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Community Health / Policy

Abstract Title

Children's Reasoning About How Interpersonal Experiences and Emotions Relate in Technological Contexts

Background

Today's world is considerably digital, with technology being an inescapable facet of children's lives. Consequently, it is extremely important that children's online experiences are safe and positive.

Objective

In this study, I investigated how often children use interpersonal experiences to reason about technology's effects on everyday life. Specifically, I aimed to characterize the valence of experiences that children view as influential, assess the targets involved in these interactions, and see how age affected the aforementioned considerations.

Methods

This within-subjects exploratory study had a sample of 20 children aged 7-9, who were interviewed via Zoom. Participants were asked to explain why a peer may feel a particular emotion (happy, sad, excited, or worried) based on their technology use. I coded their responses based on whether their response included an interpersonal interaction, if these experiences were harmful or promotive, and who these experiences were with. Descriptive statistics were computed, as well as a series of point biserial correlations to understand how age affected participants' responses.

Results

One of the originally selected participants' interview could not be successfully transcribed, so they were swapped with another participant who was not selected in the original sample of 20. A two-tailed sensitivity analysis showed that a medium effect size of $d = 0.55$ could be detected. Results showed that overall, children mentioned interpersonal interactions 53% of the time.

Conclusion

Based on the results, it is clear that children strongly consider interpersonal experiences when thinking about technology. Harmful online interactions were extremely salient in children in the older age group. Furthermore, interactions with friends were most commonly mentioned, indicating that children may connect with friends online more often than with others. These findings may inform updates to laws to inform what children are allowed to access online, to ensure their online safety and wellbeing.

Table 1*Frequency of Mentioning Types of Interpersonal Experiences, Based on Age Group*

Variable	Young	Old
Total Interpersonal Score	38%	68%
Total Harmful Score	10%	70%
Total Promotive Score	25%	25%
Total Friend Score	23%	38%
Total Family Score	10%	13%
Total Stranger Score	0%	8%

Table 2*Correlations Between Age and Mentions of Interpersonal Experiences, Based on Emotion*

Variable	Age in Months	
	Pearson's <i>r</i>	<i>p</i> value
Happy Interpersonal Score	.426	.061
Sad Interpersonal Score	.354	.126
Excited Interpersonal Score	.343	.139
Worried Interpersonal Score	.426	.061

Table 3*Correlations Between Age and Mention of Interpersonal Experience Based on Target*

Variable	Age in Months	
	Pearson's <i>r</i>	<i>p</i> value
Total Friend Score	.294	.208
Total Family Score	.101	.671
Total Stranger Score	.349	.131

Authors

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