

## PARENTAL CONTROL OVER MEDIA CONSUMPTION IN SLOVAK FAMILIES

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### Abstract:

**Introduction:** A child's upbringing begins with his/her birth as he/she gradually adapts to the current family habits and society, so that the child is prepared for all circumstances. From birth, a child perceives the warmth, the light, and the love of his/her mother. They also perceive the influence of the media, and it is, therefore, desirable to prepare children to use them correctly and safely. Children use several types of media as a source of information, entertainment, and leisure.

**Objectives:** The study aims to identify and analyse adolescents' media consumption and to highlight parental control in Slovak families.

**Methods:** the data for the study is conducted with an online questionnaire focusing on media literacy and parental mediation, which is then distributed among the pupils in Slovakia.

**Results:** The study finds that boys spend most of their time on the computer or laptop, and the most common activity is playing games. Connecting to social networking sites for chatting is popular among girls. The use of mobile phones with internet access is common among both genders. Boys are found to have more restrictions on the time spent online and the content consumed. Age wise, media consumption of 11 and 12 year olds is restrictive. For older pupils, there is not much parental control.

**Conclusion:** Media literacy is important for families today. Parents must adapt to the digital age and equip their children to use online media responsibly. The study highlights the possibilities for family media education and draws attention to age and gender-wise differences in the parental control on media consumption of adolescents in Slovak families.

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### Introduction

The use of media and information and communication technology are common among children and adolescents. Many parents are often too busy with their responsibilities to keep a check on their children's media consumption. Family is the primary social institution the child is born into, and parents are expected to equip their children with all the necessary skills required to live in today's society. Media has both positive and negative influences on the family. *The positive aspect* mainly includes facilitating communication, filling one's free time, or taking advantage of the media landscape, saving the whole family time. *The negative influence* includes excessive media consumption which results in deteriorating family relationships and forgetting traditions and customs. Spending time with family is being replaced by spending time online. Children spend less time talking to their parents and this can lead to various problems that everyone solves independently. According to Helus (2004), positive media influence on the family is not automatic, but rather a result of its media literacy.

Media literacy begins in the family as the children gain their first experience with media content. It starts with parental control over watching inappropriate television programs and internet and computer use. In this case, the parent acts as a mediator. In several countries, the parent's role as a mediator is called parental mediation (Pařa, 2017). Parental mediation is a way of protecting children from the current media influence. In the past, it mainly consisted of restricting television access. Parents are under more pressure nowadays as children and adolescents spend most of their time on the internet. Children actively use media, so the need for control, and the need to build trust in the relationship with the child has increased.

Parents influence their children's behaviour, especially media consumption, which often happens subconsciously (Kařinová, 2009).

Hoganová (2001 In: ředřová, 2006) defines family media literacy as a practice that helps a child to become an educated, critical, and conscious consumer of media. Media literacy in the family should involve:

- limiting the time that children want to spend using media,
- choosing high-quality, educational programmes,
- parents leading by example,

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- intentionally creating a suitable media environment,
- media communication that supports media literacy.

These features are a detailed description of family media literacy that is non-threatening and beneficial to the child. It teaches the child to use media in a safe, educational, and enriching way.

Parental mediation is a form of media literacy. Parents become the child's teachers and guides in the media environment. But often, parents only set rules and do not teach children how to correctly use media (Hacek, 2013). Consequently, parents may indulge in a conflict with their children trying to prove the educational and social advantages of using media, or rather explaining its negative impact on their behaviour, attitude, opinions as well as safety (Livingstone and Helsper, 2008). Parents play an important role in managing their children's media habits, especially by examining and evaluating their own media habits to guide and correct their children.

Common parenting styles can be categorised as direct and indirect, the same goes for media literacy in the family. Direct influence is intentional with a clear goal. It means intentionally influencing the consumption of media content. Indirect influence lies in changing one's attitude as per media content (Izrael, 2018). Younger children imitate their parents' behaviour, and are typically interested in the same stimuli. The same happens with media consumption. Therefore, parents should set a positive example right from the beginning. While directly influencing the media consumption of their children, parents should try to reach a consensus with them on media's important educational aspects.

There is a two-dimensional approach to parental mediation in family media literacy: a *system-based* and a *user-based* approach. Both approaches involve technical solutions and parental guidance. Further, frameworks include a *protective* and *promoting attitude* towards children's upbringing based on social, restrictive, and instructive mediation. *Technical solutions* are computer software to monitor children's media usage. It monitors the websites children visit, people they communicate with online etc. This way, the parent can immediately detect and block inappropriate websites or forms of communication. *Instructive mediation* allows children to understand and accept. *Restrictive mediation* deals with regulating media consumption. There are three basic strategies for restrictive mediation: a *social approach* based on communication and interaction with children. It involves parents participating in their children's activities. *Making rules* means restricting inappropriate activities. *Technical solutions* monitor children's activities on the internet and block inappropriate ones (Kirwill et al. 2009).

A combination of these three approaches ensures media safety and security for children. Media literacy in families must not be neglected as media, and its use are now integral to daily life. One of the important aspects is nurturing a relationship of love and trust with children and trying to understand them.

Nathanson (1999 In: Izrael, 2018) introduces three main strategies for media literacy in families: *active mediation*, where parents and children communicate about media, *restrictive mediation* based on rules that children must follow, and *social co-viewing* which means parents and children consume a media together.

Active mediation is the most effective of these three strategies, where parents communicate and share their opinions and views on the media content they consume. Restrictive mediation mainly focuses on making rules. However, it lacks parental guidance and may direct a child towards harmful media content. Co-viewing of media, just like restrictive mediation, is insufficient without communication and selecting appropriate and inappropriate media content.

### **Methodology**

A questionnaire was developed for data collection. The sample of the study consisted of 169 boys and 181 girls aged between 11 to 15 years. Out of all respondents, 40 (11.4%) were 11 years old, 60 (17.1%) were 12-years-old, 77 (22%) were 13 years old, 99 students (28.3%) were 14-years-old, and 74 students (21.1%) were 15-years-old. Kruskal–Wallis test was used for hypotheses testing and the results are presented in tables and graphs. Results of the study show the time adolescents spend on different types of media and the degree of parental control over their media consumption.

### **Methods**

Primary data for the study is collected with the help of an online survey. Secondary data is collected from an extensive literature review. Data was analysed with the help of suitable statistical methods.

### **Research Objective**

The aim was to analyse the time adolescents spend using different media and to identify parental control methods in Slovak families.

## Results

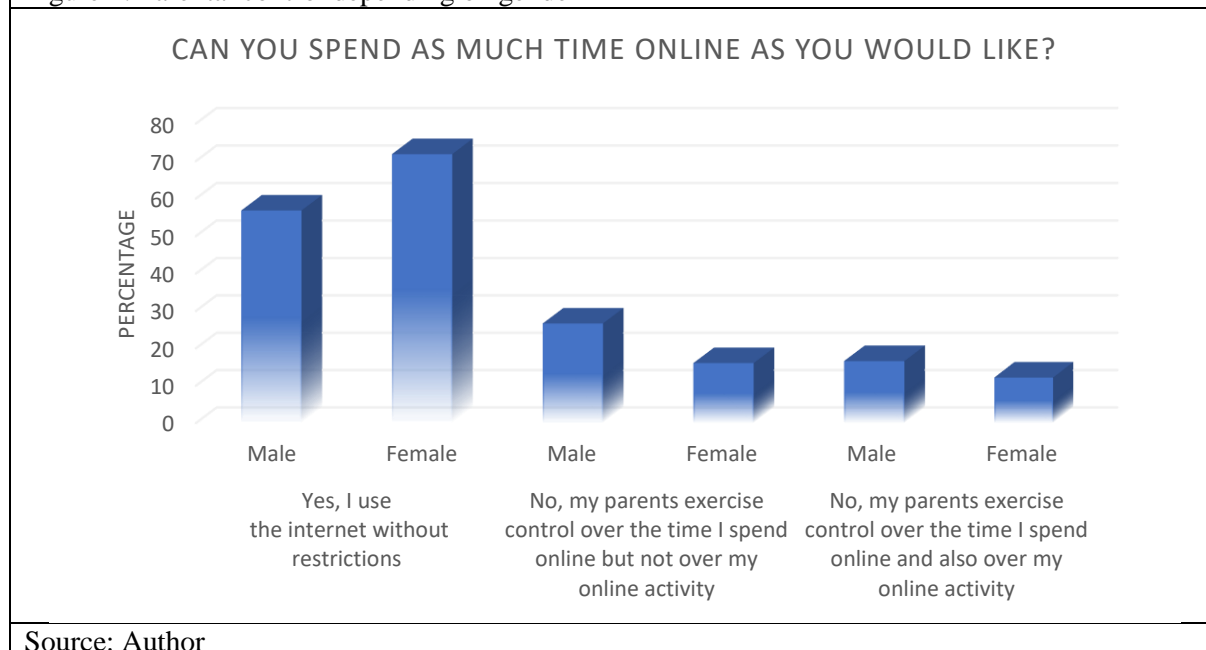
This section presents the results of the study. Results show that parental control is a prerequisite for regulating media consumption.

How much time do you spend using the media listed below?					
Medium	Gender	Average	Expected value	Standard deviation	Mode
Television	Male	2.722	3	1.647	4
	Female	2.945	3	1.46	4
Video/DVD	Male	1.391	0	1.783	0
	Female	1.282	0	1.614	0
Radio	Male	<b>1.077</b>	0	1.581	0
	Female	<b>1.149</b>	0	1.518	0
Computer/Laptop	Male	4.112	4	1.624	4
	Female	4.188	4	1.464	5
Video game console	Male	1.615	1	1.848	0
	Female	<b>0.873</b>	0	1.531	0
Internet (excluding social networks)	Male	2.876	3	1.578	3
	Female	2.823	3	1.64	3
Internet (including social networks)	Male	3.763	4	1.501	4
	Female	4.37	5	1.342	5
Mobile phone (for texting and calls)	Male	2.822	3	1.457	3
	Female	2.95	3	1.431	3
Mobile phone (for internet access)	Male	3.722	4	1.527	4
	Female	3.818	4	1.624	4
Newspapers, magazines	Male	<b>0.976</b>	0	1.443	0
	Female	1.122	0	1.478	0
Audio storage	Male	1.314	0	1.797	0
	Female	1.818	1	1.908	0

Source: Author

Table 1 shows the time spent by the respondents on the specific media types. Statistically significant differences can be observed between the time spent by male and female students. Boys spend the most of their time on their computers or laptops ( $\mu=4.112$ ). Girls most often connect to social networks for chatting ( $\mu=4.37$ ). Mobile phones are often used by boys ( $\mu=3.722$ ) and girls ( $\mu=3.818$ ), especially for internet access. Regarding the popular media, girls are attracted to using social networking websites on their phones. Adolescent girls have a greater need for communication and understanding, they tend to confide more in strangers, which exposes them to online threats and negative media influence. Girls spend the least time playing games on consoles ( $\mu=0.873$ ), while boys spend the least time reading newspapers and magazines ( $\mu=0.976$ ). This result is expected as most girls do not enjoy playing games that much and boys are less interested in reading newspapers and magazines. Playing games is less common among girls student. This might be due to boys being more technically inclined and due to their need to perceive more stimuli and feel more excitement. Girls usually choose more relaxing leisure activities that are less stimulating. Answers to the sub-question targeted at the *most preferred online activities* revealed the following preferences. The most prevalent activity among girls is chatting on the social media ( $\mu=3.905$ ), while among boys, it is playing games ( $\mu=3.802$ ). These results confirm that girls are more active in the chats on social networks, and boys, on the other hand, favour playing online games. For boys and girls, the internet is the most important source of information. Results clearly show that students spend much using the internet and laptop and chatting. It is their primary source of information and favourite pastime. This makes parental control and mutual trust crucial.

Figure 1: Parental control depending on gender



Source: Author

Figure 1 depicts the extent to which parental control over the time spent on the internet and the content their children consume online. 57% boys and 72% of girls stated that they use the internet without any restrictions. Girls have even more freedom compared to boys. As per 26% of the boys and 16% of girls, parents control their time spent online but do not control the content they consume. Parental control over online content and the time spent on the internet is reported by 16% of boys and 12% of girls. Results indicate that parents exercise greater control over boys both in terms of content and time spent. One of the reasons for exercising less control over girls might be that parents tend to consider them more reliable and responsible. On the contrary, they find it more important to regulate boys' time and the content they consume. Girls need guidance that would give them more safety and protection against cyber aggression as the girls spend much time online chatting and communicating with strangers. This makes them vulnerable to cyberbullying. Adolescent girls tend to seek people they can confide in and share everything with. These are mostly friends and peers. The online environment, however, allows them to confide in strangers. Virtual aggressors often take advantage of this. Adolescent boys and girls fall easy prey to cyber aggressors, who can easily manipulate them and seriously threaten their psyche.

The Kruskal-Wallis test was used to test the following hypotheses :

H<sub>0</sub>: Parental control over students is the same regardless of gender

H<sub>A</sub>: Parental control over students varies depending on gender

Table 2: Parental control by gender (Kruskal-Wallis test)

Can you spend as much time online as you would like?	Gender	Number	Mean	SD	SEM	F	p
	Male	169	0.592	0.759	0.058	1	<b>0.008</b>
	Female	181	0.403	0.697	0.052		

Source: Author

Results in Table 2 show that students are not subjected to the same amount of parental control. Gender wise, statistically significant differences are found in the level of parental control. Thus, the null hypothesis (p=0.008) is rejected at the significance level of 0.05. These results are confirmed in Figure 1. The next section is dedicated to a detailed analysis of the parental control as per the age of the child.

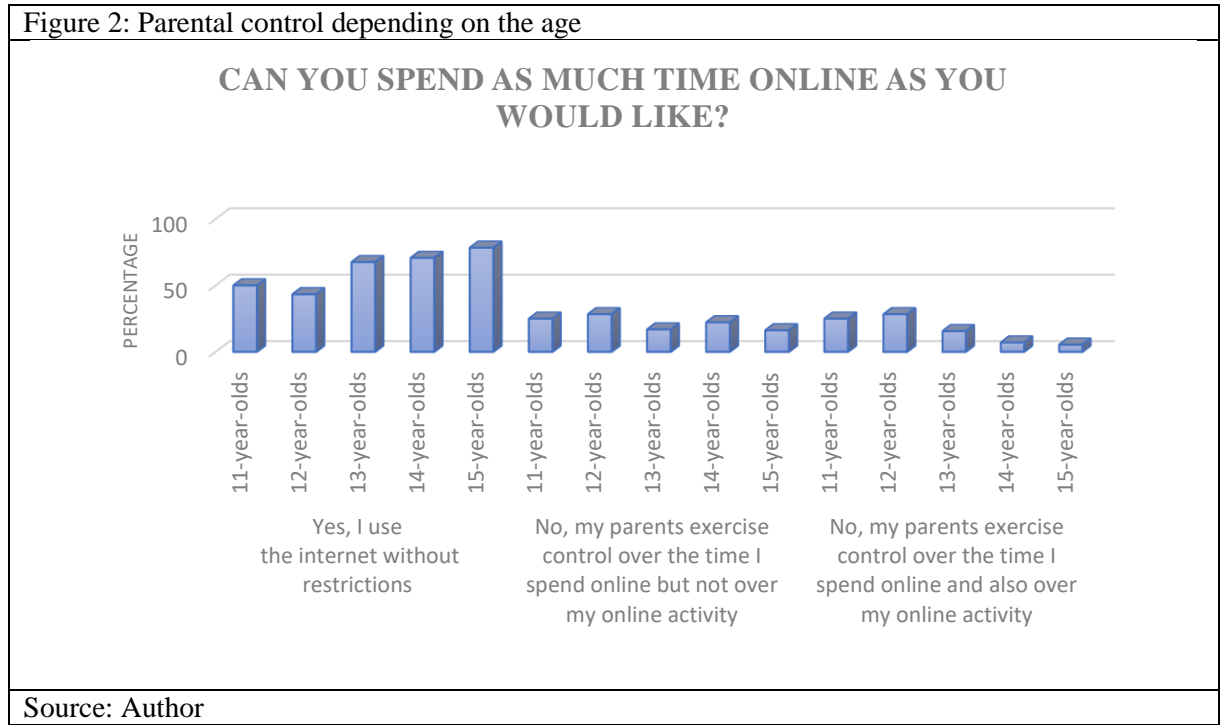


Figure 2 depicts the results of parental control according to the student's age. Students aged 14 years (70%) and 15 years (79%) are allowed to use the internet without restrictions. Unrestricted internet access is least common for 11 and 12-year-olds. Parents of students aged 11 (25%) and 12 (28%) tend to control the time they spend online but do not control their internet activity and the content they consume. Parents of 11 (25%) and 12-year-olds (28%) exercise more control over the time spent on the internet, and the content consumed. Parents exercise the least control over students aged 14 (7%) and 15 years (5%). Results indicate that younger students are more subjected to parental control than older ones. It is because parents tend to devote more time to younger children, at this age, children also need to spend more time with their parents. It justifies more parental control over young children. On the contrary, older students are more likely to spend time with their peers and do not spend as much time with their parents. It explains why they are subjected to less parental control. It is more difficult to build trust in adolescence, so parents need to create a trusting relationship with their children from a very young age. At the same time, parents and children often get into a conflict because commands and restrictions are favoured over compromises.

Kruskal-Wallis test was used to test the following hypotheses:

H<sub>0</sub>: Parental control over students is the same regardless of their age.

H<sub>A</sub>: Parental control over students varies depending on their age.

**Table 3: Parental control by age (Kruskal-Wallis test)**

Can you spend as much time online as you would like?	Age	Number	Mean	SD	SEM	F	p
	11	40	0.75	0.84	0.133	4	<b>&lt;0.001</b>
	12	60	0.85	0.84	0.108		
	13	77	0.468	0.754	0.086		
	14	99	0.364	0.614	0.062		
	15	74	0.27	0.556	0.065		

Source: Author

Results in Table 3 show that students of different ages are subjected to different degrees of parental control. There are statistically significant differences in the level of parental control as per the child's age. The null hypothesis ( $p=0.001$ ) is therefore rejected on the significance level of 0.05. Differences are statistically significant. As the students begin to mature at 14 or 15 years, communication and well-defined rules (to a certain extent) are very important. Using the internet as the main source of information and entertainment increases the risks of online threats and misuse. Parental control from an early age is

important to protect children from online threats. It ensures that their children consume age-appropriate content and indulge in meaningful leisure activity.

## Discussion

The present study presents the level of parental control and commonly used practices for media education in families. The aim of the study was to find how much time adolescents spend using media and highlight the parental control over media consumption in Slovak families. Parental control is a way of teaching their children the basics of media consumption. It safeguards them from undesirable and threatening media influence and equips their children with the basic skills. The aim of the study was to find the time students dedicate to various types of media. It has been found that the boys spend most of their time using the computer or laptop ( $\mu=4.112$ ), especially playing games ( $\mu=3.802$ ). Girls prefer using the internet and social networks ( $\mu=4.37$ ) for chatting ( $\mu=3.905$ ). Boys spend the least time reading newspapers and magazines ( $\mu=0.976$ ) and listening to the radio ( $\mu=1.077$ ). Girls spend the least time on video game consoles ( $\mu=0.873$ ) and newspapers and magazines ( $\mu=1.122$ ). Among both genders, the use of contemporary media is highly popular as it is a source of entertainment for the students. Popular media in the past is not used much. Online chatting is the most popular online activity among girls. All this makes communication and parental control important in families, as online threats are common these days. One such example of a dangerous threat is cyber grooming, where perpetrators develop a close relationship with their victims and convince them to meet in person with some wrong intentions. Adolescent girls are sensitive, and at this age, they experience physical and psychological changes during this stage. These changes might strongly influence their online activity and behaviour. As indicated by the results of this study, girls are subjected to less parental control than boys. Only 16% of girls have parental control over the time they spend online, and 12% of girls have restrictions over the online content they consume. Parental control for boys (26%) is mainly targeted at the time they spend on the internet. However, 16% of the boys have parental control over the time they spend online and the content they consume. Nevertheless, time spent online is considered more important than content consumed online. Restricting time on the internet does not protect the child from potentially threatening online activities. Content control provides more online safety. Girls are typically more responsible and reliable, which is often not the case for boys.

Turzák et al. (2020) note that the risk of sexting or further online threats decreases when parents and children have a loving relationship based on trust. Parents are encouraged to use parenting methods that reflect their children's characteristics. This emphasises the importance of communication and a trusting relationship between children and their parents in creating a safe media environment.

Kačínová (2009) further stresses the need to develop parents' media literacy, to make them aware how media can influence children and adolescents. It would allow them to make, enforce, and respect appropriate parental rules regarding media consumption in families. The study also emphasises that children observe how media is being used in the family and then copy their parents' behaviour. It is recommended that families should introduce their children with age-appropriate media that provide children with knowledge and experience. Children should participate in using media content so they can build their sense of responsibility.

The research results also show differences in parental control depending on students' age. Mainly parents of students aged 11 (25%) and 12 (28%) control the time they spend online but do not control their internet activity. Parents of 11- years-old (25%) and 12-year-old (28%) are most likely to control both the time and the content. Parents need for more control over younger children than older ones. The results of the study that show that there was the least amount of parental control over the group of students aged 14 (7%) and 15 (5%). Setting rules and enforcing them develop responsibility not just in children but also in their parents. Parents feel less need for control with older students than with younger ones. However, this might lead children to be more reckless and to seek more entertainment online.

## Conclusion

Media influences children in several ways, which might impact the quality of their life. It may affect their *cognitive ability*, as media act as stimuli that help acquire new knowledge. It may also impact their *attitude*, especially when media users promote various products, opinions, and values that can become important to a maturing child. The *emotional impact* of media may trigger a wide range of feelings, moods, and emotions that might positively or negatively impact students' behaviour. Regarding

*physiological impact*, different physiological reactions can be observed as a result of consuming media content. *Behavioural impact* of the media may affect overall behaviour, communication with relatives, and the wider social well-being, especially imbibing inappropriate behaviour from media (Jiráček, Köpplová, 2009 In: Labischová, 2011).

Uncontrolled media exposure often causes chaos that children cannot handle alone. They need a facilitator. When parents set rules, exercise control, and communicate with their children, they can ensure a safe media environment for their children and keep track of their activities and interests. With all these practices, they provide basic knowledge to their children about how media functions and how to use it to one's advantage. Finally, it helps them in detecting any cyber threats. By exercising control from a young age and gradually building a trusting relationship, parents prepare their children to enter a safe media environment. Hayman and Coleman (2016 In: In: , 2017) introduced digital rules for parents that can help them regulate the use of media in families:

- when the child arrives from school, turn off the media for some time and spend time together,
- eat together at the dining table, not while consuming media content,
- intentionally choose programmes to watch together and communicate about,
- have critical discussions about media content,
- involve them in other activities so that media is not the only source of entertainment,
- mutually decide when and for how long media can be used and turn it off before bedtime at night.

These rules provide a good foundation for correct media usage. Additionally, setting rules guide children and encourage them to spend their free time in different ways together with their family.

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