Capable parents: Freedom of choice under the GDPR

A case study of families’ media literacy competencies

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ABSTRACT

An increasing number of Swedish children have access to connected media devices and as the European Union General Data Protection Regulation will soon be implemented, on May 25th, 2018, it creates new options for parents. The GDPR suggests that parents will have greater freedoms to manage children’s data. However, this thesis questions that notion with governmentality theory and investigate how these choices will be met by the parents. Previous research propose that media literacy is the ability to access, evaluate and create messages that better reflect citizens’ realities, carrying hopes of democratisation. The accounts of five Swedish families portray an absence of adequate media literacy competencies to manage children’s online safety, regarding commercial data processing. Not only revealing difficulties in complying with the GDPR, but also that media literacy competencies alone would not make the families interviewed more engaged in changing habits regarding their privacy. Indicating that the parents equated GDPR to obsolete choices, where partial or full opt-out would cause a greater menace than the commodification of children’s data.

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Capable parents: Freedom of choice under the GDPR – A case study of families’ media literacy competencies

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

GDPR — General data protection regulation
EU — European Union
UN CRC — United Nations Convention of the Right of the Child

LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Data Subject — The natural person utilizing services and goods, while personal data is being processed
Data controller — The actor mandating processing of data
Objective data — Anonymous data gathered to form massive intelligence about large groups
Subjective data — Personal data gathered to individualise and direct specific services and experiences
Profiling — To gather subject data and form services accordingly
Processing — To gather and manage data
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1. INTRODUCTION

Games are, incontestably, an integral part of childhood. New worlds and experiences can be found in our digital fantasies and as many social media services and gaming applications ‘seem free’ to use, it is easier than ever to access spaces for leisure. Although, ‘free’, in this instance, means personal information traded in exchange for content and services. Reactions, and navigations – behaviours – created by users most often thinking about anything else but their commodification into ‘big data’, a holistic term for our digital everyday lives gathered for commercial and societal intelligence (Fuchs, 2012; Beer & Burrows, 2013; Bolin & Andersson Schwartz, 2015). This commodification is found everywhere, from health tracking clocks and pregnancy applications to classrooms, where pupils are mandated to follow their learning curves through various commercial platforms (Lupton & Williams, 2017). Student’s may even take their class assignments to their private social media accounts, such as ‘Facebook groups’, to seek each other’s assistance (Arteaga Sánchez, Cortijo & Javed, 2013).

Young children playing and learning, on the other hand, do not notice their trades with commercial forces, they are developing their identities. And giving away their fantasies. Their private information can then be used to manipulate users. Not only to increase consumption through direct marketing, but with strategies to increase commercial gains by nudging consumers into political opinions better suited for the corporations. The personal data accumulated is utilized by corporations and their partners, studied to maximize revenues (boyd & Crawford, 2012; Andrejevic, 2014; Kitchin, 2014; Brunton & Nissenbaum; 2015).

Hence, it is important that parents make sense of and consent to terms of service to make sure that their children’s rights are not being violated. But, are they? According to the Children’s Commissioner for England (Afia et al., 2017), integrity policies and terms of service are hard to understand for most adults, even specialists in the field, and nearly impossible for children. Alas, the European Union’s General Data Protection Regulation (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679) is presented as a reinforcement of citizens’ rights. Carrying options that will grant users greater control over their personal data, both online and offline, assuring that terms are going to be written in plain language,
specifically regarding services directed at children, that even a thirteen-year-olds should be able to understand. Enforcing the right to access, where users will be allowed to access, move and remove information about themselves that is used for direct marketing, or might be untrue or outdated. Also, instigating a system of certification, where users have a greater ability to categorise and recognise which data controllers implement terms best suited to their ideals. Under the present regulation (PuL, Personuppgiftslagen SFS 1998:204) any child can consent to their own usage, provided they understand the terms, though an age limit of fifteen is recommended for commercial services by the Swedish data protection authority (Datainspektionen, n.d.). Albeit, the GDPR suggests that there should be a sixteen-year age restriction for consent by children, though, allowing member states to move the restriction to thirteen-year-olds at its lowest if the terms and policies are formatted in languages suitable for the perceived maturity of the children.

This regulation assumes that parents are literate enough to understand complex structures of commercial data processing and make informed choices regarding their children’s data. Hence, the relation between being media literate and the capability to break norms within children’s online privacy and integrity need to be investigated further through theories of governmentality. Therefore, parents’ child right ideals and media competencies will be identified and evaluated to review their ability to comply with the GDPR. Because, with all the knowledge at their feet (policies and certificates) and the future in their hands (media devices), these parents are going to have to make their choices on May 25th, 2018, when the GDPR is implemented.


INTRODUCTION

1.1. RESEARCH AIM

The overall aim of this study is to understand how governmentality theory can explain how media literacy relates to families’ responsibilities over children’s online safety under the impending European Union General Data Protection Regulation.

To obtain the main objective, the focus of this thesis will be to assess the capabilities of 5 families to ensure that their children’s data is treated according to their child right ideals, by:

- Identifying which circumstances surrounds parents as providers of participation and protection in commercial children’s media.

- Critically evaluating how the parents’ media competencies relate to their ideals regarding child rights.

- Outline which measures the families perceive as most beneficial for the safety of children’s digital lives under the GDPR.
1.2. RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE AND BACKGROUND

To begin with, the definition of a child may be phrased differently depending on the context. In this thesis, a child is any human below the age of 18, based on the Convention of the Right of the Child (UN CRC, 2005). While interviewing the parents the children will be regarded as multidimensional beings, going through a cognitive development. Admittedly, children’s need for security has changed throughout the ages. Considering the pervasive and persuasive technologies of today, it is important to recognize both the gains and the losses children face when changes are being done to their everyday lives. It is also important to note that commercial media has strengthened the image of children as independent actors on the market. Making the commercial context a great part of children’s identity work. A context in which children are often viewed as both victims and active users (Takahashi, 2015; Longacre et al., 2016). Hence, raising questions about commercial actors’ and governmental agents’ responsibilities towards children. Therefore, many inquiries regarding the commercial parts of childhood has resided within a negative sphere, focusing on how to protect children and not giving the child’s right to access and participation any, or enough thought (Livingstone et al., 2017).

Furthermore, technology must be understood by the parents, since they are the primary protectors and the provider of children, according to the UN CRC (2005). Wherein, they are mandated to make difficult choices about their children’s digital welfare. Including being literate within fields that they don’t necessarily find interesting. Yet, in our digital society, most adults are not equipped to face the challenges of internet privacy and integrity (Livingstone et al., 2017; Afia et al., 2017). In this thesis, it is assumed that the gap between parents, institutions and regulations regarding child data, regarding information about children’s online safety is what keeps parents from being invested in their children’s digital safety.

1.2.1. A BRIEF SUMMARY OF BIG DATA

How dangerous can children’s digital lives become? Lupton and Williams’ (2017: 3) propose that parents begin the commercial ‘dataveillance’ (authors term for online tracking) of children while they are still in the uterus, via pregnancy application and
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alike, and lay the foundation for their children's digital lives. Our digital personas are described as immersive, continuous and longitudinal; shared between various parties and serves as a map for future interventions into users' lives. To further exemplify this, the authors list the applications and toys that contribute to this datafication of childhood, including wristbands (a.k.a. smart clocks) that encourage activity, gaming applications for toddlers that measure their interaction and dolls that listen and respond to verbal interaction. However, it is not only the devices, games and applications that parents appropriate at home that collect data about their children, there are also commercial learning applications implemented at schools to enforce communication between parents and teachers (Lupton & Williams, 2017: 6). The encouraged interaction becomes a way for both governmental and commercial establishments to learn more about children's behaviours, to benefit children's health and cognitive performance or for commercial purposes such as direct marketing (Lupton & Williams, 2017: 5).

The gathering of data, direct marketing and algorithmic modification of products and services based on our behaviours, is gathered under the term 'big data'. It consists of both data we intentionally produce and our by-products, 'social data' (Beer & Burrows, 2014). All this information can be used in various ways, ranging from algorithmic predictions of citizens' behaviour in new infrastructures or to calculate advertisement strategies (Brunton & Nissenbaum; 2015; Andrejevic, 2014; Kitchin, 2014). Locations are being logged for every activity for corporations to measure our daily routines; what we want, depending on where and when we are in certain areas. Of course, it is possible to abstain from using such devices, but the social stigma and inconveniences makes the avoidance a menace. Andrejevic (2014) notes, that there is no viable way of trying to control our data and claim some sort of ownership, because the information is too big for any individual to store.

Boyd and Crawford (2012), too, point out the power inequality between ‘big data rich’ and ‘big data poor’, where corporations, nation states, and universities represent the primary category, whom can make deductions based on analyses of massive data-sets, while the everyday data subjects are part of the latter. The ‘big data poor’ do not have access to the data about themselves, many lack sufficient knowledge to understand that they are being commodified, and they are most seemingly unable to do anything
about the gathering of their data (boyd & Crawford, 2012). Considering the power of having ‘big data’ it is important to recognise that data about hundreds, thousands and millions of people is still not equivalent to being able to predict or assume the truth about individuals (boyd & Crawford, 2011; Andrejevic, 2014). Brunton and Nissenbaum (2015) put a certain emphasis on the “we don’t know” (57) of ‘big data’. Representing the whole information asymmetry between corporations, governments and citizens. There is little to no concrete information about where our data is sent and how it is being used. In addition, integrity policies are continuously updated – asking users to confirm new terms. Hence, users are not only supposed to understand the often-obfuscated texts, they should also have time to read the changes. Herein resistance is equated to exhaustion for those inclined. Brunton and Nissenbaum (2015) suggest that “they [data controllers] will make predictions, accurate or inaccurate, which will be used to make decisions and produce coercive outcomes, and people will be punished or rewarded for things they have not yet done” (59). Hence, scenarios of how data could be used both for positive and negative purposes is presented during the interviews. According to ‘praxis intervention’, this may help the participants imagine the possible benefits and perils of commercial processing of children’s data and how it can affect them as future adults (Madhu, 2011). Hence, ‘big data’ must be lifted into political discussions on how corporations and institutions should be able to use data, wherein the European Union General Data Protection Reform comes of interest for this thesis.
2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH

Acknowledging how parent’s view children’s media habits allows for an investigation of what parents deem beneficial and harmful, and how they define online safety. Admittedly, both regulation and academic studies of the digital childhood resides within a field of ideals regarding provision, participation, and protection. Livingstone & Third (2017: 662) suggest that parents are the primary providers and gatekeepers for participation, which they define as positive rights wherein child autonomy and agency is achieved. Whereas protection is traditionally seen as governmental restrictions, themed as negative rights (Livingstone & Third, 2017: 662). By supplying children with technologies and services, parents are providing them with tools to participate. Although, to participate, parents also need to allow their children to access platforms on devices where they can be heard and meet others. To better understand how children’s rights are being utilized by the parents, Livingstone & Third’s (2017) definition of provision, participation and protection will be presented and then related to Mihailidis (2014) media competencies.

2.1. PROVIDING AUTONOMY

Livingstone and Third (2017) propose that research on child rights in a digital age is moving further into the idea of childhood being fluent between online and offline. Suggesting that media devices and services should be perceived as tools that aid children’s manifestations and formation of their identities as well as platforms that might pose risks to vulnerable children (Livingstone & Third, 2017: 662). In earlier works Livingstone (1998) argues that the media children engage with during their leisure time should not be considered a sole inducer on their persona but rather understood as a contextual development that depends on peer influence as well as the entertainment system in the Livingroom:

“watching television means something different to the child with nothing else to do compared with the child who has a PC at home or friends knocking on the door”
– Livingstone, 1998: 441
The media parents provide their children should therefore be viewed as some of the many sides of the prism through which children construct their self. Depending on who they interact with, both online and physically, it will affect their identity formation variously. Hence, the questions of interest are: What media are parents providing their children? How are they accessing media? Alone or with parents/friends/siblings? Why do they provide certain media? Why not? The answers must be understood according to perceived media effects, suggesting that the extendedness of children’s autonomy reflects the parents’ values concerning online safety.

Looking back, children have always used games as a catharsis for leisure, stress-relief, and constructing individuality. When playing they could take greater risks exploring their identities, since it would be on pretend and the consequences would appear less severe (Sutton-Smith, 1997). The same notion can be found in their digital gaming habits. Jones (2008) suggests that children might even partake in more violent and brutal content when using media than they would in actual play situations with friends, since the mediated play would safely relieve them from anxieties provoked by their environment or the sheer fright of the common, yet for them, unknown experiences like beginning first grade, moving away, having a dying relative, first signs of puberty, and alike. Hence, their behaviour in games or viewing habits might be beneficial for their social development rather than a sign of aggressiveness or recklessness.

In a Swedish investigation, parents’ opinions about children’s digital media use was studied in a broader sense, considering children’s media landscapes in general (Statens Medieråd [The Swedish media council], 2017). Parents’ concerns for time consumption, unhealthy content and unwanted encounters online were listed as highly prioritised. The authors found that parents generally worried more about girls, nine- to twelve-year-olds, being sexually abused online compared to boys (Statens Medieråd, 2017: 25). Although, parents seemed gradually worry more about gaming boys as they grew older and their gaming time prolonged. Both in this report and in an earlier study by Andersson, Christofferson & Dalquist (2016) on behalf of the Swedish media council, parents had linked long hours of gaming to what they perceived as an ‘addiction’, which they believed would turn, predominantly, teenaged boys into social deviants (Statens
Medieråd, 2017: 25). The ‘addiction’ was portrayed as steeling time from sleep and school work, leading to concentration difficulties and making it harder for children to keep up with their everyday social lives. Recognising both the beneficial and harmful aspects of children’s media habits, based on parents’ perceptions, will highlight how parents value the right to provision.

2.2. PRIORITISED PARTICIPATION

New media devices and platforms has changed our role as consumers from being the end of the value chain to that of part producers. Consumers are continuously materialising their individual and collective realities, hence, the capability of the parents to control their children’s data and understanding what that data is part of must be considered while discussing the idea of participation. Scholars, such as Beer and Burrows (2013) and Jenkins (2006; et al., 2016), propose that the internet provides a democratisation of societies, giving users a channel for individualisation. Kücklich (2005), on the other hand, more cautiously explore the ambiguity of ‘modifying gamers’ (users modify existing content in games). Suggesting that a mixture of play and labour must be reckoned both as contributions to fantasy worlds as well as a harvest of users’ creativity. The children of the families’ in this study, however, are not active modifiers in this sense, they are passive muses of the media industry. The algorithmic application of their behaviours data can modify their experience individually. Therein, one could argue that the children are participating in forming content and services, although, not as candidly as writing code to change the colour of the main characters’ clothes. This unpaid contribution to gaming corporations and brands could be perceived as an expansion of their favourite fantasy worlds, thereby giving something emotional in return, which Beer and Burrows (2013) and Jenkins (2006; et al., 2016) propose. During the analysis, it will be of interest to identify whether the parents view their children’s data as an addition to their fantasy worlds that will benefit them emotionally and educationally, or if it will be discussed as an exploitation of their creativity in order to produce and sell more content. Suggesting whether they see commercial processing of children’s data a fair trade for the participation rights ideal.
Moving on towards more candid participation, Livingstone, Ólafsson and Staksrud (2013) propose that children from the age of twelve show greater tendencies towards setting up social media accounts, which the authors explain as a consequence of most platforms allowing members from the age of thirteen. To the authors surprise, most of the children between the ages of eleven and sixteen whom had been banned from social media platforms by their parents complied with their restrictions. But among the young users of social media, Livingstone, Ólafsson and Staksrud’s (2013) data showed that children of countries that had implemented internet technologies later also had the least privacy settings activated on their profiles, suggesting that the potential harms of social media might not have fully spread among those societies. In comparison, children from the Nordic countries were the ones with the strictest privacy settings with 91 per cent private profiles in Finland at the top and 86 per cent in Denmark at its lowest, these were also the countries where Facebook was the most used social media platform. Considering the various social media platforms in their study, the authors propose that differences in the format of privacy settings could not explain the difference of awareness between the countries (Livingstone, Ólafsson and Staksrud’s, 2013: 311). Bear in mind, it was only asked whether they had changed the settings according to what they would disclose to the public, rather than what information the social media companies would be able to collect from the children.

2.3. PROTECTIONIST RIGHTS

Many countries striving to uphold the UN CRC experience issues in providing children the possibility to be engaged participants of our societies while at the same time protecting them from online perils (Bulger et al, 2017: 2f). Risks and perils have had a tendency of becoming intertwined and translated into ‘what will happen online’, rather than considered as specific irregularities within the complexity online devices and platforms hold (Bulger et al, 2017: 3). Hence, many governmental restrictions were based on incidents where a child (or children) was found abused through internet channels, and the legal apparatus responded by inhibiting children from participating as an answer to a negative public reaction (Bulger et al, 2017: 5f). Bulger et al (2017: 5f) studied the legislatives of the European union, United States of America, and South Africa, and their
results showed that the regulations seemed to be contradicting. The authors note that precedent issues had urged contradicting restrictions, both legislative and technical (content filters and age verification processes), resulting in an overriding of children’s freedom of expression, in favour of their ‘perceived protection’.

Both Jones (2008) family accounts, Swedish surveys (Statens Medieråd, 2017) and interviews with parents (Andersson, Christofferson & Dalquist, 2016) indicate that content censorship and ‘media curfew’ is commonplace in most households to protect children from perceived perils, such as becoming socially deviant, sexually abused or violent. Fears that are not thoroughly scientifically grounded. Andersson, Christofferson and Dalquist (2016) suggest that harmful media effects must be treated as three intertwined fields; harmful content, harmful communication and harmful conduct (screen time, for example). Alike Livingstone and Third (2017), they enter the issue from a perspective where children can be vulnerable to certain aspects of each field, rather than being naturally vulnerable.

Livingstone & Third (2017: 4) suggest that moves to criminalising children’s and teenager’s sexual ventures online is a sign of potential childhood perils and digital risks being merged into one. As argued above, Sutton-Smith’s (1997), Livingstone (1998), Livingstone and Third (2017), and Jones’ (2008) observations propose that children and teenagers use media to form their identity in a media environment where risks occur. It is up to parents and regulators to decide whether risk equals exclusion or platform adaptation to children’s needs. When regulation accords protectionist ideals, adult rights on the internet are positioned as something in contrast to the needs of children, and adult rights end up prioritised higher (Livingstone & Third, 2017: 662). Hence, the internet is preserved as a space for adults. Thereby, children or those representing them are silenced, rather than making internet a safer space for children.

There is a discussion on whether the regulative appropriation of children’s access to new media is a turn for democratisation or bureaucratisation of childhood (Livingstone, 1998: 14). Arguably, the GDPR could be perceived as a step towards bureaucratisation, suggesting that regulations are used to constrain children’s access rather than making the technologies more child safe. These insights are important to include, since the families’ opinions upon the regulation of children’s online safety might be different.
according to how much influence they allow their children to have over their gaming habits.

2.4. Intervention and Skills

To recognize how the child rights ideals are utilized and reproduced by the parents, the analysis will focus upon their media competencies. These skills have been defined variously within the field of media literacy research. Maintaining one definition, Mihailidis (2014) ‘5 media competencies’ will be applied in the analysis. The competencies consist of certain points that Mihailidis (2014: 61ff) finds important for members of a community to achieve to become active media literate citizens. Firstly, there is the ability to curate, meaning to have the skills to organise information and gather content in an understandable and structured format. What Mihailidis and Cohen’s (2013) theoretical discussion of curation found is that organising information does not only consist of societal information and news, it also includes users’ individual information. Suggesting that it also demands that citizens know what information about them is accessed by data controllers; such as their friend lists on social media platforms, personal profile presentations and CV uploaded to job search platforms, to name a few (Mihailidis & Cohen, 2013). Recognising that the information accumulated about a person is a piece of one’s story; that it is an important part of how others – people, states, and corporations – perceive one. A part of this is the parents’ ability to recognize how their children’s data accumulation is a step towards giving corporations information about who their children are, information that is gathered through algorithms that might not be able to fully comprehend the complex person their child is. Algorithms that will treat children according to stereotype categories manufactured by programmers. Their habits and motives for curating children’s data will be connected to provision, participation and protection ideals, recognising if, how and why the parents enforce these.

Secondly, critique is found to be the capacity to question the truthfulness of information and recognising reliable sources. Mihailidis (2014) takes note of Bartlett and Miller’s (2011) report on youths’ issues with finding truthful content online and points
out that critique should not be used for negative critiquing only, but to have a sensible scepticism towards proprietorship and economic or political incentives in combination with verifiable facts gathered by being able to curate. Fuchs (2012) argued against this ability, pointing out that it would be impossible to stay critical on a commercial platform, since those platforms would probably alter the feed of the information in ways that would obscure the facts. Manipulation will be visited during the interviews, making it is possible to access information about what the parents find interesting regarding their perceived need to be critical and what conclusions about perils and benefits they reach. For example, allowing the child to play games while having an open discussion about possible hazards, the parents might signal that they trust their children’s capabilities and attribute them maturity. In contrast, restricting access because of the same hazards could be interpreted as the enforcement of the children’s negative rights; following protectionist ideals.

Thirdly, being able to contribute, suggesting that vocal members of a community are actively forming their reality by “fuelling the group’s position, connectivity and vibrancy” (Mihailidis, 2014: 63). Hence, one could argue that parents verbalizing their concerns for children’s online safety amongst their network contribute to a status quo about what actions are necessary to perform as a parent currently. Depending on how the surroundings react to the parents’ contributions to the communal dialogue about children’s data, the meaning of commercial processing could be interpreted differently. An unconscious collaboration could be the result of contributions that lead to norms of negligence regarding perils of commercial data processing. Contribution should in this instance not be regarded as a question of how eager the parents are to contribute to their networks, but what notions they find in their networks within the discourse of child data safety, and why – connected to curation and critique.

Thereby and fourthly, citizens must collaborate with their network and round up behind issues to achieve change. Again, illustrating how the different skills depend on one another. Vocalizing one’s thoughts and concerns within the group demands common grounds for joint efforts. Mihailidis (2014: 63) uses examples ranging from crowdfunding to tackling issues with local organisations where the common ground (fundraising for a fanfiction book or protesting a municipality decision) opens for others
to join in on the cause. Collaboration, Mihailidis (2014: 63) proposes, inspire civic engagement. If a parent in this study would participate in an active collaboration for their children’s benefit, be it within online safety or elsewhere, it would suggest that they, as seen with the groups studied by Mihailidis (2014), could change their situation as a collective. Parents that do not perceive their friends as being concerned might believe that ‘big data’ does not pose a problem for children. Therefore, parents are asked to present how they have engaged with their networks. Recognising what collaboration, the parents identify as more prevalent and affective, will lead the investigation in how they utilize their children’s rights collectively.

Fifthly, and finally, the citizens need to be able to create their own messages. This aspect involves both the creative and the practical components of reaching an audience. Lessing (2008) points out that the tools for creation are far less complicated today than previously, both accounting technologies and publication platforms. Lessing (2008) uses the term RW (short for read/write) which could be compared to Mihailidis (2014: 62) curate and create. Today’s media makes it possible for new creators to access and ‘read’ information in new and simpler ways, in this case this might imply watching a meme or listening to a podcast instead of having to read a 1000-word-article with overtly formal language. They can then translate that information into a new message, that they present through channels most comfortable for them to use. Mihailidis (2014: 64) findings show that creators not only learn how to operate platforms and technologies they have at hand, they also need to creatively format their messages. Accounting for the less clear appliance of creation, the parents’ activities towards changing their children’s privacy settings could be interpreted as a way of creating an individual message to data controllers about what parents perceive as rightful processing of children’s data. The inclination to create change in privacy settings will be discussed regarding what that message might imply according to the parents’ relation to expertise in regulative politics, certification, and informed consent.
3. THEORY

Recognising the advancement of governmentality theory within media literacy, this chapter will first define how governmentality may explain the structural fundament from which the parents are performing their media literacy competencies. These competencies will then be investigated as a tool for the parents’ capability to break norms regarding commercial data processing and utilize their rights under the General Data Protection Reform.

3.1. GOVERNMENTALITY

Values and opinions are constructs based on the beholders perceived reality. Hence, when investigating the families’ relation to provision, participation and protection, it is important to recognize that their situation is based on what they perceive as harmful and beneficial for their children. According to governmentality theory, their perceptions are based on norms within their surroundings regarding how to foster healthy children. To explain their motives, governmentality will be applied using Foucault’s (1978/1991) understanding of the theory. By combining governance and rationality he defined governmentality as an explanation of the ongoing organisation of power, where “the state is no more than a composite reality and a mythicized abstraction, whose importance is a lot more limited than many of us think” (Foucault, 1978/1991: 103). In other words, citizens’ perceived ability to change their situations are based on their view of what norms are dominating combined with their incentives towards creating change. Thereby, one can argue that the parents’ media competencies, ideals, and self-estimation of their children’s online safety might portray their ability and perceived need to change their reality.

Knowledge allows the parents to access a governmental discourse regarding commercial data processing, but it needs to be instigated by motives. This motivation is known as ‘rationale’ in Foucault’s (Gordon, 1991) work. In this study, it is assumed that this rationale is a combination of their relation towards their children, towards corporations and towards government, regarding children’s online safety, as well as
practical obstacles such as time constrain in their everyday lives. A rationale in these families could be that parents are concerned about their children’s online safety, recognising potential online abuse or commercial tracking as harmful but they lack time to moderate their children’s usage and therefore restrict use of online devices according to protectionist ideals. Similarly, a family with predominantly autonomous children could have a rationale towards a less protectionist parental style. This might be due to parents feeling exhausted by their children’s gaming demands, found online participation harmless, or deemed that their children were mature enough to act in manners that would not potentially harm their future juridical person.

3.1.1. MEDIA LITERACY

In a short summary of ‘media literacy’, Livingstone (2004) motivates its educational value as a means for a democratic dialogue. Just as print literacy is and has been an integral part of the construction of societies, should we also consider media literacy. This is based on the ideal that knowledge is the solution to difficult questions threatening our democracy. The notion of educating away ignorance is not a new idea, it has changed throughout times and have had different strategies and motives in various places (Mihailidis, 2014: 32f). But it revolves around making new media and communication technologies understandable for the common people, while at the same time urging citizens to be engaged and participating themselves.

If the parents of this study have a rationale to change their habits or start a movement to change regulations, they must also have the same access to information, that governments, institutions, and corporations have about commercial data processing. Foucault’s (1977/1995: 58) theory posits that by being able to see – having knowledge about the processing of data – the actors are invited into the formulation of norms regarding children’s online safety. Hence, returning to media literacy and the ability to understand terms of service. In a capitalistic structure with an array of choices literate citizens are expected to make healthier life choices, and increase their class mobility (Druick, 2016: 1127). Conversely, Druick (2016: 1127f) argues that Foucault’s quote in ‘The history of sexuality: Vol 1. An introduction’ where he compares literacies to a “controlled insertion of bodies into the machinery of production and the adjustment of the phenomenon of population to economic processes” was critique towards the
idealisation of literate citizens. It should rather have been seen as a means of governing people into taking their places within the capitalistic system, claims Druick (2016: 1128). Thereby, one could interpret literacy as a means of schooling citizens into becoming consumers that make choices rather than oppose the choices given. Druick (2016: 1135) refers to “supervised freedom”, described in ‘Culture and government: The emergence of literary education’ by Hunter in 1988, claiming that the choices citizens are given are illusions of freedom, a perceived increase in autonomy. Of course, this argument overlooks the demands for critical thinking. It suggests that being able to choose can be translated into ‘you have a choice, therefore you must choose something’, rather than ‘you have the choice to oppose’.

Hence, the level of the parents’ media literacy depends not only on their media competencies, it also rests upon their rationale for modifying their situation according to their values. By asking them about how they recognise their abilities and motives behind moderating their children’s online safety, it is possible to see what reality they base their decisions on and how that correlate with their new choices under the GDPR. By understanding what their content is a part of, citizens can dictate the course of their digital societies. As already visited, Mihailidis (2014) pose media literacy as an integral means for creating more engaged citizens, who make use of their technologies to create civic change. This engagement is presumed to shift power relations, by being able to use various media languages and by recognizing the abilities technology hold citizens gain autonomy in their daily lives. Thus, the parents of this study should be able to curate, critique, contribute to, collaborate within and create circumstances revolving their children’s online safety to be considered media literate. Recognising the competencies, the parents have, will not only estimate their ability to utilize their rights, it also shines a light upon what norms they follow regarding commercial data processing and whether they are in a situation where they can break those norms.
4. RESEARCH METHOD AND MATERIAL

Returning to the research focus, interviews were implemented to investigate the circumstances surrounding parents as they navigate their children’s online safety. Hence, the selection process and a description of the participants, will be presented. The interview questions and intervention praxis will then be defined and motivated. To reach the overall aim, which is to further the understanding of media literacy with theories of governmentality, a hermeneutic analysis is outlined, regarding how the parents’ child right ideals and their media competencies connect to the choices the EU GDPR will confront them with. Closing with a statement about the research ethics applied in this study.

4.1. SELECTION

An ethnographic approach was implemented for finding the participants, following three topics: ‘time’, ‘people’ and ‘context’. Time affects not only the researcher but the participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007: 35ff), hence, the willingness of the families to participate had to be measured against their workload and practical issues they faced upon inviting a stranger into their homes. Pilot interviews unveiled that the parents had low interest in participating more than once and they reacted reluctantly towards reading additional information before the interviews. Hence a lighter approach was applied where the interviews were prolonged from 1 hour to 2 hours and only performed once, but with follow-up correspondence during the analysis, when needed.

People determines what participants will be included in the study. Families living in Sweden with children in the Swedish school and preschool were chosen as part of the ‘observer-identified category’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 37f). To find participants within several socio-economic classes and within various work careers, the application was posted on buy and sell groups on Facebook, including both a student neighbourhood group and a regional group where members were specifically invited as ‘trusted buyers/sellers’. In addition, personal contacts were asked to see if their friends with children would consider participating.
Which brings the sampling discussion into the last topic, context. Recognising that the parents might be more comfortable sharing in some spaces rather than others, the interviews were facilitated in places they found comfortable, both actual (homes and cafés) and virtual spaces (video/sound-conference).

### 4.2. About the Participants

Families living in Sweden, regardless of national background were sought, since their children are lawfully compelled to attend Swedish schools which are using games and applications on connected devices¹. This usage is mandated in the curricula as a part of understanding information and communication technology (Sveriges Riksdag, 2016). In recent polls, the Swedish media council (Statens Medieråd, 2015) found that 96 percent of all Swedish sixteen-year-olds used internet in 2014 on their smart phones, four years earlier the very same poll only showed 6 percent with access. Their data, of approximately 1600 respondents, shows that amongst nine- to twelve-year-olds closer to 50 percent now own their own tablets (Statens Medieråd, 2015: 6). Slowly decreasing among older participants. Although younger children and infants do not own their own tablets in the same extent, 67 percent of all two- to four-year-olds have access at home (Statens Medieråd, 2015: 9). Among the zero- to one-year-olds, 26 percent were playing games on tablets (Statens Medieråd, 2015: 10).

Tablet use by five- to eight-year-olds had the highest percentage of parents being “never” involved, though this group only included 5 percent of the respondents of this category (Statens Medieråd, 2015: 28). Closer to 95 percent of the respondents were either present “often” (18 percent), “rarely” (43 percent) or “more rarely” (26 percent). Moreover, parents seem to have a great faith in state legislation regarding the safety of children’s media use, at approximately 70 percent, although they emphasise parents’ role as the foremost protector, at approximately 90 percent. The report does not explain the raise in parents’ concerns regarding the lack of protective measures online (a raise in 22 percent units in two years, Statens Medieråd, 2015: 48), but considering research on

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¹ In this instance tablets and smartphones are assumed to be the most common connected devices
media and information literacy it could possibly be an effect of growing discussions in society about the importance of being vigilant online.

The families interviewed in this study had children in ages ranging from two to eighteen. Questions regarding children’s data were focused primarily on the pre-pubertal children who still had a greater reliance on their parents for accessing games and devices.

4.2.1. FAMILY 1

The first family consisted of a mother, father, daughter (12) and two sons (15 and 18). Only the mother participated during the interview. She worked as a preschool teacher and described the family as part of the higher middle class. They were living in a two-story row-house in a suburban of Stockholm. Their technical resources were two stationary gaming computers (although one was temporarily out of order), individual laptops and smartphones for every family member, several tablets, and more than one gaming console. Their self-estimated technology competence was limited to resolving minor internet connection problems. Both parents were born in Sweden. And had Swedish born parents.

Disposable income: 50.000 to 60.000 SEK/month.

4.2.2. FAMILY 2

The second family consisted of a mother, father, son (2) and daughter (5). Both parents attended the interview. The mother worked as a construction engineer and the father as a client manager at a logistics company. They described themselves as somewhere between low and high middleclass and lived in a two-story house suburban of Stockholm. Their technical resources included two tablets (both temporarily out of order), individual laptops for the parents and several gaming consoles. When experiencing technical disruptions, they would solve most software issues themselves, but would rather buy cheap new or second-hand devices instead of repairing their hardware. Both parents were born in Sweden and had Swedish born parents.
RESEARCH METHOD AND MATERIAL

Disposable income: 50,000 to 60,000 SEK/month.

4.2.3. FAMILY 3

The third family consisted of a mother, father, a daughter (4) and a son (8). The father was the one interviewed, he worked as a sales manager at a media company. He described the family as a part of the higher middleclass and were living in a two-storey house in a small village with barely 900 inhabitants in Västra Götaland County. Their technical resources included individual smartphones for every family member, plus one to spare, and one functional tablet, besides two laptops used by the parents. They described themselves as technically competent in some degree, wherein they would solve minor software issues but would ask better equipped friends for help with tougher problems. Both parents were born in Sweden, although one parent of the mother was born in Turkey.

Disposable income: 40,000 to 50,000 SEK/month.

4.2.4. FAMILY 4

The fourth family consisted of a mother and her son (12). She compared the family’s socio-economic situation to that of the working class, although the mother was currently a full-time student and part-time nurse. Their technical resources were individual smartphones for the mother and the son, access to tablets via the son’s school, a gaming computer for the son and a laptop used primarily by the mother. They viewed themselves as not very technically competent and would buy new devices if their current broke. The family lives in Stockholm county and mother was born in Sweden, but her parents were Finish.

Disposable income: 15,000 SEK/month

4.2.5. FAMILY 5

The fifth family consisted of a mother, father and daughter (2). Both parents participated in the interview. They described their living situation to a working-class
family, although, both were studying full-time. Their technical resources included two individual smartphones for the parents and one laptop which they would share. They noted that their daughter might have had access to tablets occasionally at their preschool, but were not sure. They viewed themselves as moderately technically competent, and would solve minor issues with internet connection. Depending on the cost, they would either repair or buy new devices if some of them broke. Both the mother and her parents were born in Sweden and the father was born in Senegal and had moved to Sweden as an adult.

Disposable income: Would not disclose their income.

4.3. INTERVIEWS

The participants were interviewed with a praxis intervention method combined with semi structured questions. The interviews measured up to approximately 2 hours for each session, besides two families participating in the pilot study who were interviewed twice à 1 hour. A microphone was used to recall the interviews. The recordings were then summarized except for specific quotes that were added as examples in the analysis chapter. In those segments, phonetic variations were mimicked and translated to preserve the nuances that were possible to transfer to written format.

Open-ended questions were administered as seemed fitting during the interview, and the questions were divided into segments which decided the organization of the interview (Appendix A). These segments were descriptive summaries of the questions to come, for example, “Current media consumption” including questions regarding their taste in movies, reading of newspapers and books, etc., the “Current financial and technological recourses and competences”, regarding the state of their technical devices and technological skills and “Concerns regarding children’s digital welfare” focusing on sub fields such as hacker-attacks, commodification and manipulation. The themes were then followed with scenarios describing the possible consequences of both the processing of their own and their children’s data, mixed with follow up questions that paved new paths.
4.4. **Praxis Intervention**

In sum, the parents were at first more focused on how online content, communication and conduct might harm or benefit children rather than the commercial use of child data. This was certainly prominent before the information about ‘big data’ and the GDPR was inserted into the conversation. Commercial data processing in games and services targeted at children appeared to be a new concept for the parents to consider. Hence, leading the interviews to explore the parents’ thoughts on the matter at an early stage.

To explain data processing and the oncoming GDPR, the interview guide was inspired by ‘praxis intervention’ were the researcher’s goal is to inspire the participants to make conclusions based on scenarios lifted by the interviewer to provoke the participants into challenging current norms (Madhu, 2011). Praxis intervention is described, by Madhu (2011), as a tool for participants to recognise their habitus. Thus, the self-reflexions of the interviewees help them realise their own patterns and how they can be broken. This method it specifically applied at groups that may be unaware about their vulnerability based on their inability to identify risks and harms. Recognising the results of the pilot interviews the parents were not literate in the new digital market and its terms, making them and their children possible victims of commercial exploitation.

The intervention was composed of the general knowledge about ‘big data’, what legislative limits and liberties there are, and how that might be applied to children’s data. Suggesting, for example, that an increase in data processing could make commercial interactions more individually tuned to users’ needs, while explaining that this individualised experience is based on algorithmic discrimination that could affect their children’s future credit scores, prospects of employment and insurance premiums. Moving on to questions regarding consent of terms, where the participants themselves could contribute with ideas about what it implies, why it might or might not be needed and how it should be achieved. Consent proved to be a key symbol for regulating children’s data, because it is built on the idea that parents are informed before accepting the terms returning to the theory of media literacy and governmentality.
4.5. **The EU General Data Protection Regulation**

The GDPR (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679) will be commenced on May 25th, 2018, within the European Union, which in Sweden will replace the current Privacy Protection Law (Personuppgiftslagen). The regulation will also replace the previous directives and includes instructions on how children’s data should be processed and presented between the data subjects and the data controllers. Children, under the GDPR, are natural persons below the age of eighteen, though, they are, per standard, allowed to consent from the age of sixteen, or at its lowest thirteen, depending on the legal implementation of individual member states.

Regulations important to understand the future legal ramification of children’s data are gathered below. Beginning with act 1, *supra* note 71; that processing should not affect children. Albeit, while restricting controllers from processing child data unconsented, they permit parents to consent in the child’s place (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679 art. 8). The objective use of data by public authorities, corporations, institutions and organisations is circumstantially granted. According to the perceived necessity of the information processing. Additionally, when subjective data processing is consented, the legal effect on the natural person must be considered by the data controller:

“discriminatory effects on natural persons on the basis of racial or ethnic origin, political opinion, religion or beliefs, trade union membership, genetic or health status or sexual orientation, or that result in measures having such an effect.” (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679 *supra* note 71)

Meaning that discriminatory processing is allowed, unless it is based on the listed premises. The “legal effects” (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679 *supra* note 71) signal that all profiling may potentially prompt several consequences for the data subject financially and personally. Therefore, all controllers who collect large amounts of PII (personally identifiable information) are mandated to conduct an analysis of the potential risks of the processing. Controllers can then implement protection strategies involving technical systems decreasing the consequences of hacking, like encryption or pseudonymisation,
or mechanisms reducing access to some data points for third parties or that certain data is not registered.

The measures and evaluations can be translated into codes of conducts and certificates approved by the Board assessed by the EU (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679 art. 40-42). The approved codes and certificates are then made accessible in a register provided by the EU, in accordance with article 12 ‘Transparent information, communication and modalities for the exercise of the rights of the data subject’ (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679), which will be revisited.

Regarding the legal effects, children are described as “vulnerable natural persons” (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679 supra note 75), whose accumulated data cannot be representative for their juridical future. When allowed, the child has full control over what terms they will consent, while still being protected as a child, see Council regulation (EC) 2016/679 supra note 65:

“That right is relevant in particular where the data subject has given his or her consent as a child and is not fully aware of the risks involved by the processing, and later wants to remove such personal data, especially on the internet.”

The “right of rectification or erasure” (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679 art 16 & art 17), allows children to erase their data if asked for, even after the data subject has reached the age of eighteen. This also grants the same properties for parents consenting their children’s terms. Both erasure and rectifications are to be performed immediately at request. The deletion, howbeit, will only be possible if the data is no longer necessary to use the service or if the consent is withdrawn.

Corporations are lawfully bound to store and write terms, policies, and rights of the data subject, in an accessible, simple and clear manner (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679 art 12). Considering that users from sixteen years old, or at its lowest thirteen years old, should be able to understand their rights and responsibilities. Additionally, certain measures should be taken for products and services directed at children. Hence, corporations are encouraged to apply visual aids to make the information more understandable, when appropriate (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679 supra note 58).
Likewise, data controllers should provide families with additional information, besides the terms and policies, that may offer guidance in what consent might imply.

Finally, the ‘right to object’ (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679 art 21) allows natural persons the ability to object to certain processing of their personal data. This includes both certain information about the person, unless this is of specific relevance to provide the service or maintaining the safety of the data subjects, or commercial uses, where the data subject can at any time object to profiling utilized for direct marketing.

The use of anonymous objective data, to commercially target groups, is not regulated in the GDPR. Though, controllers can apply pseudonymisation as an alternative, to avoid parts of the regulation, stating that:

“The application of pseudonymisation to personal data can reduce the risks to the data subjects concerned and help controllers and processors to meet their data-protection obligations” (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679 supra note 28)

Therefore, information that has been pseudonymised and quantified for commercial uses could eventually be used albeit the data subject’s ‘right to objection’ (Council regulation (EC) 2016/679 art 21).

4.6. **Analytic Disposition**

To understand how governmentality and media literacy relate to the child right ideals and media competencies of the parents, a hermeneutic analysis was applied. Recognising how the parents applied or might apply their media competencies to enforce or weaken the ideals of their children’s right to *provision, participation, and protection*, according to Livingstone & Third’s (2017) definitions, will be compared to previous research. The given autonomy was met with what the parents perceived as harmful and beneficial according to Suttions-Smith’s (1997) observations of identity work regarding the consumption of television violence and Jones (2008) interviews with media violence experts and parents.
RESEARCH METHOD AND MATERIAL

The parents’ views on participation and ability to recognize its meaning for their children was compared to previous works by Afia et al (2017), Livingstone, Ölafsson and Staksrud (2013) and the Swedish media council (Statens Medieråd, 2017; Andersson, Christofferson & Dalquist, 2016), to understand how much the parents perceive themselves as part of their children’s media lives and what mandate they find their children having.

Hence, the child rights ideals and media competencies of the families would suggest two things: if they found themselves able to comply with the GDPR and how the GDPR reflects their views on children’s online safety. Concluding with a discussion where the ideals and media competencies of the parents are put in contrast to governmentality theory regarding free choice, further inquiring if the GDPR will be a turn for democratisation or an unrequested capitalistic freedom.

4.7. RESEARCH ETHICS

Asking ethical questions is a continuous part of the research process and should not be considered a predefined context to work from. Hence, to fully recognise if the participants understood their participation, they were both informed about the publication of the research and were offered to read their statements beforehand. The material was then weighed against its communal relevance. Identifiable information was extracted from the analysis since it was found irrelevant to pursue the topic. Hammersley and Atkinsson (2007: 212) argue that public meetings may contain private practices that should be regarded as outside of the study’s purpose. Hence, information obtained outside of the interviews was only included after gaining further consent from the parents, considering the contextual motives of the participants (Hammersley & Atkinsson, 2007: 212; Kozinets, 2015: 144f).

Ethical issues are integral when including children within the research, specifically when recording tools are used to gather material. Therefore, content of sensitive nature needs to be evaluated, considering how the material is to be stored and whom are permitted to access. The Swedish research council (Vetenskaprådet, 2017) states that research involving children must provide the participants with information that children
can comprehend. The children were not explicitly asked to participate in the interviews, but there was one child that confirmed their participation. Their statements were not directly quoted in the thesis, but provided information about the family. Hence, both children and parents of this study were given a written document about the objective of the study but only parents of children beneath the age of 15 who wanted to participate had to return a signed copy. The document contained information about the use of the gathered data and privacy policy. Their participation could at any time be terminated by either the parent or the child before publication.
The aim of this study was to research how theories of governmentality and media literacy connected to parents’ child right ideals and media competencies regarding the commercial processing of their children’s data. Firstly, the analysis acknowledged how and what information was curated by the parents, whereas the second part focused more on the critical understanding of entities regulating and producing information about children’s online safety and those processing child data. This was followed by two shorter segments discussing the parents’ abilities to contribute with their own opinions and collaborate with their network in their everyday lives. The final segment circled around how parents could create messages according to their child rights ideals, while discussing how partial consent and the format of terms, certificates and regulations could amplify their autonomy, and the allocation of responsibilities between parents, governments and corporations. Thereby creating a definition of how their media literacy competencies relate to the compliance mandated by the GDPR, and if the parents are prepared to utilize their rights according to their ideals.

5.1. CURATING INFORMATION

When candidly asking what the parents thought about the data their children accumulated online. None of them suggested that their non-expressive behaviour could forge personal data about their children or family. Mihailidis and Cohen (2013) specified curation of online personas as part of the information media literate citizens must have to participate on common grounds in the civic conversation and to manage their privacy settings. Recognising the practical ability to change one’s privacy settings, all the parents expressed issues regarding the effort needed in one way or another.

Mother 2: Energy, I’d rather say, even if you have time you feel that you need some minutes to just breathe.

KN: Mm.
Mother 2: So, Netflix or Viaplay probably gather data that shows that we are tired parents of young children. (laughs)

Also, time was a prominent reason for the parents’ insufficient knowledge.

Mother 1: Well, I’ve been—or I am very—have a lot on my plate (idiom: “har fullt upp” in Swedish) so I guess it is a question of time.

KN: Would you say that it’s a commonplace issue, like, on an everyday basis you don’t have time to find out more or just the last week?

Mother 1: Sure, I could have read it if it was homework or “I must do this now”, then I’d clearly find time for it, but, ehm, otherwise I have a lot to do (pause to think) in my life, to make time for everything.

Hence, it is important to specify that the ability to access information about how children’s data is being treated did not only rely on competencies and ideals.

Generally, the families struggled with recognizing what measures they had already taken and what that meant for their children’s digital safety. Indicating that, despite their access to information, they had not managed to exercise their rights. The father of family 2, for example, appeared to take pride in keeping the children’s tablets anonymous.

Father 2: Yeah, but they [their children’s data] are not on the tablets, the tablets are anonymous.

[... back and forth bickering...]

Mother 2: Yes, it’s not the children’s names on the accounts, but it’s still you and me who download the apps, only that it says that we are playing the veterinary game.

Father 2: But, I believe, like, I believe that I download apps on [the tablet]—without an account. I have not put in my [contact] information nor bankcard in there, on the tablets.
The discussion went on for quite a while, the mother insisting that their e-mail addresses are most likely linked and stored in several databases, mobile and tablet app stores included, that probably contain information about them having two children, presumably using information they shared on their social media profiles. By not being certain about such a large portion of their children's online personas the parents lacked the basic knowledge to negotiate their digital situation. The mother's persistence correlated with Mihailidis (2014) insistence that critical thinking is a vital part of being media literate. Yet, they guessed what data is collected, how, and where.

The children's experiences of content and screen time were highly affecting parents' decisions. One could argue that family 5, whom had not yet allowed their daughter to game, were the ones most actively trying to shelter their child from presumed harms following the protectionist ideals, based on their observations.

Mother 5: She has a very limited access to our smartphones and she is only watching videos or movies— and that’s only during certain occasions...
Father 5: Looking at Babblarna (children’s online video show) and others alike...
Mother 5: Yes, Babblarna, eeh, it’s only ever when I’m braiding her hair, which happens once every week or two weeks, just so that she will sit still for an hour — or during longer car journeys, that’s when she can ‘play’ with the phone (not game in this case), otherwise, we try to keep it away, even if she wants it.

Bulger’s (et al, 2017) data propose that protectionist actions are commonly applied by governmental and corporate agents, locking children out as a means of protecting them from possible hazards. The reason family 5 restricted their daughter’s usage was based on what they perceived as lazy parenting that might harm children psychologically.

Mother 5: Many parents put their children in the other room —or on the couch, eeh, and leave them with games as pacifiers instead of taking care of them...
Father 5: No, parents need to take their responsibility...
Mother 5: Yes, and we don’t like it – for our daughter to be alone with content that might frighten her or make her act out.

They perceived it as common for most parents to leave children unattended with media devices, and described themselves as consciously braking these norms. They showed that they used their knowledge about the possible harms of media, mostly focused on content, and acted accordingly, as media literacy theory would suggest. By having access to information about content influencing children (and noting that their daughter would get easily frightened) they had found it important to be more engaged with her media consumption and formed their own practice, much like Mihailidis’ (2014) proposes that curating information might lead to the creation of habits that sends messages to ones’ networks and authorities. The Swedish media council’s (Statens Medieråd, 2017; Andersson, Christofferson & Dalquist, 2017) reports describe other notions that parents found nauseating in their children’s media habits, such as content and screen time. Similarly, parents with older children in this study had found topics in their networks and children’s habits suggesting that long hours of violent gaming would turn boys into social deviants and that girls may be more vulnerable and probable victims of sexual abuse online. This had not, however, urges the parents to restrict their usage, but the mothers of family 1 and family 4 had talked to their sons and daughters about the risks that may accompany their media usage. They motivated this by suggesting that exclusion would probably cause more problems, which will be discussed later.

Leading to information provided by corporations; as noted, none of the families had read the terms of the games their children played. At most they had quickly glanced the terms for hidden costs. The primary vantage point of media literacy is access to necessary information, so that citizens can join civic discussions (Livingstone, 2004; Mihailidis, 2014). Mihailidis & Cohen (2013) suggest that information could be used as a base from which citizens can find their positioning, in these parents’ cases this information was not accounted for. After their children’s behaviours, they relied on the notions found within their networks and from the news they consumed before considering reading the
terms. When asked about their practices of reading terms, the parents of family 2 tried to estimate how much they would have to read based on all the services their family used.

Father 2: Well, that would be like a bible, roughly, eh, that would be a massive amount.
Mother 2: Well, say that there are ten pages of terms for every kind of service.
Father 2: Yes, that’s probably not, that is probably far more than a regular Swede can muster to read in a year, eh (long pause) but, it’s like, when you’re on Google on the job and want to get a number or a homepage and then Google’s new terms pops up, which is a bunch of pages, I don’t have time to take twenty minutes and reading it, you just have to consent and keep working.

The same notion can be found in the recounts from all the families, an example from family 4:

Mother 4: Never.
KN: Why?
Mother 4: Because there is too much text and you presume that it says almost the same every time.

Governmentality posits information as a form of power that governs citizens’ ideas about their reality (Foucault, 1978/1991). The dominating information the parents can access regarding children’s online safety was describes as hidden in complicated documents which resulted in a reality perception where information about data privacy is too complex and wide-ranging. This illuminated a dilemma regarding what policymakers and data controllers can ask from children of age and parents. Hence, these families were bypassed by important information about their rights and obligations towards corporations. By expressing this reluctance, the parents also admitted that corporations are governing them into believing that reading up about their rights would be too exhausting, which is also found in Brunton & Nissenbaum.
(2015) works revolving how corporations strategically format their information to hinder consumers from understanding their terms.

While most parents were frustrated by the format of the terms, two mothers were specifically worried about the consequences of their poor knowledge about commercial terms. To highlight the issues of curating terms format, the statements from family 2 will be presented here, whereas the issues closer aligned to critically understanding information will be discussed later based on family 5’s descriptions.

Mother 2: Is this something that, eh, that there has been a lot of information about? Noooooo?
KN: Nah, I mean there is …
Mother 2: … because then we haven’t missed any…

The mother's concern about missing out on information that would make her a better parent, is deduced from an earlier statement, where she said:

Mother 2: I feel like we’re the worst family when it comes to everything application-related, because we don’t really think that much about what we have downloaded.

Suggesting that family 2 were more conscious about following norms, while at the same time they wanted to be more aware about issues that may concern their children’s welfare. Foucault (1978/1991) argued that norms is a composite of citizens perceived reality, if they do not think that something in their everyday lives is wrong, or believes that bad circumstances are normal, they are less motivated to change their situation. This family wanted to know if something they found normal could still be wrong, urging a critical scrutiny of their situation that would instigate the rationale needed to change one’s situation, suggested by Foucault (Gordon, 1991). At the same time, they expressed a certain calm knowing that even though their family was exploited, others were equally affected as them, believing that these circumstances regarding commercial data processing is a constant that they themselves cannot resist. Their conviction that their children should have access to games they like followed child rights ideals of provision and participation (Livingstone & Third, 2017). But in most of the families this provision
of devices and participation is presented as a protection against social and educational exclusion.

5.2. CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING

5.2.1. INFORMATION EVALUATION

The other worried mother, in family 5, alleged that parents should be aware of the terms they consented for their children. This was also agreed upon by the mother of family 1 and both argued that parents need to take their responsibilities and question what terms they agree with. The parents of family 5 choose to not let their daughter play any digital games on connected devices, and attributed their decision to issues regarding screen time and content. Whereas the mother of family 1 suggested that she would just have to agree to the terms and take the consequences because she viewed the processing as a trade-off between the user and the companies, notwithstanding her view on commercial processing of children’s data. But, when informed about the possible uses both mothers recognised commercial data processing of children’s information as a type of exploitation that ought to not be allowed, especially regarding games and services that they were paying for.

Mother 5: I think it’s very wrong to make money by selling information about people [...] I don’t think that’s okay, really.

Her statement aligns with her self-estimated inability to understand or resist the terms on the current media market and she continues by questioning peoples’ general ability to change their online habits:

Mother 5: Like social media, like Facebook, or say some other platform or app that gather information about your usage – It’s very hard to avoid on the principle that no-one should gather your information. You can barely avoid it while using the internet on a regular computer. You will barre yourself from these social platforms – and lose contact with people.
Illustrating the powerlessness parents experience when faced with economic structures of their daily lives. Druick (2016) argues that literacy is a tool for giving citizens a perceived freedom according to the capitalistic system. Likewise, the parents of this study seemed to feel incapable of leaving or negotiating this system, no matter the information they had curated, because they could not recognize any other options at this point in the interviews. Returning to family 1 and the mother’s views on data processing as a trade-off. Even when confronted with information about how data processing might affect her children’s ability to apply for loans, the mother’s overall tone about accountability was still more stringent than the other parents’ views. She argued that parents should be held accountable, despite not knowing the content of the terms.

Mother 1: It’s so hard. If you don’t like what’s going on: you shouldn’t be a part of it, or you could just accept it, or you could try to resist, there are different choices, somehow, and I have chosen to give my consent, so I don’t know: ‘right or, not right?’

Although, at the end of the interview when asked about her children losing out on job opportunities based on algorithmic discrimination, she answered following:

Mother 1: It’s not morally wrong, it’s rather obnoxious, when they go after peoples’ soft spots.

KN: When you think of soft spots, what- what do you think those could be?

Mother 1: Ye-eah, looks, beauty errors or, yeah, pimples, or, well, is can be everything from, eeh, finding out if they [data subjects] have hearing impairments or sight impairments or have some syndrome or …

KN: So more physically-related?

Mother 1: Yeees, yes it could be that, like, (mumbling) yeah (short pause) also purely, eh, intellectually (long pause) which can be turned against you, and that- that’s unfair, but say that one is looking for a job and then they [the employee] starts: “Now then, let’s check up on this person”, like: “A-ha! No!”
INTERVIEW FINDINGS: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

[re-enacting an employer looking at their computer and rejecting the applicant] - that’s not fair, then-then we are not equals on the job market or, like …

KN: Mhm

Mother 1: … then we get segregation.

KN: Like, if there is, like, that data processing leads to segregation, or, like?

Mother 1: Mhm, then we create a society, I think, no one wants in the end.

When talking about the commercial uses of anonymous collective data-sets the frustration the parents had regarding their inability to surmise possible consequences of commercial processing came to light.

KN: There is a difference between using behavioural data when it is anonymized to improve a website or apps or to use anonymized data to find strategies for luring children and so on.

Mother 2: Yes, it is, it all depends on the intentions of, so that is, but-uhm, one must, somewhere it must be regulated, so if one notices that they [corporations] have started using behavioural data for composing strategies to lure, it- it is easier said than done, but that is when they [the data controller] should be punished, like, for it, but then also you need to understand when they use it for that, and that is not so darn easy.

Before the clarifying of the usage of anonymized data-sets, the parents were both very uncertain what it meant for their children if their data would be anonymized or not. Once they knew it had to do with building strategies where data would lay the foundation for manipulation of children, the mother tried to grasp the subject but ended with a surrendering line, confessing their inability to realise when data is being used wrongly: “but then also you need to understand when they use it for that, and that is not so darn easy”. This rhetoric is also found in family 1, 4 and 5. By not being able to
recognize abusive processing, they would not know what usage to object to. The issues of critically evaluating information about children’s digital data would mandate the recognition and prediction of misconduct within marketing strategies, wherein detailed information might not be disclosed due to corporate secrecy.

While being presented with scenarios where direct marketing could become or had been proven harmful, family 2 and 4 were the only families that could exemplify how they imagined that algorithms in commercial games could affect children:

Mother 4: If he is playing an adult game then his data will be used under my name or my IP address as it is [...] and then, unfortunately, it accumulates information about me playing war games, resulting in him being suggested games alike. Either way, no matter if it’s a game for children or adults, I don’t like direct advertisement for related games, but that’s how they sell more otherwise they wouldn’t, in that way I’m a bit ambivalent about it.

Family 2 argued that advertisers could manipulate children into growing unrealistic hopes, while discussing a veterinary game:

Father 2: They are directing this information towards someone who, in fact, is rather young and this might instigate an interest which – yeah, you get an interest forced upon you, just because there comes a lot of other stuff [advertisement based on data gathered from a veterinary game].

Mother 2: Well, enforced- you might get an interest and become really invested in something, but, maybe get into stuff you don’t really can have access to [...] it ends up with the parents having to deal with the burden of- it’s the parents who go down the drain (idiom: “det går utför för” in Swedish), who feel compelled to order [buy] things.
They both continued talking about how this could lead a lot of parents into financial trouble. When parents are only shown posts from other parents in social media that are continuously buying new toys or services for their children, they might be pushed into taking expensive credits to afford the children’s new interests.

All families recognized marketing as a vital part of the economic structure within which they viewed themselves as part of, however, most presented it as a ‘necessary evil’. Learning more during the interview due to the praxis intervention, the parents grew more critical towards the usage of children’s data. Which in turn explains why their accounts at times lacked consistency of how commercial processing is conducted specifically, but they mostly talked about it as harmful for children. Jenkins’ (2006; et al, 2016) data suggests that commercial platforms offer users spaces where their contributions open up new worlds, where they can form their identities and find others alike themselves. A lot of the parents see this benefit, and therefore applaud their children’s access. Most of them believe so strongly in the children’s positive rights (Livingstone & Third, 2017), provision and participation, that they allowed themselves to overlook the issues these platforms pose. Hence, their practices resemble the one described in Beer & Burrows (2013), where users are portrayed as equal traders of services. Although the reasons for entering the deal varies, most parents give their full consent because they neither have time nor fully know how to change the privacy settings to opt out of direct marketing. Still, the mother of family 1 saw it more alike Beer & Burrows (2013) as a trade-off, where the data was perceived a payment for services, especially services that could be formed individually according to that data. As Kücklich (2005) suggests, the data might fuel the children’s fantasy worlds, but most parents in this study spoke against direct marketing and marketing strategies that lure children, by linking it to exploitation of children’s innocence. A part of the usage that Kücklich’s (2005) investigation criticised as well. Overall, it became clear that family 1 was less inclined to be stressed by the scenarios mediated, whereas the other families had stronger reactions towards the topic. This might be a result of family 1’s more trusting relationship, that the maturity of the children made the mother feel more comfortable with their data being processed, since she could not imagine her children performing in manners that would harm them in their futures as juridical adults.
When talking about subjective profiling affecting the juridical person, most families were immediately absorbed by the negative aspects. Family 2 brought up recounts about applying for insurance for children with pre-existing conditions and how insurance companies could use subject data to raise premiums. Though, they seemed a bit reluctant towards the idea at first, the mother seems puzzled about the extendedness of data mining and reacted very strongly but her husband questioned the probability:

Father 2: The insurance companies can never be open about that. If they say: “Yes, but, you get higher premiums because our computer says you are depressed” [replying to the insurance consultant:] “But I’m not depressed, I googled that because my sister is depressed”.

The anger and denial illustrated a common naivety among all the interviewed parents. They recognized the concept of ‘big data’ as a part of reality, but had not imagined what it could mean in the long term for individual data subjects. It became evident that all of them had been convinced in some degree that there was some sort of prohibition against algorithmic discrimination. This illustrates the complexity of algorithmic discrimination and the implications of commercial data processing. Suggesting that critical thinking was not enough for the families to recognise the possible perils, they needed that someone else curated the information about data processing before they could fully grasp the consequences. As praxis intervention aims to disrupt the mental convictions of the participants, one can also argue that by lacking the ability to see realities as a “mythicized abstraction” (Foucault, 1978/1991: 103) critical thinking might just stay in citizens’ minds rather than developing into civic engagement and a contribution to a change of power relations.

5.2.2. AUTHORITY JUDGEMENT

The information they had access to since before and were given during the praxis intervention lead them to believe that governments and corporations were the institutions with most competence in these questions. According to Foucault’s (1978/1991) description of governmentality, this collective conception of the government being in charge and taking care of the citizens’ safety online is a representation of the
power structure within which the parents see themselves. One could also argue that their fate in the state as a protective agent further highlights that the parents viewed commercial data processing as a form of economic exploitation and commodification of children that they disagreed with. Regardless of it being anonymised or subjective processing. The norms this power asymmetry seemed to represent for the parents, besides the father of family 3 which will be revisited, suggested that they should be able to trust their authorities, while at the same time they should not trust restrictive regulation over the freedom of the individual. A freedom wherein they will be given three choices. 1) Being invested and making efforts towards managing the privacy settings of their children’s games under the GDPR (by refusing direct marketing, for example), 2) opting out and having to deal with the consequences of exclusion or 3) taking the easy way out by consenting to all use and having their children commodified by commercial agents.

Governmental theory (Foucault, 1977/1995) suggests that knowledge is power, in combination with creating an image of being more competent than other agents within a society. By making the terms easily accessible and phrased in plain language, the parents claimed that they could regain some power over what terms of service and privacy policies mean within a power balance discourse. Suggesting that being able to read and understand terms would also expose the terms as a contract that can be negotiated. Conversely, they questioned whether it would make any difference if they were more informed, since access to information also would demand skills to understand terms, rights and responsibilities critically. As seen in the previous paragraph, the parents’ critical inquiry of the power relations regarding children’s online safety suggested that they valued the competence of the authorities, which they viewed as more considerable than their own knowledge. Information issued by the government about safe practices would thereby be perceived as more accurate and important to follow than information spread by other’s in their networks, counting for one exception:

Father 3: Never, I know I’m screwed [...] I only trust myself in these questions, everything is corrupt.

Further explaining that he had not perceived himself as being able to affect his situation no matter how much knowledge and insights he would accumulate, since he
believed that corporations and governments would still find workarounds to track users. Proposing that the information would be used to control citizens. But, Bartlett and Miller’s (2011) research suggest that critique should not be confused with negative critiquing. This competence urges users to be sceptical about power relations, to consider what their curated information is a part of, and how that might affect the individual. Showing that the state and massive economic capital was viewed as a power that is overpowering, where consumer resistance was deemed insignificant in comparison. Foucault (1978/1991) theorised, that observing power inequality is in itself a powerful tool for sovereignty. In other words, when the corporations and governments are using a jargon that excludes common citizens, they are simultaneously sending a message telling citizens that they own more information, or simpler put: more power. In this instance, the views of the father could be a consequence of his job as a sales manager at a media company, where he manages the company’s corporate clienteles and produce commercials. Hence, he presented a deeper understanding of the importance of knowing the audience and how much money is incorporated in the process of reaching target groups, based on the information he had curated in his profession. His knowledge enabled him to see through the polished messages corporations send to users; where corporations propose that commercial data processing is a fair trade. Yet, he argued that marketers have moral responsibilities towards their fellow citizens and should follow norms for ethical conduct:

Father 3: This might seem contradictory, with my job — and I really think that there exists both good and bad marketing — but a small company, in a tiny village, wouldn’t have a tenth of their customers if they couldn’t advertise their car services, for example, through the local media channels in the town four kilometres away.

The father of family 3 showed a greater ability to think critically about the power of corporations and related it to his knowledge, illustrating the bond between the ability to curate information and critically scrutinising proprietorship. However, it had not lead him to restrict his children’s media usage or urged him to manage their privacy settings.
5.3. Contributing to networks

Some of the parents had been reached through their news outlets about the data processing implemented by social media platforms. Most had shared anecdotes with their friends and family about browsing online shops and a while later finding ads from those shops in their social media feed, which had urged discussions about adults being tracked online through their social media accounts. But this had not spurred their interest for the topic or made them more vigilant regarding their children’s safety online. Family 2 and 5 stated that they have had conscious dialogues with other parents and preschool staff about screen time and educational content. In contrast, the mother of family 1 had been asked by worried parents, in her role as a preschool teacher, for advice on these issues. Though, there was a viable difference between the families. Family 2 focused more on finding new content and services, focusing on positive child rights, whereas family 5 were more concerned about how to protect (negative right) their daughter from harmful content and too much screen time.

Mihailidis (2014) criteria for contributing with the goal of ‘positioning’ the group was difficult to find in the interviews, since the parents lacked a history of being vocal about issues regarding children’s online safety in commercial data processing. Continuously, subjective profiling and direct marketing was presented as the most credible consequence of data processing. However, these consequences were not prominent topics of worry within their social networks. The overall reactions suggested that they had neither thought nor talked more intensively about the topic.

Mother 1: Mm (short pause) I don’t know, would anyone start gathering information if they didn’t get paid for it? Ehmm, (long pause) I think (long pause) if it’s okay or not, I wonder. But that is how it looks today, you don’t do very much if you don’t make money –if it doesn’t have a purpose you can profit from yourself.

The phrase “that’s how it looks today” suggests the general image the families have of subjective profiling. The others did not word it as candidly as she did, though they urged that target marketing or direct marketing is “inevitable”, because ‘why would the
commercial data processing cease?’ and ‘corporations would always find a workaround’. In the works regarding ‘big data rich’ and ‘big data poor’, boyd and Crawford (2012) suggest that the information inequality between common people and entities with political or financial power is a source of exhaustion. Their aversion towards discussing these issues in depth seem attributed to their perceived inferiority, leading the connoting of the families’ as part of the ‘big data poor’.

5.4. Collaborate on safety

None of the families imagined that they would use the information they had obtained through the interviews to further discuss the issues with their network. Meaning that they had not expressed the ability to collaborate on changing the terms for children’s data processing. Conversely, Mihailidis (2014) suggests that the ability to collaborate depends more on the collectives joined opinions. In these cases, the parents’ networks are reproducing opinions that suggests that provision and participation is more practical, accounting for time consuming conflicts with children and overwhelming reading of terms and consequences, than protection. With the exception that babies and toddlers, as seen in family 5, might not demand as much screen time and, by the parents, unwanted content, therefore making it easier for them to break norms and reproducing protectionist ideal. The parents did, however, talk continuously to their friends and family about other aspects of their children’s safety, where it seemed easier for them to practically change their habits. This included tips regarding games with beneficial attributes, such as educational content.

5.5. Creating compliance

5.5.1. Formats

When asked how they would act differently recognising their inferiority to commercial data controllers, most of the parents displayed that they could not imagine themselves as changing their habits, but rather argued that the corporations should change their aggressive commodification of children. This segment will focus on the
changes they want to see in commercial data processing of child data. The changes they propose and their self-estimation for changing the privacy settings on their children’s devices, applications, platforms and services under the new law will be interpreted as messages they create. Mihailidis (2014) suggests that by being able to curate, critique, contribute and collaborate, citizens will have the base needed to create individual messages that reflect their own situation and values.

When asked what changes the families wanted corporations to make in the terms and the process wherein they gain parental consent, most suggested that a short bullet list of the terms could be a possible option. This list was usually comprised of ten points or an A4-page sized document, with normal sized fonts. This format aligned both with the requirements of the GDPR and the necessary accessibility pronounced by Mihailidis (2014) and Livingstone (2004) that would ensure that the terms are understandable even for children from the age of thirteen. Family 3 also suggested that this list could come with questions at the end of each point.

Father 3: … and there should be ten questions about the terms.
KN: How would you be presented with them?
Father 3: Like, after every point and at the end you would be able to also opt in for commercial tracking and automated processing.

Similarly, the mother of family 1 showed how she would access all her consented terms through an umbrella organisation or agency, where citizens could get an overview:

Mother 1: I’m thinking that if it should be gathered under a folder- or then-then that’s good, comprehensible (short pause) “do my kids have access- what have we consented to?” [replying herself:] “Yes, it’s these things” [and] “Oh, no! something happened here, is my child affected by this?” And then you can, like, go in and have a look: “But-uhm, we probably shouldn’t be a part of this anymore: ‘Do not consent!’”
Adding that the organisation or agency should be transparent and that the terms or settings should be easy to read. The mother of family 4 argued that each service should allow for many more partial consents, where parents would be able to choose which points to consent according to their convictions. The ability to partially consent to terms according to one’s values would suggest that citizens would receive more choices wherein they can use their competences to make informed choices and change their situation. Governmentality theory suggests that the change could be class mobility (Druick, 2016). In this case, it would possibly protect the children from being discriminated through biased algorithms or be treated negatively based on their sensitive information; allergies, illnesses, sexuality, race, ethnicity, religion, disabilities and alike. Returning to the mother of family 4, it seemed that she believed her son could benefit from some data collection, to get recommendations for games he liked. At the same time, she wanted to be able to restrict profiling that did not match her parenting style.

Mother 4: So, once I got that list I would be able to choose that my recommendations [on Steam (digital software distributor)], would only show games that are appropriate to children aged below 15, despite the age-limit of the games he was actually playing.

While admitting that they were not fully able to curate their terms and legal rights, the families wanted it to be easier to curate content surrounding their children’s digital safety. Showing that they appreciated the ability to curate information and thought that it would enhance their agency over their situation, as pronounced in media literacy literature (Livingstone, 2004; Mihailidis, 2014). Although, they recognised that the formats they previously had encountered were too difficult or time consuming to comprehend and utilize. Conversely, family 3 and 5 suggested that solutions alike would most likely not lead to any changes in parents vetting of games, even though family 3 were among those who had proposed a ten-points bullet list. The mother of family 4 later changed her opinion, too, and insisted that no parent would have time to make those decisions continuously. Likewise, family 2’s optimism changed abruptly as they realised that this would require additional efforts:
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Mother 2: Well, but then you log in on a site and you see everything, but what is it really you want to be able to control?

Father 2: I would like to know what the information is used for.

As most of the other parents did, the parents of family 2 first agreed that transparency and accessibility would help them be better parents online. But then questioned whether they would understand the gathered data and if the terms would be comprehensible without specific education.

As an alternative to the communication of terms and policies from corporations, the families discussed the use of certificates from organisations, following certain values. This would allow them to curate data controllers according to a set of certificates that they could weigh against the child rights ideals they valued. Although, the mother of family 4 criticised the extendedness of these certificates:

Mother 4: But, nowadays, children don’t play children’s games.

And later added:

Mother 4: Since I’ve studied a construction programme I know that there are environmental aspects [of materials] and which brands are certified and such, but not in games.

KN: Could you see yourself reading up on it?

Mother 4: No, as a matter of fact. Again, you want to make it as easy as possible, like, when you see something, then you want to start right away. Yes, there are terms but you already know that they all say the same thing.

Suggesting that even though the children’s games are certified, it would not make any difference in the online safety of either the son in family 4 or the sons of family 1, who played games with age limits above their own age.
Overall, the parents claimed that umbrella organisations, certificates, and privacy professionals, might increase their agency; while questioning whether the power of those instances would measure to the power of commercial data controllers. Although, recognising the capitalistic fundamentals of their everyday lives, they neither could see a future where personal data would be omitted as a currency, nor did they view themselves as capable of altering their behaviour to change the market, as the theory of media literacy would suggest that they should be able to do (Livingstone, 2004; Mihailidis, 2014; Druick, 2016).

Generally, the families argued that the choice of opting out, would not solve the problem. They proposed that consent to terms of service should not equal an automatic opt in for commercial processing, and suggested that commercial processing should demand an active opt in registration. The issue at hand, was that they felt mandated to make an informed choice, a choice they had not asked to make. They showed this by fixating upon the fact that opting out or partially consenting would demand both time, energy and knowledge. This was certainly frustrating for them since they wished to fully provide their children with opportunities to participate with media in everyday life, while weighing risks and perils of commercial data processing into their decisions. Their descriptions illustrated a conviction that children need inclusion, amusement, and educational benefits. Which meant, along the lines of Jones’ (2008) observations, that their children use media as a tool for emotional development, anxiety release and relaxation, that might benefit their overall maturation. They also agreed with Sutton-Smith’s (1997) and Livingstone’s (1998; Livingstone & Third, 2017) arguments, that media give children the opportunity to form their identities through roleplaying within spaces where they could test their own and societal limits.

5.5.2. RESPONSIBILITIES

When asked about parents’ responsibilities in data processing, all recognised themselves as the main agents. They described their role as parents as an obligation towards their children, rather than the state.

Mother 5: Laws and regulation on what is allowed must exist, but the absolutely greatest shelter against what your children may or may not use or which risks
they take, that’s on us. One can never claim that it’s the fault of the state or the school that children have this or that problem. Fundamentally, we are the closest protection of children.

Father 5: Yes, yes, neither the state nor the family can do everything. It’s impossible.

KN: But even if a company is doing everything in their power to keep you in the dark, do you still feel responsible?

Mother 5: We have the responsibility, although, it is hard to take and to accomplish. We have a constant responsibility (long pause) I would say, yes (short pause) because we are adults so it can never be our children’s fault or that it is our children’s responsibility –and politicians or organisation can never see the individual, it is us who have our children’s best at heart.

The choice of being a good parent or succumbing to the capitalistic structure is by most of the parents described as binary; either they must trust corporations and governments to protect their children’s information or take matters into their own hands to guarantee children’s safety. Suggesting that trust in the ‘big data rich’ (governments and corporations in boyd & Crawford, 2012) was not a trait for ‘good parents’ under these circumstances. But they also insinuated that their current behaviours enabled them to have more energy for their family relations. The compromise they sought was fair and transparent terms and laws working together and recognising the limitations of parents to prevent corporations from taking advantage of children’s innocence. Admittedly, none of the parents were sure what a fair use would be; only that commercial use of children’s data most probably was wrong. No one expressed that a complete prohibition of commercial processing of child data would be plausible, it seemed as if a complete prohibition of such processing was a solution only found ‘in the best of worlds’.
Likewise, the mother of family 1 found difficulty in describing how involved the
government should be with her children’s safety.

Mother 1: How protected should we be? How—how much are
we supposed to protect our children? What should we,
as a society take responsibility for?

She pondered on various criteria for a capitalist market (free markets, trading,
investment incentives, and alike) and the negative consequences on the individual data
subject, back and forth. All in all, repeating the key arguments in governmentality theory
that the freedom of living in a capitalistic structure is accompanied with choices that
demand literacy (Druick, 2016). After repeatedly expressing her inadequate knowledge
about the topic, she prompted the importance of expertise within policy making. She
also took a stance for her incompetence, where applied expertise would serve her the
convenience of being ‘uninterested’ or ‘unbothered’. At the time, she had not
experienced any discomfort for neither her children nor herself regarding online safety,
and assumed that others with suitable competencies already were in command.

Mother 1: I think that’s the sort of thing someone else
already should have figured out, just like some
people are expert surgeons, no one just gets in and
starts operating, so, like there must be people who
take care of different things in society to create
the safest society for all of us.

She suggested that privacy and integrity in processing of children’s data was not an
important literacy field for common people within her network. As proposed by
Mihailidis (2014), one could connote that this is a media problem as well, since news
outlets seemed to have failed to inform the parents of this study about these issues and
their role in maintaining their children’s online safety.

They suggested that the status quo was to allow children to play games without
reading the terms of service and privacy policies. For example, family 2 expressed a
certain calm knowing that even though their family was exploited, others were equally
affected as them. Their sentiment that children should have access to games convinced
them that they must act according to the capitalist structure. As Foucault (1978/1991)
proposes, the image they had of society and inclusion today suggested that they had to ‘insert’ themselves into the system, rather than find a way to change the circumstances. Family 5, on the other hand, thought that parents should be aware of the terms they consented for their children, alike the mother of family 1. The difference being that they agreed with Fuchs (2012) and Kücklich (2005) that commercial tracking of children could be perceived as a form of exploitation, which they wanted to prohibit.

By expressing that they would not change their habits they were contributing to a parenting style where everyone seemed content with having their children either commodified or excluded. Combined with their presumption that regulations were already in place to hinder corporations from processing children’s data in ways that could have negative consequences on the juridical person, one could argue that the data controllers, organisations and policymakers were being left responsible for the solution for issues that regular parents could not comprehend. After realising that such measures were not implemented, the parents suggested that the terms could be curated either under certificates, gathered on a homepage where they would access and manage their consented terms, or a combination of the two. The interviews showed that the families wanted to have an overlap between professional interventions and certification; wherein it should be possible to choose what terms to consent, while certain data processing should be prohibited if it may affect children’s potential to succeed later in life.

They neither had nor imagined themselves going to talk to their network about commercial data processing, hence, they would not try to collaborate on spurring a communal engagement for their values. Considering their choices, opting in and having their children used for commercial processing, changing the privacy settings to better suit their values, or opting out and dealing with their children acting out because of the exclusion, a majority choose the first alternative. None of them could imagine themselves being able to change the settings on all their devices, applications and services, arguing that they would neither have time nor the required knowledge and interest to affect their situation. Since they would not change their habits they would not themselves create the change they wanted to see in their children’s digital safety, though, by vocalising their situation in this thesis they, but not for the reasons they
might have pictured, contributed to a message based on their individual experiences and opinions, leading: ‘we want expertise working on behalf of our children’s online safety’.
6. CONCLUSION

The focus of this study was to investigate parent’s abilities to manage their children’s online safety regarding commercial data processing, while advancing the comprehension of media literacy through governmentality theory.

6.1. RESEARCH FOCUS

By identifying that parents value their ability to provide children with media participation, for both their cognitive development and identity formation, as well as their need for leisure, it was possible to connote that their children are viewed as agents with certain needs correlating to their individual characteristics. Several works (Sutton-Smith, 1997; Livingstone, 1998; Kücklich, 2005; Livingstone & Third, 2013; Jones, 2008) propose that children benefit from their access to media devices, whether it is socially, creatively, psychologically or physically, it is argued that children use devices for their cognitive development. This cognitive advancement can be reached both through mediated social participation and by allowing children to access content or games that help them channel their feelings in order to find their identities. In most instances the parents seemed to share this perception, enforcing positive child rights ideals (Livingstone & Third, 2017).

When talking about exclusion, or protectionist ideals, the parents often focused upon perils that can be found in violent content or through contact with predators. Andersson, Christofferson & Dalquist (2016) found in their interviews with parents and children about child online safety similar fears seen in the answers of the parents in this study, suggesting that these parents are more worried about sons becoming socially deviant and that their daughters might be more susceptible to sexually abuse online rather than the commodification of child data. They laid certain emphasis on violent games with age restrictions above their actual age that boys most often play and how long screen time they deemed suitable. Conversely, many admitted that the exclusion not only would affect the children negatively regarding their cognitive and social development, but that it would provoke inconveniences in their relationship towards
one another. Which urged them to approach the issues with a socially more convenient strategy, avoiding conflicts with their children, by keeping their restrictions as limited as possible, similar to what other parents tend to do according to Livingstone, Ölafsson & Staksrud (2013) and the Swedish media council (Statens Medieråd, 2017).

The parents gained this information through their curation of related themes in their family, social networks and media outlets, leaving out information comprised by the corporations about the devices, platforms, content, and services their children were accessing. Additionally, they lacked an overview over which terms they agreed with, what those terms implied and what information they had shared about their children, unveiling an incapability in managing information about their children’s online personas. As to their ability to critically evaluate the information they had gained, both by themselves and through the praxis intervention, they seemed to have the practical tools to scrutinise information about commercial data processing and acknowledged several both positive and negative aspects of ‘big data’. Although, their conclusions often landed in hopelessness, admitting their defeat against the ‘big data rich’. Boyd & Crawford’s (2012) research suggests that corporations, institutions and governments are considered ‘big data rich’ whereas common people, in this case the interviewed parents, are ‘big data poor’, because they lack information needed to critique the consequences of commercial processing of child data. Their research, among other works (see also Brunton & Nissenbaum, 2015), suggest that the power inequality between the common people and authorities with access to time, money and knowledge hinder citizens from accessing the democratic conversation of online privacy. A topic several parents pointed out in the interviews as part of their critique.

This exhaustion in facing the power inequality might be a result of their inadequate curation competence, but it also seemed to be tied to their inability to contribute and collaborate regarding these issues. None of the parents described themselves as typically invested in questions regarding privacy and integrity, and even though they were critical towards both commercial processing and advertisement targeting children, they would not talk about these issues with their surroundings. Neither had they had the notion that these were important issues within their social networks or something news outlets had presented as crucial for their everyday media lives.
CONCLUSION

Learning about their new possibilities of managing their children’s data under the GDPR, at first, the parents seemed positive towards the possibility to choose to opt out of commercial processing that could be used for direct marketing. But their optimism quickly disappeared as they recognised that this, too, would require certain skills and resources. They admitted to not having the knowledge, time nor interest required to assure their children’s online safety. A majority had already assumed that there were regulations protecting their children that parental consent would not override. Learning about their responsibilities under the GDPR, they expressed reluctance towards having to become more invested, suggesting that they did not wish to have greater freedom over their children’s privacy. Specifically, noting that there must exist professionals who can make those decisions for them. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the GDPR should be more restrictive towards corporations, rather than providing parent’s the ability to choose whether their children’s data should be commercially processed or not.

Livingstone (1998) claims that many regulations regarding children’s access to new media moves towards bureaucratisation, in this instance the GDPR is restricting the use of children’s data. Herein, corporations are mandated to guarantee that parents give informed consent to commercial processing, rather than mandating that corporations change their services so that children’s data would not be used for direct marketing or general marketing strategies aimed at children.

Following Livingstone’s (2004), Lessing’s (2008) and Mihailidis’ & Cohen’s (2013) studies regarding media literacy and Mihailidis (2014) definition of the five competencies required to be media literate citizens, the interviewed parents’ capability to comply with the GDPR was flawed. Suggesting that these parents will not be able to access the civic conversation regarding children’s online safety and create a message to the corporations about what they believe is fair data usage and application.

6.2. OVERALL AIM

Recognising the basics of media literacy and governmentality theory, this thesis has found that the parents will not use their gained freedom of choice to better their children’s prospective online personas (Druick, 2016). However, the material suggested
that the participants, in some extents, could recognise the power inequality between themselves and authorities and attributed this inequality to their inability to change their habits. Foucault (1978/1991) theorizing suggests that citizens of a society can change their situation if they can see that the power balance, that citizens could collectively create a movement that would challenge the truth that authorities, in this instance corporations, have more knowledge and resources. By being able to see what processing was, Foucault (1977/1995) claims that citizens will be able to change norms if they have incentives towards creating change. These parents did not express any motives that would suggest that they are going to use their curated information to change their circumstances.

Media literacy, as a tool to make citizens more active in the economic system (Druick, 2016), can hereby be understood as a line of choices becoming available. Albeit, the consequences of each choice provided by the GDPR gives little-to-no freedom to the parents. Being able to choose between three ‘evils’, the material suggests that when the parents can choose between their values and convenience, they chose the latter. The punishment of being exhausted by choosing to change settings or breaking the norm with a total opt out cannot practically be compared to the future perils children might fall under, since the issue is perceived by the parents as too abstract. In the theory chapter, it was suggested that being given a choice would be the same as demanding that the citizen choose something, forgetting the choice of not choosing at all. This was based on Druick’s (2016) interpretation of literacy, that an array of choices creates the illusion of freedom. When given choices, citizens are expected to choose one of the alternatives. Thereby, they will feel their autonomy increasing, as also seen in the interviews with the parents. But as they scrutinized the alternatives GDPR offered they also grew more aware of the options this regulation lacked.

Considering the results, it is possible to argue that choosing something is, in this instance, the same as not making a choice, since the families’ circumstances has already made the choice for the parents. Likewise, the parents of this study must trust that their children’s media habits are equally as good or bad as other’s, thereby limiting the negative discrimination they might face in the future, considering the level of the bar that has been set.
7. BIBLIOGRAPHY


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Families interests in media and general knowledge

Which books do you prefer to read?
Which papers do you read?
What do you prefer to watch/listen to on ether media?
How do you participate in social media?

Attitudes towards technology and financial conditions revolving children

How much do you pay for apps and digital services for your children?
Which content/devices do you prefer to spend money on?
How much do you pay for these products/services?
What technical issues do you experience with your digital media?
How do you handle technical issues?

Relation to children’s media products and services

Which products/services has your children engaged with the past month?
What do you like/dislike about them?
How much do you use these products/services together?
What's the best part about your children using digital media?
What's the worst part about your using digital media?
Who in the family mandates the usage?

Knowledge about digital media

What do you know about the corporations behind devices and the content you consume?
How much do you talk to other families about digital media for children?
What do you talk about?
What do you know about the financial aspects of digital media corporations?
How often do you read the terms for your games?
What do you think corporations want with their terms?

Attitude towards monetization of child data

What do you think corporations should be able to charge for?
Learning about monetization, how do you feel about paying for digital media?
If you could change how the corporation phrased their terms, how would that be?
If you could change how corporations achieve your consent, how would that be?
Who do you think should be responsible for children’s data being treated fairly?
How much information do you want about your child’s data?