Family and media in the 21st century

Monika Židová[1]
Kristína Bielčiková[2]

[1] Katedra Pedagogiky, Pedagogická fakulta, Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre; Dražovská cesta 4, 949 01 Nitra; monika.zidova@ukf.sk
[2] Katedra Pedagogiky, Pedagogická fakulta, Univerzita Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre; Dražovská cesta 4, 949 01 Nitra; kristina.bielcikova@ukf.sk

Abstract This contribution explores the topic of media as a tool available to almost every family in the 21st century. Regular interaction of family members with media is a strong predictor of the children's future behaviour and their use of technology. It is highly important to find a balance between taking advantage of the options the world has to offer today and the guidance needed to do so in an appropriate way. We took this opportunity to create our own typology of cyber control that can be applied in the family upbringing.

Keywords: family, child, cyber control, media, 21st century

1. FAMILY AND MEDIA

The progress of information and communications technology impacted people's behaviour both inside and outside the cyberspace. Apart from a number of advantages, it has also brought some disadvantages that are mostly caused by risky use of technology including the Internet. In a way, media became a part of almost every single person. There are also some that gave up media consumption voluntarily and do not have a TV or radio at home or are content just using the computer at work. In addition, there are religious orders where members also voluntarily gave up the use of media (apart from a phone call once every few months) as well as countries where media are not yet prevalent.

The society of the 21st century enjoys many educational and professional advantages brought by digital tools. They also offer constant access to new information and facilitate interpersonal communication. Individuals regularly interact with media, not only in educational and professional institutions, but also in the family environment. This is why parents need to provide their children with some guidance concerning the use of media. Due to the variety and the specific characteristics of media, it is not an easy task.

According to the existing media typology by Luscoň (2019), we are nowadays witnessing the gradual transition of print media towards the virtual space. Hradiská, Brečka and Vybíral (2009) state that media can impact every form of social learning, namely in the form of:

a) imitation – acting according to patterns presented in the media;
b) identification – identifying with a media personality, their looks, the way they dress, their behaviour;
c) adopting social roles – on the basis of media depiction (e.g., parents adopting social roles from the media and subsequently acting according to these roles in their relationship to children).

V. Hladíková (2016) states that media had a lesser influence in the past. This enabled more variety in children's activities including meeting other people, friends and family. Nowadays, families experience an increased interest in spending leisure time separately. This phenomenon was described by Livingstone (2007) as the family moving from the living room towards a more dispersed model. It can also be described as the transition from the social model to the so-called bedroom culture. Typically, this means that family members spend less time together and instead dedicate more time to solitary activities involving interaction with media. As media have now become more portable and can be used anywhere, they are perceived as something personal, not social. What matters most is not the way one spends their time with family, but rather the way of spending time alone (Livingstone 2007). There is also a significant difference in the number of media available in the family environment.

In modern households, it is common for children to have their own TV in their room, as well as a laptop and a mobile phone. Thus, media influence is considered a part of family life. The media that are the most widespread in families belong to the basic typology interpreted by Lull (1982 in Volková 2020):

- structural dimension – media are used as a background that influences the behaviour of family members and their interaction,
- relational dimension – media provide topics of discussion to the family, they help to form opinions, attitudes and values,
- affiliation/avoidance dimension – media as a tool for making contact and strengthening family relationships,
- dimension of social learning – with the help of media, family members learn the norms and rules of the society, which are then compared to the internal rules and norms of the family,
- competence/dominance dimension – media enforce roles and validate arguments.

EUROPEAN GRANT PROJECTS | RESULTS | RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT | SCIENCE

We would like to add one more dimension to the ones listed above with regard to the family environment: the dimension of prevention, which is based on the conscious and appropriate use of media in the family. The virtual space is now considered to be a natural environment. As a result, upbringing in families takes a new direction.

The confrontation of family and media significantly impacts the communication between family members as well as the process of raising children. Parenting styles are individual expressions of parental mediation and at the same time, they are conditioned by the parents' overall approach to media. The approaches favoured by parents are directly reflected in their relationships with children, as they interact with each other daily. Children are expected to accept the chosen style of parental guidance and this to a large extent determines the way the children themselves use media. The ideal approach is the cyber-democratic parenting style rooted in regular parental communication, clear rules outlining the appropriate use of media and the Internet and also in the mutual trust between parents and children (Bielčiková, Židová 2022) that seems to be a key factor. A lack of trust between the child and the parent leads the minor to regulate their own time spent using the media or social networks. These are currently the most used platform attracting ever more children and young people despite being vulnerable to online threats. In such cases, there is a certain risk. Should the child encounter an online threat, it is very likely that they will not confide in their parents. That might result in further issues not just in the digital and media environment but also outside of it. A connection was found between an inappropriate or even problematic use of mobile phones by children and issues related to the family environment, such as the functioning of the family in general: a lack of trust between family members, parental neglect, parental monitoring or regulation of activities in the cyberspace (Nikken, Haan 2015). These families are more likely to be affected by phubbing.

Phubbing is a newly emerged kind of risk behaviour. It is a form of social neglect where one participant of the communication directs their attention to their mobile phone for a variety of reasons (they are unable or unwilling to react to the other communication participant) (Zhang et al. 2021). At the same time, we realise that such behaviour is the reality these days. While one person is speaking, the other one is answering a text or reading an e-mail. Phubbing – in connection with various media – has an ever-stronger negative impact on families and has become the new phenomenon of family issues. Both parents and children can be guilty of phubbing. In any case, such behaviour causes conflict or unpleasant situations, poses a threat to the harmonious atmosphere in the family and lowers the quality of family relationships. These problems grow even larger as ever younger children come into contact with media. A few years ago, children using media were already highly active on social networks. Early use of some platforms can have an adverse effect on minors, their personality and interpersonal relationships including their family life.

According to the research undertaken as a part of the Common Sense Media programme (2010), 22% of all children who responded to the survey 11 years ago were active on social media more than 10 times daily (O'Keeffe, Clarke-Pearson 2011). The research conducted by Hinduja and Patchin (2007) revealed that 75% of children currently own a mobile phone, 25% use their phone exclusively to access social networks, for self-presentation and to gain information, 54% use their phone primarily for communication and 24% for instant messaging in important cases (Hinduja, Patchin 2007). We believe that the percentage dispersion is even greater today.

Nowadays, children are constantly migrating between different modern technologies. At times, they may prefer the computer to their mobile phone. Other times, they favour completely new media. But it is a fact that they grow up with media. This is not going to change and parents need to deal with it when raising their children. Based on the reviewed literature (Davila et al. 2009, Sturm 2010, Livingstone & Helsper 2008, Adigwe & van der Walt 2020, Luo et al. 2021, O'Keeffe & Clarke-Pearson 2011, Zhang et al. 2021), we developed our own typology of cyber-mediation in families. By combining cyber education with digital and media-oriented parenting approaches (Table 1), we established different variants of cyber control. These present a separate area of cyber education in families. Within the framework of direct cyber-mediation, we interpret basic digital skills that parents teach their children:

Table 1 Variants of cyber control and their application in direct mediation

AREA OF CYBER-PARENTING STYLE	DIRECT CYBER-MEDIATION
Regular open communication	Parents directly communicate with their children about the advantages and disadvantages of the media and the Internet. They raise their children's awareness of potential online threats and teach them to avoid these threats. Regular communication is a broad area that also includes the following variants of cyber-mediation.
Digital education of the parents	Parents need digital and media education so that they can provide guidance to their children. Through (self-)education, they acquire the digital and media competencies needed to guide their children through the cyber education process.
Constructive problem-solving	Parents are capable of solving problems in a constructive way and they teach this skill to their children, too. If the child is experiencing any difficulties related to media or media content, they must be taken seriously. Parents need to actively listen to their children, they must be ready to help and assure the child of their safety. Trivialising the child's problems or accusing them of lying troubles the child even more.
Parents' interest in media/online activities	Parents actively participate in media-related activities and express a serious interest in platforms regularly visited by their children.
Protection from the media environment	In order to protect them, parents have the right to block their children's access to selected platforms and content that may be unsuitable.
Children's digital and media-related development	Parents educate their children about media and digital technology, also by answering their questions. They readily respond to the children's queries and needs. They teach them to use modern technology in a safe way.
Regular cyber monitoring	Parents are aware of the media most often used by their children, of the children's online contacts, of the content they upload on social networks. They know whether their children are in touch with strangers and how much time they spend using media, etc.
Digital and media-related rights	Parents are entitled to make use of the digital and media-related rights (such as communication, cyber control, blocking unsuitable content) belonging to their cyber-parenting style. They also have the right and the duty to respect their children's independence in the digital and media environment. From a certain age, children are entitled to manage and protect their own privacy.
Supporting children's digital and media citizenship	Parents regularly educate their children on the topic of media and digital technology. They strive to strengthen the children's ability to practise self-control and to know who to contact in adverse situations they might witness or experience

	directly.
Parental cyber assurance	Parents may use an application that allows them to monitor their children's activities via their mobile phone. For example, they can see whether the children visit banned websites and, if needed, they can block access to unwanted content.
Gentle cyber education	Parents act as strict but kind facilitators. They understand their children's need for interaction with modern technology, but they also make it clear that any restrictions in this area are there to protect children from threats such as phone addiction.

2. CONCLUSION

Parents' willingness to develop media-related skills depends on their motivation to minimize the negative influence of media on their children. Only by acquiring digital and media competencies are they able to efficiently prevent or eliminate potential online threats and, as a result, protect their children. Children should not be afraid to tell their parents about their experience with media, nor should they be scared to ask questions related to this topic. If children are experiencing problems in the digital world, trivialisation of the issue by their parents is the most hurtful reaction possible. This is why regular communication on the subject of media or online threats is crucial. For better understanding, we offer some basic tips for parents outlining the dos and don'ts that help children to safely function in the digital world:

- do not block your child's access to all technologies – select the ones that are appropriate,
- help your child to use technology in a safe and positive way,
- show interest in your child's favourite applications and websites,
- set boundaries and consider using filtering software,
- reach an agreement on media use in the family, create technology-free zones (dining table, bed, communication, etc.),
- teach your child what personal information should never be published online,
- help your child learn how to filter information on the Internet and distinguish facts from fiction,
- take an active part in solving your child's problems, both online and offline,
- educate yourself on the topic of media so you can also educate your child,
- when it comes to using technology, lead by example.

While applying direct cyber-mediation with the help of cyber education variants (Table 1), parents can raise their children in the cyber-democratic way that involves learning how to use media appropriately. Considering the above-mentioned research findings (Common Sense Media 2010, Hinduja & Patchin 2007), it is reasonable to discuss certain habits concerning mobile phones, computers and especially social networks. Falling into these habits might lead to a gradual development of addiction in minors. This, however, can be eliminated by cyber-mediation. After 2007, in the view of progressive compulsive use of media, a new type of online threat was introduced by the experts on the issues of online risk behaviour: Facebook depression (Davila et al. 2009). This type of risk behaviour on the Internet is not known in Slovakia. Abroad, this term is interpreted as depression emerging in children or adolescents that spend a lot of time on social networks. When the need to check one's messages, likes, etc. is not satisfied, the individual enters the second stage characterised by symptoms of depression (Sturm 2010). We believe that the term Facebook depression could be substituted with the equivalent social network depression or media depression, as it is our opinion that a person can be addicted to any online platform or medium. Every kind of addiction has an adverse effect not just on the person directly affected, but also on their whole family. That is why parents need to make rules concerning media and Internet use that will prevent family members from putting themselves or the whole family environment in danger

Sources

1. ADIGWE, I., van der WALT, T. 2020. Parental mediation of online media activities of children in Nigeria: A parent-child approach. In: Computers in Human Behavior Reports, v. 2. Doi: 10.1016/j.chbr.2020.100041
2. COMMON SENSE MEDIA. 2009. Is Technology Networking Changing Childhood? A National Poll. San Francisco, CA: Common Sense Media; Available at: www.commonsensemedi a.org/sites/default/files/CSM_teen_social_media_080609_FINA L.pdf. Accessed July 16, 2010
3. BIELČIKOVÁ, K., ŽIDOVÁ, M. 2022. Štýly výchovy ako prediktor používania médií deťmi (Parenting styles as a predictor of media use by children). In: Educa XVII. Vzdelanie – cesta pre všetkých. Zborník príspevkov z XVII. vedeckej konferencie doktorandov s medzinárodnou účasťou Katedra pedagogiky, Pedagogická fakulta Univerzity Konštantína Filozofa v Nitre. NR: PF UKF. (In print.)
4. DAVILA, J. et al. 2009. Romantic and sexual activities, parent-adolescent stress, and depressive symptoms among early adolescent girls. In: J Adolesc. 32 (4)
5. HINDUJA, S., PATCHIN, W. J. 2007. Offline Consequences of Online Victimization: School Violence and Delinquency. In: Journal of School Violence 9 (3)
6. HLADÍKOVÁ, V. 2016. Dôležitosť rodičovskej mediácie používania médií a jej súvislosť s výchovnými štýlmi v rodine. In: QUAERE 2016: recenzovaný sborník příspěvků vědecké interdisciplinární mezinárodní vědecké konference doktorandů a odborných asistentů. roč. VI. - 1. vyd. - Hradec Králové: Magnanimitas, s. 44-53. ISBN 978-80-87952-15-3.
7. HRADISKÁ, E., BREČKA, S., VYBÍRAL, Z. 2009. Psychológia médií. Bratislava: Eurokódex, s.r.o, 416 s. ISBN 978-80-89447-12-1
8. LAOR, T. GALILY, Y. 2020. Offline VS online: Attitude and behavior of journalists in social media era. In: Technology in Society, v. 61. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techsoc.2020.1012 39
9. LIVINGSTONE, S. 2007. From family television to bedroom culture: Young people's media at home. In E. Devereux (Ed.), Media Studies: Key issues and Debates (302-321). London: Sage.
10. LIVINGSTONE, S. HELSPER, E. 2008. Parental mediation and children's internet use. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media. Doi: 10.1080/08838150802437396
11. LUO, Y. et al. 2021. Profiles of maternal and paternal parenting styles in Chinese families: Relations to preschoolers' psychological adjustment. In: Children and Youth Services Review, vol. 121, Doi: 10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105787
12. NIKKEN, P., DE HAAN, J. 2015. Guiding young children's internet use at home: Problems that parents experience in their parental mediation and the need for parenting support. In: Cyberpsychology 9 (1). Doi: 10.5817/CP2015-1-3
13. O'KEEFFE, G. S., CLARKE-PEARSON K. 2011. The Impact of Social Media on Children, Adolescents, and Families. In: Pediatrics 127 (4). Doi: https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2011-0054
14. STURM, S. 2010. Social networking psych studies: research shows teen Facebook users prone to depression. TrendHunter. Available at: www.trendhunter.com/trends/depression-from-face book
15. PRICE, L. T. 2019. Media corruption and issues of journalistic and institutional integrity in post-communist countries: The case

of Bulgaria. In: Communist and Post-Communist Studies, v. 52 (1). Doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.postcomstud.2019.02.005

16. VOLKOVÁ, N. 2020. Vplyv médií na spoločnosť a rodinu (Media influence on the society and the family). In DZIEDZICTWO JANA PAWŁA II SPOŁECZEŃSTWO, AUTORYTET, PRZYWÓDZTWO. Poland: Eikon Plus. Drukarnia. s. 140-193. ISBN 978-83-953289-3-9

17. XIA, X. 2022. Family Income, Parental Education and Chinese Preschoolers' Cognitive School Readiness: Authoritative Parenting and Parental Involvement as Chain Mediators. Doi: https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.745093

18. ZHANG, Y. et al. 2021. Why parental phubbing is at risk for adolescent mobile phone addiction: A serial mediating model. In: Children and Youth Services Review, v. 121. Doi: https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2020.105873