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#DigiCHANSE

How digital technologies become embedded in family life across generations

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The Platforming Families project (PlatFAMs)

More info: bit.ly/Platfams



Funding

- CHANSE (Collaboration of Humanities and Social Sciences in Europe)
- The UK strand of the work is funded by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council).
- Project end date: September 2025



Partners

- Lead: University of Oslo (Prof Ola Erstad); academic partners in the UK (LSE, PI Prof Sonia Livingstone), Estonia, Romania, and Spain;
- Cooperation partners: stakeholders from the participating countries.



Aims

- To trace the impact of digital platforms through the life course as expressed in family practices;
- To better understand the negotiations between family members and across generations about the use and implications of digital platforms;
- To understand how different age groups and diverse families imagine their digital futures.

Research design

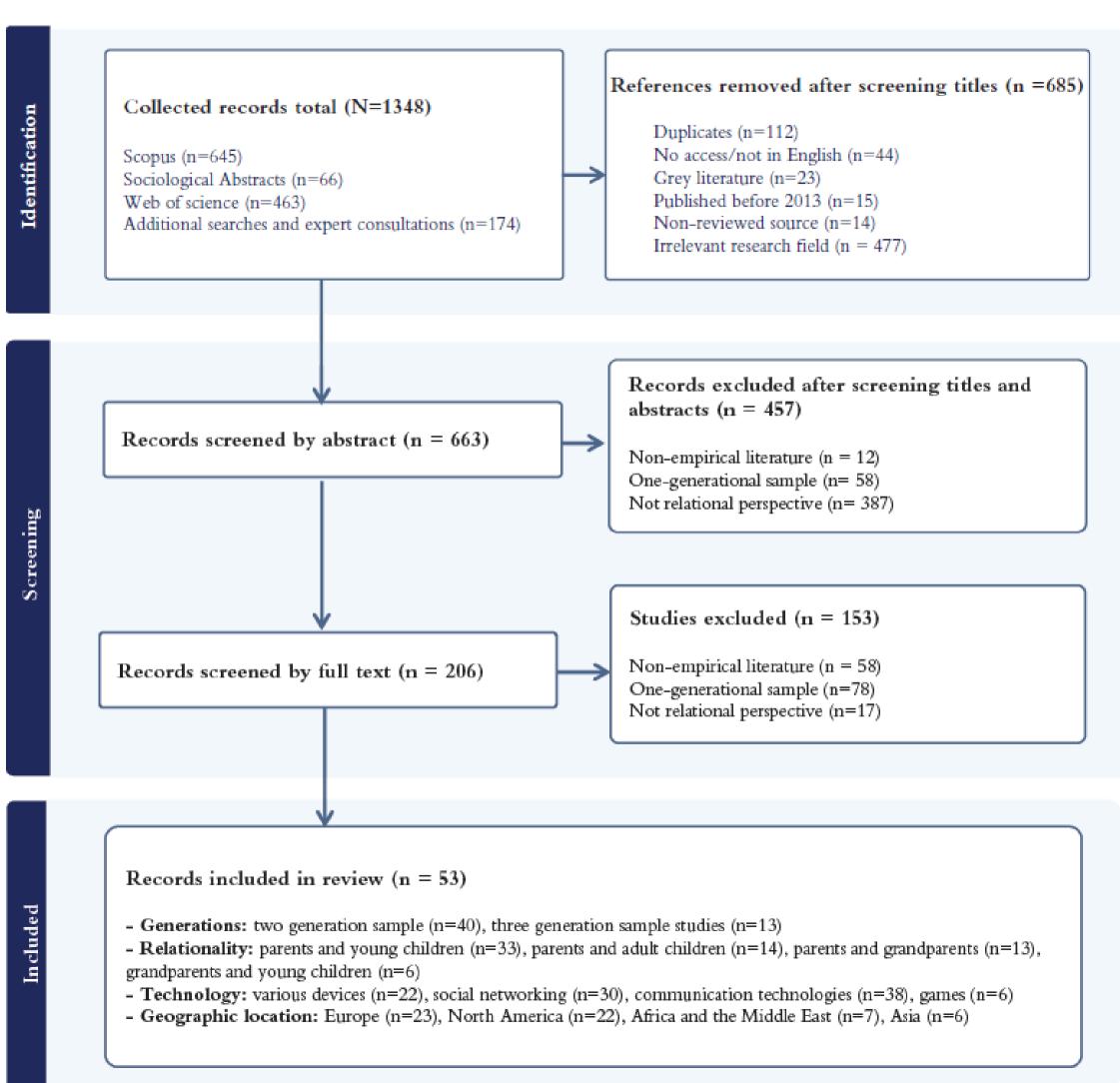


- Primary research with 100 three-generation families (children, parents, grandparents) in 5 countries using a mixture of qualitative and participatory methods.
- Secondary analysis of longitudinal quantitative data across European countries (EU Kids Online).

Scoping review approach

- Map existing research on families, generations, and digital technologies
- Systematic searches with keywords: digital technology, family, generations, relationality
- Published after 2012, English language, peerreviewed, multigenerational perspective and relational focus
- Anthropology, media & communication, HCI, education, psychology, sociology, family studies

Figure 1: PRISMA diagram - identifications, screening and inclusion of records



Theoretical gaps



- The study of platforms and the study of families co-exist mostly in isolation from each other;
- The field is dominated by an individualistic approach, lacking relationality. Little attention to the internal and external dynamics in which the family is embedded, and the emergent processes that result;
- The multi-generational studies seem either normative or technophobic; little critical engagement with processes of power.



bit.ly/RelationalityArticle

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SPECIAL ISSUE: Families, relationships and technologies

research article

How digital technologies become embedded in family life across generations: scoping the agenda for researching 'platformised relationality'

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This article advances the unfolding research agenda on families, relationships and societies in the so-called 'platform society' by applying both a relational lens and a multigenerational approach. Our scoping review of the multidisciplinary research literature revealed two main themes linking relationality and digital platforms: (1) the intensification of connectedness, especially in relation to intimacy, belonging and care, and (2) power struggles and conflicts in a context of interdependency and vulnerability. The studies identified suggest that relationality is transformed rather than interrupted through the emergence of new platformed practices as well as the reconfiguration of existing ones. Hence we propose an emphasis on 'platformised relationality', and call for greater specificity in the analysis of platform affordances in future research on families' engagement with digital platforms, as well as greater attention to family relationships beyond the often-studied parent-child relationship.

Keywords digital technologies - platforms - family relationships - relationality - generations - intimacy - power dynamics

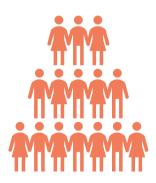
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Theoretical framework: platformised relationality



Platformisation

- Transformation of social fields through digital platforms (Nieborg & Poell, 2018)
- Platforms as infrastructures for communication, care, intimacy, commerce, etc.
- Impact on cross-generational family dynamics: younger members navigate digital landscapes, older members may rely on younger experts



Relationality

- Dynamic, processual relationships shaped by social and technological factors
- Intra-actional approach: Relationships as ongoing negotiations (Mauthner, 2021)
- Digital relationality: platforms constitute and mediate family interactions

Theme 1: Intensification of connectedness



Enhanced communication & care across generations

- Platforms like WhatsApp & Facebook enable continuous connections: "Technology, at times, becomes the only viable option" (Francisco, 2015)
- Older adults feel more connected and supported (Neves et al., 2019)
- Virtual participation in family activities (Toumi, 2023)

Creation of micro-memories

 Digital platforms facilitate "micro-memories" and vernacular archives (Grønning, 2021): "doing family" through shared digital experiences

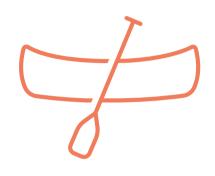
Techno-emotional mediation

- Platforms transform care practices: "Techno-emotional mediation of care" (Alinejad, 2021)
- Enhanced emotional labour and strengthened bonds

"we talk together daily and maybe more than once a day. We have a deep connection with everybody [... in the family]. We know nearly everything."

(granddad, 78y, Egypt)

Theme 2: Power struggles and conflicts



Inequalities and exclusion

• Digital literacy gaps marginalise older generations (Neves et al., 2019): low digital literacy and usability difficulties

Negotiation of relational boundaries

Decisions on platform usage and group memberships (Eklund & Sadowski, 2023):
 platform affordances enable fine-tuning of relationality

Shifting family dynamics

Children as digital experts and media brokers (Levinson & Barron, 2018)

Parental surveillance

• Mixed perceptions: care vs. intrusion (Francisco, 2015): complex power shifts

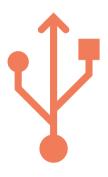
Gendered practices

 Mothers as gatekeepers of digital media use (Balleys, 2022): good dad vs "bad" mom dynamics

"My daughter would run off and be talking to a friend for an hour, or then my son would FaceTime his friend. [...] you lose them. They go off into their own world."

(dad, 45y, UK)

Discussion and conclusions: communication & social (dis)information



Transformation over interruption

- Platforms reconfigure existing family practices, not replace them
- Dual impact: enhanced intimacy & care and new power tensions & inequalities

Complex dynamics

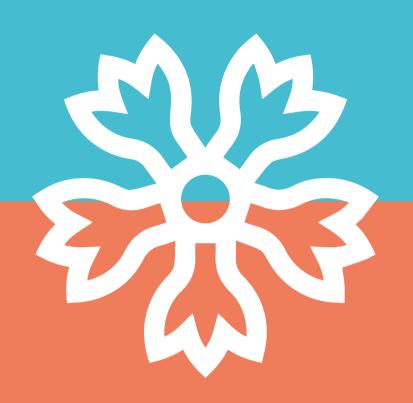
- Emotional, social, and technological facets intertwined
- Relational lens: balancing benefits and challenges of digital platforms

Multidimensional impact

- Platforms influence emotional connections and family hierarchies
- Dynamic negotiation of relationships in digital spaces

"the people that you would be in touch with [online], they are the ones that you feel closer to anyway [...] I don't think posting a photo of you on holiday or like a cute little video you've seen is going to change a relationship." (girl, 11y, UK)





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Thank you!

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