

Zero to Eight Report – Very Young Children and Their Internet Use

Aims

There have been noticeable increases in the internet participation rate of children and young people in all EU countries. However, very young children (0-8) are showing particularly increased patterns of internet use. Tweens' (9-12 year olds) usage patterns now resemble those of teenagers five to six years ago, and younger school-aged children's usage is increasing to the equivalent of tweens' previous use. Pre-schoolers are going online too, and most babies under the age of two in developed countries have an online presence (or digital footprint). This report aims to identify recent relevant evidence regarding young children of eight years and under and their increasing engagement with the internet. It evaluates the quality of this evidence, the research gaps and the implications for policy.

Key Findings

- Over the last five to six years there has been a substantial increase in internet usage by children under nine years old. This increase is not uniform across countries but seems to follow usage patterns among older age cohorts – in countries where more children overall use the internet, they also go online younger.
- The substantial increase in usage by very young children has not yet been matched by research exploring the benefits and risks of their online engagement, so there are many gaps in our knowledge.
- Children under nine years old enjoy a variety of online activities, including watching videos, playing games, searching for information, doing their homework and socialising within children's virtual worlds. The range of activities increases with age.
- It has not been established that children under nine years old have the capacity to engage with the internet in a safe and beneficial manner in all circumstances, especially when it comes to this age group socialising online, either within age-appropriate virtual worlds or as under-aged participants in sites intended for teenagers and adults (Facebook, YouTube etc.).
- Video sharing sites are popular with children in this age group and are one of the first sites very young children visit. As such, the ease with which children can access inappropriate video content is of concern.
- There is an emerging trend for very young children (toddlers and pre-schoolers) to use internet connected devices, especially touchscreen tablets and smartphones. This is likely to result in an increasing number of very young children having access to the internet, along with a probable increase in exposure to risks associated with such internet use.
- The variety of internet connected devices and apps available today risks compromising the privacy and safety of young children. Different operating environments complicate the use of security and safety settings on individual devices, and the numerous applications (apps) available for children tend not to

disclose the company's data collection and sharing practices. Nor do they usually provide easy-to-use opt-out options for parents or children.

- Children's digital footprints are now taking shape from very young ages. Some parents are writing blogs, and parents and grandparents regularly post photographs and videos of babies and children. These digital footprints are created for children who are too young to understand or consent (or who may not even be born, if their parents post ultrasound scans). Children's future ability to find, reclaim or delete material posted by others is uncertain.

Methodology

EU Kids Online has examined children's engagement with the internet within the 9-16 year old age range. Since zero to eight year olds are outside that age range, this report does not present findings from original research by the EU Kids Online network. However, the EU Kids Online's European Evidence Database, which collates other research on European children's online activities, risks and safety, indicates that there is a growing body of published research regarding children under nine years old. This report reviews this growing literature to draw together what is already known, or not known, regarding the online experiences of children under nine years old.

Background

EU Kids Online has spent seven years investigating 9-16 year olds' engagement with the internet, focusing on the benefits and risks of children's internet use. It has produced a series of reports of theory, findings, policy recommendations and methodological best practice guidance, all of which can be found at www.eukidsonline.net. One key resource is the European Evidence Database, to be found at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/media@lse/research/EUKidsOnline/DB/home.aspx>. This makes freely available information about 1200+ research studies conducted in Europe. Based on this resource, it has been possible to examine the experiences of much younger children than had been researched before EU Kids Online began its work in 2006, thereby meeting the critical need for information about the internet-related behaviours of zero to eight year olds.

Source The EU Kids Online network

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Full report This is available at <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/52630/>

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