supporting role in ICT industry's efforts 'to create a system by which they can deal rapidly with any security challenges that may arise'.¹⁹⁴ Thus, the success of most of these initiatives heavily relies on the *good will* of ICT businesses.

However, according to the CoE the primary responsibility remains with the states, as they are required to 'ensure that business enterprises and other key partners meet their human rights responsibilities and are held accountable in case of abuses'.¹⁹⁵ Further, they are demanded to

encourage the private sector to engage in genuine dialogue with relevant State authorities and civil society in the exercise of their corporate social responsibility, in particular their

¹⁹¹ Deutsches Kinderhilfswerk, 'Die Kinderrechte-Strategie des Europarates', *dkhw.de*, [web blog], no date, <https://www.dkhw.de/schwerpunkte/kinderrechte/koordinierungsstelle-kinderrechte/die-kinderrechte-strategie-des-europarates/>, (accessed 31 March 2019).

¹⁹² Better Internet for Kids, no date.

¹⁹³ COM(12) 196, 2012, pp. 6-16.

¹⁹⁴ Better Internet for Kids, no date.

¹⁹⁵ J. Croll, 2018.

transparency and accountability, in line with the ‘Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights: implementing the United Nations ‘Protect, Respect and Remedy’ Framework’.¹⁹⁶

4.3 Austrian framework

Is Austria falling behind? Can digital education secure Austria’s future? Does Austria want to become or is it already a digitalised nation? These are the questions dominating Austrian public discourse today. Several studies by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) showed Austria lags behind when it comes to digitalisation and technologization – at least in European comparison.^{197, 198} Effective responses and strategies are needed now – also when it comes to children and their protection and empowerment online.¹⁹⁹ Thus, it is no coincidence that the former Austrian government decided to make a reform of the current educational system one of its primary goals.²⁰⁰ Awareness and an apparent willingness to change and necessity for further improvements for children online seem to have existed.

However, a lot is happening in Austria right now – which as we can see also affects the future plans Austria had for the youngest generation. With the new interim government that holds the office until the elections in September 2019 all described future projects must be considered as on hold or even quashed. That the interim government would follow the plans of the former government is very unlikely. Likewise, due to the very short time-period the interim government will be in charge, it seems impossible that it would develop a new strategy towards preparing children for a digitalised world.

¹⁹⁶ Council of Europe, 2014, p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ D. Ritz, ‘Digitale Bildung sichert die Zukunft Österreichs’, *Microsoft*, [web blog], 19 September 2018, <https://news.microsoft.com/de-at/features/digitale-bildung-sichert-die-zukunft-osterreichs/>, (accessed 01 April 2019).

¹⁹⁸ APA, ‘Österreich in Digitalisierung bisher nur Mittelfeld’, *Salzburger Nachrichten*, 29 August 2018, <https://www.sn.at/wirtschaft/oesterreich/oesterreich-in-digitalisierung-bisher-nur-mittelfeld-39383623>, (accessed 01 April 2019).

¹⁹⁹ M. Bittner and P. Schmidt, *Digitalisierung in Österreich: Politisches Feigenblatt oder Modernisierungsschub in einer zunehmend vernetzten EU?*, Wien, ÖGfE Policy Brief, 2018, p. 1, https://oegfe.at/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/OEGfE_Policy_Brief-2018.25.pdf, (accessed 01 April 2019).

²⁰⁰ Bundesministerium Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung, ‘Digitale Bildung’, *bildung.bmbwf.gv.at*, 04 March 2019, <https://bildung.bmbwf.gv.at/schulen/schule40/index.html>, (accessed 02 April 2019).

Austria's political future and direction are uncertain today, however, there already exists a child protection and empowerment framework where all future plans will be based on or derive from. Thus, the following chapters provide an overview on the status quo, on where Austria stands today when it comes to children's rights in a digitalised world.

4.3.1 Media environment

A recent country report by the OECD showed that Austria still has some catching up to do when it comes to its degree of digitisation.²⁰¹ According to the *Digital Economy and Society Index* (DESI), which evaluates the development and changes of the digital economy and society in all EU member States using five dimensions and 30 indicators,²⁰² Austria is ranked 11th from 28 EU member States.²⁰³ With regard to its *connectivity* Austria holds its 17th place in 2018. When it comes to the broadband price index, Austria ranks 5th within the EU.²⁰⁴

While in general internet access is quite high in Austria, there are disparities between urban and rural areas in this regard. Today, 90 per cent of all Austrian households have a high-speed broadband connection, which lies well above the EU average. Supra-regional coverage of ultra-fast broadband accounted for around 66 per cent. Nevertheless, Austria's coverage of rural areas with high-speed internet is only 45 per cent due to geographical circumstances, which is below the EU average of 47 per cent.²⁰⁵

Moreover, with regard to the use of internet services by the Austrian population the country remains below EU average – however, with a catching-up trend. Step by step Austria is minimising the gap to EU's digitally most advanced countries in every

²⁰¹ M. Bittner and P. Schmidt, 2018, p. 3.

²⁰² Digital Roadmap Austria, 'Status quo: Österreichs Digitalisierungsgrad', *Bundesministerium für Digitalisierung und Wirtschaftsstandort*, 2016, <https://www.digitalroadmap.gv.at/uebersicht/status-quo/>, (accessed 01 April 2019).

²⁰³ M. Bittner and P. Schmidt, 2018, p. 3.

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ European Commission, 'Index für die digitale Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (DESI) 2018: Länderbericht Österreich', *ec.europa.eu*, 2018, p. 3, http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/newsroom/image/document/2018-20/at-desi_2018-country-profile-lang_4AA58FEB-0517-6054-404FC1F4332A6159_52342.pdf, (accessed 01 April 2019).

respect.²⁰⁶ Still, only 77 per cent of all Austrians aged 14 or older actually use the internet, while 97 per cent of Luxembourg's population – EU's frontrunner in this context – do so.²⁰⁷ Further, especially when it comes to the Austrian's social media usage the country holds its former role as latecomer.^{208, 209}

In contrast to this, human capital is Austria's digital competitive advantage. Austria ranks 7th when it comes to professional digital competences and skills. However, continuous growth is needed in order to keep or even improve this position. Currently, Austria is witnessing an increasing number of ICT professionals and a decreasing number of graduates of MINT (mathematics, information technology, natural science, technology) subjects.²¹⁰ Hence, also in this regard further investments are needed. Moreover, the *integration of digital technology* within the Austrian private sector stagnates in the better EU midfield. Only electronic commerce is quickly gaining ground in Austria.²¹¹

As one can see, Austria is trying and improving but still has not reached its full potential when it comes to digital media and technologies. The solution for this could be 'enablement' or activation, therefore digital education and awareness raising. At that 'facilitation', i.e. development of an intelligent infrastructure for businesses, schools and institutions is suggested. Also, the establishment of 'e-government' and 'e-procurement' services could be part of a strategy towards a digitalised Austria,²¹² and is implemented by the Austrian government efficiently and sustainably. In this context, Austria holds one of the top ranks in an EU-wide comparison.²¹³

²⁰⁶ European Commission, 'Index für die digitale Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (DESI) 2018: Länderbericht Österreich', *ec.europa.eu*, 2018, p. 7.

²⁰⁷ M. Bittner and P. Schmidt, 2018, p. 5.

²⁰⁸ Digital Roadmap Austria, 2016.

²⁰⁹ European Commission, 'Index für die digitale Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (DESI) 2018: Länderbericht Österreich', *ec.europa.eu*, 2018, p. 7.

²¹⁰ European Commission, 'Index für die digitale Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (DESI) 2018: Länderbericht Österreich', *ec.europa.eu*, 2018, p. 5.

²¹¹ European Commission, 'Index für die digitale Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (DESI) 2018: Länderbericht Österreich', *ec.europa.eu*, 2018, p. 8.

²¹² APA, 2018.

²¹³ European Commission, 'Index für die digitale Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft (DESI) 2018: Länderbericht Österreich', *ec.europa.eu*, 2018, p. 10.

4.3.2 Regulative framework

In Austria the UN CRC, was signed on 26 January 1990.²¹⁴ It was approved by the Austrian National Council on 26 June 1992, ratified on 06 August 1992 and entered into force on 05 September 1992.²¹⁵ The *Optional Protocol on the Involvement of Children in Armed Conflict* entered into force on 12 February 2002.²¹⁶ Furthermore, in 2011 the Austrian National Council passed a *Federal Constitutional Law on the Rights of the Child*. It entered into force in the very same year.²¹⁷ From then on central UN CRC provisions, such as the primary consideration of the best interest of the child or the participation and consideration of children's and youth's opinions are enshrined in the Austrian constitution.^{218, 219} Hence, the basis of a functioning child protection and empowering system seems to be given in Austria.

However, according to the *concluding observations* of the *UN Committee of the Rights of the Child* from 2012 there still is potential for improvement. Austria's incidents of humiliation, insult, cyber bullying or grooming of children via the internet was explicitly mentioned in this regard. Moreover, the *UN Committee of the Rights of the Child* observed that the dangers and risks of the internet for children are not sufficiently discussed at school. Parents and teachers seem to be unaware of the consequences of misuse of electronic media by children. Thus, Austria is demanded to 1) take appropriate measures in order to ensure children's privacy and to guarantee the respect for this privacy by all media, 2) protect children from all forms of humiliation and insult via the internet and 3) to educate children, parents and teachers towards understanding the necessity of protecting children's privacy and the risks as well as legal consequences of misuse of

²¹⁴ UNICEF Österreich, 'Alle Kinder haben Rechte', *unicef.at*, [web blog], no date, <https://unicef.at/kinderrechtsarbeit-oesterreich/kinderrechte/>, (accessed 02 April 2019).

²¹⁵ Bundeskanzleramt, 'Kinderrechte in Österreich', *KinderRechte*, [web blog], 2019, <https://www.kinderrechte.gv.at/kinderrechte-in-oesterreich/>, (accessed 02 April 2019).

²¹⁶ UNICEF Österreich, no date.

²¹⁷ Bundeskanzleramt, 'Kinderrechte in Österreich', *KinderRechte*, [web blog], 2019, <https://www.kinderrechte.gv.at/kinderrechte-in-oesterreich/>, (accessed 02 April 2019).

²¹⁸ UNICEF Österreich, no date.

²¹⁹ Kinder- und Jugendanwaltschaft Österreichs, 'Kinderrechte', *kija.at*, [web blog], no date, <https://www.kija.at/kinderrechte/>, (accessed 02 April 2019).

digital media by children, while respecting their right of access to appropriate information.²²⁰ Further, the *UN Committee of the Rights of the Child* recommends Austria to adapt the criminal code on child pornography. In particular, the possession of child pornography, including virtual pornography, by children between the ages of 14 and 18 – even without the intention of distribution and the consent of minors – should be criminalised.²²¹

In response to these *concluding observations* of the *UN Committee of the Rights of the Child* the Austrian *Children's Rights Board*, a permanent coordination mechanism, was constituted in 2012 – with the potential of being of pragmatic rather than symbolic purpose. The *Children's Rights Board* can be described as an interdisciplinary committee of experts on children's rights and consists of diverse stakeholders from civil society with relevant expertise in the field of children's rights and works on the implementation of the recommendations of the *UN Committee of the Rights of the Child*.²²² And indeed, a lot has happened since 2012. The withdrawal of the Austrian reservations to Article 13, Article 15 and Article 17 of the UN CRC in 2015 has to be especially highlighted in this context. Finally, the UN CRC has attained its unrestricted validity in Austria.²²³

How the UN CRC is applied and interpreted in Austria shows the Austrian *Youth Protection Legislation*, which is – despite the recommendation of the *UN Committee of the Rights of the Child*²²⁴ – still regulated at provincial level.²²⁵ However, countrywide

²²⁰ UN-Übereinkommen über die Rechte des Kindes: Ausschuss für die Rechte des Kindes, 'Erörterung der von Vertragsstaaten vorgelegten Berichte gemäß Artikel 44 des Übereinkommens', 61. Session, 17 September – 05 October 2012, p. 8.

²²¹ *ibid.*, p. 16.

²²² Bundeskanzleramt, 'Kinderrechte-Monitoring', *KinderRechte*, [web blog], 2019, <https://www.kinderrechte.gv.at/kinderrechte-monitoring/>, (accessed 02 April 2019).

²²³ Bundeskanzleramt, 'Kombinierter 5. und 6. periodischer Staatenbericht Österreichs gemäß Art 44 der Kinderrechtskonvention', *KinderRechte*, [web blog], 2019, <https://www.kinderrechte.gv.at>, (accessed 17 July 2019).

²²⁴ UN-Übereinkommen über die Rechte des Kindes: Ausschuss für die Rechte des Kindes, 'Erörterung der von Vertragsstaaten vorgelegten Berichte gemäß Artikel 44 des Übereinkommens', 61. Session, 17 September – 05 October 2012, pp. 3-4.

²²⁵ Saferinternet.at, 'Welche Inhalte sind für Kinder und Jugendliche gesetzlich verboten?', *saferinternet.at*, [web blog], 2019, <https://www.saferinternet.at/faq/handy-tablet/welche-inhalte-sind-fuer-kinder-und-jugendliche-gesetzlich-verboden/>, (accessed 02 April 2019).

harmonisation is continually progressing.²²⁶ The Austrian *Youth Protection Legislation* determines both, the rights and duties of young people under the age of 18 and the responsibilities of adults with regard to protecting and empowering children and adolescents.²²⁷ In the context of the internet usage of children the prohibition of media, data carriers, objects, services or events that are particularly brutal, discriminatory or pornographic for young people under the age of 18 in Austria is especially relevant. In this regard, adults are obliged to take appropriate precautions to prevent young people and children from being offered or using such media, subjects and services harmful to minors.²²⁸

Last but not least, the *Children's and Youth Ombudspersons* in the Austrian federal provinces and their important role in implementing the Austrian legal framework needs to be highlighted. These independent institutions support the interests of children and young people and serve as important contact point for the Austrian youth.²²⁹

4.3.3 Educational system

Although digital media are the formative technology of our current time, their actual use in Austrian classrooms falls short of expectations. In international comparison Austria is ranked in the midfield, when it comes to the use of digital media in schools – however, with a rising trend.²³⁰ That is why, in Austria, an overall digital strategy for schools is in process since 2016. However, the OECD only recently suggested the implementation of concrete timelines and measurable targets in order to actually realise these plans of digitalising the Austrian school system.²³¹

²²⁶ Österreichische Jugendinfos, *#jugendschutz in österreich: Die aktuellen Bestimmungen im Überblick*, Wien, Ortmann Team Ainring, 2019, p. 1.

²²⁷ Österreichische Jugendinfos, 2019, p. 2.

²²⁸ Österreichische Jugendinfos, 2019, p. 13.

²²⁹ Kinder- und Jugendanwaltschaft Österreichs, 'Kinder- und Jugendanwaltschaften', *kija.at*, [web blog], no date, <https://www.kija.at/kija>, (accessed 02 April 2019).

²³⁰ K. Oberwimmer, S. Vogtenhuber, L. Lassnigg et al., *Nationaler Bildungsbericht Österreich, Band 1: Das Schulsystem im Spiegel von Daten und Indikatoren*, Graz, Leykam, 2019, p. 104.

²³¹ M. Bittner and P. Schmidt, 2018, p. 9.

Since then significant measures have been enacted in Austria. In 2017 the programme *School 4.0*, which consists of a number of measures to develop the digital skills of students and to equip schools with IT infrastructure, was implemented.²³² In 2018 the former Austrian government announced a *Digital Master Plan*, which should concretise the longstanding project of improving and modernising the Austrian educational system.²³³ According to the former government programme such a *Digital Master Plan* should emphasise 1) the revision of curricula with regard to digital and media skills, 2) the development of a countrywide digital infrastructure in schools and the promotion of the use of digital technologies and the internet in teaching and 3) a compulsory training for teachers.^{234, 235} In doing so, the aim is to encourage children's interest in technology and technology development and to promote digital skills, knowledge and critical awareness among children and young people. Further, Austrian youth should get better equipped for the working environment of the future.²³⁶ Hence, an awareness of the necessity of an adaption of the Austrian educational system seems to exist.

Also, the aspect of awareness raising and creating acceptance of digital technologies among the Austrian population has been completely left out so far.²³⁷ Furthermore, the draft of the previously planned *Digital Master Plan* was aimed at secondary schools,²³⁸ whereas an improvement of the digital literacy of even younger students seems at least equally important (see chapter 2). Besides that, the rigid structures within the Austrian educational sector could represent a major obstacle in realising a so-called *Digital Master Plan*.²³⁹

²³² K. Oberwimmer, S. Vogtenhuber, L. Lassnigg et al., 2019, p. 104.

²³³ Bundesministerium Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung, 'Digitale Bildung', *bildung.bmbwf.gv.at*, 04 March 2019, <https://bildung.bmbwf.gv.at/schulen/schule40/index.html>, (accessed 02 April 2019).

²³⁴ M. Bittner and P. Schmidt, 2018, p. 9.

²³⁵ *ibid.*

²³⁶ *ibid.*

²³⁷ M. Bittner and P. Schmidt, 2018, p. 9.

²³⁸ Bundesministerium Bildung, Wissenschaft und Forschung, 'Masterplan Digitalisierung', *bildung.bmbwf.gv.at*, 2018, https://bildung.bmbwf.gv.at/schulen/schule40/masterplan_digitalisierung_pi.pdf?6ma2f9, (accessed 02 April 2019).

²³⁹ M. Bittner and P. Schmidt, 2018, p. 9.

4.3.4 Public discourse / Attitudes and values

In 2018 the former Austrian Minister for Women, Family and Youth Juliane Bogner-Strauß – following the CoE *Guidelines to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment* – highlighted media literacy, thus, digital literacy as a key competence in nowadays' digital societies.²⁴⁰ Indeed, modern technology and digital devices are omnipresent in Austria but – as we have seen – have not quite reached the entire Austrian society. Internet access is there but is – compared to other European countries – rarely used. Modern technology is there, but neither present in all schools nor in all Austrian households. A still very strong urban-rural divide in Austria can explain this²⁴¹ and must be a primary consideration when developing strategies towards a digitalised educational system, an improved legal framework for the protection and empowerment of children online and the creation of an efficient and sustainable media environment.

²⁴⁰ Bundeskanzleramt, 'Familienministerin Bogner-Strauß: Medienkompetenz von Kindern stärken', *bundestkanzleramt.gv.at*, 19 September 2018, <https://www.bundestkanzleramt.gv.at/-/familienministerin-bogner-strau-medienkompetenz-von-kindern-starken>, (accessed 02 April 2019).

²⁴¹ K. Oberwimmer, S. Vogtenhuber, L. Lassnigg et al., 2019, pp. 104-111.

EMPIRICAL PART

5. Methodology

Based on existing literature, data and legal documents the first part or theoretical part of this work provides the fundament for this second part or empirical part of this Master's thesis. Within the following chapters the aims and attempts to react on current technological developments on all previously mentioned levels will be directly contrasted with the actual situation of children within the Austrian population, aiming at the identification of trends and giving impulses for further research. Moreover, an insight on how efficient child protection and empowerment measures in the digital age actually are will be provided. Such a comparison of theory and practice will be facilitated by conducting surveys among parents as well as teachers and most importantly by conducting guideline interviews with children aged six to nine themselves. Considering this method mix it becomes clear that the aim of this empirical study is not to provide representative statistics on the experienced reality of children in Austria. Instead, the aim is to illustrate how a number of children are living in our already digitalised world and how they perceive and experience the internet. From this description hypotheses for later quantitative investigations should be derivable and tendencies through relating the perspectives of the individual interviewees should be identifiable.²⁴²

The results of the conducted guideline interviews and surveys should be directly compared with the objectives, theories and envisaged framework conditions of the current child protection and empowerment system. From this extensive conclusions and recommendations for international, regional and national institutions as well as individuals should be drawn to further improve the current system of digital child protection and empowerment.

²⁴² U. Flick, *Qualitative Forschung: Theorie, Methoden, Anwendung in Psychologie und Sozialwissenschaften*, Hamburg, Rowohlt's Enzyklopädie, 1999, pp. 98-99.

5.1 Guideline interviews

As outlined in the theoretical part of this work children's participation and taking their ideas and opinions into account is seen as one of the most essential principles of nowadays child protection and empowerment mechanisms. For this reason, conducting one-on-one guideline interviews with children was considered the most appropriate method to get a relevant insight of how Austrian children aged six to nine experience the internet. Guideline interviews are well-known for the high visibility of the views of the interviewee.^{243, 244} Further, the qualitative method of guideline interviews makes it possible to get particularly involved with the nature and needs of the individual child, and thus, to receive more meaningful and profound answers.²⁴⁵ Besides, the guideline interview is very suitable in addition with other methods, as it is also used in this research.^{246, 247}

5.1.1 Guideline

The first step in conducting guideline interviews with children was to develop a guideline in order to improve the comparability of the data and facilitate more structured interviews.²⁴⁸

The specific guideline for the conducted interviews with children consisted of six sections: 1) introductory questions, 2) questions with regard to the internet usage of the interviewed child, 3) questions on the interviewee's experience with the internet, 4) questions on their sources of knowledge regarding the internet, 5) questions on how they

²⁴³ *ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p. 112.

²⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p. 94.

²⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p. 99.

²⁴⁷ M. Meuser and U. Nagel, 'ExpertInneninterviews – vielfach erprobt, wenig bedacht: Ein Beitrag zur qualitativen Methodendiskussion', in D. Garz and K. Kraimer (eds.), *Qualitativ-empirische Sozialforschung: Konzepte, Methoden, Analysen*, Opladen, Westdeutscher Verlag, 1991, p. 441.

²⁴⁸ U. Flick, 1999, p. 114.

would assess, improve or change the internet and 6) questions on their knowledge about children's rights (see annex II).

For all six sections a non-structured guiding question was determined in the guideline. These guiding questions were complemented by concrete questions, which were either semi-structured or structured questions.²⁴⁹ All guiding questions were asked during the interviews, whereas the concrete questions were only used when certain topics were not addressed by the interviewees on their own. In addition, a set of ad hoc questions were defined in the guideline. These questions were used to dig deeper into unexpected relevant issues raised by the children.

Besides that, the guideline contained instructions on how to use a smartphone, tablet and/or laptop in order to ease the process of getting into the topic of the internet – if considered needed and appropriate by the interviewer. At that it was highlighted in the guideline to gather demographic information on the interviewee's age and gender.

5.1.2 Selection of respondents

After an in-depth theoretical examination of various studies and research on the internet usage of children, it quickly became clear that the previous focus of diverse projects was mostly on children from the age of ten – even though it is by now a matter of fact that children are using the internet already at earlier ages, especially in developed countries. It quickly turned out that there was a lack of knowledge. Therefore, from the beginning the main target group of the Master's thesis at hand was defined as six to nine years old children in Austria.

After the elaboration of a guideline suitable respondents were selected. Here one public primary school was selected as a random sample, as the aim of this Master's thesis is not

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 95.

to gather superficial representative data on the reality of children in Austria but to detect trends based on the in-depth analysis of the experience of a number of children in Austria.

Moreover, the number and composition of all interviewees was dependent on several factors, such as the official permit by the provincial Department of Education, the approval by the public primary school concerned, the teachers' allowance, the permission of parents or guardians and most importantly the children's consent and voluntary participation. All in all, 26 children were interviewed – 19 girls and seven boys. In sum, ten interviewees were nine years old, nine were eight years old, five were seven years old and two were six years old.

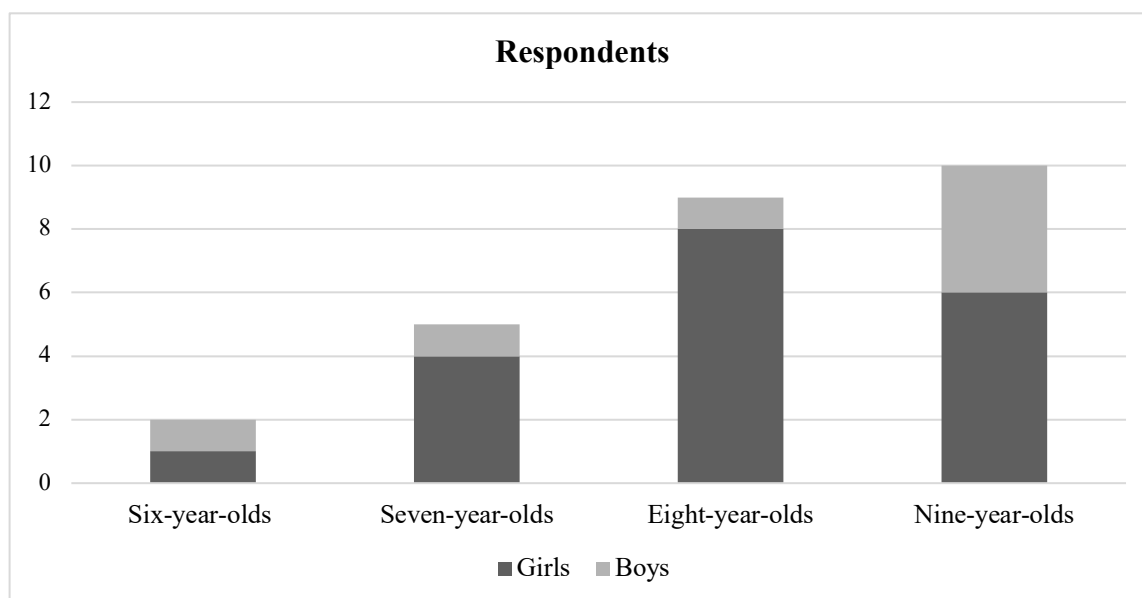


Figure 5: Number and composition of interviewees

5.1.3 Implementation

During the guided interviews with children aged six to nine attention was paid to the fulfilment of four criteria, namely non-interference, specification, wide spectrum coverage and depth or personal frame of reference.²⁵⁰ Therefore, firstly, the interviewer

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 95-97.

tried not to interfere through evaluations during the interview or asking questions at the wrong time. Secondly, the interviewer tried to make the interview as specific as possible and to avoid a conversation on a very general level. In this regard, materials such as a smartphone or a laptop were used when appropriate in order to visualise the topic of the internet for the children. Thirdly, it was tried to cover the full range of issues within the scope of the guideline in a sensitive and proportionate manner. Lastly, all conducted interviews followed the aim of achieving a maximum of self-revealing comments and descriptions of children's personal experience with the internet. Hence, in order to fulfil these criteria and conduct successful guideline interviews ad hoc decisions regarding the choice of questions, priority setting, timing and manners of interaction during the interviews were inevitable²⁵¹ and required a high level of sensibility for the concrete interview process.²⁵² Thus, the order of the questions varied according to the course of the interview.

Special attention was also paid to the creation of a relaxed interview situation for the children. Most children were interviewed individually, only some wished to be interviewed together with their best friends – which was accepted for the sake of the children's well-being and comfort. The interviews were conducted in a quiet room at the attic floor of their own primary school, where the children themselves were up to decide where they wanted to sit. Further, they were informed that they do not have to give an interview and that they can stop or make a break at any time. Also, they were asked, if it was okay for them to tape record them. On average the interviews took eight to ten minutes – strongly depending on the talkativeness of the individual child. All interviews were conducted in German language.

²⁵¹ *ibid.*, p. 97.

²⁵² *ibid.*, p. 113.

5.1.4 Analysis

The analysis of the 26 conducted guideline interviews with children is strongly inspired by Meuser and Nagel's *analytical strategy for expert interviews*. This strategy aims at a text comparison to identify the representative in the children's different approaches and experiences. The aim is to detect the 'supraindividual' common ground.²⁵³ The whole analytical process is therefore oriented towards the assessment of content related passages throughout all interviews.²⁵⁴ However, also the identification of important differences, divergences and contradictions should be noted.²⁵⁵ Further, the analysis of what they define as 'contextual knowledge' is aimed at acquiring empirical knowledge and not theoretically explaining and generalising empirical facts,²⁵⁶ which is completely in line with the objectives of this Master's thesis.

Meuser and Nagel's *analytical strategy for expert interviews* for what they define as 'contextual knowledge' is carried out in five steps. As a first step they propose a partial or selective transcription of the interviews.²⁵⁷ Only relevant parts of the interview should be transcribed. In a second step the transcribed interviews should be paraphrased individually. Here it is important to bear the research question or interview guidelines in mind.²⁵⁸ Thirdly, every paraphrased interview should be arranged in order through adding headlines to the paraphrased passages.²⁵⁹ In the fourth step, a thematic comparison follows. Throughout all transcribed, paraphrased and arranged interviews comparable and content related text passages are identified and brought together under one headline.²⁶⁰ Lastly, the aim is the systematisation of priorities, typifications, generalisation and interpretation patterns.²⁶¹

²⁵³ M. Meuser and U. Nagel, 1991, pp. 451-452.

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p. 453.

²⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp. 461-462.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 454-455.

²⁵⁷ *ibid.*, pp. 455-456.

²⁵⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 456-457.

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*, pp. 457-458.

²⁶⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 459-462.

²⁶¹ *ibid.*, pp. 462-463.

After the completion of the proposed process of analysis a sixth step has to be introduced in the special case of this Master's thesis: the translation of the results from German to English, as all interviews were conducted in German.

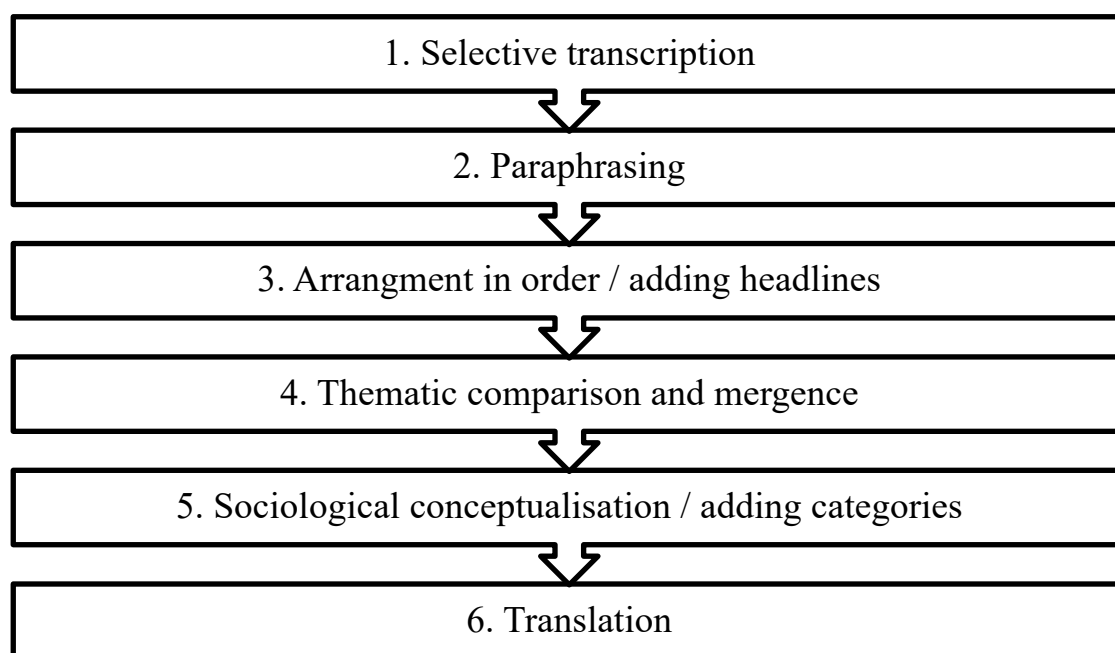


Figure 6: Process of analysis for the guideline interviews²⁶²

5.2 Questionnaires

As the guideline interview is very suitable to be combined with other methods,^{263, 264} conducting surveys among parents and teachers was considered to be a perfect methodological supplement in order to reach the aim of this Master's thesis. To carry out such polls among the parents and teachers in addition to guideline interviewing children of the very same school appeared to be an appropriate way to be able to provide a rounded and as realistic as possible image of this school when it comes to the internet usage of children aged six to nine. Thus, educators and guardians' perspectives should offer further information on the virtual reality children are actually experiencing.

²⁶² *ibid.*, pp. 441-471.

²⁶³ U. Flick, 1999, p. 99.

²⁶⁴ M. Meuser and U. Nagel, 1991, p. 441.

Also, here the aim of this empirical study is not to provide representative statistics on the experienced reality of children in Austria but to generate a realistic reflection of how a number of children is actually experiencing the internet today. From this, the aim is, to derive hypotheses for later quantitative investigations, to identify tendencies through relating the perspectives of the individual interviewees²⁶⁵ – be it children, parents or teachers – and most importantly to relate the results with the current child protection and empowerment system.

5.2.1 Questions and implementation

The questions of the written surveys are aimed at obtaining an assessment of the situation by parents and teachers, which can be conducted at any time and without any purposeful construct.²⁶⁶ The only precondition of participation for parents was to have a child at the age of six to nine.

In order to get an insight into the perspectives of parents and teachers they were presented with certain statements, which they had to evaluate according to their level of personal agreement or disagreement. In addition to that, the teachers, as nodal point between the state, parents and children, were asked to answer one open question. With this it was hoped to gain an insight into their wishes and recommendations when it comes to preparing children for a digital world.

The statements were selected on the basis of the previously elaborated theoretical part and with a view towards answering the research question. Further, attention was paid to ensuring that the statements and questions were written in clear and simple language and that the questionnaire would not take more than five to seven minutes for the respondents. The surveys were conducted in German language.

²⁶⁵ U. Flick, 1999, pp. 98-99.

²⁶⁶ T. Benesch, *Anschauliche und verständliche Datenbeschreibung – Methoden der deskriptiven Statistik*, 5. überarbeitete Auflage, Wien / Graz, NWV Neuer Wissenschaftlicher Verlag, 2013, p. 12.

5.2.2 Selection of respondents

The aim of this Master's thesis is to portray the online experience of children, based on the current perception of children's realities by children, teachers and parents at one specific public primary school in Austria and to compare it with current children's rights mechanisms. The benefit of asking all three stakeholders is to find out to what extent there exists a common perception of realities of children among all three groups when it comes to the internet usage of children and what is needed to be done in order to foster such a common understanding. For this reason, the teachers and parents that undertook the surveys had to be from the very same school the children attended (see chapter 5.1.2).

Here, one questionnaire targeting parents was distributed among all 70 parents of the school and one questionnaire targeting teachers was distributed among the five educators working at the very same school. After distributing the surveys, parents and teachers were given one-week time to complete it, place it in envelopes handed out together with the surveys and return it to the interviewer. In the end, 39 parents and 3 teachers took the time to fill out the surveys prepared.

5.2.3 Analysis

The analysis of the results followed a four-step process.²⁶⁷ Firstly, the collected data had to be properly managed. Thus, a data matrix had to be created and the data had to be coded.²⁶⁸ The data processing program Microsoft Excel was used for this purpose. It followed the data cleaning, where all respondents that did not have a child at the age of six to nine were excluded. Further, one respondent seemed to have only seen one page of the two-page survey and thus missed almost half of all questions. He or she had also to be excluded from the evaluation process. At that, in some cases single questions were skipped, however, those respondents were not rejected. Secondly, the received data was

²⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p. 11.

²⁶⁸ *ibid.*

analysed and compared.²⁶⁹ Also here, the data processing program Microsoft Excel was used. The main part of this step was to illustrate the collected data graphically and comprehensively. In a third step, the analysed and processed data were interpreted, and core messages were derived.²⁷⁰ Lastly, the translation of this evaluation had to be carried out.

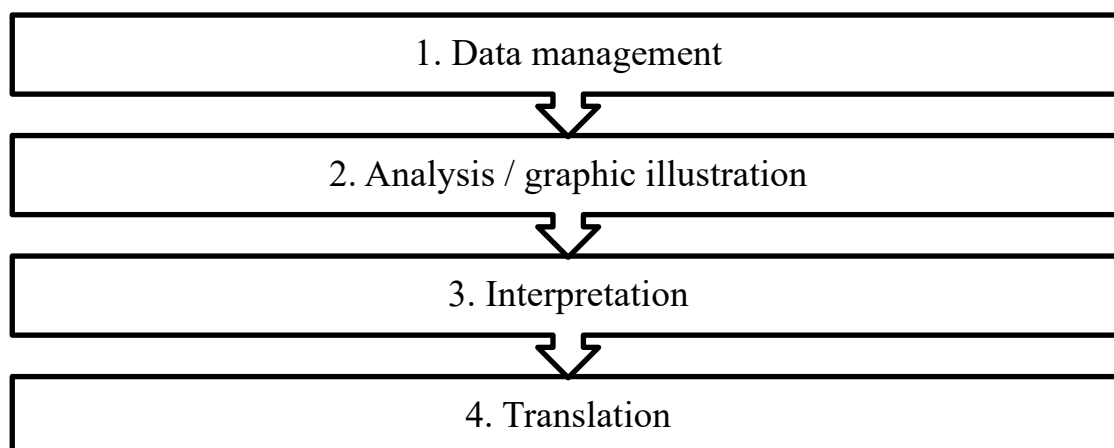


Figure 7: Process of analysis for the questionnaires²⁷¹

6. An Austrian reality and what it tells us

Austria has definitely arrived in a digital world and developments are progressing. Previous chapters have shown, that children of all ages are already using the internet for different purposes and on diverse digital devices. It is a matter of fact that the internet, ‘offering a feast of passive entertainment, interactive computer games and the opportunity to connect with peers remotely’,²⁷² has by now changed the preconditions of a child’s well-being fundamentally – for the better or worse, here the spirits divide. For instance, Jean Twenge, a well-known psychologist from the San Diego State University, is convinced of ‘a decline in personal interaction’, ‘a decline in developing into mature

²⁶⁹ *ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *ibid.*

²⁷¹ *ibid.*

²⁷² The Economist, ‘Why children’s lives have changed radically in just a few decades’, 03 January 2019, <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2019/01/03/why-childrens-lives-have-changed-radically-in-just-a-few-decades>, (accessed 10 June 2019).

adults’, ‘a rise in mental health problems’, ‘an unwillingness to engage with conflicting ideas’ and ‘a decline in civic involvement’²⁷³ of children due to an increased time spent online and in front of a screen of any kind. Others, however, see less of a threat and do not accept this simple demonisation of new technologies. Their line of argumentation is based on history. According to them, the same has happened when the television, the radio or even books were invented and broadly changed societal cohabitation and the growing up of children. By now the incredible added value of diverse once newly invented media outlets have become clear and are widely acknowledged.²⁷⁴ Anyway, the sole existence of this broadly discussed debate gives hope. Gradually, the Austrian society is becoming aware of the influence of current changes, technology and digitalisation on the environment, development and growth of the youngest generation. The topic of the effects of the internet on nowadays children has entered public discourse, legal debate and is climbing higher and higher on the political agenda – at least in theory one can observe movement, rethinking and confrontation.

Hence, it is time to reflect and analyse to what extent these theoretical and legal admittances and reactions are reflected in the lives, upbringing and experiences of children in Austria today. It is time to evaluate in what way the theoretical examination of the topic has already been translated into practice. Moreover, the question that needs to be answered is how far current child protection and child empowerment mechanisms can protect today’s children in their internet use from previously outlined dangers and promote them through new digital possibilities (see chapter 3). In addition, it is important to discuss if and to what extent the current system is used to prepare today’s children for an unpredictable and, above all, for many people unimaginable future.

The following chapters give an overview on the experience of a group of Austrian children aged six to nine, their parents and teachers and aim at exploring their understanding and perception of the internet.

²⁷³ G. Nichols, ‘Book Review: iGen: why today’s super-connected kids are growing up less rebellious, more tolerant, less happy – and completely unprepared for adulthood – and what that means for the rest of us’, *Leisure Studies*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2018, pp. 238-239.

²⁷⁴ The Economist, ‘How children interact with digital media’, 2019.

6.1 Children's perspectives

The following pages provide an analysis of 26 Austrian six to nine-year-olds' perspective on the internet and digital technology. In this context it has to be mentioned that no statistically significant age or gender differences with regard to their digital experience, knowledge and literacy within this group of interviewees occurred. A subdivision on the basis of these two factors is therefore not made. Thus, all 26 children are considered as one group.

6.1.1 Defining the internet

When it comes to understanding children's knowledge about the internet and the degree of their children's digital literacy and digital citizenship, the analysis of their definition of the internet seems to be an appropriate first step. All six to nine-year-olds interviewed can be categorised as follows.

Only two of 26 children were not able to provide any definition of the internet, and at the same time do not use the internet at all. Almost half of all children interviewed were not able to define or extremely insecure in defining what the internet is – and this although they use the internet on a regular basis, which further discussion showed.

Those who were able to find a definition of the internet most of the time provided a description of the internet based on what you can do online drawing from their own experience or the observation of fellow human beings. All together they provided a broad range of things you can do online, from playing and downloading games, watching videos, communicating with each other, ordering items to finding the right way – it was all mentioned. Nonetheless, the majority of respondents equated the internet with the use of search engines. Thus, in many cases the internet was understood as and appreciated for 'knowing everything' and 'having answers to all of your questions'.

In accordance with this definition of the internet based on things you can do online, a number of digital devices, which enable certain online activities were mentioned. Smartphones and tablets were remarked continually, whereas the laptop or computer were less frequently mentioned. Surprisingly in this regard the television was mentioned several times as internet receiving device. Gaming consoles were remarked rarely as devices connected to the internet.

Others, – however, a rather low number of interviewed kids – defined the internet on the basis of what you should not do online. Therefore, the first things that came to their minds, were things you should keep in mind when being on the internet. They consider the internet as ‘not entirely safe for children’ and suggested ‘to be a little careful online’ and to think twice about ‘what pictures to put on the internet’. In concrete, they mentioned the possible threats of ‘hackers’ and ‘data theft’.

Against this background only two kids provided knowledge on how the internet actually works, whereas only one was able to explain it correctly and comprehensible. Further, only one child was convinced to know ‘how the internet was built’ and explained that ‘there are satellites orbiting around our earth and they direct the internet to us’.

Taking these results into account it can be assumed, that the majority of children interviewed has not received any explanation about what the internet actually is and thus understood what it means. Therefore, it can be stated that children’s definitions of the internet are mainly based on their own experience, which seems to be predominantly positive. Hence, for six to nine-year-olds the advantages of the internet seem to outweigh the dangers of the internet. Further, only in rare cases the definition of the internet by children starts from the experience of others or from learned knowledge, which clearly shows that children are often left alone, in their use of the internet and in their cognitive gain about the internet.

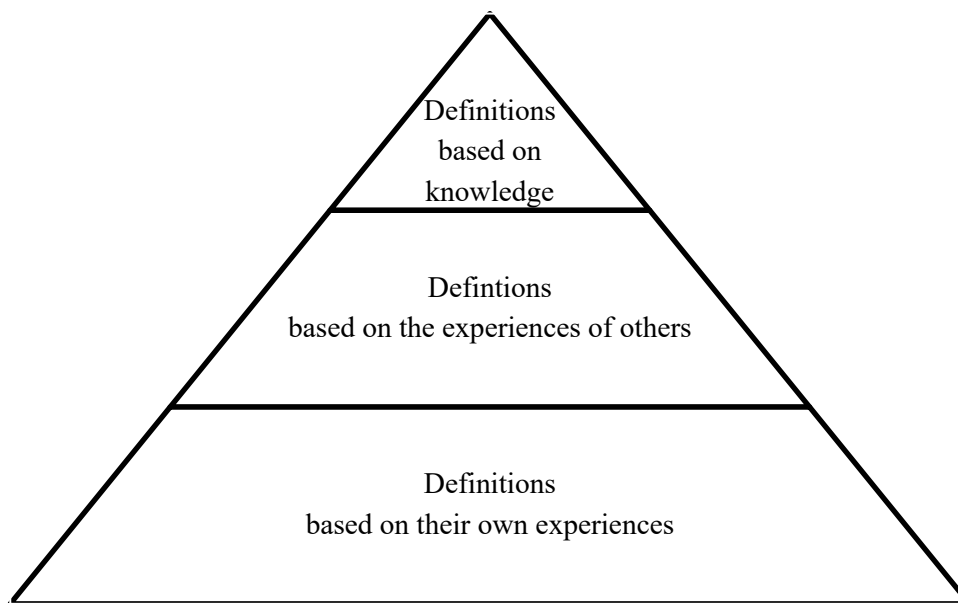


Figure 8: Children's definitions of the internet

6.1.2 Using the internet

As the previous chapter has already shown, the number of children within the interviewed group of six to nine-year-olds, who do not use the internet at all or only in very rare cases is very small. Only two children stated that they are not using the internet at all. Consequently, the internet does not play an important role in these children's lives.

The majority of the interviewees is using the internet on a regular basis, enjoys using it and considers the internet to be important. However, in this regard, most of the kids highlighted, that other things such as friends or other hobbies are more important to them.

Further, it has become clear that all children that are using the internet regularly are doing so at home. As the previous chapter has already outlined, here they are using the internet for diverse online activities and on diverse digital devices. Watching videos or playing games online are the main online activities of the interviewed group of children. Further, several kids spoke of using the internet at home for their homework or preparing themselves for exams. In this context they told about using the internet in order to

complete maths exercises, improve their reading skills or conduct some basic research. In contrast, communicating via social media platforms, the editing of pictures and videos online or looking something up via search engines were mentioned infrequently.

Interestingly, despite this often-distinct web usage of the interviewed kids, those who were asked whether they would prefer to work with a book or a digital device at school, would always choose a book, even though there is – according to the children – at least one computer in every classroom. A few children mentioned to have done arithmetic or reading exercises on the school computer. Nevertheless, the interviews showed, that this does only take place in exceptional cases. Only one child mentioned the occasional use of the internet by teachers in order to show the children knowledge movies or documentaries at school.

With regard to the digital devices the children use to get online, the main digital devices used by the explored group are the smartphone and the tablet. Eight children possess their own smartphone and tablet, eight children share it with their family members. In contrast to this, the computer or laptop is of very little importance. Only two children alluded that they have their own laptop.

In most cases, there are fixed rules at home on the duration of internet use or the use of digital devices. Mostly, the internet usage is limited to the weekends or a specific period of time per day. Additionally, most of the children have to ask their parents for permission before using the internet. Only in the rarest cases the digital devices are freely and unlimitedly accessible at home. Further, only a low number of children spoke of concrete content-related rules with regard to their web usage. Most of the children are using the internet on their own, without supervision or assistance.

When it comes to knowledge about, exhilaration for the internet and the high number of opportunities it provides, children seem to profit immensely from older siblings. Moreover, they seem to be more confident in their web usage than children without older siblings.

In conclusion, it can be said that the interviewed group of children pretty much corresponds to the statistics on the internet usage of Austrian children of the same age when it comes to their online activities and their use of digital devices (see chapter 2) – with a few exceptions. Current data assume that the use of E-readers starts at the age of eight years. Nevertheless, this specific digital device was not mentioned once during all the conducted interviews. Moreover, the assumingly still important role of the TV or other media formats was not really pointed out during the interviews. The TV was mentioned several times as another device connected to the internet, which might be true in the cases of smart-TVs. Further, the newspaper came up several times as source of information about the internet. Also, according to the children's narrative, the behaviour of the parents is reflected in the aforementioned statistics on the regulation of the internet usage for children.

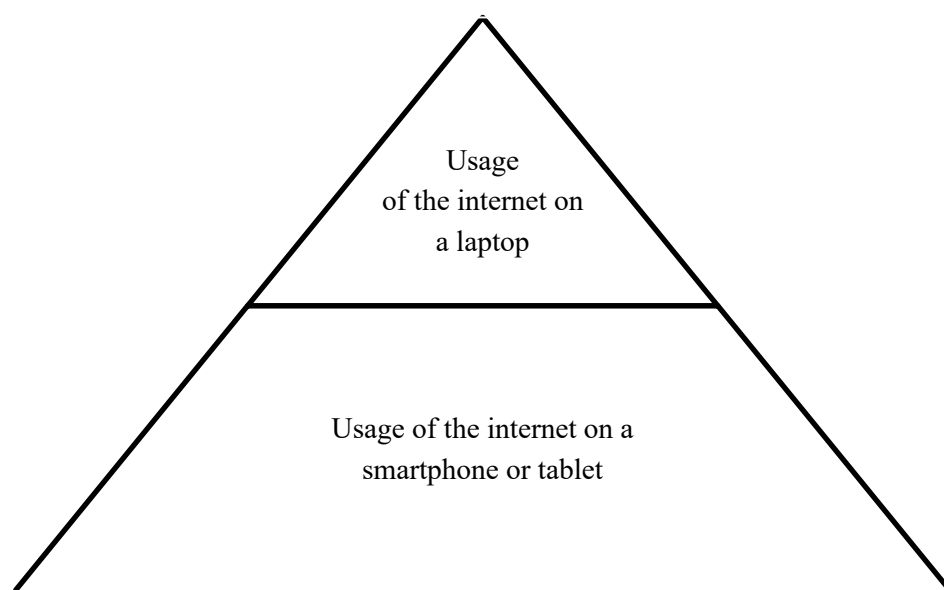


Figure 9: Children's use of the internet on different devices

6.1.3 Online risks and opportunities

As we have heard before all online risks and online opportunities can be divided into three categories. There are risks and opportunities that are content-based for the child as a recipient, contact-based for the child as a participant and conduct-based for the child as

actor (see chapter 3.2).²⁷⁵ The following paragraphs should provide an overview on how far these kinds of dangers and chances the internet brings matters in children's experience and perception of the internet – based on the statements of the 26 children interviewed.

First of all, it has to be outlined, that the interviewees' experiences with the internet are in about 80 per cent of all cases described as positive. Further, in rare cases, where certain dangers and risks have been mentioned often the kids did not speak out of their own experience but out of what they have heard from relatives or friends. Hence, when evaluating the 26 interviews conducted it becomes clear that the children's focus lies on the diverse opportunities the internet brings. The online risks play a minor role.

In particular, children mentioned a variety of online opportunities and online activities that they themselves rate as positive. The majority of the interviewed kids talked about playing games and watching videos online – be it for fun or learning. Further, the possibility to learn new things via the internet was outlined several times. One child even mentioned, the option of searching for the right way. Another, child explained that it enjoys looking up hotels or places before going on holidays. Therefore, the main emphasis of children's understanding of the internet is on content-based opportunities, and thus, concern them as recipients. Only in rare cases children addressed conduct-based opportunities of the internet, which affect them as online actors. In this context, they named uploading and editing videos as well as pictures as important examples. Also, contact-based opportunities play a minor role in the children's evaluation of the internet. Only one child mentioned it as an advantage to have the chance to get to know new people and find new friends online through playing interconnected video games.

Less often, children have reported known dangers or risks on the internet. Thus, more thoughtful or supposedly more careful children mainly mentioned inappropriate or gruesome contents that scare them as the main thing they would change about the internet. One child also told about the 'dangers of imitating what bloggers do'. Thus, their major concern regards content-based risks, which regards them as recipients. Furthermore, the

²⁷⁵ S. Livingstone and L. Haddon, 2009, p. 9.

danger of becoming addicted to the internet was highlighted several times, which strongly depends on their own behaviour online. Less but some children further talked about the danger of hackers, the danger of unknown counterparts online and their fear of data-theft, which both can be classified as contact-based risks. Moreover, one child complained about the fact that ‘as soon as something is uploaded it remains there forever’. At that, this specific child told about children that edit and upload offensive and exposing pictures of other children, and therefore, indirectly spoke about cyber-bullying, which can be categorised as both a contact- as well as conduct-based risk.

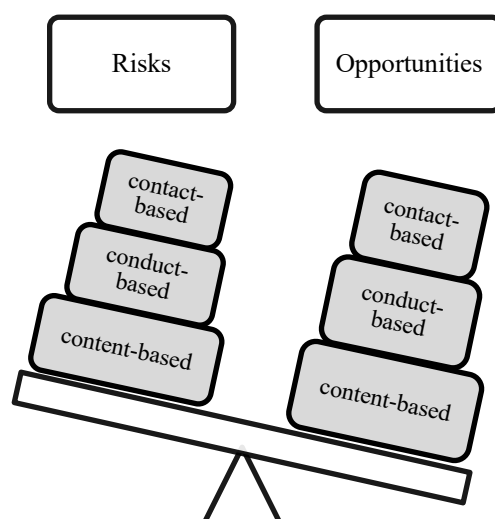


Figure 10: Assessment of online risks and opportunities by children

6.1.4 Sources of information

During the guideline interviews with the 26 children approached, it became clear that the main source of information on the internet are parents. The majority of kids explained, that they are asking their mothers and fathers, whenever they have a problem with the internet or the digital device they are using. In rare cases, children claimed, that they are always trying to solve problems online on their own or are asking their older siblings for advice.

Further, when it comes to sources of inspiration on what you can do online, the suggestions of friends, cousins or siblings seem to be especially important. In addition, however, also here parents seem to play an important role. Only, one child claimed, it is the one in its family that knows the most about the internet and technological devices. In addition to that, in very rare cases the newspaper, TV and The Planetarium were outlined as further sources of information on the internet. Interestingly, teachers were not mentioned once as a source of either inspiration or information on the internet and the opportunities as well as risks that it entails.

Hence, the fear of the evolvement of a vacuum, which makes it harder to reach children who face challenges online, because of the assumed preference of children to ask their peers or siblings for advice,²⁷⁶ cannot be confirmed (see chapter 2). Still, parents seem to be the preferred contacts in case of any doubts about the internet.

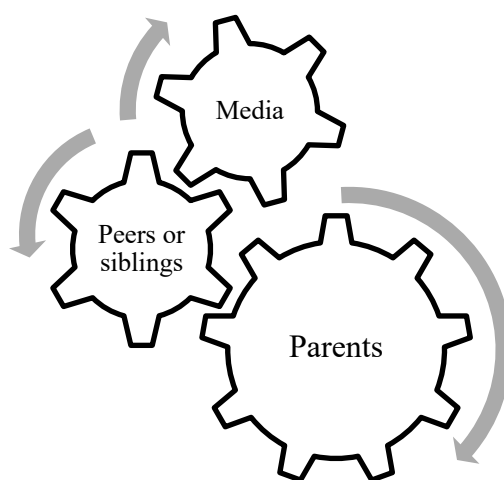


Figure 11: Children's main sources of information on the internet

6.1.5 Child participation

During the interviews children had the chance to express their critics, wishes and suggestions for improvement with regard to the internet.

²⁷⁶ Universität Wien (Institut für Soziologie), 2018.

Here, soon it has become evident that most of the interviewed kids are satisfied with the internet how it is today and would not change anything. Some, however, suggested improvements concerning user friendliness. In particular, they proposed to change the display of videos on YouTube and the display of answers in search engines. Both of these suggestions are aiming at reducing contentual input at one glance. Others would make technological improvements in order to make using the internet more efficient. Concretely, they would change that ‘the computer does not take that long to start’, ‘the use of the internet does not consume so much battery’ or that ‘the internet cannot fail or be down anymore.’ Also, some mentioned the need to ban all gruesome and inappropriate contents from the internet.

Moreover, the majority of children is pleased regarding their own online experiences and would be sad if the internet would not exist anymore. Furthermore, they are satisfied with the support they get while using the internet. Only in very rare cases the children wish for more help, when it comes to their web usage. In contrast to that, almost all interviews conducted show that children wish to know more about the internet and would like to use it more frequently and longer.

6.1.6 Children’s rights in a digital world

The question if children have heard about children’s rights or children’s rights online is the only question where an age-related tendency is discernible. The answers to this question show that younger children are less likely to have heard of children’s rights than older children. Further, most of the kids, who have heard of children’s rights were not able to describe or explain what children’s rights are. In this context several children named the school as main source of information on children’s rights. Less children named the newspaper, television or YouTube videos as knowledge resource.

Only two children were able to define children’s rights. One called the fact ‘that children should determine more things and say what is better or worse for themselves’ as main

essence of children's rights. Another kid explained children's rights as 'children should not be beaten and that one should not bully others'.

Trying to contextualise children's rights with children's internet usage, children were asked whether all children should be allowed to use the internet. Here, the interviewees aged six to nine surprised with very considered and well-argued responses. Most children are in favour of limiting internet use for children by age. In their opinion, very young children and babies should not yet use the internet. According to the kids, the perfect age to start using the internet is shortly before starting school or with the start of school. Various reasons have been given for this. One child argued that 'bad words are used in videos, and babies who cannot speak properly would just parrot these bad words without knowing what they mean'. Another child argued that 'you should only use the internet if you know your way around'. Another one mentioned the 'danger of getting bad eyes' as a reason for a later start of using the internet. However, not all children proposed a limitation of the internet usage of children by age. One child proposed a limitation based on the behaviour of children, as 'only good children should be allowed to use the internet.' Another kid was convinced that all children should be allowed to use, however, not all the time.

6.2 Parents' perspectives

The following pages provide an overview on the self-evaluation of 35 parents of the analysed Austrian public primary school. In addition to the experiences of six to nine-year-olds themselves, the analysis of parents' attitudes towards the internet usage of their children is considered as essential complementary perspective when trying to display the children's virtual reality. In a written survey, distributed among the parents of the very same school of the 26 children interviewed, the parents were asked to rate certain statement, with the aim of enabling an assessment of their basic attitudes towards and educational knowledge of the internet usage of their children. For all thirteen statements

provided, they had to choose between: fully applies, largely applies, partly applies, does rather not apply and does not apply at all.

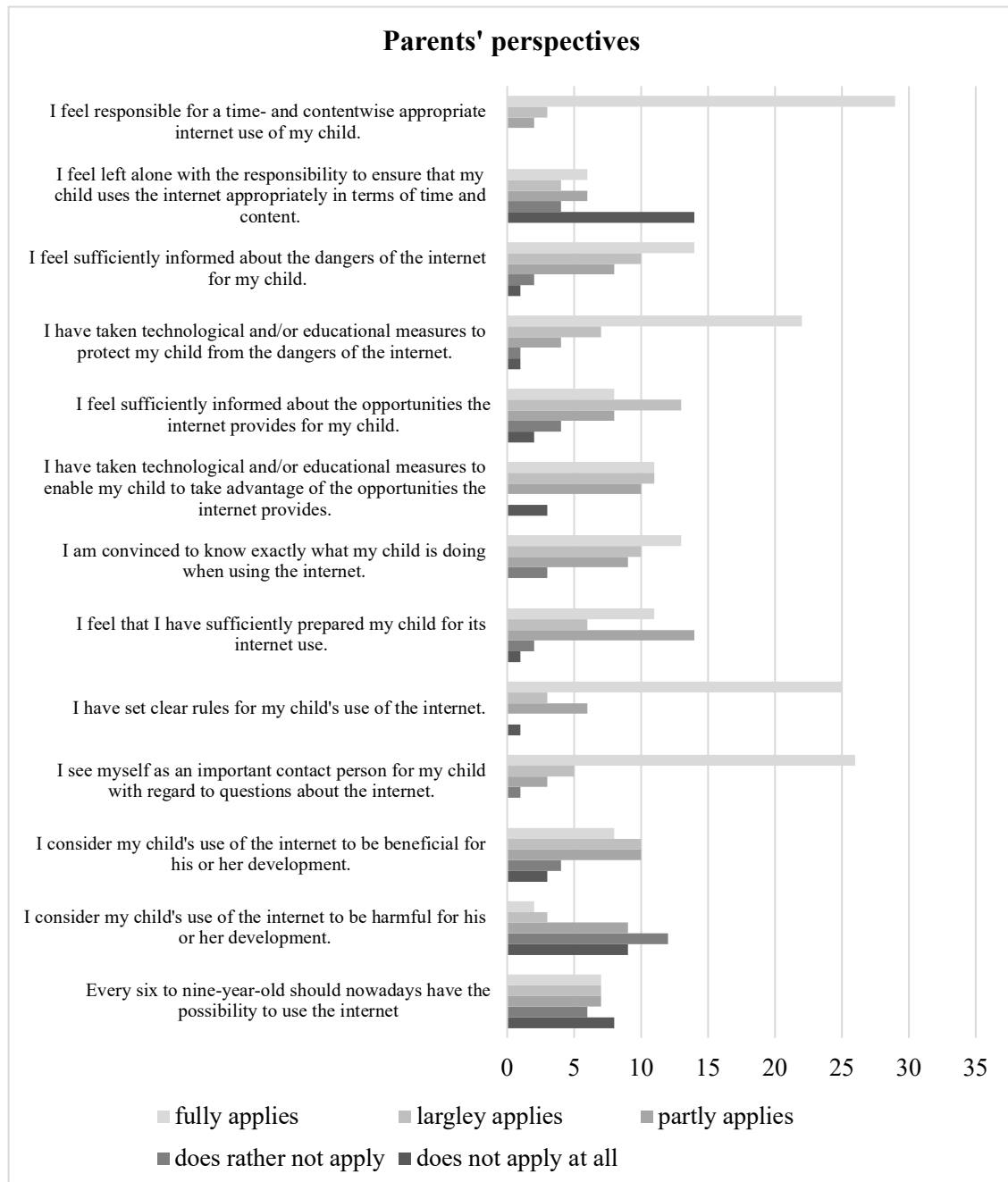


Figure 12: Parents' perspectives on their children's internet usage

6.2.1 Question of responsibility

This self-evaluation of parents clearly shows that the majority of parents is convinced to be fully responsible for a timewise and contentwise appropriate internet consumption of their children. Only three parents stated to feel largely responsible and two parents stated to feel partly responsible. Hence, all parents surveyed feel – to a certain degree – responsible for their children's online experiences.

However, while digging deeper in this regard it became evident that almost half of all parents asked feel left alone in this responsibility to a certain extent. Six parents fully approved this, four parents largely approved this and six parents partly approved this. In contrast, 18 parents do not feel left alone in the responsibility to ensure the safe use of the internet by their children. Thus, considering these results a certain wish of almost 50 per cent of all questioned parents for more support in educating their children towards safe online users can be derived.

6.2.2 Online risks and opportunities

In accordance, with this feeling of being left alone and the related insecurity that comes with this important topic only 14 of 35 parents fully agree with the statement 'I feel sufficiently informed about the dangers of the internet for my child.' Ten parents largely agree, and eight parents partly agree. By contrast, three parents do not feel sufficiently informed. Nevertheless, the majority of parents are in a way convinced to have appropriate knowledge on the online risks their children could face. Consequently, 33 of 35 parents agree to have taken educational and/or technological measures of any kind to protect their children from the online harms. In concrete, 22 of the respondents fully agreed to have taken such measures, seven largely agreed and four partly agreed. Only two parents did rather not or not at all take educational and/or technological measures in this regard.

When it comes to the parents' knowledge about the opportunities the internet could provide for their children a different picture emerges. Even less parents, namely eight are fully satisfied with their knowledge on online chances for children. Thirteen parents are largely and eight are partly satisfied with their knowledge in this regard. Six parents even feel to be rather not efficiently informed or not at all sufficiently informed about this topic. Nevertheless, 32 of 35 parents agree – to a certain extent – to have taken measures to enable their child to take advantage of the opportunities the internet offers. In particular, eleven parents fully agree, eleven largely and ten partly agreed to have taken such measures. Three parents stated to have not taken any measures in this regard at all.

Hence, when comparing the results of the parents' self-evaluation on their knowledge on the online risks and opportunities for children it becomes evident, that parents in general feel better informed about the dangers rather than the chances the internet brings for their kids. Further, it seems to be more important for them to protect their children online than empowering their children online. If one now places these results in the theoretical context previously worked out (see chapter 4.1.1), a frequently criticised tendency is reflected here. Protecting children seems to be the priority, empowering children is overlooked.²⁷⁷

6.2.3 Internet usage of their children

In accordance with the children's narratives (see chapter 6.1), 29 of all parents surveyed, therefore 88 per cent indicated that their child is using the internet. In contrast, only twelve per cent, namely four parents stated that their child is not using the internet at all. Two parents did not answer this question. Also here, no correlation between the age of the children and their internet usage can be detected. Those, who are not allowed or simply do not use the internet are evenly spread among six, seven, eight and nine-year-olds. Hence, often the internet usage of children does not depend on their age. On the contrary, rethinking the statements of the children and parents in this regard, it can be

²⁷⁷ A. Third, D. Bellerose, U. Dawkins et al., 2014, p. 40.

assumed, that the internet usage of children aged six to nine is mainly determined by their parental environment.

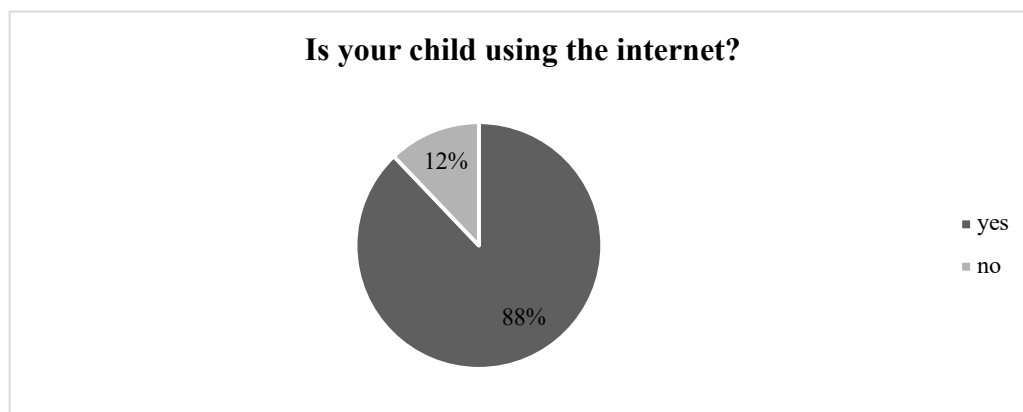


Figure 13: Is your child using the internet?

6.2.4 Online education and regulation

When it comes to the internet usage of their children 32 of 35 parents are to a certain extent convinced to know what their kid is doing when being online. Thirteen respondents are fully convinced, ten respondents are largely convinced and nine partly convinced to exactly know about their children's online activities. Only three parents feel, that they rather do not know what their child is doing in the virtual world. Moreover, the majority of parents only partly feel that they have prepared their children for the online world appropriately. Also, 25 respondents fully approved the statement 'I have set clear rules for my child's use of the internet'. Further, three parents largely approved, and six parents partly approved this statement. Only one respondent did not set clear rules for their kid's web usage. At that, the majority of questioned parents see themselves as important contact persons for their children, when it comes to questions regarding the internet.

Hence, when it comes to the regulation and control of children online parents seem to be confident in their educational means. However, a certain insecurity can be detected when it comes to preparing children for their internet usage.

Furthermore, parents were asked to what extent they approve the statement ‘Every six to nine-year-old should nowadays have the possibility to use the internet’. Here, opinions seem to be divided. Seven parents fully agreed, seven parents largely agreed, seven parents partly agreed. In contrast, six parents did rather not agree, and eight parents did not agree at all. Half of all respondents tend towards a world where all children should be allowed to use the internet, the other half does not see this as a necessity. Freely interpreted, they seem convinced that it should be up to parents to decide whether children are allowed to use the internet or not.

6.2.5 Effects of the internet for children

The 35 respondents clearly see the use of the internet by their children as beneficial rather than harmful to their development, whereas the rejection that the internet would be detrimental for children is greater than the agreement that the internet would be beneficial for the children’s well-being – a finding that could be interpreted as a contradiction to an earlier finding, which showed the focus of parents on protecting instead of empowering children (see chapter 6.2.2).

6.3 *Teachers’ perspectives*

Like the parents, the teachers had the opportunity to reveal their views on the subject. They were asked to state their level of agreement with eleven statements. In addition, one open question was asked, where they had the chance to express their personal wishes and suggestions with regard to the internet usage of their pupils and the handling of the increasing use of the internet by the youngest generation.

Five teachers work at the selected school, three took part in the survey. Thus, again it must be outlined, that the Master’s thesis at hand is not aiming at providing a representative portrayal of the Austrian situation but to detect important tendencies for

one specific public primary school and give ideas for further quantitative studies using one specific example.

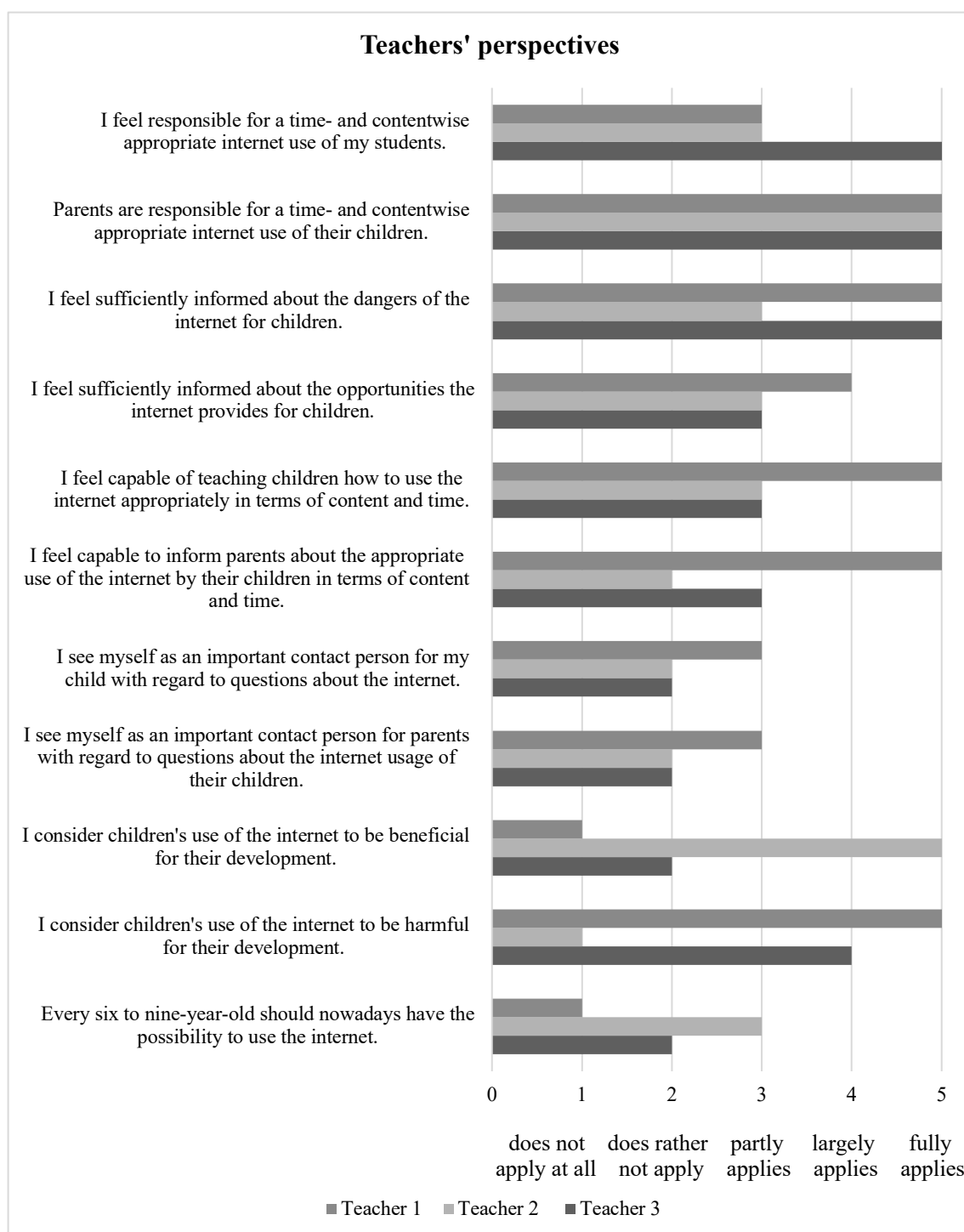


Figure 14: Teachers' perspectives on children's internet usage

6.3.1 Question of responsibility

To a certain degree all respondents feel responsible for an appropriate internet usage of their students. Two of the three teachers feel partly responsible. One teacher stated to feel fully responsible for reasonable duration and content consumption of children online. At the same time all three educators fully agree that this is also the parent's task – which is the only statement where all three gave the same rating.

Hence, it becomes clear that in teacher's understanding of responsibility distribution parents bear the highest responsibility when it comes to children's use of the internet. Nevertheless, teachers also have a responsibility, which seems to should have a more supportive effect.

6.3.2 Online risks and opportunities

As with the parents' perspectives a gap between the knowledge about online risks and online opportunities becomes evident. On the one hand, two of three teachers fully approved the statement 'I feel sufficiently informed about the dangers of the internet for children'. One teacher only partly feels sufficiently informed about the online risks. On the other hand, when it comes to their knowledge about the opportunities the internet could provide for kids a different picture emerges. In this context only one teacher largely feels sufficiently informed and two of the respondents partly feel sufficiently informed.

Therefore, the information received by teachers must be assumed to be focused on how to protect children from harm rather than how to empower children to live out their fullest potential.

6.3.3 Self-evaluation

One of three educators assessed feels fully capable of both teaching children and

informing parents about an appropriate timewise and contentwise use of the internet by six to nine-year-olds. One educator surveyed feels partly capable of doing so. Further, one teacher makes a difference in their ability to teach children and inform parents. In concrete, he or she feels partly capable of teaching children on an appropriate web usage, however, he or she does rather not feel to be able to inform and support parents in this regard.

Thus, although all teachers are convinced to bear a certain responsibility when it comes to their pupils' online behaviour, they are not very confident in their abilities to fulfil this task. In line with that, only one teacher partly feels to be an important contact person for students when it comes to questions regarding the internet. Two teachers rather do not feel as important source of information for children using the internet.

6.3.4 Effects of the internet for children

When it comes to evaluating the effects of the internet for children only one of the three responding teachers is fully convinced about a beneficial impact of the internet on the development and well-being of children aged six to nine. On the other hand, the same teacher does not at all think of the internet as harmful for his or her students. Remarkably, another teacher from the very same school is of the exact reversed opinion. This educator is fully convinced that the internet is harmful for children, and not at all advantageous. The third respondent lies somewhere in-between the other two teachers, however, with a tendency towards the assumption of a rather destructive than constructive impact of the internet on the youngest generation.

Hence, looking at these results a trend of teachers of this school tending to think of the internet as something bad rather than something good for kids may be held, which directly contrasts the parents' opinions.

6.3.5 Teachers' recommendations

First of all, it must be outlined that two of the three teachers do not agree with the statement 'Every six to nine-year-old should nowadays have the opportunity to use the internet'. Only one respondent partly agrees with this statement.

Furthermore, when asking for their recommendations the educators impressed with realistic and pragmatic approaches towards improving the situation for all actors – be it children, parents or themselves. In concrete, two teachers proposed a kind of internet licence for children, and thus, the integration of digital education into the syllabus. At that, two of the three educators outlined the need of educating and informing parents in this regard. One even propagated an obligatory school for parents on the topic of their children's internet usage. At that, two of the three respondents wished for trainings and further education for themselves and also asked for corresponding digital devices in classrooms.

Thus, it can be assumed that the internet is not seen as a necessity but as an inescapable fact in their students' lives, a development, that needs proper reactions.

7. Measuring efficiency

The following pages are an attempt to measure the efficiency of the current child protection and empowerment mechanisms. To this end, it is necessary to determine how many and to what extent planned measures in this context actually reach a group of six to nine-year-olds in an Austrian public primary school. Thus, the results of guideline interviews with children and the outcomes of conducted surveys among their parents and teachers will be directly contrasted with the preceding theoretical frame of reference and requirements for implementation.

7.1 Equal access and equal opportunities

Revising the theoretical elaboration in the first part of this Master's thesis, equal access to the internet for children must be highlighted as a top priority of efforts at the current stage of development. Within the actual understanding of the effects of the internet for children, its high potential of limiting social divides becomes evident. Speaking for the analysed school, in Austria this important objective of child protecting and empowering mechanisms in a digital age seems to have been more or less reached. The majority of the six to nine-year-olds use the internet regularly.

However, this development does not appear to have been pushed or promoted by state actors, as the results of this research provide a basis for making the assumption that the internet usage of children in Austria today mainly depends on the will or attitudes of parents. In school no incentives or significant educational efforts with regard to promoting a safe and appropriate internet usage of children are offered – neither for the children nor for the parents. According to the teachers the internet usage of children is not at all part of the current Austrian public primary school curriculum. Hence, internet access is still not a given fact and lived reality for all children, which parents do not allow them to become active online. Beside not being able to use the internet, explore the opportunities provided and preparing themselves for their interconnected future, these children also have a disadvantage when it comes to their present social integration. Connectivity is seen as key element of realising children's rights today, as it forms the basis for achieving children's rights to learn, to express themselves and to participate in a digital world. However, apart from the establishment of a general broadband infrastructure, it appears that only little measures have yet been taken in Austria to offer all children the opportunity to benefit equally from the internet – especially when it comes to the youngest schoolchildren. A first approach here could be a reform or at least adjustment of the school system, which is also demanded by the teachers questioned in the course of this Master's thesis.

7.2 Public perception of the internet

While in theory it has already been recorded and realised that an appropriate internet use can be conducive to the development, social integration and later economic integration of children, this does not yet seem to have reached the environment of the children examined. Although the majority of the children surveyed uses the internet, a certain scepticism about the positive effects of the internet on children emerges from the questioning of parents and teachers. A special focus in countering that lies in regulating the time children spend online – even though recent studies showed that the impact of the length of time kids spend online is slight, while the impact of the activities they exercise online is drastic (see chapter 2). Hence, a clear lack of knowledge on the sides of parents and educator becomes evident in that regard. The distribution and promotion of information on how to deal with children's use of the internet appropriately is envisaged in the current - theoretical - child rights system as an important task of the state. An intervention by the state, which is requested in the international and regional discourse, where those who are responsible for children's enjoyment of their rights, namely parents and caregivers, fail to protect and empower children in accordance with their rights, remains missing.

7.3 From child protection to child empowerment

Furthermore, within the international and regional child rights system a certain shift from not only protecting children from harms but also empowering children to reach their full potential can be observed. More and more the international and regional community realises that the opportunities the internet provides by far outreach the risks and challenges that come with it. However, also in this regard a different picture appears on a national level, after carefully evaluating one primary school in Austria. Here, a clear tendency of parents and teachers towards protecting children from online risks instead of enabling children to take advantage of all the online opportunities can be observed, which according to the conducted survey can be traced back to a lack of knowledge on the new

chances the internet provides for kids. Remarkably, however, in contrast to their parents and educators, children themselves are oriented towards the positive side of the internet and at the same time have little knowledge about the dangers of the internet. Thus, knowledge is missing on two ends. Also, in this regard – according to the results of this research – not many of the interviewed children are climbing up far ‘the ladder of opportunities’,²⁷⁸ as for most of the children, their online activities do not go far beyond playing games and watching videos online.

7.4 Funnel theory

A basic assumption of this work is that the current child rights system is constructed like a funnel, where a lot is happening on an international level, less is happening on a regional level and even less is happening on a national level. In the course of the theoretical and empirical work on this topic, this assumption turned out to be partly correct.

According to the previous analysis of the international and regional child protection and empowerment frameworks it can be stated that on both of these levels policy makers seem to be forward-looking and aware of currently changing and already changed new circumstances with regard to the implementation of children’s rights online. On an international as well as regional level awareness of the importance and necessity to react on nowadays’ developments in relation to the web usage of the youngest generation is certainly there. International and regional systems have made provisions with regard to finding a balance between protecting children from harm and enabling them to reach their fullest potential online. Further, both international and regional institutions seem to complement each other quite well. While the international framework provides a broad and applicable basis, the regional framework does not only implement this broad basis but also promotes and further develops it. However, when reconsidering the results of the research implemented in the course of this work it becomes evident that not all of these efforts seem to reach all children themselves. On the basis of the analysis of one Austrian

²⁷⁸ S. Livingstone, G., Mascheroni, K. Ólafsson and L. Haddon, 2014.

public primary school it can be stated, that there seems to be a lack of implementation. Further, an unbalanced priority setting within what has been implemented so far can be detected.

These results can be attributed to the fact that it is in the hands of the states to interpret and put this theoretical framework into practice. As we have heard and seen, the relevance and necessity to react to new problems and challenges that the internet brings for the implementation of children's rights does not yet seem to have arrived in Austria. Many plans have already been forged by diverse Austrian governments. Nevertheless, none of these planned measures seem to have reached the – in the course of this work – investigated Austrian public primary school. Whether the same claims to be true for other public primary schools in Austria can only be guessed and would need further research (see chapter 8.3).

However, it is not only at the state level that the topic does not seem to have gained proper attention. Interviewed parents feel left alone with the responsibility associated with the use of new technologies by their children. Interviewed teachers seem to be unaware of their very important role in this respect. At least at the analysed public primary school there seems to be a need to catch up. There seems to be a need to realise that the internet has come to stay, and that the level of connectivity is foreseen to increase immensely over the next years. Moreover, it has to be understood that the importance of implementing the given children's rights system also in the digital world is not only an investment in the well-being of children today but also in their future. Whether these specific results can be transferred to the Austrian population as a whole would require further research. However, they give some indications where to start to dig deeper into the issue

8. Recommendations

As this Master's thesis has shown, with the advancing digitalisation '(t)he world is changing at lightning speed'.²⁷⁹ Human interaction, corporate governance and management, consumer habits, social visions and 'dreams', the health system and the current and future work force are transforming 'constantly (and rapidly) and provide a number of new opportunities.'²⁸⁰ It is up to today's societies to make the best out of them. It is a matter of fact that if it's not yet so, digital media will shape the future lives of nowadays children and the internet will most certainly become integral part of their daily routines, transforming every aspect of their future cohabitation. A number of new technologies are 'silently spreading' and 'becoming more prevalent across economies and societies.'²⁸¹ Children's level of digital literacy and digital citizenship are already and will be even more crucial for their social status and their level of economic integration. Digital skills, that children acquire today will impact their chances and performances in the future 'digital workforce.'²⁸² However, the speed at which these changes progress is broadly underestimated and appropriate practical responses of diverse actors – for the sake of the youngest generation's future – still seem to be a long way off. Digitalisation and the rise of the internet seem to be excluded perpetually from the educational process, which means to further separate school from the everyday and future reality of children – even further than it already is the case.²⁸³ Moreover, a large gap appears to have been emerging between the broadly expected future and the actual future of children. In other words, nowadays children are prepared for a different future than they will most likely experience according to our current knowledge, predictions and forecasts – be it at home or at school.

²⁷⁹ OECD, *The Future of Work: OECD Employment Outlook 2019*, Paris, Secretary General of the OECD, 2019, pp. 3-5.

²⁸⁰ *ibid.*

²⁸¹ *ibid.*

²⁸² D. Feldner, 'How is Digitalization Changing the Future of Work', the Globalist, 16 June 2018, <https://www.theglobalist.com/artificial-intelligence-digitalization-education-facebook/>, (accessed 24 June 2019).

²⁸³ E. Neuwirth, 'Bildung und Digitalisierung sind kein Widerspruch', Der Standard, 05 September 2018, <https://derstandard.at/2000086779028/Bildung-und-Digitalisierung-sind-kein-Widerspruch>, (accessed 24 June 2019).

Therefore, it is recommended to adapt the prevailing knowledge-based approaches towards educating and preparing children for a supposedly good future.²⁸⁴ Instead new and comprehensive strategies towards protecting and empowering children in the light of ongoing and coming changes must be developed.²⁸⁵ Based on the findings of the Master's thesis at hand, the following chapters provide a number of recommendations for diverse actors on how to do so more efficiently.

8.1 International and regional levels

For all international and regional institutions, that are already performing important work with regard to making the current child rights system more efficient in a digital age, the author of this Master's thesis recommends to

prioritise the topic of the impact of digitalisation and the spread of the internet on the present and future of the youngest in international and regional discourse. In this context the *12th European Forum on the rights of the child* in April 2019 can be mentioned as a best practice example in this regard, as one of the three main topics at this annual conference organised by the European Commission was 'Children's rights in the ever-changing digital world';²⁸⁶

support academic research on how to prepare children properly for a digital life and communicate the results in a – for all important actors and especially children themselves – understandable way;

²⁸⁴ A. Sebesi, 'Analysis. How digitalization is reshaping the jobs of the future', Business Review, 05 May 2018, <http://business-review.eu/news/analysis-how-digitalization-is-reshaping-the-jobs-of-the-future-167802>, (accessed 24 June 2019).

²⁸⁵ D. Feldner, 2018.

²⁸⁶ European Commission, '12th European Forum on the rights of the child: where we are and where we want to go', *ec.europa.eu*, [web blog], 2019, https://ec.europa.eu/info/events/12th-european-forum-rights-child_en, (accessed 22 July 2019).

make aware of the number of opportunities the internet provides for children and the importance of empowering them to use these opportunities to their fullest extent, as the dangers of the internet seem to have already reached attention at the national level, and thus, the general public;

put special emphasise on the implementation of the current child protection and empowerment system on a national level, as the current theoretical framework already responds very well to the needs of children living in a digital age;

urge states to respond to current changes with regard to the protection and empowerment of children in a digital age and promote the adaption of their educational systems as crucial first step. Here, solely providing digital devices at school will not be enough. Instead, '[t]rue transformation [in this context] means totally renewing the teaching toolbox as well as the role of the teacher';²⁸⁷

identify best practices and establish concrete solutions in order to better support states in implementing the current child protecting and empowering measures;

provide a platform for and promote dialogue between states with regard to better preparing children for their already digitalised present and even more digitalised future. Also, the inclusion of children or child representatives, the civil society and the private sector in such a platform is highly recommended to be considered in this regard;

actively promote cooperation between states and the private sector, while addressing and providing incentives for both sides;

²⁸⁷ E. Hazan, 'Reinventing schools for the digital age', *mckinsey.com*, [web blog], 17 July 2017, <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/digital-mckinsey/our-insights/digital-blog/reinventing-schools-for-the-digital-age>, (accessed 23 July 2019).

promote a system of equal opportunities for all children through calling for equal access to the internet for children from the age of six through integrating digital media, thus, digital literacy into the educational system;

give children a voice and promote their participation in finding efficient responses to new digital challenges for their protection and empowerment on international, regional and national levels.

8.2 National level

In order to improve the efficiency of the current Austrian child protection and empowerment system the author of the Master's thesis at hand urges the Austrian government to

create a rethinking when it comes to the topic of digitalisation within the Austrian public. Make aware that when speaking of digitalisation, we do not only speak about the future but by now also the present. The Austrian population and especially Austrian children are already living in a digitalised world, and there is no way backwards;

create an awareness for current processes, such as digitalisation and the spread of the internet, and the importance of properly responding to them in the Austrian general public. It is needed to be made clear, that digitalisation is not a question of choice. Digitalisation is already omnipresent in our society and will be even more present in the future, the question is whether we – as a society – will faint or will try to control ongoing developments.

prioritise the topic of the impact of digitalisation and the spread of the internet on the present and future of the youngest in the national political discourse and emphasise the number of opportunities that come with them especially for children;

improve general awareness of the importance of empowering children to use these opportunities to their fullest extent, as the dangers of the internet seem to have already reached the general public. In this context, parents and guardians should be especially addressed;

ensure that the Austrian school system meets the new needs of and requirements for children;

support and train teachers in adapting to these new challenges;

implement a system of equal opportunities for all children in Austria through providing equal access to the internet for children from the age of six through integrating digital media, thus, digital literacy into the educational system;

take best practices of other states into account, when developing new strategies and approaches towards equipping children efficiently for a live in a digital world;

support academic research aiming at identifying gaps and weaknesses in the current national child protection and empowerment system and develop strategies to efficiently react on the results;

closely cooperate with the private sector in establishing an appropriate child protection and empowerment system. Further, integrate the results of public-private partnerships and cooperation like the saferinternet.at²⁸⁸ initiative, which is jointly implemented by the public sector, NGOs and business enterprises into the educational system;

²⁸⁸ Saferinternet.at, 'Die Initiative', *saferinternet.at*, [web blog], 2019, <https://www.saferinternet.at/ueber-saferinternetat/die-initiative/>, (accessed 22 July 2019).

give children a voice and promote their participation in finding efficient responses to new digital challenges for their protection and empowerment on the national level.

8.3 Individual level

In order to make most out of their potential in a digital age the author of this work recommends children to

ask parents, teachers, siblings, relatives or peers whenever they have questions about the internet;

talk with parents, teachers, siblings, relatives or peers about problems they face online;

exchange with other children about what to do online;

exchange with other children about what should not be done online and what risks the internet brings;

help each other when it comes to digital media or the internet.

Furthermore, based on the carefully evaluated results of the qualitative research at hand and in order to help parents and guardians to fully empower and efficiently protect their kids in a digitalised world the author suggests parents to

take the topic of their children's internet usage and the risks as well as opportunities that come with it seriously;

inform themselves about how to efficiently prepare children for their internet usage, how to protect them from online harm and how to enable them to seize their full potential online. Only in this way can they become reliable contact persons for their children when it comes to their internet usage;

dare an educational step from the sole timewise regulation of children's internet usage towards the time- and contentwise guidance of children in their internet usage.

create an open and trusting environment when it comes to speaking to and with children about their internet usage. Furthermore, promote direct dialogue and interaction with children regarding their online experiences;

get actively involved in promoting the importance of considering and implementing a proper protection and especially a proper empowerment of children online among other parents and teachers;

exchange and join forces with other parents as well as teachers with regard to appropriately dealing with the inevitably increasing internet usage of children;

jointly demand state action with regard to adapting the educational system towards fulfilling the needs of and addressing the requirements for children today and in the future.

Lastly, in order to help teachers to properly react on the new challenges children face in a more and more online shifting world the author recommends teachers to

take the topic of their students' internet usage and the risks as well as opportunities that come with it seriously;

take responsibility when it comes to protecting and empowering children online;

get active and react on personal and individual observations, such as the increasing use of digital devices by children;

inform themselves about how to efficiently prepare their students for their internet usage, how to protect them from online harm and how to enable them to seize their full potential online. Only in this way can teachers become reliable contact persons for their students when it comes to their internet usage and for parents when it comes to the internet usage of their kids;

create an open and trusting environment when it comes to speaking to and with students about their internet usage. Furthermore, promote direct dialogue and interaction with students regarding their online experiences;

exchange and join forces with other teachers with regard to the appropriately dealing with the inevitably increasing internet usage of children and a proper integration of digital media in the classroom. Further, include parents and children into this process;

jointly demand teacher trainings with regard to the internet usage of children;

jointly demand state action with regard to adapting the educational system towards fulfilling the needs of and addressing the requirements for children.

8.4 Scientific research

Deriving from the results of this work and tendencies detected, this Master's thesis aims to be of inspiring potential for further scientific research on the advancing digitalisation and its effects on children's lives. In this context, the author of the work at hand suggests scientific researchers to

dig deeper into the topic of children's internet usage and its impact on their development and well-being in the present and future while following an interdisciplinary approach;

make the challenges and opportunities digitalisation brings for children and the evaluation of current child rights mechanisms a top priority;

put an emphasis on researching gaps and weaknesses in international but most importantly national child protection and empowerment systems. Thus, focus on comparable research, where for instance the realities of children on the countryside and in cities or the realities of children in private schools or public schools are compared and assessed;

think practical in their way of working and provide diverse stakeholders with concrete solutions. In this regard, a focus on researching best practices is highly recommended;

communicate and present the results of their work on how to promote digital literacy and digital citizenship of children most efficiently in a comprehensible way;

put a special emphasis on researching the internet usage of the youngest children from kindergarten onwards, as there does exist a huge information gap and that although the age of children using the internet is ever decreasing.

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II. Guideline

Leitfadengestütztes Interview: “Kinderschutz und Kinderbefähigung im digitalen Zeitalter”

Allgemeine Informationen	
Forscherin	Helena Gabriel, B.A.
Forschungsinstitution	Universität Wien Postgraduate Center Wien Vienna Master of Arts in Human Rights
Gewünschter Befragungsort	Eine öffentliche österreichische Volksschule
Durchführungszeitraum	Zu ausgewählten und mit der zu untersuchenden Volksschule vereinbarten Terminen zwischen 13.5.2019 und 31.5.2019
Art der Interviews	Leitfadengestütztes Interview
Befragte	20 – 40 Kinder im Alter von 6 bis 9 Jahren
Dauer der Interviews	8 – 10 Minuten
Ethische Grundsätze	1) Grundvoraussetzungen für die Durchführung und Tonaufnahme der Interviews sind die schriftliche Zustimmung der Eltern und die schriftliche und mündliche Bestätigung der freiwilligen Teilnahme der Kinder. 2) Die Eltern und Kinder werden vor dem Interview, darüber informiert, dass die Kinder das Interview jederzeit unter- oder abbrechen können. 3) Des Weiteren werden die Eltern und die Kinder darüber aufgeklärt, dass die Interviews anonym bleiben und ausschließlich für den Zweck dieser Masterarbeit verwendet werden.

Anmerkungen/Instruktionen	
Einleitung	Zur Einleitung sollte den Kindern ein Smartphone, Tablet und Laptop gezeigt werden. Mit Hilfe dieser Geräte, sollte bei der Einleitungsfrage auch gemeinsam mit den Kindern eine Definition des Internets erarbeitet werden.
Erklärung	1) Diese Forschung geht davon aus, dass Kinder das Internet und die Geräte, über die das Internet genutzt wird, nicht trennen. Sollte es daher zu Verständnisschwierigkeiten beim Begriff ‚Internet‘ kommen, darf die Nutzung des Internets oder das Internet selbst mit der Nutzung von Smartphones, Tablets, Laptops oder Computern gleichgesetzt werden. Als weitere Hilfestellung kann immer wieder auf die mitgebrachten Geräte verwiesen werden. 2) Sollte es Verständnisschwierigkeiten beim Begriff ‚Kinderrechte‘ geben, darf dieser Begriff als ein Konzept, bei dem es darum geht, dass

	alle Kinder auf der Welt gleiche Rechte und Chancen haben, dass sie zum Beispiel alle zur Schule gehen dürfen, alle eine Platz zum Wohnen haben, alle zum Arzt gehen dürfen, alle vor Gewalt geschützt sind, alle ihr Meinung äußern und mitreden dürfen etc. beschrieben werden.	
Leitfrage	Die Leitfrage ist eine Erzählaufforderung.	
Konkrete Fragen	Konkrete Fragen werden nur gestellt, wenn ein Thema nicht von alleine angesprochen wird.	
Checklist	Die Checklist ist ein Hilfsmittel, um zu überprüfen, ob alles Relevante angesprochen wurde.	
Ad-Hoc-Fragen	Ad-Hoc-Fragen können gestellt werden, falls unerwartete und relevante Themen angesprochen werden. Beispiele wären hier: Wie meinst du das? Könntest du mir das näher erklären? Hättest du hierzu ein Beispiel?	
Demographische Daten	Nach dem Interview muss das Alter und Geschlecht der Kinder erfasst werden.	
Beiblatt	Nach dem Interview müssen die Rahmenbedingungen, Vermutungen und Bemerkenswertes auf einem Beiblatt festgehalten werden.	
Leitfaden		
Leitfrage	Konkrete Fragen	Checklist
Part I: Einleitungsfrage		
Was weißt du über das Internet?	Was ist das Internet? Wofür verwenden die Leute das Internet? Was kann man mit dem Internet alles machen? Ist das Internet wichtig oder nicht wichtig?	Definition des Internets erarbeiten Wissen Bewertung
Part II: Internetnutzung		
Könntest du mir etwas über deine Internetnutzung erzählen?	Nutzt du das Internet? Wo und wann nutzt du das Internet? Wie lange nutzt du das Internet? Was machst du im Internet? Gibt es zu Hause oder in der Schule Regeln zu deiner Internetnutzung? Nutzt du das Internet alleine oder gibt es jemanden der bei dir ist, wenn du das Internet nutzt?	Dauer Nutzungsgeräte Tätigkeiten Regulation
Part III: Persönliche Erfahrungen mit dem Internet		
Könntest du mir über deine Erfahrungen oder Erlebnisse mit dem Internet erzählen?	Was war das tollste was dir im Internet passiert ist? Was gefällt dir am besten? Gab es irgendwann einmal etwas, was nicht so toll war? Ist dir schon einmal etwas im	Bestes Erlebnis Schlechtestes Erlebnis

	Internet passiert, was dir nicht gefallen hat oder wobei du dich nicht wohlgeföhlt hast?	
Part IV: Informationsquellen zum Thema Internet		
Wenn du Fragen zum Internet hast, wen fragst du oder was tust du?	Wenn du dich nicht auskennst, zu wem gehst du? Woher nimmst du deine Informationen zum Thema Internet? Wer erklärt dir das Internet? Wer zeigt dir, was man im Internet alles machen kann?	Ansprechpersonen Informationsquellen Nutzungsanregungen
Part V: Kinderbeteiligung		
Wie zufrieden bist du mit dem Internet?	Was würdest du am Internet verbessern? Würdest du gerne mehr über das Internet wissen? Würdest gerne mehr Hilfe bekommen, wenn du das Internet nutzt? Würdest du lieber mit einem Computer/Tablet/Smartphone arbeiten oder mit einem Buch? Was würdest du tun, wenn es das Internet nicht geben würde? Wie wäre das für dich?	Wünsche Hilfestellung Wissensbedarf Verbesserungsvorschläge Bewertung
Part VI: Kinderrechte		
Hast du in der Schule schon einmal etwas von Kinderrechten gehört?	Was sind Kinderrechte? Welche Kinderrechte kennst du? Gibt es auch online/im Internet Kinderrechte? Sollten alle Kinder das Internet nutzen dürfen?	Definition von Kinderrechten erarbeiten Kenntnisstand Kinderrechte online
Part VII: Abschlussfrage		
Gibt es noch irgendetwas, was wir vergessen haben?	Fällt dir noch etwas Wichtiges ein?	Abschließende Gedanken

Beiblatt

Interview Nummer:

Audio File Name:

Datum und Uhrzeit des Interviews:

Dauer des Interviews:

Ort des Interviews:

Alter des Kindes:

Geschlecht des Kindes:

Anmerkungen:

III. Questionnaires

Fragebogen für Eltern

1. Wie alt ist ihr Kind? (Angabe in Jahren)

2. Nutzt ihr Kind das Internet?

3. Bitte bewerten Sie inwiefern die folgenden Aussagen auf Sie zutreffen.

a. Ich fühle mich verantwortlich für eine zeitlich und inhaltlich angemessene Internetnutzung meines Kindes.

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

b. Ich fühle mich mit der Verantwortung, für eine zeitlich und inhaltlich angemessene Internetnutzung meines Kindes zu sorgen, alleine gelassen.

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

c. Ich fühle mich über die Gefahren des Internets für mein Kind ausreichend informiert.

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

d. Ich habe technologische und/oder erzieherische Maßnahmen gesetzt, um mein Kind vor den Gefahren des Internets zu schützen.

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

- e. Ich fühle mich über die Chancen des Internets für mein Kind ausreichend informiert.**

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

- f. Ich habe technologische und/oder erzieherische Maßnahmen gesetzt, um meinem Kind das Ergreifen der Chancen des Internets zu ermöglichen.**

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

- g. Ich bin mir sicher, genau zu wissen, was mein Kind tut, wenn es das Internet nutzt.**

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

- h. Ich habe das Gefühl, mein Kind ausreichend auf dessen Internetnutzung vorbereitet zu haben.**

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

- i. Für die Internetnutzung meines Kindes habe ich klare Regeln festgelegt.**

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

- j. Ich sehe mich als wichtige Ansprechperson meines Kindes bei Fragen zum Internet.**

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

k. Ich erachte die Internetnutzung meines Kindes als förderlich für dessen Entwicklung.

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

l. Ich erachte die Internetnutzung meines Kindes als schädlich für dessen Entwicklung.

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

m. Jedes Kind im Alter von 6-9 Jahren sollte heutzutage die Möglichkeit haben das Internet zu nutzen.

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

Vielen Dank für die Teilnahme an diesem Fragebogen!

Fragebogen für LehrerInnen

4. Bitte bewerten Sie inwiefern die folgenden Aussagen auf Sie zutreffen.

n. Ich fühle mich verantwortlich für eine zeitlich und inhaltlich angemessene Internetnutzung der Kinder meiner Klasse.

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

o. Eltern sind verantwortlich für eine zeitlich und inhaltlich angemessene Internetnutzung ihrer Kinder.

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

p. Ich fühle mich über die Gefahren des Internets für Kinder ausreichend informiert.

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

q. Ich fühle mich über die Chancen des Internets für Kinder ausreichend informiert.

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

r. Ich fühle mich in der Lage, Kindern eine inhaltlich und zeitlich angemessene Internetnutzung beizubringen.

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

- s. **Ich fühle mich in der Lage, Eltern über eine inhaltlich und zeitlich angemessenen Internetnutzung ihrer Kinder aufzuklären.**

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

- t. **Ich sehe mich als wichtige Ansprechperson für Kinder bei Fragen zum Internet.**

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

- u. **Ich sehe mich als wichtige Ansprechperson für Eltern bei Fragen zur Internetnutzung ihrer Kinder.**

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

- v. **Ich erachte die Internetnutzung von Kindern als förderlich für deren Entwicklung.**

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

- w. **Ich erachte die Internetnutzung von Kindern als schädlich für deren Entwicklung.**

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

- x. **Jedes Kind im Alter von 6-9 Jahren sollte heutzutage die Möglichkeit haben das Internet zu nutzen.**

(trifft überhaupt nicht zu) ☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 (trifft in hohem Maße zu)

5. Auf welche Weise könnte Ihrer Meinung nach besser auf die rasant steigende Internetnutzung von Kindern eingegangen werden? Was wünschen Sie sich als Lehrperson in dieser Hinsicht? Bitte erläutern Sie.

Vielen Dank für die Teilnahme an diesem Fragebogen!