Tackling youth crime: exploring technological solutions to enhance youth engagement and promote social capital

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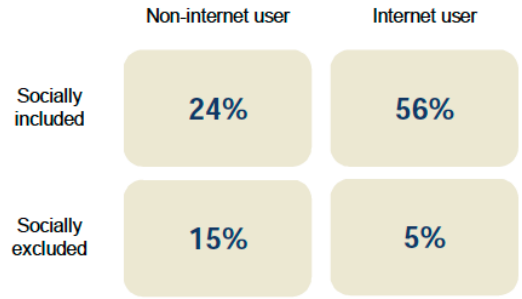
Motivation

- UK: Youth crime, social inclusion and engagement of marginalised youth remain a key policy challenge [11]
- The potential role of social capital seen as an potential important tool for addressing inclusion and engagement
- Digital Inclusion:
  - *the use of technology, either directly or indirectly, to improve the lives and life chances of disadvantaged people and the places in which they live*
- There is strong evidence that many of those who are on the wrong side of the digital divide are also socially excluded (OFCOM 2005)



- Our analysis indicates little or no work exists on the use of social software sites for exploration of engagement and social capital building with **young offenders**

Updated context

- Gaming technologies
- The use of "free" social software sites and their risks
- The use of vertical technologies – Mobile phones for music creation
- Measurement and Evaluation is critical but challenging
- Limited usage of:
  - Bespoke social software platforms (e.g. ELGG)
  - 1-1 and 1-M communication between SS platforms and mobile devices

REMORA: Project Aims

- Aims
  - to provide mobile software applications to support work-based learning and assessment for social workers "in the wild"
- Objectives
  - Build software tools that students and social workers want and need - using a user-centred approach to elicit requirements
  - Evaluate tools and their usage to provide key knowledge to inform JISC E-Learning Strategy

The tools

Search, Review

Student, Placement Advisor, Academic Tutor

Share, Collaborate

REMORA Applications

Search Tool

Share Tool

REMORA: Outcomes influencing this project

- Focus on basic technology
- Training and capacity building
- Participatory Design approaches
- Evaluation metrics are difficult to develop and measure
- Issues of risk and fear
  - Fear of technology – coping
  - Precautionary principles – anticipation of security and potential loss of data
- Paper driven processes – can't always be supported
- Organization culture and work pressures
- Buying in of technology-sustainability

UK Digital inclusion activity

- Digital inclusion activities focused on either the elderly or disabled
  - Focus on larger target segments

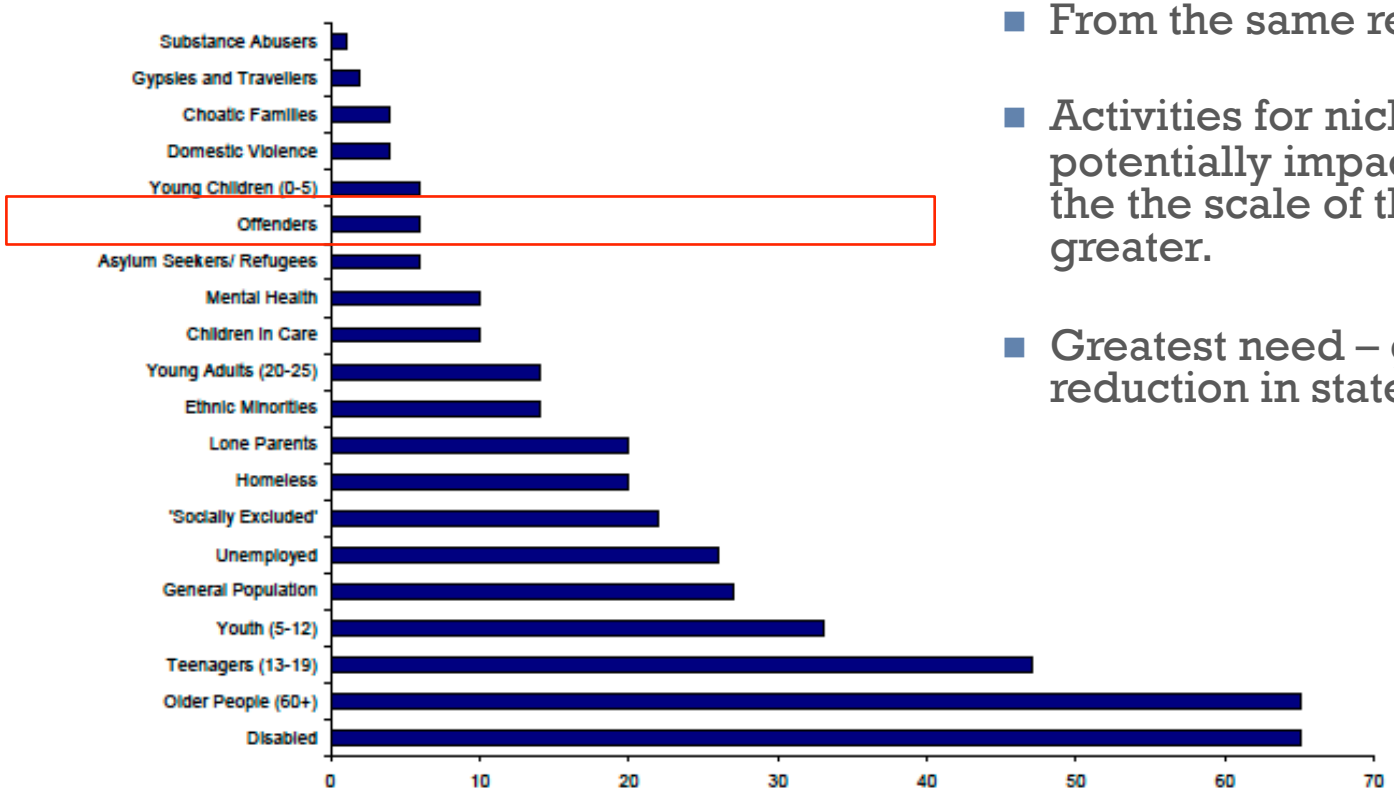


Figure 13 The Target Segment focus of Cases and Projects

(- from Digital Inclusion Landscape Study 2007)

- From the same report:
- Activities for niche segments potentially impact fewer people, but the the scale of the impact could be greater.
- Greatest need – greatest benefit > reduction in state dependency

Working Hypothesis

- The hypothesis rests with the notion that social inclusion can be addressed by providing technology-based solutions that will enhance and develop social capital for and with young offenders.
- The question is what technologies are best suited for social capital development?

Study aims

For the purpose of this feasibility study, we identified the following aims:

- Identification of current use of technology in this community
- An understanding of the 'technical capital' of young offenders (that is technical access, use, knowledge and expertise), and how this can contribute to the building of 'moral' (being a 'good' person), and social capital of these young people
- An identification of the perceived technologies considered appropriate and best suited for this particular section of the community.

Methodology

- A feasibility study operating within the framework of social capital building, our methodological design entailed:
- A review of the extant literature on use of digital technology with youth at risk
- A review of youth offending data collection assessment forms such as ASSET
- Data collection from three youth offending teams representing diverse areas including rural England, inner-city multi-racial London, and outer London
- Interviews and focus group discussions with key stakeholders
  - From: service managers, case managers to health workers
- Observational participation in one youth offending team
- Methodology deliberately lightweight to reflect the feasibility nature of the study given the challenging nature of the subject community

Findings: Current technology use

- Considered in the context of 4 dimensions
  - Transforming government services: Infrastructure, better information sharing
  - Technology support for policies aimed at addressing social inclusion (e.g. Design4All - acessibility)
  - Preventing digital disadvantage as technology becomes more prevalent (education and training)
  - Technology for priority needs (e.g. e-health)
- Current technology usage in the you
  - A focus on surveillance [13]
  - Supporting organizational processes
- **Not for addressing the expressed young people**
- **Not for positive or direct engag offenders**

…practitioners…have really only experienced IT in terms of inputting to client/management information systems and the receipt of performance information. Often this has been viewed as bureaucracy that detracts from their direct work with young people.

Service Manager

Findings: Social computing, mobile phones and engagement

- Social computing –
  - Empowerment of users is crucial for the growth of the digital economy [15]
  - Enhancing users' social capital [17] – but little evidence of such use in socially excluded sectors
  - Technology changes with social software platforms means that new possibilities emerge for example integration with mobile phones.
- Mobile phones and young offende
  - Young offenders are key users of mo
  - Within YOTS teams there is anecdota communicate with young people via

Most of our young people have a mobile phone. Some of them have several…(laughter). I have a work phone and I do use it to text young people to remind them of appointments…

Case worker

Findings: Emerging requirements for technological solutions

- Integrating a bespoke, dedicated social software platform with texting services for community engagement and communication
- A platform that delivers:
  - Access to relevant and timely information that supports social capital building
  - Communication between young people and their case workers
  - Dedicated personal and group space for social networking
  - Calendar services for helping young people organize their lives
  - Integration with external SMS texting s
    information to the young people via the
  - Apps that support one-one engagemer
    their workers to address self-esteem, h
    (from the ASSET from).

I am a health worker and I carry out health checks, and give information about various things. But to be honest, I think many of the leaflets I give go straight in the bin. So, if this kind of information could be given in a different format…such as a website and through texts…in a way that young people can relate to…I think that would be incredibly empowering…

Health worker

How it could work

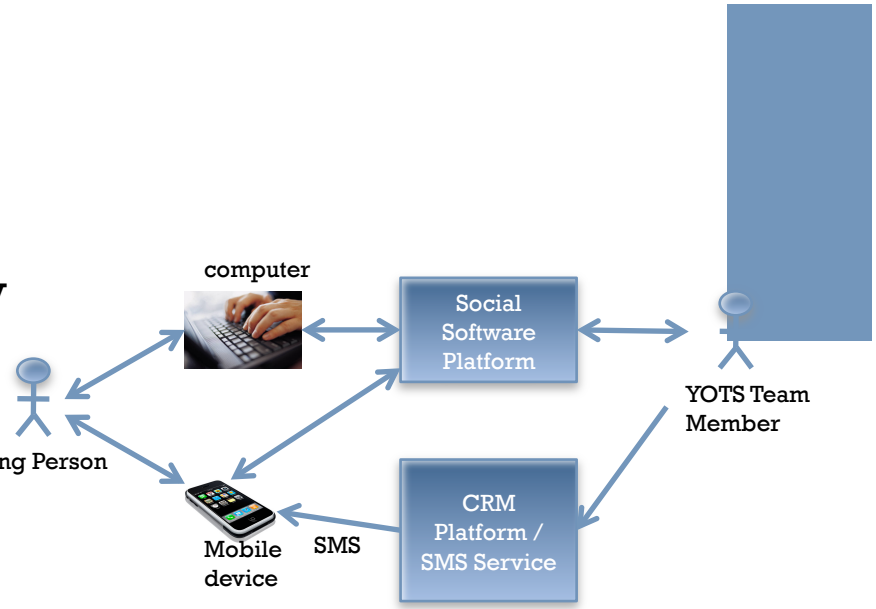
How it could work:
Profile of YP on introduction – interests, key dates etc

YP uses the social software platform where they are encouraged to develop social capital through usage of the tool.

The YOT professional keeps in touch via the social software platform and automated texts sent to the young person's phone.

Information sent can for example include court meeting reminders, interesting events or simply friendly texts.

Such regular interventions that are supported by technology and therefore not placing a significant burden in their maintenance will
encourage better active engagement.



- Dedicated social software platform (based on Elgg)
  - Events, content, personalisation, diary management, diary
- SMS Texting service (through 3rd party provider) for communicating directly with YP

Other options and issues

- Virtual Worlds and Serious games
  - Construction of dedicated environments that have high quality graphics, interaction and encourage immersion
  - Currently, very limited use of such platforms in this segment of marginalised communities.
- Managing the design process – the need for co-design
  - A systems process that deploys a creative mix of methods and techniques from disciplines such as computer science, usability and social sciences.

"*The latter (vulnerable customers) however are hardly ever part of the design process, where they could give input regarding performance, scalability and easiness to adapt of the solutions to their daily needs" (page 105,[24]).*

Conclusions

- Research/Literature evidence suggests that social inclusion and digital inclusion are closely linked
- Marginalized youth such as young offenders are particularly susceptible to issues of exclusion
- There is limited research activity that aims to address how social inclusion can be addressed by technology for the young offender section of the community
- Social software platforms and their integration with texting services is a good candidate for "in the wild" experimentation and evaluation
- Such studies should form part of the UK / EU policy and research agenda