

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

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This study arose out of a project called *EU Kids Online*, a cross-national study of research on children's experiences of the internet. This was funded by the EC's *Safer Internet Plus Programme* and hence one of the key goals is to inform policy and stakeholders interested in online risks to children. Having established what research existed (Staksrud et al, 2007), and then the patterns of children's experience online (Hasebrink et al, 2008), the next goal was to try to explain differences in national experiences. To this end those working on this part of the project considered a range of contextual factors such as the development of the internet in different countries, the regulatory framework and enforcement, the role of government and NGO awareness-raising and media literacy initiatives, the educational arrangements and levels, etc. Amongst these potential influences on children's experiences was the role of media coverage, specifically press coverage¹, in this field. This was also relevant for another part of the project investigating whether national variations in press coverage might in self have any influence on the patterns on national research that took place in different countries².

The problem was that, unlike some areas where there are internationally comparative statistics or at least comparative analyses, there is no such material showing such press coverage. Hence, some of the national teams participating in *EU kids Online* conducted this exploratory project, with a content analysis of the press in 14 countries: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain and the UK.³

There is a background literature with media studies that can provide some frameworks. For example, there is the material on how media can create moral panics, especially in relation to children and specifically in relation to each new information and communication technology that appears – the internet included (Drotner 1992; Boëthius 1995; Barker and Petley 1997; Critcher 2008). More generally, various analyses show how media can frame reality, influencing our perceptions of the world (Meyrowitz 1995; Morley 2000). One potential pertinent example for an analysis of risk perception, admittedly not specifically related to children and more focused on TV, is the Cultivation approach looking at how media can lead people to over-estimate the incidence of crime (Gerbner and Gross, 1976; Gerbner et al, 1986).

Some of these approaches may be more directly applicable in this study, for example, in helping to understand people's perception of the prevalence of different online risks. But there are additional questions in this study, e.g. concerning the balance of online risks versus opportunities in the press. Moreover, there are other factors at work such as the efforts of national Governments, NGOs and the EC itself to raise awareness of online dangers and promote children's safer internet use. To the extent that their efforts influence media coverage, then clearly the picture is more complex

¹ Although in principles we were interested in media coverage more generally, when we made the decision to undertake this project it was more practical to look at the press as a written form compared to audio-visual media.

² One working group within *EU Kids Online*, whose members conducted this press analysis, was looking at the social shaping of research i.e. what factors influenced the different types of research on children and the internet, the research questions, etc.

³ Not all *EU Kids Online* teams had the resources to take part in this. The other countries in the 21-country *EU Kids Online* study are Cyprus, the Czech Republic, France, Iceland, Poland, Sweden and the Netherlands.

than just emphasising the processes at work within this media industry that help to shape newspaper content.

On the one hand, the project was interested in more general patterns of media coverage, which applied in many countries if not necessarily in all. For example, do negative stories tend to be more newsworthy? Do certain aspects of the internet receive more media attention? Are the voices and views of some groups more likely to be reported in the press than others?

But in addition there are the questions relating to cross-national variation. Might differences in media coverage help to explain some of the different perceptions across countries of the Internet as a 'place' where children can spend time, of the opportunities open to them and of the risks that they might encounter? Are the experiences of children online simply less visible in some national media compared to others? Do some national press provide a more optimistic picture of children's life online? Are any 'problems' portrayed as something that happens in other countries? Or is the media message, "could it happen here?"

It is important to add some caveats at this point about what could be achieved. It is one thing to be able to describe the patterns and give examples of press coverage in each country and across these. It is another thing, however, to be able to provide answers to *why* one finds these differences and similarities and what they mean. In the analysis of the data the aim is to give indicators of possible answers to the 'why' questions, but the major finding in this relation is that patterns of press coverage regarding extent, attitudes and impact depend on a complex combination of factors such as culture, traditions of public discourses and debate, communication and market strategies, reader interests, etc. These all make an uncertain foundation upon which to build a comparative analysis of causes and consequences.

In addition to this complexity, which provides some intrinsic limitations to our analysis, the research team also discovered the methodological challenges to conducting this type of study. For example, in our attempts to be representative the researchers strove to get a balance of (relatively) quality and popular/tabloid press, as well as regional press because coverage varies between these media. However, such distinctions simply do not exist or vary in their definition between countries. Differences in collection can occur in searching databases (with search tools) and looking at paper copy of the press, and different options existed in different countries. And there are issues of inter-coder reliability across national teams, although an attempt was made to ascertain where this was more and less problematic. Although the methodological discussion will be developed in a later report, 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. The end of the paper, for another set of reasons to be developed in this analysis, will reinforce this message.

This paper reports on the first stage of analysis, describing the patterns of material collected and reflecting on some of the processes that may be at work to shape these. The remaining paper is divided into four sections.

- The first provides an overview using the quantitative data from the content analysis, in order to introduce the questions that were asked and reflect upon some general processes in media coverage.

- As a case study, the second section takes a more detailed look at the variation between countries as regards one type of story – crime reporting - providing a qualitative element to the analysis by examining the national coverage of some particular international stories.
- The third section looks at the national variation in media coverage of the risks children face on the internet, once again looking behind these statistics to see the influence of particular stories.
- The fourth section aims to disentangle some of the different processes affecting media, in this case press, coverage of children and the internet

European overview

This first overview itself combines two modes of analysis. One is the approach to cross-cultural analysis that takes countries as case studies in order to reveal more general processes at work internationally (Kohn, 1989). The section starts with the overall figures combining the datasets for all countries. The second stage is to at least give some idea of whether and how much national variation exists: to what extent do the overall figures represent a major trend in most all countries, perhaps with exceptions, as opposed to being an average that hides wide variation. Finally, for each of the questions, there is an indication of their significance and further issues these raise that might be addressed in later sections of the paper

The exercise generated a database of 1036 newspaper papers, ranging from 9 papers in Bulgaria to 130 papers in Spain, although the variation in part reflected the number of newspaper covered, which varied a little. Nevertheless, coverage of this topic of children and the internet was clearly greater in some countries than others, so it was useful to have a better idea of the average national coverage per newspaper⁴. There are a few countries with, very similar levels of low coverage: Bulgaria, Denmark, Greece and Portugal (with 8-9 papers per newspaper over 2 months). The majority of countries had a similar number of items on average, about 20 over two months per paper. The outliers were Italy with 30 papers per month and Spain with over 40 papers per month. Given that there was no particular reason to expect similar levels of coverage, it was striking that in some many countries there appears to be a consistent level of reporting.

Exceptionally within this section, the actual countries are mentioned to make both a general substantive and methodological point. Bulgaria, Greece and Portugal had lower internet penetration rates compared to most the other countries and lower use by children (Hasebrink et al, 2008), and so in these cases media coverage it might be understandable that less coverage reflects less general experience of the online world. However, Denmark certainly has high penetration rates, and Italy is in the same group as the other three southern European countries despite its high coverage. This reminds us that what determines media coverage is complex, not just a simple matter of reflecting what exists in a country. And in such a large study, whenever there is some indication of an explanation for a pattern of media coverage, there are always,

⁴ Ideally we would want to know the coverage across all newspaper per country, but this simply was not practical to implement in the research. Some national press, for instance, specialised and regional, had so little coverage that including them in the averages would have distorted the picture, so newspapers with under 3 stories in the time period were eliminated from this process. At best, then, we can say that we have a very rough picture of coverage.

sometimes inexplicable exceptions – and this would be true for all the figures that are not reported in this paper.

The next stage was to evaluate the overall tone of the paper, the balance of positive and negative elements, which meant taking into account both the paper writers' perspective 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 more positive or negative children and Internet stories, or ones that, overall, balance or have a mixture of positive or negative elements. In other words, putting the detail of content to one side at the moment, what overall impression would one get from the national press as regards children's experience of the online world?

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.⁵ Underlying this overview, 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.

When looking in more detail at the other data it will become clearer why this balance of coverage exists, but before doing so one could speculate about what is happening in those countries where coverage has many negative connotations? Is this the result of awareness raising campaigns, as risk come onto the policy and academic agendas, more so in some countries more than others? Or, is coverage negative not because of the actions of awareness raising but because the national media find it newsworthy to show how the virtual world can be a dangerous place, just as media analysts have noted how they can over-represent dangers such as crime in the offline world? Or is there some other process behind negative coverage, such as reporting of what bad things children get up to online?

In fact, the degree of negative coverage is because of the generally high degree of reporting across most countries of crime, court cases and police actions. When examining the coded data for the areas of life related to the story, this is the category that dominated. This area was covered in 53% of stories within the whole dataset, and it was the dominant category in all but one country. The three, approximately joint second categories - Education, Entertain/play/leisure, Social problems – related to around a fifth of stories each, allowing for multiple coding, but these were clearly a long way second⁶. The influence of these legal stories can be illustrated by the fact that 68% of all the stories that were categorised as negative overall came from this area of life.

⁵ An exercise in intercoder-reliability showed that of all our questions this had the lowest score, reflecting the degree of interpretation involved. However, the figures quoted are believable because they are in the same overall direction as reporting of risks vs. opportunities, which had a high reliability score and, as we shall see, they are very understandable in light of the other data reported here when viewed as a package.

⁶ The other options generated through the pilot study - Work, Family/home, Sport, Politics, Medical, Shopping/e-commerce/product comparisons, Technology developments, Security industry, Media, and Other – were far behind these. The figures for education were inflated by the school massacre story discussed later on – it was coded as education by virtue of being in an educational setting.

The same message comes across when examining the related issue of the origins of the story, i.e. what led to the story appearing. Crime, court cases and police operations, accounting for 43% of all stories, was clearly the most significant source, the next source of stories being some (other) event (30%).⁷ While the legal origins dominated in most countries, there was some national variation relating to other sources.

Unsurprisingly in the light of the evidence above, when turning to the question of whose voice is heard in the news stories the fact that crime receives so much coverage means that overall (in 37% of all stories) and in most countries it is the police and legal representatives who are most often cited. The second most common opinions (21%) are those of the reporter who wrote the piece, especially clear in editorials and papers reflecting on social developments, but also elsewhere.⁸ Once again, there is some national variation as regards the predominance of other voices apart from legal ones.

Before leaving the issue of negative coverage, it is worthwhile looking at a slightly separate issue of whether news was international. The key reason for wanting to check the balance was to see the extent to which events or debates in other countries influenced ones own perceptions of this field of children and the internet. Across all countries 55% of stories were national, 36% foreign and 10% mixed. But that average actually hides a good deal of variation, in about half the countries there is distinctly more purely national coverage, with about two-thirds of papers reporting national stories. There was a more even balance in a few countries. But in some countries there was a minority of national stories: two-thirds of stories in Slovenia were about foreign events and over half were so in Austria and Portugal, for example. Later in the paper there is a description of some particular international stories that influenced the statistics, and it is an open question whether this made the time period unrepresentative. But certainly in this study 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. So if you are a country with a higher proportion of foreign news, this affects the proportion of negative news – at least on this topic.

There are now a few comments on the other measures used in this study. One aimed to ascertain the centrality of children and the internet stories in the papers collected. In the pilot there were some stories specifically about children and the internet, i.e. that topic is the core subject of the papers. In other stories this was one element among many, so that we see the children and internet with peripheral vision, or, to use another metaphor, ‘in the background’ or ‘in passing’. While, overall, the split was 56%:44% this hide considerable differences in emphasis across countries. In some countries papers were very focussed directly on children and the internet, where in

⁷ The other options – Academic research, Market research, Non-empirical reports, Government laws/regulations/initiatives, conferences and other each accounted for less than 10%, sometimes only a few percent, of story origins.

⁸ Children themselves, academics, politicians educational spokespeople followed next in 10-15% of stories, with categories Internet industry, NGOs/charities, Parents, Non-commercial institutions, Media representatives, Other companies, celebrities, medical spokespeople, the church and consumer groups representing just a few percent each.

80-90% of papers the internet was central to the story. There were some where two-thirds to a half of stories were of this nature. On the other hand, the internet was mentioned much more in passing in Austria (in three-quarters of all stories) this was true for between two-thirds to a half of stories in some other countries. What this means can be illustrated by comparing two countries. In the UK and Austria the majority of evaluations were negative – but in the first country this occurs in papers where children and the internet are the focal point, and in the second this is not the case. Hence, there are different nuances to the coverage in the two countries.

One question asked of coders concerned which part of the Internet was being discussed, allowing multiple coding if the paper covered several dimensions. Overall, nearly half (46%) of the stories were about the internet in general. After that came two categories each found in about a quarter of stories: Video/*YouTube*/webcams (28%) (which in practice usually means *YouTube*) and Search engines and websites (25%) (which in reality often means *Google* and websites).⁹

One observation is that when combining some categories that relate to communication - social networking, chatrooms and *YouTube* – then these also account for over half of all papers. The communications area would be even larger if one also counts online games and email, but they were not as large as the three listed above. The coverage appears to reflect the fashion element in relation to social networking sites and *YouTube* at the time of the study.

Lastly, risks and opportunities were coded, risks especially since the *EU Kids Online* project was funded to address this question. The first point to note is that there is far more on risks than on opportunities – bad news appears more newsworthy. Nearly two-thirds of all stories (64%) referred to risks, whereas nearer a fifth (18%) referred to opportunities. Few papers (7%) did both. Underlying these averages, with one exception¹⁰, over 50% of stories covered risks in each of the countries, the maximum being 85% of stories.¹¹ Conversely, for most countries, the proportion of stories covering opportunities was 14-25%, while a few countries were under 10%. In other words, there is some national variation, but the overall images provide a good idea of the general trend.

The same structured grid of risks was used to analyse media content as was more generally used within the *EU Kids Online* project to categorise risks (Figure 1). Overall in the dataset, looking at the rows in Figure 1 that classify risks according to the role of the child, content risks receive the most media coverage, the split between content: conduct: contact being 50:30:20. It is worth noting the proportions vary substantially by country in this case, so content is not always first at the national level.

Looking at the columns in Figure 1, which classify risk according to the type of risks, aggression is the main risk in 43% of stories (but in part reflecting a Finnish school

⁹ Social networking sites and Chatrooms/message boards accounted for 15% and 13% respectively. The others were each under 10%: Email/instant messaging; Online gaming/virtual worlds; Blogs; Wikis; VoIP; Audio, music downloads; Infrastructure; Mobile online services; Another part of the internet.

¹⁰ 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.

¹¹ Portugal.

massacre and its repercussions that will be discussed later), followed by sexuality (36%), commercialism (13%) and values (8%). Within the grid in Figure 1, looking specifically at actual cells, sexual content (24%) and then aggressive conduct (22%) were the most frequent risks to appear in the press. Once again, there is considerable national variation when moving to these levels of detail rather than talking about risk in general.

Figure 1: Risks faced by children online

	Types of risk			
	Commercial	Aggressive	Sexual	Values
Content Child as recipient	Adverts, spam, sponsorship	Violent/ hateful content	Pornographic or unwelcome sexual content	Racist, biased of misleading information/ advice
Contact Child as participant	Tracking/ harvesting personal information	Being bullied, harassed or stalked	Receiving unwanted sexual comments, meeting strangers, being groomed	Self-harm, unwelcome persuasion
Conduct Child as actor	Illegal downloading, hacking	Bullying or harassing another	Creating and uploading porn material, sexual harassment	Providing misleading info/advice

Crime stories as a case study

In this next section begins the process of reflecting on country variation in media coverage. While one can imagine a procedure of looking for patterns in statistics, perhaps grouping countries together by various criteria as was done elsewhere in the *EU Kids Online* project, it can be revealing to reflect upon what lies behind the statistics in terms of looking at some of the actual stories that composed them.

Turning to the columns in Figure 1, which classify risk according to the type of risks, aggression is the main risk in 43% of stories (but in part reflecting a Finnish school massacre and its repercussions that will be discussed later), followed by sexuality (36%), commercialism (13%) and values (8%). Within the grid in Figure 1, looking specifically at actual cells, sexual content (24%) and then aggressive conduct (22%) were the most frequent risks to appear in the press. Once again, there is considerable

national variation when examining these levels of detail rather than considering risk in general.

Table 1: Percentage of stories in the three main story types¹²

Country	Legal/ crime/ police stories	Education	Entertainment/ play/leisure stories	Total number of stories
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

Table 1 shows the three main areas of life that stories covered, and the percentages reflect multiple coding i.e. a story could be about crime and education, which will become very salient at a later point in the analysis. The key figures to focus on are in the column legal/crime/police stories.

The main point of the first section still stands: that several patterns, including the overall evaluation of stories, as influenced by the fact, across countries, that there are many stories related to court cases, discussions of crimes or of police initiatives. More than half of all papers in Austria, Portugal, Greece, Spain, Belgium, Slovenia, Italy and Estonia refer to this topic (marked in bold), and the UK is not far behind this level. This is followed by Ireland, Norway and Germany, all in the region of 40%. One has to be a little careful in interpreting the Danish figure since there are relatively fewer stories, but it does look like the anomaly. In fact, in Table 1 81% of the Danish stories fall, instead, into the entertainment/play/leisure, vastly higher than any of the other countries. Of course, what one cannot tell from the figures is why the Danish figures are different. Is it 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. Or is the level of crime reporting less because of a difference in Danish press policy as regards how much reporting is devoted to that particular subject. In which case, if the Danish press had covered crime as much as the other countries, their overall number of stories might have been higher.

¹² Bulgaria was not included at this stage since there were too few stories to divide up into different categories

First, after checking the actual stories, it is clear that it is important account for the fact 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. It asked the public for help in finding this person. 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 the story, more visibility than others. In addition, in some countries the story has more visibility over time. Given the original request by Interpol, it is perhaps surprising that the several papers examined in Norway and Belgium did not cover it at all. More commonly several papers per country carried the item, although only 1 or those surveyed in Portugal and Germany did so. At the second stage, most countries reported he had been identified (but not the papers examined in Austria), although not all papers examined in any one country did so – in several counties only one of the newspaper surveyed carried the story. In the third phase, most countries covered the arrest (but not the newspapers examined in Germany and Greece). So overall, apart from the gaps noted above) coverage went from one or two papers per country reporting the different stages, to several papers reporting the each stage. In fact, in Spain, for the first two stages not only did several papers cover it, but they had multiple items per day, and sometimes reported the story on several days (although far less was said about the arrest).

The second major international story occurred in November 2007 when a Finnish school¹³ student shot several classmates and teachers before killing himself but what made it relevant for the Internet was that he posted his intentions on a video on YouTube. (There were some other links to the Internet, like what he had viewed there, but this was the main connection).

This story was covered in most of the participating countries (but not Greece) and was a sufficiently important 'event' that usually all the main papers surveyed in a country covered it, even in some countries geographically distant from Finland, such as Portugal and Austria (where it even generated several items in the same newspaper). But geography (implying some shared culture between neighbours) did still mater. The story received far more attention in Estonia and Norway, with follow-up stories, sometimes asking 'could it 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.

The picture is more complicated because there were then further copycat threats of such action in Finland (again), Norway and Germany. Estonia reported all of these,

¹³ When coders were first given instructions on how to code based on a pilot study, those working on the media analysis project had not anticipated a particular event like this. Because it took place in a school it was coded in terms of the education area of life, as well as crime and sometimes other categories. This makes the figures on 'education' problematic to interpret because while the event took place in an educational setting, arguably it was, for the most part, not about an educational issue.

plus related incidents that emerged in Estonia, as did more geographically distant Austria. But some did not report these other stories at all (Belgium, the UK), or picked up some but not all of these copycat threats (Slovenia, Portugal and Spain). Understandably, Norway and Germany reported the threats in their own countries. Once again, one can see from this incident 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 theme in newspaper for 3 weeks.

Now it is useful to go back to table 1 in order to see how both these and some other national stories related to the statistics, looking especially at the countries where over half of the stories related to crime. In general, Portugal, Slovenia and Austria were exceptional in that they had the most reporting of international stories (67%, 66% and 56%), where this accounted for less than half of stories in other countries. This is reflected in the crime stories, not only in the two above but in other stories as well. Austria's figure was particular 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 coverage of the first, Thai, case, combined with some Spanish paedophile and operations and multiple stories in Spain about the videoing of a disabled person being beaten that was put online. In Greece, the figure is in part influenced by some stories of Greek involvement in an international paedophile network and stories relating to changes in Greek law in this field. 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 that fact that it covered the Finnish massacre and its aftermath extensively. Italy's coverage reflects a fair number of stories on both international incidents together with some national crimes.

The point of this outline is to say that although there are some shared underlying processes affecting the variation in crime figures, such as the degree of reporting of international news, the figures are also arrived at by slightly different national processes including the balance of which international stories are covered as well as particular national stories.

National variation in the importance of risks

Table 2 organises the data to show the relative importance of the different risks, as shown earlier in figure 1, which were reported in the different countries' press coverage. Arguably the first most striking point is that different national media have very varied levels of coverage of the three types of risk. Countries low on content risks, like Italy, can be high on conduct risks, and vice versa when checking Denmark for conduct vs. contact risks. Or some countries can be high or low for some risks, but be medium for others.

Table 2: Country variation in the types of risks coded in relation to the three risk codes in the national samples of papers¹⁴

Risk/ Country	Content	Contact	Conduct	Total	N
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
Average	47%	21%	32%	100%	

Looking at the details, it is clear that

- In many countries *content* risks count for over half of all risks cited in the press: in Greece and Spain, then Portugal, Belgium, Ireland, Estonia, the UK.
- In contrast, the reporting of *conduct* risks is noticeably higher in Norway, Austria (then Italy and Germany).
- Only in Denmark and to an extent Slovenia do *contact* risks form a substantial minority of all risks discussed in the press.

Although not shown in this table, but reflecting an earlier observation, the most important content risks relate to sexuality (i.e. pornography) and the most important conduct risks relate to aggression.

In one sense one can take these figures at face value and say that this shows patterns that can have consequences. Media coverage in different countries may be contributing (among other factors) to sensitising people to different kinds of risk, which may have a bearing on how the degree to which people in different countries think the various risks are prevalent.

On the other hand, one can once again look behind the statistics to ask how these patterns emerge. Risks can be discussed in a variety of different types of paper, such as editorials and stories that pick up what politicians say. However, one type of paper where risk are more commonly discussed is in the stories on crime. So can our

¹⁴ Some papers were multi-coded – e.g. they might include content and contact elements. Therefore N is not the number of stories or papers but rather it is the total number of codes referring to the combination of content, contact and conduct in all papers 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.

background knowledge of international stories throw further light on the nature of these figures?

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 influences that particular column but all the other ones – since such a high percentage were about conduct, a lower percentage in those countries were concerned the other risks.

While the figures are ‘accurate’ in the sense that this was the coverage in the time period, the question then becomes one of whether they are ‘normal’ (of representative in the long term): would they have been different if this event 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 discourses about ‘looking to Finnish schools’ because the Finns were performing better than the Norwegians in educational league tables¹⁵. 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.

Turning lastly to content risks in the media, Portugal and Greece come out high. But both countries (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 on children on the Internet - this one story boosted the ‘contents’ statistics). It would seem that while the national press may cover risk stories, that does not necessarily mean ‘risk in my country’. So the implications might be different from countries where the proportion of national stories of risk are greater.

Understanding European variation in media coverage

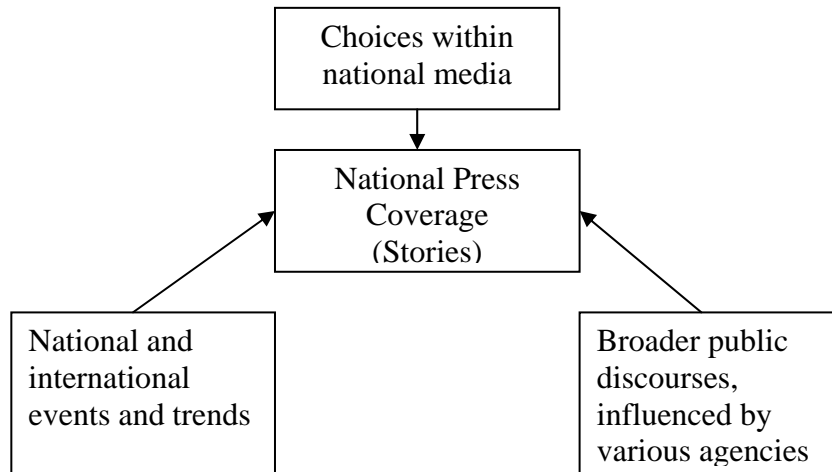
Figure 2 provides a model, fit enough for the purposes of this analysis, of some of the factors influencing national press coverage. This is now explored, looking back to the previous discussions and looking forward the questions that might be asked in the future.

Starting at the bottom left, there is a pool of events and trends that national media can choose to report. The paper has already noted examples of the international crimes they could pick up, but also some examples of the national ones. But the very broad heading ‘trends’ might also include other national differences between countries, such as the level of diffusion of the internet itself. More generally the *EU Kids Online* project looked at a range of such factors, exploring whether there were groupings of countries where some shared background factors (e.g. population size, GDP, internet diffusion) led to common patterns of internet experiences (Hasebrink et al, 2008). When this exploratory approach was applied to this dataset of media coverage, it did not yield much, although there were occasional glimpses of this type of influence. For

¹⁵ This observation was supplied by the Norwegian team of EU Kids Online

example, when grouping countries based on the percentage of young people using the internet into high, medium or low use¹⁶, the lower the internet use, the more likely it was to find more foreign news rather than home news on children and the internet and the more likely it was to find stories discussing the internet in general, as opposed to specific aspects of it.

Figure 2: Factors influencing national press coverage



Moving to the bottom right, there are the broader societal discourses that may influence such media coverage, reflected in the opinions of politicians, religious leaders, NGOs, etc. To take the latter example, the degree of lobbying by NGOs varies between countries, probably being most highly organised, along with Governmental support, in the UK. There have been sustained attempts to raise awareness of risks, and some success in providing spokespeople in media stories about risks (and crimes). To put this influence in perspective, however, apart from the figures for negative papers, the UK is rarely amongst the most extreme in any of the above tables (or for that matter other tables that could have been provided from these data).

But public discourse is also a broad heading, which can refer to multiple layers. For example, it might include the conceptions of childhood that lie behind and are embedded in particular national media coverage. For example, the Norwegian team within *EU Kids Online* pointed out that in Norway there is a notion of a ‘natural childhood’, where sexuality is less of a risk while at the same time discussions of children’s rights is strong. The particular table is not reproduced here but there was a high interest in sexuality in content in Belgium (42% of all items in the 12 cells of the grid in figure 1), Greece (39%), Spain (37%), and the UK (36%). In contrast, interest in this issue is shown to be very low in Norway (6%), Denmark (12%) and Estonia (12%). Apart from the influence of particular national histories (e.g. the paedophile

¹⁶ High: Norway, Denmark, Slovenia, Germany, Belgium
 Medium: UK, Estonia, Ireland Austria, Italy, Spain
 Low: Greece, Portugal, Bulgaria

public scandal in Belgium), this may well reflect different national concerns (at least in the media) about what images of sexuality children should be exposed to. Here there is, at least, the scope for further lines of enquiry that could be followed up beyond what could be achieved in this content analysis exercise.

Lastly, at the top of the diagram, there are the processes of selection (and framing) within the media itself. There is some work looking at European regional media systems, but in this paper the focus has been on more specific, micro media choices. For example, different national press made different decisions about how much of the two main international stories they would cover. The national variation in the centrality of the internet in stories and in the amount of foreign versus home news has already been noted. The case of Denmark raises the question of whether there are also any implicit quotas on how much certain categories of news – such as crime – will be covered in national newspapers.

Summary

Although the original rationale for the press analysis the various impacts of press coverage (on perception and discourses) that part of the analysis will be developed elsewhere. Instead, this paper has been more descriptive of the material collected, but this has still provided the chance for some reflections.

In the process of collecting the material the researchers discovered some of the difficulties researchers encounter when aiming to manage a reliable, comparative analysis based on irregular data: even if the design and conduct of the study followed the best methodological practices the empirical realities overruled the attempts to create an unbiased basis of data. So, one important result regards methodological issues: the awareness of methodological challenges in cross-national, comparative projects and of the important recognition: how much and what can one actually say based on the data collected?

More substantively, the first section of the paper showed the broad press coverage of children and the internet in Europe, as well as indicating the degree of national variation. The single most interesting result, arguably, is the role, indeed dominance of news about legal matters (mainly court cases), crimes and police operations, which has a bearing on the overall image of the internet, the views represented and, as was later noted, perceptions of risks faced by children.

The second section revealed some processes by which the patterns captured in the statistical analysis were formed and hence show the limits of a media content analysis performed at any one point in time and how care is needed when interpreting these patterns. It also paved the way for the later model of influences since it showed how different national media made different choices as regards coverage of two international events

The third section revealed the relative coverage of different risks in the press, showing both the degree of common coverage across many countries (of content especially), but also the extent of national variation. The later is important to the extent that it implies that it may contribute to different perceptions of readers in different countries. But the risk coverage is itself influenced by the crime coverage discussed above.

Lastly, the model was provided merely as a guide to future research questions. For example, anyone from a media studies background would question how much media simply 'select' from a pool of possibilities separate from the media in the 'world out there'. The media make events, and certainly they can help define what that 'event' was. Nevertheless, such reservations and others aside, one common outcome of a research process is that the end one has better questions than at the start. The model is meant to indicate directions in which the analysis could be taken further.

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