

Presenting Author Name

Emma Papoff

Phonetic spelling of your (full) name

Eh-Mah PAH-pawf

Presenting Author Category

Non-Trainee

Supervisor Name

Shaylene Nancekivell

Research Category

Community Health / Policy

Abstract Title

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

Authors

Name	Role	Profession
Allyson	Paton	Graduate

Background

The world has become remarkably digital, with technology now 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 exploratory study included 20 children aged 7-9, who were randomly selected from a broader pool of participants interviewed for a related project. In previously conducted Zoom interviews, participants were asked to explain why a peer may feel a particular emotion (happy, sad, excited, or worried) based on their technology use. Their responses were coded 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 interview could not be successfully transcribed, so this participant was excluded and another participant's interview was transcribed in its place. 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

Children in this study strongly considered interpersonal experiences when thinking about technology and emotions. Harmful online interactions were extremely salient in children in the older age group.

Furthermore, friends were the most mentioned interaction target, indicating that children may connect with friends online more often than with others. These findings may inform updates to laws on what children are allowed to access online, to ensure their online safety and wellbeing.

Table/Figure File

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