What can research on children learn from cross-cultural qualitative research?

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ECREA preconference: Researching children, youth and media - lessons from the field
Overview

• The project: Net Children Go Mobile

• Smartphones and tablets

• Similar methodology and analytical approach to EU Kids Online
Participating countries

- Denmark
- Italy
- Romania
- UK
- Ireland (self-funding)
- Belgium (self-funding)
- Portugal (self-funding)
- Germany (self-funding, only qualitative part)
- Spain (self-funding)
Qualitative report

- Haddon, L. and Vincent, J. (2014) *European children’s and their carers’ understanding of use, risks and safety issues relating to convergent mobile media*
Goal

- Different ways in which this qualitative research enhances our understanding of children and smartphones
- Examples of how it does so
- Areas of discussion to which this contributes
- Different ways of using qualitative cross-cultural comparisons, the different roles this material can play
Acquisition and use

Children make/influence decisions about:

- buying smartphones
- what to download
- what apps to use
- when and for how long to use them
- where to use them
Constraints on acquisition and use

• The qualitative research shows the circumstances in which they make decisions, the pressures, the constraints

• Children are constrained more than adult users (e.g. pressures from adults and teachers)

• Various financial, time and space constraints
Bases for making decisions

• What influenced parents decisions to buy/allow smartphones/tablets for children at that point in time (and not earlier)?
• What was the content of the negotiations?
• Examples: children’s perceived maturity, rites of passage, rewards, automatic hand-me-downs
Finding a place in an ecology of devices

- The decision-making process about when to use a smartphone, tablet, laptop, PC, console or other device
- New devices do not automatically replace older ones (remediation)
- We see how the ecology is re-arranged

- What the ‘post-PC’ world really looks like
Change over time

- The different ways in which children’s use evolves over time

- Not just a case of more of everything

- At the individual level some activities may be reduced (e.g. SNS)
Children’s concerns and frustrations may sometimes be similar to their parents, but not simply repeating them!

- e.g. frustrations about disruptive/unnecessary communications
- e.g. concerns about their own use taking time away from other things
Children’s concerns and frustrations

- The interviews show how negative some things are perceived to be relative to perceptions of ‘standard’ risks

- What do they talk about first?
- What do they talk about most?
- What do they get agitated about?
- What do they complain about?
Children’s concerns and frustrations

Examples:

• Commercial sources trying to trick/cheat them, hidden costs

• Trying to repair social relations when a peer has pretended to be them online

• Complaints about peers being on their smartphones when co-present
Subtle enhancements of risks

Risk experiences and worries:

• Migration of harassment and meeting strangers to WhatsApp
• Ease of ‘borrowing’ phones and identify theft
• More private material on smartphones that peers might see
• Money can be taken from the device if an account has been set up
Complexities of school rules

- **Experience**: the enforcement of school rules varies – e.g. concessions

- Children’s ambiguous **perception** of school rules

- Teach **reactions** - especially confiscating smartphones – can be problematic
How did qualitative contribute?

• Variety of constraints and why they exist

• Content of negotiations in different households

• Decision-making behind choices

• Understanding individual change over time
How did qualitative contribute?

• Insights into children’s concerns and frustrations
• New details of how smartphones effect risk
• Perceptions of school rules and examples of issues
To what areas did it contribute?

- Wary of industry rhetoric – e.g. ‘always at hand’
- Post PC era
- Questioning always more and more use
To what areas did it contribute?

• How other concerns balance against ‘standard risks’

• Subtle shifts in risk experience

• Complexities of school regulation
Cross cultural qualitative: Pooling data

• Showing the same point is being expressed across countries (concern, perception, experience, issue)

• Using material from different countries to show the variations on a theme, how a similar point occurs in slightly different guises (e.g. hidden costs, identity theft)
Clues and illustrations

- Prevalence of phenomena in the qualitative in different countries - clues for future quantitative research (or for re-checking quantitative)
- E.g. fears about smartphones and plagiarism
- Illustrative of quantitative patterns - vignettes, stereotypical households from different countries
Reflecting country specificities

- History/historical claims about country differences (e.g. Romanian parents experience of parental mediation of TV when they when children) – can we see implications in the data?
- UK history of safety awareness arising – wary of showing smartphones in certain public spaces (prevalence makes sense given background knowledge)
Predicting through understanding cultural variation

• Understanding motivations relate to country specificities in order to predict statistics

• Example: Buying smartphones when children are mature enough – particular markers of maturity specific to some countries (Catholic Holy Communion, Confirmation)
Conclusions

- There are various ways in which the qualitative could be used to understand the smartphone and tablet experience
- These could contribute to a variety of arguments
- Most of this involved pooling data
- These was a reluctance to explore differences (e.g. small samples)
- The data was used in a few ways to do this