Parenting the Mobile Internet in Italian Households: Parents' and Children's Discourses

# Details

## Year

2014

## DOI

10.1080/17482798.2013.830978

## Issued

2013

## Language

English

## Volume

8

## Issue

4

## Start Page

## End Page

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## Type

Journal article

## Journal

Journal of Children and Media

## Publisher

Informa UK Limited

## Sample

23 parents aged between 36 and 51 took part in the research; four boys and four girls aged 11–13.

# Abstract

Drawing on the rich literature on parental mediation of children's use of digital and mobile media, this paper discusses the findings of an explorative study conducted in Italy, aimed at understanding how families appropriate smartphones in relation to the household's moral economy, their domestication of ICTs and the parenting style adhered to by parents. The aim of the paper is threefold: understand (1) how are social legitimations for or against children's use of smartphones constructed; (2) how do parents make sense of their mediation of children's mobile internet use drawing on different interpretative repertoires; and (3) how children negotiate, resist or evade parental justifications by producing alternative narratives.

# Outcome

"The paper has investigated the appropriation of smartphones in Italian families from
the viewpoint of the household’s cultural system and parenting styles. We presented three
questions which guided the analysis.
First, the paper has investigated the ongoing legitimisation of smartphones, which is
still polarised among conflicting optimistic and pessimistic discourses and primarily shaped
by parents’ gender, their own domestication of ICTs and the discursive environment:
mothers, especially those who identify themselves as digital immigrants, are more sensitive
to media panics, and tend to delegitimise smartphones based on the idea of mobile phones
as an “electronic leash.”
Second, the paper aimed at understanding how parents make sense of their attempts
to regulate children’s relationship with smartphones. The findings show that parents draw
on two main interpretative repertoires when accounting for parental mediation: the
“parenting out of control” style—which includes both engaged and permissive parents—
and the authoritarian parenting style. For different reasons, in both frames the use of
technical restrictions is questioned: what bothers parents is the notion that control may rest
on external constraints rather than parental guidance (Nelson, 2010), no matter if personal
vigilance is achieved through responsiveness and warmth—as in the case of engaged and
permissive parents—or through restrictions and surveillance—as in the case of authoritarian
parents. A third repertoire emerges, which is drawn upon by “digital immigrants” mothers: in
this case, though mothers’ own understanding of what it means to be a competent parent is
also mobilised in the account of their regulation activities, parental mediations strategies are
discussed and assessed drawing mainly on the perceived generational gap with their
children.
The third research question addressed the issue of how children understand parental
regulation of their media use. In doing so, children claim their right to engage in
communication and entertainment practices, as a way to emancipate from their parents
through a perpetual contact with their portable communities. Therefore, they legitimise
attempts to negotiate their own accessibility to parents, and resist or ignore parental
mediation when it is perceived as intrusive. They especially blame monitoring and technical
restrictions for corrupting the child-parent relationship, which they would rather be based
on mutual trust." (Mascheroni, 2014, p. 453).