

YOUNG PEOPLE'S AGENCY IN SOCIAL MEDIA (#AGENTS)



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The main objective of the #Agents project is to examine how young people act in social media environments as influencers on the one hand and targets of influence on the other. We will be focusing on both the good and bad effects – bright and dark sides – of their agency in social media.

Young people's agency in social media is full of controversies at private, social, societal and national levels. Therefore, there is a need for a deeper understanding of young people's different kinds of agency in multiple social media environments. Young people's individual agency refers to the capacity of acting independently and making own choices. Co-agency refers to the mutually supportive relationships that help young people progress towards their valued goals. Young people also promote collective actions, thereby exercising distributed agency. Moreover, young people are affected by various kinds of charismatic authorities and individual key leaders in social media, which influences their values and world views, in often adverse ways.

We will study how different kinds of agency and influence in social media are connected to young people's identities, world views, emotions, wellbeing and feelings of safety and security. The target group are adolescents aged 13–19, since they are the most active users of social media at an important life stage in the identity formation.

Our consortium is multidisciplinary. The partners are the Department of Social Sciences and Philosophy (DSSP), University of Jyväskylä, Jyväskylä School of Business and Economics (JSBE), the Faculty of Educational Sciences (FES), University of Helsinki, and the National Defence University (NDU).

The research implementation is divided into work packages:

- Young people as actors in private and public social media environments (DSSP)
- Young people at the crossroads of media, markets and economy (JSBE)
- Youth social media engagement, identity and academic and emotional functioning (FES)
- Young people's agency in social media as an aspect of society's comprehensive security (NDU).

We will utilise multiple research methods: surveys, longitudinal research, focus group interviews with young people and authorities, personal interviews, security café discussions, computational data gathering from social media, and a new kind of experience sampling with mobile devices, as well as activity tracking with bracelets.

Based on our results, we expect to be able to develop an explanatory, comprehensive and integrated evidence-based model depicting the impacts of social media use on young people's agency. Our research results will allow us to develop conceptual and practical tools for social media use to strengthen young people's agency and media literacy in current social media environments and thereby improve their positive engagement in social groups, identity formation and wellbeing and feelings of safety and security. We will also put emphasis on developing young people's competences to act in ethical ways in social media. A concrete result will be a social media expert toolkit, developed in cooperation with schools and the Finnish Defence Forces.



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