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.

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.

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 over half of all child mobile phone users 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 80%), 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 25% 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.

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.

Over 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 child’s mobile phone use, content filters are the most popular control method applied by 56% of parents, followed by usage controls at 44%.

The impact that social networking has on children who use these services via their mobile is also apparent, with 48% 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.
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, as well as more than 200 companies in the broader mobile ecosystem, including handset makers, software companies, equipment providers, Internet companies, and media and entertainment organisations. The GSMA also produces industry leading events such as the Mobile World Congress and Mobile Asia Congress. For more information, please visit Mobile World Live, the online portal for the mobile communications industry, at www.mobileworldlive.com or the GSMA corporate website at www.gsmworld.com

NTT DOCOMO is Japan’s premier provider of leading-edge mobile voice, data and multimedia services. With more than 58 million customers in Japan, the company is one of the world’s largest mobile communications operators.

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

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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