DANDELION

Reaching younger audiences

The general public represents a diverse audience that SSH research can have a huge impact on. Many people want to be made aware of the latest results, facts, figures and solutions offered by EU-funded projects, while most will certainly benefit if those results lead to positive action in terms of social policy or commercial innovation.

SSH researchers in particular have a responsibility to keep the wider public informed about their work, so that people can confidently and actively push for change or even alter their behaviour for the common good. But it can be hard for researchers to attract people's attention when there is so much information out there and they are vying for attention amongst multiple channels and crowded spaces. Attracting the attention of younger people is particularly challenging and yet they are often the most important target audience for SSH researchers.

Why target younger people?

Younger audiences are, first and foremost, the future, and because of this they are an important group for SSH projects to communicate with so they can make informed decisions about what will affect them in later life. They are also some of the most easily influenced and opinionated groups in society and most likely to take action when they are given a tangible vision of how things can change. By communicating effectively with younger generations, projects can have a greater impact.

What?

As well as packaging information about research in ways that are most likely to appeal to a younger audience, using pictures, infographics and bitesize pieces of information, DANDELION also focused on gamification as one of the best ways of communicating with younger people.

Gamification is the process of using game-like elements for business or marketing strategies and, as DANDELION has shown, research communication. Transferring information using game-like scenarios works by triggering emotions that are linked to positive user experience, and it can be easily adapted to attract younger audiences of different ages.

Using games as a means of dissemination puts the user or player in control, and younger audiences in particular are more likely to retain information if they feel they are in control of what they're learning, rather than being forced to learn.

Gamification also works because it reinforces good behaviour by using rewards such as going up a level or gaining points when a correct answer is given.

This also adds a level of competitiveness, which younger audiences thrive off in schools and against their peers, making them more likely to understand results in order to win. At the same time, they are pushing themselves further and harder in the effort to achieve more.

Gamification works well with younger generations who have grown up in an environment where video and computer games are the norm. They are familiar with getting lost in roleplay worlds and exploring an altered state. By giving them the freedom to explore, projects are more likely to create intrigue and excitement and therefore more likely to communicate their message effectively.

Games also give players a little rush and they can become almost addictive. If done correctly, projects will be able to retain their younger audiences, making it easier for them to inform them about the importance of the information they are receiving both for themselves and for the world as a whole, and this can encourage them to act on what they have learnt.

Dandelion examples

The DANDELION project developed and launched two social games to show other projects how they can use gamification to reach and engage younger audiences with pressing social challenges in the EU.

The first game, **EU@work!** was developed in collaboration with two other EU-funded projects to test the knowledge EU citizens have of unemployment issues in Europe. It was designed to increase awareness of the issues many young people face in European countries today.

The second game called **GueSSH!** was designed and developed to increase the awareness EU citizens have about relevant SSH challenges, and aimed to dispel several myths about some of the challenges society faces in terms of migration and shifting attitudes to democracy and the rise of the far right.

Both these games represented an innovative way to convey content through a series of questions presented through text, images and graphics, with the correct answer being explained afterwards and links to resources provided for continued learning.
Attractive design, excellent graphics, engaging questions and short pieces of factual information all offered in the casual context of a quiz or a game, is an excellent method for communicating complex research information gathered in a project. Furthermore, by building trust with younger audiences, projects can see people repeatedly visit these games, or other project communication materials, in the future.

Just as DANDELION has done, **projects can create their own games** by collaborating with other EU projects in order to collect wider-reaching research results, share ideas on innovative content and design, and disseminate the final product to a broader audience. By including input from other experts in the field, games can also hold more significance as younger audiences can see they are a trusted source of information, something more likely to encourage them to take further action.

Methodology

DANDELION's examples were based on two Q&A type games that were appropriate for the younger audience they were targeting and the more detailed information they were trying to communicate. However, gamification incorporates a host of other types of games that can be adapted to be more suitable for specific younger age groups whilst still applying game design principles to motivate and inspire learners.

For example, there are games that have levels which the player needs to progress through in order to achieve something. There are simulation games that recreate real-world scenarios or situations, and there are multiplayer activities that make gaming more peer-centred.

Games can also be used by teachers or presenters as a springboard into wider discussion about a topic, using the interactive and visual nature of the questioning as a way of eliciting a variety of responses from the class or audience. As such, they become valuable presentation tools.

Whichever type of game projects wish to create, successful learning games seamlessly integrate communication into the experience, so the younger audience is more aware of having fun than learning.

Games are not the only method of reaching younger audiences, however. Projects can successfully disseminate their work through opinion leaders such as famous bloggers or YouTubers who are trusted and well-regarded among their peers. Videos are also a short, concise and creative way of keeping younger audiences engaged (see the DANDELION video guide).

Establishing contact with relevant youth groups and creating discussions and workshops about specific topics (see the DANDELION guide on events), as well as organising events with live streaming and video recording to create online videos are also effective methods for targeting younger people.

Ultimately, what you are trying to achieve is a sense of community through casual dissemination, where people can invite their peers to join in with them and engage in controversial topics that lead to discussion and action.