Media Representation of Children’s Privacy in the Context of the Use of “Smart” Toys and Commercial Data Collection

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* Digital and socio-cultural environment

## Sample

Discourse analysis

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

## Implications For Educators About

Digital citizenship

## Implications For Policy Makers About

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Industry

# Abstract

The growing use of “smart” toys has made it increasingly important to understand the various privacy implications of their use by children and families. The article is a case study of how the risks to young children’s privacy, posed by the commercial data collection of producers of “smart” toys, were represented in the media. Relying on a content analysis of media coverage in twelve European countries and Australia collected during the Christmas season of 2016/2017, and reporting on a follow-up study in selected countries during the Christmas season of 2017/2018, our article illustrates how the issue of children’s privacy risks was dealt with in a superficial manner, leaving relevant stakeholders without substantive information about the issue; and with minimum representation of children’s voices in the coverage itself.

# Outcome

At the core of this project was an international comparative analysis of the public discourse on smart toys in Europe (Germany, Finland, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Malta, Austria, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, United Kingdom) and Australia. A special focus was on the age group of 0 to 8 year olds; in addition, public discourses with regard to older children and adolescents were also analyzed. The project was divided into two parts. The first part of this project was the analysis of public reporting on smart toys and the Internet of Things in relation to children in Europe. A survey was carried out between November 2016 and January 2017 and the data were evaluated in spring and summer 2017. In the second part of the project, the focus was on the German-speaking area. A second wave of surveys with an identical research design will take place between November 2017 and January 2018 in order to compare the data accordingly and to be able to determine changes and shifts in the public discourse. The data analysis took place in spring and summer 2018 and was compared with results from the international partner countries. In spring 2019, another survey was carried out with the same research design, with the aim of a longitudinal study that enables a comparison over three years. After the project has been completed, the annual surveys will be continued in Germany and Austria.
This publication highlights the relevance of commercial data collection and respective implications for various stakeholders.