Tykes, Tablets, and Tantrums: Investigating Pre-schoolers' Digital Media Use and Parental Mediation Strategies

While parents of pre-schoolers embrace tablets for their versatility and rich functionality, many are nevertheless circumspect about their potential adverse impact. Among their key concerns are excessive use, behavioural issues, impeded acquisition of academic and social skills, long term damage to health and a sedentary lifestyle. Parents attempt to actively manage their children’s device use through self-education: reading up on the best apps for their children, peer-to-peer sharing of parenting tips via social media, and consulting friends and experts on their mediation practices. Through interviews with 60 mothers of pre-schoolers and observations of their children, this study investigates these mothers’ mediation strategies and the challenges they encounter, comparing the digital literacies of stay-at-home versus working mothers. The study’s findings indicate that traditional parental mediation theories need to be extensively refined in view of the use of highly accessible, portable media devices by an increasingly younger group of media consumers.

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