

DISPOSITIFS AND DISPOSITIONS IN INFANT MOBILE MEDIA USE

Abstract

Young children's use of mobile media devices, interaction with touchscreen interfaces, and engagement with digital content and communication is attracting increased research attention. As these technologies have penetrated domestic spaces and lowered thresholds of usability, a number of studies have quantified young children's digital practices and routines, and investigated parental attitudes towards and mediation of digital media play.

The research highlights a critical tension between policy and practice. Health guidelines continue to emphasise a restrictive approach to young children's 'screen exposure' – despite now distinguishing between broadcast and interactive – whilst the use of touchscreens in early childhood is both common and unexpected with young children inhabiting media environments containing multiple and mobile devices. In these contexts, parents are often left 'rudderless', having to navigate competing and contradictory messages from commercial, health, and educational discourses.

This paper contextualises the entanglements of discursive tensions and material negotiations by analyzing how infant mobile media use is enacted and understood within domestic space and family life. It draws on qualitative research that explored young children's (aged 0-5; n=41) use of mobile media in domestic contexts in Melbourne, Australia, during 2015-2016, using techniques including household media and screen tours, family interviews, and demonstrations of digital play. This household research was complemented by social media data collection exploring wider cultural contexts and content shared about young children's mobile media use on platforms such as YouTube and Instagram.

This research findings are located in reference to the concept of *dispositif* (Foucault), which articulates the varied discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements and so on that collectively shape and govern a particular situation. The *dispositif* analysed in contexts of infants' mobile media use incorporates a range of material and discursive elements, including histories of media domestication, wifi infrastructures, device distribution and mobility, policy guidelines, family routines, news media, internet publics, social norms, and personal values. The paper argues that this *dispositif* configures and complicates parental *dispositions* towards infant mobile media use, challenging models of parental mediation through uncertain and inconsistent practices.