From surveillance to co-viewing: Strategies and responses to smartphone regulation within a family context

Engl. transl.: From surveillance to co-viewing: Strategies and responses to smartphone regulation within a family context

# Keywords

* smartphone use and regulation, family communication, domestication of technology

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## Authors

Zepan S.; Oblak Črnič T.

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## Topics

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## Sample

The sample encompasses five Slovenian families selected from a personal circle
of acquaintances. Families have been selected according to the appropriate age of children and their partially known positions on mobile phones in order to gather as diverse
experiences as possible: from those that do not allow using mobile phones at all, to those
where the use is almost unlimited. All families involved are heterogeneous, consisting of
two parents (mother and father) and two children, all of whom live in a common household.3
 Five children and seven parents (three fathers and four mothers) participated in the
group discussions. The in-depth interviews were conducted with five parents (two fathers
and three mothers) and five children: two 11- and 13-year-old girls and three 11-, 12- and
13-year-old boys. For privacy reasons their names, were completely anonymised.

## Implications For Parents About

Parenting guidance / support

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Stepping up awareness and empowerment

## Implications For Stakeholders About

# Abstract

This article presents an ethnographic study conducted within five distinct Slovenian families, the aim of which was to discuss how different models of family communication
intersect with the regulations of mobile devices and responses to regulatory strategies
within the same families. Following the four ideal types of family communication (protective, consensual, pluralistic, and laissez-faire) and many studies that have confirmed a
correlation between media use and family communication, this article primarily focuses
on the ambivalent roles of smartphones within family relationships. According to the results based on in-depth interviews with parents and their children, the study finds that parents mediate children’s use of mobile phones with three distinct tactics: through co-use
of devices, surveillance of usage, and strict rules that limit the use of phones within the
homes. Children resist such regulations, yet again in different ways: through persuasion,
by avoiding the rules and hiding their practices, and through partnership with parents. The
role of family communication in this regard is not linear but quite complex: It seems that
within the families oriented more towards conversation, children learn how to affect and
potentially transform the rules, while for the families oriented towards conformity, this is
not always the case.

# Outcome

Regardless of the communication pattern, all children showed at least some resistance to the regulations imposed by their parents: all children mentioned some ways
and examples of concrete hiding of what they are doing with and on the phones. In contrast to Krcmar (1996), who suggested that neither the child’s nor the parent’s orientation to conversation has any influence on resisting regulation, our study shows how the
orientation to conversation affects the type of resistance. When a child perceives the
communication pattern with (at least one) parent as being oriented toward conversation,
they choose persuasion to change the rules over hiding real practices. However, the aforementioned competence for persuasion and the ability to argue is important: when children consider that they lack good arguments to persuade their parents in adjusting the rules, they still prefer to hide their behaviour.