"I'M ONLINE NOW!"

Children & the Change of Their Media Environment
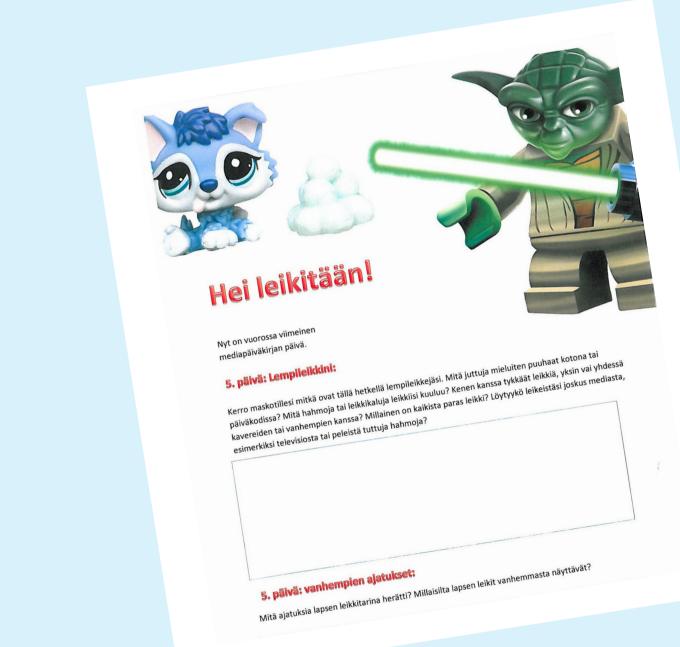
The project is a national longitudinal study on children´s media environment and media use, repeated four times between 2007 and 2016.

2007 — 2010 — 2013 — 2016

Participants:

- The study is conducted in three year intervals among 5-, 8-, 11- and 14-year old children.
- Sample is about 60 children in each research year, boys and girls from Tampere and nearby cities and from different backgrounds.
- Every research year a new group of 5-year-old children participate and the former participants from each age group move to the next age group. So the ones who came along in 2007 as 5 year olds were 8 years at 2010 and 11 years at 2013, and they are followed throughout the study until they are 14 year old in 2016.
- The study highlights the voice and agency of children themselves; the framework can be found on the sociology of children. Children are given the opportunity to define and tell about their media experiences themselves, although the assistance and commitment of parents is needed especially with the younger children.

Methods:

- Media diaries
- Media tasks (drawing, photographing, writing)
- Media mascot
- Background forms for children & parents
- Observation in home environment
- Qualitative interviews of children
- Anonymous web survey about sensitive topics (bullying, online sexual harassment, 18+ content)

Children have different capabilities and strengths; several methods are used so that every participant could find the best possible way for self-expression. Children´s rooms are observed and understood as a cultural text: children´s bedrooms "tell stories" of their taste and meaning making of popular and media culture.

One task is to evaluate suitable methods for children´s research. Each method has challenges. For example in interviews the researcher has to gain children´s trust and remember that child–adult relations and spatial practices affect children´s talk.

Publications

Uusitalo Niina, Vehmas Susanna, Kupiainen Reijo (2011): Naamatusten verkossa. https://tampub.uta.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/65438/naamatusten_verkossa_2011.pdf

Noppari Elina, Uusitalo Niina, Kupiainen Reijo, Luostarinen Heikki (2008): "Mä oon nyt online!" http://tampub.uta.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/65730/978-951-44-7293-0.pdf

2013 media mascots given to 5 year olds

Repeated research themes in every trial:

1. Children´s media use (different devices and times of use)
2. Media as a social environment (media plays, social interaction, social media)
3. Media culture as a commercial area (favourite contents, brands, fan activity)
4. Children´s media literacy and competence

Social and mobile media

- Since 2007 we have seen the rise of the social media and especially Facebook from year 2007 to 2010. Facebook has replaced many other web services even among 11-year-olds, even though the age limit for the service is 13. Facebook is like "a virtual school yard", used mainly for chatting.
- Children´s use of social media varies: some are active & produce content, write blogs, publish photos and videos, the others prefer online games or just like to hang around in different platforms.
- Children are optimistic users: they seldom feel threatened by media and rely on their own media competence. No one told about severe harassment, but quite many young children have seen 18+ content online.
- Compared to last trial, 2013 seems to be a year of mobile media: smart phones and even tablets have a strong role as ubiquitous media devices of young people and children. Mobility has increased the autonomy in children´s rooms especially in the families where kids did not have their own computers before.

How has the media environment changed?

- Entertainment, brands and products are increasingly present: children´s media environment is based on consumption chains, children´s rooms are often full of media figures, textiles, devices, toys etc.
- The supply of commercial TV channel packages has grown – however, Pikku Kakkonen is still popular among 5-year-olds.
- Media defines children´s discussion & games in each age group.
- Internet has not replaced other media forms, although the importance of web increases when the child grows up.
- The importance of games and the amount of game devices has grown.
- Uploaded music is gradually replacing cd´s and radios.

Not all is about change though

The research proves that "digital native narrative" which underlines radical change is somewhat exaggerated. Children change when they grow up, so not all the change is media related. In media environment there are many features that remain the same year after year. For example there seems to be surprisingly little changes between boys´ and girls´ media use from the gender perspective – media environment is very gendered.

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