02/08/2022

Safer Internet Day 2022 - understanding the power of data "Fit for democracy - Fit for democracy" is the motto of this year's Safer Internet Day (SID). Democratic participation and the formation of opinions have long since arrived in the digital world. At the same time, political influence via social media platforms has increased.

What all this can have to do with data protection is answered in the student workshops of the State Commissioner for Data Protection and Freedom of Information of Rhineland-Palatinate. Among other things, the question of which actors can have an interest in the data of the students and for what purpose is discussed.

"The two elections - the state elections in March and the federal elections in September - gave our speakers a variety of starting points to work on the topics of manipulation through data and fake news with the students," says the state data protection officer Prof. Dr. Dieter Kugelman. "We have been showing students in our workshops for over 10 years the power that data can have in the wrong hands. The data-hungry big tech companies of the world use this power, especially to generate revenue. In the meantime, however, groups with political goals are also buying information via data dealers in order to use targeted forms of influence. This can go as far as trying to manipulate democratic elections." Especially in the higher grades, the students are familiar with the democratic processes. The latest digital phenomena – from Cambridge Analytica to mood-mongering in mass messenger groups – are often not yet taken up in school books. The data protection workshops can tie in here.

After workshops could only be held to a limited extent last year due to school closures due to the pandemic, 331 events took place again in 2021, some of them digital as online workshops.

The primary school workshops from grade 3 are mainly about raising awareness of what data is and how the students can protect themselves on the internet. In the advanced classes, there are more complex topics such as big data, artificial intelligence (AI) and also the socio-political context of data and data protection. "There are now many schools that include the workshops in their media didactic concept and hold the events every year in a certain class level," says Prof. Kugelmann. "Such consolidations show us that schools and teachers attach great importance to the digital education of their students. In our opinion, given the dynamic technical developments, this is exactly the right way to go."

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return