Editorial: Young children's use of digital media and parental mediation

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Growing numbers of young children use a variety of media devices and applications at home (Jones & Park, 2015), and at an increasingly younger age. Parents report that their children are using digital technologies even at the age of one (Mifsud & Petrova, 2017). Mobile devices have become especially popular among children aged 0 to 8, with a large number of families with young children having smartphones and tablets in the home, although this has not automatically led to an increase in digital media use (Common Sense Inc., 2017), and does not tell anything about the range of factors influencing how the technologies are appropriated in the family setting (Plowman, Stevenson, Stephen, & McPake, 2012).

In this special issue, we present a holistic perspective on young children's digital media use by accounting for the various factors that shape their online experiences at home. We aim to arrive at a better understanding of how the digital media landscape offers both opportunities and challenges for young children. Previous research (e.g., Marsh, Hannon, Lewis, & Ritchie, 2017; Plowman et al., 2012) has shown that 'digital literacy' is established early on in young children (0-8) and they learn with technology at home. Plowman et al. (2012, p. 36) concluded that the ways in which "children, families and technology interact in the home [...help children towards an] understanding of the world, learning dispositions and the role of technology in everyday life". This in turn has brought about increased concern that "young children's lack of technical, critical and social skills may pose a risk" (Livingstone, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011, p. 3). Parents play an important role in shaping young children's digital media experiences (Marsh et al., 2017). In order to gain a deeper understanding of the difficulties faced by parents to balance their role of mitigating and preventing the negative effects of children's digital media use on the one hand, with that of providing them with the opportunities offered by digital media on the other, an extensive accumulation of knowledge on all aspects of parental mediation is required.

Three decades of research on parental mediation have repeatedly shown that active mediation, restrictive mediation, co-use and monitoring are common styles by which parents in Western cultures mediate the media use of children across a wide age spectrum (Gentile, Nathanson, Rasmussen, Reimer, & Walsh, 2012; Mendoza, 2009; Nikken & Jansz, 2014; Padilla-Walker, Coyne, Fraser, Dyer, & Yorgason, 2012; Valkenburg, Krcmar, Peeters, & Marseille, 1999; Warren, 2001). The research field concerned with young children's media use and the role of parental mediation is challenged to stay current with technological evolutions (Troseth, Russo, & Strouse, 2016), and to consider a wide variety of 'screen' media other than television (see e.g., Brito, Francisco, Dias, & Chaudron, 2017; Goh, Bay, & Chen, 2015; Lauricella, Wartella, & Rideout, 2015). Rather than the traditional situation of one television per family accessible at a fixed location at home with limited interactivity and predefined content, we are now increasingly witnessing a situation in which a family has access to several media devices (often per family member) that allow for individualized mobile use, online connectedness and interactivity (see e.g., Eastin, Greenberg, & Hofschire, 2006; Fisch, 2017). A situation which presents us with a broad mix of media related scenarios, with significant differences in both media quantity and quality, as well as in the way media use is shaped by the characteristics of the family context.

Therefore, the body of knowledge on parental mediation would benefit from empirical insights accounting for this heterogeneity in family compositions, media environments, and in the light of contemporary media evolutions. It would allow us to discover whether and how new or adapted parental mediation practices have

emerged. It is therefore important that the research focus is not only on the intentional and behavioural aspects, but also on the underlying parental attitudes and motives, their 'ethnotheories' or cultural beliefs (Plowman, McPake, & Stephen, 2010), their unconscious or unintended behaviours (see e.g., Bandura, 1977; Kammerl & Kramer, 2016; Vaala & Bleakley, 2015), and the situational factors shaping the dynamics of parental mediation practices (Zaman, Nouwen, Vanattenhoven, Ferrerre, & Looy, 2016). Such an holistic stance helps to arrive at an in-depth understanding of why certain parental mediation practices (co-)exist (Stattin & Kerr, 2000), why oftentimes they appear paradoxical (Zaman et al., 2016), and how the social interactions between the child media user and family members may go in both directions (Livingstone et al., 2017; Nelissen & Van den Bulck, 2018).

In this special issue, we address these challenges and aim to contribute to the body of research on young children's digital media use based on a selection of studies covering a variety of methodologies, including quantitative and qualitative empirical research as well as a systematic literature review.

Special Issue

The special issue invited contributions that build on our understanding of children's contemporary practices with digital media, studied from quantitative, qualitative and mixed approaches. The special issue originated in cooperation with the COST ACTION IS1410 'The digital literacy and multimodal practices of young children" (DigiLitEY) and the ECREA TWG group on Children, Youth and Media, and was launched in November 2016.

We received 38 abstracts of which 11 were selected by Natalia Kucirkova (University College London, UK), Charles Mifsud (University of Malta, Malta), Cristina Ponte (Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Portugal) and Bieke Zaman (KU Leuven, Belgium) to go to the next phase. Then, the review process of full manuscripts was double blind. Each full manuscript was reviewed by two respected scholars in the field of children, youth and media, and shepherded by at least one special issue editor. A total of six papers were selected to be considered for publication in this issue. In the final publication phase, these six papers were further reviewed by Bieke Zaman and Charles Mifsud as special issue editors and by Lenka Dedkova, David Smahel and Kristian Daneback as main journal editors.

The final list of papers mainly revolves around the theme of parental mediation of children's use of digital media, with a focus on families with young children. Five of the papers deal with research questions that have not been extensively addressed in previous research, including amongst others an empirical investigation of the role of the parents' own media use (Nikken, this issue), toddlers' use of digital media platforms like YouTube (Elias & Sulkin, 2017 - this issue), and the situational factors shaping parental mediation dynamics (van Kruistum & van Steensel, 2017 - this issue; Smahelova, Juhová, Cermak, & Smahel, 2017 - this issue; Daneels & Vanwynsberghe, 2017 - this issue). The last paper in our special issue presents a literature review of 60 research studies published between 2011 and 2015 and sheds light on the landscape of young children and digital media research. It shows that the findings from our special issue converge with the recent body of research on digital technologies featuring children's interaction with social partners (Miller, Paciga, Danby, Beaudoin-Ryan, & Kaldor, 2017 - this issue).

When we garner the insights offered by our special issue, we can identify four main findings that might contribute to the further maturation of parental mediation theory, and an in-depth, actualized understanding of children's digital media use.

Firstly, the empirical evidence provided in this special issue shines a light on the heterogeneity of families with children, the relation to parental mediation styles, and its consequences for children's media use. For instance, it points to the variety of family types based on the time spent by parents and children on different media (Elias & Sulkin; Nikken), and discusses examples of different family portraits based on the diversity of values and emotions shaping parental mediation practices (van Kruistum & van Steensel). When considering that this heterogeneity is already present in relatively homogeneous populations, it is imperative that future research encompasses a wider variety of sample characteristics, including the involvement of families with low socioeconomic backgrounds and with diverse needs (Miller et al.).

Secondly, it is shown that the social interactions revolving around children's media use go in both directions. The parental mediation of digital media is a dynamic process that is co-constructed by the parents and the children in the context of the actual situation (see e.g., Smahelova et al.). Moreover, not only do parents guide children's media use, but children are also shaping parents' media use (see e.g., Nikken). This special issue further illustrates how children's media use is shaped by parents' intentional, conscious as well as unintended and unconscious actions, with parents acting as role models (Nikken; Elias & Sulkin; Smahelova et al.), who are driven by tacit knowledge, values and emotions (van Kruistum & van Steensel), and who shape the conditions for children based on their own media literacy competencies (Daneels & Vanwynsberghe) as well as their own perceptions of the risks and opportunities that digital media may have for their child (Elias & Sulkin; Smahelova et al.).

Thirdly, we discuss how the changes in the media landscape affect children's leisure time as early as the first year of life (Elias & Sulkin). This discussion addresses the need for empirical research on contemporary technologies used by children and youth, such as YouTube use by toddlers (Elias & Sulkin) and social media by adolescents (Daneels & Vanwynsberghe). Given the lack of studies on babies and toddlers in the existing body of research (Miller et al.), even more empirical evidence is needed on how very young children use digital technology and the role played by their parents.

Finally, the studies in this special issue further illuminate how parental mediation is situational, dynamic and often paradoxical in nature. Digital media use in families does not happen in a social vacuum (Miller et al.), but it forms part of daily routines (Elias & Sulkin), and depends on time and place demands (Smahelova et al.).

As guest editors of this special issue, we would like to thank the authors who submitted their valuable work and the reviewers for their careful feedback on earlier versions of the papers. We are also very grateful to Natalia Kucirkova and Cristina Ponte for their involvement in the first phase of the publication process when reviewing the abstracts and the first versions of some of the papers. Finally, we would like to thank the main journal editors of *Cyberpsychology* for their collaboration during the publication process and their conscientious reviews of the final papers.

In conclusion, this special issue presents new insights into the social interactions surrounding children's digital media use. It is our hope that these insights will feed the further maturation of parental mediation theory in the light of recent technological developments and that it will inspire present and future researchers to pursue further empirical research on and with young children and their digital media use.

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About Guest Editors

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