Young people's identities in digital worlds

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Abstract

Purpose – This conceptual paper takes identity, digital technology, young people and education as a combined starting point and suggests how to research young people's identity practices in and out of school. Today's young people form their identities in a world that is increasingly imbued by digital technologies. What is evident too is that these technologies and the use of them are not restricted to one single context. Rather, digital technologies mediate multiple contexts simultaneously – to an extent where they collapse. This means that school and leisure time, public and private, digital and analog, virtual and material, time and place, social contexts and audiences, through digital technology, merge in various ways in young people's identity practices and everyday life.

Design/methodology/approach – Little is known about what identity practices in collapsing contexts means to young people in their lives and how educators and others can support them. Most studies to date investigate digital technology use as a discrete phenomenon and few studies concern young people's identity practices in contexts, as they occur. In an increasingly digital world, where dependency on digital technologies continues this forms an urgent knowledge gap to bridge. In particular to guide educators, and others, who support young people as they live and learn through interconnected spaces in and out of school. The conceptual approach of this paper is of importance to better understand how to bridge this gap.

Findings – This paper suggests a research approach that extends previous research at the intersection of identity, young people, digital technology by outlining extended ways for thinking about identity in a digital world that can be useful for investigating identity as an existential practice, extending beyond identity representations, in conditions mediated by contemporary digital technologies and in collapsing contexts. What is also included are methodological considerations about researching young people, identity and technology as dynamic research objects, rendering a holistic approach.

Research limitations/implications – It is a conceptual paper that addresses identity, digital technology, young people and education as a combined starting point to outline further research.

Originality/value – The Guided Tour Technique and Social Media Research is suggested as possible methodologies for holistic and ethically sensitive, empirical research on identity, digital technology, young people and education.

Keywords Identity, Education, Young people, Digital technology, Guided tour, Collapsing contexts

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Being young intensifies processes of identity (Buckingham, 2008; Erikson, 1968). In both research and educational policy context, identity has for long been endorsed as one important condition for learning (Verhoeven *et al.,* 2019). It is argued that developing a confident, individual identity and reflecting upon identities of others, is central in any educational practice and inscribed as part of fundamental values and tasks (Swedish National Agency of Education, 2022). Young people's identity practices are also embraced by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), incorporated into Swedish law in 2020. In this paper, identity is broadly theorized as a social practice, essential to exist as someone rather than as no one (Bauman, 2004, Berger and Luckmann, 1966/1991, Taylor, 1994) and as human's continuous

existential requests and answers about being, becoming and belonging. That is; Who am I? How do I appear to others? Who can I be and become? And, where do I belong (Hällgren, 2019a).

Today, technologies, such as social media, bring conditions for todays' young people's life experiences and identities that differ and extend on contexts available to pre-digital generations (Björk, 2017; Boyd, 2014; Buckingham, 2008, Hällgren 2019a, b). Research on identity and digital technologies in today's digital world offer conceptualizations of identity and technology and some have emerged as research fields of their own. For instance, matters of identity and technology have been theorized in terms of the Selfie; a genre of its own able to express dimensions of human lives such as politics, religion, sports, illness, war, crime, sexuality, pregnancy, funerals and more (Hess, 2015; Losh, 2015; Lobinger and Brantner, 2015; Rettberg, 2014; Senft and Baym, 2015; Warfield *et al.*, 2016). Other examples of theorizing identity and technology are the Persona (Marshall, 2015a, b; Nguyen and Barbour, 2017), Facebook Identities (Loveless and Williamson (2013), Open-sourced, networked identity (Larsen, 2016), the Self as networked (Papacharissi, 2011) and as online identity, virtual identity, digital identity and such. These conceptualizations mostly concern ready-made, fixed representations of identities and digital technology is viewed to provide spaces for representing and expressing identities rather than mediating identity as an existential practice (Hällgren, 2019a).

Over the past decade young people's use of technologies, such as social media and smartphones, has shifted towards instant, portable, mobile connectivity and to more persistent online activities, in particular among 15–18-year-olds – an age group where matters of identity can be understood as intensified (Andersson *et al.,* 2022; Burns and Gottschalk, 2020; Šmahel *et al.,* 2020; UNICEF, 2019). What is evident too, is that digital technology is not restricted to one single context in life. Rather, digital technologies mediate multiple contexts simultaneously – to an extent where they collapse. This means that public and private, digital and analog, virtual and material, time and place, social contexts and audiences, through digital technology, merge in various ways in young people's identity practices and everyday life (Davis and Jurgenson, 2014; Dennen *et al.,* 2020; Loh and Walsh, 2021, Marwick and Boyd, 2011, Stoilova *et al.,* 2021).

Yet, the use of digital technology is often researched as a discrete phenomenon, in single contexts. And, little attention has been paid to young people's own account about the specific ways digital technology and identity practices influence and overlap education and their daily lives (Dennen *et al.,* 2020; Livingstone *et al.,* 2018; Pattaro, 2015; Wängqvist and Frisén, 2016). In an increasingly digital world, where dependency on digital technologies continues, this forms an urgent knowledge gap to bridge. In particular to guide educators and others, who support young people as they live and learn through interconnected spaces in and out of school.

Since this is a conceptual paper with the aim of exploring a position to research young people's identity practices, the intention is not to present a systematic research review (cf. Grant and Booth, 2009) of the field. The aim here is rather to give a backdrop and suggest a research approach. That said, the presented research has been identified through a systematic approach where databases such as ERIC, Web of Science and Scopus has been consulted using Boolean searches with words such as: identities, identity, identity work, identity making, identity practice, identity formation, identity construction, youth, young people, adolescence, teen, online, digital, digital technology, technology, social media and new media.

The Guided Tour Technique and Social Media Research are suggested as possible methodologies for both ontologically and ethically sensitive, empirical research. The paper finishes with concluding remarks on the relevance and significance of the proposed research approach.

Identity, digital technology and young people

Relations between identity, digital technology and young people have been extensively researched for the past decades (cf. Ehrenreich *et al.,* 2021; Fu, 2018; Pattaro, 2015; Raiziene *et al.,* 2022; Senekal *et al.,* 2022; Way and Malvini Redden, 2017; Wängqvist and Frisén, 2016). Pattaro (2015) reviewed research on relations of young people, digital technology and identity in 250 social science articles, published between 2004 and 2013. Four themes emerged and the first theme showed that social interactions online with friends offer young people a sense of belonging and identity. The second theme showed learning and identity expressions across multiple contexts and demonstrated both awareness of and needs to further understandings of how educational and other socializing contexts merge in the lives of young people and their identities. The third theme emerged as heterogeneous, showing negative relations between digital technology and identity, such as sexual exposure, harassment, disease participation, for instance on pro-ana sites. Research within this theme also demonstrate positive relations to identity in terms of possibilities to explore sexuality, sexual orientation and sexual health. Research within the fourth theme identified new media as tools for self-disclosure, identity explorations, social comparison, for experiences of possible selves and is therefore suggested to be important in young people's identity making. Pattaro (2015) concludes that even if theoretical perspectives and empirical foundations vary, there is an agreement that new media in young people's lives are significant to their agency and plays an important role in identity constructions.

Wängqvist and Frisén (2016) reviewed interdisciplinary research, published between 2000 and 2015, on identity online, from developmental perspectives, that directly addressed the issue of young peoples and identity in online contexts. In their analysis, opportunities for identity explorations, means for self-presentations and requisites for social interactions emerged as themes where online context brought changed conditions for identity development. These contexts open for autonomous development and creation of private spaces, priming both opportunities and risks. Online contexts are particularly salient to explorations of identities and aspects of identities that are constrained offline, paralleled with results showing that young people may also restrict expressions of identity in relation to how others perceive them and engage in strategies for impression management. Future research directions of young people and identities online concern the ways identity development online integrates into young people's overall identities, life-stories, across contexts and specific social identities. The review also shows that research on identity in online contexts primarily dealt with identity as expressions, self-presentation, represented, constructed and was researched by interviews, questionnaires, online content analysis.

Way and Malvini Redden (2017) reviewed 420 articles published between 2000–2016 about youth and the Internet across research fields including communication, public relations/marketing, international contexts, technology, sociology, psychology, language, disabilities studies and more. They found that nearly one-third of the publications included research on some aspects of identity. The research focused on how identities are shaped by usage of certain online tools, how social media platforms influence self-esteem and social capital and how young people's identity performances are shaped by social media practices. Research also concerned the use of online technologies to develop identities, both individual and social. Significant attention was directed to sexual identity such as gender and sexuality and how sexual presentations follow stereotypical ideals of femininity and masculinity outside online contexts, but also that normative gender and sexuality expressions are both reproduced and reinvented. Way and Malvini Redden (2017) demonstrate that even if many paradigmatic lenses are present in studies where identity is included, there is a need for more complex approaches to understanding identity. Identity tends to be described as fake online and real offline rather than as real nor fake but faceted, shifting and malleable. Results from

their review also show that research tends to prioritized female identity work over boys' identity work as well as those who identify beyond gender binary.

Fu (2018) researched 130 young people's online identity performances and senses of belonging, on two Chinese social media platforms, by using online observations and online interviews. Across the platforms, two main strategies for performing identities emerge: the sense of private and public and performing identities as complement to, or as an escape from, face-to-face life. Life moments are shared, contents posted and forwarded in line with young people's interests and their values are performed while communicating social and political matters. The study also demonstrates that young people form identities and senses of belonging through self-conscious performances across social media spaces and navigate identity, audiences and context in relation to complex social relationships.

Ehrenreich et al. (2021) reviewed research advancements in digital communication and young people's development over the past decade, focusing on the meaning of digital technologies in their lives. Results show that matters of identity are present in online social communications, similar to face-to-face encounters. Digital technologies provide opportunities for explorations and experimentation with a variety of identities, but also that sharing others' identity expressions informs young people's own identities, making them feel more confident and less lonely. Ehrenreich et al. (2021) also examine theoretical models that have guided research on young people's digital communications. Co-construction theory and gratification theory was prevailing 10 years ago and still is, broadly suggesting young people as agents in their online environments and that the meaning of social interactions online and face-to-face merge. Lately, the affordances approach suggests unique identity affordances on social media such as engaging in self-presentation. In terms of future research Ehrenreich et al. (2021) ask for flexible and creative methodologies to capture and adapt changes in young people's media preferences.

Raiziene et al. (2022) researched relations between young people's identity formation and online activities, Internet skills and risks. Data were collected through computer-assisted personal interviewing and questionnaires with 549 participants aged 13–17. Overall, the results show that young people's online activities need perspectives of both opportunities and risks. Raiziene et al. (2022) also found that identity statuses (achievement, early closure, moratorium, searching moratorium and diffusion) influence interactional patterns not only offline with family and friends, but also in the performance of online activities.

Senekal et al. (2022) reviewed 20 studies on social media and identity development, interpersonal relationships, mental health and wellbeing between 2008 and 2019, based on quantitative data with cross-sectional or longitudinal designs. In the theme about identity it was found that social media, with its various forms of mechanisms for feedback can be a safe space but also a risk. The propensity for comparison and feedback from others can and spur harmful self-images, affecting young people's identities negatively. However, young people's constructions of identities and self-esteem can also be supported through their use of digital technologies.

Digital technology and young people's use

Surveys from Global, European and Swedish contexts offer large scale mappings of young people's broad embracement of digital technologies (Andersson et al., 2022; Anderson and Jiang, 2018b; Šmahel et al., 2020, The Swedish Media Council survey, 2021, UNICEF, 2019; Vogels et al., 2022). The Global Kids Online survey (UNICEF, 2019) shows that even if access to the Internet is far from equal, a majority of young people aged 15–18 globally interact socially online and the mobile phone is the predominant device for access. The EU Kids Online report (Šmahel et al., 2020) shows that most young people in Europe use their smartphone daily to go online, typically to engage in entertainment and communication.

Thus, on average 57% in the age group 9–16 visit social network sites daily and this is even higher (77%) for 15–16-year-olds. In the United States 97% of young people aged 13–17 are active on at least one social media platform on a daily basis and 46% say they are online almost constantly (Anderson and Jiang, 2018a; Vogels *et al.,* 2022). In Sweden, digital technologies have been nearly universal in young people's lives since 2016. The Swedish Media Council survey (2021) reports that 99% of 13–18-year-olds own a smartphone, which is used for daily social media presence by the majority (13–16: 86% and 17–18: 90%). Andersson *et al.* (2022) confirms that nearly every Swedish young person (98%) in High School use social media daily.

Digital technologies and their usage do change over time. In the last decade smartphones brought about a shift in young people's usage of digital technology, towards instant, portable, mobile connectivity and towards more persistent social media presence (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020; Šmhael *et al.,* 2020; Stoilova *et al.,* 2021; Swedish Media Council, 2021; UNICEF, 2019; Vogels *et al.,* 2022). This shift made digital technologies central to young people's life experiences in multiple ways, yet our knowledge of how young people are affected is far from comprehensive. A review by Stoilova *et al.* (2021) on digital technology and children, included 359 studies published since 2016 (in science, technology, medicine, social sciences and the arts and humanities) on digital technology and children. One prominent theme concerns experiences associated with online risks, such as excessive Internet use, bullying and problematic gaming. Stoilova *et al.* (2021) also demonstrate that young people enjoy engagement in communication, learning, community and civic participation, creativity and social relationships. They value online possibilities to seek information from diverse sources, to experience new ideas, to engage with others and to become aware of different views, peer experiences and support-seeking options. However, there are several gaps identified demonstrating a need for research that takes into account that children's "education, relationships, entertainment and participation in a connected world increasingly depend on digital technologies" (Stoilova *et al.,* 2021, p. 6). One conclusion is the need for child-centered research methods to complement previous research that predominantly rely on surveys, mixed methods, interviews, focus group interviews and web-based focus groups. Therefore, one gap concerns the urgent need for studies that allow young people to talk about online experiences of their activities, in their own words (Stoilova *et al.,* 2021).

Studies confirm varied experiences of social media (Anderson and Jiang, 2018b; Ayllón *et al.,* 2020; Björk, 2017; Burns and Gottschalk, 2020; Šmhael *et al.,* 2020; Swedish Media Council, 2021; UNICEF, 2019; Wood *et al.,* 2016). There are, on the one hand, concerns among young people about sometimes being overwhelmed by drama, bullying, unrealistic views of other young people's lives and pressure to present themselves online in certain ways (Anderson and Jiang, 2018b; Björk, 2017). On the other hand, social media is credited by young people as places for creativity, entertainment, connecting with family, strengthening friendships, sharing interests and experiences, finding support, learning new things, exploring identity and self-expressions (Burns and Gottschalk, 2020; Šmhael *et al.,* 2020; Swedish Media Council, 2021; UNICEF, 2019). Moreover, Wood *et al.* (2016) demonstrates in their research review on social media, young people and well-being, that social media allow for experimentations and controllability of self-presentation and disclosure, which render experiences of security not always possible offline. Similarly, Šmahel *et al.* (2020) found in their survey results from 19 countries, that young people often find it easier to be themselves online than when they are with people face-to-face. Social media are also reported as a place to feel included rather than excluded and authentic rather than fake (Anderson and Jiang, 2018a). Ayllón *et al.* (2020) uncovered that digital technologies influence young people in their everyday lives. One key conclusion is that because of fusions of physical and digital spaces, making technologies integral parts of young people's lives, there is a need to further

conceptualize digital practices and identities and extended research has to be done to better understand young people's own accounts from when digital spaces, practices and identities combine in their lives.

Collapsing contexts – digital technology, young people, identity and education

Today, matters of identity are expected to combine with the ongoing digitalization of society in general and education in particular (European Commission, 2017, 2018). This holds even stronger with the May 2018 revised Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (Council of the European Union and European Commission, 2018) and the July 2018 amendment to the 2011 Swedish School curriculum (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2011/2018), where furthering knowledge about digital technologies (Gu and Lindberg, 2021; Olofsson *et al.*, 2020) is said to apply to all students and staff members from preschool to adult education.

Research demonstrates that in a digital world, contexts tend to collapse (Davis and Jurgenson, 2014, Marwick and Boyd, 2011, Loh and Walsh, 2021) so that the online and offline, time and place, social arenas and audiences become merged in young people's everyday life (Brandtzaeg and Lüders, 2018; Dennen *et al.*, 2020; Sefton-Green and Erstad, 2013). Stoilova *et al.* (2021) found that contexts and practices offline and online merge as young people's connectedness, participation in education, entertainment and relationships increasingly depend on digital technologies. Examining teens' sociotechnical ecosystem, through the lens of digital badges, Pitt *et al.* (2021) found that issues of unwanted context collapse and incongruent identity representations bring tensions affecting young people's engagement in learning.

Askari *et al.* (2018) reviewed 48 articles in educational research on the intersection of youth, learning and social media in primary and secondary school (K-12) and suggested social media as a hidden curriculum. Their result also points to the need to accept the systemic nature of social media in young people's lives, proclaim teacher presence and use social media in education to create supportive, comfortable communities that allow for explorations and support of learning practices and identities for both teachers and students. In terms of method, a strong preference of surveys emerged across the studies in the review (26) while other studies included quantitative analysis of social media activities, observational data, implementation of social media, engaging directly with social media, interviews and control and treatment group designs.

Ismail (2020) researched young people's media practices in and out of school and how these practices influenced learning and identity formations. Community of practice was used as theoretical perspective and data was collected from six 13 year old students by semi-structured interviews, direct observations and media diaries. It was found that young people participated in similar digital practices in and out of school, frequently chatted with friends about games and YouTube content and that technology function as a boundary object opening for establishing relationships between in and out of school communities. It was also found that technology influences identity by supporting young people's communication, socialization, overcoming loneliness, building and maintaining relationships, learning and entertainment.

Dennen *et al.* (2020) reviewed ten years of research published between 2009–2018 in disciplines both within and outside education to better understand social media, young people and the school context. They found that educational research is dominated by usage for teaching and learning; followed by adoption, use and beliefs; digital literacy; effects of use; and identity. Research outside education covered negative behaviors, health issues, identity development and expression, digital citizenship and social relationships. Dennen *et al.* (2020) also found that, to young people, social media is not just about socializing, but also about self-reflection and relates to matters of identity in ways that goes beyond the classroom. Social

media experiences also concern self-esteem, normative messages about social status, beauty-standards and sexuality. In terms of methods, quantitative surveys were the most popular data collection method followed by qualitative interviews, data from social media archives and self-reports. Emerging gaps of knowledge to investigate advocates that educational research on digital technologies and young people follow more holistic approaches, enabling investigations of the systemic nature of social media in young people's lives were educational contexts bridges with other life contexts.

What emerges from this outline is that today's young people form their identities in a world that is increasingly digital. What is evident too, is that the use of digital technology is not restricted to one single context. Rather, digital technologies mediate multiple contexts simultaneously – to an extent where they collapse. This means that public and private, digital and analog, virtual and material, time and place, social contexts and audiences, through digital technology, merge in various ways in young people's identity practices and everyday life – in and out of school. But, so far, little is known about what this means to young people in their lives. Most studies to date investigate digital technology use as a discrete phenomenon and few studies concern young people's own account about identity practices in interconnected spaces, unfolding in and out of school. With few exceptions, studies on digital technology, identity and young people draws on quantitative surveys, interviews, observations online or face-to-face, data from social media archives and self-reports and do not capture identity practices in contexts, as they occur. What also emerges from the outline is that identity has predominantly been researched as expressions, self-constructions, as ready-made, fixed representations of identity, for instance in the form of the Selfie, the Persona, as Facebook identities, open source identity, the Self as networked, as online identity, virtual identity, digital identity and such. And, digital technology is often conceptualized as spaces for representing and expressing identities rather than mediating and collapsing contexts of identity as an existential practice.

Suggestions for specific research questions and methodologies
Drawing on the above, at least three clusters of research questions become urgent to explore from young people's accounts: Firstly, what identity practices are visible in young people's use of digital technology and what specific technologies and modalities in terms of devices, applications, texts, images, video and audio, mediate these practices? Secondly, how do young people themselves understand and value these identity practices and collapsing contexts in their everyday life and how do intersectional dimensions such as gender, sexuality, class and ethnicity and such, relate to these practices? And, thirdly, what implications do young people's digital identity practices and collapsing contexts have for their academic work; in what ways are experiences of learning and education in different educational programs and settings, such as urban and rural, disrupted or enhanced?

Such research questions – on digital technology, collapsing contexts and young people's identity practices in- and out school, from young people's own accounts – produces a dynamic research object which entails ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical complexities. In adherence to these complexities two specific research methods are suggested; The Guided Tour Technique (Everett and Barret, 2012; Thomson, 2015) and Social Media Research (Lindgren, 2017; Quan-Hasse and Sloan, 2017).

The Guided Tour Technique, is qualitatively and discovery-oriented and builds on three specific arguments. Firstly: it allows one to get involved directly with research participants, securing robust possibilities with operate in accordance to ethical principles of care, respect, non-deception, empathy, informed consent and confidentiality. Principles that are of particular importance when researching young people's own accounts of identity practices (Källström and Andersson Bruck, 2017; Markham, 2018). Secondly: it enables empirical

foundations that bridge ontological ambiguities of identity as represented by digital technologies and/or as practiced, dynamic, human-lead, possibly mediated and evolving through technologies. This also enables bridging empirical dilemmas of online-offline gaps and to capture practices in contexts, as they occur. Thirdly: it is a technique where the researchers are positioned together with research participants, who are approached as local guides to their digital worlds, having particular expertise on explaining and showing, first-hand, their use of technologies, in their particular contexts, with their particular experiences and engagement in identity practices – sharing what they decide to share *in situ*. The research participant can be asked to guide the researcher through personally meaningful examples and while doing so, describe and explain features of technologies and modalities involved, think-aloud ideas and thoughts on identity and contexts.

The Guided Tour Technique includes elements of semi-structured interviews (Seidman, 2013) with open questioning formats encouraging the participants to take the lead. Typical introductory requests would be: Could you show me the technological devices and online spaces that are important to you, especially for communicating with your friends and others? Can you show me examples of posts and practices about identity? Could you guide me through how you would do a post that would be about identity? What types of social interactions and contexts are involved? These open questions can be followed by more structured questions relating to school and learning experiences. This will give opportunities to observe engagement with technologies, spaces and practices that are significant to the participants and to explore experiences as they emerge in practice and in context and to ask directly about their meaning.

The Guided Tour Technique will also generate data for Social Media Research (Lindgren, 2017; Quan-Hasse and Sloan, 2017) shared by participants themselves. That is, technologies and modalities involved in the Guided Tour session, such as spaces in terms of physically and digitally mediated devices and modalities such as images, videos, texts or other technologically mediated data. Data will be collected during the sessions by video and sound recordings, as well as by note-keepings, photographs, screen captures and data downloads. Social media data may include actual social media posts, YouTube videos, commentary fields, online profiles, snapchat instances, Instagram posts, tweets, blog posts, text/video/audio-chats, gaming sessions etc. The data will also include specific posts that relate to school, school interactions and school work.

Concluding remarks on suggested research approach

Being young has always been a particularly critical period of intense identity work, while reflecting on emerging selves, values, ideals, norms and future aspirations, often happening when interacting with others (Erikson, 1968; Buckingham, 2008). These interactions, mediated by digital technologies or experienced face-to-face, can bring approval and confirmation, intersecting identity dimensions, but also involve discriminatory discourses, such as sexism and racism and affect young people's being, becoming and belonging so that identities are made in normative ways (Butler, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991; Goffman, 1959; Hällgren, 2019a, May, 1999).

Contemporary digital technologies are not essential to identity – but bring extended contexts for young peoples' identity practices (Buckingham, 2008, Boyd, 2014, Hällgren, 2019a) Young people may use them to engage in multimodal, multidirectional, collaborative and networked ways to represent, communicate, gather information and also engage online crowds of others in continuous requests and answers about identity – in multiple contexts. Moreover, digital technologies and conceptions of them, can be theorized as temporally and spatially sensitive, dependent on understandings, practices and materialities specific to particular moments in time (Papacharissi, 2015). Deepening understandings of what this

means to young people's identity practices, digital technology can be further theorized as impending contexts to collapse (Boyd, 2014, Davis and Jurgenson, 2014; Loh and Walsh, 2021, Marwick and Boyd, 2011) Broadly, collapsing contexts refers to how public and private, digital and analog, virtual and material, time and place, social contexts and audiences, through digital technology, may merge in various ways in young people's identities and everyday life in and out of school. These proposed conditions of today's digital world, may enable not only to represent identity in other ways but also to make, practice and learn about identities in digitally mediated ways within as well as outside of educational contexts (Hällgren, 2019a; Loveless and Williamson, 2013).

This paper suggests a research approach that extends previous research at the intersection of identity, young people, digital technology by outlining extended ways for thinking about identity in a digital world (Hällgren 2019a, b) that can be useful for investigating identity as an existential practice, extending beyond identity representations, in conditions mediated by contemporary digital technologies and in collapsing contexts.

What is also included are methodological considerations about researching young people, identity and technology as dynamic research objects, rendering a holistic approach. Empirical contexts generated from The Guided Tour Technique and Social Media Research rich variations of data can be collected *in situ*, together with the research participant as a guide. Additional advantages of this technique are robust possibilities to secure adherence to ethical principles such as informed consent, which is often an ethical dilemma in digital technology research procedures (Boyd and Crawford, 2012; Markham, 2018).

Taken together, this conceptual paper shows possible ways to advance knowledge through the Guided Tour Technique, from young people's own account on, firstly; what contemporary digital technologies and modalities are involved in young people's identity practices. Secondly; how they understand and value these practices in and across different contexts, such as school and leisure time. And thirdly; what implications these digital identity practices and collapsing contexts have for young people's academic work and experiences of learning and education. Thereby, more can be known about identity and how to create supportive, comfortable communities that may allow for explorations and support of learning practices and identities so that educators and others, can support young people – as they live and learn in a digital world.

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