1. Digital Possessions in the Family – an inventory of valued digital possessions

This work was supported by the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust under Grant SG180117.

1. Overview of project

Many of the things that are important to us and our families - our music, letters, photographs, games, movies - are now digital, yet we have little understanding of what digital possessions we have or what they mean to children, their parents and grandparents. This pilot study is a collaborative project with industry (Microsoft Research) and two Universities (Bournemouth University and Oxford Internet Institute, Oxford University) that will provide insights into what the digitalisation of many objects means in the context of family and methodological testing that will enable future research. A legacy of the project will be a historical record of meaningful digital possessions kept at a unique point in time when children, parents and grandparents have varying degrees of digital media literacy and will provide a benchmark that otherwise will not be possible to create. The data generated will provide a necessary point of departure for future research to map out societal changes. The key objectives for this study were: 1) to generate an inventory of the quantity and types of digital possessions kept and accessed by children, their parents and grandparents, and 2) to explore the value and meanings, children, their parents and grandparents ascribe to their digital possessions.

In this bundle we include raw data, top line findings, a copy of the research protocol and categories used to create the inventory.

1. Type of research data   
   * .xlsx
   * .sav
   * .csv
   * .tsv
2. The time period when the data was collected:

February 2019 – March 2021

1. A description of method used

For this pilot study, an online questionnaire was created using the JISC platform. Its purpose was to generate a first of its kind intergenerational inventory of digital possessions within the home, specifically identifying the types and quantities of digital possessions within the home and the extent to which these may be considered special or meaningful. Individuals from three generations within a family (children, their parents and grandparents) were required to complete the questionnaire.

The sample consisted of 11 families (average of five respondents per family) living in Didcot, Oxfordshire, a location purposefully chosen because it is a statistically average UK town (ASI Data Science, 2017) in addition with further interview with local families (in the Bournemouth and Ringwood area). Participants were recruited via a professional market research recruitment agency and through snowballing techniques.

Questions were based on individual types of digital possession (e.g. emails, ebooks, digital music, communication apps, etc) to establish if individuals had these (dichotomous), how many they had (open), how often they access them (multiple choice), and how special they were (semantic scale). A copy of the research protocol (interview schedules) and codes utilised in the data analysis are provided below.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

HOME INTERVIEWS

Instructions

*1) Interview format*

Explain the overall purpose of the interview. The overall purpose of this interview is to understand what digital content is valuable to different family members, We ask you to offer as descriptive and detailed answers as possible. We are interested in your experiences with digital objects and the various processes undertaken in accessing using, transferring and disposing them (e.g. like organizing, backing up, sharing, deleting, what they do, how, when and where), and key incidents like data loss or software updates.

*Use prompts when needed to help elicit more detailed information like (‘can you describe to me the last time you downloaded a movie?’) or undertake guided grand tours (e.g. can you give me a tour of your laptop, and what you have stored on there?). Follow questions with probes such as ‘can you tell more about that’ or ‘what do you mean by that’ or ‘how do you feel’ when required.*

Ask them to sign consent form and explain our duty of care to them and their data.

*2) Interview structure:*

* PART 1 -GRAND TOUR QUESTIONS
* PART 2- SORTING VALUABLE DIGITAL POSSESSIONS TASK
* PART 3- VALUABLE DIGITAL POSSESSIONS

Where possible and relevant take photos of:

1. Devices through which digital things are accessed, used and stored. We want to get a feel of where they are located.
2. Photos of digital things (as viewed on screens), in particular of those things which are reported as being meaningful
3. Photos of printed out digital things (e.g. albums, art, mugs, etc.)
4. Technique responses.

PART 1 -GRAND TOUR QUESTIONS

1. Ask biographical questions to establish rapport and context for understanding their reported experiences.

* ‘tell me a bit about yourself, ‘what do you do for a living’ ‘goals you want achieve’ ‘things you are looking forward to’
* ‘what did you yesterday/or what will you be doing today’, ‘what is your typical day like’,
* ‘what sort of things do you do, hobbies, collections’ ‘things you are looking forward to, or hoping to achieve’
* How has your life changed as a result of digital media. How do you feel about that?

PART 2- SORTING VALUABLE DIGITAL POSSESSIONS TASK

In this part, we will be using a sorting task to elicit some prompts that will be used to elicit responses for part 3 of the interview. Please explain the following to your participant:

* *By using the word valuable we mean that the object has some meaning, significance or importance.* *We are interested in how the digital object functions symbolically and materially for people. We will use the world valuable as it leaves it up to the person to define the meaning of the digital object. It is vague enough so that the person can give a wider range of significations*.

*1) Using the digital objects cards, ask participants to select those items which they ‘have’. It is important to use the word ‘have’ as this will enable us to identify those items that participants recognise as a possession.*

*2) Using the living room backdrop, ask participants to locate those possessions they deem valuable in a treasure box or safe. Everything else can go in the fireplace or in the loft. Stuff that goes in the loft is stuff that they are unsure off.*

*3) Create a stack of valuable possessions based on the items that were placed in the safe or treasure box.*

*4) Ask participants to please verbalise their thoughts during the sorting task, ask them to explain in as much detail as possible* ***why they*** *are placing things in the treasure box/safe.* Explain the differences between digital accounts/app (e.g. video games, music, social media, etc.) and digital things within those apps/accounts.

PART 3- VALUABLE DIGITAL POSSESSIONS

Using cards identified as ‘valuable’ ask questions 2A-6B sequentially for each thing. Where possible ask participants to show you their valuable digital things and observe how they access it, and how they interact with it and platform. Ask them to show you/walk you through the processes they describe.

2A. What digital possessions are special to you? Describe it/Show us.

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| DEVICE | OBJECT | SHOW US |
|  |  | Describe it. |
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2B. Why is it valuable?

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| OBJECT | WHY VALUABLE |
|  | What does this mean to you? |
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3A. Gather anecdotes. Tell me about the last time you engaged with this thing. What did you do? What did you feel? **For this question, it is important to get participants to talk about actual experiences.** You can ask ‘tell me about a specific time when…’

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| --- | --- |
| OBJECT | What did you do |
| What goal are you trying to meet when using this thing? | Goals (e.g. being a top chef) |
| What do you do with this things? Why did you choose this thing to get that done? | Intentions (e.g. *learning to present a dish, Instagram has lots of celebrity chefs from around the world who post helpful videos*). Ask why did you chose this digital thing to achieve your goals |
| Show me features you used. | Features (e.g., follow function, messaging, search box, saving, bookmarking, algorithmic recommendations). |
| Feelings | What did you feel when you were using this thing to achieve your goal? |

3B. Tell me about the best/worst experience with this thing.

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| OBJECT | Best/Worst |
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4. When and how did you get this thing? (probe for how platform affordances may be mediating acquisition, ‘algorithmic recommendations’, ‘shared/sent’ ‘copied’ ‘found’ ‘made’). In the past, how did you use to acquire this thing? How do feel about the new ways of finding or acquiring things (e.g. music tracks, specific photos, movies). **This question is relevant for things found within apps-accounts (specific song, playlist, avatar etc).**

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| OBJECT | PAST | NOW |
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5A. What is this thing allowing you do? Show us how you do this (e.g. probe for the role of platform affordances (intentions, features) and individuals’ goals). Tell me about a time this happened. How do you feel about this?

5B. What is this thing making you better at? How? (e.g. consider features and individual’s goals). Tell me about a time this happened. How do you feel about this?

5C. What is this thing encouraging you to do? (e.g. consider features and individual’s goals). Tell me about a time this happened, How do you feel about this?

5D. What skill is this thing enhancing? (e.g. consider features and individual’s goals) How do you feel about this? Tell me about a time this happened. How do you feel about this?

5E. What is this thing making difficult to do? Or what do you less as a result? (e.g. consider features and individual’s goals). How do you feel about this?

5F. What has happened when this thing hasn’t been available to you or has broken down? How did you feel about this?

6A. How do you look after this thing? (e.g. organising, saving, displaying, copying, backup, printouts) (probe for role of features). In the past, how did you look after this thing? How do you feel about the new ways of looking after this thing (e.g., apps/accounts saves, curates and displays content)

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| OBJECT | PAST | NOW |
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6B. What would it mean to you not to have this thing? What would happen if you couldn’t have this digital possession? Probe for feelings.

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| OBJECT | WITHOUT OBJECT | WHEN LOST |
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7B. Are there any digital things that have been special in your life, but which you no longer have? How did you come to lose/get rid of them? Probe for feelings.

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| OBJECT/WHY | WHEN LOST | HOW LOST |
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8. If there was a virus or you ran out of storage what would you keep? Why?

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| OBJECT | WHY KEEP |
|  | What does this mean to you?. |
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9. What special possession would you like to bequeath to your family? Do you think you will be able to do it?

10. What do all your special digital objects, taken together as a whole, mean to you?

**DEFINITIONS OF CATEGORIES USED IN THE ANALYSIS**

1. **Connecting** – respondent refers to a digital object connecting them to others, forming and developing relationships, communicating and being able to be social/sociable. *“Instagram, because I can see what all my friends are up to”; “I can text my friends to see when they’re out and if they want to meet and stuff”*
2. **Extending the mind–** respondent refers to a digital object enabling extended capacity to process, retain, store and access information. Extending mind was experienced in multiple ways. As a safeguarding or taking responsibility for objects and memories, as a means for enhancing memory in a reminding capacity, and extending imagination by providing an ongoing source of inspiration and idea generation. “I know that all my pictures and videos are safe on there [Facebook] if I ever wanted to retrieve them”*“they popped up [on Facebook] from when [he] was a baby...I’d completely forgotten I had it”.*
3. **Reminiscing –** respondent refers to a digital object enabling them to reminisce about past experiences, e.g. photos of previous holiday stimulating enjoyable reminiscence alone or with others. Beyond a simple reminder, this entails a more emotional experience about the past.
4. **Expressing the self** – respondent refers to a digital object enabling them to express themselves and their identity or share part of themselves.
5. **Belonging** – Respondent refers to a digital object as providing a sense of belonging and to a group identity, understood in the context of the aggregate self (Belk sharing), e.g. belonging to family, peer group etc. e.g. Music playlist to accompany family holiday – bringing the family together.
6. **Cultivating competence** – respondent refers to a digital object as building expertise, becoming more confident and skilled. E.g. Jane using YouTube to make her daughter’s wedding dress.
7. **Expanding taste** Respondent refers to digital object as providing inspiration, developing their taste, e.g. algorithmic recommendations (offering suggestions for things they might ‘like’, providing style tips.
8. **Expressing the aggregate self** – expressing the aggregate self to themselves and others through sharing in and sharing out (Belk)
9. **Extending self-capability –** ability to enhance a sense of agency, asserting the self, enabling independence, accomplishment, empowerment, e.g. financial app enables tight control over finances, immediately identify fraud.
10. **Accruing attentional status -** respondent refers to a digital object as enabling them to acquire status amongst their peer groups and others. E.g. accruing social capital (e.g. via approval through likes/followers). For instance, finding new music and introducing friends to it.
11. **Modulating emotions -** Respondent refers to a digital object helping them emotionally, enabling a change in emotional state., e.g. Music being used to calm down, destressing, aiding relaxation, release (e.g. release from boredom), escapism.
12. **Enjoying** participant talks about the enjoyment or pleasure gained from engaging with a digital object or platform. E.g. enjoy looking at images on Pinterest.
13. **Embedding –** refers to the routinised nature of using and integrating digital objects in everyday life. e.g. checking emails first thing in the morning, going on banking app to check balance daily etc. Relates to work on ubiquitous/unremarkable computing, acknowledging the embeddedness of technology in everyday life.