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Understanding the Internet - the place to go or the way to get there

Young children and digital media in everyday life

Johansen, Stine Liv; Larsen, Malene Charlotte

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Understanding the Internet - the place to go or the way to get there.

Young children and digital media in everyday life

Danish children are among the heaviest users of media and digital technologies in Europe. This paper presents the findings from a recent, qualitative study, which seeks to investigate how Danish children between the ages of 0 and 8 (with a special focus on 6-to-7-year-olds) use and engage in activities with digital media in the home.

The study is part of a cross-national, European study, initiated by the JRC at The European Commission (based on a pilot study, Chaudron, 2015). Overall research questions covered: How do Danish children perceive and understand the technologies that they use on a daily basis? How do they engage with these technologies? What are their preferred activities and media content? How do their parents feel about their use of technology? And what benefits and challenges do parents associate with their young children's online activities?

Findings from the Danish part of the qualitative study, where ten children aged 5-6 and their parents were interviewed and children observed in the home, suggest that children are active users of digital media, most prominently tablets, and that these platforms have to a wide extent taken over the role of cabled, broadcast television.

The study points to specifically interesting issues related to children's conceptualisations of 'Internet' and 'online', which differs from that of their parents and older children (Livingstone et.al., 2013). Children in this age group may be aware if they have Wi-Fi access or not, but their understanding of the Internet is very limited. Even when asked directly, they have difficulties coming up with an answer.

The paper will discuss these issues in the light of the overall focus on digital technologies in the everyday life of first grade school children. What does digital media use look like seen through the eyes of children? What is meaningful and important to them - and why? What are the implications for digital literacy as well as for rules and regulations in the area? What role does parents play - and what guidance and knowledge do they need?

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Authors

Malene Charlotte Larsen, Associate Professor, Ph.D., Aalborg University
@: malenel@hum.aau.dk
Tel: +45 9940 7260

Stine Liv Johansen, Associate Professor, Ph.D., Aarhus University
@: stineliv@cc.au.dk
Tel: +45 8716 2029