**PhD FORUM PROPOSAL**

**Exploring Young Children’s Digital Information Behaviour**

**Kirsten Schlebbe,** Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany, schlebbe@ibi.hu-berlin.de

**Keywords: Information Behaviour; Children; Digital Technology; Mobile Devices**

# Introduction

The use of digital media and mobile devices by young children has steadily increased in recent years. In 2016, 41 % of the families in Germany with a child at the age of three to thirteen years owned a tablet computer and 96 % of the families had access to a smartphone. If parents use such a device, it may get into the hands of their children quickly: 19 % of the three to five year olds are allowed to use a tablet computer regularly (Guth and Schäffner 2016). Colourful pictures, sounds and interactive app elements fascinate the children and the touchscreen operation seems to be very intuitive, even for the youngest. But whereas we notice an increasing omnipresence of digital technology in young children's daily live, so far we know little about how they actually use and interact with these information technologies in detail.

**Previous Research**

According to Bates (2010), the term information behaviour includes "the many ways in which human beings interact with information, in particular, the ways in which people seek and utilize information" (2381). Various studies examine children’s and young people’s information behaviour but a large portion of this research focuses on school-aged children and adolescents (e.g. Bilal 2005; Cooper 2002; Dresang 2005; Meyers, Fisher, and Marcoux 2009). In contrast, the information behaviour of younger children has not been explored in depth so far - neither in the analogue nor in the digital context (Spink and Heinström 2011). As a consequence, the user group of preschool children is clearly underrepresented in information behaviour research (Barriage 2014). Previous studies have begun to investigate young children’s digital information behaviour (Given *et al.* 2016) but further studies are needed to gain a deeper insight.

**Research Question**

To close this gap, the preliminary research question of my dissertation is: Which digital everyday life information behaviour do preschool children show, especially in connection with mobile devices?

**Approach and Method**

To answer this question, I am conducting several studies between spring 2017 and 2019. In 2017, I conducted qualitative interviews with 20 parents of children aged one to six years who have already used digital and mobile devices. The focus of the interviews lied on activities the parents have observed since their children started using the devices. Therefore, the study should provide a first exploratory insight into the digital information behaviour of young children and their families. Personal contacts and snowball sampling were used for recruitment. Because of the nationwide distribution of the participants six interviews were led face-to-face and fourteen by phone or a video conference tool. The length of the interviews varied between thirty and sixty minutes. I transcribed all interviews and started to analyze the data using different coding methods.

**Preliminary Results**

The interviews indicate that the children show a great variety of activities regarding the use of digital and mobile devices. For the families interviewed, the devices can be seen as all-in-one solutions which work as a television, a computer, a communication device or a camera: the children watch online videos, use various apps, video chat with family and friends, look at photos or videos or take pictures themselves. As Given *et al.* (2016) mention, these activities can be seen as “early steps in the ‘mastery of life’ that define an individual's everyday information behaviors” (346) as described in Savolainen’s (1995) ELIS model.

Since most of the children are not able to read yet, they mostly navigate through visual features. A few of the children also use the voice control function. Especially regarding more complex information seeking activities, e.g. using search engines or online encyclopaedias, the parents act as search assistants or LIMs (Abrahamson and Fisher 2007) for their children. Overall, the parents and their parenting style greatly influence the children’s use of the devices and thus also their information behaviour.

**Conclusion and Next Steps**

The interview study described above provides a first exploratory insight into the digital information behaviour of young children. During the next months, further analysis is needed to properly evaluate the data. Based on these findings, my next study should concentrate more on children’s perspectives and views. I am planning to adopt a multimethod research approach following the mosaic approach of Clark and Moss (2011) for my main study in 2018/19. It is a framework thought as participatory, reflexive, focused on children’s experiences, and multi-method (Clark 2010). Concerning this study, I am still working on some methodological, methodical and ethical issues. Therefore, the LIDA PhD Forum would be a great opportunity to present my work to other researchers and to receive feedback on further ideas and approaches.

# REFERENCES

Abrahamson, Jennie A. and Karen E. Fisher. 2007. "'What's past is prologue': towards a general model of lay information mediary behaviour." *Information Research* 12 (4): 1-21.

Barriage, Sarah. 2014. “Parental Perceptions of Young Children’s Information Behavior Related to Free-Time Activities.” *Proceedings of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 51 (1): 1-4. doi: 10.1002/meet.2014.14505101101

Bates, Marcia J. 2010. “Information Behavior.” In *Encyclopedia of Library and Information Sciences,* edited byMarcia J. Bates and Mary Niles Maack. 3rd ed. New York, NY: CRC Press.

Bilal, Dania. 2005. “Children’s information seeking and the design of digital interfaces in the affective paradigm.” *Library Trends* 54(2): 197-208.

Clark, Alison. 2010. *Transforming Children's Spaces: Children's and Adults' Participation in Designing Learning Environments.* Abingdon, UK: Routledge.

Clark, Alison and Peter Moss. 2011. *Listening to young children. The mosaic approach*. 2nd ed. London, UK: JKP.

Cooper, Linda Z. 2002. “A Case Study of Information-Seeking Behavior in 7-Year-Old Children in a semistructured Situation.” *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology* 53(11): 904-922. doi: 10.1002/asi.10130

Dresang, Eliza T. 2005. “The information-seeking behavior of youth in the digital environment.” *Library Trends* 54 (2): 178-196.

Given, Lisa M., Denise Cantrell Winkler, Rebekah Willson, Christina Davidson, Susan Danby, and Karen Thorpe. 2016. “Watching young children “play” with information technology: Everyday life information seeking in the home.” *Library & Information Science Research* 38: 344-352. doi: 10.1016/j.lisr.2016.11.007

Guth, Birgit and Robert Schäffner. 2016. „Von großen und kleinen Screens: Basisdaten kindlicher Mediennutzung.“ Presentation. http://www.ip.de/fakten\_und\_trends/zielgruppen/kinderwelten/von\_grossen\_und\_kleinen\_screen.cfm

Meyers, Eric M., Karen E. Fisher, and Elizabeth Marcoux. 2009. “Making sense of an information world: the everyday-life information behavior of preteens.” *Library Quarterly* 79(3): 301-341. doi: 10.1086/599125

Savolainen, Reijo. 1995. “Everyday life information seeking: Approaching information seeking in the context of “way of life”.” *Library and Information Science Research* 17: 259–294. doi: 10.1016/0740-8188(95)90048-9

Spink, Amanda and Jannica Heinström. 2011. “Information Behaviour Development in Early Childhood.” In *New directions in information behaviour* edited by Amanda Spink and Jannica Heinström, 245–256. Bingley, UK: Emerald.