The Effect of Internet Filtering on Active Youth Citizenship in the Information Age: Experience from Public Libraries in the United Kingdom

L'effet de filtrage d'Internet sur les jeunes citoyens actifs à l'ère de l'information: l'expérience des bibliothèques publiques du Royaume-Uni

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Abstract: This study investigates the impact that the practice of Internet filtering is having on youth citizenship in the United Kingdom. It contends that, in the *information age*, the Internet is a significant channel for information gathering and community participation by youth. A model of active youth citizenship is employed which identifies three dimensions—*environment*, *personal traits*, and *behaviour*—that influence an individual's contribution as a citizen. Empirical research is presented to investigate one source of Internet filtering that is encountered by the young citizen, the public library, and to explore young people's views as users of the resource. The study concludes that the practice of Internet blocking has the potential to impede all three dimensions of active youth citizenship.

Keywords: citizenship, youth, Internet filtering, library

Résumé : Cette étude examine l'influence de la pratique du filtrage d'Internet sur les jeunes citoyens du Royaume-Uni. Cette recherche soutient qu'à l'*ère de l'information*, l'Internet est une voie importante pour la collecte d'information et la participation communautaire des jeunes. Un modèle de jeunes citoyens actifs est employé pour identifier trois dimensions, l'*environnement*, les *traits personnels*, et le *comportement*, influençant la contribution d'un individu en tant que citoyen. Une recherche empirique est effectuée afin d'examiner une des sources de filtrage d'Internet rencontrée par les jeunes citoyens, la bibliothèque publique, et d'explorer la perspective des jeunes en tant qu'utilisateurs de cette ressource. L'étude conclut que la pratique du blocage d'Internet est susceptible limiter les trois dimensions des jeunes citoyens actifs.

Mots-clés: citoyenneté, jeunes, filtrage d'Internet, bibliothèque

Introduction

There is considerable evidence that active citizenship in the United Kingdom is diminishing. This can be demonstrated in various ways. Voter turnout has been on a downward spiral at general elections since World War II, a trend that can be observed in other western democracies. Another indicator, the membership of political parties, shows a similar decline (Milburn 2000; ODPM 2000; Parliament 2001).

The UK government has attempted to reverse the decline in active citizenship by introducing a range of measures as part of its modernization of public administration (Parliament 1999). Long-standing democratic structures have been re-engineered. Electronic service delivery is being introduced to serve citizens better. New technologies are being deployed specifically to increase democratic participation by youth.

The Internet has become the primary delivery channel for digitized services, and the government aims to have all of its public services on-line by December 2005 (Training Reference 2004). This has prompted recognition of the 'e' element of citizenship. The British Computer Society (BCS), for example, has developed an e-citizen qualification, which is available across Europe. The government has set up the *People's Network* (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council 2004) with the public library becoming a community-based point of access to the Internet information channel. Young people make extensive use of the Internet and frequently visit public libraries. They gather information and participate in communities of interest through the medium of the Internet. Access to some of this information—and group involvement—may be blocked by filtering technology employed by the school, the library, or parents, among others. Empirical evidence is presented here concerning one source of Internet filtering, the public library, that affects the development of the young citizen. An important voice to be heard is that of youth themselves. A survey conducted with young people regarding these issues will also be reviewed.

This article aims to answer the question, What effect does Internet filtering have on active youth citizenship in the Information Age? The wider topic of e-democracy, which includes e-citizenship, is an emerging area of study. However, most scholars to date have concentrated their attention on other aspects of e-government. The investigation of e-democracy from the perspective of youth is a particularly under-researched, yet important, area.

The current study offers a citizenship framework and some initial empirical research to contribute to the scoping of this area.

For the purposes of this article, we define *youth* as the period of a person's life, between childhood and adulthood, during which she or he is developing a degree of independence but, legally and psychologically, still requires adult support, care, and guidance (Coles 1995). The precise chronological age at which a person may be judged as a youth will vary from country to country and, possibly, between ethnic and religious cultures within a country.

Similarly for the purposes of this article, we will broadly use the definition of *e-citizen* provided by Becta (2003):

> A citizen is an active member of a community or society who has had certain rights and duties within that community conferred upon them. In terms of the Internet and World Wide Web e-citizenship, this topic concerns learning to be a citizen of an electronic community and using the Internet to learn about citizenship in general.

The article is organized as follows. First, we review the literature covering youth citizenship (including e-citizenship), public library service to young people, Internet filtering, and the right to information. This draws upon material from several disciplines: public administration, politics, and information systems. We present a model of youth citizenship, comprising three dimensions, previously developed by our research team. We then outline the methods used to gather the empirical evidence for this research. Finally, we present the findings from a survey of public libraries, a survey of young people, and interviews with a small sample of library-service stakeholders. We apply the model to e-citizenship in the Information Age and conclude that the practice of Internet blocking has the potential to impede all three dimensions of active youth citizenship and thus, according to the authors, could impede the progress of measures designed to strengthen democratic participation.

Development of active youth citizenship

The question of how young people can become good citizens has been high on the political agenda in the United Kingdom over the last decade (France 1996; Marinetto 2003). Pupils in schools are expected to become

"informed and interested citizens" through the development of communi-cation, enquiry, action, and participation skills (DfES 2004). Citizenship has been included as an element of the National Curriculum, covering social and moral responsibility, community involvement, and political literacy (DfES 2004). In addition, non-governmental organizations such as the National Youth Agency have established initiatives to encourage young people to engage actively with their communities (Parsons 2002).

In the developing digital society, with the Internet and World Wide Web being used for leisure and by business and governmental organizations, a focus on e-citizenship is emerging. Thus, as we are focusing on the Internet in this article, where we refer to *citizenship* we are assuming that e-citizenship is a component.

Some researchers have suggested that crucial components of citizenship are the individual's social participation in the community and her or his contribution being valued by that community (Bailey 1997; Coles 1995). Of course, being active citizens may cause young people to raise awkward questions about the nature of the community and their rights and obliga-tions to it (Williamson 1997).

There are a number of ways of encouraging young people to become acti-vely involved in their communities. One way to attract participation is to offer activities that are co-ordinated and managed by youth themselves. Activities that support the personal development of the individual (e.g., in acquiring skills) but also help the community are favoured by active youth participants (Parsons 2002). Ultimately, encouraging active participation requires that young people be provided with the opportunities and the information they need to get involved (Mohamed and Wheeler 2001). The Internet is one source being utilized and encouraged by the govern-ment, as information can be regularly updated, and there is the "opportunity to publish far more information than would normally be read by citizens, at a time and place that is convenient to them" (Becta 2003).

Trevorrow, Orange, and Halpin (2006) have developed a model of active youth citizenship (see Figure 1).

According to this model, there are three dimensions of active youth citizenship: *environment*, *personal traits*, and *behaviour practices*. The model is a graphical representation of the major dimensions that contribute to active youth citizenship. Each dimension will have some degree of impact
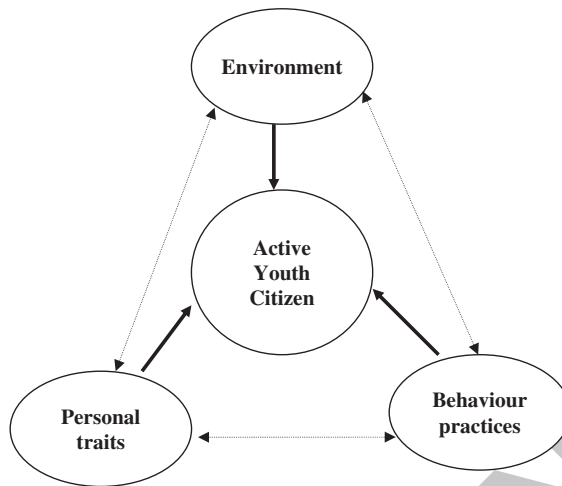
Figure 1: Model of active youth citizenship
(Adapted from Trevorrow, Orange and Halpin 2006)

upon the others, but what we are interested in is how each influences the overall active participation of young citizens. The model was developed based on an extensive review of literature and was critiqued via information gathered and analysed from a questionnaire (40 responses) distributed to youth organizations in five countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, Romania, and the United Kingdom). Other models published in the literature, although with different representation and focus, corroborated many aspects and elements of the one developed here. Hart's (1992) model includes much of the information comprising the environment dimension, with a focus on the requirement of sub-systems. The personal traits dimension is corroborated by models such as ACT (Institute for Citizenship 2003), Osler and Starkey (1999) and Woyach and Cox (1997). They all show that skills are necessary to becoming an active participant and that knowledge of one's rights is also a requirement. Finally, elements of the behaviour dimension can be observed in Hart's (1992) model and in Treseder's (1997) model with the idea of empowerment as a significant factor.

Environment

The environment dimension consists of the external factors that affect individuals as they strive to become *participating citizens*, a concept that, as we move towards a society dominated by digital technologies, includes

the notion of e-citizenship (Becta 2003). This dimension can be further divided into *sub-systems*, *needs*, *aspects*, and *resources* that influence the individual in some way.

Youths' experiences will affect their later-life levels of participation (Frazer and Emler 1997). Experiences with societal conditions and structures can act as enablers for or constraints on individual participation (Jones and Wallace 1992; Morch 1997). The environment dimension includes the sub-systems to which the individual may be exposed—for example, public libraries, school, youth clubs, and parental guidance. An individuals' degree of engagement with these sub-systems determines the material, intellectual, and cultural resources and information available to him or her (Frazer and Emler 1997).

Public libraries are a valuable resource for young people, and they were given prominence by the government recently in, for example, the *People's Network* (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council 2004) and *Framework for the Future* (DCMS 2003). They are seen as offering "a neutral welcoming community space and support[ing] active citizenship," in addition to being "public anchors for neighbourhoods and communities" (DCMS 2003). The National Lottery has provided funding to equip nearly all public libraries with information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure offering Internet access to the public. Thus, the public library is seen as a significant element of the environment dimension, as it is a place where there should be access in abundance to information, resources, and knowledge.

Trevorrow, Orange, and Halpin (2006) identify basic needs that must be fulfilled if individuals are to become active members of the community. One of these is the need for autonomy: recognizing one's own identity and having the skills, knowledge, and freedom to act as a self-governing individual (Alderson 2000; Coles 1995). Support from the sub-system of members of the community—such as friends, family, and professional practitioners—is required to facilitate satisfactory fulfilment of these needs (Harris 1998; Sinclair and Franklin 2000).

According to Jones and Wallace (1992), there are three aspects of citizenship: *civil*, *political*, and *social*. The civil determines the right to individual freedom and justice. The political determines the right to participate in political power. Level of education received appears to have a causal relationship the political aspect of citizenship (Frazer and Emler 1997).

The social determines the right to well-being and a civilized life. In addition, an understanding of the nature of the state and of the legal, political, and social systems is believed to help the individual participate fully in society (Williamson 1997).

Personal traits

This dimension includes the competencies and attitudes a young person needs to become an active participant in society. Embedded in the competencies are a number of skills and beliefs and a good deal of knowledge. People require certain skills to act as self-governing individuals and these include being able to open their minds to alternatives, being able to make decisions (Hill, Pike, and Selby 1998), and being able to gather the extensive information necessary for making informed judgements (Institute for Citizenship 2003; Parsons 2002). Most young people who actively participate do so because they like to be involved—to have the opportunity to debate issues, to be listened to, and not to be dictated to (Harris 1998; Mohamed and Wheeler 2001). Knowledge and understanding play significant roles in youth becoming active citizens. Knowing their rights and understanding and appreciating the community in which they live will encourage young citizens to participate. "Knowledge is a source of power" (Cairns 2001, 356; see also Hackett 1997), and young people need to have a diversity of information in order to be able to contribute to the full.

Behaviour practices

This dimension includes the actions individuals take and represents the degree to which they may engage as active citizens. This is an important dimension and the feelings of *desire*, *wanting to be involved*, and *wanting to take action* need to be considered. Having the appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes "does not imply a dynamic, committed, engaged citizen" (Hall, Williamson, and Coffey 2000, 464) if the individual does not want to act on those competencies.

Individual may choose not to engage if they have a negative view of the organization or product with which they are asked to involve themselves. Such negativity sometimes comes from personal experience, sometimes from personal perception (Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker 2001). Young people need to feel empowered. This can be achieved through their having appropriate information, making decisions, and having responsibilities. A secondary benefit of such empowerment can be that it encourages

future participation (Milburn 2000; Osler and Starkey 1999; Sinclair and Franklin 2000).

The public library service and young people

The public library service is one of the many services provided, in the United Kingdom, by the local-government tier of public administration. It is regulated by the national government, with day-to-day policy and management of the service provided by local councils. Brophy (2001) defines the library as "a vital part of the world's system of education and information storage and retrieval. [It makes] available—through books, films, recordings, and other media—knowledge that has been accumulated through the ages" (9).

Historical studies of the library movement (Black 2000; Snape 1995) support this definition and suggest that public libraries were established to meet the educational and technical needs of users. Others take a more holistic stance on the library's contribution to citizens' lives. Beenham and Harrison (1990), for example, state that the library contributes to its readers' quality of life, adding to their happiness and promoting a democratic society.

According to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) (2003), public libraries should be at "the heart of the communities that they serve" as they are "a valuable infrastructure" for the young citizen. Therefore, the public library, with Internet access, could be seen as an important resource to support young peoples' quality of life. Initial library encounters have been seen to influence the future role of libraries in the lives of young people. If the experience was successful, then this has been shown to have a positive effect and encourage continued use of library facilities and activities (Whitmire 2001).

In recent years, there has been considerable impetus for libraries to employ a growing range of ICT tools to support and deliver their services (Audit Commission 1997; Department of National Heritage 1997). This culminated, in the United Kingdom, with the establishment of the *People's Network* (Library and Information Commission 1997), which argued for a major change in library services in recognition of the impact of ICTs. As a result, libraries have now been linked electronically to form a United Kingdom–wide information network, and the Department for Culture,

Media and Sport, published a "new strategic framework for the public library service: *Framework for the Future*" (DCMS 2003). The framework details the government's vision for public libraries and sets key objectives for the public library service. Internet connections have been made available in all public libraries in order to meet this commitment of getting the United Kingdom on-line.

The development of library services specifically for young people has a relatively long history. The Public Libraries and Museum Act (1964, c. 75) imposed a duty on local authorities to provide "a comprehensive and efficient library service for all persons … [and to] … encourage both adults and children to make use of it" (s. 7). Article 17 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN 1948) expands the requirement for service to the young. This report argues that libraries should provide young people with access to information and material from a variety of national and international sources. However, recent research by the Library and Information Council (England) Working Party on Library Services for Young People identified a lack of coherent policy and provided recommendations to remedy this (Elkin and Kinnell 2000). The public library service remains an important service in today's society, offering valuable opportunities and equality of information access (DCMS 2003).

The right to information

For many hundreds of years, information providers have been beset by proponents of various kinds of censorship, including banning books and editing them to remove content believed to be unsuitable. The librarian has, as a matter of course, had to deal with this issue, either directly (e.g., when limiting access to special collections such as erotica) or indirectly (e.g., when selecting books). Current concerns relate to a new mode of information delivery and emphasize questions about access to information in a broader context. The key issue facing public libraries delivering information and services via the Internet continues to be censorship. Some argue that librarians have always acted as censors (Brophy 2001; Saxton 1997). The advent of ICT, however, has introduced a new mechanism for censoring. With the implementation of filter systems on public-access computers, the issue of stock selection or special access is no longer a professional choice. The type of material filtered includes that which might be of public interest or of political or personal value. The Internet does not create a new question of access and censorship but returns

us to old questions in a new context. In blocking *content*—for example, books and films—censorship, in fact, restricts the *action* of civil participation as well.

Citizens have rights, codified and legitimized in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UNUDHR; UN 1948). The Declaration sets out a framework for freedom and dignity in society (Hick and Halpin 2001). However, these rights are not absolute or distinct. Sometimes individual rights conflict with each other. Therefore, each right needs to be balanced with other rights. These freedoms and rights apply to all citizens and countries that are signatories to the Declaration. Articles 18 and 19 of the UNUDHR provide for freedom of thought, freedom of expression, and the freedom to hold an opinion. The Declaration states that these rights include the "freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers" (UN 1948, art. 19). These rights are deemed to belong equally to adults and young people.

Young people were recognized by the UN to be in need of specific protection. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN 1989) includes forty-one articles covering the rights of children under the age of eighteen (Hick and Halpin 2001). Incorporated within this document is the right of young citizens to have access to information from a range of different sources.

Hick and Halpin (2001) suggest that the Internet can be a positive force in supplying information to young people, but it also has a destructive side. In recognition of these negative aspects, Capitanchik and Whine (1999) suggest there is a need to balance the individual's right to free speech with society's need to control the Internet. They offer a series of policy proposals to regulate the Internet. An alternative view is put forward by civil liberties campaigners, such as Davis and Hosein (1999), who argue for an open and accessible Internet with limited regulation and control.

Internet-filtering activities

For the purposes of this article, filtering is considered to be the deployment of technology by an information provider, at the point of use, to prevent access to Web sites by its users, with this action being based on the content of those Web sites.

While there are a variety of filtering techniques, there are broadly three types in use in libraries: inclusion, exclusion, and content (Halpin and Khan 2000). Inclusion filtering only permits access to known "acceptable" sites. The rest of the Internet is effectively blocked. Identifying acceptable sites can be problematic. With more than 800 million pages on the Internet, it is not possible for the information provider to cover all available sites searching for suitability (Greenfield, Rickwood, and Tran 2001).

Exclusion filtering blocks "inappropriate sites." It is less restrictive than inclusion filtering. However, a major weakness of this method is the need to constantly update the list for it to be effective (Halpin and Khan 2000).

The third method is called content filtering. This permits access to the whole Internet because, instead of looking for specific named sites, the filter searches for key words. A drawback with this method of controlling Internet access is the lack of agreement over the meaning of "harmful to young people" in this context (Neumann and Weinstein 1999).

In the United Kingdom in 2000, the Library Association, the professional body at that time, issued the following guideline on the use of filtering by libraries: "[I]ndividuals should have the right to choose what information and ideas to receive and what not to receive, including what others might find objectionable, without censorship." (Library Association 2000). This professional body has since been subsumed into a new association, the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), which has yet to adopt these guidelines.

Thomason (2001) suggests that children should be educated in how to use the Internet appropriately in order to avoid the dangers it can entail. The younger the child, the more they need protecting. This indicates that different levels of filtering might be required for different age groups.

Some researchers, including the authors, argue that libraries should be places of inclusion (see, e.g., Symons 1998). In fact, one of the main objectives of the ICT-based modernization of local public-sector services is to increase social inclusion (Parliament 1999). Those holding this view may be attracted to arguments against the filtering of information to library users.

Methodology

This exploratory study investigates the impact that Internet-content filtering technology is having on youth citizenship by examining the specific context of the UK public library. Three questions are posed by the study:

1. How important is the Internet to the developing young citizen?

2. What is the young citizen's involvement in the set-up of Internet filtering?

3. How does Internet filtering affect the young citizen's right to information?

A multi-method approach, employing quantitative and qualitative techniques, was used in order to provide for triangulation of the results (Babbie 1991). The methods employed provided an opportunity to consider the issue of youth citizenship from a number of different perspectives: those of policy, technology, the professional, and the service user.

Firstly, an evaluation of local-authority Web sites was conducted to identify Internet usage and monitoring policies governing the activities of the public libraries overseen by those authorities. Twenty library-service Web sites were selected from the index of local-authority Web sites compiled by Tagish Consulting (http://www.tagish.co.uk), following the practice of previous studies that have used this as a sampling frame (Griffin and Halpin 2002; Horrocks 1998). The sample was selected using a convenience sampling method (Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight 1996). It was limited to a single geographical area, with all councils being in Yorkshire and Lancashire. Furthermore, the sample was limited to authorities with responsibility for the provision of public library services. All the Web sites were visited within a one-week period to provide a fair basis for comparison between councils. This part of the study determined whether the Internet policy was available on the Web site, an expectation in the Information Age. It also assessed the ease of finding the policy and the ease of understanding it, posited to be two requirements for young citizens searching for Internet policy information. A summary of the evaluation framework is shown in Table 1.

The sample of 20 library authorities was sent a questionnaire to determine views on Internet usage policies and policy and practice regarding control of access to Internet content by youth library users. The questionnaire was

Table 1: Library Web sites' evaluation framework

	Ease of Access to the Internet Usage Policy	Ease of Making Sense of the Policy
Easy	Immediately visible on entry to the library Web site	Well presented and easy to understand
Average	Accessible by a simple search or drop down menu	Generally well presented and easy to understand, with some elements not so well presented or easy to understand
Difficult	Accessible by search option or hidden on the relevant page	Poorly presented in a complex manner; difficult to understand
Complicated	Accessible using a complex search pattern and/or hidden / not accessible on the page of the Web site	

piloted with three library services, and their comments were taken into account in the final design of the questionnaire. (The content of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix A). A response rate of 40% was achieved for this survey.

Secondly, a sample of 100 young people attending schools in the same geographical area was surveyed to obtain their views, as users, of the impact of Internet blocking. The respondents' ages ranged from 10 to 19, with a mean age of 15. Sixty-five per cent of the sample was female. The questionnaire was completed during lesson time at school, resulting in a 97% response rate. (The content of this questionnaire can be found in Appendix B). Convenience sampling was used to distribute this survey, and it is accepted that this approach may produce a biased sample (Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill 2000). However, it is argued that the five schools which took part in this survey broadly matched the socio-economic profile of the region.

Finally, a small sample of three experts in the field was assembled to conduct semi-structured interviews in order to gain a deeper understanding of the issues. The sample consisted of a senior librarian responsible for the deployment and management of information and communications technologies to support public library activities; a representative of CILIP, the professional body for UK librarians; and a representative of the civil liberties lobby.

Silverman (2005) warns researchers to beware of "anecdotalism," the practice of relying on a sub-set of data collected that best fits with the overall study hypothesis. Validity has been addressed in this study by

- triangulation of the results by using the multi-method approach

- identifying *deviant cases* in the young people's survey data and further analysing this data to test the emerging conclusions.

Findings

How important is the Internet to the developing youth citizen?

According to the National Statistics Social Trends Survey carried out in 2002 (ONS 2002), 98% of children between the ages of 5 and 18 used computers at home or elsewhere. Sixty-seven per cent of those between the ages of 11 and 18 accessed the Internet on the computer. Our survey suggests that use of the Internet by this age group may have increased in the last three years. Eighty-nine per cent of our sample of young people had access to the Internet at home. The group regularly used the Internet to obtain information for purposes other than homework. Ninety-one per cent of our sample searched for information on the Internet at least once a week, with 55% seeking Internet-based information on a daily basis. Most of this activity took place at home, but almost half of the young people made use of the Internet in the public library or school library at least once a month. According to our results, young people not using the library were more likely to be male (65% of the males did not use the Internet facilities provided by the library) and have access to the Internet at home.

The Internet is not solely a provider of information. It is also where people can meet to share their interest in a specific topic. In our survey, 17% of those who considered themselves to be actively involved in society took part in on-line clubs.

What is the youth citizen's involvement in the set up of Internet filtering?

Internet usage policy

Access to Internet resources in all the libraries surveyed is governed by an Internet Usage Policy (IUP). Thirty-eight per cent of the respondent

libraries had a separate policy for young people. We set out to examine how easy it was for the young members of the library to gain access to this policy in order to appreciate their rights and responsibilities in using the Internet within this particular sub-system.

Sixty-five per cent of the sample library authorities published their IUP on their Web site. Only 25% of the respondents considered it *easy* to access the IUP from the Web site. An equal 25% found it *difficult* to access, with 10% finding it *complicated*. The remaining 40% found it *average* to locate. Having established the level of difficulty of accessing the IUP, the Web site survey next evaluated how easy it might be for the library user to make sense of the policy. Forty-five per cent found it difficult to comprehend, with 25% considering it average, and only 30% finding it easy.

Seventy-five per cent of the respondents to the librarians' questionnaire had prepared their policy without consultation with parents or young people regarding their Internet requirements. There also appeared to be no consensus over the age at which a young person could be considered to be sufficiently mature to access the Internet in the library without adult supervision. The results ranged from as young as 5 years old (13%) through 8 years old (24%) and up to 14 years old (13%), with a surprising 37% claiming no age limit. The questionnaire sought to determine the reasons for choice of these age limits. Qualitatively, the responses can be summarized as follows:

- Age five was chosen as the limit because "filtering [technology] in use was dependent on key stages in education."

- Age eight had been chosen with reference to "the Children Act."

- Age fourteen had been chosen as this was the age that respondents considered "a borrower is no longer a junior borrower."

Internet-filtering methods employed

All three of the Internet-filtering methods were in use by at least one of the respondent libraries, with three quarters of the sample operating exclusion filtering. Their reasons for applying a filter ranged from a youth-centred viewpoint (providing a safe environment for young people to access Internet-based information) to an information-provider-centred opinion (avoiding prosecution from providing access to illegal sites). All of the authorities surveyed alerted young people to the presence of the

filtering software. This message does not appear to be getting through to service users. Of those young people in our survey who used the public library at least once a week to access the Internet and were aware of Internet-filtering technology, fewer than half (43%) felt that their access was controlled. Nevertheless, the majority of young people (69% of the total sample) believed that, in general, filtering of Internet sites provides a safe, protective environment for them.

It was evident that the sample library authorities acknowledged the shortcomings of their chosen filtering technology. 75% of the library respondents provided examples of Web sites that should have been blocked, but were still accessible with the filter in place. 50% of them also gave examples of sites that the filter had blocked which should have been accessible by young users.

The majority of library respondents keep records of the young people who have been using the Internet in their libraries. In half of the authorities this was a written record. Others stored the information in computer-based files. There appears to be no agreement over the period of time for which this personal information should be retained. The time the data was filed varied from one month to two years, with 25% of respondents having no set time limit for deleting records of access. 25% of the library authorities keep a record of young people who have tried to access prohibited Web sites. Over 60% of the sample found it necessary to ban users for continual abuse of the Internet usage policy.

How does Internet filtering affect the youth citizen's right to information?

The respondents to the library survey gave the following reasons why young people should not have the right to access unlimited information from library computers:

It is not in the interest of child safety to have unrestricted Internet access.

Interviewee A emphasized the degree to which the Internet is an unsafe virtual environment:

> [It is] not at all safe—even with the [Library] Authority providing filtering, I have been amazed at the range and depth of material some people will access or attempt to access.

Interviewee B felt that the human actor interfacing with the technology was a variable that influenced the safety of the situation.

> It depends upon the child and their curiosity. Children lack the interpretive skills to know where the appropriate limits are. It's great to have the freedom to play, but I wouldn't assume that [the Internet] was a risk-free zone and would take adequate precautions to supervise and guard where need be.

He felt that there was a need to prevent young people's access to Web sites where there were people with agendas other than education.

Interviewees A and B both were of the opinion that Internet filtering enhances the safety of young library users.

Young people do not have the right to access all Internet information.

They need to be protected from inappropriate material. It is up to their parents to decide on access until they reach adulthood. In addition, 75% of the library survey respondents felt that filter systems do not affect individuals' access rights to information.

Interviewee B shared the minority viewpoint and emphasized the impact of the multicultural nature of UK society:

> Filters do impose on a person's right to information but they also protect other people from being exposed to that information—particularly, when there is a mix of ethnic and cultural backgrounds where certain material would be seen to be offensive.

There is a need to balance rights and responsibilities and exercise a duty of care for the child.

Interviewee A acknowledged this. He agreed that Internet filtering restricted the young person's right to information, but he also felt a duty to protect them from some of the worst excesses of the Internet. He differentiated between sites that educate or inform young people and those sites that represent the Internet's worst excesses. It was to these latter sites that filtering should attempt to restrict access.

Interestingly, whilst the library practitioners surveyed had taken action to attempt to balance the right to information and the need to protect the under-18 age group, there was little help or advice available at the time of

the survey from their professional body. Interviewee C, representing this body, stated,

> I regret that CILIP has yet to form a view on [Internet filtering] and it would be wrong for me as an officer to pre-empt what view might be. A Freedom of Information Panel has recently been set up … and this is one of the issues that have been referred to it.

Alternative approaches to safe Internet surfing

The interviewees agreed that there are alternative measures to filtering that libraries could introduce to partially achieve a safe-surfing environment. Interviewee A stated,

> I think there should be some introductory access scheme [for young people] which formally trains them about the advantages and the risks.

In his opinion, adults soon became discerning about the information retrieved from Web sites. Young people needed training to be aware of the risks and dangers of some Internet sites.

It is evident from this sample of authorities that most libraries keep records of Internet usage by young people. Interviewee B suggested that it could be made a condition of use that a monthly report of sites visited by the young person be sent home to their parents. He concluded,

> This would have a chilling effect on the more adventurous kids, if they knew that their forays into busty babes and beavers … were going to be reported back to their parents.

Discussion

In this section of the article, we use the model of active youth citizenship to analyse the findings of our study. The three dimensions of the model—environment, personal traits, and behaviour practices—will each be explored in order to critically discuss the potential impact of Internet filtering by libraries. In doing so, we apply the model to the context of e-citizenship.

Environment

Youth are seen to be in an interstitial state (Coles 1995), that is, they are in-between their family of origin and adult destination and they are

in-between their initial education and final career. Hence, they are more open to alternatives and have not yet fixed particular views and standpoints. While the family is the key environmental factor in childhood and early youth, the formal organizations, experiences, and social groups that they may encounter during this phase will help to determine their future beliefs, views, and any contribution that they may make as citizens (Frazer and Emler 1997).

In the present model, we identify two types of environmental sub-system. Using an analogy from biological systems, we identify the *ethos-creator*, which establishes aspects of citizenship, and the *ethos-incubator*, which provides an environment to facilitate growth in the emerging young citizen. The *ethos-creator* sub-system directly contributes to the formation of the young person's beliefs and attitudes (key examples being the family, school, and church), whereas the ethos-incubator provides an environment for gathering information and evidence to develop and practise these beliefs and attitudes.

The public library is an important part of the network of ethos-incubator sub-systems that is available to the local community's youth. Their experience of the library at this age may determine how they view it and use it throughout the rest of their lives (Whitmire 2001). If they believe that they are being denied access to particular pieces of information, with their right to "seek, receive and impart information through any media" (UN 1948) being restricted, then their attitude towards libraries and the facilities that they offer may well be a negative one. With the government and others emphasizing the significance of public libraries as places, at the heart of communities, offering "equality of access to information" (DCMS 2003), it might be argued that young people are being denied this equality of access when such restrictions are put in place. In our survey of young people, 67% were of the opinion that Internet filtering denied them access to useful information. Those who considered themselves active citizens were more likely to hold this view (71%) as were those who used the library (77%).

The range and quality of cultural, intellectual, and material resources available to individuals affect the degree to which they become active participants in society (Frazer and Emler 1997). Societal conditions, structures, and experiences can often constrain rather than encourage participation from young people (Jones and Wallace 1992; Morch 1997). The young people in our survey were evenly split on this issue. Forty-seven per cent felt that filtering encouraged active participation, while 49%

thought that it discouraged active citizenship. However, the active citizens were more likely to feel that filtering had a positive effect, and 52% of them believed that filtering encouraged community participation, while 44% of the inactive citizens held the same view. It is also noticeable that those who used libraries were more likely to hold the positive opinion (52% felt filtering was an encouragement to active citizenship, as opposed to 42% of the non-library users).

The deployment of Internet-filtering systems by libraries deliberately, or sometimes unintentionally, restricts the variety of source information delivered to the young person and can thus be viewed as a constraint. The civil aspect of citizenship includes a right to individual freedom and to justice (Jones and Wallace 1992) that is curtailed by the act of Internet filtering. However, this curtailment can be viewed positively from the point of view of the social aspect of citizenship, as it safeguards young people's security. The majority of the young people surveyed (69%) held this view. Those who used the library and were the most active citizens were even more convinced by this argument (77% of each of these groups held this view).

Filtering also reduces the autonomy young people need to act as self-governing individuals. This is significant, as autonomy heightens the enjoyment of participating (Alderson 2000; Coles 1995; Harvey 2000).

Even if we adopt the stance that Internet filtering supports the social aspect of citizenship, the imperfections of the filtering systems still need to be considered. The quality of the filtering technology is questionable. Three quarters of the sample libraries employed filtering systems that permitted the viewing of material that was believed to be unfit, and half of the sample employed filtering systems that blocked sites that were actually deemed appropriate for viewing.

In order to become fully active members of society, young people require an understanding of the legal, political, and social systems in which they participate (Williamson 1997). The Internet usage policy in the public library sets out access rights, responsibilities, and sanctions that cut across all three of these systems. However, evidence from the library survey suggests that it is currently difficult to gain an understanding of the usage policy. Thirty-five per cent of the libraries did not publish their policy on their Web site. Of those that were available electronically, we considered 65% to be difficult or complicated to access and 45% to be difficult to comprehend.

Personal traits

Identity is a significant part of citizenship (Williamson 1997), and in order to develop their civic identities, young people require a safe working environment (Mohamed and Wheeler 2001). This is what the interviewees (A and B) believed the libraries were providing by restricting access to particular Web sites. Sixty-nine per cent of the young people in our survey also believed that filtering protected them from unsavoury material. However, this may contradict Harris's (1998) view that a safe environment is one that is free from "bureaucratic barriers that suppress change, defy democracy or hinder fun" (33).

Blocking particular Internet sites can prevent young people from developing and exercising the essential skills they need to become active participants in society. Skills such as negotiation, decision making, considering alternatives, and seeing the big picture are all believed to be required if someone is to act as a self-governing individual (Institute for Citizenship 2003; Hill, Pike, and Selby 1998; Parsons 2002). Being unable to make their own choices about viewing material and not receiving all of the information needed to view a problem in its full context could limit young people's development. Livingstone (2006) suggests that restricting young people's Internet use denies them the benefits that the Net can provide (see also Revell 2005).

Most young people like to participate because they feel involved, they are heard, and no one is dictating to them (Harris 1998; Mohamed and Wheeler 2001). Telling them what they may and may not access is dictating to them. Seventy-five per cent of the respondent libraries that had IUPs in place did not give young people the opportunity to discuss what was believed to be acceptable material and what was not, prior to blocking.

Knowledge is seen as a personal trait that is powerful for contributing fully to society (Cairns 2001; Hackett 1997), and the library is considered to be a vital system within which information to enhance knowledge can be retrieved (Black 2000; Brophy 2001; DCMS 2003). Forty-five per cent of the young people surveyed made use of their school or public library for this purpose. Furthermore, the survey suggests that the library is particularly significant during the later stage of development of youth citizens. Sixty-seven per cent of the 15–18 age group retrieve information from the Internet in the school or public library. Filtering and blocking access to particular pieces of information denies young people a required resource and limits the places in which they can find knowledge.

Behaviour practices

The third dimension of the model of active citizenship is that of a *need* and *wish* to be involved, something that has to come from within the individual. However, even if individuals does want to be involved and to participate, a number of factors have been observed that can discourage their contributing.

If young people have a negative view of the organization or product with which they will be interacting then they may choose not to engage. These do not have to have their origin in personal experience. They can stem from hearsay or a general perception (Lowndes, Pratchett, and Stoker 2001). The library is supposed to be a promoter of democracy; and ICT-based modernization in local public services, an act to reduce social exclusion (Beenham and Harrison 1990; Parliament 1999; DCMS 2003). When we filter access to Internet material, are the goals of social inclusion and democracy really being met and will future participation be discouraged, due to a negative view of the facilities?

Empowerment is an important feature of participation and can help to encourage future participation. And empowerment can be achieved through having appropriate information, being able to make decisions, and being given responsibilities (Milburn 2000; Osler and Starkey 1999; Sinclair and Franklin 2000). Blocking access to Web sites can have an affect on the information available to young people and on their ability to make choices. In addition, responsibilities are being taken away rather than given to them. We learn by doing and such learning is restricted by processes such as filtering (Nightingale 2005). Alderson (2000) states that "young children show sophisticated skills when adults expect and encourage these" (131). By enforcing restrictions upon such people is society expecting too little?

Conclusion

This study set out to answer the question: What effect does Internet filtering have on active youth citizenship in the Information Age? One source of Internet filtering that particularly affects the young, the public library, has been investigated in order to draw some initial conclusions.

First, we have found that Internet filtering may affect all three dimensions of active youth citizenship. Figure 2 shows the relationship among the

elements required for developing active citizenship and the impact of Internet filtering. The library is considered to be part of the environment sub-system that helps to encourage and nurture young people's beliefs and attitudes, affecting their future development and the extent of their activity. Internet filtering obviously limits access to information and on-line participation in communities of interest. The purpose of the present study has been to consider how this affects young people's growth as citizens. Ongoing negative experiences may restrict the contribution that the library as ethos-incubator may make to the development of young citizens' beliefs and attitudes. Libraries have introduced Internet usage policies without consulting young people. In view of recent audits and reports on the problems besetting public engagement and young citizens' political engagement (Electoral Commission 2004; Fahmy 1996), it is perhaps important to consider the issue of filtering and develop an informed position in consultation with young people themselves. This is particularly relevant when we consider that the Young Person's Agenda for Democracy (Hansard Society 2003) expressly refers to Web sites as a source of information, and we are also aware of the extent to which young people use the Internet as an information resource. The public library, therefore, needs to be a valued and trusted point of access, where young people can be involved, engage in informed decision making, and be active citizens; this may also increase the percentage of those who use the library.

The personal traits dimension involves the development of an identity and that, in turn, requires acquiring the skills and knowledge necessary for participating effectively. When certain sites are filtered out, young people are limited in the development of essential skills, such us decision making and considering alternatives, that are necessary to becoming active citizens and are denied the full knowledge required for making informed decisions.

A recurrent theme in all dimensions of the model and especially in the third dimension, behavioural practices, was that of empowerment. A number of researchers have observed that feeling in control of an activity and having some authority and voice gives young people the impetus that they need to participate and to find the experience a positive one (Milburn 2000; Osler and Starkey 1999; Sinclair and Franklin 2000). When access to particular pieces of information is blocked, young people are denied full empowerment. This could be countered by giving them ownership of which sites can be accessed and which cannot; currently, sites are being blocked without consulting those who use the service. All three dimensions of the model developed are limited to some extent by this failure to

An Example of how Internet Filtering could affect an Active Youth E-Citizen
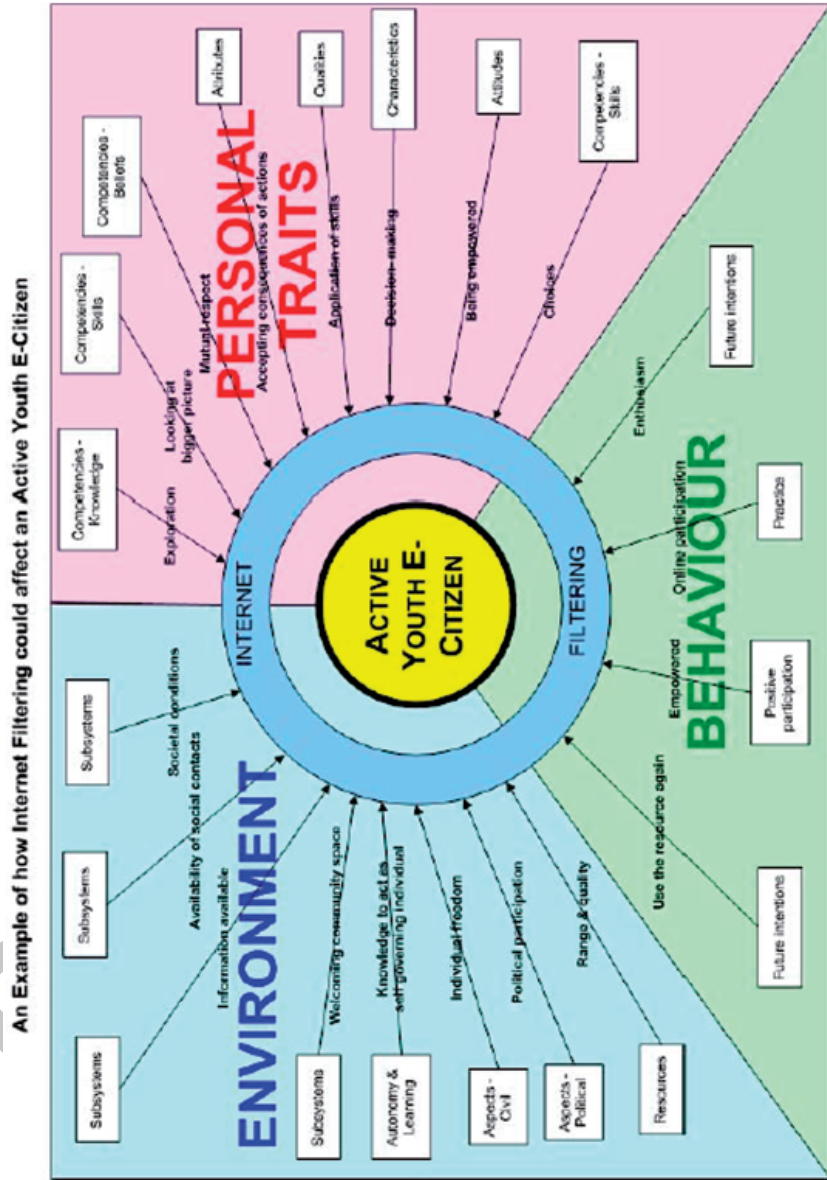

Figure 2: An example of how Internet filtering could affect the model of active youth citizenship

consult; at a time when information is paramount, young people appear to be actively impeded.

Of course, it may still be asked how significant this all is in the overall development of the emerging citizen? It is clear that the Internet provides an important source of information and a means of active participation in social groups. The evidence from our survey, confirmed by others, shows that it is a key source of information for this age group. It is also an emerging virtual space, where young people meet and interact in clubs and societies. But does it speed up or impede the incubation of the active citizen? The majority of our respondents felt that filtering denies them access to useful information. Interestingly, it appears that active citizens, and those who use libraries, are blocking optimists: they are more likely to hold the opinion that filtering safeguards their security and encourages citizenship. The inactive citizens, and those who are infrequent library users, are more likely to be blocking pessimists. This has significant implications for policy makers wishing to implement Internet-based measures to strengthen democratic participation by young people.

Secondly, it is clear that the rights contained in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UN 1948) and the *Conventions on the Right of the Child* (UN 1989) do not sit comfortably with the decision to filter and censor the information available to young people. Even though these human rights are not absolute, controlling information without fully engaging with young people to understand their views on filtering and censoring can be seen as a constraint on civic engagement. The use of filtering also clearly breaches the spirit of the IFLA declaration, which suggests that

> [l]ibraries and information services provide access to information, ideas and works of imagination in any medium and regardless of frontiers. They serve as gateways to knowledge, thought and culture, offering essential support for independent decision making, cultural development, research and lifelong learning by both individuals and groups. (IFLA 2002)

Thirdly, this study also raises issues regarding libraries' public accountability for electronic service delivery. One objective of the recent modernization of UK local government under the e-government program is to improve the transparency of services and public sector accountability to stakeholders (Parliament 1999). This accountability is impeded if the service users are not consulted when policy is being devised. Similarly, transparency of processes is not improved if the policy governing the process is difficult for stakeholders to access or comprehend.

Finally, to what extent are these findings generalizable? The model of active youth citizenship has been tested in the United Kingdom and other European countries (Cyprus, Greece, Italy, and Romania). However, we are not claiming that the findings and discussions in this article are generalizable so as to be applicable outside the United Kingdom. Countries obviously exhibit cultural differences (McKenna and Beech 1995), and cultural traditions influence the practice within each country (Andrews 1997). Success or failure of policies in one country does not necessarily guarantee the same in another country (Reynolds and Farrell 1996). We are aware that, in order to generalize findings outside of the United Kingdom, we would first have to examine the existing culture of the country before deciding if the policies would be appropriate (Burnes 1996; Trevorrow 2002). Thus our article is directed at the United Kingdom solely and not elsewhere.

We have examined one source of Internet filtering that affects young people, the public library. We contend that the model presented here, and our conclusions from applying it in this single environment, will be replicated in other environments that restrict young people's access to the Internet. After all, the governance arrangements and filtering software used in the library are likely to be identical to arrangements in other parts of the local authority network—for example, schools and youth clubs maintained by the council. Furthermore, we would suggest that the model is applicable to other channels of engagement that are available to the young citizen. Digital television, for instance, has the potential to be a significant source of information and engagement. We invite other researchers to apply the model of active youth citizenship in this and other environments in which service-delivery channels are subject to access control to deepen our understanding of this important area of youth citizenship.

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Appendix A: Questionnaire relating to children's rights to access information

Questionnaire relating to 'Children's Rights to Access Information'

Please circle the appropriate answer where required. Thank You

1. Does your authority use a filter system to block undesirable Internet sites?

   Yes   No

2. If yes please state which system it is.

   ....

3. Do you have an Internet users policy?

   Yes   No

4. If yes is there a separate policy for children?

   Yes   No

   Please could you enclose a copy of your Internet Users Policy with this questionnaire? Thank you.

5. At what age can a child use the Internet without adult supervision?

   ....

6. Why was this age chosen?

   ....

7. Who makes the decision whether a filter system should be used?

   ....

8. How does your filter system block sites?

   Inclusion Filtering   Exclusion Filtering   Content Filtering

9. Do you agree with the implementation of a filter system?

   Yes   No

10. Please explain your reasons

    ....

    ....

11. What are your views on children having a right to access any information they want?

    ....

    ....

12. 'Filter systems affect the individuals' access rights to freedom of information' Would you agree or disagree with this statement?

    Yes   No

13. Are you aware of any sites that the filters have not blocked that you feel should have been blocked?

    Yes   No

14. If yes, please give examples.

    ....

    ....

Appendix A: Continued

15. Are you aware of any sites that have been blocked that should not have?

    Yes   No

16. If yes please give examples.

    ....

    ....

17. Are history blocks checked regularly?

    Yes   No

18. If yes by whom?

    Librarian   IT staff

19. Do you keep a record of children who have tried to access sites they shouldn't?

    Yes   No

20. Have you had to ban anyone for continual abuse of the system?

    Yes   No

21. Do you make sure that the children aware that there is a filter system in place?

    Yes   No

22. How would you feel if the Government enforced legislation banning the use of filter systems in libraries?

    ....

    ....

23. Have you carried out any consultations with parents about children's usage of the Internet?

    Yes   No

24. Have children been consulted about what they want from the Internet?

    Yes   No

25. How are records kept of children allowed to use the Internet?

    ....

    ....

26. Do you keep records of who is using/has used the Internet?

    Yes   No

27. If yes, for how long are these records kept?

    ....

Name...

Position..

Authority...

Thank you for taking the time to answer this questionnaire.

Please could you return it in the enclosed SAE by Friday 30th May 2003
If you have any questions you can contact me on C.Wootton3696@student.lmu.ac.uk

Appendix B: Young citizen questionnaire

Young Citizen Questionnaire

We are investigating the views of young citizens. We would be grateful if you could complete this short questionnaire to help us. No personal information about you will be included in the questionnaire.

1. Do you consider yourself to be actively involved in clubs/groups/societies outside of school/college?
Yes ☐   No ☐

2. If yes, in what way?
_____

3. Do you take part in any clubs (please tick any that apply):

Online Clubs ☐   (please specify) _____   Outdoor Organisations ☐
Youth clubs ☐
Community Activities ☐   Political Groups ☐
Girl Guides/Scouts ☐
Other (please specify): _____

4. Do you feel that you are:
Encouraged to participate in clubs/societies: Yes ☐   No ☐
Included as part of your local community: Yes ☐   No ☐
Supported by others in joining clubs/societies: Yes ☐   No ☐
Aware of the opportunities to join clubs/societies: Yes ☐   No ☐
Equipped with the resources to participate in clubs: Yes ☐   No ☐

5. Do you:
Want to be involved in community issues: Yes ☐   No ☐
Want to contribute to the community: Yes ☐   No ☐
Want to help to resolve community issues: Yes ☐   No ☐

6. How often do you use the public/school library to obtain information for anything other than homework:
Never ☐   daily ☐   weekly ☐   fortnightly ☐   monthly ☐

7. How often do you use the Internet to obtain information for anything other than homework:
Never ☐   daily ☐   weekly ☐   fortnightly ☐   monthly ☐

8. Do you have access to the Internet at home?
Yes ☐   No ☐

9. If yes, how often do you use it to obtain information for anything other than homework
Never ☐   daily ☐   weekly ☐   fortnightly ☐   monthly ☐

PLEASE CONTINUE OVERLEAF

10. Are you aware of any Internet filtering methods?
Yes ☐   No ☐

11. Do you feel that your internet access is filtered/controlled by others in any way:
At Home: Yes ☐   No ☐   Don't know ☐
At School library: Yes ☐   No ☐   Don't know ☐
At Public library: Yes ☐   No ☐   Don't know ☐

12. Does this affect the types of information that you search for:
At Home: Yes ☐   No ☐
At School library: Yes ☐   No ☐
At public library: Yes ☐   No ☐

13. Do you believe that filtering:
Protects you from harmful sites   Yes ☐   No ☐
Denies access to useful information   Yes ☐   No ☐
Encourages/discourages you to use the Internet: Encourages ☐   Discourages ☐
Protects/conflicts with your rights as an individual: Protects ☐   Conflicts ☐
Encourages/Discourages active participation: Encourages ☐   Discourages ☐

14. Is there any information that you would like to obtain that you are blocked from doing so by filtering methods?
Yes ☐   No ☐

15. If yes, could you provide some examples: _____

Your Age (in years): _____

Your Gender: Male ☐   Female ☐

THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE

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