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A Comparative Analysis of European Press Coverage of Children and the Internet

Leslie Haddon and Gitte Stald

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Abstract

This article reports a content analysis of press coverage of children and the internet in order to examine cross-cultural similarities and differences in the news values framing accounts of the benefits from and risks facing children online. By comparing media reporting in 14 European countries, the study found greater coverage of online risks than opportunities across Europe, which appears to be due to the high position of crime stories on the news agenda.. Thus readers, including parents, are exposed to media representations that often show the online world as being risky for children, which may affect perceptions of the prevalence of risk. However, there is national variation in terms of which risks receive more press attention, meaning that parents in different countries are potentially sensitised to different risks.

Keywords: children, content analysis, cross-national, European, internet, press, risk

Theoretical framework and research questions

Within media studies perhaps the most well known cross-national research is that of Hallin and Mancini (2004), which compares media systems (e.g. the development of media markets, degree of state interventionism, extent of journalistic professionalism). However, there appears to be little cross-national research comparing actual media coverage of specific areas of life. Yet this is important because the various different analyses of “media logics” (Altheide & Snow, 1979) often describe general, rather than country specific, processes affecting media reporting. Hence, the question remains as to whether there are slightly different media logics at work in different countries or, indeed, whether cultural or other such contextual factors contribute to producing national differences in media reporting.

More specifically, the particular area of life examined in this article is press coverage of children and the internet, with a specific interest in the media reporting of potential online risks to and (to a lesser extent) opportunities for children. The study formed a small part of the *EU Kids Online* project,¹ part of which identified national variation in children’s online risks (Hasebrink, Livingstone, Haddon & Ólafsson, 2009). The project investigated whether various contextual factors (such as the very diffusion of the internet in different countries, different legal systems and the different activities of NGOs) might influence these patterns. One such contextual factor was the national media..

To appreciate the importance of the media, we can start with the stress by Jensen (2002), following Giddens’ (1984), on the importance of reflexivity in everyday life, characterised as “the monitored character of the ongoing flow of social life” (Giddens, 1984, p. 3). He emphasises how the media provide a core tool in this

process, as “institutions to think with” (Jensen 2002, p. 6). For something as new and challenging as the internet, it is likely that news stories and media values will be particularly important in contextualising how parents reflect on the issues that arise for their children and influence any decisions to monitor and mediate their children’s use of the internet, which in turn could have a bearing on children’s behaviour online

If the media are important, within media studies there are several theoretical frameworks one could employ to examine this process. Insofar as children’s use of the internet involves risks, the tendency of the media to inflate moral panics is especially pertinent (Barker & Petley, 1997; Boëthius, 1995; Critcher, 2008; Drotner, 1992). Another relevant approach was agenda setting, whereby the media set the topics deemed to be of more public interest (McCombs and Shaw, 1972; Dearing and Rogers, 1996). . While frame analysis (e.g., Thompson, 1995; Weaver, 2007) also offers a way of examining these issues, recent issues of interpretation and reliability (Matthes & Kohring, 2008) posed difficulties for a cross-national study such as that undertaken here.

Indeed, the challenges of conducting a comparative, multi-lingual study are significant, and consequently a straightforward approach to coding was decided upon, following the model established by cultivation analysis. In its long history of assessing the frequency and nature of crime and violence on television, cultivation analysis effectively demonstrated the importance of media coverage in influencing people’s under- or over-estimation of risks in their daily lives (Gerbner & Gross, 1976; Gerbner, Gross, Morgan & Signorielli, 1986). Cultivation analysis emphasises less the history of particular media themes, as in the moral panic approach, but rather the routine processes of media coverage – for example, that the routine coverage of crime has a “drip effect” over time, creating a (misleading) perception of how much

crime really occurs. While it is not within the scope of the article to examine any link between media coverage and public perceptions), we report, as a first step, a content analysis that measures similarities and differences in routine media coverage of children and the internet across Europe.

In order to structure the general research question, a number of sub-questions were posed progressing from a wider to a narrower focus:

1. To what extent is there cross-national variation in media coverage of children and the internet overall? In other words, are experiences of children online simply less visible in some national media compared to others, which in turn might also have implications for risk coverage?
2. To what extent is there cross-national variation in positive versus negative media reporting of children and the internet, and how does this relate to the specific balance of coverage of risks versus opportunities? In other words, do some national press provide a more optimistic, positive picture of children's life online or do they more generally express concern about the internet as a "place" where children can spend time?
3. To what extent is there cross-national variation in the coverage of different specific types of risks? For example, do the media in some countries focus on and potentially sensitise readers, including parents, to some risks while in other countries there is more emphasis on other types of risk?

These formed the basis for further methodological choices, outlined in more detail directly below, and the structure of the presentation that proceeds from the amount of coverage, to positive and negative coverage, the role of two particular international stories in producing this pattern, and the balance of coverage of different risks.

Methodological Approach

Fourteen countries were studied: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and the UK. These represent a good spread across Europe in terms of geography (and related cultures and histories), country size, and internet penetration (Hasebrink et al, 2009).

The decision to use a quantitative media content analysis (Flick, 1998; Weber, 1985) was based on the interest in the prevalence of different types of media coverage. In a separate article, teams from three of the countries (Italy, Portugal, and Spain) complemented this with a more qualitative analysis (Mascheroni, Ponte, Garmendia, Garitaonandia, & Marru, forthcoming).

Following a pilot study, which revealed that certain events, especially international ones, could suddenly trigger a substantial amount of coverage, a common time period was selected for the sampling in all countries, namely the two month period from October to November 2007. In order to address the issues of the representativeness of the newspapers chosen, the researchers were asked where possible to achieve a balance of quality and popular/tabloid press, as well as some regional press because coverage varies between these different media. However, sometimes such distinctions simply do not exist or vary in their definition between countries². To give some idea of range of coverage, 72 newspapers were examined overall, where six countries covered three to four newspaper while six more had over six newspapers, but these often included more specialist or regional ones. Analysing fewer newspapers did not mean fewer stories – Spain and Italy each covered three papers and were the two countries with the largest number of stories.

The result was a database of 1035 newspaper articles that contained a reference to both children and the internet. These were coded according to a coding system that underwent several waves of refinement, though not all the parts are relevant for the analysis in this article.³

The first question, and the one arguably involving the most interpretation, required the coders to evaluate the overall tone of the story, which meant taking into account both the perspective of the article writer and the opinions of persons involved when they are also expressed. The rationale was to determine whether, when national audiences are reading this media coverage, they more frequently encounter positive or negative stories about children and internet, or ones that, overall, are neither simply positive nor negative⁴.

The second question investigated whether the balance of national and international news varied by country - for example, to see if the risks reported tend to be present in other countries rather than one's own. The point is that if there are media policies in different countries regarding how much foreign news to report this might have bearing upon their coverage of risk.

The third located the article in relation to (one or more) areas of life – in this sense, what was the story about, where, in terms of society or people's lives, do we see stories of children and the internet and is this where we find national variation or commonalities?

The sixth focused on the origins of stories, trying to ascertain if there was some event, including publications, which provide the basis for the story, to explore whether different national press routinely appear to report some types of events more than others.

The fifth examined whose voices were heard in the article – e.g. what agencies were cited – to see which actors have visibility in this field.

Finally, the risks and opportunities discussed in the newspaper stories were categorised according to the content, contact, and conduct framework generated within the *EU Kids Online* project more generally (Hasebrink, et al, 2009). Hence, content risks could include stories about advertising aimed at children, ones about problematic sexual web content (e.g. porn), violence on websites and sites whose values were an issue (e.g. racist sites). Examples of contact risks could cover stories about children being tracked by advertising, children being harassed, children being groomed or being supplied with misinformation. Conduct risks included stories about children making illegal downloads, publishing porn, cyberbullying other children or somehow ‘cheating’ using the web. As regards opportunities, there were the equivalent stories about positive online content (e.g. stories referring to websites for learning, encouraging creativity, supplying useful information), online contact (e.g. stories about platforms for meeting peers, online collaboration) and online conduct (e.g. stories about children’s various beneficial initiatives)

In addition to drawing upon the research experiences within a contemporary content analysis study in another project (COST298⁵), pilot studies were conducted in the UK and Denmark. These not only tested the initial coding system that was being developed but provided a sense of what material existed and some first indication of the time periods that would be required to obtain different sized samples of articles – as outlined above.

It was not possible to test coding reliability between national teams because of the lack of a common language. All the national team leaders spoke good English and explained the project goals and procedures to the coders in cases where the leaders

were not coding themselves. However, not all of the actual coders spoke English well. To address this issue, detailed explanations of the rationale for questions were documented and examples of potential grey areas were discussed in national team meetings. That said, this is a potential weakness of the study, one that was only discovered once attempting to do a comparative analysis on this scale with the resources available. The second strategy involved different coders in the UK coding British newspapers to see which questions produced a more (relatively) reliable consensus compared to other questions (Lombard, Snyder-Duch & Campanella Bracken, 2002). For example, the least reliable coding occurred with the positive versus negative overall evaluation and hence quite dramatic differences would need to be found if the data from this question were to be credible. In the event there were dramatic differences, but the patterns that emerged were fairly striking and consistent with the coding on risks and opportunities.

Each newspaper article was evaluated according to the coding frame outlined above and the results for all countries were entered into an SPSS database. There was then a division of labour whereby different members of the project reflected upon and reported upon the comparative results for each section – e.g., one person dealt with the 14 country answers to the question about national versus international news, others dealt with other questions. These later formed the basis for chapters of the report by Haddon and Stald (2009), while the current article reports the syntheses of these separate chapters. As will become clear, simply comparing the data from the different sections helped clarify some of the processes producing these figures – i.e., sometimes one set of figures made sense in the light of another. But in order to see whether there were certain processes specific to the time period covered, the

prevalence of two particular international stories was examined in considerably more detail.

In sum, certain methodological precautions were taken to address such issues as inter-coder reliability, the balance of types of newspapers, and the stability of findings over time. That said, there were methodological challenges, reflecting in part the time available to conduct the research, in part issues discovered during the research process. Examples, some already noted, included the standardising of coding judgements across (so many) countries, the fact that distinctions between “quality” and “popular” press work better in some countries than others and the lingering question of whether different findings would have emerged if different newspapers had been selected. Inevitably, then, there are limitations and questions. The key message is that one must be very careful in assessing these quantitative data, which at best provide a rough guide to the media processes at work.

Findings and discussion

*Amount of coverage*⁶

The first research sub-question concerned the national coverage of children and the internet in general.⁷ A majority of the countries covered had, perhaps surprisingly, a similar “rate” of coverage per newspaper, an average of 20 articles per month, per paper, initially raising the question of whether some more general media production processes are at work across these countries. However, there were some with lower coverage (Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, and Denmark – with 8-9 articles). In the first three cases, a first interpretation is that this may reflect the fact that these were

countries which generally had lower internet diffusion rates and lower use by children (Hasebrink et al, 2009). But that does not explain the Danish coverage, given that this country had a high internet penetration rate. There were also two countries with above average coverage - Italy (30 articles) and especially Spain (40 articles) – which did not have a high internet adoption rate. This supports the initial premise that there might be other “media logics” at work in national media besides reflecting the “reality” of internet diffusion.

Positive and negative coverage: Opportunities and Risks

The next sub-question first involved evaluating the overall tone of each newspaper article, the balance of positive and negative elements. Example of positive coverage include ‘Casualties of war go on-line; Billesley School website remembers victims of WWII conflict’ (UK) and ‘The young are producing their own news (Austria). Examples of negative coverage include ‘Youngsters risk fraud and sexual harassment on the Internet’ (Spain) and ‘Teenager’s suicide spurs virtual vigilantism’ (Ireland)

Within the whole dataset, the most striking figures were that 19% were positive, 37% negative, with the rest being neither or mixed in their tone (see Table 1). At the national level, there were a few countries where the cumulative coverage was actually positive, there were some where it was balanced or mixed but the factor that led to this overall average was that there were many countries where coverage was primarily negative, and this was quite extreme in some cases.

Table 1: Overall evaluation of the topic in the article

Country	Positive	Negative	Mixed, elements of both	Neither/ Descriptive	N
Austria	18%	68%	14%	0%	72
Belgium	34%	25%	19%	22%	79
Denmark	24%	38%	14%	24%	21
Estonia	15%	19%	21%	46%	116
Germany	7%	19%	17%	57%	122
Greece	7%	43%	34%	16%	44
Ireland	18%	64%	10%	8%	50
Italy	21%	28%	41%	11%	90
Norway	22%	55%	15%	8%	104
Portugal	18%	41%	39%	2%	56
Slovenia	19%	35%	28%	18%	79
Spain	28%	33%	30%	9%	130
UK	10%	57%	30%	3%	63

While we would need to know a good deal more about national contexts to understand these patterns, it looks as if part of the answer is shown in Table 2, where there seems to be more common negative coverage because of the generally high degree of reporting across most countries of legal changes, crimes, court cases, and police actions (hereafter referred to collectively as “crime stories”). Examples include ‘Stricter laws for chat. The security plan’ (Italy), ‘Birthday boy's father and brother battered by YouTube gatecrashers’ (UK), ‘Slapped and filmed: Happy slapping on trial’ (Germany) and ‘Adolescent arrested accused of heading international network for computer crimes’ (Spain).

When examining the coded data for the areas of life related to the story, this is the category that dominated in all but one country. Although the tables are not reproduced here, the same message comes across when examining the related issue of the origins of the story, with crime origins being predominate in most countries.

Unsurprisingly, therefore, the fact that crime receives so much coverage means that in most countries it was the police and legal representatives who were most often cited.

Table 2: Percentage of stories in the three most common areas of life covered by the newspaper⁸ (multicoded)

Country	Legal/ crime/ police stories	Education stories	Entertainment/ play/leisure stories	Total number of stories concerning children and the internet
Austria	68%	57%	19%	72
Belgium	59%	14%	22%	79
Denmark	14%	14%	81%	21
Estonia	56%	53%	30%	116
Germany	40%	26%	21%	122
Greece	61%	11%	23%	44
Ireland	44%	26%	34%	50
Italy	56%	12%	18%	90
Norway	40%	15%	20%	104
Portugal	64%	7%	7%	56
Slovenia	57%	15%	30%	80
Spain	61%	12%	12%	130
UK	49%	17%	13%	63

Sometimes in comparative analysis it is useful look at outliers since they can raise issues in a dramatic form. One has to be careful in interpreting the Danish figures on

crime since there are relatively fewer stories, but it does look like a striking anomaly.

Table 3: Quality and popular press legal/crime/police stories (multicoded⁹)

Country	Quality Press		Popular Press	
	Crime stories as a % of all quality press stories	No. of crime stories in the national quality press	Crime stories as a % of all popular press stories	No. of crime, stories in the national popular press
Austria	4%	18	76%	16
Belgium	60%	22	61%	25
Denmark	33%	2	8%	1
Estonia	66%	45	60%	12
Ireland	46%	20	25%	1
Italy	45%	13	63%	20
Norway	49%	18	34%	13
Portugal	58%	11	74%	17
Slovenia	65%	31	60%	6
Spain	54%	27	81%	33
The UK	69%	11	36%	9

In fact, in Table 3, 81% of the Danish stories fall, instead, into the category entertainment/play/leisure, vastly higher than any of the other countries (e.g. ‘Today’s babysitter’, ‘The internet - It’s for children’ and ‘Mom can I attend “gaming”?’).

This may be because there is, literally, less crime, or less crime reported to the police, or less acts defined as criminal, or less police actions for the press to report. But the other possibility is that there is less crime reporting because of a difference in Danish

press policy as regards how much reporting is devoted to that particular subject. In other words, this is a strategic case for thinking about whether there are any implicit quotas on how much certain categories of news – such as crime – will be covered in national newspapers.

Before leaving the issue of negative coverage, it is possible to add a little more detail to this picture. Some analysts have argued that popular papers generally have a higher percentage of more sensational stories than the quality press, which to some degree one might anticipate would be reflected in the distribution of crime stories (Scannel, 2002; Schrøder, 2002; Tuchman, 2002).

However, Table 3 shows the countries that collected data on both types of press, and only some countries (Austria, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) had a distinctly higher proportion of crime reporting in their popular press. In fact, in three countries there were strikingly more stories in the quality newspapers (Ireland, Norway, and the UK¹⁰). The implication is that if there is a process producing quotas of certain types of story, this applies across different types of press.

In about half the countries there was clearly more purely national coverage, with about two-thirds of articles reporting national stories (see Table 4). There was a more even balance between national and international stories in a few countries. But in some countries there was a minority of national stories: two-thirds (66%) of stories in Slovenia were about foreign events and over half were so in Austria (56%) and Portugal (57%), for example. Later in the article there is a description of some particular international stories that influenced the statistics during the period of the research, leading one to raise the question of how robust patterns of risk coverage are over time, especially where the coverage of such foreign events is substantial

Table 4: National vs. Foreign News

Country	National event	Event in some other (foreign) country	Both national and foreign events in the same article	N
Austria	35%	56%	10%	72
Belgium	61%	25%	14%	79
Denmark	67%	14%	19%	21
Estonia	48%	38%	14%	116
Germany	71%	18%	11%	122
Greece	36%	39%	25%	44
Ireland	48%	34%	18%	50
Italy	53%	31%	16%	90
Norway	65%	27%	8%	104
Portugal	39%	57%	4%	56
Slovenia	26%	66%	8%	77*
Spain	63%	32%	5%	130
UK	63%	35%	2%	63

*Two articles were not coded.

The other point to make about this balance of national and international news is that there were distinctly few positive stories coming from abroad – perhaps because they were less newsworthy. In the overall dataset only 8% of foreign news was positive compared to 27% of national news. Therefore, if you are a country with a higher proportion of foreign news, this also affects the proportion of negative news – at least on this topic. Here is an example where different countries appear to have different news selection policies, which in turn affects the nature of media coverage.

Turning specifically to risks and opportunities, nearly two-thirds of all stories (64%) referred to risks, whereas nearer a fifth (18%) referred to opportunities. Underlying these averages, with one exception¹¹, over 50% of stories covered risks in each of the countries, the maximum being 85% of stories.¹² One can already understand the reasons for this predominant - and common - coverage of risks: the degree of reporting of crime in many countries.

The role of particular international stories

At this juncture, before dealing with the final research question, it is worth pausing to look at two international stories. While the main intention of conducting this particular analysis was to look at implications for the stability of data over time, it also has immediate consequences for the balance of risk coverage discussed in the next section.

First, it is clear that during the data collection period there were two international stories which helped to shape the above figures. The first story emerged on the 8th/9th October 2007 when Interpol issued a statement that it was looking for someone involved in child pornography videos whose face had been distorted by computer in the various images (for example, producing the Portuguese headline ‘The hunt for an internet paedophile’). The story asked the public for help in finding him. On the 16th Interpol announced that it had identified the person as a Canadian English teacher. On the 20th Interpol announced that he had been arrested in Thailand. Since this was an international police agency approaching the press, how were these stages covered in the different countries?

All the participating countries covered the story to some extent, but some gave it, or parts of it, more visibility than others. In addition, in some countries the story had more visibility over time. Several papers examined in Norway and Belgium did not cover the original Interpol request at all. More commonly several papers per country carried the item, although only one of those surveyed in Portugal and Germany did so. At the second stage, most countries reported that he had been identified (except Austria) – but in several counties only one of the newspapers

surveyed carried the story. In the third phase, most countries covered the arrest (but not Germany and Greece). So overall, apart from the gaps noted above, coverage went from one or two papers per country reporting different stages, to several papers reporting each stage. In fact, in Spain, several papers had multiple items per day, and sometimes reported the story on several day.

The second major international story occurred in November 2007 when a Finnish school student shot several classmates and teachers before killing himself. What made it relevant for the internet was that he posted his intentions in an online video (leading to the Greek headline ‘He heralded the massacre on YouTube’)

. This story was covered in the main newspapers in almost all participating countries, even those geographically distant from Finland, such as Portugal and Austria. But geography (implying some shared culture between neighbours) did still matter. The story received far more attention in neighbouring Estonia and Norway, with follow-up stories such as the Estonian ‘School leaders estimate that Estonia is not safe from a shooting tragedy’ and the Norwegian ‘When it happens in Finland, it can also happen here’, In contrast, some countries only reported the incident the next day (e.g. Belgium) or for two days (the UK, Germany) but then stopped. Subsequent copycat threats in Finland, Norway and Germany were then reported in Estonia and Austria as well as in Norway and Germany, unsurprisingly. A particular story, or related stories, can boost the sheer amount of coverage in some countries compared to others. For example, in several countries, especially Estonia, this was a newspaper theme for three weeks.

These two particular stories influenced the statistics on stories related to crime, as illustrated below. Austria’s figure was particularly boosted by the coverage of the Finnish massacre and subsequent stories. In the case of Spain, the size of the

percentage is in part accounted for by the substantial of coverage of the first, Thai, case. Overall, in Belgium the Thai paedophile case received more coverage than the Finnish massacre, and in keeping with that there were quite a few national stories relating to paedophilia and online pornography. Estonia's figure in part reflects the fact that it covered the Finnish massacre and its aftermath extensively. Italy's coverage reflects a fair number of stories on both international incidents.

Thus, if overall there seems to be some shared underlying media processes leading to the predominance of crime reporting in many countries, the history of these two cases show how in different countries media professionals also make slightly different choices at the level of how much attention to give to particular stories.

Coverage of different risks

Lastly there is the national coverage of the different types of risk: content, contact and conduct. Table 5 organises the data to show the relative importance of the different risks. Arguably the first most striking point is that national media vary considerably in levels of coverage of the three types of risk. Countries low on reporting content risks, like Italy, are high on conduct risks, and vice versa (as with Denmark's reporting of contact over conduct risks, for example).

In many countries, *content* risks (often concerned with pornography) count for over half of all risks cited in the press, appearing in around 60% of cases in Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland. In contrast, the reporting of *conduct* risks is noticeably higher in Norway and Austria. Only in Denmark and to an extent Slovenia do *contact* risks form a substantial minority of all risks discussed in the press.

Table 5: Country variation in the types of risks coded in relation to the three risk codes in the national samples of articles¹³

Risk/ Country	Content risks (%of times coded/all codes)	Contact risks (% of times coded/all codes)	Conduct risks (% of times coded/all codes)	Total	N (number of codes in all national articles)
Austria	25%	10%	65%	100%	59
Belgium	55%	28%	17%	100%	94
Denmark	40%	44%	16%	100%	25
Estonia	54%	12%	34%	100%	158
Germany	44%	13%	43%	100%	118
Greece	64%	23%	13%	100%	44
Ireland	57%	16%	27%	100%	55
Italy	29%	23%	48%	100%	90
Norway	22%	12%	66%	100%	79
Portugal	59%	23%	18%	100%	71
Slovenia	41%	34%	25%	100%	111
Spain	60%	13%	27%	100%	130
UK	54%	16%	30%	100%	50

The present analysis provides little indication about the factors shaping coverage of types of risks in different countries. The Norwegian team within *EU Kids Online* pointed out that in Norway there is a notion of a “natural childhood,” where the

natural sexuality of the child is constructed as normal and thus exposure to sexual materials is considered less of a risk while at the same time discussions of children's rights is strong. But this raises a more general question of whether the different coverage of risks might reflect conceptions of childhood that lie behind the stories and are embedded in particular national cultures, including their media. In support of this particular line of analysis, , there was a high coverage of sexual risks in content in Belgium (42%), Greece (39%), Spain (37%), and the UK (36%), a fair amount related to child porn online (e.g. 'Paedophilia: 20,000 websites on the internet, Belgium) but not all of it (e.g. 'Scandal in Chile due to School sex video on the Internet, Spain). In contrast, press interest in this issue was very low in Norway (6%) but also in Austria (10%), Denmark (12%), Estonia (12%) and Germany (14%).

However, while promising as a line on enquiry, this approach to understanding variation in risk assumes stable patterns of media coverage. If we once again look behind the statistics to ask how these patterns emerge, the Norwegian, Austrian and Italian figures for "conduct risks" are in large part high because they had far more coverage of the Finnish massacre story and subsequent events (and the German press had coverage of its own copycat event). This not only influenced that particular column in Table 5 but also all the other ones – since such a high percentage of risks were about conduct, a lower percentage in those countries concerned the other risks. Meanwhile, Greece, Spain, Portugal, and Ireland are high as regards content risk. But Greece and Portugal (along with Austria) were amongst those with a high proportion of international news stories in general, including the first international story of a paedophile's images of children on the internet. This one story boosted the "contents" statistics for those countries.

While the figures show the coverage in the time period noted earlier, the question then becomes one of whether they are “normal” (or representative in the long term). Would they have been very different if specific events had not occurred? In the case of Norway, part of the reason for reporting the massacre was probably that it happened in a neighbouring country and in recent years there had been public discourse about Norway “looking to Finnish schools” because the Finns were performing better than the Norwegians in measures of educational achievement.¹⁴ In addition, one of the copycat attempts was in Norway itself. All this would make the Norwegian coverage more understandable, and it is possible to speculate that coverage would have been less had the original incident occurred in a different country. But this would not explain the degree of Austrian and Italian reporting. Moreover Estonia also reported the case extensively, but still did not appear high in terms of conduct risks. In other words, when trying to speculate about the robustness of the figures, the evidence is mixed.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to provide a cross-national comparative analysis of press coverage of a specific area of content – children and the internet, examining where and to what extent similarities and differences in press coverage occurred across countries. At a general level, beyond the specific content, this provides insights into what extent there are common and different media logics at work in different countries. The first is exemplified by the argument that there can be common (although occasionally different) quotas of news, as shown in the discussion of crime reporting. The second is illustrated by the variation in the balance of national and

international news. The variation of media logics by country was also found in the separate study by Pinter, et al (2009).

What are the lessons specifically for the study of children and the internet? First, up to a point there is common degree of newspaper reporting, an average rate of reporting per newspaper per month, across many countries, suggesting some shared news values. That said the exceptions remind us that other factors can influence the amount of coverage, including, but not only, the degree to which the internet itself has diffused.

Second, across most countries there is overall inclination to produce negative news stories, and hence more coverage of risks than opportunities. This appears in large part to reflect the predominance of “routine” news about crime. The case of Denmark at least raises the question of whether the press in some countries have different news values, with less reporting of these particular sources. Although in most countries national news dominates, for some smaller countries international news rises in prominence, and this difference in national media practices also enhances the negative and risk coverage. The overall, result is that these routine practices may over-represent online dangers and, from a cultivation analysis framework, lead the public to overestimate the internet as a risky place for children.

The other main finding is that which types of risks are covered more also varies across countries - mainly in terms of content, conduct and conduct risks, but also in terms of topics like sexuality. What factors lead to this is more open to discussion, including the fact that the media may itself be influenced by wider cultural values. Whatever the that the reason for these variation, media coverage in different countries may be contributing (among other factors) to sensitising readers to different kinds of risk, which may have a bearing on the degree to which people (including

parents) in different countries think the different types of risks are prevalent. The question for further research is whether that affects parental mediation and through that children's very experience of risk.

A number of methodological challenges were encountered when designing and conducting the study amongst such a large group of participating countries, including coder reliability, newspaper choice, and the interpretation of findings. But the one most developed in this account through following the details of two particular stories concerns the stability of the findings over time. So while the limitations of the data must in general be acknowledged and hence there is a need for caution in interpretation of the results, it is especially important to bear in mind that this is a snapshot of press coverage at a particular moment and this can be affected by events at that time.

The overall conclusion is that despite these methodological challenges in conducting a study like this, and the level of complexity in the cross national analysis, the explanations for the patterns identified are sufficiently suggestive to merit further research in this field, specifically on whether this coverage has an impact on reader perceptions and, indeed, on national public discourses and social reflexivity.

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² The coordinators had to ask each national team for guidance about classification of newspapers. A full table showing the newspapers covered can be found in Haddon and Stald, 2009.

³ The codes also included questions about which part of the internet appeared in the story and the centrality of children and the internet in the story – but this material proved not be relevant for the analysis conducted here.

⁴ In the coding guidance the following clarification was provided. 'If police break up a paedophile ring, this can be both positive and negative – positive because the police were successful, negative because it is a story about paedophilia. Since it was clear in early planning that this question might raise the most issues of reliability in coding, the national teams discussed various scenarios that they might encounter when coding.

⁵ The COST298 study looked at press coverage of the internet more generally in 4 countries and included both quantitative and qualitative analysis – see <http://www.cost298.org>

⁶ One qualification here is that in some stories the children and the internet are more central, more at the core of the article, whereas in others they are more peripheral. In the main project there was a code relating to this, and national variation was found. But limitations of space prevent the development of this aspect in this article since it is not at the heart of the main arguments developed here.

⁷ Newspapers with 3 articles of less (in some of the very specialist and very local press e.g. for small towns) were excluded because this would distort any sense of 'average' number of articles per paper per country. More stories covering children and the internet occurred in the national press than regional papers.

⁸ Bulgaria was not included at this stage since there were too few stories to divide up into different categories

⁹ Individual stories could be coded in more than one way and so some of the stories are not solely categorised as crime/courts/police

¹⁰ Denmark also belongs to the latter group but is not a good example as the number of stories is so low and as the general coverage of areas is so atypical.

¹¹ This was Bulgaria, but one has to be careful interpreting this because there were so few stories overall that a few items made a large difference to the percentages.

¹² This was Portugal.

¹³ Some articles were multi-coded – e.g. they might include content and contact elements. Therefore N is not the number of stories or articles but rather it is the total number of codes referring to the combination of content, contact and conduct in all articles in that country. Content percentages are the

number of codes referring to content divided by N, the total number of codes. Hence, 25% of all codes referring to these 3 risks in Austria referred to content.

¹⁴ This observation was supplied by the Norwegian team of EU Kids Online

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