A Comparative Study

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INTRODUCTION

This following is a brief review of a comparative study on Youth Media Participation (YMP) which was funded by the Academy of Finland and includes the following countries: Finland, Egypt, Argentina, and India. The main objective of the study was to find out about children's use of the new media (i.e. the internet and mobile phone) and their media participation.

COUNTRY BACKGROUNDS

EGYPT lies in North East of Africa with part of it in Asia (Sinai). It has long borders on both the Red Sea in the East, and the Mediterranean in the North. Egypt is the largest county in the Arab World with respect to population which exceeds 80 million. Cairo is the Capital City of Egypt with a population of 18 million.

Of the 80 million in the country, 17 million attend schools and universities. Education is compulsory for all children until age 12. There are mainly two types of schools in Egypt; Governmental and private schools. Governmental schools provide education for a small, affordable fee. Private schools exist and are very expensive as they provide high quality education and a number of them of them follow the American, French, British or German educational system including taught curricula. Children have to spend 12 years at school before joining the university. After 12 years of education, they receive the General Secondary School Certificate which qualifies them to join the University.

FINLAND has a population of 5.4 million, in a land between Russia and Sweden. The main languages of Finland are Finnish and Swedish, the latter being a minority language of Finnish-Swedish people, who are mostly bilingual. School in Finland is obligatory and free to all 7-16 years old children. The basic levels (classes 1-9) give qualification to vocational school or college. Practically both of them offer gates to the possibility of broader education, also on to the university level. Finnish school system still offers equal

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learning opportunities, also special education, though differentiation between areas and schools are already visible due to multiple actions of the latest economical situation.

MEDIA LANDSCAPES

Egypt has a wide range of governmental and private media. Egyptian Radio and Television Union, which is a part of the Ministry of Information, supervises radio and television. There are three national TV channels as well as six local channels. Channel Two, which is a national channel, broadcasts mainly in English and French. There are also quite a few private TV channels.

Generally speaking the viewer in the Arab World is exposed to a great number of TV channels. In addition to the land TV channels, there are 696 satellite channels; 97 are owned by governments, and 599 are privately owned. They broadcast through 17 satellites working in the Arab World (Media Committee, 2010).

Among the governmental channels 49 are general channels and 48 are specialized whereas the private satellite channels are 161 general and 438 specialized.

Most channels broadcast in Arabic (76%) and English languages (20%). They also broadcast in other languages such as French, Persian, Spanish, Indian, Hebron, and Urdu. Children in Egypt and other Arab countries are also exposed to other satellite channels coming from Europe, North America and other parts of the world.

It is estimated that 58 million (nearly 75%) have mobile phone services. The internet is widely spread in 65% of homes in Cairo and 40% of homes in other areas. There are seven radio networks which are listened to all over the country. One of them broadcasts in more than 40 languages, i.e. the Overseas Radio. Moreover, there are local radio stations in all parts of the country. Private radio stations (FM) exist and broadcast mainly light musical programs which are the most listened to by young people. There are three im-

portant governmental publishing houses which publish tens of newspapers and magazines, in Arabic, English, French and German. It is estimated that there are more than 600 newspapers and magazines in total in Egypt, privately and publicly owned (Higher Press Council, 2009). Lastly, the Egyptian film industry plays in the Arab World the same role of Hollywood in the west. Egyptian films and TV programs are very popular all over the Arab World.

In Finland 70% of homes have broadband internet. The users of internet come nowadays from all age groups. Almost 82% of 16-84 years old people has used internet during the last three months. Still reading has kept its position: 80% of over 12 years old read newspapers daily. Also libraries, movies and TV are all still popular. There is 21 million library users and 863 public libraries with their interne-connections, databases and services free to all. Most of the over 60 radio stations can be heard also in internet. Everyone seems to have several mobile phones; there are 8.1 million mobiles in use.

Not only literature but also TV and film industry are supported by the state, especially the Swedish broadcasting for minority languages. The programs of the minority languages of the immigrants in Finland are rarely supported. Children are protected in special actions: programmes are regulated by age limits and scheduling. Children's programming is supported in all media. There are altogether 2 state TV channels, five national ones and 10 commercial TV channels, with lots of their substance found also in Internet. All satellites and cables are available in most of the parts of the country. Also from over 60 radio stations most are in internet. More than 200 newspapers and 3300 magazines are published.

THE STUDY SAMPLE

For the Egyptian study, it was decided to interview a sample of children from Fayoum, a rural area outside of Cairo and the city itself. In total, 36 interviews were carried out in Cairo and Fayoum, with children from two age groups: 12 -14 and 16 -18.

Interviews in Finland consisted pilot interviews in fall 2009 and final interviews in spring 2010 (N 34) from the capital area and on the rural area. Girls and boys were interviewed mostly separately, 1 – 4 in each group.

The main question handled in these interviews was: **What kinds of media literacy are the children practicing and developing in different regions?**

FINDINGS

Data collected from the interviews were classified into four main categories: access to the new media, meaning how and in what quantity the media was available, and also the uses of media; socioscape, the larger contexts of the media use; and genderscape, meaning the possible special differences between the media use due to a sex.

ACCESS TO THE NEW MEDIA

It was found that children from Cairo have access to all media except one young boy who had access mainly to television and the internet. All the interviewed children from Cairo have access to the internet at their homes. Children's parents subscribe to the net through DSL. The internet fees of subscription were mainly paid by parents.

In Fayoum, the rural area, only one female child interviewed mentioned that she did not have a mobile phone. It was also found that children from the rural area were using other traditional media, i.e. newspapers, magazines television and radio more than those of Cairo. This matches findings of a previous study (Asran, 1998). Television was more important than any other medium for children in the rural area. This supports findings of previous studies carried out on Egyptian children (Kamel, 1995; El Semary, 1995; El Sayed 1996).

A child of the rural areas' heavy use of the traditional media is normal as he/she did not have much of out-door activities like the Cairo children. This finding does not contradict results of previous studies carried out on Egyptian children (Tayie, 2008).

Age factor emerged as am important factor with respect to children's use of the new media. It was found that younger children were more interested in games and being visible on line. They were seeing this as a kind of prestige and showing off. They were even creating more stuff on line than the older children. Older children were mainly interested in listening to music, watching films and downloading them.

In Finland the children's media use has shifted from listening radio and watching TV into playing games and using the internet rapidly during the last two decades. The results of national surveys echo also in our interviews: belonging to the virtual communities and groups is common, specialization starts in early phase and is many times completely separated from a child's school identity; chatting, sending text messages and playing are part of the everyday life.

SOCIOSCAPE

The social background factor was also influential on Egyptian children's access and dealing with the media. Children from high-income families have access to all media, especially the new media, while some children from low-income families had limited access. It was observed that parents of children from low-income families were more involved in their children's use of the media. These children also mentioned that they discuss some contents of newspapers and magazines with their parents, mainly fathers. It was also noted that children from high income families were more open to talk about many things including the private and personal things they were doing with the mobile phone or the internet for instance.

In Finland, it can be said that the availability of media was understandably good amongst all children. Old and new, as well as social media were part of their everyday life. Generally the uses sounded quite similar; many children read some newspapers, practically all magazines. Almost all

followed TV-programs and watched movies, some listened music from a radio; everyone used more than one device to listen music. However, when looked closer the uses of new media one could see clear, big differences in individual level uses. Age factor became crucial. The mere playing and learning by doing was a major factor at the age group of 10 years old and under, and the social factor was important. Still, the children of 11-13 years old use new media mainly for pleasure in a classical sense; playing and being in contact with friends and the family. In the stories of the media use of older children, especially from the age 14 on starts movement from sharing to private uses, the specialization and gaining special skills. Pleasure is gained from the specialized media uses. However, communication and the major use of mobile phones rule in all age categories.

Additionally, the internet provided a special connection to the social situations of the families through shortening the distance between family members and relatives. That was seen in a special way in two different situations of children's lives: the other is their parent's divorce and new family members—the other the situation of the children in the immigrant families. This was also seen in city area and on countryside. For the children of the immigrant familie's social media offers contacts to own culture and relatives, way of learning new culture and identity work. In Finland it has become very common that children stay with both of their parents, for example shifting the place every week. After the parent's divorce social media seems to offer a possibility to daily contacts and neutral place for meetings of old and new siblings and parents.

International networks and meaning making processes seem to be connected in certain media user's groups. Being a fan of something or having special hobbies seem to support finding international web sites. In the groups of football fans and in Finland especially the fans of Japanese popular culture seem to skip the national web sites and go straight to the major English or Japanese sites. Also for gaming lowers the threshold of using the international sites supports heavily learning and using of English language. Thus it is clearly visible that global aspects of certain participatory cultures (Jenkins 2006a, 2006b) through media, especially in online communities, are interrelated into special personal interests in very special ways. The joining the international fan based communities is clearly something to be followed in an international studies about children and young adults media use (Hirsjärvi 2010).

Surprising was, that participation in Finland—in a traditional sense of the term—seems to grow not in media, but in local ground, in everyday social world, at school or community level activities. Also it seems that there is connection between early heavy media use and participation with media.

GENDERSCAPE

The gender factor also emerged as an important factor in the Egyptian study. It was noted that girls differ from boys in a few aspects. The geographical area was a contributing factor in children's use of the new media.

In Cairo girls did not vary a lot from boys with respect to their access to the new media, and media use. They were also heavy users of the net, iPod and the mobile phone. Only one girl mentioned that she did have a mobile phone because she thinks that she does need it now. It was a matter of principal rather than lack of money to buy it as she is from a high-income family. All girls mentioned that they mainly use the mobile phone to stay in touch with parents and to contact relatives and friends. The father pays for the line in all cases.

All boys from Cairo have the internet at home and paid for by their parents. The net was mainly used for playing or chatting with friends. FaceBook and YouTube were the most common sites with them. All girls have email addresses as from a few years ago. They also mentioned that they use the net to download music and movies. When asked about their sources of information about the net sites, friends were mentioned as their main source.

Among the traditional media, Television was the most mentioned medium. This matches findings of previous studies (Reda 1994; El Shal,1997, El Abd 988). All girls have satellite receivers and dishes at their homes. The most preferred TV programs were mainly films and serials. One girl also indicated that she likes the programs which encourage the viewers' participation. She added that she would like to see more programs open for viewers' participation through normal land telephone lines not the mobile phones only. This girl does have a mobile phone and it was clear that she has an anti-mobile phone attitude. Another girl mentioned that she likes religious programs which educate people on the right basics of religion. Radio and newspapers were hardly used by this group of girls.

When asked about their hopes or expectations from media, they said that they would like to see TV programs tailored for each age category and not only two categories of programs, for children and adults.

Though girls were free in terms of their use of the new media, they were controlled sometimes by their parents on what they should or should not see on television at home.

Girls from the rural area were, to a great extent, different and they were more conservative than those from Cairo. None of them has ever mentioned a single word about private and personal matters. Their use of media was mainly for education and informative purposes bearing in mind that they were using the traditional media especially television. It was also clear that girls from the rural area were using newspapers, magazines and television more than those from Cairo. They also mentioned that they talk frequently about media contents with their parents. This was not the case for the Cairo girls who never talk with their parents about media contents. Rural-area girls also mentioned that they watch television in most cases with other members of the family, i.e. parents, brothers and sisters.

When asked about their hopes and expectations from the media, they indicated that they expect more serious and educational programs. They also hope to see more programs which reflect the reality in their own geographical area.

Boys, in general, were heavy users of the new media, especially in Cairo. All boys have access to the internet. The internet was mainly used for chatting. Only one boy indicated that he used the net for educational purposes to do his school assignments. Boys also indicated that they use the internet to download programs and films. For the younger child it was mainly chatting with his peers. One boy indicated that he combined the net with TV, so that he can watch films downloaded from the net on TV. FaceBook was the most visited net site. All boys indicated that they know about it, and other web sites to visit from their friends.

All Cairo boys indicated that they heavily use the mobile phone on a daily basis and at any time of the day. The young boy was not using the mobile phone as he has not got one. He said that he will have one when he grows older. He also mentioned that sometimes he calls some of his friends or his grandmother using his mother's mobile phone and that he knows how to use it. Generally speaking, boys were using the mobile phone more than girls. Boys from the rural area were more likely to abide by the school rules than boys from Cairo.

Though it was not allowed to use the mobile phone at the schools, according to the school rules, all children from Cairo indicated that they hide and use them during breaks. They all said that they put them on the silent mood while at school so that the teachers won't find out about them. Boys from the rural area said they never take their mobile phone to the school as it was not allowed.

Boys from Cairo also mentioned that they use the mobile phone for the internet. Even one boy indicated that he always sees films on his mobile phone. Girls were less users of the mobile phone, however, they were using the net more. Boys in the rural area use the mobile phone only for calling. A said: "I use it only in cases of emergency, the mobile phone was meant to be used only for these cases"

It was clear that the Cairo boys frequently use the mobile phone for messaging friends. So SMS was common among children. Through these SMS, as they mentioned, they agree on meetings and outgoings. Surprisingly, even when they are at home they never use the land lines, they mainly use their mobile phones. Boys from Fayoum were less users of SMS and they use the land phones when they are at homes.

Though boys from Cairo hardly mentioned newspapers, magazines and even televisions, in rural areas these media were frequently mentioned. The two boys from Fayoum also mentioned that they usually watch television together with other members of the family. That was also the case for girls from the rural area. The Cairo boys usually watch TV alone as all of them have TV sets in their own rooms.

All boys indicated that they listen to radio. For Cairo boys, musical programs were common through their mobile phones which all have radio and musical services on them. Boys from the rural area listen to radio too at home and not on their mobile phones. They like to listen to religious, educational and news programs. Boys in Cairo know and use the iPod, whereas boys form the rural area have never used it or even heard about it.

In sum, it was found that the social and geographical area factors emerged as important factors that influence children's new media literacy, their media use and participation in Egypt. In Finland the gender factor became most visible in the group of girls of the immigrant families. Especially some girls in the capital area were struggling with the quality of the media they were eager to achieve. It looks that in this particular group the social factor of owning certain kind of mobile phone or game consoles is an important issue. They also had least possibilities to affect their purchasing media stuff, and their media use seemed to be more observed that the other girls in Finland.

However, in capital area as well as in rural area the differences of the skillful media use were clearly not so much connected to the sex but the availability of media, the personal interests of the children and the support available in everyday media use. Similarly boys and girls alike spent a lot of time in using the media, also internet.

BUDGET FOR THE MEDIA

Girls from Cairo were allowed to use the mobile phones which were paid for by their parents. The situation for boys was a bit different. Some were given a certain amount of air time (paid by their fathers) and then they buy more air time (prepaid cards) from their pocket money. Other boys from Cairo were given a free use, paid for by their fathers. On the other hand, boys and girls from rural area were only given limited time to talk on the mobile paid by their fathers. They have what they call "controlled lines", meaning that they can use them to speak for a limited number of minutes per month. Then they did not bother about buying any credit when the allowed number of minutes is over. Newspaper and magazines were mainly bought by the parents.

Compared to the children of Egypt, the buying and using mobiles children in Finland were usually supported by their families. Certain limits were set for use either by using pre-paid connections or by setting the limit that the parents would pay. It was very usual that children gained more gadgets, games or programs they wished as a reward from good school numbers or small house work. They usually also got the magazines they wanted, as well as books.

CONCLUSION

The results achieved demonstrated that media in Egypt, especially the internet, set the agenda for children. The internet provides them with topics to talk about with peers and friends while mainly being used for chatting and entertainment. It was hardly used for educational purposes. Younger children were more active than older ones in creating materials and producing on the internet. The addiction to media was in evidence which is where media education could be useful.

Finnish results show the meaning of the accessibility and availability of media in welfare state. It also shows the positive results of media education, however, also the hidden differences in ability of media use. It also hints the certain cultural differences—like in the case of the children of the immigrant families—and the special individual uses—like in the cases of the children who are in contact to the other part(s) of the family after the parent's divorce. These are the factors that are usually not easily seen in statistics. It is also interesting to see how the using of an international web sites and activity in fandom based groups are seen in the statistical part of the study.

It seems that the internet has created some kind of popular culture among children all over the world. This is a phenomenon that could be seen world wide. We can see children in Egypt as well as those from Finland and other countries doing the same things with the new media.

In sum, therefore, the new media is becoming a crucial and vital factor in children's processes of meaning making. That is the reason why more attention needs to be paid media literacy education. This also justifies the hard work done in this respect by scholars and with the support of international organization such as UNESCO, the United Nations' Programme on the Alliance of Civilization, Academy of Finland, the International Clearing House on Children, Youth and Media and Mentor International Association for Media Education. It is also worthy mentioning there is an urgent need for more data from different parts of the world. More joint and comparative studies are also needed.

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