

# MIFGASH

JOURNAL OF SOCIAL-EDUCATIONAL WORK

Special Issue

**Digital childhood: Digital media in the life of children and adolescents**

- › Digital childhood: Challenges and opportunities
- › Between virtual and physical spaces during maternity
- › Extensive media consumption and its developmental consequences for young children
- › Teens' use of TikTok to share their online learning experiences during COVID-19
- › YouTube childhood: The incarnations of Tom Sawyer in the third millennium
- › Digital media, care workers and at-risk youth
- › Online space as part of teens' coming out process
- › The virtual gaming world and its implications on the lives of children
- › The use of smartphones by Ukrainian refugee-children



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**Digital media in the life of children  
and adolescents**

Guest-Editor: **Prof. Nelly Elias**

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# ABSTRACTS

## Digital childhood: Challenges and opportunities

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**Nelly Elias**, Ph.D., Professor, The Department of Communication Studies, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel

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Over the past few decades, research on the role of media in the lives of children and adolescents has significantly progressed in the volume of studies, the variety of topics and the richness of methodological approaches. This process has accelerated even more in the digital age, which created a greater diversity of content, ways of accessing media and new practices of content consumption and creation. This situation has resulted in new research challenges and yielded new insights regarding childhood and adolescence in an environment saturated with digital technologies and their effects on the development processes, identity formation, family relationships and the young media users' well-being. This review provides a bird's eye view of the main research areas, which bring together children, youth and their parents and the digital media, while shining the spotlight on the essential processes inherent in "digital childhood" and their implications for cognitive, emotional and social development.

**Key words:** adolescents, children, digital media, parents

## Digital media in early childhood

### Motherhood in distraction: Between virtual and physical spaces during maternity

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Mothers on maternity leave in this era belong to a generation that makes inherent use of social networks for various needs. However, when looking at the needs that this use fulfills for them, we see a complex picture. Therefore,

the goals of the present study are twofold: (1) to check whether there is a connection between the sense of parenthood-self-efficacy, the use of cellphones (a tool for accessing social networks) while interacting with the baby, and excessive social network use. (2) to deepen the knowledge about the usefulness of the social network in the lives of mothers on maternity leave.

In the first study, 91 mothers on maternity leave filled out questionnaires regarding their cellphone use while interacting with the baby, excessive social network use and parental self-efficacy. The findings indicated that excessive social networks use predicted self-efficacy; mothers who used more social networks reported lower parental self-efficacy. However, cell phone use while with the baby did not predict parenting self-efficacy after taking into account the control variables and excessive social networks use. In the second part of the study, 72 of the mothers were interviewed regarding the role of social networks in their lives as mothers on maternity leave. The analysis of the interviews revealed findings on the types of networks they use and their usefulness. Moreover, it was possible to distinguish the support component that was divided between a public (foreign) audience and a familiar or professional audience, passive versus active consumption; and turning to the network as a primary or secondary source. The research findings show the importance of social networks in the lives of mothers and the growing need to maintain a balanced use.

**Key words:** absence presence, cellphone, distracted parenting, excessive use of the Internet, mothers on maternity leave, parental self-efficacy

## From both sides of the screen: Extensive media consumption and its developmental consequences for young children

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The objective of the present study was to explore media consumption among children aged four to eight years and its consequences on their motor, social, and emotion recognition skills. The participants included 200 children (49% girls) and their mothers and teachers. Media consumption was assessed by a comprehensive questionnaire given to the mothers to document the available media devices in the household and the duration



of the children's usage of each device. Motor and social skills were assessed using questionnaires given to the teachers. Emotion recognition skills were assessed by the research team, which employed the test of emotion comprehension (TEC-I) (Test of Emotion Comprehension). The results indicate that among the media devices available at home, mobile devices are the most preferred and used for approximately 1.5 hours each day on average by each child. High media consumption was consequently shown to impede the development of motor, and emotion recognition skills. The conclusion of this study emphasizes the importance of motor activity and face-to-face social engagement, along with restricting media consumption in favor of the acquisition of key developmental skills that require experience and training.

**Key words:** early childhood, emotion recognition, media, media play, motor skills, social-emotional skills

## Adolescents' self-expression on social media

"We, too, have a side to the story": Teens' use of TikTok to share their online learning experiences during COVID-19

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In this study, we analyze multimodal content (combining visual images, spoken text, and sound) uploaded by Israeli teens to TikTok, reflecting their online learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a qualitative content analysis of 200 posts hashtagged #Zoom and uploaded during COVID-19 lockdowns, we identified three rhetorical styles, constituting three main expression modes used by youth to convey their experience of online learning: humor (including self-deprecating humor and humorous internet memes), personal expression (via video blog, personal blog, and individual expression of protest) and interactivity (a less prominent style, including user guides to Zoom, surveys, and reaction videos). The findings not only expose us to the experiences of Israeli students regarding online learning, but also to a showcase of how they use TikTok's affordances to make their voices heard on a platform perceived as focused on sociality and entertainment. The study thus contributes to our

understanding of how Israeli teens use social media to express themselves about civic and political issues that are central to their everyday lives.

**Key words:** affordances, COVID-19, digital-visual literacy, media literacy, multimodal, online learning, social media, students, TikTok, Zoom

## YouTube childhood: The incarnations of Tom Sawyer in the third millennium

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A first attempt is made in this article to examine and conceptualize the economic aspect of the activities of young populations in the network. Recent studies have shown how daily use of digital technology, surfing the web, and using social networks affect monetary exchanges and change familiar conceptions of work and leisure. Children and adolescents are integral parts of the digital technology and Internet landscape, causing changes to childhood concepts and perceptions regarding childhood and money. The article is a part of a comprehensive study that examines these effects and focuses on children and adolescents' YouTube activities from an economic perspective. First, we present a theoretical review of the characteristics of network activities as work, prevailing perceptions regarding children's work, and the combination of leisure and work elements on YouTube. We then present findings regarding salient features of 'work' found in the leisure activities of the young population on YouTube. In the final chapter we provide suggestions based on the recognition of activities on YouTube as desired productive activities.

**Key words:** childhood, child work, digital economy, immaterial work, free work, influencers, YouTube, YouTubers, gamers

## Digital media and at-risk youth

### “Hi! I read your post”: Digital media, care workers and at-risk youth

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In this study, we examine whether and how youth care workers in Israel utilize social media for the purposes of outreach, emotional support, and therapeutic interventions for at-risk youth, while referring to the advantages and challenges of online communication. Interviews with counselors, social workers, and clinical psychologists who work with youth at risk, reveal positive perceptions towards these channels and report on therapeutic successes achieved through social networks and messaging apps. The analysis of the interviews reveals that online communication improves the possibilities of the care workers in three key areas: (1) Reaching out and maintaining reciprocal and meaningful therapeutic relationships with youth at-risk over time; (2) Identifying risks and emotional distress; and (3) “stepping in” and providing psychosocial assistance, when needed. These beneficial practices are made possible through the high accessibility and the sense of secured mediation that characterize social media communication and that complement the psychosocial needs of youth at risk. Alongside these advantages, the analysis yielded several challenges in social media therapeutic relationships, questions of privacy, authority and boundaries.

**Key words:** at-risk youth, detection of distress online, online counselling, social networks, therapeutic relationships, youth outreach online

## Online pride: Online space as part of teens' coming out process

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LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer) teens in the midst of their coming out process often testify to feelings of loneliness, when they cannot find an attentive ear or information allowing them to shed light on their sexual or gender identity. Online space, which allows anonymity along with accessibility and availability, meets teens' needs to receive information and get to know others in a similar situation, with no need for exposure in the physical world. However, LGBTQ teens' online experiences during their coming out process is a topic almost untouched by research. To this end, a qualitative pilot study was conducted, including 15 semi-structured interviews with LGBTQ teens from different parts of the country. The findings show that by conducting online searches for information relating to their gay identity, the participants found on the one hand information which helped them form their identity, and on the other they encountered extreme information unsuitable for their age, which made them afraid of revealing their secret. Furthermore, the findings indicate that the teens found other LGBTQ teens and LGBTQ organizations online, which provided them with a sense of belonging as well as a normalization of their feelings. In light of the findings, the article presents suggestions for educators and therapists.

**Key words:** adolescents, coming out, internet, LGBT

# Digital media in the life of adolescents: Between everyday life and existential crisis

Let's meet outside: The virtual gaming world and its implications on the lives of 11-year-old Israeli children

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Many works have dealt with the reciprocal relations between the conduct of children in the various internet realms and their demeanor outside of them. My starting point supports the dominant discourse describing a relation of continuity, and suggests an integrated body of three interpretational approaches regarding the mechanisms which link these two worlds: (1) Continuity in the structure and the function of the peer group (2) Continuity in the status of dominant cultural narratives (3) Continuity in the meaning of “outside” and “free play” in children’s lives. These three points of view are the background of the case analysis presented herein: I intend to show how a group of seven 11-year-olds use a virtual computer game “mikmak” – an Israeli virtual “sandbox game” – as a context that functions as a substitute to outdoor free-play where the borders of the peer group established in school are reinforced and where social solidarity is repeated as a value. Relying on the insights of ECM (Extended Case Method) – which details ways of making generalizations on the basis of limited research contexts – I shall contend that the ensemble of indicators contribute to the discourse about the nature of relations between the two worlds. I will also argue that the potential of sandbox games such as Mikmak to offer children an experience similar to that obtained in free play outside the home is greater than in other digital contexts.

**Key words:** childhood, ethnography, network games

## “Always in my hands...”: The use of smartphones by Ukrainian refugee children

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By giving voice to 15 Ukrainian refugees, aged 10-14, who sheltered in a refugee camp in Poland in March 2022, this qualitative study reveals how and why they used smartphones to cope with the challenges they faced during the first days of the Russia-Ukraine war. The results show that since the inception of the war, the children and adolescents have created new practices of smartphone use, suitable for their new needs and concerns. They extensively used their smartphones for three overarching purposes: emotional shelter; preservation of contacts with their peers; and maintaining a sense of continuity in their lives that have been shattered by the war. The study reveals the important role of digital media in coping strategies of children and adolescents who are victims of war and forced displacement.

**Key words:** children refugees, coping strategies, digital media, Russia-Ukraine war, smartphone