

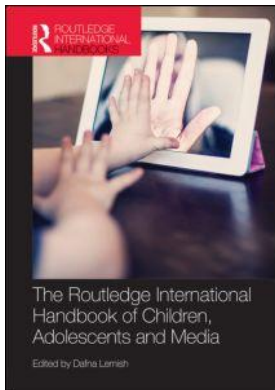
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3

TRENDS IN CHILDREN'S CONSUMPTION OF MEDIA

Uwe Hasebrink and Ingrid Paus-Hasebrink

Introduction

Within the framework of this volume this chapter deals with children's media consumption and how it changes over time. A reconstruction of long-term trends in children's media use meets two challenges. First, it cannot rely on long-term data, which cover several decades or even centuries and provide comparable data over a longer period of time. Second, as a rule the existing data, which cover at least several years, reflect the situation only in a specific country and do not enable general conclusions on a global level. Thus, our approach has to build on a synopsis of a large body of research from different historical and cultural backgrounds. In order to identify relevant trends which can serve as meaningful interpretations of the history of children's media use, this synopsis has to be highly selective.

Our approach combines two steps: first we take the historical development of media technologies as a key condition for children's media use, starting with the earliest media; we will follow the historical development. For each relevant media technology we will sketch how it entered children's everyday lives and how it is used today. This way of telling the story of children's media use as distinct stories of individual media technologies is linked with the risk of a deterministic view of technology. Therefore, against today's backdrop of an increasingly converging media environment, our second step sets out to develop a more holistic view of children's media use. We will focus on function rather than on technology. This means that we try to identify comprehensive media repertoires of children, for example the composition of different media that children select for themselves. This perspective helps to better understand the particular role of the different media and the interrelations between "old" and "new" media, as well as the changing functions that media fulfill in children's everyday lives.

Single media technologies in children's media use

From a historical perspective, children's media consumption is most obviously shaped by the particular media available in a certain time period. In the following we will briefly sketch the most important media innovations, when they first appeared, what has been particular about them for children's media consumption, and how they are used in today's multimedia environments.

Due to space limitations we have had to make a decision here: around the world, technical development is not at all synchronous; while, for instance, radio and television have been normal presences for children in the Western world in their families' households for several decades, this is not the case for many children in some developing countries even today. For this chapter we decided to take the Western or American/European perspective as the reference point, but at some points we will emphasize the substantial differences among different parts of the world.

Print media

Although there were different forms of mediated communication for and with children before Gutenberg invented the printing press (for example, theater or orally presented fairy tales), in this chapter we take print media as the earliest form of media. The development of children's media started with periodical magazines for children. In Germany, for instance, the first weekly magazine for children was published in Leipzig between 1772 and 1774. During the nineteenth century more and more magazines and books for children were illustrated with colored drawings. This development builds the early starting point for the new genre of comic strips. Walt Disney's cartoon movies, including *Mickey Mouse*, first presented in 1928, became so popular that the company started to distribute them by using a wide range of media and merchandising products, including printed magazines or short strips in newspapers. Since the 1980s Japanese *Manga* comics have also become quite popular in the Western world.

Compared to books and comics, other print media like newspapers and magazines are less popular among young children; however, teenagers tend to read books and comics less often, and increasingly turn to newspapers and magazines. In some countries, youth-oriented magazines have become particularly important platforms for all aspects of youth culture. Reading books is clearly more frequent among girls than among boys; regarding age there is a decreasing trend after the age of 8 to 10 years (Rideout et al., 2010, p. 30). In a comparative European study, Beentjes et al. found that among 9- to 10-year-olds in Europe, 85 percent read books. However, this figure decreases to 73 percent among 15- to 16-year-olds (2001, p. 94).

Cinema

The advent of cinema was a starting point for a still increasing interest in empirical research on how children deal with any new medium and what effects this might have (Paik, 2001, p. 7). In the first decades of the twentieth century, cinema proved to be quite attractive, also for children. Paik (2001, p. 9) reports that in 1929 the average American child was attending 1.6 movies per week. Cinema attendance in general was highest between the late 1920s and late 1940s. After the advent of television the number of people going to the movies substantially decreased.

While younger children go to the movies together with their parents, the core function of going to the movies is related to teenagers' increasing need to develop their own social network and to experience social events outside their families' homes. Recent figures reflect a stable role of cinema within children's lives, at least in the United States. A recent Kaiser Family Foundation study on American children's media use in 2009 (Rideout et al., 2010) reports that 12 percent of children aged 8 to 18 report watching a film in a cinema on a normal day. This figure is the same as five years ago.

Radio

Starting in the early 1920s radio entered households in the US quite quickly: In 1930 46 percent of American households had a radio; in 1940 the figure was 80 percent, and in 1970 it reached

98 percent (Paik, 2001, p. 11). In the first decades of its development radio proved to be a highly attractive medium, for children as well as adults; many dedicated children's programs were developed. An American study in the 1950s showed that listening to the radio was the most frequent evening activity of young people aged between 8 and 16 (Lyness, 1952, quoted from Paik, 2001, pp. 11f.).

As a consequence of the advent of television the relative importance of radio for children and young people decreased. Although in most countries there are still some dedicated children's programs, the main function of young people's use of the radio is listening to music. This is particularly true for older teenagers: according to most studies the amount of time devoted to listening to the radio increases with age. Girls tend to spend a bit more time with radio than boys (e.g., Medienpädagogischer Forschungsverbund Südwest [MPFS] 2011a, p. 22; Rideout et al., 2010, p. 28).

Television

Television's rapid diffusion in the United States started in the late 1940s; the strongest growth occurred in the 1950s. Globally the proportion of households owning a television set reached 79 percent in 2009. Whereas there is almost full availability in Europe, the Commonwealth of Independent States (former Soviet Union), and The Americas, only three quarters of the households in the Asia and Pacific region and less than one third in Africa can view a TV set at home (International Telecommunication Union [ITU], 2010a).

From early childhood, children have spent quite a long time with the screen medium, more than with any other media activity. Even today with the availability of a wide variety of media, television viewing time is still high. In this respect, it is important to define what we mean by viewing television. In many statistics the amount of viewing only includes the time that children spend watching TV programs on a TV set when they are broadcast. By contrast, the recent Kaiser Family Foundation studies use the category *TV content*, which includes watching TV programs on a TV set at the time of their broadcast, or by means of time-shifted TV (on demand or self-recorded), DVDs/videos watched on TV or on a computer, and TV on other platforms like the internet, iPods/MP3 players, and cell phones (Rideout et al., 2010, p. 15). In 2009, 8- to 18-year-olds in the US spent 4.5 hours per day with TV content; this figure was more than half an hour higher than five years earlier. The overall viewing time reaches a peak for 11- to 14-year-olds. Boys tend to watch slightly more than girls.

Audiovisual and audio recording devices

Children's options to make use of electronic media were substantially enhanced by audio recorders in the early 1970s and by video recorders in the late 1970s. Over a relatively short time both devices entered the majority of children's bedrooms in most Western countries. There were two functionalities which made these new devices so attractive for young audiences. Firstly, particularly for younger children, they offered "repeatable pleasures" (Wood, 1993, p. 184): children love to listen to or watch the same story again and again, although (or because) they know the content by heart. This constellation allows them to experience exactly the degree of suspense that they like. Secondly, particularly for teens, these recording devices allowed them to collect or sample or re-mix their own content from different sources, and by doing so to express themselves and their identities.

Since then the specific technical devices and features for recording audio(visual) content have changed substantially: VCR technology has been widely replaced by DVD, Blu-Ray, DVR and

other standards; the path from cassette recorders and LPs to CD players to MP3 was similar. Nevertheless, the respective older technical devices stayed quite popular for children: The typical development was that families bought the latest technology, e.g., a CD or DVD player for the living room, and moved the old technology, e.g., a cassette recorder or VCR, into the children's room.

Almost every American household has at least one DVD player or video recorder and 57 percent of 8- to 18-year-olds have one in their own bedroom; this figure has been increasing over the last ten years (Rideout et al., 2010, p. 9). The amount of use of these devices (0:41 hours per day) is lower than the use of TV programs on a TV set at the time of their broadcast (2:39 hours); nevertheless, it fills a substantial part of children's everyday lives. This is even more true for different audio media, which are mainly used for music.

Electronic games

When in the middle of the 1970s electronic games left public amusement halls and entered private households, they immediately became an important new element in children's media repertoires. Although – from today's perspective – rather simple, early games like *Mario* or *Pac-Man* in the 1980s fascinated millions of children worldwide. The first years were dominated by games consoles to be linked with a TV set, and small handheld games. In the second half of the 1980s, computers increasingly made their way into private households, with games of all kinds being the main function for children. The games market and particularly the most successful Japanese companies like Nintendo (e.g., *Game Boy* and later *Wii*) and Sony (*PlayStation*) grew exponentially, until annual turnover with electronic games exceeded that of the complete movie industry. On the one hand the consequence of this development was a strong fragmentation of the market with fast innovations in technology, design, and game genres; on the other hand, very few products became overwhelmingly successful on a global scale. One example is *Pokémon*, which started as a game on the Nintendo *Game Boy*, was then adapted for bigger consoles, TV series, play cards, and a wide range of merchandising products, and in the process became a globally distributed cultural brand (see Tobin, 2004).

Today, electronic games are available on all new digital platforms, particularly cell phones. An important step in technical development has been the increasing use of online games. Particularly the so-called Massively-Multiplayer-Online-Role-Playing-Games (MMORPG) like *World of Warcraft* have attracted many young people. Gaming is highest between 10 and 13 years; boys play considerably longer than girls. Because of their persistence and the highly time-consuming tasks that have to be fulfilled in these online worlds, they have generated intense public and academic debate on whether they might lead to excessive gaming behavior (e.g., Gentile, 2009).

Internet

In 2009, 15 years after the start of the public diffusion of the internet, 84 percent of 8- to 18-year-olds in America had internet access in their family; one third even had their own access in their bedroom (Rideout et al., 2010, p. 9).

Before dealing with some findings on how children use the internet, it has to be emphasized that until now internet diffusion is extremely imbalanced across the world. According to the ITU statistics from 2010 (ITU, 2010b), Europe is the continent with the highest proportion of internet users (65 percent of the total population). The Americas follow with 55 percent, the Commonwealth of Independent States with 46 percent, and the Arab States with 25 percent.

The Asia and Pacific region has 19 percent internet users, Africa 10 percent. Given the fact that some of these continents include pioneer countries in terms of internet use, e.g., the United States, or Japan and South Korea, these figures indicate that there are many countries in Asia or in the Americas where internet distribution is still very low.

A recent European study which investigated the online behavior of 9- to 16-year-olds and their parents in 25 European countries (EU Kids Online, see Livingstone et al., 2011) provides a rich empirical basis: use of the internet for school work is the top online activity (85 percent). Playing games against the computer (83 percent), watching video clips (76 percent), and social networking (62 percent) are the next most popular online activities. This contrasts with the various ways of creating user-generated content: posting images (39 percent) or messages (31 percent) for others to share, using a webcam (31 percent), file-sharing sites (18 percent), spending time in a virtual world (16 percent) or writing a blog (11 percent) are all less common (ibid.).

Gender differences are generally small; boys overall have a slightly wider repertoire of online activities, and they play more games. Age differences are greater, with the exception of using the internet for school work: 9- to 12-year-olds are much less likely than 13- to 16-year-olds to use the internet for watching or posting video clips or messages, reading or watching the news, instant messaging, social networking, and email or downloading music or films. In terms of the amount of use, children's internet use is dedicated mainly to communication (MPFS 2011b, p. 33).

Comprehensive trends of children's media use

While children's media consumption has obviously been shaped by the media technologies available at a given point in history, the technology-oriented perspective applied in the previous section has its limitations. Given the broad availability of different services, one relevant phenomenon regarding children's media use is that children actively combine different services and build their personal *media repertoire* (Hasebrink and Popp, 2006). This perspective helps to better understand the relationship between different media, particularly between so-called "old" and "new" media. As the history of media-related discourses shows, this relationship is usually expected to be competitive, with new media replacing the earlier media. Many findings regarding trends in children's media consumption contradict this assumption. Even if today's children devote quite a lot of time to social networking sites or online gaming, they continue to read books, listen to music, and watch television. If we take this perspective and observe general patterns of children's media use, several relevant trends can be identified.

Availability of media services

Children's everyday lives are particularly affected by the meta-process of mediatization (Krotz, 2009; Livingstone, 2009). An increasing number of media devices, in their own bedroom and elsewhere in the family's household, the expanding range of functionalities offered by new services, the continuous and omnipresent availability of services which overcome temporal and spatial limits – these aspects mark a significant trend in the conditions for children's media use. Today's children have far more options to communicate than any generation before them.

Amount of media use

One consequence of the omnipresence of media services seems to be that the time children spend with media continues to increase. In 2009 8- to 18-year-olds in the United States spent more

than 7.5 hours per day with media (Rideout et al., 2010, p. 11); this is more than one hour longer than five years earlier. In the same time period the proportion of multitasking increased, indicating that young people increasingly use two or even more media at the same time, so that the total time of media exposure adds up to 10.75 hours, which is 2.25 hours more than five years ago. According to the methodology of the Kaiser Family Foundation (KFF) study, these figures do not include the time spent using the computer for school work, or time spent texting or talking on a cell phone. While 8- to 10-year-olds use the media for fewer than eight hours per day, 11- to 14-year-olds spend almost 12 hours and those 15 to 18 years of age about 11.5 hours with the media (ibid.). These figures are one of the strongest indicators for the wider process of mediatization of children's lives.

Cross-media patterns of use

The media industry increasingly develops cross-media strategies, the ideal being to distribute content on as many platforms as possible. Famous media brands for children, which may originate from games, movies, television, comics, or even books (e.g., *Harry Potter*), are available almost everywhere; the same content is now marketed across different media platforms. Such media brands build the integrating and characterizing elements of children's media repertoires.

Relationship between parents' and children's media use

Children's media repertoires are increasingly independent from their parents' influence. The availability of media in children's bedrooms, individualized media services such as digital games or social networking platforms as well as parents' lack of knowledge about modern digital media allow children to decide rather independently what media they use. This phenomenon has been described as "bedroom culture" (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001, p. 179), and stresses the importance of children's bedrooms as their own social spaces. Bedrooms can be constructed (e.g., decorated) according to a child's own conception, and they provide an unsupervised and private place to spend their leisure time. This leads to fewer opportunities for shared media experiences of parents and children (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001, p. 195; Livingstone et al., 2011, p. 19).

Entertainment and education as functions of children's media use

As a consequence of the developments mentioned above, pedagogical approaches to children's media are becoming less influential; educational services are giving way to entertainment and fun-oriented content (Buckingham and Scanlon, 2005, p. 46).

Consequences of recent trends in children's media use

Changes in media environments and in children's practices of use lead to changes in childhood and socialization and in the development of their view of the world as well. Today the idea of childhood as a preparatory stage for adult life is increasingly modified by the notion of the child as a competent, self-socialized being in its own right who steers and fosters his or her own development largely independently. Thus, more significance is attached to the independence or "agency" of children. This change in the understanding of childhood is closely related to the trends in media use mentioned above.

Not least due to discovering young people as a target group, childhood increasingly turns into a self-determined as well as market-oriented form of life, in the context of which media

again play a decisive role. On the one hand, children are addressed as active and supposedly competent media users, and on the other, they are regarded as future consumers in a globalised media system. Therefore, the phase of growing up manifests itself not only as a mediated but also as a consumer childhood.

Nowadays, communication largely equals media communication; and as studies concerned with early childhood media use show (Rideout et al., 2003), even toddlers use a wider range of media. Media offer children and adolescents an area of projection for their dreams, emotions and fantasies, which they use according to their age, gender, and development status (e.g., Beentjes et al., 2001, p. 86; Paus-Hasebrink, 2007). Moreover, media provide a broad repertoire for identification and action that adds to children's identity construction. As media are agencies of symbols and meanings, they provide children with orientation and the potential for identification (Lemish, 2007). Children choose their personal favorites among these heroes and champions and use them in their own identity formation (Paus-Hasebrink, 2007). The trends in children's media use as highlighted in this chapter suggest that media play an ever increasing role in children's socialization and in developing their view of the world.

SEE ALSO in this volume chapter by Drotner, chapter by Nathanson, and chapter by Livingstone.

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