

A digital Christmas?

Home About **On our minds** From our notes Around the world **Publications** Resources

Subscribe



*As we approach Christmas, many parents will be buying new digital products of one kind or another for their children. **Sonia Livingstone** argues that not all will, and not all can afford to. Sonia is Professor of Social Psychology at LSE's **Department of Media and Communications** and has more than 25 years of experience in media research with a particular focus on children and young people. She is the lead investigator of the **Parenting for a Digital Future** research project. [Header image credit: C. Alcoran, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0]*

It may seem that Christmas sees a rising clamour of demands from children (along with some great ideas of how to fulfil these **imaginatively, safely** and even in **a Christian spirit**). But children vary hugely, as **my year with a class** of thirteen year olds made clear to me. And children don't always see the world as **adults think they do**.

At the end of the autumn term **of our fieldwork**, just as **the class** was looking forward to the Christmas holidays, we asked them to jot down the '3 things that you imagine might make this a 'digital Xmas' – we explained when asked that this might include gifts they were hoping to get, experiences that will happen over the holiday, or anything else that would make the holiday period 'a digital experience'.

The results illustrated the point that possession of some digital goods creates the continuing desire for even more. Middle class boys Jamie, Dominic and Max* all expressed a generic hope for 'digital presents' and 'electronic items', as did Fesse, one of the less well-off boys.

Some were more specific: Shane and Mark wanted a digital camera, Shane a new computer, Adam a monitor, Joel a Nintendo 3DS, Sebastian some new computer games, and Salma and Deyan a new phone. Shane, Mark and Deyan are boys from poorer homes – perhaps they need to be clear about what they want and why, if they hope to get what they want. Deyan was a new entrant to the class, and saw a phone as a way of joining in:



I'm hoping to get a new phone that's touch screen and popular like an iPhone.

Interestingly too, some of the other children from poorer homes interpreted the question less in terms of what new goods they want to get and more in terms of which technologies they already have that they plan to spend time with over the holiday. Abby said 'iPad, Xbox360, iPhone', and similar answers are given by the other poorly-off kids (Dilruba, Lydia, Yusuf and Hakim).

Technology is far from inevitably antisocial, and several of the students had distinctly social plans for their "Digital Christmas". For instance, Sara replied that she was looking forward to:

Taking photos on camera or iPod. Texting people to say Merry Xmas. Playing XBOX games on Xmas with family.

The more **digitally creative kids** – mostly middle-class girls – had plans for digital photography over the holidays – Giselle, Sara and Alice (with Jenna planning to join Alice in taking pictures and perhaps uploading the results of her photography).

Some of the class added explanations that show they had anticipated possible **parental concerns**. Max noted that he would try not to spend too much time on the computer over Christmas. Sara wants to play Xbox games with her family. Jamie, who has family abroad, said he'll Skype relatives over the holiday period. Giselle generously planned to give as well as receive digital gifts.

It was noteworthy, however, that although many wanted something, there wasn't a single 'must-have' item. Equally, it was interesting that some had already learned not to want anything – perhaps because they had everything already, perhaps because they knew their parents couldn't afford it, perhaps because they really had other interests; as **not all children are obsessed** with the digital.

As we've concluded before on this blog, more technology in the market place doesn't have to mean more technology **dominating children's lives**. Nor should we imagine that children are undiscerning or blindly embracing all that the market offers. It's more interesting to delve a little deeper into asking each child what they want, why, and how they hope to make use of it. Then parents can figure out what they might get, digital or otherwise, and how it might enrich their child's life.

Notes

* All names have been changed to protect the identity of individuals.

December 23rd, 2016 | [Featured](#), [On our minds](#), [Publications](#) | [0 Comments](#)

