Parents' Lived Experiences in the UK

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1. Introduction

Parenting in the digital age is a complex issue and international literature (Nikkelen *et al*., 2016; Valkenburg *et al*., 2013;) has sought to explore a range of factors that potentially combine and contribute to a better understanding of the challenges faced by society. The pivotal point of significance appears to lie at the point of families' social lives, which are fluidly impacted by and with digital technologies. In view of wider empirical research (Ofcom, 2017; Livingstone, 2018) that confirms the appetite of parents for support and advice in this area, and, in accordance with an ontological position (Crotty,1998), this study seeks to understand parents' lived experiences, together with any meaning they might associate with it by theorising in an interpretive approach (Glaser,1992) within the context of a proposed free online TV channel offering support. There is an increasing sense that our social lives are influenced by and with digital technologies (Livingstone *et al*, 2018) and the introduction of a video source of information for parents regarding children's digital agency the digital age – is ripe for study. Research attention (Wartella, 2016; Sanders *et al*., 2016) has also most recently turned to how parents might be mediating their children's digital experiences in the home and an interest in children's increasing media usage at an ever-younger age.

This small-scale study is important because it examines the range of mediation approaches taken by parents with children from birth to 18 years in the home and probes for detailed information regarding where, when and why it occurs. Social learning theory is the lens through which this study is approached and, as suggested by Clark (2011), Vygotsky's (1978) work offers a useful place for situating the role of parents in supporting children's digital agency. Furthermore, it aids the exploration of the nature of support parents are seeking and, how to better understand the extent to which *Tomorrowschildtv.com* (TCTV) the video - based resource may, or may not, offer the range of advice identified. This pilot resource was built on the model developed for *Parentchannel.tv* by Harding (2008 – 2012), who developed it for government. The research made available for the Government in 2012 regarding the impact of *Parentchannel.tv* provided the underpinning for the TCTV format. This study is also built on a survey (Harding, 2015) that suggested the top five concerns for each age range with 120 parents upon which TCTV was built and age divisions set for this study:

Birth - 5 years	6 – 11 years	12 -18 years
1. How much screen time is OK?	How can I protect my child from online bullying?	How can I protect my child from online bullying?
2.How can I protect my child from online bullying?	How can I help my child understand about stranger danger (online)?	How should I manage my child's online privacy?
3.How can I help my child understand about	How much screen time is OK?	How can I teach my child to balance online

stranger danger (online)?		gaming or screen time with doing homework?
4. At what age should I allow my child to use with an iPad?	What are the dangers involved in my child accessing online porn?	What are the dangers involved in my child accessing online porn?

Previous studies in parental mediation

To foreground this study, the importance of recent studies in this area are recognised, such as: In the digital home, how do parents support their children and who supports them? *Parenting for a digital future Survey Report 1*, Livingstone *et al*, 2018, and *Family dynamics in digital homes: The role played by parental mediation in young children's digital practices around 14 European countries*, Brito, Francisco, Dias and Chaudron, 2017. Importantly, Livingstone *et al* (2018), acknowledge the challenging task ahead for parents of all ages of children, at a time when they are investing in new technology in the home (despite their misgivings regarding privacy). Moschis, Moore and Smith (1984) discuss communication patterns in the home and the impact on adolescent's agency in the home, whilst research in the United States (Sanders *et al*., 2016) Australia and the United Kingdom, (Sanders *et al*., 2008) tends to discuss mediation in its more punitive or restrictive form as a prominent pattern (there is increasing literature regarding how parents seek to restrict children's media use, and how rules are developed). It is crucial to consider how parents are living with the tension between performing the role of educator in this context: explaining, helping and encouraging usage (i.e. Face-timing family) against the more restrictive measures that tend to focus on concern for the negative impact of media and attempts to set rules (Nikken & Jansz, 2014). US and UK research studies (Rideout *et al*., 2010; Livingstone & Helper, 2008) found that a significant amount of time is dedicated to restrictive mediation.

Defining terms: Enabling mediation, parenting styles and digital agency

Livingstone *et al* (2018) provide a useful description of a style of parenting in relation to managing children's media usage. They define and position 'enabling mediation' as practiced more by parents who judge their own or their children's digital skills to be relatively high, but are also aware of the risks of Internet use. Thus, even though the issue is possibly more about online risk as well as offering greater opportunities, such parents may be confident that they and their children can deal with risk when it occurs, thereby in the future possibly minimizing actual harm. 'Enabling mediation' (Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2015) which is akin to the well-established 'active' mediation style (or a child's agency) as discussed for television viewing for children under 9 year olds (Harding, 2015) but acknowledges the increasing complexity of the internet age. It is this definition of 'enabling meditation' in the context of children's digital citizenship (ibid) that is of interest to this study.

Turning to an analysis of the range of communication styles parents undertake with older children (10-14) studies (e.g.: Nikkelen *et al*., 2016,

Valkenburg *et al.,* 2013) provides some useful data regarding how chosen parenting styles might impact and control exposure to media violence. Interestingly, for the purpose of this study, this position is inherently suggested within the subsequent choice of terms for scales of mediation proposed to parents: 'monitoring,' 'restricting' 'helping,' 'intervening,' and, 'encouraging' (together with brief suggested examples to help guide them). The terms chosen, such as 'Monitoring' replaced some of the terms used in other studies, such as: 'Supervision' (as provided by the Nikken and Jansz (ibid) which proposed that parents tend to view monitoring as a more specific way of behaving rather than 'supervising' suggestive of 'sitting alongside'. Also terms such as: 'helping' and 'encouraging' from a pedagogical view point were chosen to help parents/carers of birth to eighteen as a way of identifying a child's agency in the process, although both could correlate with the term 'co-use' or 'co-viewing,' (Nathanson, 1999).

Sources of available support

Despite a vast amount of support available for parents from trusted sources such as the *National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children* and *Childnet*, parents still appear bewildered about where to access help. Livingstone's blog (2018) reveals that parents *'are still drastically under-supported when it comes to digital parenting advice. So, parents have few resources to turn to either when they or their children run into problems or when they want positive recommendations'.* Hop and Delver (2011: 9) agree concerning the lack of parental guidance: 'children and young people have a right to our guidance and supervision, and yet this is exactly what they have lost.'

2. Methodology

Research questions

1. How, where and when are parents mediating their children's media experiences/digital skills in the home?
2. With which particular media are their children engaging, when they choose a particular form of mediation: 'monitoring', 'restricting', 'helping', 'intervening' or 'encouraging'?
3. In what ways can 'enabling meditation' be exemplified in everyday life with families?
4. Are parents identifying specific help/ advice regarding mediation of their child's digital skills in the home?
5. Where are parents turning to for advice, should they need it?
6. Might parents value a free online TV channel dedicated to the provision of advice about the digital age – led by experts in the field and supported by real parents' and children's experiences?

Given the sensitivities of research with families together with the challenge of connecting with them in meaningful ways to elicit data that genuinely tells their story), the study took a qualitative approach. Drawing upon Crotty's (1998) research design elements for structure in determining what kind of knowledge

to create, an interpretative phenomenological approach was taken in order to generate knowledge about the parent's subjective experiences, set firmly within their social and cultural context. The experiential world of the parents (phenomenological knowledge as described by Willig, 2008) was chosen for its desired quality for an interpretative approach. The concept of selfhood and embodiment in the digital world means that research needs to be reconceptualised, (Lupton, 2015). Hine's insight when discussing pop-up moments when the online and offline world collides is that: 'it is in these everyday non - digital moments that we make sense of the digital' (2015:195).

Research tools included tick charts to be completed by parents detailing daily moments of interventions/mediation or interaction over a period of self-chosen five days (as described against specific media applications), accompanied by narrative at the end of each day to bring the charts to life, followed by predetermined questions (semi-structured interviews) via 20 minute telephone conversations or visits (as preferred by participants) to discuss the experience over the five days period and their perceived advice 'needs' during that time. As knowledge is situated and contextual (Mason, 2002) the interview approach matched that purpose and was impacted by the concept of research as conversation wherein 'knowledge is constructed in the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee' (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009: 1). Participants were not voice recorded to avoid any inhibition (Clifford and Maisto, 2000) but typed in note form and written up more fully immediately after each interview.

Ethical consideration

All contributions were anonymised and participants informed that they could withdraw at any time during the process and that their data would be destroyed. No personal data was stored. Participants were able to seek clarification before or during the interviews. The study received ethical approval from Middlesex University.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited employing a mix of strategies, including more formal introductions via schools and through personal networks and snowballing sampling and were selected based on a combination of criteria: age range, social economic status and geographical location. This strategy resulted in 40 case studies providing a snap shot of digital media mediation activity in the home, supplemented by verbal responses (and written narrative around the charts). £25 vouchers were offered to compensate for parents' time.

Overview of children in the study

Number & age of child	Location in UK	Parent/grandparent
20:0-5 14 Male 6 Female	4: South-east England 2: North England 4: London	12 Parents 3 Grandparents
10: 6-11 6 Male 4 Female	7: South-east England 2: North England 1: London	8 Parents 3 grandparents
10: 12 –18 8 Male 2 Female	4: South West 2: North 4: London	5 Parents 2 grandparents

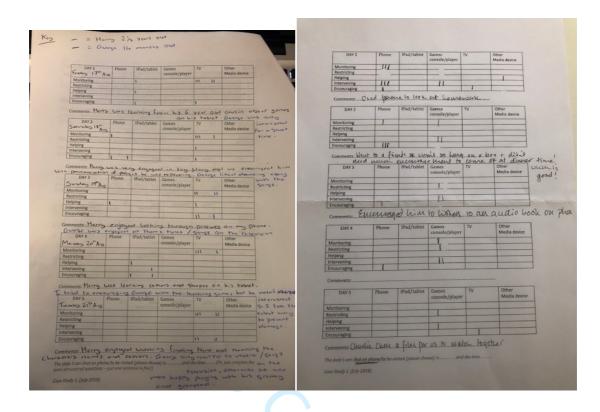### *Semi-structured questions used as a follow up to the completed charts*

1. Were there any surprises over the last week in terms of the mediation of your child's media experience?

2. What were they actually doing when you mediated/intervened (in any form) - can you elaborate in any way?

3. Where were you mostly when the mediation (of any form) took place? For example, in the same room?

4. Did you identify any specific help/advice regarding media that you as a parent might seek out regarding these matters?

5. Where would you turn to for advice about how to handle media with your child in the home (should you ever need it?).

6. Might an online resource for parents (described below) be useful?

Analysis of qualitative data

The approach to analysis of the data was supported by theoretical sampling and coding techniques from grounded theory, (e.g., Glaser, 1992; Strauss & Corbin, 1998) in order to probe how families interpreted their experiences and the way in which the broader social context might have a bearing on this. Inductive coding was used to generate themes whereby the findings were derived from the research objectives (together with multiple readings by the researcher who also conducted the interviews). Thus, the data was then analysed using a hybrid approach based on thematic analysis (permitting a deep level of identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns presented by data) and used to examine the essence of reality for the families (Boyatzis, 1998). Importantly, Smith et al (2009) advocates this level of intensity which honours the individuality of a particular narrative thus enabling an authentic process at the point of merger where each narrative's superordinate themes are acknowledged (at the final analysis step) thus permitting a more organic process to emerge.

Screen shot of two charts completed by parents:

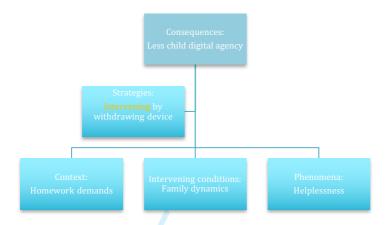a) **0-5 example**   b) **12-18 example**
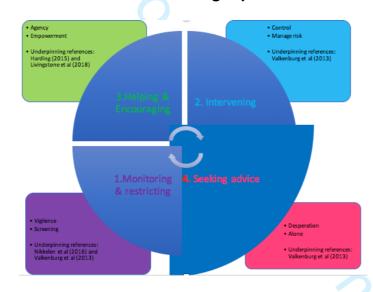
3. Findings and discussion

The results are drawn from 40 tick charts (and their accompanying notes) and 40 pages of discussion notes achieving a reasonable spread of gender and age of children from six months to 18 years.

In addition, noted responses (which added clarity around the charts) are presented under relevant *themes* (rather than the headings provided for the raw data as they were less representative of the emerging trends). Using open coding, listed themes were used to form initial coding categories (Watling and James, 2007) followed by a second order of interview notes using axial coding by searching for links between themes and concepts. The data collected was analysed thematically following a comprehensive sub-coding process. The main concepts that appeared frequently aided the final level of selective coding. Finally, modest conclusions were drawn from the analysis and recommendations made.

Example of just one component of axial coding for *Theme two*:

Final level of selective coding represented as 4 Themes:

3.1 Theme one: 'Monitoring' and 'Restricting'

In relation to the act of 'monitoring' children's media experiences in the home, parents with children under 12 years of age tended to report that 'monitoring' was frequently driven by the need for vigilance around safety online (often resulting in 'restricting' the use of particular devices, depending on the time of day).

Typically, parents reported a difference in approach according to the age of the child, with younger children receiving intense focus and vigilance regarding safety issues and time restriction, and a gradual relaxation in terms of time restriction, remaining concerned about safety as the child matured. Also, at times, parents reported restricting media as a form of incentive or punishment. For example: "*I restrict TV if he has not done homework.*" Perhaps surprisingly, few parents mentioned filters or technical tools but, of course, that may now be a 'given' rather than a piece of information that they felt they needed to share. Indeed, Ofcom's latest study (2017) reveals that

nearly 2 in 5 parents of 3-4 and 5-15 year olds, use network content filters and that more than 9 in 10 who use parental controls consider them useful.

When discussing restrictive use of digital media in the home, there was a tendency for parents to report rather precise time limitation in terms of their children's media access and, as raised by numerous recent studies (Carey and Hoyle, 2015; Dunkley, 2015; Draper, 2016) this was unsurprising: *"I limit everything: …games on a phone – I allow 15 minutes, …for a CBeebies games (I allow one hour)…when it comes to the I pad I allow one hour,"* and *"I let my child play a game on an app but I limit it to half hour."* Parents of 6 to12 year olds frequently reported precise monitoring of screen time: '*between one-and two hours' screen time a day.'* Indeed, these comments may well be attributed to the Hawthorne effect (Adair,1984), especially as parents also tended to speak of not wanting to appear to others as a 'bad parent' when it comes to media mediation in the home.

Interestingly, two parents with under-fives discussed limiting their own adult screen time: "*I have to restrict myself!! I can see that I spend two and a half hours on social media,'* whilst another contributor to the study commented: *"I spend five hours a day on Facebook."* They both concluded that they will restrict their own children's screen time in the future.

Consumption of content and strategies used by parents

Nevertheless, four parents were more concerned with the content than the time spent and typically commented:*' I look for educational content that will help my two year-old with colours','"* and *"I love sitting watching some TV shows with my two year old: I even suggest the ones to watch together'".*

Moreover, parents with children between six and 18 years tended to report how content often 'connected them,' and this was especially true when it came to talking about sensitive issues. For example, "*we watched a documentary together about transgender."* Researchers such as, Nikkelen, *et al*. (2016) discuss the language and communication style whilst mediating media usage. Indeed, as can be seen in the example below within the 12 – 18 year old section, a parent was particularly aware of her use of language in communicating with her son: "*I discuss and I recommend.*" Padilla-Walker, et al (2016), study how parents' attempts at restrictive monitoring of young people (teenagers) media usage actually inhibits the young person's own attempts to self- regulate the behaviour. In other words, if the parent's aim is to increase self-monitoring then the very act of mediation in the restrictive form tends to disrupt that aspiration. Crucially, Nathanson's (1999) work in this area goes some way in demonstrating that parental energetic attempts to restrict can increase the desire for 'forbidden activity,' rather than decrease it.

Other monitoring activities described by parents/carers of younger children frequently stated what they hoped to be 'unobtrusive strategies', such as: *"keeping all media in the living room."* Whilst previous advice to parents was to ensure the computer is in the living room – this is no longer applicable and difficult for parents to simply 'keep an eye' on them and there is little doubt

that children and youth are becoming more dependent on influences from their own peer group (Hop and Delver 2011). Contrastingly, other parents spoke of the need to model their expectations of their children with their own media usage, or, through positive approaches, such as becoming more involved in their children's media experiences: *"I like to sit with them and watch the shows on Youtube."* Indeed, Ofcom's study (2017) also reveals the fact that 53% of parents of 5-15 year olds say that they are usually somewhere close by (perhaps checking in with them) and just under half stating that they question their children about what have been doing online.

A high percentage of parents/carers (ranging from 34% - 43%) rising with the age of the child, reported that 'monitoring' was the main way they viewed their choice of mediation within the home (irrespective of age, gender or device). Their reflective daily comments substantiated this position. However, the in-depth telephone or face-to-face conversations which probed for better understanding, revealed that, in fact, 'restricting' (particularly in reference to safety issues) was a significant way in which they conducted their 'monitoring' activities. However, some parents were also keen to point out that (both in their five-day monitoring of their own behaviour and through the subsequent semi-structured interviews) under the selection of the choice of 'intervention,' they often found themselves declaring the position of needing to withdraw (intervene with) the device. The highest level of intervention appeared to occur at 24% for the 5-12 year olds, followed by the 13-18 year olds with 23%, and the lowest level occurring for the 0-5 year olds at 15%. Therefore, parental choice of 'monitoring' was, at times, found to be directionally associated with restrictive mediation.

Strikingly, findings were in complete agreement with Livingstone (2018), who proposes that there is a need to discuss the relevance of adoption of an 'enabling mediation' style of parenting (suggestive of tendencies towards awareness and protection of possible online dangers, yet holding the tension and permitting a level of independent exploration).

Snapshots: **Monitoring and/or restricting parental activity narratives examples**

The following examples are narratives typically offered by parents around the ways in which they 'monitor' and/or 'restrict' in terms of the use of specific media devices:

Age	Device	Verbatim examples
18 months	Phone	*"It's always about the phone – not just my phone - everyone's phone –(laughs) she brings me the phone – so I don't forget it – makes me realize how much I use it… that she thinks I might need it!"*

2 and 5 year old	iPad	*"They are watching less TV - all have iPads – so I have to keep an eye on them. I'm always in the same room. I like to be with them so I can see."*
15 months	TV/Video/Youtube	*"My little one is very interested in repetitive TV/video/Youtube – watches Buzz Lightyear over and over again… and I am aware of it – think he needs it so I don't turn it off."*
9 year old	TV	*"It's all about the room layout… makes it easier for me.* *"I checked today what she was watching on her tablet and it was all about dolls! Relief."*
12 year old	Xbox	*"I check the Xbox (it's in front room so I can always see the screen) and he asks my permission before he plays a game on the Xbox and then I check age ratings."*
6 year-old	Phone	*"I say 'no' to the phone in the bedroom."* *"I'm always asking if she is OK and I look at what she is doing."*
17 year old 16 year old	Phone and TV	*"I remember his 'fear of missing out' from last year and worried that it might happen again…I'm looking out for him all the time."* *"Well … mediation of his digital life is non-existent really…my parenting style is the same across the board – I discuss - recommend –and then give choice for him to ignore. I don't reprimand. I know he has sex – he told me… and I gave him condoms. We have a very honest relationship."*

3.2 Theme two: Intervening (linked to Theme One)

Overwhelmingly, in the area of 'intervening,' the main concern for parents was challenging behaviour, and, in many ways, this was closely linked to the first theme. However, due to the level of anxiety for parents when discussing their concerns, a separate theme was allocated.

10

Parents used quite strong vocabulary to discuss their levels of distress (such as: 'addiction' when discussing the behaviour of two-year-olds watching 15-20 minutes of favourite cartoons a day) in relation to TV consumption. They also mentioned how surprised they were that their young children believed that seeing/using sufficient TV/media was *their* right and typical examples were: "*But I haven't seen TV today."*

Two other issues that arose when parents spoke in terms of when they had needed to intervene were situations where a young child had been accessing porn and another where a parent had become aware (during the research) that their child was a perpetrator of abuse online. Recent research (Marriner, 2016; McKee, 2010) is helpful in this area and in study two these issues are likely to be key areas for TCTV content accompanied by the latest research.

In contrast, other comments offered were around the more positive usage of intervention in terms of using media to distract their child: "*To distract him I show him pictures of himself on the phone…prefers stills over videos and likes to see his family members. He's happier playing with people though."*

Other parents adopted a more pragmatic view when it came to frustration concerning their child's media usage and discussed how they handled digital issues that arose in much the same way as they managed other issues in their child's life. Comments such as: "*I transfer my parenting skills to the digital world,"* captured this sense of transferring existing parenting skills into a new arena. Most commonly, parents of children over 12 years of age, tended to lament the time children were spending on their phones and felt unable (or unwilling) to intervene explaining: *"It is the way they communicate."* In addition, one parent stated that he knew in advance of completing the chart that the phone was going to be an issue as it was a recent birthday present and felt conflicted over having bought it.

In conclusion, the data yielded within this theme provides further evidence of the need for guidance for parents regarding a move towards an: 'enabling mediation' style, as proposed by Livingstone (2018).

Snap shots

During the semi-structured interviews, (following submission of the five-day chart) parents of older children were keen to convey specific real – life situations where they had intervened and how they had *'felt like a bad parent,'* declaring that the motivation to take part in this study was to share how they had felt with others (see further comments below):

Intervening

Age	Device	Verbatim examples

14 month old 17 month old	iPad	*"I had to take the iPad away from him...he will damage it."* *"Another day – too much Tablet use so I had to take it away."*
5 year old	TV	*"I turn the TV off – I interrupt it as I am always in the same room."*
2 and a half year old 4 year old	Phone	*"I stop the older one after five minutes looking through videos on my phone…I keep an eye."* *"She wants my phone to look at but I say no."*
9 year old 10 year old	Xbox, TV and tablet	*"Porn was accessed by my child when he was at my elderly aunt's house… then social services got involved and we were accused of being a dysfunctional family. It affected him (he used to minimize the screen and my aunt didn't notice)… it was bad for him…I wanted to take part in this study to say how these things can easily happen."* *"TV is less desirable now –it's all about Xbox and Playstation and all about managing their behaviour around these!"*
12 year old	Laptop/phone	*"I was surprised to find out that my daughter can be mean online so I had to stop her from using online chat and had a conversation about why this is happening. She said she is saying exactly what others have said to her, but after explaining the negative consequences of this, I encouraged her to think about how she felt when others commented like that about her".* *"She is overusing her phone to watch YouTube videos, thinking that taking a break from computer means using the phone, so I had to tell her to stop using it… if not, it will be confiscated."*
13 year old	TV, laptop, hones, Tablet	*"Our boys absolutely love computer games, TV etc. Unfortunately, they would have them every day if we let them"*

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| 18 year old | | *"...at the end of the day we're all guinea pigs as technology is moving so quickly."* |
| 17 year old | | *"It's how kids communicate today, so I'm not going to take it away – but I do try and limit it as much as I can. However, I am constantly monitoring them, they tend to be on their phones."* |

3.3 Theme three: 'Helping' and 'Encouraging'

The most enthusiastic discussions for 'helping' or 'encouraging' children with digital devices were described by parents with the youngest age range (0-5 years) and oldest age range (12-18 years) where parents tended to offer more in-depth descriptions for ways in which devices in the home afforded a number of benefits: encouraging communication; bonding; meeting a specific developmental need. The greatest percentage within the category of 'encouraging' or 'helping' (with the knowledge that mostly parents did not differentiate between the two categories despite the examples provided before the study) lay with the 0-5 year olds (with a combined figure of 34% as 'encouraging' and 'helping' results have been combined for the above reasons). The 6-12 year olds and 13-18 year olds each attracted 26%.

Surprisingly, there is a consistent choice of mediation style across all the age ranges with 'monitoring' as the primary choice and 'encouraging' as the least likely style for parents to adopt. It should be noted that the descriptive accompanying notes against each choice during the five-day period, together with the answers to the semi structured interviews, suggested that the choice of 'monitoring' was focused mainly on safety issues. The other choices of styles were broadly consistent with the verbal and written accompanying notes (although 'encouraging' and 'helping' were similarly interpreted). Furthermore, when it comes to 'monitoring' a particular device, the usage of 'phones' for 6-11 year olds and 12 -18 year olds required the greatest attention, whilst the iPad and TV received the most attention within the 0-5 year age range,

Notably, in agreement with Livingstone (2018), who found that parents enjoyed shared positive experiences around time spent as a family around the use of television and films (an important feature in 'enabling mediation') the families in our study also shared several similar scenarios where joint media experiences had encouraged communication (see snapshots below). Similarly, Livingstone's (ibid) study found that other uses of technologies (playing computer games together, Skyping and using technology for creative activities) brought closeness to the family, as also claimed by some of the families in our study (see examples below). When it comes to fun and enjoyment, only a few parents comment on this aspect: *"makes us laugh and it helps him,"* although this is, of course, an important contribution to the whole family experience. When it comes to discussing apps, Harding (2014) discusses how not to underestimate the value of humour in the development

of children's apps.

Parents also shared examples which fell within the 'enabling' mediated use of digital media in the home' and the way in which it can lead to fulfilment of specific needs for their children. For example, one parent commented on his participation in an online game and the impact on the teenager: "*He enjoyed having me involved in his game.*" Parents also spoke of their delight in using apps for music (drumming) with their children; aiding language development for a child with dyspraxia and general educational use of TV and videos for learning about names of animals, colours, etc.

Snapshots: Helping/encouraging

The following further examples of the way in which parents typically discussed 'helping and/or encouraging' their children in terms of the use of particular media devices:

Age	Device	Verbatim examples
5 year old	iPad/Tablet	*"He has dyspraxia so when he is on the tablet I get him to talk to me about it and he uses actions too - great!"*
10 months old 15 month old	Phone	*"Facetime – we use it with relatives in other countries!! We encourage it."* *"I give him my phone to play with, he likes the way the display changes as he touches it."*
3 year old 2 year old	TV	*"She saw a baby Toucan on a show then in her book and it was the same… then we made a puppet and saw the toucan on video again."* *"We watch In The Night Garden it's like talking to an adult…... last week she said: Look mummy here's the one (the character) you wanted to see."*
18 month old	Internet/Skype On laptop/laptop/Tablet	*"I was surprised by how much we used media when I was asked to take part in this study: I realised we use Skype a lot to connect with family members."*
2 year old and	Camera	*"My grandchildren use the camera… lots of interaction."*

3 year old		
10 year old	Laptop	*"I watched drawing videos with her to encourage her drawing skills…*
16 year old	Phone/tablet/ robots/AI/laptop	*"I am a Grandmother and I live with my grown-up child and grandchild: he shares phone pictures with me so I ignore the screen time battles for the sake of a good relationship with him where he will include me in his digital life."*
13 year old		*"We watch documentaries together about drug abuse on YouTube channel. Helpful."*
13 year old		*"We watched a video about transgender together and gender neutrality … good conversations then."*

Chart demonstrating percentage of choices of mediation style across the five-day period

The following data was drawn from the competed tick charts as discussed earlier and analysed in terms of mediation (across all devices):

Mediation	Age range 0-5 years	Age range 6-12 years	Age range 13-18 years
Monitoring	34%	36%	43%
Restricting	17%	14%	8%
Helping	16%	16%	13%
Intervening	15%	24%	23%
Encouraging	18%	10%	13%

This chart (analysed in conjunction with the accompanying narrative provided by parents) goes some way to confirming the records of discussions with parents (on phone or in person) regarding the greater perceived need to 'monitor' - rising with the age of the child and engaging in more encouraging behaviour at its peak with younger children.

3.4 Theme four seeking advice

In agreement with Livingstone's (2018) observations of the lack of support for parents, our study revealed significant anxiety right across all age ranges. Indeed, Ofcom's study (2017) revealed a similar picture where more than three quarters of parents of 5-15 year olds have sought information about how to manage online risks (an ever-increasing picture emerging). In answer to questions about identification of specific help/advice regarding media that a parent might seek out regarding these matters, answers typically fell into the following four broad categories: safety; behaviour; time restrictions and educational opportunities.

Several parents expressed similar concerns and the need for sources of help around behaviour and media with most parents admitting to feeling like a 'bad parent' or wishing not to appear negligent (this was a reason for seeking help). Parents frequently commented on the lack of advice available about suitable lengths of time for children to spend on media devices: *"I need to know how much is too much?"* Although overwhelmingly, parents were primarily concerned about online safety regardless of age, parents of younger children tended to speak of their fear increasing as their child matures.

The following quotes from parents in the study are typical of the anxieties expressed throughout all age ranges:

"Desperate, yes, I'd say I was desperate for help."

"They are so quick… they minimize the screen…I need support from someone who knows about these things."

"I won't allow a phone until secondary school – it's too worrying - although there is less about stranger danger nowadays it's more fear about online."

"I heard about a child in the media…they were bullied online and committed suicide… it's so worrying."

"I worry about YouTube videos with inappropriate content still coming up even with parental controls."

"I'm worried about my child (six years old) and her use of apps to insult people."

"Access to porn had such a bad impact on my child – it caused him to act up at a later age (child now 13)."

"I caught my child being the abuser online – I was shocked..."

Furthermore, the study found agreement with Livingstone's (2018:11) enquiry into where parents might turn to for advice about digital media. In answer to the question: *Where would you turn to for advice about how to handle media*

with your child in the home, should you ever need it? - answers differed according to the age of the child. Parents of younger children were more confident of where to search for help and spoke of: *going online for help; going to Google; Mumsnet; CBeebies; peers; Facebook mum's group; forums; mum's groups;* others suggested that the responsibility shifts to the child as they matured: *My own children will get advice when they are older at primary school.* Parents of children in the 6-12 year age range spoke of *going to the school and asking for help.* This also correlated with Ofcom's (2017) study, where 61% of parents seek help or advice from their child's school.

In the study a number of other parents seemed mystified about where to go for help (feeling unable to seek help from their own parents) as: "*They wouldn't know what to do… all this stuff happened after their time,*" and continued by trying to offer suggestions such as: "*Kids YouTube might help… maybe; or a neighbour?*"

Parents of 12-18 year olds were the most puzzled and felt unable to think of where to begin to access help, and three parents with children ranging between 13 and 17 years, were openly bewildered about where to access help. Ofcom's recent study (2017: 209) found that: 'one in six parents of 12-15 year olds feel they don't know enough to help their child manage online risks'. One parent stated: "*I guess I feel pretty helpless.*"

However, in contrast, another parent reflected on how she saw the connection between the way she had built a trusting and close relationship with her son at an early age as an important factor in how she manages his media in the home now that he is a teenager: "*He is very talkative to me as a mum… so I think that helps… we work it (any worries I have about media usage) out together. For example, when he was younger we watched CBeebies together (although it drove me mad and I didn't understand the shows) it helped build that bond… he can talk to me about anything.*"

In response to questions around whether a TV channel dedicated to parents using film and underpinned by experts interviewing parents and children, the responses were overwhelmingly positive. The strength of feeling in the accompanying written and verbal comments were notable and some participants were even anxious to ensure that other parents would know about the resource by suggesting that it must be discoverable and suggested visits to schools to raise awareness of such a resource.

The majority of responses to the suggestion of an online video-based platform tended to suggest the level of anxiety that parents are feeling about managing their child's media: "*I'm desperate for help*; "*Online TV great…so it's available on my phone,*" "*Definitely yes,*" and, "*Please…this is what we need*". Two parents of teenage age children were quite emotional at the thought and revealed the loneliness attached to trying to cope with social media pressures with a teenager.

In light of Livingstone (2018) comments: 'parents have woefully few sources of support and advice when they have digital questions and dilemmas', the parents' responses in our study were unsurprising.

4. Conclusions

These findings offer a modest but new perspective on parents' perceptions of their day to day lived experiences which are more are more complex and multi-layered (as indicated by the themes constructed through coding) than perhaps previously thought. Importantly, this new perspective also demonstrates that advice which simply suggests transferring traditional mediation styles into the digital world are not always helpful (as confirmed particularly by grandparents in the study).

However, the promising results of this small study should not be over interpreted, and although participation rates in the study were high in general, the study sample was limited and not fully representative of UK parents. Moreover, the largely under-explored area of simultaneously investigating children's accounts of the effects of different parental mediation strategies has been noted, and further studies will provide a more comprehensive picture. It must also be noted that a particular bias may have occurred due to the example descriptors provided for parents under each heading (for ease of explanation) from which they could choose and are, therefore, more deductive (although the interviews sought to address any deficiency). However, the strengths of this study lie in the new depth of personal accounts offered of lived experiences and emotion that fills parents' everyday lives and the way in which the four themes identified a strong relationship between 'enabling mediation' and digital agency for children together with a correlation to greater reported confidence in parenting in the digital age.

Interestingly, it was notable that there was often a need to be seen as 'a good parent,' which was synonymous with the belief that this was being one who 'restricts' (of course, the potential for social desirability bias in responses must be acknowledged). There was a distinct tendency for parents to attempt to protect children from possible online dangers whilst also permitting a level of independent exploration and for their mediation style to be dependent upon the device in question with a greater perceived need to 'monitor' - rising with the age of the child and engaging in more encouraging behaviour at its peak with younger children. Strikingly, the study reveals parents' depth of feeling about parenting in this area, such as feeling like a *'guinea pig',* coupled with the inability to turn to their own parents for support as they might do in other areas of parenting. Furthermore, despite a vast amount of advice available for parents from trusted sources, they remained desperate for easily accessible support, declaring that the *"challenges are 24/7; and having…"No idea where to go,"* together with the general bewilderment of parents and grandparents of 12-18 year olds who were largely unable to think of where to begin to access help.

Furthermore, the results of this study found significant agreement with Ofcom, 2017 and Livingstone *et al*; 2018, and invites us to consider perhaps those

more problematic questions around *what content is more appropriate* rather than the more simplistic view of *precise time restrictions* associated with particular media device, thus moving the discussion away from questions around: *How much screen time?* to: *What is on the screen?* And*, How might it impact my child in particular?* The crucial point appears to be the desired adoption of 'enabling mediation' and advice about positive content and how to weigh up the risks. This small-scale study harvested useful new data which confirms the need for parental support in two areas: 1) encouragement to engage in a more 'enabling mediation' style of parenting and how to make daily calculations about what to restrict or permit, 2) improve the digital skills of parents themselves. Importantly, 'enabling mediation' tends to be adopted by parents who have acquired greater digital skills and are aware of the risks of Internet use and are able to pass on this confidence and vigilance to their children.

Further research and recommendations

There are significant implications raised by this study:

- As a policy priority, this study signals an urgent need to invest in empowering parents and grandparents with digital skills to increase children's digital agency, whilst also increasing awareness of safety online.

- Conduct comprehensive research to confirm the more novel findings of this study.

- Endeavour to provide support and advice around the style of 'enabling mediation,' and ensure that the new TCTV site is discoverable (as advised by parents).

- Ensure that the content of TCTV is accessible to schools.

- Ensure that resources designed for parents content reflects the lived experiences of parents who often 'feel like a bad parent' and offer sensitive content from experts and other parents.

- Include content on TCTV that, a) carries an emphasis on the ubiquitous affordances of mobile technologies where learning is occurring outside traditional locations with regards to how parents are keen to optimize learning in the home, b) continues to offer support around issues of safety online, and, c) continues to offer guidance regarding age appropriate digital activities.

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