

# **Offline Youth and the Digital Divide: Revisiting the Concept of “Digital Natives”**

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# Introduction

- In 2009 FTU was asked to do research on the e-competencies of young people between the age of 16 and 25 years.
- Particular for young people this age, is that they are expected to transit from “adolescent” to “adult” e-practices.

# Introduction

- According to Statbel 9% of these young people are non or rare users. They are the so-called Offline youth.
- 16% are irregular users.

# False Preconceptions

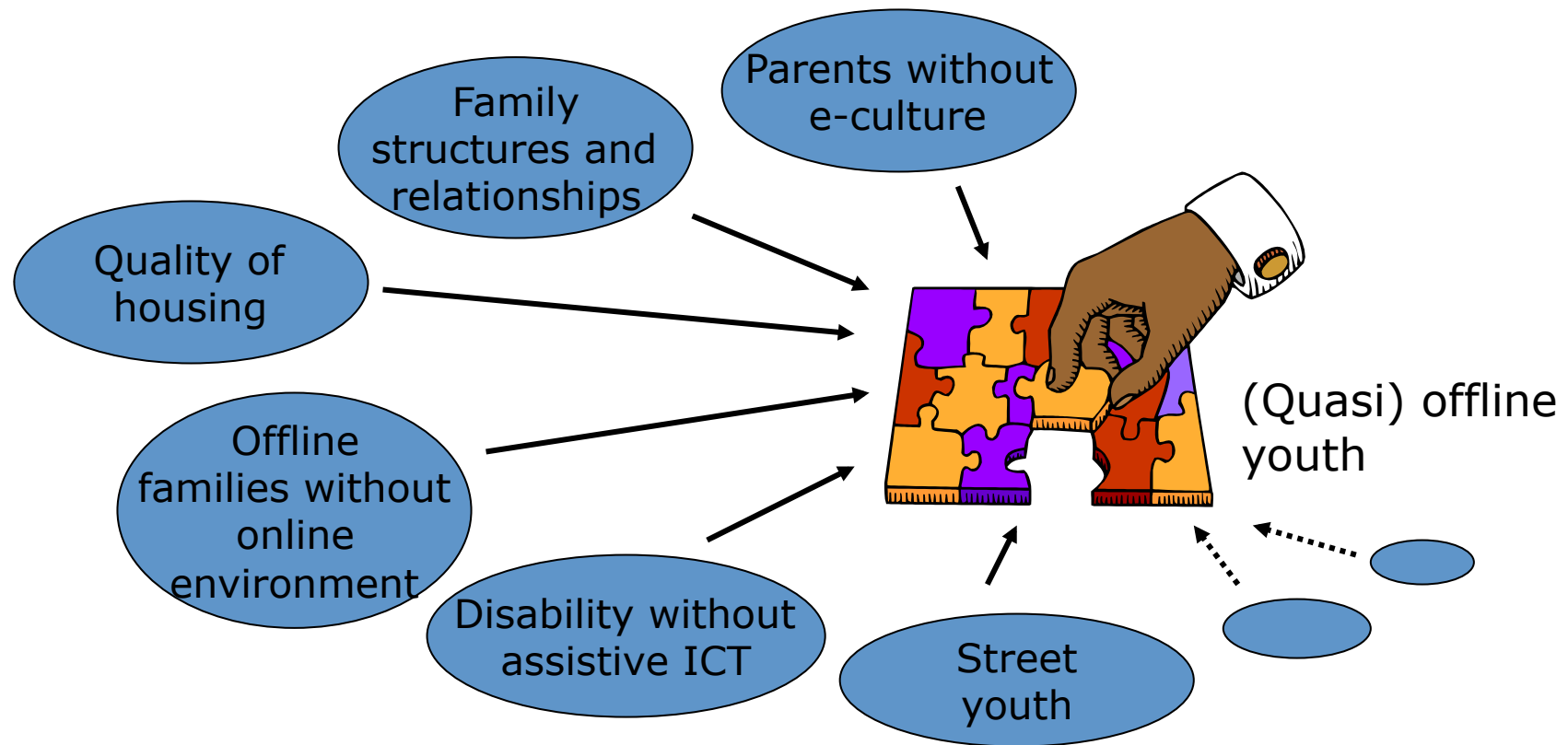
- The research started with the preconception that offline young people would be more easily found in economically and socially underprivileged households.
- Offline young people this age are not a homogeneous group.

# False Preconceptions

- A diversity of circumstances lay at the origin of the e-exclusion of young people this age.

# False Preconceptions

– The diverse reasons for being (quasi) offline



# False Preconceptions

- There is no direct relationship between having access to the internet at home and the e-competencies of young people.
- Since the internet is part of their youth culture, they find access to the internet on other locations.

# False Preconceptions

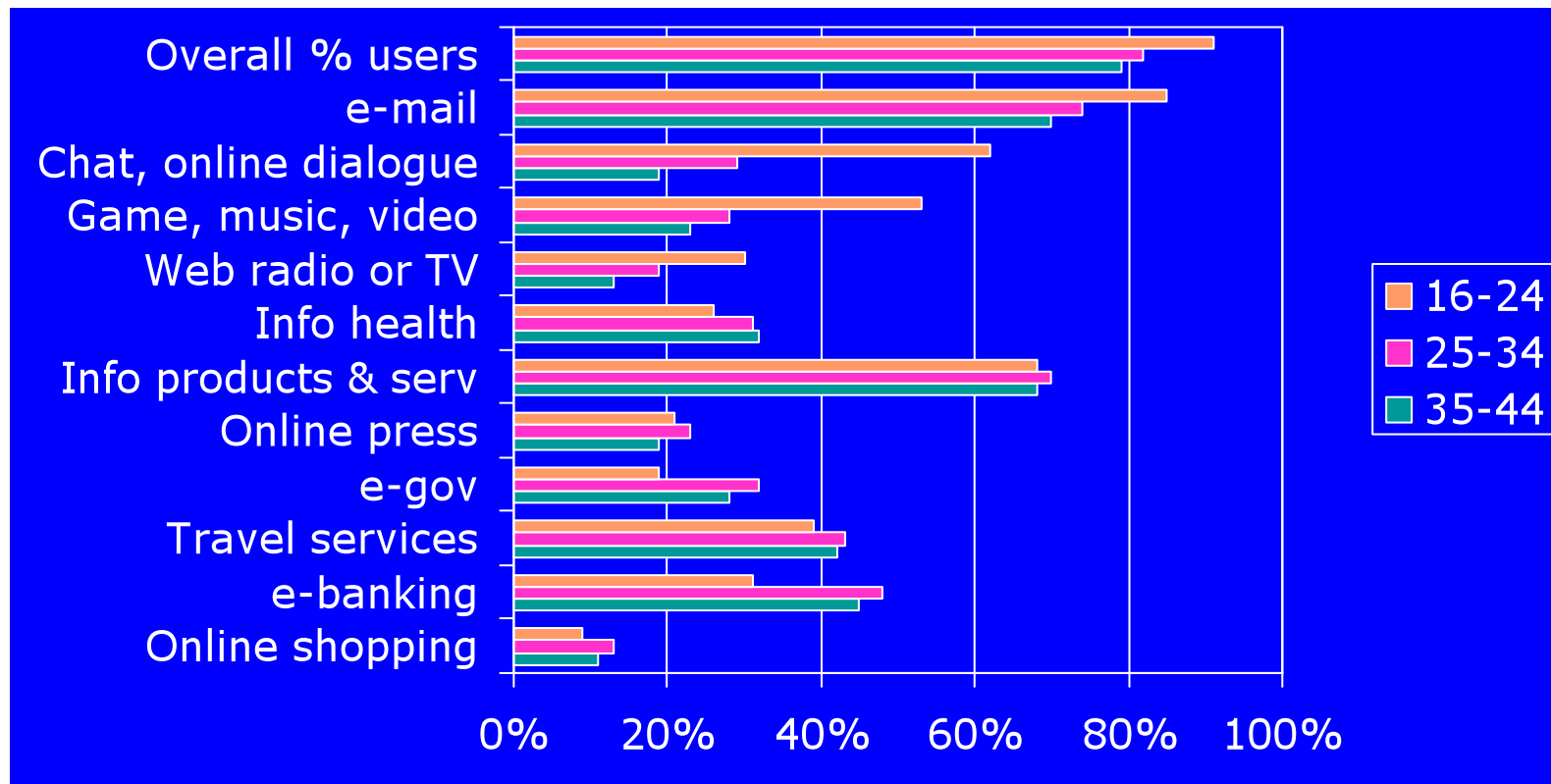
- Almost all young people this age are in some way or another familiar with the computer and the internet.
- The discontinuity between their e-practices and the e-practices expected by adult society is a strong explanatory factor their e-exclusion.

# Different worlds of Internet usage

- The e-world of young people (16-24) differs radically from the e-practices of older age groups.

# Different worlds of Internet usage

- Usage of online services according to age groups



*% of Internet users within each age group*

*Source: Statbel 2008*

# Different worlds of Internet usage

- Young people's usage of the internet is very leisure-oriented.
- They consider the internet as an extended chat room.

# Different worlds of Internet usage

- Preferred uses by the youth

office software

e-learning

e-government

e-commerce

facebook, netlog

music, photo & video

chat & online messaging

e-mail

online gaming

ambient intelligence

second life

- Expected uses by the socio-economic world

office software

e-learning

e-government

e-commerce

facebook, netlog

music, photo & video

chat & online messaging

e-mail

online gaming

ambient intelligence

second life

# Different worlds of Internet usage

- For young people this age, e-exclusion means not being able to share their experiences with their peers and to participate in e-youth culture.
- The way policymakers and society consider e-exclusion is most often a lesser concern for them.

# How to bridge the gap

- For grown-ups the e-world of young people still appears to be a foreign and ill-known territory.
- If Prensky considers young people to be e-experts, it must be because their expertise is restricted to this territory.

# How to bridge the gap

- Which means that young people will have to cope with the existence of double and conflicting norms, if they want to respond to the expectations of society and economy.
- Many young people avow their lack of e-competencies to access the e-world as expected by economy and society.

# How to bridge the gap

- This double system of social norms should incite researchers and fieldworkers to revisit and handle with care and circumspection their concepts and instruments.
- Adequate tools to draw a more balanced picture of their e-knowledge remain absent.

# How to bridge the gap

- Schools and youth organisations still have little knowledge of the youth e-world.
- They are poorly aware of the effects of the Internet on their socialising process and on the construction of their identity.
- They do not take measures to facilitate the migration from their e-world to the expectations of the economy and society.

# Conclusions

- Offline young people are not necessarily to be found in underprivileged households.
- This very small group of young people call for an individual approach that takes into account the particular context of their e-exclusion.

# Conclusions

- The large majority of young people need assistance to migrate to the e-world of adult society.
- Throughout Europe there are very few policies and measures that sustain this “migration” process.