How parents of young children manage digital devices at home: The role of income, education and parental style

# Details

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English

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Short report

## Topics

* Social mediation
* Access, inequalities and vulnerabilities
* Literacy and skills
* Online safety and policy regulation

## Sample

In total, the researchers visited 70 families at home, 10 each in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Finland, Italy, the UK and Russia. The 70 families interviewed included 119 children (aged 0–8, and indirectly covered older siblings (n=38) aged between 9 and 20. A short family introduction took place in which the children and parents participated in a joint discussion and activity.

## Implications For Parents About

* Parental practices / parental mediation
* Parental digital literacy
* Parenting guidance / support

# Abstract

From when children are very young, their parents start to develop strategies to manage (or mediate) their present and future digital media use. A key challenge they face is that digital media – by which we refer to the array of domestic and personal digital and networked devices for information, communication and entertainment now present in many European homes – are associated with both opportunities and risks.

Qualitative research (based on interviews and observations) with 70 families with children younger than the age of eight conducted in seven European countries has already reported that parents are guided by their already-established styles of parenting and family values, extending these to digital media uses at home as soon as their young children first pick up a tablet or smartphone.

For the present analysis we divided the families into three groups – lower income/less educated, lower income/more educated and higher income/more educated.

In lower income, less educated families, we found:
-A generation gap in digital media expertise between parents and children, especially among immigrant families
-More restrictive parental mediation strategies regarding digital devices, yet parents who are rather ambivalent and worried about digital media

In lower income, more educated families, we found:
-fairly confident parents in terms of both their digital skills and thus their ability to prioritise active over restrictive mediation

In higher income, more educated families, we found:
-A wide range of diverse mediation practices including different strategies to manage restrictions for digital device use
-Parents who work with digital media, or use digital media at home, who often find that their own practices undermine their efforts to limit their children’s digital media use.

# Outcome

In lower income, less educated families, we found:
-relatively high device ownership at home;
-a generation gap in digital media expertise between parents and children, especially among immigrant families;
-more restrictive parental mediation strategies regarding digital devices, yet parents who are rather ambivalent and worried about digital media;
-an ‘ethic of respectful connectedness’ in parenting values.

In lower income, more educated families, we found:
-a mix of media-rich and media-poor homes in terms of device ownership;
-a variety of domestic circumstances with a high proportion of single-parent households;
-fairly confident parents in terms of both their digital skills and thus their ability to prioritise active over restrictive mediation

In higher income, more educated families, we found:
-an ‘ethic of expressive empowerment’ in parenting values;
-a wide range of diverse mediation practices including different strategies to manage restrictions for digital device use;
-efforts to promote offline (non-digital) activities for children while limiting digital activities in the home;
-parents who work with digital media, or use digital media at home, who often find that their own practices undermine their efforts to limit their children’s digital media use.

"Importantly, and complicating matters somewhat, the relationship between parenting
style and parental regulation of digital devices is qualified by parents’ own familiarity with digital media. Across all the family types, insofar as parents had particular expertise in digital media, whether because of their work or interests, it appeared that they were more confident of managing their children’s digital media activities and more engaged in them" (Livingstone et al., 2015, p. 6)