

Studying Young Digital Users: Methods in Practice

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Abstract

In contemporary societies communications technologies are constantly evolving under the pressure of digital innovation. Devices and software that allow learning, mediated communications, and the consumption of cultural products always, everywhere, and on every device are multiplying. OssCom (Centro di Ricerca sui Media e la Comunicazione) analyzed the cross-media practices of young Italians, the mediated communication activities of young digital users, the cross-media activities of Italian kids, and social networking use among Italians. The article presents these qualitative studies with a specific attention to the integration of different qualitative research methods—face-to-face interviews, “expanded ethnographies,” participatory methods—and the challenge of harmonizing qualitative research and the large social database retrievable from social networking software. The article describes how these methods can add layers to our understanding of young digital users’ practices that cross the boundaries of online and offline spaces and that include entertainment, sociality, and learning activities.

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