Young Children (0-8) and Digital Technology - A qualitative study across Europe

# Details

## Year

2018

## DOI

http://dx.doi.org/10.2760/294383

## Issued

2018

## Language

English

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## Type

Report and working paper

## Topics

* Social mediation
* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Literacy and skills
* Digital and socio-cultural environment

## Sample

The data set comes from semi-conducted interviews and observations in families with children aged 0-8, respectively
10 in Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania,
Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, and United Kingdom, eight families in Switzerland, 11 families in each of Romania and Spain, 20 families in Belgium and 24 in Russia, amounting to 234 families across 21 countries in total. It resulted in a total sample of 400 parents and
198 children from the target group aged 6-7 (102 boys, 96 girls), 21 interviewed children under
the age of 6 (10 boys, 11 girls) and 25 interviewed children aged 8 (17 boys, 8 girls).

## Implications For Parents About

* Parental practices / parental mediation
* Parental digital literacy
* Parenting guidance / support

## Implications For Educators About

Professional development

## Implications For Policy Makers About

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Industry

# Abstract

It only takes witnessing a few interactions within modern western families to realize how much the experience of childhood has changed. The change comes from different winds blowing on today’s families’ time but certainly, the use of digital technologies peaks out and its impacts on childhood, education, learning and safety has been at question over the last years. Since a very early age, video watching and gaming on a variety of internet-connected devices are among children's favourite activities. Parents see digital technologies as positive and unavoidable, if not necessary, but at the same time, find managing their use challenging. They perceive digital technologies as something that needs to be carefully regulated and controlled. They would appreciate advice on fostering children’s online skills and safety. The document reports on results of a cross-national analysis building on data coming from 234 family interviews with both children and parents, carried out from September 2014 until April 2017 in 21 countries. It exposes the key findings regarding first children’s usage, perceptions of the digital technologies and their digital skills in the home context but also on parents’ perceptions, attitudes, and strategies. Beside the cross-national analysis, a dedicated section provides contextualized snapshots of the study results at national level. It then takes a close up on 38 families in seven countries in which researchers came for a second interview distant of one year in which they focused on monitoring change of context, children and parents’ perceptions, attitudes, and strategies over time. Conclusion reflect on the potential benefits, risks and consequences associated with their (online) interactions with digital technologies and provide recommendations to policymakers, industry, parents and carers.

# Outcome

" Young children generally have a varied and balanced life integrating sports, outdoor
play and creative activities in which digital activities play only one part. Nonetheless, they
are daily consumers of audiovisual media services (AVMS) products, (smart) TV, video on
demand (VOD) and games, through smartphones, tablets, video-game consoles, laptop and
more rarely PC’s. Most popular are small screens (although smart TV is striking back) that
allow mobility and have 24/7 availability, ownership and autonomy of choice and use.
• Children have their first contact with digital technologies and screens at a very
early age (below 2), usually through their parents’ devices, which are not tailored for them
in the first place.
• Young children learn very quickly how to interact with digital devices by observing the behaviour of adults and older children. [...]
• For young children, digital technology is useful for four main purposes: (1) leisure entertainment; (2) information and learning; (3) creation and (4) communication.
[...]
• Across Europe, young children learn to interact with digital technology and build
their digital skills and competences mainly in the home context, influenced by:
(1) the type of digital devices and content they have access to;
(2) their own interests and needs; and
(3) the level and typology of support and engagement they can benefit from their
parents

(Chaudron et al., 2018, pp.15 - 16)