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The Experience of Participating in the Digital Community as the Essence of Children's Everyday Life. Research Report

Abstract

The article discusses the research aimed at revealing the meanings that children give to their daily participation in the digital community. For several decades, the immersion of children in the online world has been evoking different opinions of adults – from those very enthusiastic to those highly alarmist. However, it seems to be essential to listen to the voice of the children themselves. This creates an opportunity to rise above the level of assessing the impact of media on children and to reach the space that hide a repertoire of colorful experiences related to the presence of children in the online world. For this purpose, children aged 8–10 took part in the focus interviews. The research material was collected and analyzed according to Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's six-stage analytical framework. One of the most important conclusions is that online activity fills children's everyday life to a large extent and their online presence is naturally intertwined with being offline. Children perceive the internet as a source of many opportunities and declare that they feel safe, as they are aware of the rules that must be followed in it. The Internet provides them space where they can be together and engage in many activities. Children appreciate the value of face-to-face contacts, which they find different from those mediated by technology.

Keywords: child, childhood studies, children's everyday life, the internet, e-culture of children.

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Doświadczanie uczestnictwa w cyfrowej wspólnocie jako treść dziecięcej codzienności. Doniesienie z badań

Abstrakt

W artykule opisane zostały badania, których celem było poznanie znaczeń, jakie dzieci nadają swojemu codziennemu uczestnictwu w cyfrowej wspólnocie. Zanurzenie dzieci w świecie online wywołuje bowiem od kilku dekad różne opinie osób dorosłych – od tych bardzo entuzjastycznych, aż po dalece alarmistyczne. Istotne jest natomiast – jak się wydaje – wsłuchiwanie w głos samych dzieci. Stwarza to szansę na wzniesienie się ponad poziom oceniania wpływów oddziaływania mediów na dzieci. Ponadto przybliża do poznawania tych przestrzeni, które kryją repertuar barwnych doświadczeń związanych z byciem dzieci w świecie online. Wykorzystano w tym celu wywiady fokusowe, w których wzięły udział dzieci w wieku 8–10 lat. Uzyskano obszerny materiał badawczy, który przeanalizowano zgodnie z sześćoetapową ramą analityczną według Virginii Braun i Victorii Clarke. Wśród najważniejszych wniosków można wskazać, iż aktywność internetowa wypełnia dziś w znacznym stopniu codzienność dzieci, a ich bycie online przeplata się naturalnie z byciem offline. Dzieci postrzegają internet jako źródło wielu możliwości i deklarują, że czują się w nim bezpieczne, ponieważ są świadomi zasad, jakimi trzeba się w nim kierować. Internet stwarza im przestrzeń do bycia razem i inicjowania wspólnie wielu aktywności. Dzieci doceniają wartość bezpośrednich kontaktów, które w ich odczuciu znacznie różnią się od tych zapośredniczonych przez technologie.

Słowa kluczowe: dziecko, studia nad dzieciństwem, codzienność dzieci, internet, e-kultura dziecięca.

Introduction

The immersion of present-day children in the world of digital media generates considerable interest among researchers, who attempt to portray the issue from different perspectives. Also in Poland, a number of research results have recently been published that account for children's participation in digital culture (cf. Iwanicka 2020; Dziekońska 2020; Siwicki 2021; Donoso et al. 2021). However, it is worth noting that the child-media relationship implies a variety of opinions and views, from the very enthusiastic to the far alarmist (cf. Buckingham 2008; Bougsiaa et al. 2016). It seems that one reason for this may be the ambiguity and elusiveness of the two categories that constitute the phenomenon. After all, both the child and the media are described in different ways depending on the perspective the researcher takes, the discipline he or she represents, and the approaches to the child and the media themselves that are closest to him or her. Consequently, combining such complex categories and showing examples of their relationality makes the phenomenon of children's immersion in the world of digital media, evoked at the beginning, difficult to grasp. It requires the selection of a well-considered methodological strategy that allows children to actively express their thoughts, identifying adequate social, cultural, political or educational

contexts, but also – it seems – constantly updating the knowledge in the field of media development. These activities, however, provide an opportunity to rise above the level of assessing the influence of media on a child, often conducted from the position of an expert researcher. They thus bring one closer to exploring the spaces that hide the range of colorful emotions and experiences associated with children's presence in the online world. Exploration at this research level is at the center of my interests, and hence in this article I focused on investigating the meanings children give to their daily participation in the digital community. The results obtained in the course of the research provide a voice in the discussion of the functioning of present-day children in the world of digital media, thus participating in the trend of childhood studies.

Child, childhood, digital media

For several decades, researchers from various fields of study have been engaged in considering new dimensions of modern childhood. The category has become a subject of research fascination ever since the child with its experiences, needs, rights and views became the center of interest (Kehily 2008). The foundations for this were laid by child-centered pedagogy, but it was the contemporary trend of childhood studies that brought out a new field of exploratory inquiry, from the perspective of which many researchers today look at the child and its everyday life (Qvortrup, Corsaro, Honig 2009). This is because it enables an interdisciplinary study of the child as a subject actively participating in social life and allows a deeper understanding of, among other things, “the social, cultural and historical variability of childhood and its irreducibility to the biological dimension” (James, Prout 1997; as cited in Kowalik-Olubińska 2020: 11).

The described approach to the study of the child and childhood is proving to be particularly valuable when unveiling those aspects that have so far often been reserved exclusively for adults, but now also include children (cf. Esser et al. 2016). Such initiatives as the Parliament of Children and Youth, children's and youth councils of cities and municipalities, social consultations involving increasingly younger citizens, grassroots civic acts involving children and youth – despite their sometimes still only “decorative” function on Polish soil – make “the very language of children's participation less and less exotic and more and more common” (Brzozowska-Brywczyńska 2021: 13). Indeed, according to Gerison Lansdown, there is no age limit when expressing views and exercising the right to participation. Moreover, children can express their opinions on issues that are important to them not only through verbal speech, but also through art, literature, play, or using computers (Lansdown 2001: 2). Many examples of children acting as active social actors can be found in Małgorzata Kowalik-Olubińska's book *Dzieci aktorami w przestrzeniach życia społecznego. Sprawczość w sieci relacji [Children Actors in Spaces of Social Life. Causality in the network of relations]* (2021). Undertaking, among other things, meta-observations of causality of children in various spaces of social life, the author sees them “in the space of family, school, children's peer cultures, digital and public spaces” (Kowalik-Olubińska 2021: 55).

For several years an interesting space of children's activity and participation has been the media, which is changing both children's everyday life and themselves. This is because the Alpha generation, as those born between 2010 and 2024 are called, is entirely rooted in the 21st century and is very different from the children of previous generations. These are people who live surrounded by tablets and smartphones. They actively participate in the social life realized on social networks. They model themselves after influencers from sites such as YouTube and TikTok. They like to be online all the time, hence they show a significant dependence on mobile technology (McCrinkle, Fell 2021). This attachment to technology is also due to the fact that children of the Alpha generation are increasingly coming online earlier and earlier, which is becoming their natural nurturing environment from the first years of life (Rowicka 2020).

However, children's relationship with modern technologies generates a lot of discussion in public discourse, as well as in the academic field. Arguably, the contradiction and polarization of opinions on the role of media in the lives of modern children is often due to the fact that they are formulated almost exclusively by adults (Buckingham 2008: 164). Among them are concerned and helpless parents whose children prefer to spend their time online rather than play outside. There are also teachers, whose students learn differently and need different working methods because the ones used so far are insufficient and inadequate for the children's needs. There are the producers of the media market, who are aware of the consumer power of the youngest users of the internet, hence they influence children through advertising and impose certain behavior patterns on them. Finally, among them are politicians and promoters of various ideologies who impose ways of thinking about the child and its participation in the online world (Clément, Buckingham 2019: 11).

Meanwhile, it seems that children may have much to say on the matter. After all, it is hard not to agree with William Corsaro, a scholar of children's culture, that it is children who know the most about themselves and their childhood (Corsaro 2015). Giving voice, then, to children who move seamlessly between the online and offline worlds (Cantelmi 2015), crossing the world's borders using technology as digital travelers (Kenway, Bullen 2001: 178), could yield valuable descriptions of the specifics of children's everyday life immersed in digital reality.

Research description

Children's participation and activity in the online world have been the subject of my research inquiries to date. Recently, they have taken the form of netnographic explorations involving non-participatory observation of children's online communication. This communication is seen as a manifestation of the new face of children's culture, which in the pre-digital era was generated by children playing outside, and today has largely moved to online space (Dziekońska 2020).

In the case of the research described in this article, however, I focused on exploring the meanings children give to their daily participation in the digital community. I reduced the above goal to a number of specific research questions:

- What are the activities children engage in online?
- How do children participate in the digital community and what rules do they follow?
- How do children communicate online?
- What emotions accompany children when they are in the online space?

To search for answers to the problems mentioned above, I used a qualitative strategy and made use of the research methods offered within it. The first was the research sampling method, which consisted of a deliberate, non-random selection of respondents. The study included children aged 8–10 who declared that they use the Internet on a daily basis and showed interest in participating in the interview. Due to the age of the respondents, the research procedure was of particular importance and was carried out in accordance with all ethical standards (including concern for the protection of the respondents' personal data, concern for the safety and emotional comfort of the children during the study, caution when describing the results of the study so that the identity of the respondents was not revealed – the children's names were replaced by symbols in parentheses, and other names were introduced in the quoted statements of the children). It was necessary to obtain approval from the university's Research Ethics Committee to conduct the study before proceeding, a condition that was met. In the case of minors, it was also necessary to acquaint legal guardians with the specifics of the research and request their consent for the child's participation in the study. Due to the fact that the selection of the research sample was made through the principals of the selected elementary schools, who showed interest in the research topic undertaken, the principals of the institutions were also asked for permission to conduct the study. Consequently, the study involved twelve children (seven girls and five boys), whom I met with in November–December 2022 on the premises of two elementary schools in the Mazovia Province.

The method for collecting research material was focus group interviews, which I conducted using an interview plan (the interview questionnaire consisted of four problem boxes based on the four research problems mentioned, which additionally included specific questions). This is because I assumed that direct contact with children would be valuable in view of the research objective undertaken. It provides an opportunity to obtain in-depth research results. It was also important to unleash the group potential and create conditions for motivating interaction between the discussion participants (Ciechowska 2017: 108). This was possible by maintaining the principle of contextualization when organizing and implementing the focus groups (Kubinowski 2011: 213). The discussions were held in three groups of four, within which the children knew each other very well (the children in each group attended the same classes), in their natural environment, in familiar classrooms on the school grounds. Thanks to the triggering of various group processes during the children's interviews, such as responding to

the statements of others, complementing each other's statements, adopting different positions, changing their opinions, and asking each other questions (cf. Lisek-Michalska: 29), rich research material was collected, recorded on a voice recorder and then transcribed.

The last method taken from the qualitative strategy was that of data analysis. To do this, I used the thematic analysis method and followed the six-step analytical framework proposed by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (Braun, Clarke 2006, 2022). This method made it possible to organize the rather chaotic transcriptions of the focus interviews and extract the meanings that children – treated here as a certain group in a socio-cultural context – give to their participation in the digital community.

Children's everyday life on the Internet – survey report

All children who participated in the survey declared that they use the Internet. They connect to the web through a variety of devices, most often indicating a private phone or tablet, but also mentioned a laptop shared with other family members (with parents or siblings) or an xbox. The children were very active in the discussion, eager to express themselves and were very natural. They often interacted with each other, asking each other questions, addressing their discussion partners, completing their statements, such as: "And Kasia, don't you take pictures like on a trip recently with your camera?" (KB3)¹; "Quiet, don't say the password!" (KB3); "Let me guess what it is!" (KB4) "Goodness, I remember it!" (MG9); "Oh yeah? And who did that, Roxana?" (MG12); "Zosia, I mean..." (MG12).

Six topics emerged in the area of the collected data. The topics emerged as a result of inductive coding involving repeated immersion in the children's statements and were strongly linked to the data. They captured the essence of the data and represented a certain level of responses from the children surveyed (Braun, Clarke 2016). I have included the topics and their interpretations below.

"The Internet fills my everyday life"

In their statements, the children described their online participation as a natural content of their daily functioning. They included it in the schedule of their everyday activities, describing it as entertainment, fun, a way to spend their leisure time. Mainly, they indicated that they turn on their favorite games, watch short videos, watch cartoons and feature films, listen to music, write with classmates, while freely naming various online places, such as: "Sometimes on the Internet I look for some games. I type their name in the search engine, for example Roblox, sometimes I download one and play" (MB5) or:

¹ The symbols used in the article consist of letters and numbers assigned to the participants according to the rule: name of the city in which the school is located, the child's gender, and the participant's number.

Usually when I'm on my phone, I also go on YouTube and look at either Netflix or CDA. I ask my dad to turn on a kid mode for me, and I usually just watch family and adventure movies [...]. And on my cell phone, for example, Monica and I text and send each other some pictures on Snapchat (MG12).

They also indicated that they connect to the web because they want to stay up to date on current events:

Often the news is, well, the usual kind of news you get when you get on the phone. I want to know what's going on in the world. These are different. I do not type anything, such as they appear, I read. This is Google, as there is the usual news. But there are other sites I go to, for example YouTube, Spotify and such things. I search all sorts of things there, sometimes I'll type something there and that's it. Some are for children, some are not, but mostly they are for children (MG9).

Children often pointed out certain conditions that must be met in order to use the internet freely. One of these was homework. One respondent describes it this way: "When we have a test, I can't use it at all, but when I don't have a test, I do... for as long as my phone lasts" (KB3). A girl, on the other hand, describes her day this way:

After school, me and Milena go to grandma's. I come, she eats and then I come and we do lessons, and well, for example, we play something on the phone or watch something. We also need the Internet and we sit until... well, yesterday we sat until five o'clock, and today maybe even until six (MG8).

Others wrote about the fact that academic performance must be satisfactory and behavior appropriate, otherwise the use of the Internet may be restricted by parents: "I can't use the Internet for one, two days when I have an argument with my sister, for example" (KG2). Another boy described the opposite situation: "In my case, if I get an A on a test, I can play all weekend" (KB3). The children were also very deliberate about how much and when they can use the Internet, e.g. "I can't have the phone on Saturday. On Sunday I can only have 20 minutes or so on the phone, and on other days an hour and a half for the whole day" (MG10); "I have two to three hours, but after nine o'clock I already have the phone taken away. My dad said we were using too much and just restricted it" (MG7). At times, however, they referred to their parents' restrictions with some irritation: "I used to be able to use it like that every day, but now I have like an hour and a half a day, because my mom watched some parenting videos and now I only have an hour and a half... some man gave a lecture" (MG9). They also happened to be negative about the various types of parental protection installed by parents on their phones: "It even discourages children from taking the phone!" (MB6). They sometimes pointed out that the phone is their property and they have passwords to protect their privacy, and parents do not have access to them. In summary, technology fills the daily lives of children, combining with the responsibilities and other activities carried out every day, and their participation in children's lives is most often subject to regulations and rules set by parents.

“The Internet gives me many opportunities”

In the course of analyzing the research material, a clear theme emerged related to the benefits that the Internet gives children, which they would not have if they were deprived of access to the Web. In a way, this stemmed from the abovementioned topic of everyday life, but in this case there were statements that emphasized the significant role that the Internet plays in their lives and the opportunities inherent in it. The children clearly emphasized that participation in the digital world allows them, above all, to develop their passions and interests. One of the girls said straightforwardly, “Surely if I didn’t have the Internet, I would draw twice as badly, because from the Internet I take tips on how to draw something step by step. When I look at the work of others, I also follow their example” (MG7). Other passions that children develop while online are physical activities, such as gymnastics and dancing. The girls told how they create and enjoy their choreography routines and share them online:

MG12: Usually I just record my workout or I record my dog and record different acrobatics or something like that...

Researcher: And what do you do with it next?

MG12: It goes viral and everyone is watching and liking and giving hearts...

R: And it’s important that a lot of people watch these videos?

MG11: Well, because it’s just so lucky that someone is watching... you’re kind of famous.

The boys, on the other hand, shared their experiences of writing books on the Internet: “I did one book in Wattpad, I wrote two chapters and that was it. There were comments, likes. I made a bonus chapter for this book, because people liked it” (MB6) or developing architectural skills: “I build nice houses in the game and just make my plot available. Others can follow the example of building” (MB5).

Respondents cited the ability to overcome spatial boundaries as an important advantage of operating online, meaning that they can talk to people from other provinces or even other countries:

MG6: I have more friends on the Internet, but most of them in general are from other provinces, but it’s fun to talk like that. I once got acquainted with a person from Vietnam.

R: And how did you communicate?

MG6: In English. I learned a lot of English from games.

A girl from Ukraine talked about being able to keep in touch with her Ukrainian friends while in Poland: “I write to my friends who are in school, not here, who are in Ukraine, because they don’t have Messenger, and I talk to them either on Instagram, or Telegram, or Facebook” (MG8).

The educational aspect of being online also resounded in the statements:

It teaches me a lot of English (MB5);

For example, when we don’t know something and our parents aren’t there, we can find out. When I didn’t know how many legs a reindeer has, because I was making such a reindeer and forgot how many it has in total, I checked myself on the computer. Sometimes it comes in handy to check some recipes too (MG9).

Children also emphasize that searching for information online is much easier than in the offline world: "It's harder to get knowledge from adults, because you have to listen to it all, and on the Internet you'll read it and that's it. No one will read to you, no one will explain to you" (KB3). For some children being online is also a way to overcome their weaknesses, such as shyness and the difficulty of establishing face-to-face relationships: "I'm happier online, more shy in real life" (MB6). What needs deeper recognition, it seems, is the issue of the complex question of whether the Internet is a means of overcoming difficulties in interpersonal relations, or perhaps the cause of them (see Turkle 2013).

"On the Internet I am with others"

The activities that children undertake are very often based on a community of play. The statements show that children have a constant need to be together with others, to do something together, and the Internet creates good conditions for this. It is popular among children to play games remotely while simultaneously connecting via instant messenger to experience the excitement of the game together: "We go on Messenger, call a friend, share a screen and go. I play at my place and he plays at his place and we play together" (KB3) or: "You can play games together, like you can connect with Nataalka, for example, and you can play games like Brawl Stars or Stumble Guys and you can connect with someone, and play each other together" (MG9).

In the case of the activities mentioned, the children communicate at a distance with their friends. However, they indicate that they enjoy participating in games and activities in which they also communicate with random people:

MB5: I look for cool games on the Internet. Mostly they are some hide-and-seek games.

R: What are they about?

MB5: Well, you simply hide and someone is looking. You have to find a hiding place, some of us are hiding and two or three people are looking. When they find me I spawn. The person who is looking has a countdown on the monitor, and when it's over, they can start looking.

Or for example: "I go to some server in the game and chat with them. This chat is in the game, so they are Internet-only people" (MB5). One girl also shared her experience of making friends over the Internet:

I have a friend from the Internet, and we'll chat sometimes on Messenger. We met on TikTok and we followed each other, and when you follow someone, you can text them in private chat, not just in comments. And so we texted. Eventually we gave each other our Messenger details and now sometimes we text on Messenger (MG7).

Children are also eager to form groups in various instant messaging services, where they communicate with each other: "I sometimes form groups, for example, with Sandra and Karolina from class. The three of us just talk, send messag-

es” (MG11). However, some view participation in these groups – especially class groups – negatively and opt out, such as one boy: “There are seven class groups on the Internet, all of which I left because my phone kept vibrating” (MB5). It’s also interesting to note that children derive considerable joy from creating something together during meetings in their offline lives and then sharing it with others in their online lives:

We record various videos together with a friend on TikTok. They are different, for example, we record mowing corn, some plowing, cultivation, things like that, and we send it on TikTok, and we also add songs to make it cool. And then when people like it, it’s cool (KB4).

Children’s awareness of the opportunity to connect with others and be together with others online is significant. They derive pleasure when they participate in the digital community, watching and commenting on what others have produced, but also when others respond to their creations.

“The online and offline worlds are different”

Children move seamlessly between online and offline realities. The two worlds are intertwined in their daily lives. Nevertheless, they definitely perceive the differences between them and can easily describe them. Interestingly, the vast majority of the participants in my study said that they feel more comfortable in the organic world, despite the fact that life in it is more difficult. The children often talked this way: “Real life is cooler ... well, because you’re not going to watch it, you just have it in front of your eyes, not on a monitor. You can touch it, you can get into it, and on the phone I can’t do that” (KB1) or: “The real world is better, because there is nature, plants, people, there is more knowledge, you can know more things, you can have many friends” (MG12).

Other girls also referred to the possible dangers of anonymity online: “In person you see your friend, what she does, you see who you talk to. And over the Internet, a person can pass themselves off as a friend” (KG2);

When you talk to someone on the phone, you just don’t know if they are real as they present themselves in text messages, that they have such a good heart, and in person they can turn out to be some kind of... they can blackmail, they can hit, they can be unkind, and they will definitely be different than on the cell phone (MG11).

The children noted that the online world gives people more options:

Well, because it’s just that when you’re on the Internet, you’re going to sit around a little bit, but in the world you can learn more things, know more things, for example, on your phone you’re not going to fly to Africa. There’s more opportunity in the real world (MG9).

At the same time, when talking about their being in the online world, the children mentioned very positive emotions. They recounted being online: “I am happy

then, I feel joy, I feel very good on the Internet” (KB4). Children perceive the world of the Internet as an idealized reality that is a kind of respite from everyday things:

On the Internet everything is kind of perfect, and in person it’s not quite so much. On the Internet everything is great, cool and so on, and in real life, however, there are problems (MG7);

In the game it’s all so much easier than in real life [...]. Some things are faster, and in real life, for example, time passes more slowly (MB6).

The Internet appears in the children’s eyes as an artificial space in which “things are pasted” (MG10).

“It’s hard to imagine a world without technology”

The children who participated in my study emphasized the superiority of the offline world over the online world. At the same time they found it difficult to imagine a world without the Internet. They indicated that they do not remember a world without technology, because the media accompanied them from the beginning. They only know a world without the Internet from the stories of their parents or grandparents. They recalled these stories very readily, with a certain sentimentality and joy:

Mom used to write letters to her cousins, because they lived far away from each other, and the dad of one of them drove... I can’t remember what he drove and delivered those letters, and they had their own special code, e.g. a star was some letter, a circle some other letter, and they wrote in code so no one would decipher them (MG7).

One of the boys even admitted: “I would have preferred the old days. Back then there was no technology, you played with your friends, you were invited over. Life was not boring. My dad, for example, herded horses, worked in the fields” (KB3).

However, the children stressed that today people’s functioning depends largely on technology: “We wouldn’t be able to drive cars, all the lights would go out. Everything is online now” (MB6). They also said with some concern that if there were no Internet: “There would be no games, YouTube, there would be nothing, now people take everything from the Internet” (MG11). Their statements also included opinions that if it weren’t for technology, it wouldn’t be possible to call for help in an emergency or quickly contact a parent who is at work, for example.

“I feel safe online, although a lot can happen on the Internet”

During the analysis of the data, the theme of online safety clearly resonated. The children very naturally and with great conviction talked about various situations that can happen to online users. The matter-of-factness in them was characteristic. It also seems that these descriptions were less filled with anxiety than that usually created by adults when talking about children’s safety on the Internet.

In their statements, the children gave numerous examples of dangerous situations in the online world:

For example, if someone writes to you to send a picture of yourself, well, we shouldn't do it, because they might... I don't know... they might share it with someone else who is very bad and might have this special thing, and they might invade our house when we're not home, or blackmail us that they will share it with the whole world (MG11).

Sometimes in the game people call you names, for example, I added a person to my land in the game, on my island, well, and this person just robbed my island and started to call me names, and I felt such anger that they called me names (MB5).

In doing so, the children were able to point out many rules to follow online. These include both those derived from their own experiences, but are also taken from and heard from adults or in the media: "You can't get provoked. When someone wants some personal information from me, I say I don't give it, and just keep playing" (MB5); "You have to watch out for hackers, so you don't go into unsecured sites or movies for 18-year-olds, such as the Peppa the Pig rehash" (KB4); "It's very important that no one finds out your password, so no one gets into things that aren't theirs, such as stealing money from your account" (KB3).

From the children's descriptions, it seems that they feel rather safe online, as they function in it on a daily basis and know the basic rules of netiquette. As a contrast to the other children's statements, however, one girl's words can be quoted: "I feel a slight fear when I'm on the Internet, because, after all, I can't predict what can happen on the Internet" (MG12). Unpredictability is also inscribed in the offline space, where, just like online, surprising, difficult, dangerous, as well as pleasant situations can happen. Children, in most of their statements, perceive the issue of online life in this way, somewhat similar to offline life. The repertoire of ambivalent emotions and experiences is permanently inscribed in both. It is important to be able to deal with them.

Conclusions of the study and concluding remarks

Taking up the interpretation of the analyzed data, it can be pointed out that functioning in the online space is a natural form for children to fill their daily lives and is the content of their childhood. This is indicated by the categories that emerged, as well as the course of our interviews. It was characteristic that the children talked about their being online in an obvious way, quite as if it was an ordinary activity, comparable to eating, sleeping or getting dressed. When answering questions, they often began with the words: "well, just like that," "normally," "I get online and that's it." In addition, they were keenly interested in the topic taken up. They were eager to speak and share their experiences, even interrupting each other and reacting to the speakers' statements. Each of the children had a lot to say, although in each group there emerged dominant individuals and those who found it difficult to naturally join in the discussion.

Among the most important conclusions that emerged from the analysis is the fact that children's Internet activity takes a very diverse form depending on their needs and interests. Children develop their passions in it, spend their leisure time, and communicate. Their online functioning is naturally intertwined with their offline functioning, although children strongly emphasize the differences between the two spaces. Although online presence is important to them, the superiority of the offline world is obvious in their perception. This one appears in the eyes of children as alive, real, graspable by the senses. The online world, on the other hand, is artificial, "pasted" and limited in sensory terms. This does not change the fact that children perceive the Internet as a source of many opportunities and feel safe in it, because they are aware of the rules to follow. They mainly appreciate that the Internet is a fast source of information and a space that allows communication both with people familiar to them from the offline world, but also with random people, for example, in online games or web applications.

What resonated most strongly in the research was the children's display of a constant need to be together with other members of the digital community. It seems that the category that emerged from the research breaks the colloquial belief that children spend time alone on the Internet. Children enjoy being online with others. They then engage in many activities that are based on a community of play: they participate in multiplayer online games, generate e-artifacts together, sharing them with other members of the network in the form of tiktoks, photos, videos, posts and more. I see these as examples of artifacts of contemporary children's culture, which can be compared to nursery rhymes, drawings or rituals of children's games created in traditional outdoor games, characteristic of pre-digital times. In addition, they emphasize the opportunity to follow and observe the activities undertaken by others, which is often a source of inspiration and a basis for the development of their passions. Thus, it seems that the observed phenomenon is the result of transferring the need for play and the need for a community of activities - the distinctive needs of childhood - to the online space. It turns out that children have found in the digital space such places and ways to be able to satisfy both needs there, thus creating a new face of modern childhood.

The research report is a voice in the discussion of children's digital participation. Conducting research with the participation of children of different ages, looking at the issue from different perspectives, exploring new activities undertaken by children today in online spaces provides an opportunity to get closer to learning about the content of contemporary childhood, as well as children themselves. It also seems that making research attempts in the area of child-media relations, where the voice of children resonates most strongly, breaks through the voice of adults about the disappearing or endangered childhood.

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