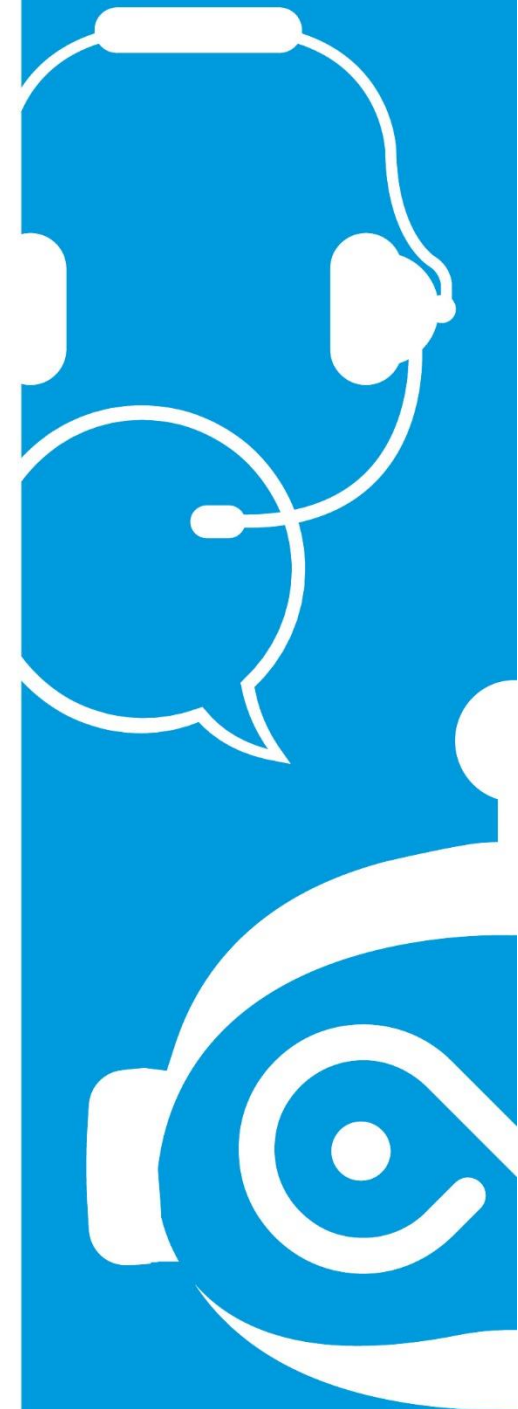




SRH MATERIAL ONLINE: USER-GENERATED CONTENT

What is it?

User-generated content (or UGC) is any interactive content, created by people that they themselves post online. This **digital phenomenon** can be linked with brand-related content that is created by customers and brand advocates, as opposed to an employee or official representative of that brand, but also can provide information about SRH that is created by 'ordinary' people (as opposed to content created by experts), including posts on social media, blog articles, videos, podcasts or sharing experiences on forums.



How can it impact the sexual and reproductive health of youth?

Youth often turn to online media to seek information about SRH because it is quick, easily accessible and provides the opportunity to look for information anonymously. Moreover, online media provide the opportunity to access and share a variety of different sources of information, different opinions and other youth's experiences.¹

Viewing and obtaining information with the help of UGC brings a variety of information to young people, which can provide them with clues for a broader and further knowledge of the field or it can initiate a conversation, both with peers and with parents or other adults, about SRH education. In an anonymous and safe environment, they can gain a sense of belonging by being exposed to UGC that brings similar feelings or experiences to their own. This can increase their confidence to be aware of these feelings and talk about them.

Because of UGC that appears in online sources such as social media, young people can actively participate and highlight a topic of interest which they may not want to express in real life due to prejudice. By seeing a wide variety of other people's opinions and experiences, most peer-created, youth can deepen their knowledge, acquire new clues and questions, and can more easily and actively then turn to other, more professional sources of obtaining information, such as expert opinions.

¹ Doornwaard et al., 2017



What are some ways in which youth can be supported?

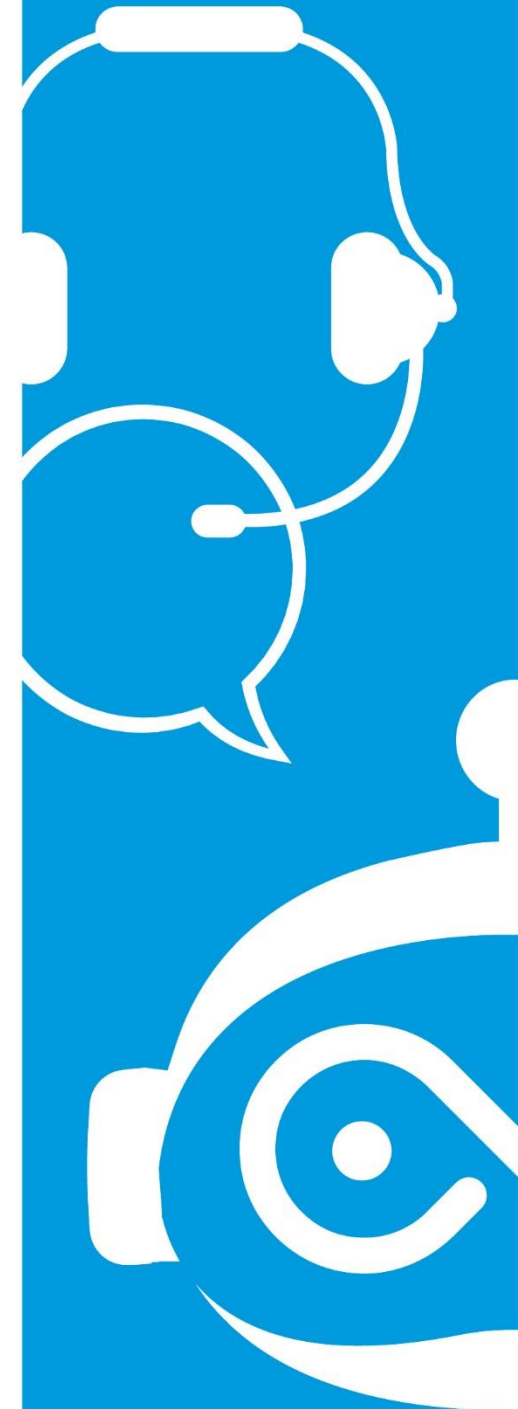
- Inform young people that all obtained information should be critically evaluated and, if necessary, checked with other, relevant sources. The abundance of information available online makes it difficult to distinguish unreliable from reliable sources of information; moreover, UGC is often inconsistent with scientific evidence or clinical practice ² and can lead to unwanted actions.
- Remind young people that UGC is generated by 1 person's opinions. This means that all he/she posts online cannot be proven as fact and the indisputable truth, regardless of his/her popularity and/or positive reputation. Being exposed to different opinions can broaden their horizons, but they need to be careful to always keep their own opinion on which choices are right for them.
- Inform young people about the risk of viewing sexual content that is developmentally inappropriate (e.g., pornography) or one that presents a risk of child exploitation, such as grooming content or messaging.

Related digital phenomena/tools:

See sheets:

- SRH material online: Expert opinions
- SRH material online: Opening a dialogue between parents and youth
- Misconceptions and misinformation: About digital literacy

² Chou, Prestin, Lyons, & Wen, 2013



Further reading:

- Doornwaard, Suzan M., et al. "Dutch Adolescents' Motives, Perceptions, and Reflections toward Sex-Related Internet Use: Results of a Web-Based Focus-Group Study." *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 54, no. 8, 2016, pp. 1038–1050, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2016.1255873>.
- Kanuga, Mansi, and Walter D. Rosenfeld. "Adolescent Sexuality and the Internet: The Good, the Bad, and the URL." *Journal of Pediatric and Adolescent Gynecology*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2004, pp. 117–124, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpag.2004.01.015>.
- Nikkelen, Sanne W., et al. "Sexuality Education in the Digital Era: Intrinsic and Extrinsic Predictors of Online Sexual Information Seeking among Youth." *The Journal of Sex Research*, vol. 57, no. 2, 2019, pp. 189–199, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00224499.2019.1612830>.

