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The Disappearing Digital Divide: An Examination of SES and Children’s Activity Pursuits Across Media Platforms

Abstract:

Children today are surrounded by and immersed in media, spending about half of their waking hours engaged with some form of media platform (Strasburger, Wilson, & Jordan, 2009). Children’s constant media use is, in part, due to the fact that they use media for a multitude of functions. Since most contemporary media can fulfill more than one purpose, the particular media that children choose to use is largely reliant on the media to which they have access. In turn, access is often heavily dependent on socioeconomic status (e.g. Anand & Krosnick, 2005; Common Sense Media, 2011; Kaiser Family Foundation, 2004; Roberts & Foehr, 2008), suggesting that children of different income levels may turn to different media for the same purpose. The current study sought to investigate how income level is related to children’s choice of media when it comes to a variety of activities. A sample of 531 parents with children between the ages of 2 and 13 years completed an online survey related to children’s media access and use. Results demonstrated that the idea of a “digital divide” is largely nonexistent, at least for older media. Children are still turning to more traditional media to fulfill their daily needs, and access to these media is largely equivalent across income levels. These findings suggest that media products for children need not always be designed with socioeconomic status in mind; rather, it may be more important to consider the function of the product and which media platform children typically turn to for that purpose.