Opposing narratives about children’s digital media use: a critical discourse analysis of online public advice given to parents in Australia and Belgium

# Details

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## Topics

* Social mediation
* Literacy and skills
* Online safety and policy regulation

## Sample

The purposive sampling strategy focused on collecting publicly available online materials of
Australian and Belgian (viz. Flemish) contributions posted between 1 January 2015 and 30 June
2017. Inclusion criteria: (1) Publications produced in electronic format (e.g. reports, fact sheets, websites, policy documents, blog posts, piece of commentary, podcasts); (2) Published by a government, NGO, newspaper, non-parenting magazine, non-tech journalists’ blog, tech journalists’ blog, parenting website or forum, mummy bloggers’ website, parenting magazine or radio
show/podcast, within Australia/Belgium; (3) Implicitly or explicitly intended for an audience that
includes parents with young children, reporting on tips for media education of young children within the age category of approximately 0–8, includes information, tips, tricks, guidelines, or dos and
don’ts about parents’ media education of their children or describes and comments on parenting practices as an example of what can be considered as (not) good.

# Abstract

What are the public discourses about parental guidance of children’s digital media use in Australia and Belgium? The findings of a multi-method interpretive content analysis suggest that both risks and opportunities are made significant, (re-)claiming power for parents to decide what is realistic. Belgian critical-optimistic commentary suggests that it is normal to see a variety of parenting practices in society, encouraging parents to make informed decisions considering the child’s developmental age and mutual trust. Australian public commentary features emotionally laden, opposing views, whereby restriction seems the golden rule for guiding young children’s engagement with digital media. Across the 30 months of the dataset, however, Australian pieces began to give voice to experts who embrace more relaxed rules. The study illuminates how public narratives are sites of political manoeuvring, revealing ideological stances relating to parental mediation and children’s media use, sensitive to and reflective of situated meanings bound by space and time.

# Outcome

The advice offered focused on a variety of digital parenting practices about children’s digital media use. "The discourse acknowledges the parents’ role in facilitating online opportunities (as opposed to a sole focus on risk prevention), and the role of the child as an active agent (rather than merely vulnerable, and in need of protection). Together with the child-differentiators included in the online tips for Belgian parents, this approach moves the debate beyond the ‘average’ child or ‘average’ parent, and acknowledges the situational factors, instead. These narratives indicate that being a good parent means seeking a personalised approach based on mutual trust that reflects the developmental age of the child and that accounts for situational demands. Rules are flexible, exceptions are fine and no ‘ideal’ approach is offered." (Zaman et al., 2020, pp. 133-134)