

Press release

Under embargo until: 31 January 2018 at 00.01h GMT

New insights into UK childhood in 2018

A new report shows children are eagerly embracing voice-recognition gadgets – but could they be teaching children to be rude and demanding?

Children are eagerly embracing voice-controlled devices such as Alexa and Siri – suggesting we’re on the brink of a surge in children’s use of this technology, reveals a new independent report from CHILDWISE.

But is this new ‘Alexa generation’ - accustomed to barking orders at a device - learning a less-civil way of communicating that could spill over into their interactions with humans?

“Our research shows that children age 9 to 16 are really taking to voice recognition gadgets such as Siri and Alexa this year - with the younger children using them the most,” says Simon Leggett, research director at CHILDWISE.

The 2018 CHILDWISE Monitor is a comprehensive annual report looking at 5 to 16-year-olds media consumption, purchasing and social habits as well as key behaviours. More than 2000 children in schools across the United Kingdom completed in-depth online surveys for the report.

“We are on the tipping point with this technology and it is about to become mainstream for children. This is likely to have implications around how children will learn to communicate,” he says.

“As there is a surge in children’s use of gadgets that respond to verbal commands we may see them learning ways of communicating that then slip into their interactions with humans,” says Simon.

Voice controlled digital assistants like Apple Siri, Microsoft Cortana and Amazon Echo will tolerate anything and still reply even if children fail to say please and thank you.

Children can issue anonymous, curt orders such as ‘set an alarm for 7am’ and a digital assistant will respond without complaint – unlike a more easily offended human. The dividing line between digital ‘person’ and a real human being might not be clear for children.

“Will children become accustomed to saying and doing whatever they want to a digital assistant ‘do this, do that’ – talking as aggressively or rudely as they like without any consequences. Will they then start doing the same to shop assistants or teachers?” said Simon Leggett.

It seems that younger children, growing up with this technology, are more comfortable with using it to help them with day to day tasks such as help with spelling words. By age 15-16 fewer than half of children with this technology at home say they use it at all.

“The expected surge in this use of technology by children will also raise questions about who is programming the answers,” said Simon.

The report shows children mainly use the technology to search for information – with one in seven asking, for example, for help with their homework. One in nine ask their digital assistants to play music.

The data shows that 42% of children aged 9 to 16 access voice recognition gadgets at home - 36% access Apple’s Siri, 20% access Microsoft’s Cortana, 15% access Amazon’s Alexa at home and 7% access Google Assistant.

Findings of the report also include...

- Children age 5-16 spend just over two and a half hours a day watching programmes, video and short clips (2.6 hours, 2.5 hours last year).
- Most children now use devices other than a traditional television set to watch video content.
- YouTube remains the top way of watching on-demand content.
- Children age 9-16 spend an average of 2.7 hours online a day. This has dropped over the last three years and is down from 2.9 hours last year. However, this fall could be a consequence of children being less able to determine which of their routine activities are carried out online or offline.
- Children are taking to virtual reality with 25% having mobile VR equipment at home, 11% with Playstation VR, 10% have Oculus Rift and 6% have HTC Vive
- Binge watching content is a growing habit.

CHILDWISE is an independent market research agency specialising in children and young people. CHILDWISE has a programme of published independent research and also conducts research for government agencies, charities, broadcasters, publishers and brands www.childwise.co.uk

The Monitor Report 2018 covers... children and their media; TV viewing; music; reading ; cinema; children’s equipment; money; purchasing; sports & activities; health & wellbeing and social awareness.

Editorial notes: For more information or to interview a CHILDWISE researcher please contact Liz Hollis 07880 680302 liz@lizhollis.co.uk CHILDWISE website www.childwise.co.uk