![CORE logo — Children Online: Research and Evidence]

Theories and Concepts for Understanding Children's Digital Lives: An Annotated Bibliography

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This annotated bibliography provides a roadmap for understanding nine key areas of children's digital lives. It has been designed for researchers and research users and provides essential and supplementary texts on each of the areas.

Key areas of children's digital lives

Children and young people
The child, children, young people
Development and evolving capacity
Structures and cultures of childhood
Diversity and difference

Digital environment
Technology and affordances
Uses, users and domestication
Normative values in design
Innovation, datafication and AI

Access
Place and time of access
In/equality and in/exclusion
Fixed, mobile and wearable
Transcending on/offline

Opportunities and benefits
Internet engagement
Engagement and participation
Information and exploration
Play, creativity, fun

Skills and literacies
Learning and information skills
Digital skills and competencies
Data literacy and e-Safety
Civic and other literacies

Risk and harm
Content, contact, conduct, contract
Familiar and emerging risks
Cross-cutting risks including privacy
Relation between risk and harm

Health and wellbeing
Digital wellbeing and health
Mental ill health and anxiety
Resilience and coping
Vulnerability

Social support
Parental mediation
Socialisation, family and school
Sociality and peer support
Professional help services

Policy and regulation
Children's rights in the digital age
Law, policy and regulation
Agency, voice and activism
Responses to emerging challenges

OPPORTUNITIES AND BENEFITS

This section addresses the theories and concepts for analysing children's engagement with digital technologies and the internet, pointing to a wide range of benefits and opportunities, including socialising, creativity, civic engagement, entertainment and learning. A common theme is the posing of a theoretical challenge to the common-sense distinction between online and offline engagement. Recognising the multiple interdependencies between online and offline activities, researchers are instead seeking a comprehensive approach that distinguishes between different types of engagement, depending on the context, and on the outcomes for children, many but not all of which are conceived of as beneficial.

Some authors propose a hierarchical classification of online activities (or modes of engagement), arguing that some but not all children are able or supported to 'climb the ladder' and engage in more complex digital activities. Another direction of theorising explores the connections between online engagement and longer-term benefits for children, such as scaffolding child development and learning, and impacting positively on children's life outcomes.

🔓 **Brites, M.J. & Ponte, C. (2018). Reasons and circumstances that lead to the non-use of media by young people and their families.** *Comunicação e Sociedade*, **34, 411–429.**

This article tackles the underdeveloped area of media resistance among young people and families, from the point of view of deep mediatisation, disconnection studies and also social capital traditions.

Brites, M.J., Ponte, C. & Menezes, I. (2017). Youth talking about news and civic daily life. *Journal of Youth Studies*, **20, 3, 398–412.**

This article considers how young people talking about news and politics in their family and peer contexts influences their civic life. Based on talking and news-mediated contexts and habits (from diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds), the authors identified three different profiles: limitations to empowerment; civic capital and self-empowerment; and socioeconomic conditions and empowerment. These show how family and peer talking play a central role in strengthening and making a habitus of being an active citizen, even in contexts with limited cultural, economic and social conditions.

🔓 **Colvert, A. (2021).** *The Kaleidoscope of Play in a Digital World: A Literature Review*. **Digital Futures Commission, 5Rights Foundation.**

The report outlines the possibilities and challenges of children's free play in the digital environment, exploring the similarities and differences with free play in general, and tackling the specifics of digital affordances as they shape play possibilities.

🔓 **Dahlgren, P. and Hill, A. (2020). Parameters of media engagement.** *Media Theory*, **4(1), 1–32.**

Dahlgren and Hill discuss how media engagement has become synonymous with social media analytics and ratings performance but should instead be theorised as subjective experience linking the personal, socio-cultural and political. They use a model with five parameters of media engagement – in relation to media contexts, motivations, modalities, intensities and consequences.

🔓 **Fingerhut, J. (2021). Enacting media. An embodied account of enculturation between neuromediality and new cognitive media theory.** *Frontiers in Psychology*, **12, 635993.**

This article offers a short primer on media theory, but the work is primarily situated within a cognition perspective, which asks questions related to mental state in media engagement.

Gee, J.P. (2008). Learning Theory, Videogames, and Popular Culture. In K. Drotner & S. Livingstone (eds) *International Handbook of Children, Media and Culture* **(pp. 196–212). SAGE Publications.**

Critiquing psychological and individualistic theories of learning, including in relation to digital environments, Gee sets out his influential socio-cultural analysis of learning, taking online games as a provocative case. He contests accounts of gaming as problematic, and insists on understanding gaming in cultural terms – as social, aesthetic and pedagogic, as with other forms of media.

🔓 **Greene, K., Yanovitzky, I., Carpenter, A., Banerjee, S.C., Magsamen-Conrad, K., Hecht, M.L. & Elek, E. (2015). A theory-grounded measure of adolescents' response to media literacy interventions.** *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, **7(2), 35–49.**

This study offers a conceptual framework for the effects of media literacy interventions on behaviour. The authors posit that it is not participation but engagement that can explain and predict individual variations in media literacy programmes.

Hasebrink, U. (2012). Young European's Online Environments: A Typology of User Practices. In S. Livingstone, L. Haddon & A. Görzig (eds) *Children, Risk and Safety Online: Research and Policy Challenges in Comparative Perspective* **(pp. 127–139). Policy Press.**

Hasebrink analyses how and with which outcome children use online opportunities, using the 'ladder of opportunities' approach. This is based on the notion that children can be divided into groups depending on the range of opportunities used by a particular child, moving from information-related sources to communication to advanced uses, ending with online content creation, practised by only a few. European countries are also compared in this context.

Hasebrink, U. & Domeyer, H. (2012). Media repertoires as patterns of behaviour and as meaningful practices: A multimethod approach to media use in converging media environments. *Participations: Journal of Audience Research & Reception Studies*, **9(2), S757–S783.**

This article proposes a conceptual approach to media-related practices that considers the overall range of media practices, including different kinds of engagement, as a comprehensive pattern. This can help to avoid a biased picture as provided by studies that focus on specific communicative practices and neglect their embeddedness in larger patterns (or repertoires).

🔓 **Ito, M., Arum, R., Conley, D., Gutiérrez, K., Kirshner, B., Livingstone, S., Michalchik, V., Penuel, W., Peppler, K., Pinkard, N., Rhodes, J., Salen Tekinbaş, K., Schor, J., Sefton-Green, J. & Watkins, S.C. (2020).** *The Connected Learning Research Network: Reflections on a Decade of Engaged Scholarship***. Connected Learning Alliance.**

This book reports on a sustained programme of exploration of the potential of children and young people's digital engagement. With the focus on designing to optimise youthful digital media engagement in terms of creativity, collaboration, learning and civic engagement, it reviews the

lessons learned and the future direction for internet engagement in the interests of children and youth.

🔓 **Paus-Hasebrink, I. (2019). The role of media within young people's socialization: A theoretical approach.** *Communications: The European Journal of Communication Research*, **44(4), 407–426.**

This article is relevant in order to research media socialisation in the context of social inequality. It combines the subjective and structural components of practice. The approach is based on three analytical concepts – options for action, outlines for action and competences for action – and advances an interlinkage of subjective perception, action-driving orientations and everyday life practices against the backdrop of (changing) socio-structural conditions.

🔓 **Paus-Hasebrink, I., Kulterer, J. & Sinner, P. (2019).** *Social Inequality, Childhood and the Media: A Longitudinal Study of the Mediatization of Socialisation*. **Transforming Communications – Studies in Cross-Media Research. Palgrave Macmillan.**

This book is an in-depth analysis of the nature of digital and social inequality, based on a longitudinal study (2005 to 2017) on the question of the role of media within the socialisation of socially disadvantaged children and their families.

🔓 **Ravenscroft, A., Dellow, J., Brites, M.J., Jorge, A. & Catalão, D. (2020). RadioActive101- Learning through radio, learning for life: An international approach to the inclusion and non-formal learning of socially excluded young people.** *International Journal of Inclusive Educational Review*, **24(9), 997–1018.**

This article describes an original international approach to the inclusion and non-formal learning of socially excluded young people through participatory internet radio. First, it critically discusses the social and digital exclusion of young people. It then describes participatory action research methods that are influenced by the work of Dewey and Freire. The article emphasises that to support the non-formal learning of socially excluded young people, we must foreground our attention on fostering psychosocial dimensions alongside developing contemporary competences.

🔓 **Reicher, S.D., Spears, R. & Postmes, T. (1995). Social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE model).** *European Review of Social Psychology*, **6(1), 161–198.**

The social identity model of deindividuation effects (SIDE model) explains how group behaviour is affected by anonymity and identifiability. There are many social situations in which people interact in relatively anonymous ways. In social interactions on the internet, for example, people often use pseudonyms or avatars (pictures) to identify themselves, and even email addresses do not typically provide much information about senders. An important question, therefore, is how anonymity affects people's behaviour.

🔓 **Robinson, P.A., Allen Handy, A. & Burrell-Craft, K. (2021). Critical media literacy and Black female identity construction: A conceptual framework for empowerment, equity, and social justice in education.** *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, **13(1), 79–91.**

While this article does not specifically include children, it offers an overview of critical consciousness and develops a conceptual framework for the gendered and racialised construction of identity, which can be used for teaching critical media literacy.

🔓 **Sarwatay, D., Raman, U. & Ramasubramanian, S. (2021).** <u>**Media literacy, social connectedness, and digital citizenship in India: Mapping stakeholders on how parents and young people navigate a social world.**</u> *Frontiers in Human Dynamics*, **3.**

The literature reviewed in this article aids in understanding key themes and concepts influencing media literacy, digital citizenship and social connectedness, with a specific view to diversifying media literacy scholarship beyond the context of the Global North.

Subrahmanyam, K. & Smahel, D. (2010). *[Digital Youth: The Role of Media in Development](#)*. **Springer Science & Business Media.**

This book is a useful reference as it focuses on the integration between offline and online experiences, challenging the outdated opinion according to which when children engage with the internet, they develop a different persona. Overall, the book looks at youth online through a developmental lens, offering frameworks useful to orient the theoretical and empirical analysis of children's internet engagement.

🔓 **Wartella, E., Beaudoin-Ryan, L., Blackwell, C.K., Cingel, D.P., Hurwitz, L.B. & Lauricella, A.R. (2016).** **[What kind of adults will our children become? The impact of growing up in a media-saturated world.](#)** *Journal of Children and Media*, **10(1), 13–20.**

This article offers a framing for media (and the internet in particular) as a 'more knowledgeable other', following Vygotsky, in order to frame children's internet engagement as an opportunity for informal learning. Technologies are conceptualised as dominant activities of childhood that can scaffold learning and inference values, for instance in relation to priorities and expectations around relationships with others, and definitions of success.

🔓 **Woodfall, A. & Zezulkova, M. (2016).** **[What 'children' experience and 'adults' may overlook: Phenomenological approaches to media practice, education and research](#)**. *Journal of Children and Media*, **10(1), 98–106.**

Drawing on foundational work by Husserl, Bakhtin and Dewey, this article outlines several concepts that are useful in rethinking the direction of research in this area – primarily from a media-centric to an experience-centric approach.