

'KIDS WILL ALWAYS OUTSMART US'

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY INTO PARENTS' DECISION-
MAKING AROUND SCREEN TIME**

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Digital Technology vs Screen Time

- Internet access “important in allowing everybody to wholly participate in society” (Hooft Graafland, 2018)
- Secondary school pupils are “leaders in the application of digital [technology]” (DCCA, 2018)
 - “The harmful effects of too much screen time for kids” (Morin, 2018)
 - “How I banned screen time for my kids when I realised they were addicted” (Power, 2017)

Research Questions

- How do parents navigate the digital lives of their school-aged children?
- How do parents make decisions around screen time use? What kind of limits, rules, and restrictions are imposed and how?
- What are the key influences on parental views and behaviours?

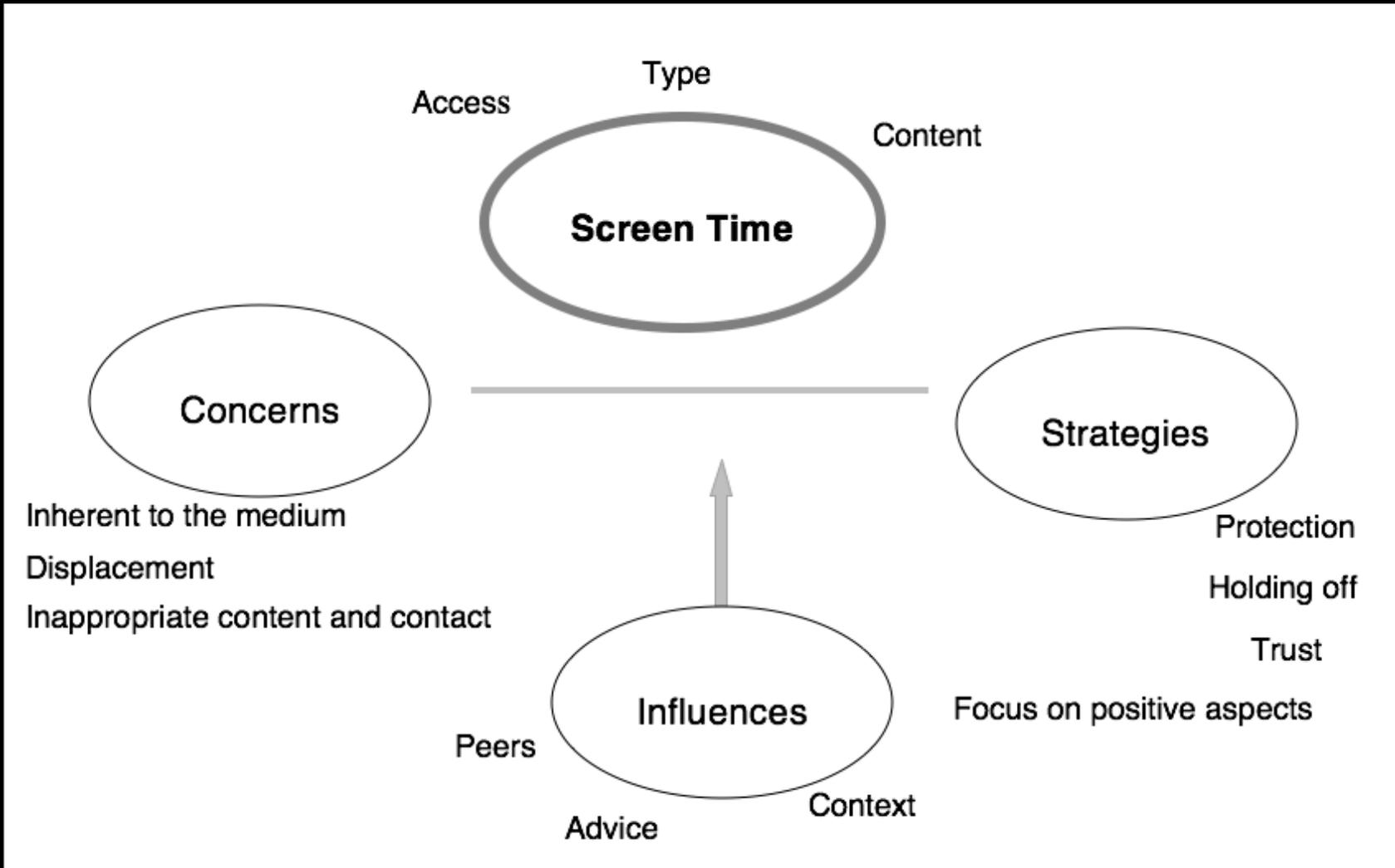
Methods and Sample

- Semi-structured interviews
- Inclusion criterion: child/ren aged between 7-12
- main stream school (N=7), Steiner school (N=5)
- 10 mothers and 2 fathers
- Relatively homogenous sample
- 9 Irish born, all children born in Ireland
- 1/3 lived in a town, 1/3 in small towns or villages, 1/3 in rural areas, one parent lived in a suburban setting
- Children between 7-12: 5 girls, 13 boys.

Screen Time Engagement

- **Watching:** movies, cartoons, family shows, YouTube
- **Playing games:** Minecraft, Roblox, football, racing, little app games
- **Interacting:** messaging services, musical.ly
- **Information:** for school work, about toys, public figures, sports,...

Themes



Concerns

Inherent to the Medium

“[A]t the end of hours of [playing with the game console], they’re not content with [it]. ‘Ah that was great I played that game for a few hours and I did really well’. That doesn’t come into it. It’s like you’re stuck, it’s like taking a drug off them. ‘No I want that, I want that’ ‘Well you can’t have it’ and then they’re grumpy for a while, and they get over it, but [...] it’s not like finishing a game of football and chatting about it afterwards how great the game was. It doesn’t matter that you’ve played for four hours, it’s just the fact that you are taking it off me now, [...] and the thing you keep hearing [...] is ‘There’s nothing to do, there’s nothing else to do’, and I think that’s because this is so exciting in a very superficial way; it’s so exciting that everything else around it seems dull, you know, that when you turn off these flashing lights then it’s just back to the plain old world that isn’t flashing.”

Concerns

Inherent to the Medium

Displacement

Inappropriate content and contact

- Violence
- Advertisement
- Negative body image
- Pornography

Strategies

Protection

Difficulty to find “a balance [...] between educating them and protecting them and then frightening them, you know what I mean, [they are] too young for all that. So, you’re trying to get that balance right”.

Holding off

“[My son, 11] has such inner strength which [is] going to stand to [him] down the line. Rather than knowing all about bloody Snapchat, and having always just followed like a sheep with everything that’s going on... I think being able to stand back and question something, because he’s going to now enter the world of drug taking, of alcohol, of sexuality... so to be able to stand back and question something, and his head filled with the world rather than a false world of social media for so long, I think is going to stand to him much more.”

Trust

“In fairness, I don’t really check on him [9] to see what he watches but I think [the father] put in some safety things [...] but I think kids will *always* outsmart us when it comes to computers and [...] online stuff, so we just have to trust them and make sure that they talk to us, you know, if there *are* things. I think that it’s futile to try [...] and control them. They will *always* outwit us. If they want to. [...]. *Of course* I don’t want them to find out about sex through pornography, [but] are they going to find those sites? Yeah, no matter what I put in. Again, I suppose it’s just to make sure that they know it’s there, it is vile, it’s horrible, a lot of things, and that’s what real life is.”

Influences

Peer Pressure

“It’s that balance between [...] what is okay in my consideration and what I would like them exposed to and not exposed to, and then deprivation, [...] you know, that feeling, ‘I’m the only child in the class that’s still watching Paddington and everyone else has seen Star Wars [...]”

Discussion

- No “one-size-fits-all”: Aligned family lifestyle
- Cognitive dissonance: strategies employed to alleviate two incongruent cognitions (Festinger, 1957)
 - Changing behaviour
 - Changing attitudes around screen time
 - Introducing other factors in an effort to rationalise choices
- Content matters: almost no *regular* TV
 - 36% of primary school children list YouTube as favourite app (Everri & Park, 2018)
- “Price” of protection? (Livingstone et al., 2018; Mathiesen, 2013)

THANK YOU

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