

Summary – Parents & Media 2012/13

Foreword

In many ways, we have found ourselves in a paradigm shift in society. A shift where we, regardless of age, spent an ever greater amount of our waking hours connected to the Internet and various forms of social media. A life where, broadly speaking, every Swedish adult is a frequent Internet user. Where 83 % of all teenagers have the Internet in their pockets. Where 98 % of all 9–12-year-olds play computer and video games. And where the age of first Internet use is 3 years. We live in a time when the flow of information is growing nearly exponentially, and in parallel with this the amount of biased or incorrect information. This is a development that puts great demands on us as people, adult and child alike, to deal critically with the texts and pictures we meet. It puts demands on us all to balance the time that has been allotted to us. We are no longer only consumers of information and media. We are, to an ever greater extent, also producers. With this new role follows an increased opportunity to participate in, and influence, the society we live in. But with this new role also follows increased responsibility for what is published and disseminated. What is reasonable? What is right?

In the present study, parents of children between ages 9–18 responded to questions about their children's media usage and the daily life that follows in its tracks. There are clear signs of worry around their children's media usage, in particular as concerns the time devoted to various media forms. Their concern is thus regarding time consumption rather than the content children encounter – time that must often be taken from something else.

Parents of girls are, in general, more concerned about their children getting in trouble. Women are generally more concerned than men about the same issue. Girls are also more in focus as regards their parents' dissatisfaction concerning how much time media usage takes from the "rest of their lives". This, at the same time as it turns out that boys spend at least as much time on various media.

There are also very different perceptions of what media content makes children feel bad. Parents mention fictional content such as horror films, feigned violence and pornography to a greater extent, while children themselves state that documentary portrayals of suffering and misery make them feel bad.

In this study, we see a great deal of interesting results, around which we now intend to deepen the knowledge in various ways. Certain issues are new with regard to the Council's previous surveys, which is why the future will have to show us the direction in which development will occur.

Ewa Thorslund, Director, Swedish Media Council

Introduction, background, method and reading instructions

This is an account of the results from a survey of guardians' attitudes towards their children's media usage, aspects of protection as regards media content, and opinions on harmful media influence. The data from the Kids & Media 2012/13 survey being reported here consists of questions to guardians of children between the ages of 9 and 18; it was therefore not the children themselves who responded to the questions. The results are reported thoroughly and divided into three age groups of children, which are mentioned only by numbers in the running text: 9–12 (years), 13–16 (years) and 17–18 (years).

The Media Council committee, which came to an end in 2011 when the Swedish Media Council was formed, conducted the 2005, 2006, 2008 and 2010 Kids & Media surveys. These did not cover children older than 16 years, which is why the result from the 17–18 group cannot be compared with the results of the earlier surveys. The media landscape is changing quickly, which is why new questions are arising while others lose their relevance. The 2012/13 survey has also been designed in collaboration with the Media Authority in Norway and the Department for Media Education and Audiovisual Media in Finland, our neighbouring countries' counterparts to the Swedish Media Council, for the purpose of generating a joint Nordic report with comparable data. This has meant reformulating certain questions and changing response alternatives, which means it is not always possible to make direct comparisons with the results from the 2010 survey. In the cases where there is comparable data between both studies, this is reported in the running text and tables. Nor is it possible, for statistical reasons, to make safe comparisons with the three oldest surveys (see appendix).

Previously during 2013, the Swedish Media Council published Kids & Media 2012/13, where media habits and attitudes toward the media among children and young people aged 9–18 were studied; as well as Little kids & Media 2012/13, on media habits in children ages 0–8 and their parents' attitudes towards this. The issues reported on here thus apply only to parents of children ages 9–18. Data on parents' attitudes towards younger children's media usage is reported in Little kids & Media 2012/13.

The basis for this report consists of a postal survey sent out to 2 000 parents of children ages 9–18. Statistics Sweden carried out the collection of data, which ran from 26 October 2012 to 16 January 2013. The selection of respondents was independent and random. The frequency of response was 41.5 %. This is relatively low compared with earlier Kids & Media surveys. The decreasing frequency is, however, something that has been observed for a long time in various types of polls with random selection, both in Sweden and internationally. The causes of this have not yet been made clear. The future will show us whether it is possible to continue with surveys that use independent and random selection, or if alternative methods for data collection may be used.

In general, it is a matter of the group of parents of children ages 17–18 being studied for the first time, which means comparison material for this age group is missing. For the other age groups, comparable data has been reported – in the cases where such data exists – in connection with the respective questions.

To check how the ages of the parents influence their attitudes towards their children's media usage, they were divided into three age ranges: under 40, 40–49, and over 50.

Parents' age	Children's age			Total
	9–12 years	13–16 years	17–18 years	
-39 years	68 %	25 %	6 %	99 %
40–49 years	43 %	39 %	18 %	100 %
50 + years	15 %	38 %	47 %	100 %

There is thus a large covariance between the ages of the parents and the ages of the children: a majority of parents under 40 have children ages 9–12, and nearly half of the parents over 50 have children over 16. This means that what appears at first glance to be differences in attitude between parents of different ages can depend in part on the fact that these attitudes concern children of different ages. It is not possible, however, to report on data for how different older parents responded within each individual age range for children, as the data material is entirely too small to allow for such analyses.

It was significantly more common for women to respond to the surveys than for men to do so. Despite the questionnaire being sent out to as many men as women, the response base consists of 65 % women and 35 % men. This is a consistent pattern in most surveys of this kind.

Summary

This section presents the results where the differences are greatest between different groups: the guardians' gender and ages, or the children's ages, or where there have been substantial changes since the 2010 survey.

In general, there are larger proportions of parents who express positive attitudes towards TV, the Internet, and computer games than express negative attitudes. Computer games, however, are the form of media that has the highest share of negative opinions from the parents' side. Above all, they think that computer games are addictive. On the other hand, only a small proportion of parents think that children become aggressive because of computer or video games. The attitudes towards TV and film, respectively, are similar, with a few exceptions. While the Internet is regarded to a greater extent as addictive, and that children learn both good and bad things from the Internet, they state that TV and film make their children passive to a greater degree.

The proportion of parents who are concerned that their children will encounter unpleasant things on the Internet has increased since 2010. This applies to all the phenomena asked about (see Diagram 7). It has not become more common, however, for children to have experience of phenomena that can be perceived as objectionable or threatening in any regard besides two: among children ages 9–12 the share of parents who indicate that their child came in contact with pornography on the Internet has increased, and among both 9–12 and 13–16 the proportion who state their child has chatted via web camera has increased. Women are concerned to a significantly greater degree than men about their children encountering something on the Internet. Parents are also more concerned about girls getting in trouble on the Internet than about boys doing so. This applies especially to issues with a sexual connection. The only thing they worry about more regarding boys rather than girls is that they spend so much time on games or the Internet that they become socially isolated.

A majority of parents state that protecting children on the Internet works poorly. They are also – to a lesser extent – critical of how protecting children works when it applies to computer games, while they are quite satisfied with how it works when it applies to TV and DVD. They are most satisfied with the protection of children in cinemas. Cinemas are the only area of media where age limits are fixed by law. Paradoxically enough, parents think at the same time that age limits in all areas – TV, the Internet, DVD, computer games and cinemas – should be recommendations rather than fixed by law. Women are significantly more critical than men of how protecting children works, and more positive towards age limits fixed by law. The presence of siblings seems to have an effect on parents' attitudes on issues of child protection and media regulation: parents of children who have older siblings express a greater degree of dissatisfaction with how protecting children works when they use media. One explanation could be that following recommendations and age limits is regarded as simpler if the child does not have older siblings who tempt them with more "adult" media content.

Similarly, great differences can be seen in the extent to which parents pay attention to age limits on computer and video games, depending on where in the family the child in question is located. If the child who is the subject of the questions is oldest, a larger share of parents pay attention to the age limits than if the child has older siblings. Once again, there is reason to assume that it will become more difficult to set up rules for media consumption and follow recommendations if there are older siblings in the family. A substantial majority of the parents asked think that the parents themselves should have the greatest responsibility for protecting their children and youth when they use media. At the same time, they express the sentiment that all entities – the industries, school, the state and its agencies – have quite a great responsibility.

A majority of parents think that there is content in the media that can be harmful to children (9–12: 80 %, 13–16: 67 %, 17–18: 67 %). Violence in various forms is primarily mentioned as an example of harmful media content, as are sex and pornography.

The proportion of parents who stated that their children felt bad because of media content they encountered in film, TV, computer and video games or on the Internet has increased compared with 2010. The increase is greatest among ages 9–12 and applies chiefly to the category of "horror film", "pornography", "violence in reality", "feigned violence" and "sexual threats or assaults". The parents thus mentioned primarily media content of a fictional character, which is the direct opposite of what the children themselves indicated were negative media experiences for them. Kids & Media 2012/13 reports on the children's responses, and there it turns out that they state to a greater extent than their parents that materials with a documentary connection made them feel uneasy. A clear sibling effect comes forth on this question as well, where parents of children with older siblings indicated to a greater extent that their child encountered material that made them feel bad.

Finally, parents were asked if they thought their children spent too much time, too little time, or a reasonable amount of time on different activities, both physical and social, such as media use. It came across clearly that parents think media use takes up too much time. Their dissatisfaction with this too large amount of time has increased substantially since 2010, primarily as regards the 13–16 age group. The proportion who think that their child spends too much time on the Internet has increased from 28 % to 41 %, and as regards mobile phone use, from 23 % to 42 %. The children agree with their parents on this, even if the percentages are lower (see Kids & Media 2012/13). Since the use of both the Internet and mobile phones has increased substantially in these age groups, it can be

argued that parents' increased dissatisfaction has a basis in real changes in the use of media. This is not the case, however, with parents' dissatisfaction with computer and video games. In 2010, 25 % of parents of 9–12 thought that games took up too much time. In 2012/13, 34 % thought so. During the same period, computer gaming has not increased appreciably in this group.

In general, the parents think that boys spend too much time on computer and video games, while girls use mobile phones and social media entirely too much. This has its basis in the fact that boys play games more than girls do, and girls use mobile phones and social media more than boys do.

If the parents' dissatisfaction is put in relation to how much boys and girls actually use various media, it turns out that parents of girls are in many aspects more dissatisfied with their child's media usage in proportion to how much they actually spend on media.

This applies to things such as TV and film, and social media. As regards how much boys and girls actually watch film and TV, there is no gender difference; despite girls using social media to a greater extent, dissatisfaction is proportionally greater than it is with boys' usage of social media. Similarly, it is significantly more common that parents think girls spend too much time on computer or video games in proportion to how much they actually play. Parents' critical attitude towards the scope of girls' media usage thus does not stand, in this regard, in proportion to actual usage of media. As regards mobile phone and Internet use, no such differences come forth.