

Chapter 8

New Communication Technologies: A Focus Group Study About Children

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ABSTRACT

From the onset of the digital dawn, visually constructed new communication technologies, in particular social networks, have occupied a significant place in the lives of children. With increasing compactness of digital technologies, its availability increased also and helped social networks to a central role in the lives of adults and children as well. The shrinking of technology enabled most families to afford a tablet for their children who used the technology for starting an active social network life. This process brought with it endless debates about the actual control conditions of the children's usage and those conditions that were advisable. This study utilized in-depth interviews with six parents of children in the 4-7 age group, consisting a focus group to define the motives of adults who enabled their children with access to "digital technologies" and "social networks."

INTRODUCTION

The development of internet technology empowered the new media to engulf all aspects of lives for most people like the indispensable and unavoidable many arms of an octopus. The advertising sector professionally exploited and transformed capitalism into a new era of widespread consumer culture. The following transformation made people who could or would not use digital technology feel like they lost touch with the times, while with the ever decreasing age of users, babies are born into these technologies with lullabies from the smartphone. A severe generation gap developed between those who grew up with this technology and those who had to learn it as grownups. In particular parents who acquired this technology after adolescence, are facing the dilemma of whether –or how- to protect or not to protect their children from the onslaught of unlimited knowledge.

This dilemma of parents who themselves are consistently using the new communication technologies rises the debate about the conditions the children are exposed and what would actually be advisable.

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While parents are adopting a virtual lifestyle that encompasses nearly all aspects of their lives, it seems unavoidable that their children begin to learn life in the same ways. Particularly the attraction of products that are developed with a visual technology is appealing to the perception level of children. Thus, these digital products affirm a central role in the lives of the children as they grow with it and that in turn, induces much debate about the safe usage of the internet and the new media for children.

This study tries to find out the motives of the six mothers who have been interviewed as a focus group, about whether and how they allowed their children to use the new communication technologies and to which degree they found the Internet safe.

BACKGROUND

Scholars who dealt with the relationship of the new media technologies and children, note that children now were watching television less than previously and were spending more time in front of the PC. Actually this state has produced a new “Net Generation” who led their lives through digital technologies (Aydoğan, 2017: 604-603). An example is the animated series of *Pepee* which was presented as an example for content that successfully mediated Turkish culture. A search of *Pepee* on Youtube yielded 8.380.000 different results with the first of them viewed 41.844.745 times (Youtube, 2018) which indicates the significance of social networks for the lives of children. The education, leisure time activities, plays, etc. are supported widely by digital technologies.

Under the light of these developments, The Ministry for National Education developed the FATİH (Turkish abbreviation for *Movement for Increasing Opportunities and Improving Technologies*) projects for schools with the aim of increasing technology usage in schools, achieving opportunity equity in education and training, and improving technologies used in schools. As part of the project that began with the pilot distribution of 13.800 tablets in 2011 and continued the following years, reaching 737.800 in 2014. In 2015, this figure almost doubled to 1.437.800 units. (Fatih Projesi, n.d.). The Project is a good indication how the government attaches importance to new communication technologies in relation to the lives of children.

On the other hand, while nearly all aspects of our lives are affected by the new communication technologies, the uncontrollability of these Technologies has developed society-wide sensitivities in regard to the “children and technology” relationship. Particularly the prevalence of new media use has given rise to concerns about children being exposed to media products which can be seen by the increase in scholarly research on the issue.

Tipeez Children Media Research Group has conducted in 2016 a study on the internet usage of children (MediaCat, 2017). The Turkish section of the study consisted of nearly 1000 participants 60% of these were boys and 40% were girls. Notable findings included those:

- 50% of the children possessed a smartphone and 48% possessed a personal computer.
- 39% of the children used the internet 7 hours daily while only 35% of parents controlled their children during this activity. The favorite activity of the children during summer holidays was surfing on the internet and their favorite activity during internet usage was playing online games.
- The social media of choice was Youtube and the main usage in Youtube was viewing game related content.

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