



International Conference on Social Media & Society
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Panel Title: Selling play and perfection in the digital imaginaries of young people

Panelist:

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Objectives*

Describe the main objectives of the Tutorial/Workshop/Panel and how each presenter will contribute to the session and what the audience should expect to learn by attending your session.

Panel session of three papers that are thematically connected. Each of the three papers center young people and their families' engagement with social media.

Paper #1:

Family life on social media, social media in family life

Ana Jorge, Francisca Porfírio, Lidia Marôpo and Patrícia Dias

Social media platforms and smartphones are an integral part of everyday life for families. The home is a central environment where children and young people use digital media (Livingstone, 2011), and one in which relationships between parents and children shape, and are shaped by, the media (Chambers, 2016). This paper examines the role of digital media in families' leisure time and the interaction of children, parents and wider family, paying attention to the commercial, consumerist aspects. It does so by focusing (1) on representations of family life and

parenting on Instagram, by 10 Portuguese influencers and 10 ordinary parents; and (2) on home environments of 5 families, through ethnography (including observation and interviews).

Results show that sharenting appears to 'make family' and construct a positive sense of harmony. When sharing through social media to other parents, influencers and ordinary parents place a considerable focus on crucial moments about going out as a family, or celebrations, birthdays and holidays. Children are mainly depicted in fun, entertaining and joyful activities (from sport to cultural or artistic activities), often accompanied by their parents or siblings; they rarely appear to be spending their time in front of screens. Influencers performed an aspirational family lifestyle (travel; theatre; exclusive brand events). However, in the home environment the use of digital media by children is often a locus of tension and negotiation, which varies according to the age of children and the type of parental mediation. Digital media also appeared to support learning and a source to find new, offline hobbies (often involving buying specific products).

Paper #2:

Living with perfect bodies: the impact of influencers' brand communications on body care in adolescent

Beatriz Feijoo and Patricia Núñez-Gómez,

This paper aims to contribute to the reflection on how certain environmental factors affect the perception that individuals have of their own body, in particular the incidence of influencers and their promotions about products to take care of the physical image. Through qualitative focus groups with 55 Spanish teens (11- 17 years old), we explore various perceptions, including that participants do indeed take into account the products or advice offered by the influencers they follow. It was interesting to observe how minors avoid assessing their own feelings when viewing content where certain influencers boast about their physical appearance. Moreover, when referring to the bodies of influencers, they use terms such as "great body," "handsome," "slim," while the characterization of their own physique is much more modest, and the majority tend to describe themselves as "healthy" individuals. It is important to add that these adolescents are aware that exposure to perfect body content can be harmful to some people and may even affect self-esteem or create complexes.

In summary, our study underscores the substantial role of influencers, particularly among adolescents, in shaping satisfaction with the own body. Understanding these dynamics can inform and help to update interventions aimed at promoting positive body image in this age group that is closely related to their wellbeing.

Paper #3:

Influencer creep and the play of tween girls

Natalie Coulter

GRWM's (Get Ready With Me) seem to be everywhere on TikTok with Fortune magazine estimates of over 150 billion views on the genre. Many of these feature preteen girls, ring lights in their

bathrooms sharing how they get ready for school by putting on blushers and bronzers and talking to the camera mimicking the cadences and gestures of TikTok stars Alix Earle or Mikayla Nogueira.

In my ethnographic study of 15 preteen GRWM's I draw upon Sophie Bishop's notion of "influencer creep" (2022) arguing that the cultural pervasiveness of the influencer has moved well beyond the confined sites of social media and has become a key social and cultural form that shapes other cultural spaces. The cultural codes, the aesthetics and practices of influencer culture has bled beyond the just micro-celebrity practices of influencers, but to other cultural sites and forms such as children's play.

These videos are both forms of play and are moments of aspirational labour (Duffy year) that teases a promise of accruing social and/or economic capital. I argue that these videos encapsulate a collapsing of labour and play under the pressures of digital capitalism. This is an ideological shift whereby young people's play is not as sacred and protected, but an opportunity to be monetized. In the entrepreneurial contexts of GRWM, the play is not for play's sake or for its social and developmental advantages but instead a potential opportunity for commercialization by either selling advertising spots or that the play itself can be leveraged as paid moments for brand evangelization as sponsored content.

Significance and Relevance*

Describe the significance of the proposed topic and relevance to the conference main theme on Social Media and Society

Together the three papers on the panel, *Selling play and perfection in the digital imaginaries of young people*, forge a larger argument that teases out the tensions between young people's social media use and the pressures of commercialization. Together the papers question how the discursive cadences of social media content impact the lived experiences of young people and their families. As well as how the commercial affordances of social media shape the way that young people engage with the content.

But presenting these three papers in conversation with each other, our panel hopes to push for a broader understanding of how such social concepts of play and perfection are shaped by the digital imaginaries of young people under the pressures of digital capitalism.

Why a Tutorial/Workshop/Panel?*

Briefly explain why the proposed session should be delivered in this format, and what attendees will gain from participating.

These individual papers work more succinctly as a unit. While each paper focuses on a discrete social media context, together they are part of wider social trends. These themes are:

1. How the discursive cadences of social media content impact the lived experiences of young people and their families.

2. How the commercial affordances of social media shape the way that young people engage with the content.
3. How such social concepts of play and perfection are shaped by the digital imaginaries of young people in under the pressures of digital capitalism.

Logistics*

Describe how you plan to organize your session and who will lead/moderate the session. Also describe if you have any special equipment/software requirements.

Natalie Coulter will moderate the panel and ensure that each paper is kept short. At the start of the panel, Natalie will present three the key themes (listed above) that run through panels and remind the audience of these at the end of the panel to encourage a discussion that places the projects in dialogue with each other.

Interactivity*

Describe how attendees will be able to actively engage in the session.

There will be ample time left for discussion and attendees will be encouraged to consider the connections and points of juncture between the papers, and how the projects shape new directions in the ways we understand young people and their families' engagement with social media. As well as exploring how these understandings of young people and social media should influence how we consider social media as a whole.