

Children's use of mobile phones

An international comparison 2013

Executive Summary



Children in a mobile world

Children around the globe are increasingly passionate users of mobile technology. Demonstrating a receptivity and enthusiasm that far exceeds those of their parents and teachers, they are embracing the opportunities and technologies provided by mobile devices in ways that could not have been predicted a decade ago.

Children's use of mobile phones – An international comparison 2013 provides a detailed picture of children's mobile phone behaviour in Algeria, Egypt, Iraq and Saudi Arabia. Now in its fifth year, the 2013 study surveyed 3,560 pairs of children and their parents/guardians.

The 2013 research has been funded by mobile operators in each country, with a small contribution from the GSMA and the continued support of the Mobile Society Research Institute. The report data was obtained through a series of surveys conducted in each country during 2012 and 2013.

Research focus

To enable year-on-year comparisons, standard questions were posed to children and their parents including:

- Age of first mobile ownership
- Reasons for getting a mobile
- How they feel about their mobile phone
- Parents concerns over their children's use of mobile phones

Additionally, topics for the 2013 survey included:

Social networking and privacy: How many children use social networking services on mobile phones; how many contacts do they have; are children and parents aware of what information they are making public via their mobile phones?

Internet access via mobile and content: Are children accessing the internet via mobile phones; how many are doing so; how long do they spend online; and what content are they looking for?



Mobile app use: Are apps being accessed by children and how does that compare against their parent's use; what types of apps are being used, and which are the most popular?

Tablet use: Are tablets being used by children, and for what purpose; are tablets used instead of mobile phones or in conjunction with them?

Ownership and usage

81% of children aged 8 to 18 currently use a mobile phone, with 79% of these owning a new handset, and one in three owning a smartphone. Children from higher income households, or those who already own a smartphone, are more likely to use a tablet with overall tablet usage amongst children surveyed at 28%.

Across the four countries, 10 and 12 are the most common ages for children to receive their first mobile phone. Both Saudi Arabia and Egypt show high usage rates from a younger age, with over 80% of children using a phone at ages 10 and 12 respectively. However, in Iraq and Algeria children's usage of mobile phones reaches over 80% at ages 15 and 16 respectively.

The calling and texting habits of children are similar across all four countries, although there are some differences in gender. Children use the calling and messaging functions on their mobile phones more than their parents, with boys calling more frequently than girls. Across the four countries surveyed the majority of children make an average of 6 to 10 calls per day and send less than 5 text messages per day.

The most popular pre-installed mobile phone function used by children is a camera (more than 90%), followed by music players and movie players. Other functions are becoming increasingly popular, with more than half of all child mobile phone users surveyed making use of location based services.

Accessing the internet via mobile

55% of children who use mobile phones use them to access the internet. This percentage rises to 93% when looking exclusively at child smartphone users.

Over 80% of all children who access the internet using their mobile handset go online at least once a day, with 21% accessing it more than six times a day.

Of all children who have a mobile phone, 14% listed their mobile phone as their primary device for accessing the internet. When looking at smartphone users, over 38% of child smartphone users stated that their mobile phone was their primary source of internet access.

Social networking, apps and other services

Over half of all children surveyed who use mobile phones use social networking services, rising to 81% of those with smartphones. In all countries surveyed children are using social networking services on their mobile phones more than their parents, with the largest gap between parents and children found in Iraq where only 10% of parents versus 82% of children use social networking services.

Of children who access the internet via their smartphones, 85% download or use apps. Entertainment apps are the most popular among children who download apps, and fitness and health apps are the least popular.

Across all countries ringtones, video games, music and videos are the most popular type of internet content accessed by children, followed by internet games. In Saudi Arabia 27% of children who use mobile phones use the mobile internet for school or work, followed by 15% of Algerian and 13% of Egyptian children.

Mobile's impact on children's lives

Mobile phones are an integral part of children's lives with 87% of children surveyed agreeing that having a mobile phone increases their confidence.

The impact that social networking has on children who use these services via their mobile is also apparent, with 94% of children agreeing that they have reinforced relationships with close friends through such services. In addition 89% of children agree that social networking services enable them to build relationships with those friends who are not so close.

Safer mobile use

Over 60% of parents have concerns about their children's mobile phone use, with viewing inappropriate sites (e.g. dating or sexually explicit sites) the highest concern at 88%.

More than 70% of parents expressed concern regarding the privacy of their children when using mobile phones. This proportion is particularly high in Saudi Arabia and Iraq where 84% of parents expressed concern. On average 64% of children surveyed are using either a password or PIN on their mobile phone.

40% of children surveyed have public profiles on social networking sites, with girls more likely than boys to have private profiles. Parents express the same levels of concern regardless of the privacy setting used by their children on social networking sites. Over 70% of children surveyed have met or started to communicate with new "friends" online, with Algerian girls making almost double the number of new "friends" than Algerian boys.

61% of all parents surveyed set rules on their children's mobile phone use; this is highest in Iraq at 72% and lowest in Saudi Arabia at 48%. More than 90% of parents do take some kind of action when rules are broken, mainly to discuss the issue with their child.

In addition to setting rules, 57% of parents surveyed who have access to parental control services use them to manage their children's mobile phone use. Content filters are the most popular control method applied by 56% of parents, followed by usage controls at 44%.

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About the GSMA

The GSMA represents the interests of mobile operators worldwide. Spanning more than 220 countries, the GSMA unites nearly 800 of the world's mobile operators with 250 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset and device makers, software companies, equipment providers and Internet companies, as well as organisations in industry sectors such as financial services, healthcare, media, transport and utilities. The GSMA also produces industry-leading events such as Mobile World Congress and Mobile Asia Expo.

For more information, please visit the GSMA corporate website at www.gsma.com

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The mobile generation is here. To learn more about the growing movement of younger mobile phone users, download the full *Children's use of mobile phones – An international comparison 2013* report at www.gsma.com/myouth

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Since 2004, NTT DOCOMO's Mobile Society Research Institute (MSRI) within NTT DOCOMO has been studying the social impact of mobile phone use. The research institute, which operates independently from NTT DOCOMO, conducts research studies into both present and future influences of mobile communications. Its findings are widely disclosed to the public through reports, publications and symposia. For more information, please visit www.moba-ken.jp/english