Dear ASDtech members,

Welcome to the third monthly ASDtech Digest. The newsletter aims to contain information relevant to researchers but also parents, practitioners and other members of the autism community. Please forward the email to anyone who you feel would be interested - there is also a pdf version attached for posting to your website, twitter or blog.

At this quarterly milestone I’d particularly like to invite subscribers to send their feedback on the Digest - even one line indicating which numbers items you found useful (or not) would be most welcome to ensure that this Digest remains relevant to subscribers.

This month’s digest contains information about:

1. An online research survey to explore how technology is used by families with an autistic child in the home: **PLEASE CIRCULATE!**
2. Using the internet to educate people about autism - the Autism Reading Room
3. New online autism app resources from Autism Speaks and other specific app recommendations
4. Using Google Glass and specialist facial tracking software to support emotion recognition for people with autism
5. Practical advice for parents on getting your child’s iPad covered by your medical insurance and managing screen time
6. An academic response from Professor Dorothy Bishop to media coverage suggesting that learning from tablets might stunt vocabulary growth
7. A call for abstracts for a possible special issue on autism and technology
8. Recent publications in Autism & Technology

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1. **An online research survey to explore how technology is used by families with an autistic child in the home: **PLEASE CIRCULATE!**

You may recall that in the July Digest we introduced an online survey for parents who have a child with autism (of any age) exploring how technologies are used in the home and on the move. Among other issues, the survey seeks to catalogue the kinds of hardware and software which are most popular among the autism community and in this way address a key concern arising from the IMFAR 2013 SIG regarding the challenge of navigating the large number of available technologies relevant to autism. Findings will be shared with this mailing list once a substantial sample has been collected.

So far 75 people have responded to the survey but we would like to increase circulation far beyond this if possible. In particular, most respondents have been UK-based but we’d like the results to have international input and relevance. The link to the English-language version is below, and ethical approval has been granted by a University of Edinburgh Ethics Committee. If you require us to make a new ethical approval application to your home institution before you can circulate the survey, please get in touch as we’re very willing to engage with those requirements.

**Please send this to any parent mailing lists you may be able to access, and post on your website, blog or twitter.**

[https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/technology_autism_at_home](https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/technology_autism_at_home)

In addition, if anyone is willing and able to translate the survey into other languages, and then provide an English-language summary of results, please get in touch - co-authorship of the eventual publication can be considered for international collaborators. It is hoped that a Spanish-language translation should be available shortly via partners at the Fundacion Orange

2. **Using the internet to educate people about autism - the Autism Reading Room**

Another outcome from the IMFAR 2013 special interest group on autism and technology was a desire to harness the benefits of technology as a way to educate the community at large about autism. The [Autism Reading Room](https://www.autismreadingroom.com) aims to do just that with a range of online resources for professionals, parents and the public. The site includes quizzes to help address popular...
misconceptions about autism, a parents forum for sharing experiences and good ideas, and a database of app reviews. The site is run by the not-for-profit organisation, MindSpec, whose aim is to utilise "innovative bioinformatics strategies to accelerate research on common neurodevelopmental disorders. With our research we hope to foster discovery and development of treatments that alleviate the symptoms of affected individuals."

3. New online autism app resources from Autism Speaks, and other specific app recommendations

This online autism app directory has been relaunched, and now has an additional feature which evaluates the research evidence for each app using three levels:

Anecdotal = No specific or related scientific studies for this type of app.

Research = There are some related scientific studies, but no direct research support for this type of app or technology.

Evidence = There is solid or specific scientific evidence that this type of app or technology is helpful.

Andy Shih writes: "We appreciate that we may not have captured all the relevant research or may have missed some apps that families may have found helpful, so we would like to engage both the user and the research community to help us improve it going forward. We welcome feedback and input from you and other colleagues in order to make it more comprehensive and a helpful tool for our families."

The database is now also searchable by App function, user age-range and supported devices, as well as using keywords: you can try it out at this link.

On the same topic, here are some additional app recommendations from a range of sources.

3.1: A list of visual, sensory and AAC apps by an educator and autism consultant.
3.2: A list of five communication & social story apps
3.3: A link to a demo video of the iPrompts communication tool, built by HandHoldAdaptive and recommended by ASDTech subscriber Maria Diez-Juan who has also written this useful guidance for parents on iPad use.
3.4: A parent review of the First Words Deluxe app, with footage of her child playing the app - this is a great short video to show to someone who is skeptical about how a child with autism might engage with an iPad.
3.5: PiktoPlus is an AAC app for the Android platform, now available in many languages, which has recently received a Vodafone Foundation Innovation Award

4. Using Google Glass and specialist facial tracking software to support emotion recognition for people with autism

An 18-year-old student in the USA has developed a software called Sension which aims to create a responsive interaction between a human user and their computer technology. By tracking the location and shape of facial features the software can, for example, pause a film when the viewer looks away, or allow navigation of a virtual environment by head movements alone. However, the software is also being hailed as a therapeutic opportunity for people with autism, as it can "read" facial expressions and provide appropriate emotion labels to the viewer when used with Google Glass.

There are a couple of mainstream press reports about the possibilities of the software from the Huffington Post and Medical Daily.

Other examples of how new technologies are being employed to increase understanding of the needs of people with autism in a research context are described on this Autism Speaks blog post.

5. Practical advice for parents on getting your child's iPad covered by your medical insurance and managing screen time

Helpful bloggers continue to provide excellent guidance to parents on the practicalities of selecting, buying and using technology with their children and this Digest aims to collect the most useful tidbits. Here you can find some concise and direct guidance for families in the USA (and anyone else with private healthcare providers) on persuading your insurance company to cover the cost of an iPad for a child with autism. And the ever-informative Cool Mom Tech site lists here some very practical tips on managing screen time for children who are using electronic devices independently.

6. An academic response from Professor Dorothy Bishop to media coverage suggesting that learning from tablets might stunt vocabulary growth

You may have spotted some dramatic headlines, such as this from a UK newspaper, stating that technological routes to learning will produce less knowledge than traditional 'oral' knowledge transfer. Here, the internationally esteemed Professor
Dorothy Bishop provides her analysis of the research that gave rise to these dramatic claims.

7. Call for abstracts for a special issue on autism and technology research

One proposed outcome from the recent IMFAR special interest group on autism and technology was to be a special issue of research in this area. The current intention is to produce an issue which represents a ‘coming of age’ of the field, by reporting on studies which represent the highest standards of scientific and methodological rigour. As research on this topic develops it is essential that we produce a greater proportion of evidence based on group experimental studies and randomised controlled trials with substantial sample sizes. In order to gauge the existence of recently-completed and on-going research which might be appropriate for such a special issue, I would like to invite list subscribers to send in short abstracts (up to 250 words) for consideration. Studies do not need to be completed but abstracts should give an indication of when results are expected to be ready to publish, and should also provide relevant methodological information such as sample size, study design and outcome measures. These abstracts will be considered by the SIG committee and used to formulate a timeline for a proposed special issue in a major psychology journal, which may be compiled and published over 2014/2015. Abstracts and queries should be directed to sue.fletcher-watson@ed.ac.uk

8. Recent publications in Autism & Technology

This website has an excellent collection of research resources for teachers thinking about how to use digital technologies in the classroom.


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