

## Video-chatting with young children

Internet-connected devices like computers, tablets and smartphones are now affordable and common in most parts of the world. Such devices are at times used by parents and relatives to video-chat with young children. Paediatricians and developmental psychologists earlier used to not recommend the use of screen-based devices by children younger than 2 years. However, video-chatting with parents and relatives is now considered safe for young children<sup>1</sup>. Consequently, attempts are being made to determine the popularity of video-chatting among young children and to understand the utility of the same<sup>2</sup>.

We conducted a study in New Delhi in February 2017 to check the interest and ability of children younger than 2 years with regard to video-chatting. We found that only a small proportion of parents feel the need for, and engage in, video-chatting with their children. We identified 12 children younger than 2 years who engaged in video-chatting at least once a week. We visited these children at their homes, interviewed their parents and observed them while they were video-chatting.

The behaviour of a child towards video-chatting varies with time and context. However, there are some salient trends in their behaviour. First, a child can knowingly take part in a video-chat

by the age of 12 months. By the age of 18 months, he/she starts touching the screen and the keyboard, if there is one, of the device mimicking adults. However, as expected, a child cannot control the device even at the age of 24 months and hence cannot initiate a video-chat on his/her own. Second, a child shows interest in video-chatting with those whom he/she has met in person. While video-chatting with such a person, a child demonstrates a steady head, eye gaze, use of a variety of gestures and low distractibility. Third, a child is more interested in the audio part of the chat rather than in what he/she sees. Nevertheless, a child participates more actively in a video-chat than in a phone call, as also observed by McClure *et al.*<sup>3</sup>. A child shows interest in video-chatting with a person who is responsive and speaks contingently. Fourth, a child generally does not show much interest in video-chatting with those whom he/she has never met in person, and the situation does not improve even after several video-chat sessions. A child cannot recognize those whom he/she has seen and heard only in video-chats<sup>4</sup> in person for the first time. Fifth, the attention span of a child towards a video-chat typically ranges from 5 s to 2 min, and increases gradually with age and experience.

We observed that video-chatting is not much useful to soothe a crying child. However, it is suitable for a parent who is away to interact with a child. Video-chatting can instill a sense of proximity and security in children, as also observed by Tarasuik *et al.*<sup>4</sup>. A parent may also use video-chatting from his/her office to keep track of a child who is in a crèche or at home with a caregiver. Video-chatting may also be used by relatives and family friends to be in touch with a child.

1. American Academy of Pediatrics, *Pediatrics*, 2016, **138**, article e20162591.
2. Tarasuik, J. and Kaufman, J., *J. Child. Media*, 2017, **11**, 88–106.
3. McClure, E. R., Chentsova-Dutton, Y. E., Barr, R. F., Holochwost, S. J. and Parrott, W. G., *Int. J. Child Comput. Interact.*, 2015, **6**, 1–6.
4. Tarasuik, J., Galligan, R. and Kaufman, J., *PLoS ONE*, 2011, **6**, article e17129.

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## Artificial borders in science and nations

The Guest Editorial regarding borders in science and nations by Arunan<sup>1</sup> is pertinent in the present context. Though artificial borders are occasionally important, creating a border because of personal greed or jealousy must be avoided. The history of partition of our country is a well-known example. India is a vast country with differences among the people with regard to their language, culture, religion, appearance and habits, which provide avenues for the creation

of artificial borders. Therefore, our policies must be such that they reinforce faith among fellow citizens for solidarity of the nation. It is pertinent to note that science in India is carried out using tax payers' money. Therefore, scientists have to put aside their personal biases and come forward to play a bigger role in maintaining national integrity. I agree with Arunan<sup>1</sup> that either the three Science Academies merge or they can manage the different branches of

science separately in this large country.

1. Arunan, E., *Curr Sci.*, 2017, **112**, 435–436.

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