

# Introduction

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Digital parenting is a popular yet polysemic concept that refers both to how parents are increasingly engaged in regulating their children's relationships with digital media (parental mediation), and how parents themselves incorporate digital media in their daily activities and parenting practices, and, in so doing, develop emergent forms of parenting.

## Parental mediation

The notion of parental mediation indicates the varied practices that parents adopt in order to manage and regulate their children's engagement with the media. Our understanding of digital parenting in its first meaning can build upon the well-established tradition of research into parental mediation, initially centered on the mediation of television viewing in order to assess its effects on children's development and behaviour (Austin, 1993; Nathanson, 1999; Valkenburg et al., 1999). As the internet became widely adopted in families with children, researchers were asking whether TV-oriented strategies of parental mediation could be adapted to online media, or whether new approaches were needed (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008). In fact, the affordances of digital media as both physical (portability) and digital objects (personalisation, visibility, persistence, etc.) – that are enacted through practice (Costa, 2018) – all pose challenges to a simple transfer of the TV-based strategies of restrictive mediation, instructive mediation and co-viewing (Valkenburg et al., 1999) to online and mobile media.

The most recent research on parental mediation of children's internet use came to the conclusion that the diverse array of mediation practices employed by parents can actually be grouped into two broad categories: enabling and restrictive mediation (Livingstone et

al., 2017). While restrictive mediation can be effective in reducing children's exposure to online risks, it has numerous side-effects, because it limits children's opportunities to develop digital literacy and build resilience and discourages children's agency within the child-parent relationship. Enabling mediation, instead, encompasses a set of mediation practices (including co-use, active mediation of internet safety, monitoring and technical restrictions such as parental controls) that are aimed at empowering children and supporting their active engagement with online media.

The question is, then, how to ensure children's access to online opportunities while protecting them from potential harmful effects. This question is particularly pressing for younger children, who are now increasingly online even before they can talk or walk. However, there is still a paucity of research on parental mediation of very young children regarding their digital media uses. Available research suggests that parent of younger children tend to favour restrictive mediation, though they are inconsistent in their practices and often use touchscreens as a babysitter while they are doing household chores, or as part of a system of reward and punishment for children's behaviour (Chaudron et al., 2015).

The appropriation of digital media into families' everyday lives is influenced by parenting styles or ethics (Clark, 2013). Parents are variously equipped to face the increasing complexity of the digital world and its social and developmental consequences. Inequalities in parental mediation have emerged based on parents' education or socio-economic status (Livingstone et al., 2017; Paus-Hasebrink et al., 2013). Even among parents of young children, lower income/lower educated parents are likely to experience a generational digital divide and feel less confident in their ability to guide children's use of touchscreens and prevent their exposure to risks. As a consequence, they are reluctant to engage in parental mediation and scaffolding of their children's digital literacy practices. Children are left to experiment on their own, learning by trial and error, or seek out support from their older siblings (Mascheroni et al., 2016).

A similar digital generation gap is experienced in developing countries, especially among rural families where parents lag behind in the adoption and use of technology and children are likely to teach their parents how to use computers, mobile phones and the internet (Correa, 2014). Prior research into parental mediation has shown that children act as agents of change, by introducing new technologies in the family, reversing existing media rules or creating new rules, guiding their parents' use, and mediating media effects (van den Bulck et al., 2016). The so-called "child-effect" (van den Bulck et al., 2016) invites the researcher to consider mediation as a reciprocal process, whereby both parents and children and the family as a cultural unit are transformed. Families with children are usually early and enthusiastic adopters of new technologies, which, in turn, shape the family's communication practices and media consumption habits. However, and despite the fact that the child-effect can and, to varying degrees, does occur in all families, it has been largely under-investigated so far.

## Parenting practices

A similar attention to the diversity of contexts in which digital media are incorporated and negotiated, and a caution against easy generalisations, should be paid when we address the second meaning of digital parenting – that is, how digital media have become increasingly entangled with parenting practices. In the Global North and, increasingly, in urban contexts in the Global South, the pervasiveness of the internet and mobile media is giving rise to an emergent form of parenting, called “transcendent parenting” (Lim, 2016), whereby parents are faced with the challenges of transcending online-offline social interactions, the multi-media and multimodal environments, and the “timeless time” of parenting.

While providing means for remote parenting and coordinating family life, new technologies pose new challenges to parents. Emergent mediated parenting practices include sharenting – that is, the (over)sharing of children’s pictures and personal information on social media (see Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017), the increasing reliance on the internet and parenting apps for advice, and the use of wearable devices in order to calculate babies’ health data and behavioural patterns, or to monitor the child’s whereabouts. Together these practices concur to an unprecedented datafication of children’s lives: Children’s data are tracked, stored in commercial platforms, analysed and monetised as part of a “surveillance capitalism” (Zuboff, 2015). Through sharenting and the use of wearable objects, children are involved in ever intensifying networks of surveillance, including commercial dataveillance and “intimate surveillance” (Leaver, 2017) from parents. The implications for children’s future can only be speculated at this stage, but are likely to compromise children’s rights to privacy, as well as rights to be forgotten and to remove content they might feel constraining later.

## Structure of the book

This book addresses the challenges and opportunities faced by parents in digital times taking into account multiple levels of digital penetration among families from different social classes and regions across the world.

The 20 chapters that follow engage with evidence drawn from a wide range of methods for data collection and analysis: Surveys administered to both children and parents, allowing a comparison of the answers; longitudinal observation of families and child-parent relations, showing changes and continuities in time; in-depth interviews with parents and young people; ethnographic research, including auto-ethnographies; discourse analysis of online discussions on sensitive topics. This plurality of methods and the identification of knowledge gaps should prove inspiring for future research and interventions.

The book is organized along three sections: Digital parenting in context; Parental mediation in practice; and Challenges, risks and opportunities of digital media for parents and children.

The section *Digital parenting in context* sheds light on a host of sociocultural environments: Global North and Global South, urban and rural areas, middle class and disadvantaged families, migrant and minority families.

Chapter one presents us with a global and comparative view. Sonia Livingstone and Jasmina Byrne note how parents all over the world are responding to the rapid pace of technological innovation. As the authors observe, context matters: While parents in high-income countries are slowly moving from restrictive towards enabling forms of mediation, in middle and low-income countries restrictions are still the preferred way to deal with technological change. The chapter ends with suggestions to support parents from different contexts in the process of empowering their children online.

The second chapter focuses on deeply digitally connected households across the world. Sun Sun Lim introduces the concept of “transcendent parenting”, mainly experienced by middle-class parents. Surrounded by their digital ties, parents constantly communicate with their children and guide their children’s media use. The author discusses this parenting practice, its manifestations at various developmental stages of the children and its implications in terms of emerging parenting obligations.

In contrast to these media-rich households, chapter three addresses the case of isolated rural communities in Chile, where most of the households don’t have internet connection, even when access infrastructure exists. Isabel Pavez and Teresa Correa explore not only the role young children play in the digital inclusion of their families, but also the complexity and tensions that emerge through this process and their relation with traditional family values.

The following chapters examine other contexts and perspectives. Chapter four presents a longitudinal panel study, covering twelve years (2005-2017), on the role played by the media within 18 socially disadvantaged families in Austria. Ingrid Paus-Hasebrink analyses parents’ mediation practices and how they changed with respect to both children’s age (from 5 to 17 years old) and changing media over time, discussing the observed patterns of mediation practices.

This is followed by two chapters looking at families from minority groups also living in industrialized societies. In chapter five, Sabine Little focuses on ways in which, in the UK, parents of different cultural and linguistic backgrounds use digital technology to support their children’s language development. The author points out that these parents face tensions between their ideological assumptions regarding the use and over-use of technology versus the motivational pull they know technology has for their children. In chapter six, Marketa Zezulkova and Lucie Stastna look at a group of Roma families in the Czech Republic and listen to their family narratives. The authors explore the role of cultural experiences expressed in these narratives in parental mediation and digital parenting and underline their value for the construction of new knowledge about parental mediation, their motivation and forms.

Chapter seven, the last one of this section, engages with the topic of parenting from the point of view of adolescents who reflect on the ways their parents negotiate digital responsibilities and rights with them. Based on interviews collected in the US and

Portugal, Lynn Schofield Clark and Maria José Brites note that families who embrace a commitment to social justice when they are considering digital activities of their children may produce agentic environments. By contrast, families with low levels of agentic discussion and decision-making may reinforce low digital agentic options, actions and decisions.

The section *Parental mediation in practice*, the second of this book, gathers contributions from different angles and contexts on how parental mediation is being adapted, at an empirical as well as conceptual levels, in a (post)digital age.

Chapter eight, by Thorsten Naab, reviews the theoretical framework of traditional strategies of parental mediation of very young children in the context of social media activities and suggests media trusteeship as a complementary approach. Interviews with parents reveal that they possess only limited concepts of how they could support their children's digital media development, and they seem to apply ad-hoc tactics to cope with changes of their children's media autonomy.

Next, the chapter by Yehuda Bar Lev, Nelly Elias and Sharona T. Levy presents an ethnographic and longitudinal study of a "technologically saturated" family of a boy from the age of six to 27 months. Following the infant, then toddler, through a period of nearly two years, allowed the authors to understand how the media use of the child evolved and was shaped by parent-related factors and the presence of older siblings.

A study from Australia and UK, focusing on parental evaluations of children's (0-5-year olds) touchscreen technologies, is presented in chapter ten. Leslie Haddon and Donell Holloway reveal that parents of young children are less concerned about inappropriate content and contact than parents of older children. Parents recognised the learning and developmental benefits or detriments of children using touchscreen devices and spoke with mixed feelings about how these technologies can be useful to keeping children occupied.

Chapters eleven and twelve reveal mirrored reports from parents and children on online practices. Rozane De Cock and colleagues look at early gambling behaviour in online games, focusing on parent's perspectives on children's engagement in games, and on children's reporting about their game play incorporating gambling elements. The study with primary school children of on average 10,5 years old in Flanders shows the challenges for parental awareness and mediation posed by the convergence of gambling and digital games where there is no obligatory strict classification system and labelling of simulated gambling games and their gambling characteristics, and there is an online context of simulated gambling games.

Lorleen Farrugia and Mary Anne Lauri present parents' awareness and management of their children's online risks in Malta, an insular, Catholic culture, in chapter twelve. The balance of supervision and independence parents enact in relation to the online use of children was investigated in two studies with parents and children 8 to 15-years old. Besides discovering a gap between children's online practices and parents' awareness, the authors found that parents proceed by "trial and error" in their mediation strategies to adapt to changes in technology.

Chapter 13 brings the perspective of German professional educational counsellors on how parents deal with children's use of mobile media and internet when raising up their children and how they try to find ways to improve parental media education. Gisela Schubert and Susanne Eggert describe how parents struggle with this when their children get older, and their media use increases and becomes more independent, seeking family counsellors to help them.

Jos de Haan, Peter Nikken and Annemarie Wennekers' chapter closes this section with a contribution focused on the Dutch case, where scientific research, supported by ministries, has been the foundation for evidence-based parenting support. Practical outcomes included training programs for different agents, with the aim of contributing to the safe and playful use of the internet and the development of digital skills of children.

Lastly, section three, *Challenges, Risks and Opportunities*, brings discussions on emerging risks, challenges and opportunities brought about by digital media for parents and children.

The section opens up with Veronica Barassi's reflection on the relationship between parents' digital practices and the production of children's data traces. Drawing on a qualitative and ethnographically informed research which explores the impact of big data on family life, the author argues that the multiple variety of data traces that are produced daily about children can be used to profile them as citizen subjects and calls for attention to issues such as algorithmic inaccuracies and data justice.

Chapter 16 engages with the "screen time" debate. Alicia Blum-Ross and Sonia Livingstone analyse the guidelines by the American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) (issued in 1999 and updated in 2016) in relation to the existing evidence about the lived experience of families in the digital age, drawing on interviews with 73 diverse families in London. They argue that AAP and similar time- or exposure-based guidelines rely on an insufficient evidence base, and lead parents to prioritise restrictive forms of "screen time" that neither serves the purpose of keeping children safe nor help them towards opportunities.

In chapter 17, Pille Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt offers an auto-ethnographic account on digital parenting of a child with rare genetic syndrome – CHARGE – with the help of closed Facebook groups. The author explores the activities of three online groups of parents and identifies the helpful "therapeutic affordances" – as defined by Merolli and colleagues (2015) – provided by social media for these parents: identity, flexibility, structure, narration and adaptation.

Chapter 18 looks at the digital mediation of childbirth in the UK. Ranjana Das found that online discussions of birthing display the juxtaposition of two value laden narratives: One – the "good" birthing – emphasizes the necessity and superiority of a drug-free vaginal birth, sits within the feminist rebuttal of obstetric domination of birthing and is an empowering discourse; the other seeks to silence those whose births did not fit within this model, and presents them with the task of silencing the "horror-stories" experiences.

The last two chapters address (anti-)sharenting strategies, with regard to parents sharing pictures and information of one's children on social media. On chapter 19, Maja Sonne Damkjaer presents a study of eight Danish first-time parent couples' use and experience of digital media in relation to their new role as parents. The author identified four types of communicative orientation that characterise parents' approach to Facebook as a social network site, in relation to differences in aesthetics, values and attitudes toward sharenting. Finally, Ulla Autenrieth's chapter explores the reaction to risk assessment in relation to children's digital photos: The anti-sharenting position and the behaviour adapted by some parents that show pictures of their young children on social media sites. Analysing the emergent photo practices, the author introduces a photo guide to support families in discussing these issues.

The chapters thus illustrate the diverse opportunities, constraints and tensions that digital media pose to parenting and family life, encourage further debates, and suggest future policies. As other publications of the Yearbook collection from the International Clearinghouse on Children, Youth and Media, this book reaches out to a variety of readers, including professionals in the field as well as NGOs and other policy makers. As editors, we also hope that parents all over the world find here topics and discussions related to their own experience.

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