Technology and Children’s Screen-Based Activities in the UK: The Story of the Millennium So Far

# Details

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1761 children in 2000 (3434 diary days) and 1134 children in 2015 (2227 diary days); participants are 8–18 years old and in full-time education

# Abstract

Much has changed over recent years in the technology that children
use in their daily lives. The impact of these changes on children's time in screenbased
activities has been the source of much debate and concern. Yet we know
very little about change in children's daily time in screen-based activities,
including their time using devices such as smartphones and tablets. Using data
from two nationally representative UK Time Use Surveys 2000–01 and 2014–15,
this paper presents a detailed study of change in children's (8–18 years) daily
time in screen-based activities (TV, videogames, and computers), together with
the latest data on their time using computers and mobile devices throughout the
day. We find that children's screen-based activities increased by around half an
hour between 2000 and 2015, but that this was concentrated among boys who
increased their time playing videogames. Dwarfing this, however, was the additional
time children spent using computers and mobile devices when engaging in
other activities throughout the day, especially for girls. Multivariate analysis of
factors associated with children's screen-based activities revealed that gender
differences in children's time playing videogames widened significantly over this
period, while socio-economic differences in children's screen-based activities
remained fixed. This study highlights how children are combining old and new
technologies in their daily lives, and points to issues for future developments in
the measurement of children's engagement in screen-based activities to aid in
assessing the impact of technology on children's well-being.

# Outcome

"Between 2000 and 2015, the total time children spent watching TV, playing
videogames and using computers increased significantly. Although children’s time
watching TV decreased, by a relatively small amount, it was more than offset by
increases in time playing videogames and using computers. These results suggest that
we are some way off witnessing the demise of TV as the major focus of children’s
screen-based activity" (Mullan, 2018: 1796). There is also an "increase in the time children report using devices such as smartphones and tablets, as well as computers, when engaging in other activities. Turning to factors associated with children’s screen-based activities, we found that
boys spent more time than girls playing video games. There is nothing especially novel
about this finding in itself, but we also found that the gender gap widened between
2000 and 2015. Added to this, we showed that gender differences in children’s screen-based
activities were concentrated in time playing video games. In fact, there was no
gender difference in total time watching TVor using computers in either 2000 or 2015.
Consequently, the increase in screen-based activities (including videogames) between
2000 and 2015 was significantly greater for boys than for girls. This was, however,
counteracted to an extent, though not fully, by the fact that girls spent more time using
devices when engaging in other activities." (Mullan, 2018: 1797). "We found evidence of significant and persistent socioeconomic differences in
children’s screen-based activities. Children with highly-educated mothers spent less
time watching TVand playing videogames, whereas children in families with no access
to a car spent significantly more time in these activities than the majority who did have
access to a car. That these effects were found at both time points is evidence of
persistent (albeit not worsening) socioeconomic differences in children’s screen-based
activities. In addition, we found that children with a mother who has a degree spent
more time using digital devices when engaging in other activities, especially when
studying, highlighting socioeconomic differences in the way in which children are
incorporating technology into their time in other activities. This provides further
support for the contention that the digital divide has less to do with access, and more
to do with the way in which children are using technology and the internet" (Mullan, 2018: 1797).