Parenting young children in changing media environments with twenty years apart

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* Mediatization
* communicative figurations
* media and family
* media generation
* young children

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## Sample

40 interviews with parents of pre-schooled children, 20 were conducted in 1996 and 20 in 2016.

## Implications For Parents About

Parental practices / parental mediation

# Abstract

This article aims to bring to reflection the everyday life of Portuguese families with young children entangled in the digital media environment, by considering a past generation of families with similar characteristics. Theoretical framework combines a mediatization lens and perspectives from media and generations studies. The conceptualisation of the family as a “communicative figuration” (Hepp, Hasebrink, 2018) ‒ composed by communicative practices, actors’ constellation and frames of relevance ‒ guide the three research questions: 1) to what extent is the changing media environment related to changes in the roles played by parents, children and other family members? 2) Are digital media affecting communicative practices in relation to family timetables, routines and spaces? 3) How family’s media-related concerns and memories frame those practices? Based on a thematic analysis of 40 interviews with 20 years apart (20 in 1996 and 20 in 2016), the article explores to what extent “doing family” (Morgan, 2011) has changed. Results show that despite 2016 families are immersed in a deeper digitised environment, parents continue considering television as the main trusted screen for children. More schooled and digital savvy parents seem to be attached to a nostalgic perception of childhood that guides their mediation practices through a more cocooning approach, postponing children’s awareness of social realities around them.

# Outcome

"The 1996 media ensemble dominated by plural TV screens and digital video players and recorders gave place twenty years later to a reconfigured media ensemble that joined multifunctional mobile and individualized digital devices to the smart TV set. Although families with young children are now immersed in a deeply digitised landscape where portable affordances abound, television remains the main trusted screen for children. In contrast to the idea of a digital boom, these families did not become drastically digital; instead, they adjust and combine old and new media in their everyday routines.
In this changing media environment children are the increasingly emotional anchors of parents’ technological and educational investments, cultivated by couples engaged in the act of reflecting their mediation practices in relation to protecting their offsprings. Fathers’ position in family decisions around the media seem to lose prominence at the expense of what seems to be in the best interest of the child (now with more agency and voice). Meanwhile, mothers continue to be the main media regulators in the house, and they keep counting on digital media for help. Among other factors, gender and related assumptions continue to make a difference in the family’s digital life" (Ponte, C.; Pereira, S.; Castro, T., 2019: 287).
The data exposed the intensification of mediatization processes, visible in the acceleration and immediacy of family times, spaces and communication. It suggests that if media convergence and portable devices bring more options for the family’s mediated communicative practices, they may not assure automatically affective sociality and social extension for younger family members.
"Furthermore, more cocooning-framed approaches seem to encapsulate children in a protected and entrusting bubble that extends childhood imaginary and romantic values, avoiding children’s awareness of social realities around them. A token of this protectionism is made visible by families’ approaches to news consumption when parents opt for watching the news privately or later to protect the child from real life difficult contents and related questioning. As children have more access to personal devices and decide on family television programming, their lives become more encapsulated in their own media world and culture. More schooled and digital savvy parents reveal an increasingly nostalgic perception of childhood in which a retro culture of brands and contents (e.g. Disney related products) seems to play a role satisfying and guiding their protectionist concerns and decisions values" (Ponte, C.; Pereira, S.; Castro, T., 2019: 288).
Thus, media changing environment has consequences in the family’s life, with the safeguard that they are slower than technological evolution itself.