

Digital transformation in research

Guidelines for data collection & interpretation in the online environment



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Intro- duc- tion

Brief overview on digital transformation & data collection and interpretation

Digital transformation is a dynamic and multi-faceted process that integrates digital technologies into social, economic, and cultural processes. In the European youth field, digital transformation is understood as an inclusive, multi-stakeholder initiative co-designed and implemented with young people, youth workers, and other stakeholders. It changes the way most areas of youth work operate by transforming traditional, non-digital processes into digital ones (e.g., transitioning to paperless processes) and shaping cultural and social norms (e.g., how digital tools influence communication and participation).

In the context of research, digital transformation plays a crucial role in improving data collection and interpretation. It provides opportunities to adopt innovative tools and methods, enabling more efficient, inclusive, and meaningful engagement in online environments. However, it also presents challenges, such as ensuring equitable access to technology, maintaining ethical standards, and supporting digital literacy among all stakeholders.

Context

This output was inspired by the GEYC participation in the first **RAY Thematic Seminar**, “How to use research data for programme implementation,” held from June 11th to 13th, 2025, in Bratislava, Slovakia. The seminar, co-hosted by National Agencies of the European Youth Programmes from Slovakia, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Finland, and Romania, and coordinated by the RAY Network, aimed to explore the integration of data and evidence-based research into European youth programmes.

During the seminar, GEYC shared experiences on adapting research methods for the online environment, showcasing good practices such as **online focus groups** to engage youth across Europe and Central Asia on topics such as education, employment, mobility, and participation - developed through partnerships with UNICEF ECARO and the European Training Foundation, and **online consultations** to co-create GEYC's Strategy for 2030.

Purpose & target audience

This document is designed for youth workers, project managers, researchers, and other stakeholders in youth work who aim to enhance their data collection and interpretation methods using digital tools. It offers practical guidance on integrating AI tools into research processes and adapting traditional methods to digital environments.

GEYC's commitment to digital innovation

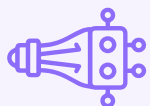
GEYC is dedicated to advancing digital innovation within youth work, promoting the integration of technology into youth work practices, expanding the role of digital platforms in meaningful engagement and learning, and providing digital empowerment opportunities for youth, educators, and youth workers.

GEYC's Strategy for 2030 solidifies its commitment to responsible and innovative use of digital tools, ensuring youth are equipped to thrive in a digital world. By fostering digital citizenship and supporting the development of the skills for the future, GEYC contributes to creating resilient communities where youth lead with responsibility and innovation.



Digital transformation in data collection

The shift from traditional to digital methods in data collection has been driven by several key factors:



Technological advancements

Rapid developments in technology have made digital tools more accessible and user-friendly.

Innovations in software and hardware have transformed how data is collected, stored, and analyzed.



Global events

Moments such as the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the necessity of remote data collection methods.

As in-person gatherings became restricted, researchers adapted by leveraging digital platforms to continue their work, leading to a widespread acceptance of online methodologies.



Accessibility

Digital tools have made data collection more inclusive. Participants and researchers can engage from any location, breaking down barriers related to mobility and location.

This inclusivity is vital for gathering diverse perspectives, particularly in the youth sector.

2 Digital transformation in data collection

Digital tools significantly enhance data collection by improving efficiency, accuracy, and accessibility. Utilizing online platforms and applications allows researchers to gather data in real-time, reducing the time and resources needed for traditional methods. Digital surveys, mobile applications, and data management systems streamline the collection process, enabling instant feedback and reducing human error.

Furthermore, digital tools facilitate remote participation, allowing researchers to engage with diverse populations across geographical boundaries, thus enriching the data quality and breadth.

Adapting research methods to the online environment is crucial for several reasons:

The shift necessitates new strategies for participant engagement, as traditional face-to-face interactions are replaced by virtual ones. Researchers must develop skills in digital facilitation to create an interactive and inclusive environment that encourages participation.

Adapting to online methodologies allows researchers to harness the full potential of digital tools, such as analytics software and AI-driven insights, to enhance data interpretation and create more nuanced and impactful conclusions from their data.

The online environment demands a focus on ethical considerations, including data privacy and informed consent. Researchers must ensure that their practices align with digital standards and guidelines, protecting participants' rights and fostering trust in the research process.





Guidelines for conducting online focus groups & online consultations



Adapt & be flexible



- » Select familiar, easy-to-access platforms & tools. Be where your target group is.
- » Minimize log-ins and downloads.
- » Offer alternatives for participants with tech challenges.



Create inclusivity



- » Technology access (devices, reliable internet).
- » Digital skills support and orientation.
- » Intentional outreach to underrepresented groups.



Keep it safe



- » Clear privacy, data use, and consent policies.
- » Creating safe, trusting environments.
- » Providing tech support before and during sessions.
- » Managing risks and setting group norms.
- » Ensuring professional online facilitation training for moderators.

3 Guidelines for conducting online focus groups & online consultations

Keep a continuous feedback loop to facilitate an iterative improvement

- » Implement post-session reviews. Collect participant impressions through instant reactions, but also through anonymous surveys, polls, and open comments.
- » Reflect on facilitator's experience for continuous improvement.
- » Document key insights and learning points to guide future sessions.
- » Adapt formats and tools as needed based on participant feedback.
- » Regularly pilot new approaches and methods to keep improving the quality of online sessions.

Communicate effectively

- » Communicate in youth-friendly formats (DMs, group chats, memes, etc).
- » Adapt topics and prompts to young people's interests.
- » Make sure the spaces have as many features as possible such as: camera and microphone controls, live chat, emojis, reactions, accessibility features (captions, language support, image reader), options for group or private interaction (breakout rooms, waiting rooms, private messaging).
- » Foster digital storytelling by supporting varied expressions (text, audio, image, video, emojis, etc).
- » Encourage peer sharing and co-creation.
- » Showcase authentic stories and experiences.

Build comfort

- » Let participants choose camera and chat options.
- » Include icebreakers and casual conversation spaces.
- » Encourage honest, informal contribution.





Interpreting participants feedback surveys **with AI tools**

Incorporating AI tools for analyzing participants' feedback surveys can enhance the quality and depth of your final and impact reports. Below are guidelines and example prompts for effectively utilizing AI in this context, including strategies to improve the accuracy of results.

Using AI to summarize and compare data for the final report purpose



Compare with initial survey data

Prompt example:

"Compare the responses from the participant feedback surveys with the initial registration form data.

Highlight any significant changes or impacts observed, ensuring that all applicable data is included and inconsistencies are addressed for accuracy."



Feed information into sections of the final report

Prompt example:

"Summarize the key themes from the participant feedback related to [specific topic], ensuring that all relevant data points are considered and cross-referenced to improve accuracy.

Propose how this information can be structured in the final report."

4 Interpreting participants feedback surveys with AI tools

Using AI-powered tools to for the impact report purpose



Configuring the persona of the AI assistant

Prompt example:

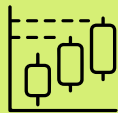
"Configure the AI assistant to adopt a professional yet approachable tone suitable for a youth-focused audience while ensuring that it relies on a comprehensive dataset for accuracy and completeness."



Visualizing the data

Prompt example:

"Create visual representations (charts, graphs) of the feedback data to illustrate key trends and insights, verifying that all relevant data points are represented to enhance accuracy. Emphasize..."



Summarizing data based on the impact report framework

Prompt example:

"Summarize the feedback data according to the impact report logical framework, focusing on outcomes related to... Ensure that all relevant data is included and cross-checked against the original dataset for accuracy."



Generating the executive summary

Prompt example:

"Generate an executive summary of the impact report based on the feedback analysis, emphasizing the main findings and recommendations while confirming that the data utilized is accurate and comprehensive. Use key words such... Take into consideration the impact at individual, organizational and community levels. We aimed at..."



Tools & tips to navigate challenges in digital data collection & interpretation



Digital divide

Not all participants have equal access to technology or basic digital skills



- » Offer tutorials to improve participants' skills in using digital tools and platforms.
- » Provide alternative methods for participation, such as phone surveys or paper forms.
- » Collaborate with local organizations/ libraries/ schools/ community centres to improve access to devices and internet connectivity.

- » Use simple and intuitive survey tools that do not require advanced digital skills to navigate.
- » Ensure surveys and data collection tools are mobile-friendly, allowing participants to engage using smartphones.
- » Recruit volunteers to assist participants who may struggle with technology during data collection events. Assign a person the role of tech support during the event.



Fewer opportunities groups



Ensuring that vulnerable groups feel safe and included in the data collection process

- » Implement targeted outreach efforts to build trust within these communities. The outreach materials should reflect the cultural backgrounds of vulnerable groups.
- » Ensure that facilitators are trained in sensitivity and inclusivity to create a safe space for all participants.

5 Tools & tips to navigate challenges in digital data collection & interpretation



Participant engagement challenge

Attracting participants to join and maintaining their interest and motivation in virtual settings.



- » Use a mix of on-site and online promotional tools.
- » Use former participants' relatable testimonials.
- » Send reminders and updates through email or text to maintain interest and encourage participation.
- » Don't exceed 1h30, ideally 1h. Break it down into smaller and dynamic parts.
- » Use interactive tools (polls, quizzes, game-like elements) to make sessions engaging.
- » Customize the content and format of sessions based on participant demographics and interests.
- » Provide an opportunity to follow-up. After participation, share results and insights with participants to show them the impact of their contributions, fostering a sense of ownership.
- » Offer incentives for participation, such as certificates.

Useful tools

For data collection

LimeSurvey, Qualtrics, Typeform, SurveyMonkey, Whisper

For data visualization

Canva, Piktochart, Datawrapper

For engagement

Mentimeter, Slido, Kahoot!

For data analysis & communication

Excel, Google Sheets, JASP, RStudio, SPSS, Stata, QCMap, QualCoder, Taguette, Julius, ChatGPT, Claude AI, Gemini (Google), Google Docs/Sheets, Perplexity AI, Notebook LM, STORM by Stanford



Data manipulation through AI



- » Ensure compliance with data protection regulations such as GDPR, which mandates proper handling of personal data. Clearly communicate how participants' data will be used, stored, and protected, fostering trust and compliance with privacy standards.
- » Utilize anonymization techniques to protect participant identities and sensitive information during data analysis.
- » Regularly train and calibrate AI models with diverse datasets to improve their accuracy and reduce biases.
- » Establish clear protocols for human analysts to review AI outputs, focusing on areas where human judgment is critical for interpretation, especially for qualitative data.

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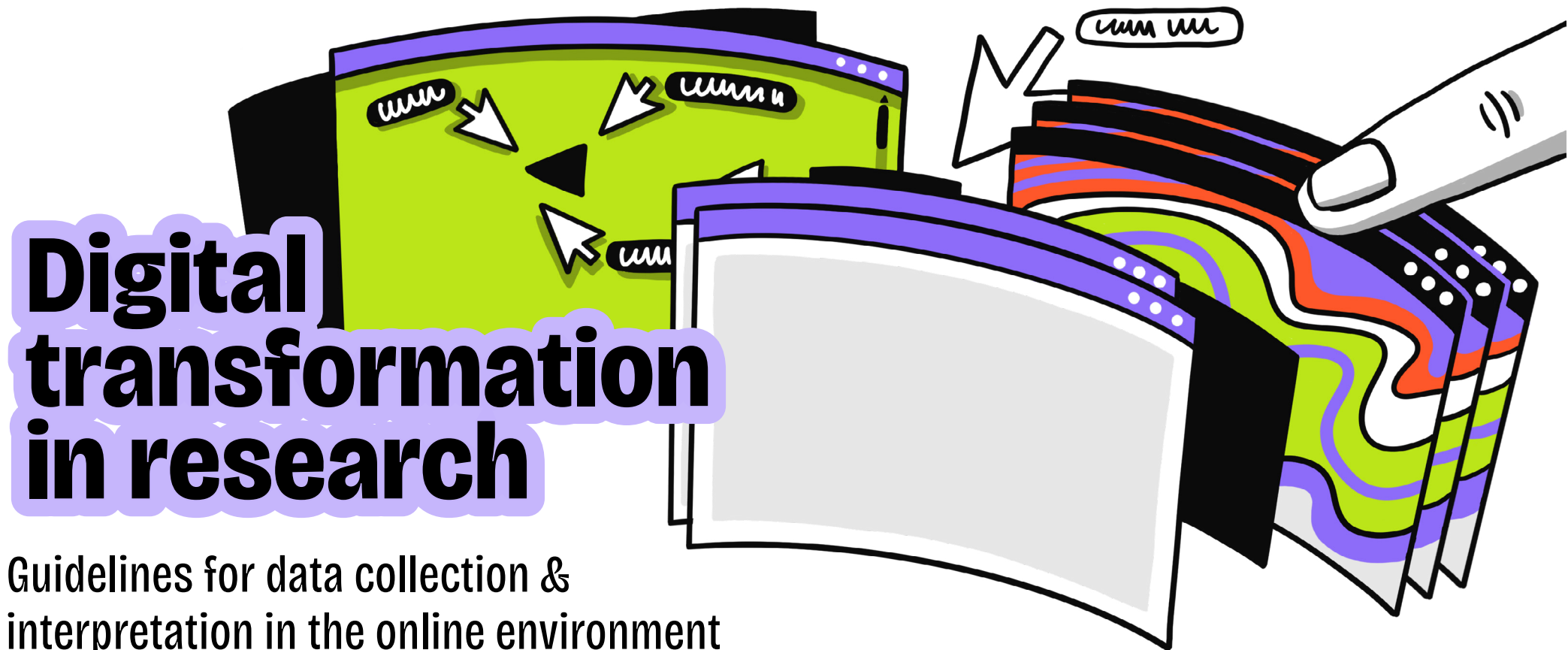
Conclusion

The integration of digital tools in data collection is more than just a trend; it's a powerful opportunity for us as youth workers to enhance our research quality and strengthen our connections with participants.

As we navigate the evolving landscape of research, embracing digital transformation is crucial for capturing diverse voices and generating insights that truly matter. Let's work together to fully adopt these digital tools in our practices, ensuring that our methodologies are not only innovative and inclusive but also resonate with the young people we serve.

This is our chance to create a vibrant, digitally empowered future that actively engages and uplifts the youth in our communities.





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