



Navigating digital childhood: Balancing children's rights and parental mediation for online safety and inclusion

Exploring young people's participation rights in relation to parental engagement in their online lives



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RESEARCH SUMMARY

Children today grow up in a world shaped by digital technologies. Parents' varied attitudes toward these technologies can influence how children's rights are upheld. This research explores how parental mediation can support children's protection online while enabling their voices are heard. Ensuring safety should not come at the expense of children's participation.

ONE KEY FINDING

13

years of age is considered as a threshold where parents tend to view their children as more capable.

Young people and parents highlight the importance of trust in shaping parental mediation, particularly in relation to rule-setting and enabling children's voices. Age 13 is often identified as a point at which parents begin to ease restrictions and allow greater autonomy in navigating online environments.

WHY IT MATTERS

By conducting qualitative research with parents and young people, this research provides a holistic understanding of the relationship, and possible conflict, between parental mediation and children's digital participation rights.

KEY CONCLUSION

While parental mediation has been extensively studied, there is a need for research that focuses on children's rights, especially their participation and voice for their best interests and expressing online experiences.

Inside the Research

ABOUT THE RESEARCH

This study explores in what ways parents navigate their approaches to digital mediation while balancing their children's participation rights and how do children negotiate their digital participation within the context of parental mediation. Data from parents and young people aged 12-16 years in Ireland were collected through interviews and focus groups.

STUDY AT A GLANCE

country: Republic of Ireland
participants: Parents (N= 11), Young people (N= 40)
age group: 12-16; Post-primary 1st year-4th year
method: Interviews with parents, Focus groups with young people
focus: Children's Digital Rights and Parental Mediation.

FINDING 1

Parents frame their mediation practices through a lens of spatial and temporal rules, technical monitoring, and differentiated approaches to gaming and social media.

FINDING 2

Young people perceive a gap between their digital knowledge and that of their parents, which can make them more aware of how to bypass parental rules.

FINAL CONCLUSIONS

This research explores how young people navigate their online lives, focusing on the balance between parental mediation and children's participation rights. It shows that parents' use of mediation is shaped by their digital knowledge, cultural beliefs, parenting approaches, and children's age. This study highlights that parental digital mediation is not solely about control or protection, but an ongoing negotiation between safety, trust, and children's rights to participate and be heard online.