

Project summary

media project integrated with research

People surf the Internet via game consoles, tablets, phones, glasses or even watches, tools that couldn't be used for that purpose just a few years ago, and which are moving so fast that it is necessary to learn how to use them in order to take full advantage of them. This project was born in this context. Interactive digital environments are explored in a participatory culture, focusing on children, youth and families. We examine how young people and families use technological devices for entertainment.

The main goal is to explain how young creators share audiovisual representations by building real and virtual communities.

Two concrete activities are currently underway: *DigitalKids* is carried out in collaboration with *Matadero Madrid*, a community center supporting innovation and art; *Instakids* is carried out at the *Telefónica* center, supporting innovative uses of technology. The project examines creative processes that bring young people closer to cultural heritage, interactive art and humanistic knowledge, which are now being transformed by being expressed and reconstructed through formal computer language. Our goal is for app users, young people and families to understand how apps (in terms of physical or computational prototypes) are designed, mainly focusing on digital art design.

Aim: To explore the participation culture of families in interactive digital environments.

Target group: Families with children aged 8-13

Media: iPads, MacBooks, Apple TV, voice recorders, professional video cameras, professional photography cameras and mobile phones

Methods: Big data and a mixed offline and online ethnographic approach

Duration of project: One year. The workshops are conducted one weekend per month, with a two-and-a-half hour session. The project is part of previous research.

Project description

The project involves approximately 200 families. The core of the data analysis comes from workshops carried out once a month (from October to May), lasting two and a half hours. They take place in the community centers Matadero de Madrid and Telefónica. Around 20 children and their families attend each workshop and work in large and small group sessions. The large group is formed by the research team (eight junior and senior researchers and eight students of the University of Alcalá). In the small groups, the children are organized in accordance with three criteria: age, level of contact with technology, friendly relations.

While young people are active participants, families are present as observers, commenting on and discussing what has happened in the workshop, through engagement with the researchers.

All sessions are recorded in audio and video formats. Then, the data are examined and analyzed using NVIVO 10 for Mac and Transana. We examine the process through which young people, researchers and families access digital content, as well as the everyday practices that allow it. Participants publish photographs and videos on Instagram, Vine or Vimeo. The products are organized using Aperture, a specific Macintosh software for organizing audiovisual productions.

We explore three levels of participation:

1. **The children and their families participate on the Internet by receiving information and building knowledge**, but without sharing it in that context. They are recipients of what others do. Consider, for example, how many people read online content but do not publish any of their own. They are active because they are interpreters of information, from which knowledge can be built, but they do not share it.
2. **Participation is a two-way street**. Knowledge is shared and people often recreate what others share. Many forms of expression are used in order to do this (multiple print and broadcast discourses). Those people are active users in networked applications through which they share interests, knowledge and activities, both public and private.
3. Those who use the net are aware that communication is possible because **someone turned everyday human discourse into a language which can be understood by computers**. For example, some users are able to understand or even design specific applications.

Method

The project takes an ethnographical approach, combining online and offline participation. The research, in taking an ethnographical approach, understands activity as a situated practice that puts both researchers and participants in the world and immersed in processes of construction of meaning. We also take an action-research perspective, combining narrative and analytical interpretations and trying to overcome the contrasts between them.

We combine this perspective with an online ethnographical approach, considering data obtained from the Internet in accordance with Rogers' proposal in his work *Digital Methods*. He proposes three principles: (1) to consider elements of the Internet such as links, tags or other digital objects; (2) to take into account that these elements can be combined (e.g. post, repost, etc) in particular cultural and social contexts; (3) to use the analytical tools provided by the network; for example, in this particular project: <http://iconosquare.com/viewer.php>

Exemplary description of one day/part of project

As mentioned, the workshops take place in two institutions: Fundación Telefónica and Matadero. Young people aged between eight and 13 and their families participate in both environments. The organizational scheme of the sessions is similar, although the content is not the same. At a formal level, the schema of the sessions is as follows:

- There is prior planning of the workshop by the research team, previously discussed with officials of the partner organizations.
- There is prior and subsequent dialogue with the families about the development of the workshop and other questions concerning the media usage of children and adolescents, for example, the participation of young people in social networks and digital environments. There are two levels of parental involvement: passive observer and active observer.
- Large group sessions. Introductory: We introduce exploratory questions where children respond actively at specific moments during the workshop, organized to reflect on performed productions. Conversations refer to possible audiences for children's productions and the broadcast content of the messages. Final moments, including evaluation of the session. Researchers, parents and children participate.
- Small group sessions in which the children are divided according to age, expertise, and mutual friendship. Creative activities take place when young people, families and researchers produce photographs and videos and share them on the Internet (Instagram and Vine). The children and parents have the support of researchers and audiovisual technicians (professional TV cameras and photography). These groups visit the spaces and exhibitions in which the sessions are developed to create their messages. Finally, the children write up the negative and positive aspects of the workshop on the iPad in small groups.

What needs special attention?

1. There is a difference between parents and children when it comes to approaching technology and digital environments.
2. Families have to be interested and participate actively.
3. Young people are involved in the process, with ongoing monitoring during the workshop and post-workshop.

Project implementation difficulties

1. We had some problems related to the introduction of innovative technology. For example, the team has 15 iPads, used by the children, as well as other mobile devices used by the researchers. All of them need to be updated after each session and their contents need to be downloaded.
2. The use of mobile devices combined with Apple TV for the kids to share their productions with the group is not always easy. The fact that at least 25 mobile devices or more are needed for sharing pictures, videos and so forth on the Internet is not an easy task in certain contexts.
3. Contact with the families can sometimes be hard as not all families have the same level of commitment.
4. Coordinating several levels of expertise among the participants.

Conclusions

The aim of this work is to offer collaboration environments related to leisure contexts in which young people and their families participate in situations mediated by interactive technology. Relationships in everyday situations, in real and virtual environments, are also a way to open the university to society.

Through this work, we define entertainment contexts centered on digital communities, and establish what motivates young people to publish content where the line between what's public and what's private becomes blurred.

Practices associated with diversified experiences where people live and interact, exploring the line between virtual and real life, are delimited.

How people interact with technology relates to the meaning-construction processes rooted in the motives, values and knowledge that guide young people's activities.

Information about the organization that runs the project Research group Images, Words and Ideas of the University of Alcalá

Initiator: Pilar Lacasa

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Website of research group <http://uah-gipi.org/>

Productions on Instagram

<http://iconosquare.com/tag/instakids14/>

<http://iconosquare.com/tag/instateens14>

Productions on Vine

<https://vine.co/tags/instateens14>

<https://vine.co/tags/instakids14>

Productions on Vimeo

<http://vimeo.com/album/3200931>

<http://vimeo.com/album/3219541>

Quotes of participants

Session 4, Matadero: “Hello again, I am Diana’s mom (Workshops 3 and 4). The kids had a blast and learned a lot, thank you. We would like to gain access to see what you did. Can you please tell us how to do that? Thanks again.”

Session 5, Matadero: “Hi Pilar, Katusca and the Gipi team at UAH, I thank you for this cool opportunity for both the kids and their proud parents. The project is fascinating and we hope to be in touch for the next workshop. Federica will be delighted and, if possible, so will her cousins ... It has been a great pleasure to meet you.”

Information about the resource

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