

Net Children Go Mobile: European Qualitative Research Results

Aims

This report aims to identify the perceptions and perspectives of children, parents, teachers and children regarding adoption, use, opportunities and risks associated with use of smartphones and tablets.

Key Findings

Adoption and use

- Children experience smartphones and tablets at a younger age than ownership figures show, but this often only involves using limited features like games on their parent's smartphones.
- The cost of using smartphones, time limitations imposed upon when they can be used, rules restricting use in schools and fear of phones being stolen in public, all help to constrain the use of these devices. This qualifies claims that children, especially younger children, can use them "anytime/anywhere" and that they are always "at hand." In practice this is often not the case.
- The locations where smartphones and tablets are used most by children is in the home, safe places with free wifi, and not on the move.

Changes and consequences

- Many children believe they are more sociable since having a smartphone, especially because these can be "at hand" and some apps like WhatsApp enable free of charge and group communication.
- However, some children report being annoyed by having to be constantly available to peers, even though they conform to the social pressure to be "always on" to varying degrees.
- Constant communication from peers is particularly criticised by adults, especially parents. Children also discussed being distracted by constantly receiving notifications from chats etc.

Risks

- Children recognise that many of the general risks they experience online also apply to smartphones and tablets. But they point out that mobile devices can enhance risks or pose them in new forms because of the increased opportunity for communication, the speed with which one can react and reply, or because of the small size and portability of the devices.
- Risks specific to mobile devices include worries about losing such expensive devices or having them stolen, the potential misuse of the geo-location function, and having to deal with hidden financial costs of apps.
- Children now come up with preventive measures to deal with the consequences of the omnipresence of mobile devices, such as leaving the device in another room, turning it into "silent mode" etc.

Parental mediation

- Parents are ambivalent towards smartphones, as they were with mobile phones before: Smartphones are viewed as a means for parents to call and check up on children, but children can interact with peers out of sight of their parents.
- Many parents note that it is more difficult to monitor their children's internet use by checking the device history because of the portability of these devices, their more private nature (compared to a PC), and (some) children's greater skills in using these technologies.
- Rules regarding place and time of use of mobile devices are still perceived by parents as efficient ways to regulate children's use.

Teachers and schools

- Rules about having and using smartphones in schools vary by country, by school, and also by the age of the child.
- Most of the problematic situations related to smartphones that teachers have to cope with relate to privacy risks, or to the production and exchange of negative user generated content.

Methodology

The research involved a qualitative study of children, their parents, teachers and others working with young people in nine European countries: Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Spain and the UK. 55 focus groups (N = 219) and 107 interviews (N = 108) were conducted with children aged 9-16, and 40 focus groups (N = 180) and 44 interviews (N = 50) were conducted with adults across the nine countries. Children were recruited through at least 3 different schools and youth centres, and adults through schools, parent / teacher organisations etc. Data collection occurred between January and September 2014.

Background

The Net Children Go Mobile Project was co-funded by the Safer Internet Programme to investigate how the changing conditions of internet access and use - namely, mobile internet and mobile convergent media - bring greater, lesser or newer risks to children's online safety using quantitative and qualitative methods.

Source The Net Children Go Mobile Network

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Full report Haddon, L. and Vincent, J. (Eds.) (2014). *European children and their carers' understanding of use, risks and safety issues relating to convergent mobile media*. Report D4.1. Milano: Educatt. Available at <http://www.netchildrengomobile.eu/reports>

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