YOUTH SPACE
Results of Focus Groups
TOPLINE report

LATVIA, ESTONIA, SWEDEN
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TECHNICAL INFORMATION
Youth Space is joint effort from Riga, Tallinn and Stockholm cities that has been put together to create a unique learning, communication and inclusion space for young people.

To discover youth internet usage patterns and activities in Social Networks focus group research have been conducted in three countries: Latvia, Estonia and Sweden.

3 focus groups were conducted in Riga, including Latvian and Russian speaking young people - 27 respondents.

2 focus groups were conducted in Stockholm, at the School of arts -17 respondents.

2 focus groups were conducted in Tallinn, at the Tallinn Youth center - 14 respondents.

All focus groups were conducted with young people age of 15-25, heavy users of internet and social networks, active and creative persons.
Conclusions

- In general there are no big differences in Internet and Social Networks (SN) usage by youth in all three countries.
- Internet and Social Networks have become very important part of everyday life for young people and takes any free time available.
- Young people try to connect and check internet and SN whenever it is possible, most used applications run in background of computer all the day while working/studying.
- Internet and SNs are perceived as space for communication. Parallel world, always open place for meetings.
- Usage of internet and SN have changed from ordinary search of information to expressing self-personalities, downloading and sharing personal information, becoming more public.
- Mostly used function of SNs are: getting, collecting and seeking for necessary information; learning about the world, news; upload, share and publish own information; keep in touch with friends and family; fun, entertainment, games; mostly all daily procedures can be done in the internet without leaving home (e-banking, e-shops, e-birthday cards, social networks for communicating with friends etc);
- Parallel usage of chats, blogs, forums – generates feeling of presence in different places simultaneously, gives possibility to work with bigger amounts of information, exchange of information, decisions are made quicker, processes run more effective.
Conclusions

- Although respondents in the beginning of discussions tended to reject the idea of necessity for a new SN, it is seen that a portal which would be professionally oriented, offering specialized information for interest groups and would unite likeminded people is of interest and have great potential.

- The thought of a new social network, based on interest groups, is at first not attractive at all in almost all groups of three partner countries, however, when considering, the attitudes are turning and a clear interest is shown!

- The main reasons why the attitudes are changing is vision that a new SN would not be another (pale) Facebook, but instead would become a top one international forum within culture, music and creativity for youth.

- Since existing SNs do not fulfill the needs of being a relevant forums within the special area of interest that pulls likeminded participants together - there is an empty position on the social network map for a portal with professional and likeminded interest groups.

- The success of this portal depends on its simplicity, meantime how integrated and linked with different other applications it is.

- Young internet and SN users are looking for very well integrated portal – platform which offers not just one function, but conjuction of them – chatting, messaging, forums video calling, file upload and exchange, blogging, commenting, background music, games, entertainment, news, advises and much more – accessible from one place.
Main and notable difference in usage of SNs by countries can be seen only when talking about preferred Social Networks.

In Estonia, there exists only one network, that young people use most often - Facebook. The main reason for that is its completeness: Facebook (FB) offers all the things that users seek in a social network. Therefore it does not make sense to use any alternative networks as everyone is represented in FB. Other difference in Estonia was regarding trust and publicity in the social networks. Estonian youth is very careful about who they share personal information with and communicate mostly with people they actually know so in order to succeed in Estonia, it has to be made safe by local opinion leaders in the beginning to create an atmosphere of reliability.

Alike situation is in Sweden. Here also Facebook (FB) is most popular and often used network. Additionally Swedish young people to fulfill their different needs still use other SN networks, like – MSN, MySpace, which gradually lose their impact and have become old-fashioned.

In Latvia situation is different since there is very strong local social networks: Draugiem.lv (for friends) – very popular between Latvian speaking and One.lv – used more by Russian speaking young people. Interestingly, that Facebook for majority of respondents seemed too complicated and is not very widely used. It is used mainly to keep on international contacts, communicate with friends living abroad. Also it can be seen that Facebook becomes more popular for mature representatives of youth which use it for professional communication.

Additionally in all three countries such social networks as Skype, Youtube, Twitter, Blogs are quite popular and often used, since they offer specific, very simple tools of easy communication.
Most often demanded feature for new Social Network is “easy usage”, according to respondents it means:

- Additional commands for any option (*file – it could be sent, sent to group, downloaded, archived, searched ect*);
- Commands have to be linked and automatically offer different options;
- Use more icons and symbol tabs for commands, not written words;
- Easy understandable logic of command tree;
- Search function for any text (in any folder - letters, forums, news, advises);
- Create own, fitted working place - possibility to select necessary and most used functions by own wishes, own design, add music in to background;
- Work, communicate in groups;
- File and photo, video download, archive;
- Grouping of friends, files, photos;
- Possibility to join network without invitation.
New Social Network could provide things that are not fulfilled today:

- To get access to individually relevant information
- To satisfy the desire of being updated and be able to take part in the world of culture and music
- To be able to share and take part of experiences with people in the same situation as oneself
- Meeting interesting likeminded new people
- Should encourage networking and make it easy to connect with people of same interest or in certain questions
- Exchange personal experience
- Chat possibilities, well functioning, with group chat possibility
- Threads, discussions open for everybody, started with a certain issue or question.
- Upload films, share happenings or own performance with others on the network
- Comment on what others are sharing, comment on comments
- Being able to sort information, news and groups on special areas of interest or on certain geographical areas (e.g. what is going on in Copenhagen this weekend)
- Subscribe on news within chosen areas
- Monitor certain information/events
New Social Network could provide things that are not fulfilled today:

- Members blogs
- Asking the expert. Experts like doctors, physiotherapists, nurses, sex advisors, professionals within culture, art and music
- Information about interesting workshops, courses and other activities
- Information about educations, scholarships
- Possibility to create events around festivals, concerts
- Open for anybody that is interested, not “friend” system
- Video instructions / tutorial
- Page where everybody can present themselves briefly, with picture, a few lines, possibility to design the page with colours and layout
- Message box (however it is not likely that the network would be the main mail)
- Search function
- Video introduction
- Grouping of contacts could be more advanced. A function that would allow splitting contacts into different groups, that would actually allow a person to update the status with only chosen contacts to see it
- Job offers
- Travelling, places to stay abroad
As all young people are used to the English language in the internet, then only English as portal working language is not a problem for a new portal/network.

It is important in the social network that all different services are available, but every user chooses, what are the things he/she wishes to use and what not.

Profile information should not be public unless the user has chosen it to be public. So anonymity and individual settings are definitely keywords.

Respondents form all countries agreed that help and advises on any every-day questions are searched in the internet so advices and expert experience are very interesting part of communication for youth. Only demand from youth is to secure advisers which are professionals and chance to ask questions and receive anonymous answers and help.

There are no worries regarding trust for such network or the people that are members. All participants in groups of Latvia and Sweden claimed they are used internet users, that they know how to separate serious internet forums and sites from others, and to part unserious people from the serious ones.

Only in Estonian groups this issue was raised as quite important. Young people are careful who they share personal information with and communicate mostly with people they actually know and overall are not so open to public communication.
Keeping track of other people’s lives (by being an active or passive user) and for sharing information.

Logical and easy to understand set-up.

Easy navigate place where to collect and manage all contacts.

Birthdays calendars.

Linking and joining with other websites.

Possibilities to create groups, share information with everyone in the group.

Possibilities to create events, choose to invite, launch an invitation, discuss all the details, comment, share memories, add photos.

Chat.

Little or no advertising.

Have voice conversations without cost (like skype) or Skype services could be integrated in.

Video calls.

Date, file transfer, exchange, possibility to share documents and materials while talking.

Music, radio which could be used as background sound while doing other activities.

Links of information could be easily joint to different portals. It is important that everybody can create and setup own profile, personalize it according own creativity.