Parental mediation and the internet: findings of NET children go mobile for parents' mediation strategies in Ireland

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## Implications For Parents About

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# Abstract

Based on data collected from the Net Children Go Mobile project, a cross-national study of children aged 9–16 in seven European countries with a focus on the Irish context, this article examines parental mediation of children’ online activities. The relationship between children’s digital skills (including internet and smartphone use) and parental mediation is also examined and factors influencing parent mediation are highlighted. Parents implement a range of strategies, favouring strict mediation and rules over active mediation on internet safety, but these were associated with reduced children’s online activities and digital skills. These findings challenge researchers to identify effective strategies that don’t impede children’s freedom to access the online world and avail of online opportunities.

# Outcome

Our findings call into question the efficacy of mediation strategies deployed by parents in Ireland, particularly the high levels of restrictive mediation. The data also points to the unintended consequences that such mediation techniques bring about such as limiting children’s digital skills both in internet and smartphone use. While balancing risks over the opportunities of the digital world, it would appear that Irish parents have been overly cautious to the extent that young people fall behind the European average in terms of digital skills, opportunities and possibly resilience in coping with risks. By creating what is undoubtedly a safer – or at least more risk-averse – environment, parents have inadvertently hampered the very population it seeks to assist and may indeed lead children to take greater risks in order to gaining access to the online world.
As the digital landscape of children continues to evolve, it is important that parents, educators and policymakers reconceptualise the learning environments that best prepare children for the future. Rather than focusing on how digital technologies fit into existing curricula, it is necessary therefore to examine how they may extend traditional learning and play activities. Promoting positive, safer, and more effective use of technology by children, particularly in family and educational context, is therefore a key priority in the years ahead, mindful always that parent has a special role to play in ensuring the benefits of digital technologies reach all children.