

Family life with digital platforms



SHORT RESEARCH PAPER 2026

How are digital platforms embedded in the lives and practices of modern families?



Co-funded by
the European Union

CHANSE.
COLLABORATION OF HUMANITIES
AND SOCIAL SCIENCES IN EUROPE

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THE PROJECT AT A GLANCE

The Topic

Across generations, everyday digital practices in family life – from streaming in the living room to messaging relatives, managing household shopping, navigating daily routines, and monitoring children's online activities – are all deeply embedded in digital platforms that collect data and shape use through largely obscure algorithms.

The Project

Platforming Families: Tracing digital transformations in everyday life across generations (PlatFAMs) involving three-generation families (children, parents, grandparents) in six European countries (Estonia, Norway, Romania, Spain, the UK and Poland).

The Results

In what way are family life “platformised”? Families imagine platforms as future infrastructure for communication and care, while insisting face-to-face remains irreplaceable; many report limited agency vis-à-vis BigTech and datafication concerns. Clear generational patterns

emerged: grandparents are ‘partially platformised’, parents are a ‘transitional’ generation managing rules, and children/youth are the ‘future platformised generation,’ active yet bounded by family norms. Ambivalence is pervasive: platforms connect and fragment, enabling care at a distance while displacing attention and face-to-face interaction in co-resident homes. Streaming platforms anchor routines and sometimes shared bonds, yet individualised interfaces and profiles, and taste differences often undercut ‘family time.’ Reciprocal family tracking and monitoring is widely normalised as care and safety, grounded in (dis)trust and local parenting norms though some resist on privacy grounds.

The project has resulted in a book on the platformisation of the family, a card game for families to encourage discussions about dilemmas and paradoxes inherent in their digital everyday life, and a number of scientific articles in leading journals. Project website:

<https://digitalfamilies.eu>



Instead of us using technology less, I think when more things are invented – more cool and useful things – it will make us more addicted instead of making us less addicted to screens. Because technology gives you cool things, but also bad ones.

Aura (9), daughter, Spain





My wife got lost while driving a few times. But if I can check this app, I know where she is. I can tell her where she needs to go.

Bertil (78), grandfather, Norway

THE PLATFAMS PROJECT

'Platforming Families: Tracing digital transformations in everyday life across generations (PlatFAMs)' involved qualitative interviews with one child, one parent and one grandparent from families in Estonia, Norway, Romania, Spain, the UK and Poland. The aim of the project was to understand how families and generations today navigate and include digital platforms in their everyday lives. The relationships between family members and across generations was central to the project, as well as their images of the future with digital platforms and AI. The project was funded by CHANSE (EU Horizon2020) and national research agencies in each country (AEI, AMU ID-UB, ETAg, RCN, UEFISCDI, UKRI). In addition, national collaborative partners were included in each country.

The Methodology

By doing individual and family group interviews as well as participatory methods the project documents how families

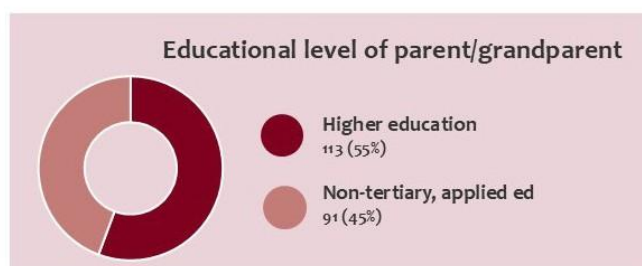
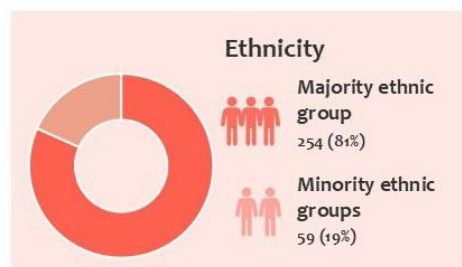
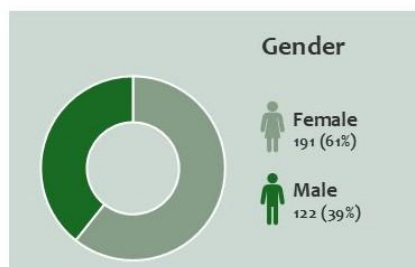
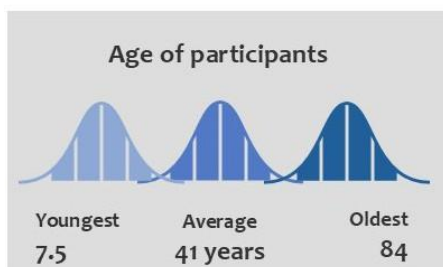
today navigate and organise everyday family life with digital devices, digital media, apps and platforms. We used an innovative, participatory approach to include multiple voices within each household; Families helped co-design their 'perfect app', and we used visual prompts such as platform logos to spark stories of lived experience.

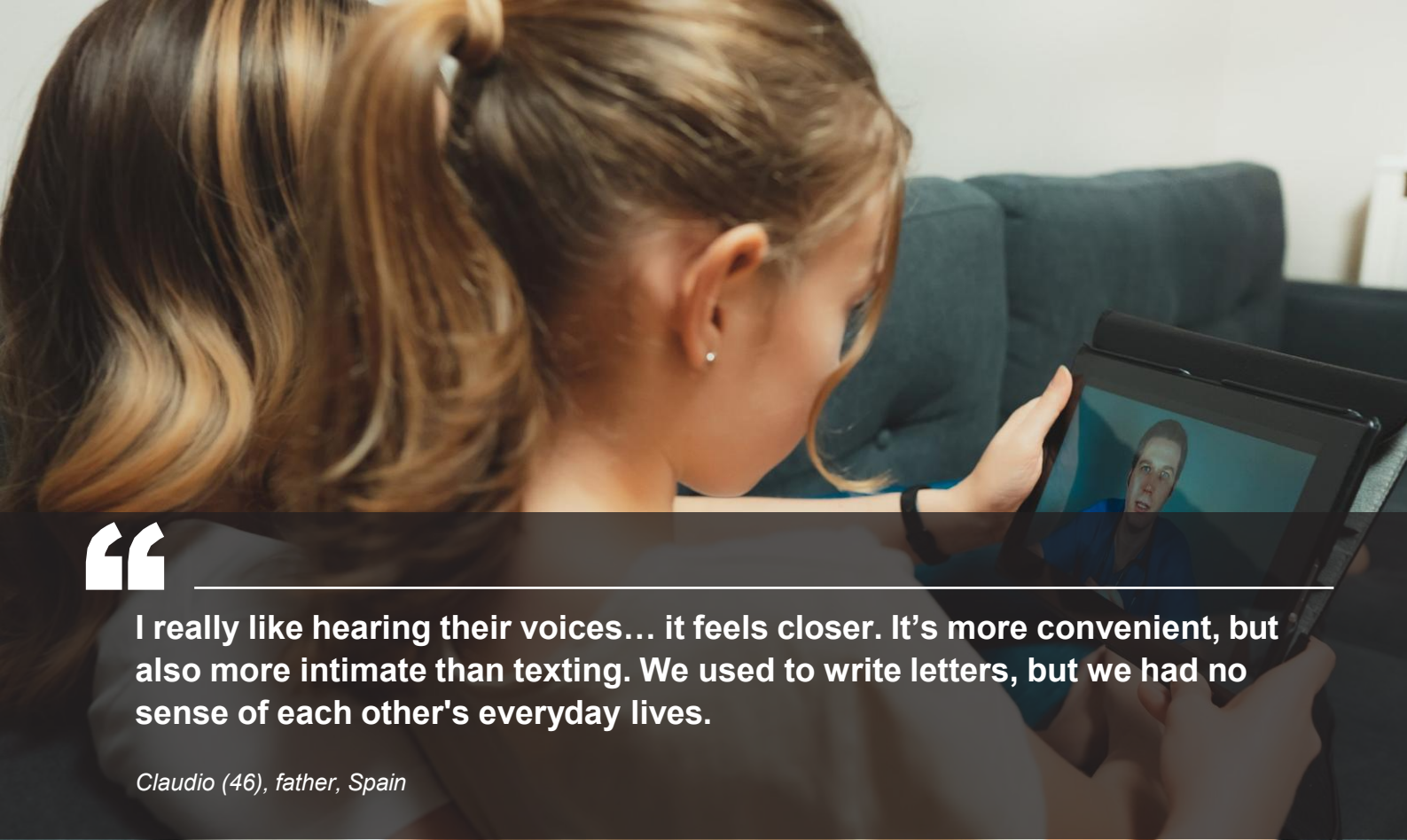
The Sample

The project involved 104 families across the six participating countries. Each of the families included three generations totaling 313 grandparents, parents and young people. Our youngest participant was 7 ½ years old, and our oldest was 84. We deliberately recruited diverse families – including same-sex, single-parent, blended, immigrant and transnational households – to reflect a broad range of experiences. Our families lived both in the main cities like London, Barcelona, Oslo and Tartu, but also across the towns and rural countryside of for instance Romania, Norway and Catalonia.

The PlatFAMs full sample

313 participants
from 104 families





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I really like hearing their voices... it feels closer. It's more convenient, but also more intimate than texting. We used to write letters, but we had no sense of each other's everyday lives.

Claudio (46), father, Spain

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My family members are in one group, and my husband's family members are in another group. We are grouped into small groups like that... So that's how we know about each other.

Crina (37), mother, Romania

KEY FINDINGS

Introducing the Media Ecology of Platformised Family Life

Crucially, this project sees the intergenerational family as our unit of analysis, not just the individual child, parent or grandparent. With the growth of digital platforms and apps we argue that research in this field needs to study the media environment more broadly as people use many different platforms and apps in their daily lives, including a broader perspective on family life and generations. We therefore use an ecological lens to understand how platformisation unfolds across the macro- (policies, business models), meso- (schools, workplaces, local services) and micro layer (homes, devices, routines).

This way we can better link the technological transformations of our societies and cultures with human interrelationship and social life. Such ecological orientations open for better understanding of platform power and tensions among family members and how relationality develop within families with platform use. This generational and holistic perspective highlights interactions between family members and shows how decisions made by digital platforms and companies far from the home (for example, account-sharing rules) ripple into living rooms, bedrooms and daily habits.



WhatsApp is the new wonder drug. Because we've got the WhatsApp now, so we don't need to Skype. WhatsApp to me is so straightforward. You just press a button and you're there.

Laura (70), grandmother, UK

Generational Differences and Platformisation

How do people see and describe their own generation in the context of media change over time and how do they describe other generations? And how involved are the generations of the family with various digital platforms?

Across the six participating countries of the study, we observed consistent generational patterns. Grandparents – the ‘partially platformised generation’—tended to be less involved with platforms and vary widely in their habits and digital confidence. Parents – the ‘transitional platformised generation’ – often balanced traditional media with newer digital tools, adapted quickly and managed rules. Children – the ‘future platformised generation’ – are increasingly active on platforms, but their independence was shaped by family rules and safety measures.

As more aspects of family life move onto platforms and are shaped by algorithms, family members' different roles and responsibilities shift. Overall, platform use is both shaped by families' existing relationships and practices and, in turn, actively shapes contemporary forms of intimacy, communication, and care. Recognising these patterns will help families and policymakers support safer, more inclusive and balanced practices.

Patterns of platformised intimacy and care

Families differ in the extent to which intimacy and care are platformised, with some relying heavily on digital technologies and others using them more selectively. Across these variations, platformised intimacy is primarily enacted through ordinary everyday gestures – brief messages, routine check-ins, and the ongoing sharing of everyday moments – through which care, reassurance, and emotional presence are sustained.

Platforms support forms of connection that are low-friction and continuous, enabling families to stay attuned to one another without demanding considerable effort. Within these everyday practices of communication and care, children tend to be the most digitally active, while grandparents often use platforms purposefully to maintain family ties, and parents draw on a broad range of apps to coordinate relationships and responsibilities. Families value platforms such as WhatsApp for the ways they combine reassurance, availability, and emotional closeness, while also supporting autonomy in everyday life.

For families living apart, platforms rework distance by enabling rapid emotional support and responsiveness in moments of need. In households where family members live together, however, platform use can fragment attention and displace face-to-face interaction, even extending to communication across rooms. These ambivalences – between connection and intrusion, reassurance and surveillance – are commonly managed through ongoing negotiation, with families setting informal rules and boundaries around device use to protect shared time and relational balance.

The EU Kids Online 2018 study confirm that help and care keep contributing positively to children's development even as everyday life moves onto digital platforms. In short, families aren't simply 'held together by apps,' nor are they 'falling apart because of technology.' Rather, platforms interact with core family processes like caring, communicating, and setting boundaries.



I think people like me will use Facebook 'till we're dead and I don't really see any alternatives emerging. It's the social network of my generation, you know.

Toomas (53), father, Estonia



Ways of doing family with digital platforms

Streaming platforms such as Netflix, You-Tube and Spotify are deeply woven into daily routines. Some families value shared viewing and listening because it creates physical closeness, strengthens bonds through shared tastes and emotions, and offers topics for conversation and joint activities.

However, several factors makes it harder to include shared listening or viewing in families' everyday routines. The most important barriers included differences in age, gender, and personal tastes, as well as conflicting daily schedules and differing ideas about the ideal viewing experience (e.g. whether it should happen in silence or with commentary and interaction). Families also varied in their beliefs about whether streaming truly counts as 'quality' family time.

The materiality of devices, technological interface, and business models also matter: streaming platforms shape family practices by their individualised design, for instance they include features such as tracking viewing history, recommending content tailored to personal preferences, setting account-specific restrictions, and limiting account sharing.



On Netflix, I watched a series with my dad. Or, for example, with the family, we watch a series together or sometimes some movies, but by myself... I don't really watch movies alone. I kind of prefer scrolling through TikTok.

David (16), son, Poland

Families in our study explained that what works well for individual comfort does not always support – and can sometimes even complicate – family use. Negotiations about what to watch, when and with whom may seem trivial, but they are central to the everyday process of ‘doing family’.

Forms of platform surveillance and family interveillance

Participants from our project were aware that platforms collected data and personalised recommendations. Platform logics also seeped into family life via reciprocal checking – what we call ‘family interveillance’ – where family members check what others are doing or where they are. Many parents and children in particular, saw this as normal and aligned with care, reciprocal openness and safety.

Pointing to parents’ responsibility for children’s safety in general, or to a sign of the closeness and openness they saw as valuable for their relationship, parents would justify linking their phone to children’s and also some teenagers’ smartphones.

Some children and youth accepted location tracking to reassure their parents, providing parents a sense of safety and calm at the cost of their privacy or because it also reassured themselves. Family members also resisted on principle, citing privacy, autonomy and distrust of companies’ data collection practices. These choices vary by country, reflecting different levels of societal and interpersonal trust, and local parenting norms.

Futuremaking as part of family practices using digital platforms

Families in Estonia and Spain consistently imagine digital platforms as the infrastructural backbone of future family life, especially for communication and care. Platforms are taken for granted as the systems through which families anticipate organising everyday routines and sustaining relationships across short and long distances. At the same time, families stress that being together and talking face-to-face will remain irreplaceable by digital alternatives in the future as well. Younger and middle generations imagine platforms as extending into education and leisure, whereas older generations foreground platforms, among other



Google Maps knows where I live because it has my GPS, there is not much I can do about it. And if I think about it, it is like “ugh the platforms know...” I don’t want that, and I prefer not to think about it.

Maria (15), daughter, Spain

things, as a way of sharing, preserving and transmitting family memories.

Across these future narratives, agency patterns align with generational roles. Digital literacy is expected to shape platform use and define family interactions in the future, often privileging younger members. Older relatives more often adopt a responsive posture, negotiating what to include and how to adapt to proposals initiated by others. Overall, families express a broad acceptance that family life will remain equally – or increasingly – platformised. Often, they tell stories of limited agency and inevitability, sometimes accompanied by worries about the growing power of Big Tech companies. Some counter narratives also surface, advocating limits to platform use or promoting digital disconnection.

Similarities and differences across European countries

Across all six countries, the generational patterns were largely consistent: grandparents tended to be less involved with platforms compared to parents and children/youth. There were minor differences in the role platforms had in family intimacy and care practices across countries. In the UK, families showed great diversity in platform use, using a wide variety of platforms that catered to different aspects of their lives.



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I'd like these parental control apps to work better, but I also don't want to overprotect. We want our children to know enough to protect themselves – to identify what's good and what's not.

Sergio (42), father, Spain

In Spain, families were more likely to use platforms for mainly communication and organisation, and to make concerted efforts to limit digital engagement in order to focus on face-to-face interaction. Romanian families used digital platforms to sustain care and emotional connection across generations.

In comparing countries like Norway and Spain, we found that the choices families made regarding how they used family control apps, smart watches and children's phones for surveilling or tracking them varied by

country, reflecting different levels of societal and interpersonal trust, and local parenting norms. Spanish families tended to be on the one hand more critical of platforms, and on the other hand more focused on keeping children safe in a risky environment. Some Norwegian parents were also tracked by their children, and saw reciprocal surveillance as a normalized part of openness as if between equal partners. Other parts of the study found that the differences between families were greater than the differences between countries – for example when it comes to streaming practices.

KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE AND IMPACT

With the aim of transferring the knowledge generated from this project, we are designing conversation-driven card game based on real-life situations from real families who have participated in the PlatFAMs research project. We have also published a book based on the project and collaborations with the ARC Centre for research on the digital child, Australia, suggesting a research agenda for further research.

1. PlatFAMs conversation-driven card game

The aim of the conversation-driven card game is to encourage families to discuss the topics that we have identified as generating the most debates, dilemmas, or even disagreements within families. The card game can be used as prompts for intergenerational dialogue, designed to spark reflection on family-related ethical dilemmas and real-world situations.

The cards do not include 'correct' answers, as there are many ways to approach each situation, depending on the family, context, and moment. However, when families play with the cards and want to know more about the project and its results, the cards also lead to the website of the project at www.digitalfamilies.eu.

This resource is composed by 24 cards that include a situation and an illustration that poses a dilemma or a problem to discuss. On the back of each card, there are questions designed to start a dialogue between family members of all generations.

The topics addressed through the cards are communication, intimacy, surveillance, streaming and gaming, health and learning. The cards were designed by professionals from Sarc Creative Studio (<https://sarc.studio/>), who developed flat-design style illustrations for the characters to resonate with diverse audiences.



2. PlatFAMs theoretical legacy and future research agenda

The Platformization of the Family. Towards a Research Agenda. This open access book outlines how the digital platforms that mediate so many aspects of commercial and personal life have begun to transform everyday family existence. It presents theory and research methods to enable students and scholars to investigate the changes that platformization has brought to the routines and interactions of family life including intergenerational communication, interpersonal relationships, forms of care and togetherness.

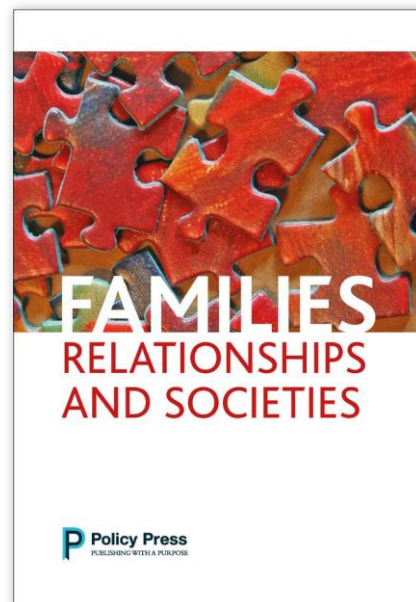
Editors: Julian Sefton-Green, Kate Mannell, Ola Erstad



RESEARCH OUTPUTS

How digital technologies become embedded in family life across generations: Scoping the agenda for researching 'platformised relationality'. This review article was published in a special issue. Since its publication of the journal *Families, Relationships and Societies* in April 2024, the article has been downloaded more than 3000 times – testifying to the buzzing interest in this research field.

Erstad, O., Hegna, K., Livingstone, S., Negru-Subtirica, O., & Stoilova, M. (2024). How digital technologies become embedded in family life across generations: Scoping the agenda for researching 'platformised relationality'. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 13(2), 164-180.



THE PlatFAMs WEBPAGE

Additional information about the project's results, summaries of new publications, and further insights into what the families who participated in the project shared can be found on our interactive webpage. Here, we have included audio files where you can listen to quotes from the interviews, and we plan to continuously add more information as the project's findings are published going forward.

digitalfamilies.eu/no/landing



Area of Research: The platformisation of contemporary educational contexts. Opportunities, tensions and risks

Editors: Raquel Miño-Puigcercós, Moises Esteban-Guitart, Paula Lozano (PlatFAMs)

PlatFAMs articles in the pipeline:

From individual resignation to collective action. Families' critical literacy in the face of data surveillance

Raquel Miño-Puigcercós, Paula Lozano, Judith Jacovkis and Lluís Parcerisa

Learning and mediation in the use of digital platforms in intergenerational families in Spain

Carlota Rodríguez, Mariana Largo, Gustavo Herrera and Sara Malo

Researchers from PlatFAMs are also involved in two other planned special issues, both as editors and article authors. One of them brings together research under the shared heading *The Platformisation of Family Life*. Here, Norwegian researchers contribute to five of the eight articles in the planned issue. The articles cover how family generations describe different media generations, what families say about closeness, care and communication, how they use streaming services, and family monitoring.

The second planned special issue describes its framework as *'doing' family life with digital platforms*. Here, too, there are articles under development that include PlatFAMs data.

This short report is based on insights from the planned articles.

PUBLICATIONS SO FAR:

Erstad, O., Hegna, K., Livingstone, S., Negru-Subtirica, O., & Stoilova, M. (2024). How digital technologies become embedded in family life across generations: Scoping the agenda for researching 'platform-ised relationality'. *Families, Relationships and Societies*, 13(2), 164-180.

Livingstone, S. and Sefton-Green, J. (2025) "The Platformization of the Family," in J. Sefton-Green, K. Mannell, and O. Erstad (eds.) *The Platformization of the Family: Towards a Research Agenda*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, pp. 7–23. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-74881-3_2.

Mannell, K., Hegna, K. and Stoilova, M. (2025) "The Home as a Site of Platformization," in J. Sefton-Green, K. Mannell, and O. Erstad (eds.) *The Platformization of the Family: Towards a Research Agenda*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, pp. 25–45. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-74881-3_3.

Mannell, K., Sefton-Green, J. and Erstad, O. (2025) "Conclusion: Towards Further Research into the Platformization of the Family," in J. Sefton-Green, K. Mannell, and O. Erstad (eds.) *The Platformization of the Family: Towards a Research Agenda*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, pp. 93–109. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-74881-3_6.

Membrive, A. and Miño-Puigcercós, R. (2024) "Researching the Platformization of the Family: Methodological Challenges," in J. Sefton-Green, K. Mannell, and O. Erstad (eds.) *The Platformization of the Family: Towards a Research Agenda*. Springer Nature Switzerland Cham, pp. 69–91. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-74881-3_5.

Miño-Puigcercós, R., Lozano-Mulet, P., & Esteban-Guitart, M. (2026). The platformization of formal and informal contemporary educational contexts. Opportunities, tensions and risks. *Digital Education Review*, (48), 1-3.

Miño-Puigcercós, R., Lozano-Mulet, P., Jacovkis, J., & Parcerisa, L. (2026). De la resignación individual a la acción colectiva. La alfabetización crítica de las familias ante la vigilancia de datos. *Digital Education Review*, (48), 55-68.

Pangrazio, L., Langton, K. and Siibak, A. (2025) "How the Family Makes Itself: The Platformization of Parenting in Early Childhood," in J. Sefton-Green, K. Mannell, and O. Erstad (eds.) *The Platformization of the Family: Towards a Research Agenda*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, pp. 47–68. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-74881-3_4.

Rodríguez-Silva, C., Sierra, M. L., Herrera-Urizar, G., & Cerrato, S. M. (2026). Aprendizajes y mediaciones en el uso de las plataformas digitales en familias intergeneracionales en España. *Digital Education Review*, (48), 16-35.

Sefton-Green, J. Mannell, K & Erstad, O. (2025) "Introduction," in J. Sefton-Green, K. Mannell, and O. Erstad (eds.) *The Platformization of the Family: Towards a Research Agenda*. Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland, pp. 1–6. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-74881-3_1.



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