

# MEDIA USAGE, CONSUMPTION AND UNDERSTANDING STUDY COVERING CHILDREN AGED 7–16 AND THEIR PARENTS

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Creative Solutions.

Executive summary for the National  
Media and Infocommunications  
Authority (NMHH)

2017

## About the research

- The large-sample data collection ordered by NMHH focused on the 7-16 age group and their parents.
- The study surveyed the children's media device possession, media usage habits and knowledge regarding media usage.
- In addition, the study also surveyed how well prepared parents are, how much help they can provide and how they can regulate and control their children's "healthiest" possible media consumption.

## Age group classification, "Breaklines"

- **The media usage habits of the surveyed age group are very divided** (school children in lower grades use different media and in a different manner than teenagers), and **the media consumption of this age group is more differentiated than expected**. These differences do not emerge only in a breakdown by the traditional larger age groups (e.g. primary school versus high school students) but also at the level of almost each year.
- In addition to the traditional age classification, we observed several other "breaklines" that basically influence the media consumption of children and young people.

- For example, the **10-11th years of age** (3-4th grades at primary school) is when **most children get their own mobile phone**, most with a touch screen and internet access (62% of the children aged 7-16 have a mobile phone for their own use).
- Mobile phones are used for very diverse purposes: children use many different functions. Apart from the basic services (calls, text messages etc.) they frequently go onto the internet, play games and listen to music. Maybe the consumption of motion picture contents scores lower on the mobile phone.
- **Compared to traditional media devices, the mobile phone also represents a new and less controllable means of communication for the parents.** Children can use their own handset at any time and anywhere (street, school, places of entertainment). Usage is not restricted to home use; therefore, parents do not have the opportunity of personal control at home.
- The **12-13th years of age** (5-6th grades at school) also set an important age limit, as this is when masses of children **enter the world of social media**, which also creates a new situation both for children and parents (43% of the children aged 7-16 have their own account in social media). This is **once again an area where it is more difficult for parents – if they want – to control and regulate usage in a direct way.** (For example, 25% of the parents of children using social media are not even among their children's "friends"..)

## Media device environment

- The various research data very clearly show this media environment that is changing rapidly over time. While **television is the most important media device** and media channel for school children aged 7 and 8 (71%), the preferences totally change parallel with the increase of age, and **mobile phone becomes the most popular device with teenagers** aged 15-16 (65%).
- **Among older children, TV is not only joined by mobile phone as a new device but also by various computerized tools** (PC, laptop, tablet) which are widely used for accessing the internet and for consuming various types of media content.
- However, intensive **usage** of PC tools is **somewhat more transparent and controllable for parents** as children have fewer PCs of their own (about half of the high school age children have their own, while almost everyone in this age group has a mobile phone). PCs are much more in front of the parents' eyes; children do not use them only in their room, and do not take them to school or leisure time activities.

## Time scale

- Parallel with the increase of age, we not only observe that the usage of media devices becomes more differentiated and covers more and more elements, but also that **children spend more and more time with using these devices**. (If the total time spent by children aged 7-8 in front of the screen is regarded as 100%, we estimate this rate to be 125% in the 9-10 age group, 152% in the 11-12 group, 193% in the 13-14 group and as much as 209% in the 15-16 group.)
- The survey highlights that it is no major problem for the parents how much time their children spend in front of the screen. They frequently find this quantity of time totally natural and acceptable.

## Parental policy

- Whichever area we survey, generally **half to two-thirds of the parents in families with children claim to have set rules or restrictions about the usage of media devices** (when, what and how children can watch). The parents also declared at a similar rate they carry out checks in this regard.

- The existence or the lack of rules and checks basically depends on the age of the children. This is a more general practice in families with small children and much less widespread in the case of teenagers.
- The data suggest a complex set of rules in families, as the parents mentioned many types of rules. These basic rules come naturally (children may not watch violent or adult content etc.) and the parents mentioned the time factor the most often (how long kids are allowed to watch TV/use the internet in the evening).
- Typically, the parents **mainly use personal control, but also rely on personal presence and personal communication**. They primarily build on confidence, i.e. they trust their children and think that they will not breach their trust. They believe in their children and hope they use media devices reasonably, appropriately and safely. Parents often think it is enough to talk to their children about this and then to try to check it personally in some way.
- The strength of the confidence factor is also shown by the fact that **almost all parents believe that their children use the internet safely**.

- Few parents use technical solutions that can theoretically be better controlled and are more difficult to evade, e.g. using child locks, content filtering software etc.
- Generally about one tenth of the parents concerned claimed to use some technical control, setting or restriction. An exception is disabling premium-rate calls, which is applied by two-thirds of the parents on their children's device.
- Various technical solutions are used at the following rates:
  - Disabling premium rate calls and sending text messages on mobile phones – 19%
  - Fully disabling certain TV channels by parental control / child lock function – 12%
  - In case of internet usage, content filtering with software and programmes – 12%
  - Disabling the download and the usage of mobile phone applications – 11%
  - Disabling certain TV programmes by parental control / child lock function – 10%
  - Setting search software upon internet usage (activating safe search function) – 10%
  - Disabling adult internet content on the mobile phone – 9%
  - Controlling the operating mode of video sharing portals (activating safety mode) – 7%

## Risks and danger

- Parents generally **do not see/perceive serious problems or danger** in connection with their children's TV viewing as well as mobile phone and internet usage habits.
- Only about 10-15% are worried about the media content their children may encounter and the persons they may contact on the internet, mobile phone etc.
- The low rates suggest that on the whole, parents are satisfied with the current practice (adopted rules, checks, content that appears and is available in the media, children's habits etc.).
- However, using new technologies implies that children may contact strangers (without any previous personal acquaintance). Of the 11-16 age group who uses the internet, 21% **initiated or actively participated in establishing contact with strangers last year**.
- Of those playing online games on the internet, 35% **(also) play with players who they have never met before**, and 24% chat online with players whom they met only during the game.



## Cyberbullying

- Minor or graver cases of **cyberbullying** were reported by 19% of the 11-16 age group entering the online space.
- **The probability of becoming a subject to cyberbullying grows in parallel with the increase in age. Girls are more exposed to cyberbullying than boys.** Of the interviewed girls aged 15-16, 27% claimed to be involved in a case that could be regarded as cyberbullying in the past year.

## The communication and educational aspects of safe internet usage

- At the level of basic information, almost all parents try to prepare their children for what they can expect on the internet and how they can use it safely.
- In the course of the communication process, **parents basically need to rely on their own knowledge as well as on their friends and acquaintances**, as this is where they can generally collect information and experience about safe internet usage.

- Schools do not provide any help to parents about safe internet usage. Moreover, it is generally true that there is hardly **any institutional or organizational help that the parents would use.**
- Children can better rely on their school. **Children basically receive help and information about safe internet usage from their parents and their school.** (We cannot talk about any other institutional or organizational help that the children could use.)

## Competences

- On the level of subjective opinions, **parents are strongly convinced that their children probably know more than them about new technological tools,** the world of the internet etc.
- However, **this was not necessarily verified by the objective knowledge-based test** that we carried out in the survey. The summarized competence index has an identical value in both respondent groups.
- Children scored 37 points and parents scored 36 points on a 0-100 scale. These rates are not very high, and only reflect a low-to-mediocre information level.

- **The family situation and background is very diverse with respect to the competence level:**
  - In some families the competence levels of children and parents are identical;
  - In some families the competence level of children is higher;
  - In some families the competence level of parents is higher.
- Comparing the knowledge-based competence indexes, we can see that the size of these three respondent groups / family types is more or less the same. However, the educational level of families strongly impacts the competence level of the groups (children or parents) and the competence level of children.
- **The higher the social status is, the higher the competence level of both parents and children is.**

## Summary

- The survey draws attention to the fact that there are deficiencies in the safe usage of media devices and in the awareness of media usage, and that these deficiencies not only appear theoretically but also at a practical level. It would be definitely necessary to raise the level of knowledge- and practice-based competences both among children and their parents.
- Unfortunately, there is currently no institutional help parents could use in order to raise competences and to strengthen the media awareness of parents and children.
- Parents perceive few problems and risks about their children's media consumption – and even if they do, they do not exaggerate them, and even underappreciate them. Feeling responsible, they try to step into the process as a controlling power in their own way, but the rules and the framework of media usage rules mainly work only along the "trust principle" among parents and their children. It is not sure that this is always sufficient.