

Tingstad, Vebjørn: Children consuming virtual world games

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The paper presents an investigation into young children's use and understanding of virtual world gaming in Norway. The commercial market dominates this area, and immersive forms of advertising and cross-promotional marketing have developed as these spaces have proliferated. The purpose of this paper is to analyse preteens' experiences and understandings of commercialized practices and social activities in virtual world games. The study started as a collaboration with researchers in the US, UK and Norway. The research is designed in similar ways, but has not approached the design in the same order. This means for instance that US has done analyses of relevant newspaper articles and informational sections of virtual world gaming websites, and done qualitative research with children, UK has also done the qualitative part, whereas Norway has done a survey.

Methods

This paper presents the survey which explores how children (ages 8-11) engage with these games (both online and offline), with two areas of focus: friendship practices in relation to virtual world games; and children's understanding of the commercialized practices connected with virtual spaces and ways they have learned to navigate them. The study involved a school wide survey with 400 children in 3 schools.

Research questions

- What is the relationship between online and offline play in relation to young children's friendships and social networks?
- What understandings of commercialized spaces and the intentions of media producers do children transfer across online and offline spaces?
- What sort of consumer identities do children adopt in these different environments?

References

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