

Chapter 6

An Empirical Study about the Use of the Internet and Computer Games among Croatian Children

Sanja Tatalović Vorkapić

University of Rijeka, Croatia

Elma Polanec

Kindergarten “Little Sparow”, Croatia

ABSTRACT

This book chapter is dedicated to theoretical and empirical review of media among children. Empirical results about computer presence in family homes, IT literacy with different computer programmes among parents, as well children are described. In addition, attitudes of parents and preschool and school-aged children about using Internet and computer games as well as attitudes toward the Internet violence are analysed. The results of games types that children play as well as frequency of playing and children's emotions evoked by them are shown. Finally, the results about presence of significant others as well as their conversation with children are shown. All of the above are interestingly studied in the frame of correlation analysis to research relations between some socio-demographic variables (sex, age, the level of education, and presence of computer in family home), so certain future research guidelines can be established.

INTRODUCTION

Somehow I was always attracted people in different disciplines - psychology, sociology, anthropology - things are looked at comprehensively. They are intrigued me – who stood to the side and tried to answer the question. What is this really happening to human behaviour that outside sometimes seems so confusing and hard to understand? Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1990)

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Digital world, internet and computer games have become great and inevitable in the life of preschool and school aged children. Nevertheless, parents could ask themselves how it influences on his/her child. A lot of questions are asked: How does it influence on child's health?; How to get a child familiar with a computer,?; Is there time limitation in playing computer games?; Does a child get access to some networks not provided for their age?; Is a child exposed to any internet violence?; What about the content of computer games?; What kind of emotions child experience at the same time?. To all these questions, there is an interesting question about difference in perception between parents and children. In any way, existing digital age inflicts new situations and requirements to children as well as parents and experts in the purpose of educational work with children (Tatalović Vorkapić & Milovanović, 2013). Therefore, it is essential to implement systematic and continuous empirical research in the purpose of more adequate adoption to modern world and maximal preservation of psychological health of children, as well as happy childhood. By putting aside their shared computer time, parents can give their children the chance to develop the full range of skills—technical and social—they'll need to succeed in our digital age. Parents can also help ensure children not to overload themselves on screen time, and buffer the flow of stress chemicals in their over stimulated systems. Despite parental fretting, technology isn't going away, and simply cloistering our children from it is neither beneficial nor practical (Letourneau & Joschko, 2014).

Child's free time is increasingly devoted to playing different indoor games, among them computer games. Dr. Clements (2007) determined that children in the early 2000s, as compared to a generation ago:

1. Spend less time playing outdoors;
2. Participate in different activities outdoors (e.g. fewer street games and more organized youth sports); and
3. Participate in more indoor than outdoor play activities.

Furthermore, Dr. Donald Roberts and his colleagues (2005) and Rideout and Hamel (2006) investigate media in the lives of children 6 months to 6 years of age, as well as in the lives of 8 to 18 years old. These studies were conducted in association with the Kaiser Family Foundation and involved various research techniques. Both studies took place during the school year and measured recreational (non-school) using of media, including TV and videos, music, video games, computers, movies, and print. A few of the key findings highlighted in these reports include the following. Young people today experience a substantial amount of electronic media. Children between the ages of 6 months and 6 years spend an average of 1.5 hours with electronic media on a daily basis, whereas children between the ages of 8 and 18 years spend an average of nearly 6.5 hours a day with electronic media. What is happening with computer games? The computer activity grows up as findings say. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, NAEYC (1996) sets forth attitude that development suitability should have to be integrated in usual context of learning. In accordance to them, computer should have to supply not to replace very valuable activities and stimulations in early childhood as art, blocks, sand, water, books, experiments with art and literacy. Furthermore, Cole (1996) described different ways in which computers could be incorporated in child's imaginary games. There are numerous studies, which demonstrated the main advantages of computer usage in early childhood and game (Yelland, 2005; Flintoff, 2002; Cassell & Ryokai, 2001; Pillay, 2003). However, how many are family homes and parents familiar with it?

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