Global Kids Online South Africa: barriers, opportunities and risks. A glimpse into South African children’s internet use and online activities

# Details

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## Authors

Phyfer J.;Burton P.;Leoschut L.

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## Topics

* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Risks and harms
* Literacy and skills
* Wellbeing
* Online safety and policy regulation
* Social mediation

## Sample

Data collection consisted of qualitative and quantitative components, with children (aged nine to seventeen) and their parents being sampled. In the qualitative component, focus groups discussions were conducted, with seven child and four parent focus groups taking place. A total 49 children and 20 parents were interviewed in the qualitative component of the study. In the quantitative component of the study 913 children and 532 parents were interviewed in their homes using questionnaires. The study sampled children and parents who used the internet, and children and parents who did not

## Implications For Parents About

## Implications For Educators About

Digital citizenship

## Implications For Policy Makers About

# Abstract

The impact of the internet on the lives of children is a significant concern globally, both in terms of opportunities it provides and its potential to put children in risky situations. Understanding how these opportunities and risks interact, especially in contextually nuanced ways, is essential to ensuring that children are able to maximise the benefits of these information and communication technologies (ICTs) to their lives. While much work has been done to delineate these dynamics and develop appropriate policies in the global North, the nature of children’s ICTs use in the global South is less well understood.

The study had two objectives:
a. to pilot and test appropriate qualitative and quantitative research tools exploring
children’s access to, use of and experiences of ICTs and social media, to be used in
lower income countries, and
b. to gather rigorously obtained and cross-nationally comparable evidence on the
 nature of child internet use in South Africa.
In addition, the study explored South African parents’ internet use and to what extent parents mediate children’s online experiences.

Five key content areas were investigated in this study: access, opportunities and practices,
skills, risks and vulnerabilities, and protective factors. The findings for each of these sections are outlined below:
-In terms of access to the internet, of the children were interviewed, 70.4% used the internet, while 29.6% did not.
-In terms of the opportunities children accessed online, most child participants (95.6%) reported that they sometimes or always had fun when they went online.
-Nearly two in three child participants (59.4%) stated that they knew a lot of things about using the internet and one in two said that they knew more about using the internet than their parents (52.1%), suggesting that a majority were confident in their technical skills.
-The children were asked detailed questions on a range of potential risks they faced online.
Nearly half of the participants (45.6%) thought that there were things on the internet that bother or upset people their age and a little over one in four (27.1%) had personally been bothered by something on the internet in the past year.

# Outcome

Five key content areas were investigated in this study: access, opportunities and practices, skills, risks and vulnerabilities, and protective factors. The findings for each of these sections are outlined below.

Access:
-"Access to the internet was found to be greatly influenced by the age of the child, with
94.2% of children using the internet by the time they got to fifteen to seventeen years old. This access was not mediated by cost as much as one might expect in a global South context, but rather by adults, who played the greatest role in determining when children could start using the internet and how often they used it once they were online" (Phyfer, Burton Leoschut, 2016, 75).
-Majority of the participants accessed the internet via smartphones.

Opportunities and practices:
-"The quantitative and qualitative components of the study suggested that the devices children used and the high monetary cost of internet access imposed limitations on the extent to which children could explore these opportunities, or access more sophisticated ones" (Phyfer, Burton Leoschut, 2016, 76).

Skills:
-Most participants reported know a lot about the internet and found themselves to have some basic technical skill
-"While children in this study were also confident that their technical skills surpassed their parents’, the findings show that those parents who used the internet were by and large just as technically skillful as their children. The implication of this is that parents may be able to provide children with more technical advice than they currently assume they can" (Phyfer, Burton Leoschut, 2016, 76).

Risks:
-Most of the participants did not report being bothered by anything online in the last year
-However, the participants did report engaging in risky behaviors, like sharing personal information to strangers or being exposed to distressing content.

Vulnerabilities and protective factors:
-"This study found that parents tended to take a more passive approach to mediating their children’s internet use, and in fact, appraised themselves as being slightly less involved than their children rated them as being" (Phyfer, Burton Leoschut, 2016, 76).
-Most parents wanted more advice on how to support their children's internet use
-The children reported that their teachers were not encouraging their student's internet use and that it was not part of their learning experience at school
-"A minority also reported getting help from their friends when something bothered them online or guidance around internet safety from friends. That said, elsewhere in the findings,
specifically in the risks section, the majority of participants named their friends as the people they spoke to when they were exposed to an online risk" (Phyfer, Burton Leoschut, 2016, 76).