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# HUMANITARIAN ENGAGEMENT IN ADOLESCENCE:

A Qualitative Study of Humanitarian Engagement in Western Adolescence  
with a Focus on Online Engagement



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## ABSTRACT

This master thesis is an exploratory research of humanitarian engagement in adolescence with a focus on adolescents' understandings of online engagement. As such, this study attempts to construct knowledge and present different perspectives on why Western adolescents engage in humanitarianism and how they understand online engagement. This is researched and discussed on the basis of a quality study of exploratory online research and twelve semi-structured interviews. The exploratory online research contributes an intercultural angle as adolescents (mostly from Europe and America) were asked on their opinion about humanitarianism and online engagement for adolescents. The twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted at a Danish boarding school with adolescents between the ages of fifteen and seventeen.

It was found that the adolescents in this research engage in humanitarianism in a multitude of different ways, both individually and collectively, and that their level of interest and engagement in humanitarianism is dependent upon several different factors. Furthermore, there were various perspectives on what humanitarianism entailed, as well as, differing opinions on global versus local efforts.

Furthermore, it was found that there are different perspectives on the importance of engaging in humanitarianism in adolescence and whether or not adolescence is a time for different priorities. As such, even though a majority of the participating adolescents consider humanitarianism important – both in society and some personally as well, there is no definitive reason as to why or why not adolescents engage in humanitarianism.

Similarly there was found no definitive understanding of online engagement among the adolescents; however, there was an agreement among the majority of adolescents in this research that online engagement is considered an alternative or supplementing method of engaging in humanitarianism, which is especially beneficial in reaching an adolescent audience and creating awareness about humanitarian issues as the use of Social Media platforms have become such an integrated part of adolescent culture.

However, a distinction or trend was uncovered, which showed that level of interest in humanitarianism among adolescents is greatly influenced especially by institutional experiences. This was evident in the adolescents from the Global stream at Dronninglund Efterskole, in which the majority chose the stream to broaden and widen their horizons, but gained much more personally and emotionally than expected, as well as, developing a greater interest in humanitarian work. Similarly, the adolescents' upbringing as well as family dynamics also influences their level of interest and engagement, as some of the adolescents who had been encouraged throughout childhood to have an interest in humanitarianism, most often chose to further that interest. In contrast, the adolescents who had not been influenced either by institutional experiences or their family did not have an interest in humanitarianism to the same extent.

The themes and concepts covered in this research is in no way definite, and, thus, further research could be done in order to construct more diverse and deeper knowledge about humanitarian engagement in adolescence. For example a deeper understanding about cultural differences in adolescent humanitarian engagement could for example be achieved by interviewing a more culturally diverse backdrop of adolescents, which could be useful to draw a better or more diverse picture of humanitarian engagement in adolescence.

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