



Mixed Methods Study Involving Young People

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Mixed Methods Study Involving Young People

Anonymous

This is an application form to an ethics committee to begin researching young people's search and evaluation practices online using mixed methods.

Describe the rationale, study aims and the relevant research questions of your study.

To find out:

When and why young people use the web to search for information.

How young people search for information; for example their choice of search engine and search query.

How young people judge credibility by discriminating between various sources of information.

Are young people persuaded by contested information they find online?

If a young person's socioeconomic status and education has any influence on these questions.

Describe the design of your study.

I have recruited two institutions to take part in this study. I will be working with a member of the management team at each college who also teaches. They have volunteered their students for this study and integrated my research methods with their students' learning objectives.

These institutions are distinguished by their students' socioeconomic status and journey through our education system.

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Stage 1: Group Interviews

Previous research in this area suggests young people need to be motivated by their interest in a topic before they research it thoroughly online. If I give them topics in which they have no interest, then they will perform perfunctory searches. The purpose of the group interviews is to discover which topics interest the students. In groups of 15, I will ask the students:

- When and why do you use the web for search information?
- What are the issues, topics, and questions would you look to the web to resolve?

During the interview, I will suggest examples and ask the students if they would use to the web to investigate them. For instance, is global warming man-made?

Group selection will depend on:

The members of staff and students from each institution who are willing to participate.

Which students under the age of 18 who, having volunteered, have obtained consent from their parents to participate.

Stage 2: Collaborative Writing Project

The questions produced during the group interviews will be used for a collaborative writing project.

This will involve 3 sub-stages:

1. The students will be asked to record their responses individually (to the issues discussed during stage 1) in Word before any online research has taken place. These responses will be uploaded to a secure, password protected server at the University.
2. Next, the students will be asked to construct responses again individually in Word, but this time using the web as a resource. These responses will be uploaded to a secure, password protected server at the University. The search queries will be captured for analysis via a proxy server. When students use the web at each college their search history (the addresses of web pages they visited) is stored on a central computer on the college's network called a web server. I will set-up a proxy server that will perform this function for students participating in my study. The proxy server will only capture data (search logs) that each institution captures already on its web servers but just for the students (or rather their machines) participating in the study.
3. For the final stage the students will be asked to integrate their individual responses written during stage 3b into a wiki that reflects a group consensus on each topic. This stage will be videoed to observe the deliberations and interactions between the students during this process.

The wiki will be hosted by the University.

A similar wiki can be seen here [removed].

The students asked to create the wiki will be given pseudonyms for log-ins and explicit instructions not to identify themselves or the institution at which they study. Only I, as the wiki's administrator, will be privy to this information.

The wiki will be written at each institution within the student's normal timetable. It will be locked by me, as administrator, for editing outside these hours to prevent any contamination or abuse.

Each wiki page will have a discussion page within which the students will be encouraged to discuss and justify their choice of source.

Observation and Recording of Collaborative Writing Project

As well as asking students to document their deliberations, while they write the wiki, I will observe and video the project in progress and record my discussions with them about their choice of sources and credibility decisions.

The video is intended as an objective 'memory' of the process. I need to see who spoke to whom and when and compare this to the timeline of edits on the Wiki. During the debrief interviews I can also refer to the videos.

Stage 3: Debrief Individual Interviews

The dual purpose of the debrief interviews is to assess each volunteer's experience after they have time to reflect on the project and capture any thoughts or processes that were not revealed during the observations.

Who are the research participants?

Approximately 30 post-secondary school students age 16-19 and specific teachers who have agreed to take part in the study.

If you are going to analyse secondary data, from where are you obtaining it?

From the institutions at which the students are attending. For example student fees and any anonymised demographic data each institution can provide.

If you are collecting primary data, how will you identify and approach the participants to recruit them to your study?

Recruitment will result from a process during which my point-of-contact at each institution will volunteer classes to participate. I will ask all the members of these classes if they are happy and willing to participate. If any of the students are aged under 18, I will seek parental consent before proceeding.



Will participants be taking part in your study without their knowledge and consent at the time (e.g. covert observation of people)? If yes, please explain why this is necessary

No.

If you answered 'no' to the above question, how will you obtain the consent of participants?

For each stage of the study I will seek the written consent of a member of each institution with the appropriate level of authority to do so, the teachers involved in the study, the students participating in the study and if necessary, their parents (see consent forms).

Is there any reason to believe participants may not be able to give full informed consent? If yes, what steps do you propose to take to safeguard their interests?

No.

If participants are under the responsibility or care of others (such as parents/carers, teachers or medical staff) what plans do you have to obtain permission to approach the participants to take part in the study?

For participating under-eighteens I will seek parental consent by writing to each participant's parent (see parental consent form).

Describe what participation in your study will involve for study participants.

Please attach copies of any questionnaires and/or interview schedules and/or observation topic list to be used.

Participation for young people would involve:

An hour long interview with approximately 15 of their peers to discuss how and why they use the web to find information. This is an opportunity to discuss topics or arguments they would use the web to help resolve.

A five hour collaborative writing project to be done within normal college hours within which they discuss and document sources that support their arguments.

A fifteen minute individual debrief interview to discuss their participation in the project.

How will you make it clear to participants that they may withdraw consent to participate at any point during the research without penalty?

On the information sheets I will inform participants that there will be no repercussions if, at any time they wish to withdraw from the study by speaking to me; during the group interviews, during observations of the collaborative writing project or specifically from the debrief interviews. I will also give the participants my university email address so they can withdraw at any time via email. In case they feel uncomfortable addressing me, participants will be able to indirectly withdraw from the study by informing a member of staff at their institution or parent or guardian.

Detail any possible distress, discomfort, inconvenience or other adverse effects the participants may experience, including after the study, and how you will deal with this.

Stage 1: Group Interviews

Although I will make every effort to avoid sensitive topics for the wiki, I am unable to predict how individual students may react to all possible topics. I will inform the students, from the outset, that if they find a topic problematic they should inform me or a member of staff at the intuition so I can withdraw the topic and/or the student from the study. For example, the students may want to research the link between mental illness and marijuana use and an individual in the group may have personal experience of this.

The interviews will be digitally recorded, removed from the recording device and transferred to a secure, password protected server at the University.

During the transcription and analysis of the recordings all the participants will be referred to by pseudonyms.

At all times during the study a member of staff from the institution will be present or in earshot.

Stage 2: Collaborative Writing Project

It is possible the participants may abuse the anonymous collaborative writing space with harmful behaviour such as bullying, flaming and trolling. I will closely monitor the wiki for such behaviour. As the wiki's administrator I will have access to participant's real identities. If any participant is behaving inappropriately I will use this access to inform the participating institution's member of staff of the participant's identity and negotiate appropriate action (for example issue a warning and if necessary remove any offenders from the study).

A member of staff from the institution will be present or in audible range.

The writing of the wiki will be video recorded. It is possible individual or all the students will become uncomfortable with this at which point I will cease recording.

Stage 3: Individual Interviews

These will be individual interviews and it is therefore possible participants will be uncomfortable in a one-to-one with a relative stranger.

I am an experienced teacher. I will use any opportunity to reassure the students and develop a working relationship prior to the individual interviews.

The interviews will be held in an open space or a room with an open door. A member of staff will be present or in earshot.

How will you maintain participant anonymity and confidentiality in collecting, analysing and writing up your data?

The institutions will be given pseudonyms. The participants will be asked to create their own usernames. These usernames will be sanctioned by the member of staff representing the institution for appropriateness.

The participants will be referred to throughout by their usernames. If a username can be interpreted in such a way that can lead to a user's real identity I will provide an alternative.

The search logs on the proxy server will only record searches performed by the machines and not the user. I will only be able to identify who searched for what and when by referring to the video.

How will you store your data securely during and after the study?

The digital recordings of the group interviews, the offline discussions during observations and the debrief interviews will be removed from the recording device and uploaded to a password protected secure server hosted by the University.

The proxy server will be my laptop. Immediately after each session, the data files will be transferred to a password protected secure server hosted by the University, then removed from my laptop.

The videos will be recorded on a tape. Immediately after the recordings, the tape's content will be uploaded to a password protected secure server hosted by the University of Southampton, then deleted.

The wiki and all its data will be password protected. Only registered users will be able to view or edit its content. The wiki and its data cache will be encrypted and stored securely on a University server.

Describe any plans you have for feeding back the findings of the study to participants.

I will publish the study's findings on ePrints and distribute the url to all participants by letter addressed to their institution.

What are the main ethical issues raised by your research and how do you intend to manage these?

The main ethical issues are as follows:

- I will be working with under-18s.
- I may discuss potentially ethically sensitive topics.
- I will be using primary data i.e. search logs, audio and video recordings.
- The abuse of the wiki and its discussion pages.

Strategies to manage these risks are described above.

Please outline any other information you feel may be relevant to this submission.

I am a former secondary school teacher. I am CRB checked. My training and experience will help identify and manage many of the risks identified above.

The use of search logs and video is unprecedented in this field of research and is therefore important to the overall thesis. For the searches I need a record of what the students searched and when; one I can use to discuss their choices during the interviews. During deliberations that influence the wiki's content, I need to see who talked to whom and when. The video will be an objective record of how knowledge is socially constructed which I can refer to when interviewing the students.