Summary

Youth Protection Software in Everyday Education

Results of a Qualitative Study on the Use of Technical Aids in Parental Media Education

User-autonomous youth protection software is discussed as an important pillar to protect minors in the scope of digital media. Quantitative studies of the Hans-Bredow-Institut showed that most parents are aware of this option, while only a few decide to imply youth protection software in their own media education efforts (see Dreyer et al. 2013). In the present study, which was commissioned by the German Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth (BMFSFJ), 40 parents were interviewed with respect to their concept of (media-)education and their attitude towards technical youth protection systems. The parents' statements provide information about their approval and usage of youth protection software, but also about possible reasons for rejecting such technical support options.

Media education and youth protection software

- **Parental concerns** are primarily related to temporal aspects of media and Internet use. Concerns about the actual contents are mainly related to violent and pornographic images on the one hand, and to content such as advertising, malware, etc. on the other hand. In addition, there are concerns regarding the children's active communication and their own media activity.
- In the families that took part in the studies, **media education** is primarily based on communicative elements. For younger children, the parents rely on accompanied Internet use and on selecting child-friendly content themselves. As the children grow older, the parents tend to exercise less control. The parents try to set rules and to provide guidance for their children.
- **Regulations of Internet usage** are primarily related to temporal aspects. Almost all parents stated to set time limits for their children. Apart from that, regulations of content play an important role for the younger children. Some of the respondents reported to have established further rules concerning their children's media-related behaviour and Internet usage.
- A total number of ten families stated to use **technical aids of youth protection**. In addition to specific youth-protection software (Microsoft Family Safety, Apple's parental control features, Salfeld Parental Control, K9 Web Protection), there are also other hardware- and software-based approaches (FRITZ!-Box router, Norton, Kaspersky). None of the families used the products by JusProg and Telekom (which are approved by the KJM, the German Commission for the Protection of Minors in the Media).
- **Youth protection software** is primarily used to limit the children's Internet usage on the content level. Here, temporal aspects play a lesser role – and other functions (such as logging the online-activities) play almost no role at all.
- In the families that took part in the survey, the children affected by youth protection software were six to 14 years of age. Software measures seem to gain importance from the age of about nine years onwards – and most of the affected children are eleven to 14 years old.
- In most cases, youth protection software is used **on one PC/laptop or on a router**. Only one family uses different software products of the same manufacturer (K9 Web Protection) on multiple devices with different operating systems (Windows, Android, iOS).

Expectations concerning youth protection software

- Apart from **protecting** their children from potentially inappropriate content, parents hope that youth protection software can help them to manage everyday (media-)education, for example by relying on the software to reduce their personal control efforts or to be able to follow through with the rules more consistently and emphatically and, thus, to avoid conflicts.
- In the families, youth protection software is rarely used to limit usage time and duration. At the same time, many of the parents who do not use youth protection software stated that they would appreciate such functions.

Obstacles in the use of youth protection software

- A majority of the parents who took part in the survey stated that they could imagine using youth protection software. Nevertheless, most of them decided against this option. The reasons for this can be divided into three areas:
  - **Pedagogical aspects**: parent-child relationship (trust), pedagogical orientation (media literacy vs. an approach of safeguarding), pedagogical practice (personal monitoring and successive increase of personal responsibility concerning Internet usage).
  - **Practical obstacles**: Scepticism concerning technical measures (filter performance, handling, tamper-protection) device-dependence, limited functions.
  - **Reasons related to media literacy**: Acquiring personal media competence, lack of knowledge concerning technical means of youth protection, lack of knowledge concerning specific software products.

- When trying to ensure a safe online environment, the parents especially experience problems that are due to the fact that there is an increase in children who possess their own (mobile) devices. Adequate apps or cross-platform concepts of youth protection are either not known – or the parents experienced limitations in their practical use.
- In general, **parents are not very well informed about specific youth protection software**. Many of the respondents did not recognize presented software logos, or had only heard of the companies in other contexts (e.g. mobile communication or antivirus software). Of the approved programs, four of the parents recognized JusProg, but none of them was familiar with the youth protection software provided by Telekom.

Perspectival use and requirements placed on youth protection software

- Many of the respondents could imagine using youth protection software if necessary. Even the more sceptical parents acknowledge that such products could be integrated into their educational concept. From their point of view, the following requirements would have to be met:
  - Improved filter performance
  - Easily customizable time and user management for parents
  - Simple usability

- o Cross-platform control options

Some of the parents who took part in the survey emphasized a **need for more information offers**, since they knew little about the existing possibilities. However, the parents' information-seeking behaviour concerning children's media usage, media education and youth protection software turned out to be quite heterogeneous.

About the study:
The study is part of the project "Youth Media Protection and Media Education in Digital Media Environments" (Duration: January to December 2014)

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