Estonian adolescent engagement with entertainment, technology and social media.

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A 2012 Eurobarometer found Estonians to be more multilingual than the average EU citizen, especially in non-native competence of English, Russian and German (Special Eurobarometer 386). In research on the language policies of multilingual intermarried families in Tallinn, the present author found that the adolescent children preferred to consume entertainment and social media in a non-Estonian language, especially English (Doyle, 2014).

This paper presents results of research, the aim of which was to extend the target group to upper secondary school adolescents living in any area of Estonia and of any linguistic and ethnic make-up. Through semi-structured, individual and group interviews, and a questionnaire, data was gathered with a view to discovering: (1) in what languages adolescents in Estonia engage with entertainment, technology and social media – with a focus on Estonian, Russian and English; and (2) their attitudes to the same and their relationship to the aforementioned languages.

The results found competence in English to be high and consumption of audio-visual media in English to be near universal amongst the ethnic-Estonians, with a large majority texting and reading in the language. A large majority of this group self-labelled as 'monolingual', while a small to a large majority stated that they were able to speak, read and write in 2 or more non-native languages. Furthermore, between a third to a half of this group stated that they had basic skills of speaking, reading and writing in Russian, while a large majority stated that their competence in Russian was either poor or non-existent.

This study holds insights into adolescent language practices and beliefs in a post-Soviet context where the state language is ’medium-sized’ globally. To the author’s knowledge, this is the first study on this topic in Estonia.


Keywords: adolescents, social media, multilingualism.