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The Platformization of the Family

Towards a Research Agenda

Edited by
Julian Sefton-Green
Kate Mannell
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The Platformization of the Family

"How do platforms get into the family home and how do families get platformized? Many books have tried to analyze the political-economic nature of platform power; this book demonstrates how platform power has deeply penetrated the nucleus of social life. It is a real eye-opener as it helps us better understand the intricate dynamics between social media apps and the families they "glue" together."

—José van Dijck, Professor of Media Studies and Digital Society, *Utrecht University, Netherlands, and author of The Platform Society*

"This short but empirically and theoretically rich book suggests a much-needed research agenda for the platformisation of the family. In eloquent nuance, it discusses the ways in which macro-structural conditions of contemporary platform society affects the micro-social relations within everyday family life, carefully avoiding alarmist dystopian jargon as well as affirmative techno-optimism. A must-read for anyone interested in relation between the affordances of technology and the social dynamics of the family."

—Göran Bolin, Professor, Department of Media & Communication Studies, *Södertörn University, Sweden*

"This insightful book tackles a compelling issue: how *platformization* is reshaping our families and our collective lives. Importantly, the authors adopt a non-media-centric approach, setting forth a research agenda that prioritises the lived experiences of doing family in the context of the sociocultural transformations of late modernity—while not neglecting the problematic datafication and monetisation of families to the benefit of platforms. A must read for anyone uncomfortable with both techno-solutionism and techno-determinism."

—Giovanna Mascheroni, Professor of Sociology of Digital media, *Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore*, and co-author of *Datafied Childhoods: Data Practices and Imaginaries in Children's Lives*

"With a smart review of recent research literature and the presentation of thought-provoking new data, this book lays the foundation for research into how families are negotiating their practices in relation to the powerful platforms of our time."

—Lynn Schofield Clark, author of *The Parent App: Understanding Families in the Digital Age*

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Chapter 3 draws on empirical material from the PlatFAMs research project, which aims to understand the use of digital platforms in, with, and for families and their everyday lives. The project involves empirical data from around 120 three-generation families from five European countries. Chapter 3 draws on the interviews from the UK and Norway specifically. The data collection was conducted during the first half of 2024 via qualitative semi-structured interviews with children 8–18 years, one of their parents, and one of their grandparents. The project was given ethics approval by the Queensland University of Technology (Ref: 202100310).

Chapter 4 draws on data from a research project exploring how parents' use of infant feeding and baby-tracking applications shapes experiences and practices of contemporary parenthood. The project included 28 qualitative semi-structured interviews with Australian parents from a range of genders and family structures. Areas of interest included how 'good' parenting today is constructed in and through the use of mobile applications, and how app use engenders particular data practices and cultures that are constitutive of everyday family life. The Norwegian fieldwork received data protection clearance from the Norwegian Agency for Shared Services in Education and Research. The UK fieldwork received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Committee at the London School of Economics and Political Science (Ref: 184400).

A brief note on terminology. We use UK spelling throughout this book; however, we spell 'platformization' and 'platformize' with a 'z' as these have become specialised terms.

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Introduction

Julian Sefton-Green , *Sonia Livingstone* ,
Kate Mannell , *and Ola Erstad*

Abstract This brief introductory chapter establishes the context for the argument of this book. In a context of increasing platformization and simultaneously reshaping of the contemporary family, how do platforms and families see, understand, and interact with each other as changing kinds of processes and social institutions? The chapter outlines the contents of the rest of the book.

Keywords Family • Platforms • Digitalisation • Datafication

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INTRODUCTION

In just two decades, digital platforms have come to define our age—we even talk of 'the platform society.' What are the consequences for our everyday lives? For families? This book shows how, for families, technological innovation can seem appealing, even compelling, in curious ways supportive of people's agency, energy and creativity, notwithstanding the popularity of dystopian narratives about the take-over of the machine. But that's not the whole story and for both families and critical scholars, platforms also represent the latest in the long march of capitalist inventions concentrating power ever more tightly in the hands of the unaccountable few. The early excitement about the free flow of information and communication across decentralised global networks now seems long gone. As Anne Helmond (2015, p. 8) has said of "the double logic of platformization," platforms are embedding themselves in all aspects of our public and private lives at work and home, learning and leisure, health and wellbeing, commerce and civic participation, local and global, even crime, while simultaneously drawing everything back to themselves.

Fuelled by the digitalisation, datafication, and commodification of people's agency, energy, and creativity, platforms represent an extraordinary recentralisation of power in the hands of today's most profitable companies, with limited control by governments. Yet our particular interest in this book is not so much how platforms operate in terms of governance or their political economy: rather, we ask how they *platformize* the family. Through this ugly word that emphasises *process*, we examine how the use of platforms might structure, mediate, influence, accommodate, or recontextualise everyday life, potentially changing family life as it is lived. What is the significance of characterising family life as being 'platformed'? What does this mean in practice, as platforms become actively embedded in ever more private domains within different kinds of homes and households? What do these large-scale social-economic-technological infrastructures portend for the role and nature of the family as a social unit and in its everyday life? And what research methods can capture these deep and often opaque processes?

These kinds of questions can only be answered by knowing more about how families actually use platforms and, at the same time, how platforms—meaning the companies that own them and their particular techno-social designs and functions—offer families particular services, and afford them distinct opportunities and risks. To answer these questions, we need to

weave together research from several domains that have developed some-what in parallel—including platform studies and the sociology of the fam-ily. Since media and communication studies have variously interacted with both domains, we use this as the mediating space of discussion and expla-nation in answering some questions—and asking others—about the impli-cations of digital platforms for the everyday life of the family.

The impacts of platformization are likely to be far-reaching. Technically, the digital platform is defined by its modular programmable architecture that allows third-party developers to build applications (apps) through its API (Application Programming Interface). Economically, platforms oper-ate a two-sided (or multi-sided) market—serving two or more user groups simultaneously via the platform, such as end-users and advertisers (Helmond, 2015). In principle, each side benefits from network effects and each provides network benefits for the other. However, given the very different and unequal forms of power on each side—the users constitute a mass market, while companies hold the power to make decisions and reap profit—there are growing concerns over the potential for platforms to exploit their users. At present, the consequences of families' increasing dependence on both state-managed and commercial platforms are unclear to the social scientists now beginning to ask questions. As Gillespie (2017) observed, "in its connotations, a platform offers the opportunity to act, connect, or speak in ways that are powerful and effective," yet this meta-phor obscures how those opportunities are shaped and controlled by the platform. In short, digital platforms connect but also exclude, and they offer opportunities to communicate and act 'for free' only on their own heavily transactional terms and at an unprecedented cost to our privacy and autonomy.

Chapter 2 sets out our theoretical line of enquiry. Sonia Livingstone and Julian Sefton-Green begin by detailing the broad context of digital transformations focusing on the changing role of digital platforms across many domains in contemporary life. Platforms are now a key type of soci-etal infrastructure governing many social, institutional, and interpersonal interactions. Similarly, and in parallel, they introduce literature describing how platforms are increasingly understood in relationship to families. This is both in terms of the family as a social unit and how the family conducts its interior and exterior lives through or 'on' platforms. They describe the theories and concepts that have been used to explain how families use platforms to 'compose' themselves and how families are addressed and identified as a social unit through and by digital platforms. They also raise

questions about what it means to research this intersection of platforms and families and what methodological challenges such enquiry makes—challenges taken up in Chapter 5. Contemporary ideas of the family itself are of course in a change of flux and the chapter goes onto describe how the sociology of the family is reconceptualising what the family might mean in the context of radical social restructuring and individualisation. The chapter ends by trying to conceptualise the relationship between families and platforms and how this relationship may be better understood by researching the *activities of platformizatio*n.

Chapter 3 focuses on how platformization occurs in relation to the home and its varied meanings in family life. In this chapter, Kate Mannell, Kristinn Hegna, and Mariya Stoilova begin by describing the mobile and networked media environment in which platformization is occurring, highlighting recurring themes around negotiations between privacy and autonomy, public and private spaces, and the uses and meanings of the homes. Drawing on examples from recent research in the UK and Norway, they then map two key trajectories along which the platformization of family life relates to the home: first, how platform technologies are bound up in the extension of familial care *beyond* the home, and secondly, how platform technologies are involved in the reshaping of domestic practices *within* the home. The chapter argues for the need to consider relationships between the household and the home and to make explicit dimensions of place, privacy, shared living, and the sites of media engagement when researching families, homes, and platformization.

In Chapter 4, Luci Pangrazio, Katrin Langton, and Andra Siibak explore a more specific context for digital media use and engagement in family life by focusing on how cultures of parenting play out in relation to platforms. Using a key case study into mobile apps for tracking and facilitating infant feeding and care, the chapter investigates how understandings of what it is to be a 'good' parent are increasingly defined through datafication and explicit metrics. It opens with a brief overview of the relationship between digital platforms, datafication, and the various contexts and micro-contexts for digital parenting. It then presents two forms of data: an app walkthrough of two infant feeding apps, and interviews with parents about their baby-tracking practices. The findings highlight instances of technology design and parental practice that challenge sociotechnical imaginaries of the usefulness of data, resist datafying practices, or allow parents to appropriate datafication for their own ends. They also emphasise how processes of platformization are not solely determined by

platform operators as institutional practices, cultural trends, and parents' lived experience are all contributing factors. The chapter concludes by summarising how platformization might be re-mediating the ways in which families understand themselves as individuals, social units, and institutions, as well as highlighting areas for future research.

In Chapter 5, Antonio Membrive and Raquel Miño-Puigcercós address the challenge of designing methods and methodologies to research the theories of the changing digital family. As noted above, the difficulty of combining broad social theory with detailed study of social and interpersonal interactions requires different kinds of investigations and more varied research approaches than are common. In particular, accounts of platforming the family need to move away from simplistic definitions like 'screen time' toward rigorous and imaginative methods for capturing everyday family life. The chapter identifies some of the methodological challenges recognised by researchers who have conducted empirical work on family lives and platformization and suggests methodological approaches and strategies that can be useful to address these challenges. It explores established and innovative methodologies that have been, or could be, used to understand how interactions among families are mediated by digital platforms and illustrates them with empirical cases. The chapter discusses the potentials and limitations of methods such as digital family ethnographies, interviews with digital prompts, and participatory methods, to elaborate questions and suggestions for researchers entering the field.

The final chapter of the book brings together key ideas, theories, methodological issues, and questions raised across the book to propose an agenda for progressing research on the platformization of the family. It summarises the key dimensions of platforms and families and proposes a theory of extended-domestication that bridges the micro and macro elements of these dimensions.

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The Platformization of the Family

Sonia Livingstone and *Julian Sefton-Green*

Abstract This chapter sets the context for the whole book by describing the broad context of digital transformations focusing on digital platforms across many domains in contemporary life. Platforms are now a key type of societal infrastructure governing many social, institutional and interpersonal interactions. The chapter then introduces literature describing how platforms are increasingly understood in relationship to families. This is both in terms of the family as a social unit and how the family conducts its interior and exterior lives through or 'on' platforms. The chapter describes the theories and concepts that have been used to explain how families use platforms to 'compose' themselves and how families are addressed and identified as a social unit through and by digital platforms. Contemporary ideas of the family itself are of course in a change of flux and the chapter goes onto describe how the sociology of the family is reconceptualising what the family might mean in the context of radical social restructuring

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and individualisation. The chapter ends by trying to conceptualise the relationship between families and platforms and how this relationship may be better understood by researching the *activities of platformizatio*n.

Keywords Platforms • Platformization • Family • Relationality • Domestication

ON PLATFORMS AND PLATFORMIZATION

Increasingly, families conduct their internal and external relationships on and through digital platforms. What do we mean by this claim, and why might this matter? In this chapter, we map the range of scholarship that links platforms to family life. Some scholars, as we will see, regard the power of commercial, global platforms to be so great as to exploit, overwhelm or even 'delete' the family. Countering these dystopian voices, other scholars explore the creative and agentic ways in which families variously 'domesticate' platforms by appropriating them into their lives in ways that make sense to them. Doubtless the truth lies in between, hence the purpose of setting out a research agenda in this book. This agenda, we argue, must examine the digital dynamics both within the family (recognising that 'the family' is itself an increasingly distributed and diverse phenomenon) and between the family and the wider society, now that the state increasingly deploys digital platforms, often via public-private partnerships, to manage its provision of education, welfare, health and law enforcement.

In recent years there has been a spate of literature about the digital platform as a way of trying to embody in a single term a complex range of governance regimes, everyday processes, interlinked power networks and technological developments (e.g., van Dijck et al., 2018; Gillespie, 2010; Srnicek, 2016; Plantin et al., 2018; Zuboff, 2019). Indeed, the idea of a platform has come to stand for so many aspects of 'the digital', it is not clear whether the specificity of the term remains useful, or whether it has become a catch all for everything digital. Key definitions of a platform over the last 10 years draw attention to four dimensions: the *technology,* especially programmability and capabilities for data extraction; *governance*, including management of and standards for trust, safety and security, privacy and rights; *powers*, relating to the uses or abuses of platforms for surveillance, control, misrecognition and prediction; and *economics*,

namely near-monopoly control of certain markets, relationship between private companies and the state, and the monetisation of data—especially the advertiser-driven exploitation of personal data for private profit. These dimensions are given different emphases by different scholars and tend to focus on the impact of the huge US-based commercial platforms, such as Google, Amazon, Uber, Facebook, Spotify, Microsoft, Apple, Netflix, Airbnb and others. While early platform studies focused on technology and its affordances (van Dijck & Poell, 2013), more recent work has drawn attention to the relations among monopoly control, regulatory interventions, and the consequences of datafication on individuals, culture, democracy, and society (e.g., Mejias & Couldry, 2024).

As platforms increasingly provide the very infrastructure for society, their ubiquity means we take them for granted, unable to imagine how we would function without them (Star, 1999). Just glance at your phone screen and think how many of the apps you could delete—the consequences are both personal and public. Plantin et al. (2018) argue that we are simultaneously witnessing the infrastructuralisation of platforms and the platformization of infrastructures (of welfare, education, health, finance and other state and community services): the implications for society are both deep and broad. For some scholarship, this invites critical analysis of the platformization of institutions—the news media, government, workplace, universities, the health service, school (e.g., Gandini et al., 2024). Indicative of our increasingly individualised society in the West, the implications of platformization are typically discussed in relation to individuals, whether imagined as highly diversified (each individual user is different) or as a homogenous mass (consumers, markets, users).

Instead, we argue for a need to capture the social lives and experiences of families—lived relationally, situated contextually, marked by particularities of gender, generation, class, ethnicity and culture. In this book we inquire both into the platformization of the internal relations within the family and of their external relations (with other families, communities, commerce and institutions). Notwithstanding the heightened visibility of technologically facilitated transformation, little has been said to date about the platformization of 'the family' by social science research. Many would claim that the family is the core unit of society, certainly the primary way in which individuals are interrelated through mutual connection and dependence. Without imposing any normative definition of what a family constitutes or the form it takes, this book asks how people themselves

conceive of their family, whether and how family life is now underpinned by platforms, and what issues or consequences arise.

What consequences can be anticipated? We live connected lives, founded on and through relationships of many kinds—interpersonal, local or community-based, embedded in culture, tradition, religion, class and more. These relationships have long been mediated by systems of transport, writing and print, telecommunications and, most recently, digital networks spanning the world—and examined by theories of mediatisation, now informing those of platformization (Fornäs, 2014). Such mediation vastly extends the possibilities of relationships and connections, bringing also unprecedented risks yet to be understood or mitigated. Mediatisation, Winfried Schulz (2004) argued, *extends* human capacities for communication through time and space, *substitutes* prior or direct social activities or experiences with mediated ones, *amalgamates* primary and secondary (or interpersonal and mass-mediated) activities, and *accommodates* social activities and institutions to the media logic. Does this analysis characterise and explain the extraordinary rise of platforms, and the pervasiveness of its effects on everyday life, including the family? The digital platform is clean, impersonal, standardised, even regimented and sets out defined contractual relationships among all parties—even if these are asymmetrical, opaque and unfair. The efficient interface, strong branding, recognisable logo, orderly placement on our phone screens—in these and other ways, platforms promise to fit helpfully into our lives, conforming to our preferences, solving our problems and making everything possible. Yet behind the logo sits a network extending far beyond our everyday oversight—typically, a large corporation driven by transactional and commercial imperatives largely invisible to its users, with a complex network of commercial partnerships stretching far into the global digital ecosystem.

ON FAMILIES AND THEIR RELATION TO PLATFORMS

Provocatively, Murray Goulden (2021) has suggested that, whether or not we could delete our favourite platforms, platforms are themselves 'deleting' the family by ignoring the diversity of families—and they (or the companies that produce them) do so precisely in order to provide techno-solutions to the very ruptures they introduce. For example, Goulden's analysis of the governance of smart home technologies such as Amazon's *Alexa* or Google *Home* showed that so-called family accounts and their associated mechanisms of control and exclusion can only really

function within the model of a traditional family. So, their very promise of supporting the family deletes the actual practices of contemporary diverse families and their hitherto taken-for-granted ways of 'doing family' (Kapella et al., 2022). How else might families' embrace of platforms be contributing to changes in family life? To what extent are these changes attributable to the business models, design affordances, or emerging social norms of the platformized society? Does it matter? And how could things be otherwise?

While platforms may be orderly, carefully designed and planned by big tech, families are intimate, diverse, messy, physical and organised around emotional and care needs. They are also structured in complicated ways that far exceed the normative model of the white suburban family with a couple of kids, encompassing non-nuclear, diasporic, non-heteronormative and mixed or blended family structures all variously running to the rhythms dictated by workplace, school, home maintenance and care needs. Ensuring sufficient income and allocating resources is nearly always a struggle, however affluent the family. Families are often marked by internal (generational, gendered) inequalities as well as by the more visible inequalities that divide and stratify them. In addition to being significant economic units, families have political significance on the national agenda and are also profound mechanisms for the reproduction or transformation of cultural values, norms and traditions. Meanwhile, everyday family life is also the site of interpersonal and emotional drama, again taking many forms, and—in this regard as in all others—increasingly deploying technologies in ways that support commonality or individuality or even mutual avoidance, facilitating sharing or conflict, expression and control, and allowing parents to bring up children for an uncertain, anxiety-provoking and challenging 'digital future' (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020).

In relation to family life, a strong tradition within socio-technical studies of the shaping and consequences of innovation for users is that of domestication research (Silverstone & Hirsch, 1992; Silverstone, 2006)—the careful, ethnographic study of the everyday practices through which people appropriate, accommodate, resist or refashion media technologies, whether in mundane or surprising ways. Domestication research—at heart, the critical analysis of how 'wild' innovations are 'tamed' through their use in ways that transform both the technologies and their users—has long sought to decentre the technology and avoid technological determinism. So while technology is the focus of interest, the analysis of what shapes its significance is likely to look elsewhere: in the institutions, norms,

values and meanings enacted in everyday life. The tradition of domestication research is especially suited to the analysis of technology use within families, since the concept itself implies the home—the domestic or private sphere—where family life is concentrated. Neither domestication processes nor family life are limited to the home (Campbell et al., 2014; Madianou & Miller, 2013). Indeed, domestication research is inspired in large part by the diverse ways that uses of technology reshape the boundaries between work and leisure, public and private, institutional and personal, as part of a host of wider societal transformations. While domestication research recognises people living their lives in real world contexts (their concerns, practices, voices or understandings), research on the platform economy, platform capitalism or platform society is more abstractly concerned with the people themselves. Such research concentrates on just one side of the two-sided market: that which generates actual revenue, rather than on the people (whose diverse and contextualised lives are not to be reduced to 'consumers') who find the platforms of value to them, even as their attention is exploited.

In theorising platform *cultures*, Burgess and Baym (2022) emphasise that, in addition to an unequal power struggle between platform providers and users, platforms are also the locus for rich and emergent cultures of use. Recalling the classic move of cultural studies against the political economy of communication, they illustrate how platform cultures are shaped significantly by the collective agency of users in ways that, while not denying the datafication and monetisation that benefits platforms, also exceeds these processes. In the case of Twitter (now X), they argue, for instance, that innovations originally invented by users include the noun 'tweet' and verb 'to tweet', the @ and # features, the retweet function and the later extension of the tweet from 140 to 280 characters (Burgess & Baym, 2022, p. 33). Platform evolution is continual, and once formalised, users again play with and against the grain of these features, such that the platform culture shifts further (Sujon et al., 2018). In short, research on platform cultures recognises everyday practices of resistance—the micro acts of refusal, choice, tactics, complaints, protest, workarounds or withdrawal of trust, and the forms of agency, literacy, organisation and critique that underpin them. It thus distinguishes and recognises the partial autonomy of the two (or more) sides of the transactional market, also keeping open the possibility of mutual shaping (even if on unequal terms).

Within traditions of research on platform cultures, some researchers have been fascinated with how platforms allow dispersed families to

communicate through time and space (Madianou, 2016), thereby satisfying individual and shared needs through the affordances of new technologies. Some scholars are grappling with people's reliance on the very platforms that undermine them (e.g., migrants and refugees, LGBTQI+, journalists), even using platforms to organise solidarity and resistance (Gilbert, 2020). Others caution that we should also take care not to attribute all the problems to platforms, for these generally have deeper roots. As Hall et al. (2022) argue, the success of Uber stems from the crisis of work, the collapse of the unions and the need to plug a social care deficit due to the crisis in social services, as we discussed earlier. There are thus many questions for research concerning the emerging interdependencies and renegotiations of power and meaning as the space-time relations of family life shape and are reshaped by digital platforms. Before exploring these further, we need to consider and problematise the concept of family.

On the Changing Meanings of 'the Family'

How have historical, structural and contextual changes in the nature of 'the family' created the expectations and anxieties with which families now approach, appropriate, and are possibly exploited by today's platform society? In this book, we try to put the long history of families in late modernity first and foremost and approach the relatively short history of digital platforms through their eyes. We are interested especially in platforms as more than a technical product—and more in terms of platform cultures (Chen et al., 2024), as well as that of the mediation of family life. We ground our analysis in the shifts, tensions, and demands with which the family arrives at the age of platforms, ensuring we contextualise people's engagement with platforms *in an account of family life*, thereby avoiding techno-determinism and media centrism. We acknowledge, further, that platforms are *par excellence* global phenomena, while our account of the family in late modernity originates in Western Europe and is situated in the global North. Given that, we have sought to avoid and contest normative assumptions about 'the family', working hard to offer an inclusive account of diverse lived forms of family life as multigenerational and relational.

Specifically, we have been thinking about 'the family' through a relational lens. By relationality, we follow what Roseneil and Ketokivi (2016) have called the 'relational turn' in the sociology of the family. This refers to the internal and external interpersonal (and intrapersonal) dynamics

through which families are constituted. Analytically, we see families as ontologically relational, together with the contexts within which they are simultaneously embedded and which they co-construct. When it comes to family uses of digital technologies, this means looking beyond the idea of a household of individuals, each with their own device uses and preferences (which is widely researched), and beyond the generally well-researched focus on individual motivations, beliefs and activities to examine the variously collaborative or conflictual negotiation of relationships. In other words, we ask: what does it mean to consider families to be 'platformed' or 'platformized'?

In a recently published evidence review of families in the age of platforms (Erstad et al., 2024), we explored what has been described as an 'intra-actional approach' (Mauthner, 2021) or 'strong definition' of relationality (Twamley et al., 2021), which sees practices and subjectivities as negotiated between and within subjects, continuously dynamic and performative. For example, research details the co-construction of family intimacy through digital technology, with emotionality, everyday habits and intra- and intergenerational hierarchies being interwoven in the platform environment. While platforms increasingly provide a significant infrastructure for family connections, enabling distinctive platformized practices of intimacy, belonging and care, these intensified connections also give rise to power struggles over resources, knowledge and agency. After all, digitally mediated forms of interdependency and vulnerability can generate tensions or conflict and these, too, may be expressed through—even shaped by—the affordances of platforms (Taipale, 2019).

In such ways, family and kinship are understood as dynamic and constituted through relational practices (Finch & Mason, 2000) in which, increasingly, digital technologies play an influential part (Evans et al., 2019; Goulden, 2021). While families encompass diverse relationships, some of us are also exploring a multigenerational approach for its insights into how ideas and experiences of relationality change over time and the life course (Nilsen, 2021), including media and technological transformations (Bolin, 2017, 2023). Aroldi and Colombo (2020) assert that, "the era of platforms undoubtedly constitutes the ecosystem in which the next generations all over the world are forming" (p. 576). They unpack how 'generations' are now mediated, eschewing a media-centric account by recognising the reflexive and participatory co-creation practices of generations, as media and mediation catalyse and engage but do not determine these practices, shaping generational identities and structures of feeling.

This is to highlight both the reflexive and participatory co-creation practices of 'media generations' living through socio-technological transformations, including the potential consequences of platformization as a distinctive discontinuity in the media ecosystem (Aroldi & Colombo, 2020). So, we are also interested in kinship as a relational practice, noting further that, as Finch and Mason (2000) point out, kinship practices: "are made and remade over time as each of us works out our own relationships with others with whom we share ties of blood, legal contract or other commitment" (p. 167).

What can we learn from positioning the individual platform user as part of a growing (family) system that shapes how each family member (re) defines family by dynamically creating meaning through mundane mediated acts of communication and engagement? How far should we focus on platforms not only in relation to the internal dynamics of families but, also, the platformization of families' external relations with other societal institutions—work, education, welfare, law, state, politics, etc.—as families increasingly rely on platforms to organise care, education, or work? Or, even, how far should we seek to tie family relationality to the relationality inherent to platforms which, after all, have no value if they are uninhabited, but gain a double value as soon as they are used to link people to each other?

This interest in how families work—how, as it were, people *do* family—derives from our interest in family practices—the activities, interactions, routines as well as the reflections about what these practices mean. In the context of new research into the family, focus has moved away from concerns with the functional or structural role family might play in society (Parsons et al., 1956) towards what the family looks like from the inside as it were. David Morgan's (1996) work on how families construct themselves as a collective identity is built on empirical research capturing the everyday. This practice-centred approach is of course equally processual (Turner, 2013) and, in the context of this book, places significant attention on being able to describe and interpret practices as they are enacted. While this book might shed light on some of the broader sociological trends accounting for historical changes in the structure of the family, it is through attention to how a family constitutes themselves through events and practices, and how they make sense of such experiences through reflection, that we can see how a family comes into existence as a collective identity. David Morgan characterises these practices in terms of "life events", "life's regularities", and "normative life" (1996, p. 37–38).

Goulden further refers to an intersecting weave of "major life experiences", "the quotidian and the mundane", and how the "ideas the family attaches to itself and its activities define 'normal'" (Goulden, 2021, p. 13). Researching the practices of platformization simultaneously with the practices of doing family will enable scholars in this field to address claims made in both academic and public discussion about the effects of platforms and changes in family structure and family life.

It is worthwhile noting here that the key terms in our discussion are family and platforms even though the language of family, home and household are often used interchangeably. The term 'household' refers quite literally to the people living in the same place, so while this can correspond with a family, it is clearly not equivalent. Similarly, home refers on several levels (emotional, physical, normative) to a place where people live, though it can also be used for places of the imagination and belonging (Ahmed, 1999). While it may frequently correspond with 'family', it may also diverge sharply. Furthermore, the home should not be treated as a synonym for the family, which is a group of individuals strongly related by kinship, law and/or choice. The distinctions between these terms are important even if they are used interchangeably in everyday discourse.

Although many platforms can be accessed through mobile technologies, the home and household often occupy a determining role in the use of particular platforms and technologies. At an infrastructural level, it is likely that homes might arrange broadband access and there is a preponderance of contracts governing the use of platforms organised by family units. From technology companies' point of view, the meaning and nature of the family of course is not necessarily the same as those defined above and can relate more strictly to the occupants of a household. In other words, family, as perceived by a digital platform, is usually defined more as an economic unit. Homes, households and families are understood by many digital platforms in slightly different ways from, for example, the use of family subscriptions for streaming services to citizens on the electoral roll at any given address. Such practices are clearly not on the same level as the values and emotions that define many people's sense of family and it does not capture the ongoing accretion of networks and relationships and social interactions through which families continually bring themselves into being.

To some extent then this theory of family construction or self-making draws from historical perspectives first articulated in the 1990s by, amongst others, Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens, who argued that the structural

functionalist analyses of family as fulfilling particular social and economic roles no longer made sense in an era of detraditionalisation (Beck, 1992; Giddens, 1991). On one level the idea of family self-making derives from these theorists of late modernity who argue that individuals play a greater role in defining the meaning and value of constructs like family, in opposition to the idea of behaving according to the allotted roles mandated by social conventions. Equally, however, the idea of self-making derives as much from theoretical innovations in methodology from social psychology and other sociocultural disciplines which began to pay attention to the discourses of meaning making, as it does from the notion that social life is more dynamic and fluid, continuously being constructed by social actors in specific contexts and over time. These methodological innovations paid attention to different kinds of processes through which people were living their lives rather than solely concentrating on top-down models of how society worked. In other words, contemporary theories of the family that emphasise the sort of tripartite processes outlined by Morgan discussed above can be seen as deriving from a particular historical moment in academic theory.

   This book invites researchers to investigate the validity of such claims in relation to the platformization of the family. In this chapter, we have suggested that research to date about platforms and families can be read from twin perspectives: exploring the mechanisms by which families constitute themselves at the same time as seeking to standardise and restrict how families are composed—in Goulden's terms (2021), as a form of deletion. Although, as the following chapters will describe, there isn't a great deal of research to date examining the day-to-day effect of platforms on families, it is possible to detect this double centripetal and centrifugal force. Platforms clearly play a role in the narrative of how families constitute themselves just as they can be seen to rewrite traditional ways of defining relations, enacting routines and contributing to changing norms about what the family is and what it does. Contemporary research in geography has theorised the idea of 'unbundling' services (Graham & Marvin, 2001). This approach examines a previously taken for granted set of practices— their example focuses on all the different services bundled together underneath a road (sewers, gas, electricity telecoms, etc.) and shows how neoliberal economic reforms conjoined with the taken for granted unitary phenomena can now be unbundled into a series of discrete processes. This way of thinking might be useful as we examine the interrelationship between platforms and families in that the family, which usually and

customarily has been thought of as a unit in social and analytical terms, has been unbundled by platformization. The rest of this book begins to take up this challenge, examining the kind of work a family does in terms of its distinctive practices of economic, social and caring work, to ask whether it is being 'unbundled' given what we now understand about how platforms divide, measure and standardise. Navigating the challenge of researching this unbundling is also explored in Chap. 5.

However, this approach to the family in terms of process—exploring relationality and everyday habits through which families compose themselves, their routines and interactions—along with our approach to how platforms are used and understood through use, requires a commitment to a mode of research that can capture the meanings and significance of these processes. It then needs to be able to analyse them in terms of contributing towards a discussion of the historical changes implied by such a research orientation. In broad terms, we have brought together scholarship from platform studies and the sociology of the family in terms of academic disciplines. Our attention to the processual in both fields is simultaneously theoretical and methodological: indeed, it is probably impossible to disentangle them. It is theoretical in the sense of relying on analyses that pay attention to processes of self-making, co-construction and relationality deriving from our understanding of historical change, especially the relationship of collective units to the individual. It is methodological in as much as we propose examining modes of process through which these new forms of self-making and individuation are taking place in practice, thus allowing us to see what the effects might be. The book is thus a provocation to new ways of thinking about families and platforms and how both sets of social concepts might be mutating and reforming as they interact with each other. It is also offered as a primer to support the difficult kinds of research which we argue are necessary to explore these claims and which to date has lagged behind rhetoric about the effects of digital transformation.

LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD

Thirty years ago, John Corner commented on the centrifugal forces by which television "project[s] its images, character types, catch-phrases and latest creations to the widest edges of the culture, permeating if not dominating the conduct of other cultural affairs" while, simultaneously, centripetal forces enable "the powerful capacity of television to draw towards

itself and incorporate (in the process, transforming) broader aspects of the culture" (1995, p. 5). Twenty years later, Stig Hjarvard observed the "double-sided development in which media emerge as semi-autonomous institutions in society at the same time as they become integrated into the very fabric of human interaction in various social institutions like politics, business, or family" (2012, p. 30). More recently still, José van Dijck et al. (2018) said of the digital platform, "it looks egalitarian yet is hierarchical; it is almost entirely corporate, but it appears to serve public value; it seems neutral and agnostic, but its architecture carries a particular set of ideological values; its effects appear local, while its scope and impact are global; it appears to replace 'top-down' 'big government' with 'bottom-up' 'customer empowerment', yet it is doing so by means of a highly centralised structure which remains opaque to its users" (p. 13). In this way, digital platforms continue a trend that has been evident in earlier media forms. But are there also differences? Platforms are distinctively profit-led, with public or social purposes subordinated to market imperatives, with global ambitions trumping national allegiances and are famously unresponsive to the concerns of either governments or individual users. Can they still be influenced by the collective efforts or concerns of families or communities? Can there be productive alignments of interests between business profit and individual concerns? Or are families today newly losing agency to socio-technical systems that dictate the conditions of their lives and obscure the very possibility of alternatives?

Scholars who have noted the rise of platforms in social, interpersonal, political and economic life are still trying to pin down their significance in contemporary social life. Does the platform society represent a new kind of economic order, as a new era of social control ushering in new kinds of polity and politics (e.g., Couldry & Mejias, 2018; Srnicek, 2016; Zuboff, 2019)? Recent moments of great political import such as the Arab Spring (Tufekci, 2017) or the effects of social media on recent post-2016 forms of political populism (Davies, 2018) are very focused on the platform as a paradigm shifting historical moment. Or do such questions and observations carry too much baggage from technologically determinist perspectives, underplaying both the political and business interests that dictate platform development and deployment and the everyday cultural processes that shape their use and consequences?

While both public and academic commentary on platforms is becoming increasingly dystopian, stimulating urgent calls for governments and regulators to regain control over national sovereignty and security, institutional

integrity, personal wellbeing and the public interest, it would be premature to conclude that the spaces for human agency and the organic generation of value and meaning have been entirely oppressed by the relentless capture of big tech. It is vital that we retain a dispassionate gaze, including attention to the people living through this societal transformation. Richard Butsch (2008) has insightfully traced anxieties about the supposedly lost agency of media audiences and users not merely over recent decades but also centuries past. Yet, as his and others' historical work also shows, human agency is a strong force, whether expressed in predictable or surprising ways, individually and collectively. No history of technology has been written without acknowledging the contribution of user practices, workarounds, inventiveness and resistance. It seems unlikely that the history of platforms will buck this trend. In this context, we approach the process of platformization to examine how the study of *uses in action* of digital technologies *may* shape the lives of contemporary families as much as how those actions may shape our understanding of the reach and power of the platforms themselves.

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The Home as a Site of Platformization

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Abstract Chapter 3 investigates how processes of platformization play out in relation to the spaces and spatial arrangements of family life, focusing in particular on the idea of the home. Given that family life, including the meaning of the home, are constructed through relational practices and that these practices are increasingly *platformized* (that is, occurring through and in relation to platforms), this chapter asks: how is the platformization of the family reshaping and extending the home? Drawing on qualitative empirical data from our own projects and existing literature, we examine how platforms are implicated in family life within the physical space of the home *and* how platforms might be used to extend the idea of home beyond a physical space of co-location. We argue that, on one hand,

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the use of platforms reconfigures how the physical home is experienced by those within it—sometimes fracturing the idea of the home as a private space and other times supporting the practices of care, intimacy, and organisation that give it meaning as a home—while on the other, it extends relational practices beyond the physical boundaries of the home, opening up new possibilities for families to practice care and intimacy across distance.

Keywords Home • Household • Family • Family-as-practice • Platformization • Platforms

Introduction

In this chapter, we investigate how processes of platformization play out in relation to the spaces and spatial arrangements of family life, focusing in particular on the idea of the home. While the shared home is not a precondition for family, in many cases it remains a key context for the everyday practices of care and belonging through which family is constituted.

Recent scholarship has highlighted how the 'platform family'—as envisioned by smart home platforms—challenges the idea of the home as a safe haven with clear boundaries (Goulden, 2021). As relationships and communication between parents, children, and grandparents are 'networked,' the home becomes a space of transconnectivity (King-O'Riain, 2015), a digitally networked space with porous boundaries (Flewitt & Clark, 2020). This can have varied outcomes. On the one hand, the home may be seen as infringed on or pervaded by digital platforms in the form of marketplaces, commercial interests, and risks related to digital 'city streets.' On the other hand, the closeness and care of family is reconfigured within the home through the mediation of platforms and stretched out to those beyond the home, such as distant family members (King-O'Riain, 2015). Platforms also intervene in the connections between homes and local communities, as pointed out by Caliandro et al. (2024) in their study of AirBnB. They discuss AirBnB's corrosive effects on housing access and local neighbourhoods due to processes of commercialisation—effects that the platform seeks to obscure via a powerful 'sharing economy' imaginary of warmth and affection between domestic hosts and visitors. Their example emphasises how the use of platforms can reshape

not only domestic space but the wider neighbourhoods and communities in which homes are situated.

Platforms can also attempt to impose their own definitions of the home and the family, producing mismatches between the rigid definitions assumed by platforms and the much more complex and varied experiences of actual families. Goulden's (2021) examination of group accounts on Google and Amazon's smart home platforms highlights how these platforms impose their own definitions of 'the family' in order to make domestic life "both encodable within digital systems, and commensurate with the platform's commercial logics" (2021, p. 916). For example, users can only be members of one Amazon 'Household' at a time with no allowance for non-nuclear families or separated families. Similarly, many platforms come with embedded expectations of families sharing one domestic space. Take, for example, the streaming platform Netflix with its insistence that a family needs to live under the same roof. Netflix enforces this definition through the use of information such as IP addresses, device IDs, and account activity, forcibly excluding family members who do not seem to be near (hence close) enough. Small exceptions to this rule are accommodated—within moderation and as exceptions—when family members seem to be travelling. Amazon 'Households' are somewhat more generously defined as people living within the same country but moving between them is discouraged: you can only join a new household 180 days after leaving a previous one (Goulden, 2021).

Based on these considerations, we argue for the need to examine relationships between the family, the household, and the home when researching families and platformization. In this chapter, we draw attention to these elements by taking up the focus on relationality and family-as-practice outlined by Sefton-Green and Livingstone in Chap. 2. Given that family life, including the meaning of the home, are constructed through relational practices and that these practices are increasingly *platformized* (that is, occurring through and in relation to platforms), we are asking: how is this platformization reshaping and extending the home? In asking this question, we are interested both in how platforms are implicated in family life within the physical space of the home, such as how their use impacts the meanings, understandings, and uses of the home, *and* how platforms might be used to extend understandings and experiences of home beyond these physical spaces of co-location.

We begin the chapter by outlining key elements within the idea of 'home,' including homes as bounded spaces that are given meaning

through their use and as spaces that can have varied significance for family life. We then outline earlier research on the domestication of media technologies in the home that has charted how the introduction of new media technologies to domestic settings is bound up in changes to domestic spaces and practices of dwelling, often requiring the reformulation of norms and practices. We describe the shift to a mobile and networked domestic media environment—the environment in which platformization is occurring—and highlight recurring negotiations around privacy and autonomy, public and private spaces, and the uses and meanings of the home—negotiations that are echoed in our discussion of platformization that follows. We then map two key trajectories along which the platformization of family life relates to the home: first, how platform technologies are involved in reshaping domestic practices *within* the home and, second, how platform technologies are bound up in the extension of relational family practices *beyond* the home. We do so by drawing on examples from existing literature and from fieldwork that two authors of this chapter undertook in the UK (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2024) and Norway.[1] In line with the broader ambitions of this book, we use this discussion as a means to raise questions that point towards possible research agendas.

The Home, the Household, and Domestic Media Technologies

Conceptualising the Home

There are two key dimensions of the concept of 'home' that are central to our discussion. One is that the family home has been defined, at least recently, through its perceived separation from the public world beyond. It has been understood as a private space to be occupied and invested in by a single nuclear family for whom it provides a space of respite and recovery (Segalen, 1996). This specific formulation of the home emerged in Western contexts as a middle-class norm following the industrial revolution and was closely linked to emerging gender roles in which women (and children) were encouraged to stay home rather than

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[1] This fieldwork was conducted as part of the PlatFams project (https://chanse.org/plat-fams/). The project is investigating the role of platforms within family life through qualitative research with up to 100 three-generation families across five European countries (Norway, Estonia, UK, Romania, and Spain).

engaging in paid work (Hareven, 1991; Segalen, 1996). In this formulation, the home is associated with intimacy, privacy, warmth, and leisure and is set in contrast to an outside world associated with anonymity, public life, and work. This boundary between the home and the world beyond has always been partial and contested (see Goulden, 2021) and, as described below, has often been reconfigured through the introduction of media technologies that have brought 'in' the outside world in new ways. However, it has remained a powerful imaginary that has given meaning to the idea of home, even if the reality has always been more complex. In this chapter, we consider how the platformization of the family relates to these perceived and actual boundaries between home and the world beyond.

Secondly, and relatedly, we recognise that while contemporary normative models of family (especially coupledom) often still centre on the idea of cohabitation (Roseneil et al., 2020), the home is not necessarily central to many people's ideas and experiences of family life. While there have always been exceptions, the norm of the family as a heterosexual co-residential couple with children that dominated in the mid-twentieth century has shifted as family living arrangements have diversified and perceptions of who counts as family have become less about co-residence and more about relationships, care, and belonging. For example, research has charted the experience of families separated by national borders (Das et al., 2023) and people who are in romantic relationships but choose to live separately (Duncan et al., 2013). The rise of solo living and shared housing has further eroded the norm equating domestic space with romantic relationships (Roseneil et al., 2020). Today, it is particularly evident that a family may or may not be a 'household' that resides together in a shared 'home.' At the same time, however, the family practice approach we draw on (see Chap. 2) emphasises the role of family practices in constructing the home as a space that holds meaning. As Morgan (2019) notes, family practices "do not simply take place in space: they also create spaces, through the investment of meanings, positive and negative." That is, the family home, as distinct from the physical place of a house, is created and given meaning through the same practices by which the family constitutes itself. In this chapter, we consider how these changing and varied relationships between the family and the home intersect with the platformization of family life.

Domestic Media Environments

The domestication of media technologies within the home has long reconfigured spatial and intimate relations within the domestic sphere. Broadcasting, initially through radio and gramophones and then television, were widely seen as perforating the boundary between the home and the outside world by providing new 'windows' onto public life from within private domestic settings (Spigel, 1992, p. 7; Williams, 1975). These media forms also reconfigured the material arrangement of the home, with furniture and floor plans shifting to make room for new technologies and the social practices developing around them, such as gathering around the television at meal times. The introduction of the telephone similarly challenged boundaries between public life and the private sphere of the home via the unpredictable appearance of telephone calls (Fischer, 1994). Again, new material configurations, like the telephone bench, developed alongside new social practices, such as negotiating when and how to accept calls and afford privacy to the calls of others (Marvin, 1988). Computer use likewise reconfigured practices and spaces of dwelling through the appearance of the 'home office' and 'computer desk,' and the emergence of new forms of work and leisure (Lally, 2002). As noted in Chap. 1, the family constructs itself through relational practices. Our point here is that at least some of these practices have been worked out in relation to a changing cast of technologies in the home, as these technologies allow for, encourage, and discourage particular practices of dwelling together. We note in particular that these shifting social and material configurations often have implications for privacy, both between family members and between the home and the world beyond.

Charting more recent changes to domestic media environments, scholars have observed the proliferation of media devices in the home as technologies have become cheaper and more portable (Kennedy et al., 2020; Livingstone, 2002). Rather than being situated in specific and often shared spaces—the TV in the lounge, the telephone in the hallway, etc.—media technologies have migrated across the home. In some cases, such as smartphones, they are more attached to people than spaces and are used in different locations around the home. In other cases, media technologies have moved into more private spaces within the home, with household members having their own TV sets, music systems, and so on, often located in bedrooms for individual use. Work in the early 2000s by scholars like Sonia Livingstone (2002; Bovill & Livingstone, 2001) described how

family members began spending more time in their own rooms consuming media on personal devices rather than in shared familial spaces. For children in particular, bedrooms become key spaces of privacy and autonomy, often replacing the freedoms that earlier generations typically found by roaming outside the home (Livingstone, 2002). At the same time, the use of internet connectivity has also reconfigured boundaries between the home and the world beyond, expanding the home's role as a node within wider networks of labour, consumption, socialisation, and organisation (Kennedy et al., 2020). It is on this foundation of a mobile and networked domestic media ecology that the platformization of family life is playing out.

Through a review of literature on platforms in family life, Erstad et al. (2024) highlight how the use of platforms transforms and reconfigures the relational practices of the family—a process described as "platformised relationality" (p. 175). They find that existing research points to a resulting "co-construction of family intimacy through digital technology, with emotionality, family everyday habits and intra- and intergenerational hierarchies being interwoven in the platform environment" (Erstad et al., 2024, p. 10). In this chapter, we consider how these processes of platformed relationality take place in relation to the home.

Reshaping and Mediating Domestic Spaces, Rituals, and Homemaking

In this section, we consider how the use of platforms is reshaping family life *within* the home. While the shared home is not the sole precondition for family relationality and intimacy, it remains a key site for everyday practices of familial care and belonging, and the presence of platforms within the home has varied implications for how collective dwelling is enacted and experienced.

Research has begun to indicate some of these possibilities. In their study of how Australian families play Minecraft via mobile devices, Balmford and Davies (2020) demonstrate how game play involves negotiating household spaces. Some families designated areas of the home as off-limits for children's Minecraft play in order to manage noise, ensure adult supervision, or limit the time children spent playing the game. At the same time, shared play between family members recast spaces in the home as places for joint play, effectively "extending the family home into the virtual space of the game" (2020, p. 15). Ferdous et al.'s (2016) study of

how families negotiate technology use during shared meals provides similar observations about the negotiated arrangements of technologies and people within the home. Many of their findings concern hardware, such as how laptops, smartphones, or TV sets are arranged in relation to bodies, furniture, and food, and how these arrangements are designed to encourage particular practices and qualities of togetherness. While platforms were not a specific focus of the study, some of the findings indicate the role they played in these arrangements, such as the deliberate use of smart home technologies and streaming services to "contribute to mood and ambience" on special occasions, or the conditions under which using smartphones to watch videos or engage with social media were deemed acceptable during meals. Importantly, they found that the use of platforms and other media technologies during mealtimes was contingent on whether the uses aligned with the families' socially enacted values around sharing meals. That is, families co-developed their own sense of when platform use supported their relational practices and when it was disruptive, with these ideas varying across families.

These examples begin to illustrate how platform use in the family home takes place through processes of negotiation, with the meaning and role of platforms in shared spaces and rituals being worked out collectively. Of course, these negotiations do not always go smoothly. Fieldwork in the UK from the recent project described above provides several examples of how the platformization of family life can offer 'wormholes' through domestic space, allowing non-family members to take part in family routines in ways that are welcomed by some family members but not by others (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2024). In one example, Stephen—a mid-40s working-class father who lives with his wife and two children—discussed how digital technology use was reshaping their Christmas rituals. The whole family had gathered for Christmas, including his wife's sister and parents. After opening presents, the celebration quickly 'dissolved' as the children went on their devices and preferred to spend time playing or talking to friends rather than around the family Christmas table. Video calling platforms played a particularly disruptive role, as his nine-year-old daughter called a friend and the two girls spent time together showing off their new presents. In Stephen's view, this friend was effectively invited to share their Christmas celebrations and enjoyed more of his daughter's attention than the family who were present in the same house. He felt that the experiences he had as a child of a family enjoying each other's company was long gone:

It's never like the old days where the whole family would sit around watching the telly […] My daughter would run off and be talking to a friend for an hour, or then my son would FaceTime his friend. And once they've opened their presents and they've had their dinner, you lose them. They go off into their own world. Whereas years ago, the whole family would be around, sitting around the table, telly, playing games together. Now it's a totally different era now to when I was a kid.

There are clear echoes here of the longer histories of new media forms (particularly the telephone) bringing 'outside' people into the home in ways that challenge existing routines, etiquettes, and understandings of the divide between private and public. For Stephen, communication platforms intensify this process in unwelcome ways, enabling his children to bring friends into family rituals and displacing collective media practices—namely, watching television together—that had been important to his own experience of being a family. Presumably for Stephen's children, these communication platforms have very different meanings as places of connection and fun, enabling them to engage with their own interests and social networks from the confines of home.

The shift from collective to individualised media practices that Stephen feels so keenly is not wholly unique to platforms. As noted above, scholarship from the early 2000s charted how cheaper and more portable media technologies led to a proliferation of entertainment media across the home, enabling much more individualised practices of media consumption, including the development of "bedroom culture" in which children shifted their media use to their bedrooms in pursuit of privacy and autonomy (Bovill & Livingstone, 2001; Livingstone, 2002). In a context of platformization, we could ask how the greater degrees of personalisation afforded by platformed media experiences, and their accessibility to much younger children, might extend bedroom culture further. We could also note that while Stephen's focus is on the unwelcome intrusion of his children's friends, the platformization of their interactions also brings corporate interests into the home in new ways, as the more intensive datafication of interpersonal interactions through platforms is used as a source of commercial value. This is an issue taken up in greater detail by Pangrazio, Langton, and Siibak in the following chapter on 'baby apps.'

While Stephen's account raises questions about how platforms might disrupt domestic spaces and rituals, other examples from the same study pose questions about how platforms can act as facilitators of the home,

building connections and enabling practices of homemaking. A family with neurodiverse members living in rural UK, for example, illustrates how the platformization of the domestic space itself can help those carrying out caring responsibilities and can even act as a 'digital carer' (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2024). Catherine—a white British mum of two in her early 50s—needs all the help she can get with organising family life and often uses platforms to 'control' their home. From smart lights in all rooms, a Google nest/assistant, and a doorbell that identifies visitors to platforms for education, shopping lists, and fitness, Catherine navigates nearly all aspects of their life via some form of tech assistance. This seems to help her keep track of everyone's activities, coordinate their varying routines, remind family members of their tasks and responsibilities, and generally stay on top of domestic life.

Of particular note is her practice of using platforms as mediators in situations when getting her children to adhere to their routines is challenging. She uses parental control apps like Google Family Link to structure the children's time online and maintain what she sees as a healthy balance between spending time offline and in digital spaces. She also broadcasts messages to everyone in the house via Google Nest smart speakers and explained that, in certain situations, this seems to be a more neutral form of interaction that provokes less resistance. For example, when her own reminders to the children to switch off the lights and go to bed do not work, she will ask Google to do it for her using the voice interface of their Nest smart speakers.

> We don't need to leave the living room to say, 'it's time to do your teeth', 'it's time to do this, that'. I mean, we do, but sometimes we just don't have to. […] There's speakers in pretty much every room.

For Catherine, platforms play an important role mediating everyday life within the household and are embedded in practices of homemaking. Her extensive use of platforms in running the household and the home brings to mind arguments about the platformization of infrastructure and the infrastructualisation of platforms (Plantin et al., 2018). What does it mean for the infrastructure of family life within and beyond the home to be *platformized*? Catherine's account suggests that the answers to these questions might not always align with the expectations and imaginaries of platforms themselves. While the Google Nest is primarily marketed as a device that provides a voice-controlled AI assistant, Catherine values it as an

intercom that can tell her kids to brush their teeth—a much more 'low-fi' use.

While platforms assist Catherine in managing the household, they also require their own managing—a role that seems to fall largely to her. While describing her husband as the "tech geek" who is keen to introduce new technologies into the home, Catherine appears primarily responsible for integrating them into the family's everyday life. This sometimes became burdensome:

> It's just so much. And he [husband]'s just constantly coming up with something new and saying, 'Oh, we should get this. It'd be absolutely brilliant.' And I'm like, 'No, because then I'm going to have to learn how to work it. And the kids will want to know when you're not here.'

Catherine's comments draw attention to the "digital housekeeping" that is required to integrate technologies into the home in productive and meaningful ways (Tolmie et al., 2007, p. 332; see also Kennedy et al., 2020 pp. 127–163). They also provide another example of how the platformization of family life occurs, at least partly, through processes of interpersonal negotiation. Here, the meaning of platforms as useful and desirable, or as burdensome, is worked out (or not) through deliberations between Catherine and her husband—negotiations that are shaped by their differing roles in managing everyday family life. Platformization here is not just a 'top down' process of commercial imposition but also a relational process in the sense that the entry of platforms into the home requires deliberation and negotiation between people: in this case between two parents but in other cases between other configurations of parents and children.

Reconfiguring Family Relationality Beyond the Home

So far we have focused primarily on the role of platforms in family life *within* domestic spaces. However, platformization also means that family practices that used to centre on cohabitation or copresence are being reconfigured as they stretch beyond the home. This possibility is raised by Erstad et al. (2024) in their review of literature on platforms and multigenerational family life. They note that the intensification of interaction afforded by platforms may "reinforce, extend and potentially reconfigure

existing forms of relationality *that used to rely on geographical and temporal co-presence* to construct family, primarily through cohabitation and child-rearing" [emphasis added] (2024, p. 6). That is to say, being physically co-present in the home is less central to enacting the practices through which the family is constituted, and the extension of these practices beyond the home can reconfigure how they are performed and with what meanings.

It is important to note, however, that the expansion of family practices beyond the physical space of the home has been enabled by technologies prior to digital platforms. Mobile communication in particular enabled new forms of "connected presence" that extended family interactions beyond the home (Christensen, 2009; Licoppe, 2004). For example, in an early study of mobile communication between parents and children, Palen and Hughes (2007, p. 345) concluded that "Parents use mobile phones to help extend the idea of 'home.' They, by being communicatively available by a single number, come to embody the physical predictability and stability of home base." Platformization represents a continuation of these developments as it extends and transforms how, and with what implications, family life, care, and relationships can be practised beyond the home.

Platforms for Extending Communication Beyond the Home

One means through which this is occurring is via more intensive platformization of existing practices for extending family life beyond the home. For example, while families have always found ways to remain in contact with distant loved ones, such as via letters or phone calls, video calling has provided new possibilities for including physically absent family members in everyday situations (Nedelcu & Wyss, 2016). Transnational families in particular have demonstrated how video platforms enable practices of care and feelings of connectedness to be maintained across distance. In her study of transnational families in Ireland, King-O'Riain (2015, p. 268) demonstrates how practices of "hanging out" via extended video calls provides "a window" into the everyday lives of loved ones. Nedelcu and Wyss (2016) describe similar practices among Romanian migrants in Switzerland who use "omnipresent co-presence" via extended video calling to bring distant loved ones into "the inherent features of the 'everyday', the 'regular' and the 'fluidity' of 'doing family' processes"

(pp. 210; 212). More recently, a study of romantic relationships during COVID lockdowns showed that video calling afforded "intimacy from afar" in cases where couples occupied different domestic spaces (Cascalheira et al., 2023).

The UK fieldwork described above offers examples of how video calling platforms can also support family relationality among those who live together. For a middle-class ethnic minority family living in the UK, for example, their busy lives and often conflicting schedules made physical co-presence difficult to accomplish (Livingstone & Stoilova, 2024). Omar—a highly educated man in his late 40s—struggled to be a present father for his teen children due to the demands of his high-profile job. Two types of platforms allowed him to "stretch" his parenting practices to and from the home: family tracking platforms that monitored everyone's movement and location, and communication platforms that allowed him to converse with family members. When shopping, for example, he would video call family members to ask what they wanted and show them what's available. Omar felt that even these simple tasks were no longer possible without the mediation of digital platforms—without them, he says, "I would be the absentee father because I'd always be at work." For his family, video calling and location tracking platforms created an alternative zone, beside and beyond the home, where connected co-presence supported relational practices, both big and small.

While early forms of video calling, such as Skype, are not easily classified as 'platforms,' these services have been increasingly 'platformized' through their integration into the platform ecologies of Big Tech companies. Apple, for example, offers FaceTime, Google has GoogleMeet, Microsoft owns Skype and provides video calling within Microsoft Teams, and Meta owns several apps with video calling features including WhatsApp and Messenger. Also, while video calling services are not necessarily platforms in the sense of facilitating multi-sided markets (see Chaps. 1 and 2 in this volume), developments in generative artificial intelligence (AI) have posed new and urgent questions about how video calling services might develop these kinds of markets by using data from video calls to train AI language models ("Zoom denies", 2023). All this to say, video calling is a function that has undergone, and continues to undergo, a process of intensive platformization at the same time that it is adopted by families to facilitate new kinds of connectedness. This platformization reconfigures the political economic context in which these interactions occur, as video calling platforms involve different configurations of commercial value, regulation,

and governance than the tools families previously used to maintain ties and communication beyond the home.

New Extensions Beyond the Home: Off-Brand Uses and Data as Family Communication

As well as the platformization of services *intended for* distant communication, families are also extending family life beyond the home via platforms primarily intended for other purposes. For example, in the research project described above, two families in Norway used the communicative and datafication features of fitness platforms to mediate novel practices of care and connection at a distance.

In one example, Anna (39 years) used the Strava fitness tracker app as a key platform for interacting with her father. Connected to a fitness watch, the platform includes a GPS tracker that logs the user's running routes and sensors that generate a range of biometric training data. As 'friends' on the app, Anna and her father could view each other's data and would leave comments celebrating achievements. Anna noted that the app gave them things to talk about when they met and that interactions within the app were often a catalyst for other forms of contact:

> If he comments on one of my runs, it's also a reminder that, oh yeah, Dad! Maybe I should call Dad! It serves as a reminder that it's been a while since I talked to him – that I have more regular contact – because I remember that I have to call my Dad when he comments. In that sense, it can help with that. But I guess we would have been fine without the app [smiles].

The Strava app provides Anna's father with information about her activities—where she has been, how her training is progressing, and other factual information—that he used to signal engagement in her life, which in turn reminds her of her care obligations towards him. Despite living separately, Anna and her father engaged in a spectrum of everyday relational practices—from very minor, like commenting on training data, to more substantive, like phone calls—that were routed around and through their shared spaces on the STRAVA platform.

Interestingly, a second father-daughter pair in Norway described a very similar use of Strava. Per (51) explained that he and his daughter Charlotte (15) used the Strava platform to communicate bidirectional support, care, and love as they kept track of each other's activities and provided

encouragement through comments in the app and in person. When Charlotte travelled abroad for training he could view her runs, and write supportive messages from home. He would even use the app to "help her process her feelings" by reviewing her run when something went wrong. She would likewise offer him praise and encouragement when she saw how far he had run, something he recounted with pride during the interview. The fitness app thus takes on a new meaning in supporting highly relational—and emotional—intergenerational practices far beyond the individual data needs of each athlete.

It is notable that these examples are both father-daughter relationships. Perhaps given the gender dynamics of these relationships, the datafication of a shared interest provides an especially helpful structure around which to enact intimacy and care. In both examples, the Strava platform opens up new opportunities for enacting relational practices at a distance, providing ways of keeping in touch around a shared interest and allowing for a range of interactions through and around the app itself.

As with previous introductions of new media forms to domestic and familial contexts, these platform practices do not simply provide new ways of connecting but also require the renegotiation of intimacy, autonomy, and privacy. Beyond creating new means for family members to communicate beyond the home, datafication-based platforms like Strava also provide family members with new forms of information about one another, sometimes raising challenging questions about how this should be managed. Anna, while not concerned about sharing her location and training data with her father, did have reservations about accessing location data about her nine-year-old daughter, Dina. Anna could view Dina's location via an app on her phone that connected to Dina's smartwatch, and later, Dina's smartphone. She saw the function as valuable in terms of enabling autonomy for her daughter and described how it gave Dina a sense of security as she knew she could reach her parents and be located, if necessary. Yet, Anna was also reluctant to use the location map, saying, "I'm cautious about not [checking] it unless it is necessary because I find it a bit problematic that we would have full control over our children all the time." When asked what would count as necessary, she was ambivalent: "Well it would be. If I don't know where she is and can't get hold of her. When I get worried, I can check. But I have to admit that it doesn't happen very often. [Laughs] It's become a bit like that in this modern society – we always have this overview of where they are." While location tracking facilitated a relatively uncomplicated form

of intimacy-across-distance between Anna and her father, its use between Anna and her daughter prompted much more complex questions for Anna about what constitutes a proper degree of privacy and autonomy for children beyond the home.

Dina, for her part, did not seem to associate the location tracking with any sense of surveillance nor autonomy. She was not aware that her mother could track her and was more concerned about the watch being *restrictive* of her autonomy because of its limited features. She explained, "A smart watch isn't fun because it decides what you can say. For example, it provides pre-set messages like 'I'm coming home soon,' 'Goodbye,' 'Hi,' 'I want to go home,' or something like that. You can't type in and write what you want. […] That's why I wanted a phone." When asked if the watch had the capability to tell her Mum and Dad where she was, Dina responded, "Yeah, or I actually don't know. I could at least make calls."

Both the smart watch and Strava examples underline how the datafication functions of digital platforms add new elements to family members' practices of not only extending *contact* beyond the family home but also enabling practices of *care* outside co-presence in the same space. To be able to communicate with her Mum through her smart watch, Dina was unknowingly accepting the potential surveillance of her whereabouts by her mother. Likewise, Anna's father was able to track Anna's running and training routines, as a side effect of their keeping in touch and sharing interests across distance. This is not simply a case of platforms further decentring the home as a locus of family interaction; these examples also point to broader implications for family life. In its simplest form, the Strava example illustrates the platformization of family leisure practices, and how connections, interests, and health data are digitalised and managed through platform infrastructures. However, more fundamental aspects of family lives—like the negotiations of privacy and autonomy—are also renegotiated. Here, parental control, relational autonomy, safety, and trust are negotiated and constituted through the use of digital platforms, as these platforms are integrated in everyday family practices.

Discussion and Conclusion

Across this chapter, we've proposed two broad ways in which the platformization of family life is taking place against, and being shaped by, the context of the home. On one hand, the use of platforms reconfigures the physical home and how it is experienced by those within it—sometimes fracturing the idea of the home as a private, bounded space, and other

times supporting domestic practices of care, intimacy, and organisation that give it meaning as a home. On the other hand, the use of platforms can also extend relational practices beyond the physical boundaries of the home, opening up new possibilities for families to practise care and intimacy across distance.

In charting these possibilities, we have paid particular attention to how the family is constructed through relational practices and to the role of platforms within these practices. At the same time, we highlight that platforms themselves are constructed relationally, as their uses and functions are worked out through negotiation and collaboration between family members. Sometimes this leads to coherent shared meanings, as in the case of Anna and her father who jointly adopt Strava as a means of keeping in touch. In other cases, such as Stephen and his children, or Anna and Dina, these meanings are contested and even unresolved. One question to consider here is how these processes might be ongoing, with continual renegotiations occurring to in response to the changing functionalities of platforms, and the changing needs, interests, and values of family members. We could also ask to what extent a platform can come to take on some of the meanings of a home—if platforms and homes are both constructed relationally, at once facilitating and deriving meaning from the practices through which families create themselves, in what ways do platforms become home-like?

Our discussion has also highlighted how, as family 'doings' around digital technology are co-constructed between family members, family use practices may both confirm and contest the scripts envisioned and encoded by platform designers (see Goulden, 2021). Training apps can take on new meanings as tools for strengthening and maintaining family relationships while smart home voice assistants can be used as mediators and intercoms between children and parents. While these examples are not quite 'oppositional uses' (Shaw, 2017), in which people use technologies in ways that circumvent or contradict their intended purpose, they begin to point to the possibility of such 'off-brand' uses. We might ask: when is the value of platforms within family life different to the value imagined or proposed by platforms themselves? Do these divergences matter in terms of trying to evaluate the competing agencies of platforms and families— that is, when measuring how families use platforms against how platforms extract value from families? Under what conditions do families use platforms to extend old practices, and under which conditions do they create entirely new ones?

As has always been the case, the domestication of new technologies into family life challenges established understandings of the home and family life. Platforms, like many technologies before them, ask families to reconsider when and how privacy and autonomy are granted, under what conditions the outside world should enter the home, who must engage in what forms of labour to maintain the smooth functioning of domestic life, and so on. Central to many of these kinds of questions is the idea of the home as a bounded space, separate from public life. Platforms trouble this already blurred boundary in new and more extensive ways, through intensive processes of datafication and commodification. This is an element that we have only briefly gestured to but is taken up in more detail in Chaps. 2, 4, and 6.

Our discussion has also begun to indicate some possibilities in terms of how platforms 'get into' the family home. If *platformization* is a process, how does this process begin for families? In some cases, new platforms are sought out for their novelty and introduced to the home, although often through processes of negotiation as with Catherine and her husband. In other cases, such as video calling, existing family practices become more intensively 'platformized' in multiple ways. Platforms can also be adopted for one purpose—such as tracking running sessions—but move sideways into family life as relational uses become valued. These are just a few possibilities, but they raise broader questions about the different vectors along which platformization occurs and the different starting points from which it begins.

Finally, while we have primarily focused on families and homes with substantial technology access, it remains important not to overstate the level of digitalisation, and thus platformization, occurring across homes. Research continues to highlight the differing degrees of access and use experienced by different families: while some families live in truly networked 'smart' homes in which technologies heavily mediate domestic routines and relations, others experience minimal technological integration, either due to affordability or personal preference (Thomas et al., 2023). What this means for the role of platforms in and beyond the home remains an important question.

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CHAPTER 4

How the Family Makes Itself: The Platformization of Parenting in Early Childhood

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Abstract In this chapter, we explore the platformization of family life by concentrating both on the specific context of parenting in early childhood and on a core function of many platforms—datafication. Drawing on two case studies of infant feeding apps, including qualitative research interviews with users, the chapter explores how understandings of what it is to be a "good" parent are now defined through datafication and explicit metrics which demonstrably transform maternal and paternal roles as well as impacting on intergenerational discussions, traditional knowledge and understandings of what it means to bring up a baby. We examine these cases by considering the role of datafication in developing self-understandings of the family narrative and changes about the relationship between the family and other "social envelope" institutions like school,

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care, and welfare. The chapter concludes by summarising how the various activities of family life might be re-mediating how families understand themselves as individuals, social units, and institutions.

Keywords Datafication • Infant feeding apps • Parenting cultures • Metrics • Digital parenting

INTRODUCTION

Parenting infants initiates new practices and processes that might now involve a wealth of apps for tracking and facilitating infant feeding and care. We examine the presentation of these apps through promotional materials and interface design and how parents come to form practices around them. We consider how 'good' or 'normal' family practices are envisioned by and encoded into platforms, and how families then take up or resist those visions of parenting practices. We discuss how understandings of what it is to be a 'good' parent are increasingly defined through datafication and explicit metrics—processes that infant care apps typically reinforce and accentuate. However, we also highlight instances of technology design and parental practice that challenge socio-technical imaginaries about the usefulness of data by resisting datafying practices or allowing parents to appropriate data for their own ends.

In focusing on parenting practices, this chapter contributes to and builds on studies of 'digital parenting'. Digital parenting, as Giovanna Mascheroni et al. (2018, p. 9) explain, "refers both to how parents are increasingly engaged in regulating their children's relationships with digital media (parental mediation), and how parents themselves incorporate digital media in their daily activities and parenting practices." It involves a range of activities, including providing different digital experiences, education, and the development of digital skills, monitoring of screen use, and rule provision (Modecki et al., 2022). For many parents, the demands of digital parenting can be stressful. Lim (2018) highlights the issues associated with these experiences and practices in her concept of "transcendent parenting", where parents are expected to be "across" the omni-present, "always-on" digital media their child uses as well as the datafying technologies now available for monitoring and controlling behaviours. Many families are unclear on key features of how these technologies work, as well as the implications of their use (Das, 2023; Mascheroni & Siibak,

2021). While notions of parental mediation and screen time have dominated much of the empirical and theoretical landscape (Griffiths et al., 2016; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020), there has been too little focus on how the digital technologies themselves have changed, alongside the social, political, and economic contexts of family life.

This chapter begins with a brief overview of the relationship between digital platforms, datafication, and the various contexts and micro-contexts for digital parenting. *Baby apps* for instance encompass a whole ecology of mobile applications designed to facilitate the transition into parenthood—and 'good' parenting—through datafication. To this end, these apps perpetuate established cultural practices of self- and health-tracking (Neff & Nafus, 2016), by helping to achieve conception through the use of fertility trackers, to ensure a healthy pregnancy using pregnancy trackers, or to promote 'optimal' infant care and development through infant feeding and baby-tracking applications (Langton, 2024). Drawing on a multi-method study of infant feeding and baby-tracking apps, we examine how datafication shapes maternal and paternal roles as well as impacting on intergenerational discussions, traditional knowledge, and understandings of what it means to bring up a baby. This analysis highlights the significance of datafication in relation to practices of care and how the construction of datafied activities and identities impact individuals within the structure of the family and society more generally. The chapter concludes by summarising how platformization might be re-mediating the ways in which families understand themselves as individuals, social units, and institutions, as well as highlighting areas for future research.

Platforming Family Life: The Increasing Role of Datafication

Many parents who use apps to monitor or track their children, or their parental caregiving activities, are simultaneously using a platform as well as having their parenting practices 'platformized'. Platformization here refers to the penetration of digital platforms into different sectors and spheres of life, as well as the "reorganisation of cultural practices and imaginations around these platforms" (Poell et al., 2019, p. 1).

As Chap. 2 noted, platforms can be conceptualised in a variety of ways. For example, we can think of platforms as the infrastructure that underpins apps, as a metaphor, or as a politico-economic structure based around

the capture and commodification of data. While computational definitions of what constitutes a platform are contested (see Bogost & Montfort, 2009), in this chapter we consider how technology companies strategically use the term 'platform' to create socio-technical imaginaries that promote these digital infrastructures as inviting environments, thus normalising frequent use. The term performs important discursive work, including the promise of providing many users with a supposedly equal platform from which to connect with each other, as well as access, share, and create digital content (see Gillespie, 2010).

However, it is not a platform's promise of 'equality' or 'neutrality' that best explains their popularity with commercial actors, and the advantages of their design and architecture for the tech companies who own them. Rather, as Livingstone and Sefton-Green note in Chap. 1 of this volume, platforms have become such a successful digital structure and business model because they are "an efficient way to monopolise, extract, analyse and use the increasingly large amounts of data that were being recorded" (Srnicek, 2016, p. 43). Datafication, or the translation of social activities into digital data that can be commodified (Mayer-Schönberger & Cukier, 2013), has quickly become integral to the data-driven business model and operation of many digital platforms. As noted in Chap. 1, this is described as "surveillance capitalism" (Zuboff, 2015) and has given rise to a multibillion dollar data broker economy in which the personal information of users is traded (Crain, 2016).

While datafication might help to customise and optimise digital experiences, it has several negative implications such as tracking and profiling citizens for surveillance and advertising purposes (see Pangrazio & Selwyn, 2023). In the context of baby app use, for example, a report by Consumer Report's Digital Lab found that popular period tracking apps—BabyCenter, Clue, Flo, My Calendar, and Ovia—were sharing user data with advertisers (Rosato, 2020). Furthermore, in the case of the Ovia app, employers and insurance companies were able to access a vast range of aggregated data, like the average time it took women to get pregnant, the percentage of high-risk pregnancies or C-sections, or the proportion of women who gave birth prematurely (Harwell, 2019). Data policies drafted by tech vendors do not generally address the issue of privacy as clearly as they should (Barassi, 2020), leaving many users unaware of the potential risks.

That said, it is important to note that there is much variety in the technological architectures and features of mobile apps, including within the

category of baby apps, meaning that these technologies do not universally contribute to the data broker economy. Some infant feeding and baby-tracking apps for instance are relatively closed, self-contained systems, designed for a specific purpose (Amalfitano et al., 2013). Baby apps that are designed and developed by community groups, like breastfeeding associations or government departments, may also follow better data management practices than for-profit tech companies.

While the purposes and business models of baby apps may vary, they consistently focus on the importance of tracking and monitoring children's health and behaviour via standardised metrics—often through the monitoring of women's bodies. This focus on tracking and metrics reflects well-established practices that long predate their digitised form. Health professionals such as midwives and maternal and child health nurses have long documented babies' and children's development by regularly measuring and quantifying their growth and behaviour (Qureshi & Rahman, 2017). These practices remain a core part of contemporary initiatives to promote adherence to public health guidelines of "optimal" infant feeding, which focus on promoting and enabling breastfeeding (Lee, 2018). While the quantification of infant feeding practices and mundane routines such as nappy changes and sleeps is not new, the more recent emergence of mobile applications for this purpose has led to their routine datafication. The "appification" of these practices—the integration of mobile applications into the everyday performance of activities for which these apps were specifically designed (Crumo, 2022)—facilitates significant shifts in how infant care is performed and understood. On the level of infant care as a mundane, everyday practice, app-based tracking facilitates a shift in the responsibility and frequency of performing tracking tasks: from a practice performed by health professionals at regular intervals (Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service, 2022) to a practice performed continuously by parents. The datafication that results from app-based tracking also holds the potential for this data to be shared and aggregated outside of the specific family context, particularly when individual apps are integrated with larger platforms, resulting in the consolidation of "small data" flows into "big data" with a higher analytic and commercial value (Lupton, 2014).

A recent trend in Australia and countries of the global North shows an increase in the use of app-based self-monitoring of mothers' and their children's health in the home environment (Australian Digital Health Agency, 2024; Thualagant & From, 2018), promoted at the institutional

level of public health service delivery (Thornham, 2019). In the UK, for instance, the *BabyBuddy* app, designed "to improve maternal and child health outcomes by increasing users' knowledge and confidence about pregnancy, birth and the postnatal period" (Daly et al., 2016, p. A184) is routinely recommended to parents by public health professionals (Thornham, 2019). While explicit encouragement by health care professionals to use particular baby apps still seems to be a mostly UK-specific trend, adapted versions of *BabyBuddy* are currently being trialled in Cyprus, Greece, and Australia (Bernard van Leer Foundation, 2024).

Baby apps also belong to the category of mobile health or mHealth technologies (Cheng et al., 2020), which are designed to promote desirable health behaviours that align with public health recommendations. In this way, many of these apps help to discipline women into the roles and responsibilities of digitised reproductive citizenship (Lupton, 2016, 2021). The focus on datafying babies' routines aligns with the increasing importance placed on digital data in society and is neatly captured by Deborah Lupton's (2021) concept of "caring dataveillance"—a form of care that is enacted through tracking and monitoring via digital data. While the concept of "intimate surveillance" (Leaver, 2015, 2017) describes the routine and often invasive surveillance of young people by caregivers or friends more generally, "caring dataveillance" specifically refers to data-based surveillance in the context of caring for others—such as parents' uses of infant feeding and baby-tracking applications to monitor their babies (Lupton, 2021). While many women experience and describe caring dataveillance as liberating, it has become an expected part of "good" (watchful) motherhood, where a mother's own emotional and physical needs may be neglected in the best interests of their infants. In the realm of caring dataveillance, digital devices become part of the "materialities of care" (Lupton, 2021, p. 399), where parental control is morally justified for assuring children's wellbeing. In this sense, caring dataveillance through mHealth apps for infant care has become integral to the imaginaries and performances of "good" parenting, as a specialised form of intimate surveillance.

These observations help to understand the contemporary social contexts that pave the way for the platformization of family life, starting at the earliest stages of childhood and parenthood, through the example of baby apps. Through the normalisation of tracking and datafying practices, long-standing cultural norms of (maternal) responsibilisation for children's health and development have become tied to datafication and

consequently to the performance of "dataveillance" (Lupton, 2021; Sukk & Siibak, 2021). These practices are increasingly facilitated through app-based technologies that promise to help mothers to meet expectations of caregiving "as recommended", while simultaneously encouraging the routine generation of large amounts of personal data, which becomes commercially valuable if aggregated into the big data flows that sustain platform economies.

To draw out some of the complexities and nuances of everyday "digital parenting" practices, we now turn to the findings of a recent Australian study that explored how contemporary parenthood is constructed in and through infant feeding and baby-tracking applications—baby apps designed to support parents in the feeding and care of their children in their first year of life. To shed light on how understandings of contemporary parenthood and family life are co-constructed between technologies and end-users, this study involved two phases: (1) an examination of two Australian-designed infant feeding and baby-tracking apps—*Feed Baby* and *mum2mum*—between June and September 2020, using the app walkthrough method (Light et al., 2018) to explore their latest app versions available at the time (version 3.2.0 of *Feed Baby*, and version 2.0 of *mum2mum*), and (2) the exploration of parents' experiences with, and perspectives on, infant feeding and baby-tracking app use, through 28 qualitative semi-structured interviews conducted between July 2021 and March 2022. The findings presented below illustrate how the platformization of family life is not only driven by platform operators, but also by institutional practices, cultural trends, and parents' lived experiences, which work together to normalise and amplify datafication as mundane.

Case Studies of Infant Feeding Apps

Feed Baby

Feed Baby is categorised as a 'Parenting' app on the Google Play and Apple app store and is described as 'Simple. Modern. Intuitive.' (Fig. 4.1). Analysis of the promotional video on the *Feed Baby* website brings insight to its envisioned use, encouraging prospective users to "track every aspect of [their] newborn baby" (Feed Baby, n.d.).

Feed Baby's main screen provides access to a range of features allowing parents to record basic caregiving activities such as 'Feeds', 'Diapers', and 'Sleeps'. The promotional material claims the app is used by "countless
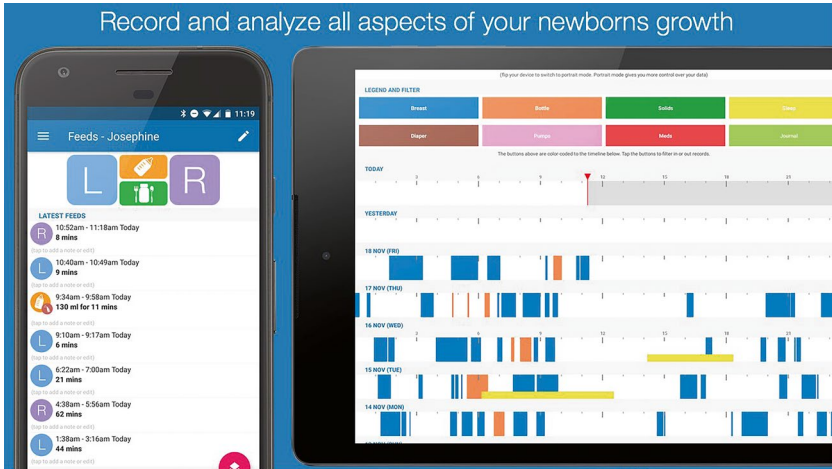
Fig. 4.1   Screenshot of *Feed Baby*'s app preview on the Google Play Store

new parents" as a tool to "track and predict" and monitor over time, emphasising the importance of these practices and affordances to new parents (Google Play, 2024). The ease with which caregiving can be recorded through the app facilitates longer-term tracking, increasing the amount of data generated, the duration of tracking, and the analytic value of the data collected. This data can then be aggregated and processed to visualise, predict, and produce trends in infants' and parents' routines (Fig. 4.2).

These discursive framings both promote and normalise the digital recording of mundane parenting practices by emphasising the ubiquity of tracking app use, and by highlighting the routine 'pen-and-paper' practises the app seeks to replace. Accordingly, *Feed Baby*'s Google Play store description proclaims that parents will "never have to write anything down again" as it "*simplifies* the logging and recording" (emphasis added) of infant care, helping parents to "have more free time to [themselves]" (Google Play, 2024). Through its material and discursive construction, baby-tracking is described as an expectation rather than an option, with *Feed Baby*'s promotional materials imploring parents to "Stop stalling and start tracking your new baby's routine today!" (App Store Preview, 2024).

These descriptions portray datafying practices as a mundane and necessary—even inevitable—part of contemporary parenting and family life, engendering routine monitoring and tracking of infants' health and
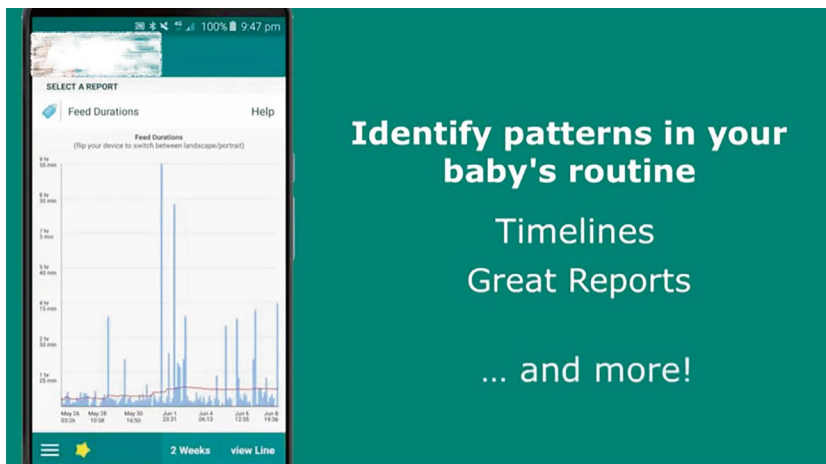
Fig. 4.2 Screenshot of *Feed Baby*'s promotional video on the app's website, edited to remove image and name of baby

development as a "necessary culture of care" (Leaver, 2017, p. 2). At the same time, parents who do not track are implicitly constructed as inferior and as following an outdated parenting approach—thus preying on the insecurities of new parents during a life-stage where they are particularly vulnerable (Virani et al., 2021). The datafication of these mundane, yet intimate aspects of everyday life is driven by, and perpetuates, the existing medicalisation, routine monitoring, and quantification of this period of the life-course (Qureshi & Rahman, 2017; Thornham, 2019). Previous research (Thornham, 2019) shows that datafying practices tend to make visible only those aspects of infant care and development that are easily quantifiable, while overlooking the significant and relentless labour inherent in these practices. As part of the frequent child health checks during infancy, mothers are frequently prompted by health professionals to track and share data on infant feeding and care. However, this data is often interpreted outside of the family context, including to monitor and evaluate mothers' feeding practices against public health ideals, and to discipline them into desired health behaviours, specifically breastfeeding (Thornham, 2019)—without acknowledging the labour involved in "making breastfeeding work" (Hausman et al., 2012; Avishai, 2007).

mum2mum

By contrast, some infant feeding apps aim to counteract these trends, such as *mum2mum*—an app developed by the Australian Breastfeeding Association (ABA). As the name suggests, the ABA's *mum2mum* app aims to support mothers in infant care, specifically through the provision of evidence-based breastfeeding education and the promotion of a baby-led approach to mothering that highlights the importance of the mother-infant bond (Lee, 2018). These aims are reflected in the visual and discursive constructions of envisioned app use, which focus specifically on the embodied and affective dimensions of breastfeeding. This focus is communicated using intimate breastfeeding imagery (Locatelli, 2017) (Fig. 4.3) that invites users to identify with the ideal of the breastfeeding mother and assume a maternal gaze (Gambaudo, 2012). These visual cues highlight aspects of infant care that defy datafication, by referencing breastfeeding as a 'journey', characterised by embodied experiences and relational practises. The app does provide features to record infants' feeds, nappies, and sleeps; however, these features are clearly deemed
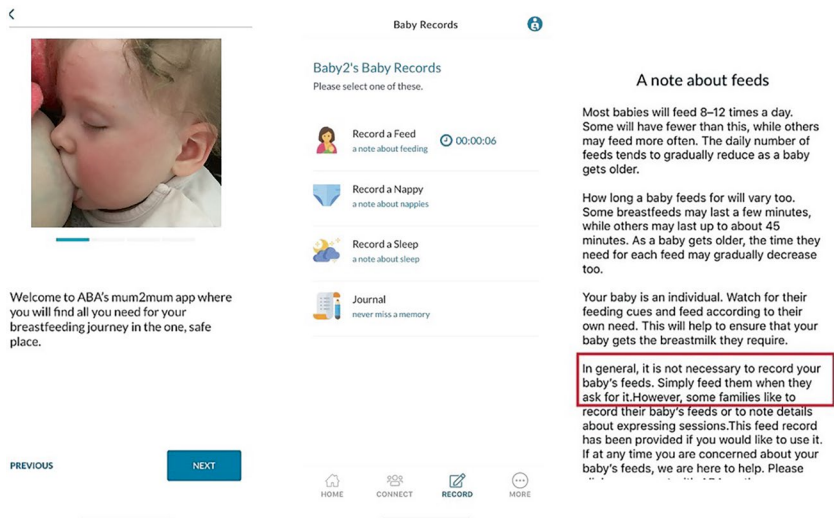

Fig. 4.3 Collage of three in-app screens in *mum2mum*: the first of its 'how to use' screens (edited to replace image of feeding baby), the 'Baby Records' screen, and 'A note about feeds'

unnecessary, with each recording function containing a preamble discouraging its use (Fig. 4.3 bottom right).

Through its focus on embodied care, *mum2mum* explicitly resists the drive towards datafication and promotes a re-valuing of women's embodied knowledge and experience. However, its gender-specific design and focus on the promotion of breastfeeding also excludes non-breastfeeding parents as a user group—rendering fathers and partners invisible and ignoring the infant feeding support needs of non-breastfeeding mothers. Its 'romantic' representations of motherhood thereby value only the embodied experiences of mothers who are committed to doing whatever it takes to make breastfeeding work—a goal that remains difficult to meet for many women (Lee, 2018; Lee et al., 2014). Hence, *mum2mum* sidelines the lived experience of a large proportion of parents who are unable to meet the ideals of "good" motherhood it represents. Its use also requires a conscious detachment from contemporary parenting culture trends including an active resistance to routine practices of data-driven health monitoring—both of which may be challenging to achieve.

Ultimately, datafication-focussed apps such as *Feed Baby* may be problematic in the long-term through their potential contribution to the data broker economy and surveillance capitalism. However, in the short term and on the level of the individual, these apps also facilitate performances of 'good' parenthood through datafication that make the identity of the 'good' parent accessible to caregivers from a wider range of genders, and with different embodied abilities. These points are further illustrated in the following section featuring interviews with parents who participated in the infant feeding and baby-tracking app study. Their responses are often linked to their everyday lived experience, particularly their immediate support needs in the context of new parenthood, which can make practices of caring dataveillance easier to follow than to resist.

Datafication to Discipline or Empower? Parents' Experiences and Practices of Infant Feeding Apps

The interview phase of the infant feeding and baby-tracking app study called for participation from parents with any experience with infant feeding and baby-tracking app use, including those who considered use, but decided against it. Whether through digital apps or non-digital means (e.g. pen and paper), all participating parents and/or their partners had

engaged in baby-tracking. Several parents explained that baby-tracking was commonly initiated in response to health professionals' questions, as explained by Briony:

> […] I didn't actually realise, before having a baby, how much the hospital staff would monitor everything. I didn't realise that I'd have to remember when her last wet nappy was or when her last feed was… I didn't realise that was a thing! [laughs] (Briony – tracking infant routines on a whiteboard)

Briony had not engaged in any self-tracking of her fertility or pregnancy, even though some studies suggest baby-tracking may be a continuation of existing tracking habits prior to a child's birth (Lupton, 2017; Lupton & Pedersen, 2016). Other parents described the importance of health professional role-modelling or explicit requests for baby-tracking as the reason they began this practice, as recounted by Corinne, a first-time mother in a heterosexual relationship, and by Rick, a same-sex coupled father:

> [At the hospital I recorded] the timing of […] poos, wees, feeds […]. [The hospital staff] would come in and log it on their own notes, and then we kind of made up our own version of that, when we got home. (Corinne – Tracking infant routines using pen-and-paper and a sleep tracking app)

> Our midwife asked us [to track]. (Rick – Tracking via an infant feeding app)

The focus on measurement and tracking of their babies' bodily functions and new parenting routines also highlight the ideological components of dataism and the widespread belief in the importance of objective and accurate quantification of all kinds of human behaviour and experiences (van Dijck, 2014). This can be contrasted with the subjective knowledge of parents, which is typically seen as inferior. The idea that baby-tracking (and caring for baby more generally) should be objective and based upon accurate representations starts to shape the imaginaries of "good" parenting and therefore parenting practices (Sukk & Siibak, 2021), also reflected in this response by Barbara:

> […] I started trying to use the apps, because I was like, "oh, I feel really stupid" when they ask me "how many times does she feed in a day", and I'm like "um… I think it's this many… and I'm not quite sure, she's getting this many wet nappies, but I'm not recording it this time… and yeah, I don't know, I felt embarrassed when they asked me, not knowing those details.

This quote highlights a point raised in Chap. 2: that platforms facilitate routines and relations both *within* and *beyond* the family. For example, apps do not just help Barbara manage and measure parenting routines for her *own* purposes, but are also useful when it comes to interacting with maternal and child health nurses. In this way, the app encourages the recording of information that is deemed important for the maternal and child health services and is also easy for a new and busy parent to reference when asked about the details of her baby's daily routines. For Barbara, this also influenced how she felt about herself as a parent, particularly in light of the nurses' questions.

Yet, parents also described choosing to continue tracking for their own benefit. Same-sex coupled mother Bree outlined how her and her partner's record of their daughter's feeding routines helped them to capture and highlight what they felt were unusual behaviours, leading to their daughter's eventual diagnosis and treatment for a food intolerance.

> It did become a little bit of a tracking tool, because we came across…so, she's got a cow's milk protein intolerance. So, it was actually a bit handy to then go back, and be able to see when she was feeding and if she was having an upset belly, or she had reduced feeds and that kind of stuff, so [we kept tracking the data] to take to the paediatrician, um.. and be able to show them all that information as well. (Bree – Tracking via a shared digital notebook and IF app)

Unlike the problematic uses of infant feeding and baby-tracking apps' data outlined earlier (Thornham, 2019), Bree's account provides an example of parents harnessing datafying practices for their own benefit to demonstrate new forms of expertise and knowledge that challenge health professionals' authority as 'experts' in infant care. Here, the recorded data facilitates a distributed way of knowing—drawing on parents' situated experience, baby-tracking data, and health professionals' expertise—to effectively extend parents' "agential capacities" (Lupton & Smith, 2018; Maslen & Harris, 2021) for health decision making and help-seeking.

Notably, many parents described a feeling of 'needing to know' through data. On reflection this was linked to their own identities, describing themselves as certain "types" of personalities. First-time father Chris explained that he and his wife started tracking out of a natural affinity with numbers:

> Like, we were doing that for our own sanity, we're both very quantitative people, my wife's a health economist, I'm a computer-scientist, so we like numbers, and so we had the clipboard by his cot, with tracking the wees and the feed times and how much, and all this sort of stuff and yeah, one of the midwives actually had a go at us about it, because these days they're very pro demand-based feeding parenting style, which I think is like… the antithesis to what we are trying to do with [our son]. (Chris – Tracking via a clipboard)

As Chris's quote highlights, baby-tracking can also be envisioned as empowering parents to take control of their babies' health and wellbeing, thereby reducing their own anxieties. This is reminiscent of babytech gadgets (Johnson, 2014) that are sold based on becoming a better and more relaxed parent. Notably, the kinds of tracking that Chris and his wife were practising reflect the internalisation of a belief in quantified data as trustworthy and meaningful representations of intimate aspects of family life. Yet, being an analogue recording avoids the datafication of these practices via the platform. Nevertheless, Chris's practices still align with the ideologies of datafication in that they "privilege[s] data, and data-driven outcomes, over other kinds of knowing" (Neff & Nafus, 2016, p. 186). Chris's example works as an important reminder that it is possible for parents to reap the benefits of data-driven knowledge in ways that confine it to the family context, without having to participate in digital infrastructures that necessitate giving up access to this data to unknown third parties.

While notions of "good parenting" through caring dataveillance are increasingly normalised, they represent a significant departure from previous generations' approaches to parenting. For some parents, this was experienced as a kind of generational divide, as articulated by Rebecca and her partner Vera:

> It's people who are older generation, but they'd always make a comment that we shouldn't need an app and apps didn't exist and we should just know, and that almost counteracted and made me feel like, well, we're trying to be good mums by knowing this information, and are we not good Mums because we have to check it, and see that it's written down in front of us, and… Yeah, so that was disappointing, but I think if anyone would [ask me about my baby's routines] and I couldn't remember, then, I think I would feel like I was letting [our daughter] down by not knowing, and I should be paying more attention. (Rebecca – Tracking via an infant feeding app)

Although first-time mother Nicola only baby-tracked for the first few weeks immediately after her baby's birth, she recounted a sense of duty, as well as feelings of satisfaction and of 'doing things well' when completing the pen-and-paper 'daysheet' of her infants' routines at the hospital and when logging her baby's developing 'skills' via a baby app that tracked developmental 'leaps'. Accordingly, Nicola also felt that a resistance to baby-tracking did not align with the realities of contemporary parenting culture.

> Yeah, so [in my ABA Facebook group] there has been more than one post in the group that I'm in, that kind of discourages you from tracking [infant feeding and care] too much, and just … you know 'get lost in the moment' and all that kind of crap [laughs]. (Nicola – Short-term tracking via an infant feeding app)

Nicola's point about resistance to the social norms and practices that drive datafication is echoed in many of the accounts featured above. App-facilitated datafication can be particularly problematic for mothers—perpetuating the medicalisation of their bodies, and individual responsibilisation for their children's health (Lupton, 2016; Johnson, 2014), while rendering invisible the experiences and types of knowledge that cannot be quantified (Thornham, 2019). Still, parents described the personal benefits of their datafying practices in how the data they recorded and tracked over time could be shared within the parenting 'team'. This can be combined with their situated knowledge to assert their expertise as caregivers, challenging traditional knowledge hierarchies and performing what they perceived as 'good' parenting.

It is not just the datafication of parenthood and caregiving that makes baby apps useful for parents, but also the affordances of these apps as *platforms*. Beyond computational definitions, Gillespie (2010, p. 351) describes platforms as technologies that "afford an opportunity to communicate, interact or sell". Parents specifically described benefitting from the communicative, interactive affordances of baby apps as tracking technologies (Lomborg & Frandsen, 2016). Not only do these baby apps afford the ability to perform caring dataveillance through the easy generation, analysis, visualisation, and tracking of intimate data on family life, but through the platform, this information is both accessible and shareable to others, enhancing knowledge of parenting practices.

Parents' positive associations and experiences with baby app use are reified through socio-technical imaginaries that construct data-driven knowledge as trustworthy, and platforms as allowing equal access and empowerment from this knowledge. These imaginaries are also readily emphasised by institutional and commercial actors. As a result, cultural expectations of "good" parenting, and imaginaries of the power and suitability of data and platforms to enable its performance, are mutually reinforcing. Yet, while these tools can be used in democratising ways within the family, beyond the family context the platformization of caring dataveillance also tacitly amplifies existing, unequal power dynamics (doctor–patient; app user–data broker), showcasing how these supposedly equalising platforms are anything but 'level'.

CONCLUSION

Recent research into platforms reveals the shifting contexts for family life and the range of challenges and opportunities that emerge. It is important to consider just how fluid digital parenting practices are, no doubt changing as a child grows and develops and as social and economic contexts shift over time. Rather than being a process that is predominantly driven from the top-down by platform operators, the findings of this study emphasise the importance of institutional practices, cultural trends, and parents' lived experience, as contributing factors in the process and progress of platformization.

Considering that present-day parents have adopted a "philosophy of protectiveness" (Simpson, 2014, p. 275), "intimate surveillance" (Leaver, 2017) has become a popular practice associated with normal parental care (Lupton & Williamson, 2017). In fact, for many parents, datafication forms the "general background of everyday life" (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 124), shaping their understandings of child-rearing. The findings of this study indicate parents may be extrinsically motivated to start recording and quantifying—or datafying—intimate aspects of family life through institutional and socio-cultural norms, expectations, and imaginaries that are baked into the design of everyday technologies. Indeed, in many respects, datafied digital parenting practices have become part of everyday life and opting out is becoming increasingly difficult. Once collected, aggregated, and processed, data about babies' and children's behaviour and practices are no longer contextualised within the parent–child relationship of care, but rather become measurable, quantifiable,

benchmarked units of analysis, as well as a source for economic value (Mascheroni & Siibak, 2021).

However, as the findings of this study highlight, parents also appropriate tracking practices and technologies for their own ends, in ways that are experienced as empowering, even if these practices are—at least in part—coping mechanisms developed in response to cultural pressures (Krüger, 2018; Leaver, 2017). This draws attention to the 'small data' practices (Lupton, 2014) of contemporary parenthood—such as baby-tracking with or without the use of apps. The normative practices, social values, imaginaries, and power dynamics associated with data as a way of knowing (Beer, 2019; Neff & Nafus, 2016) articulate well with platformization, which also helps to explain how and why platformization has become such a powerful force in contemporary society and family life.

Although scholarly interest in the topic has been growing in recent years, there are still many issues that require urgent attention and empirical research. A pressing area for research is how datafication and metrics shape the ways children and parents see themselves as well as establish and maintain their relationships with others. Whether parents and families are aware of these implications and how these are negotiated as part of their everyday life has not been well researched. Furthermore, we still know relatively little about the actual practices, thoughts, and feelings parents, as well as children and young people, have about their "everyday data cultures" (Burgess et al., 2022). For example, no comparative studies have yet been conducted that focus on exploring families' views on datafied parenting and caring dataveillance.

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Researching the Platformization of the Family: Methodological Challenges

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Abstract This chapter addresses the challenge of designing research methods to empirically study the platformization of the family. In order to move away from simplistic definitions and discussions like "screen time", we need rigorous and imaginative methods for capturing everyday family life and understand how platform logics are structuring relationships between and beyond families. Therefore, this chapter identifies ethnographical and participatory methodological approaches and strategies used by researchers who have conducted empirical work on family lives and platformization. By illustrating how these methodologies have been useful to understand how interactions among families are mediated by digital platforms, the authors discuss its potentials and limitations to understand and theorise the processes of platformization in contemporary societies.

Keywords Methodological challenges • Qualitative approaches • Digital ethnography • Digital prompts • Participatory methods

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INTRODUCTION

As it has been argued throughout this book, digital platforms have permeated many areas of everyday family life including family communications, leisure activities, consumption, daily organisation, health, education, and travel. However, studying this phenomenon is not simple in methodological terms. First, studying the platformization of family life involves delving into intimate, private aspects of peoples' lives, which poses ethical and practical challenges for researchers. Second, platformization is embedded in complex socio-digital ecosystems and processes such as datafication. As the previous chapter outlined, datafication influences family internal and external relationships in unknown ways. And third, many of the platforms used by families are owned by 'Big Tech' companies that are notoriously opaque, particularly in their use of algorithms and data.

The purpose of this chapter is to identify some of the methodological challenges involved in conducting empirical work on the platformization of family life and to suggest approaches and strategies that might address these challenges. In pursuing this aim, we describe and illustrate some established and innovative methodologies, such as digital family ethnographies, interviews with digital prompts, and participatory methods. This allows us to discuss the key possibilities and limitations of these methods and to elaborate questions and suggestions for researchers entering the field. The chapter draws from and builds on existing methodological advice on studying the digital transformation of family life (e.g. Takeuchi et al., 2021; Pangrazio & Mavoa, 2023) by articulating how emerging methods are already addressing conceptual challenges and by pointing to the kinds of methodologies and research processes that will be needed in coming years.

Ultimately, we argue for the particular value of qualitative approaches as these provide ways of examining platformization from the perspective of family life, as called for in Chap. 2 and throughout this book. We demonstrate how empirical qualitative approaches offer a range of possibilities for examining platformization as it plays out amid the complexity and nuance of families' everyday lives, including the kinds of negotiations and co-constructed practices raised across the book. The range of methods and methodologies we survey builds on and extends the interview-based approaches used in Chaps. 3 and 4.

Emerging Methodological Challenges: Relationality, Datafication, and Vulnerability

Interest in investigating children and young people's practices with digital media, including different approaches to parental mediation, has increased exponentially in recent years. There is abundant qualitative and quantitative data, particularly large-scale surveys that have documented children and parents' practices with digital media (Livingstone et al., 2018) and platforms (Taipale, 2019). Some of the methodological challenges identified in the literature are set out below.

Understanding Interpersonal Dynamics and Capturing Intimacy in Mundane Family Life

According to the scoping review conducted for the European project PlatFAMs (Erstad et al., 2024), studying family life with digital platforms raises research questions that require a 'relational lens'. By this they refer to "the internal and external interpersonal dynamics through which families are constituted, together with the contexts within which they are simultaneously embedded and which they co-construct" (p. 4). According to Taipale (2019), the moment researchers move away from studying the frequency of intra-family connections to the quality and social functions of intergenerational communication, the digital family becomes much more than "digitally connected individual members".

There are two methodological challenges signalled here. The first is capturing the complexity and intimacy of family contexts, as the uses and roles of digital platforms within family life are often entwined with issues of intimacy, care, and inequality (Baldassar, 2016). As described in the previous chapter, digital technologies are used to maintain familial caring relationships across and within generations. In general, care relationships serve people's daily life, helping them to meet their needs ranging from material and bodily to mental and social ones (Tronto & Fisher, 1990). However, families' approaches towards care and intimacy are diverse, and family units are not the only ones that facilitate care relationships. With the rise of digital platforms, there are new actors and intermediaries, such as tech companies using websites or apps in the domestic and home care sector to help with dependent family members including children or the elderly, and with house maintenance, pet care, private tuition, and so on (Blanchard et al., 2021). Some examples are *Sitly*, *Topnanny*, *Care.com*,

and *Yoopies*. Researching the role of these kinds of platforms in family care practices means finding ways to access and interpret personal and nuanced dynamics that include families but also extend beyond family units. Feminist scholars suggest the need to attend to emotions, and to be able to follow connections, links, boundaries, relationships, associations, and correlations within families' everyday contexts (Moss & Donovan, 2018). In a platformized era, this means considering both internal and external interpersonal dynamics embedded in the constitution of families, paying attention to the role played by a host of new intermediaries.

The second challenge is that researching the platformization of family life involves interactions between humans and technology. In this context, sociomaterialist perspectives such as Latour's (2005) Actor-Network Theory (ANT) or Feminist New Materialism highlight the importance of attending to the agencies and affects produced through entanglements of humans and technology (Braidotti, 2019). In outlining ANT, Latour (2005) draws attention to the fact that ´the social´ is not a homogeneous and predefined entity, but rather a continuous process of constructing and negotiating relationships between human and non-human entities. Studying these processes requires 'tracing' the networks, associations, and inter-relations between human and non-human actors (Light et al., 2018), emphasising all matter as agential. Feminist New Materialist perspectives similarly recognise non-human agency, while also accounting for affect and relationality, drawing attention to "the relational connections, affective forces, and agential capacities generated in and through the [human-non-human] assemblage" (Lupton, 2018, p. 1). Researching family platformization, then, involves not only assessing what material objects are part of which interactions but also making an effort to "trace" the associations between human and non-human entities within these intimate contexts. The discussion of baby apps in the prior chapter provides one example of this kind of socio-technical approach.

The methodological challenge faced by researchers then has to do with the access to intimacy in a socio-technical assemblage of complex and dynamic relationality. If we want to study platform-mediated relationships, it might be tempting to use platforms to follow the participants' interactions. For example, social media platforms have been used to locate, track, and communicate with participants in different studies (Bhatia-Lin et al., 2019). However, this raises ethical issues related to the need to maintain participants' privacy, respect their autonomy, and promote research transparency. Which methodological approaches and which

limitations should we consider to understand intimate connections among people and with non-human entities, while ensuring ethical use of platforms?

Navigating the Intersection of Data and Human Experience: Datafication, Tracking, and Privacy

The use of mobile phones, tablets, smart TVs, wearables, or virtual assistants and the platforms integrated with these devices blur the boundaries between public and private spaces. People intentionally share information, pictures, and videos with and across platforms; however, information people believe to be private might also be captured by platforms without their awareness. It is therefore reasonable to claim that contemporary homes are becoming sites of surveillance and subjectivation (Pangrazio & Mavoa, 2023).

In a recent project, Pangrazio and Mavoa (2023) investigated the datafication of the family home. In their sample of 504 Australian households, they identified more than 4.939 devices, including smartphones, laptops, tablets, gaming consoles, and smart TVs which have become data generating mainstays of family life. They found a clear dominance of Google products, with home assistants such as Google Nest or Google Home present in a quarter of all households and families, often serving as an entry point to additional smart home devices. For example, families purchase a Google home assistant, but then they decide to purchase other goods that integrate with the Google smart home ecosystem (Garg & Sengupta, 2020). This means that families are more datafied across different fields of their lives (Google Family Link, Google Search, Google Education, YouTube, etc.), since data is increasingly being collected through more devices and services by the same company. Such a total surveillance regime begs the question as to what role research can and should play in addressing family concerns about privacy and datafication—including helping inform purchasing decisions (Pangrazio & Mavoa, 2023).

In this context, researchers also face a problem regarding the interpretation of the data generated by platforms. Despite the 'platformized' family being heavily datafied, these data are rarely readily accessible to researchers. The diverse range of types of data, their technical nature, the use of multimedia, and even the intentions of the companies that own the digital platforms can make reading this family data by social researchers

difficult. It is therefore important to ask questions related to the interpretation of these diverse, complex, and sensitive data, alongside consideration of human perspectives about datafication. For example, what types of data do platforms capture about family life, and on what terms do they do so? What are people's perceptions and concerns regarding the processes of data tracking and collection? How can researchers strike a balance between effectively leveraging data produced by platforms and respecting and understanding human experiences related to trust, vulnerability, and privacy?

Researching with Children, Vulnerable Families, and Underrepresented Collectives

A third set of challenges in researching the platformization of families is related to the profile of participants being researched. One challenge is that, as argued across this book, understanding the platformization of family life requires examining multi-generational families. Only a few studies include older generations, or study the social dynamics between grandparents and children, and aunts/uncles and nieces/nephews (Danielsbacka et al., 2022). For example, Chap. 4 demonstrates how studying multi-generational families is key to identifying how notions of 'good parenting' have been transformed by the use of caring dataveillance platforms. However, researching intergenerational relationships requires methodological approaches that are age-sensitive (ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, 2024) and which move away from an adult-centric perspective (Shaw, 2020). To answer questions about how platformization is experienced by all members of a family, it is important to develop measures and methods that enable the expression of the youngest and oldest participants.

Another challenge is the need to carefully consider the representation of different families. Across research on children and families in general, there has been a lack of attention to families that experience disadvantage and marginalisation, such as families that are experiencing poverty, families with undocumented members, single mothers, families with people with disabilities, or families with a non-normative composition such as LGBTQ+ families or blended families (Modecki et al., 2022). There is a risk of adopting deficit models of such families where they are studied for problems that are framed as resulting from their own failings (Mannell et al.,

2024). Although the discourse of inclusion and diversity is increasingly present across many societies, we suggest that it is necessary for research to take an explicit stance and carry out concrete actions that question normativity. For example, in the case of sexual and gender diversity, it is important to challenge the "normative assumptions of intimacy that privilege heterosexual monogamy and the biological family unit" (Hammack et al., 2018, p. 556). Further, as Jordan and Prendella (2019) note, the types of participants involved in research shape what we see as important, the questions we ask, and the variables and contexts we consider.

In our view, attending to diverse and intergenerational families is important in any research on family life. However, it has particular significance within the context of family platformization. First, the study of family platformization necessitates a focus on intergenerational relationships. As discussed throughout this book, digital platforms play a pivotal role in shaping relationality among different generations both at home and beyond. Furthermore, the identities, interests, and values of different generations are increasingly constructed and expressed through digital platforms. Second, diverse and non-normative families have unique and varied interactions with platforms. As noted in Chap. 2, families are inherently diverse, encompassing non-nuclear, diasporic, non-heteronormative, and blended structures that extend far beyond normative models. Capturing the relationality of these families and the distinctive ways they interact with platforms, within the family itself but also in relation to other contexts and institutions, requires an approach that is situated and contextualised. For instance, for underrepresented collectives, such as migrant, neurodivergent, and LGBTQI+ families, platforms can serve as arenas for oppression, yet also can foster agency, resistance, and solidarity (Bonini & Treré, 2024). Addressing these aspects allows for a more inclusive understanding of how digital platforms mediate and are mediated by various family structures, and how these families navigate and resist the normative pressures imposed by these platforms. Such an approach not only enriches academic knowledge but also promotes social justice in a context where platforms underscore the asymmetry of power.

Pursuing these kinds of approaches raises questions: what new methods allow researchers to identify differences across generations in conceptions, uses, and concerns about platforms? What should we consider when including cohorts that have traditionally been forgotten in family studies in order to promote a social justice approach? How can we engage with participants in order to understand how they navigate and resist normative

pressures imposed by platforms that affect their communities? Broadening the methodologies for studying family dynamics at home and among their communities could help to more faithfully document the experiences of traditionally underserved families. This is especially important when drawing conclusions for policymakers. According to Takeuchi et al. (2021), only by listening to families' stories is it possible to advocate on their behalf to education leaders, policymakers, funders, and media and technology developers.

Methodological Approaches

In this section, we present research methods that can contribute to overcoming or mitigating some of these challenges. These methods have been used in recent years for studying relationality or digital technology use among families. We also provide some examples of pioneering research using these methods and reflect on how these could be applied to researching family life and platformization.

Digital Family Ethnography: Capturing Intimacy and Family Dynamics

Ethnography and other methods based on participant observation have long been central to understanding human relationships and, more recently, how they are mediated by technology and media (Ardèvol & Gómez-Cruz, 2014). Ethnography is characterised by thick description of social and cultural aspects within human communities, serving not just as a method but as a means to co-construct knowledge (Junnilainen & Luhtakallio, 2016). Through conversations and long-term observations, researchers gather detailed data on participants' everyday lives, aiming to foster both insider and outsider perspectives on a phenomena.

A distinctive feature of ethnographic methodologies is their ability to generate insights into participants' first-hand experiences within natural settings (Junnilainen & Luhtakallio, 2016). When studying family relationships, observational and ethnographic approaches can be effective for capturing intimate dynamics. By focusing on family practices and relationships rather than solely accumulating knowledge about individual family members, this approach enables researchers to capture both collective perspectives and the dynamic and negotiated nature of family interaction processes (Kennedy et al., 2020). Furthermore, ethnographic study across

an extended time frame allows researchers to develop a deeper understanding of family practices in everyday life, which may be particularly valuable in intergenerational families (Göransson, 2011). Observational approaches offer a rich, contextualised comprehension of relationality by revealing how digital platforms are integrated into everyday family routines. By observing families in their homes or other naturalistic settings, researchers can grasp the subtleties of how platforms are used to negotiate family life and how different family members interact with platforms in various ways. For example, researchers might examine how a family uses a shared Google Calendar to coordinate schedules and plan activities, revealing how different members use the tool differently and how these digital practices shape negotiation processes related to roles, tasks, and responsibilities.

Contemporary ethnography has evolved to include the use of digital materials and tools to better capture technology-mediated contexts. This incorporation of digital media has led to the development of new methods such as media ethnography, digital ethnography, virtual ethnography, or netnography (Ardèvol & Gómez-Cruz, 2014; Leander & McKim, 2003). Although the rise of digital technologies and their integration into family dynamics pose new challenges for researchers, as previously discussed, these technologies can also offer new possibilities to enrich and deepen the understanding of the digital family (Eisenmann et al., 2019). We highlight three aspects about family platformization that represent new opportunities for improving observational research methods.

First, as families use platforms and create new and complex interactions, researchers can access new forms of self-produced data to delve deeper into intimacy practices. In today's context, researchers are no longer always required to physically enter family settings to observe and take field notes (Collins et al., 2017). Families themselves can produce a large amount of multi-faceted data, such as videos, photos, text messages, audio recordings, home security camera footage, and mobility maps, among others. Researchers can incorporate this diverse data and employ other techniques like screen recordings or screenshots. However, this new digital landscape "raises the question of who records the data, what counts as ethnographic data" (Liu, 2022, p. 3), as families themselves can now create and share digital data with researchers. In Given et al. (2016), for example, both parents and children become co-researchers in observational research by producing video recordings at home.

Secondly, as personal relationships are developed and maintained across online and offline spaces, researchers can use hybrid methods, which combine face-to-face and online methods, to trace different family dynamics. As Leander and McKim (2003) pointed out, using such hybrid approaches requires redefining research notions of place and time, as well as the meaning of 'entering the field', 'collecting data', or 'constructing data'. Understanding the complexity of online and offline interactions requires reimagining internet research as connective ethnography. Although there are emerging hybrid ethnographies in educational contexts (for example, Liu, 2022), these approaches have rarely been used to study family platformization. Hybrid ethnographies in the study of family platformization would enable researchers to go beyond simplistic views of family interaction. For instance, when a family uses WhatsApp to stay in touch with relatives or manage their daily life together, these interactions are not simply a transposition or extension of face-to-face relationships: they may adapt to the affordances of the platforms while also challenging them and creating new—sometimes unpredictable—uses. Thus, WhatsApp communication and dynamics within platformized families can be a qualitatively different phenomenon in terms of form, meaning, and expectations, but at the same time, they are part of the broader network of relationships among members. This requires specific methods that address the particularities of online dynamics while also seeking continuities and discontinuities across settings.

Thirdly, as migration movements and globalisation reshape family dynamics across borders, remote or 'online' methods have become an important means of studying transnational families and distant family relationships. These kinds of remote methods became essential during the COVID-19 pandemic, as illustrated by Barron et al.'s (2021) study, outlined below.

Case 1. Remote diaries in the study of families during the pandemic (Barron et al., 2021)

Project. This research explored how families supported their children's learning during the pandemic—a time when many families were obliged to act as facilitators of remote learning, spending an average of 13 hours a week supporting their children's learning. The study identified the problems faced by families, and the positive outcomes observed by parents, as well as the role played by digital technologies and the equity issues that emerged. The results present many resourceful ways that families adapted to changes.

Methods. The pandemic pushed researchers to rethink creatively their methods since they were not able to conduct in-person observations and interviews for health reasons. In this research, the researchers employed a diary study (Barron et al., 2021) with 109 families, based on a remote-research approach. Across one week in 2020, they used the platform *dscout*—a smartphone-based qualitative research platform—to interact with families and collect qualitative data without face-to-face contact. In total, 109 parents or caregivers of children aged 5–10 years old uploaded diary entries that described learning moments in real time. These entries included multiple-choice survey items, open-ended text responses, and images and videos that were uploaded in response to prompts.

Results. The results pointed to the challenges faced by parents and caregivers in their new roles and illustrated how they supported and extended school learning opportunities. The findings highlight inequality between higher and lower-income families in terms of the children's ability to participate in online classes and access video lessons, and personalised communication from educators. Families expressed that participating in the diary activity made them aware of how observing their children's classroom lives sparked new ideas about how to support them. Researchers highlight the richness of parents' entries, in terms of describing the child's feelings, interests, and doubts about school content.

Platformization of the family. Recent studies of students' and families' practices and concerns about Edtech platforms in schools such as Google and Microsoft point to the need to explore further issues about their lack of knowledge about the data they generate, the effects on democratic school governance, or the reproduction of gender stereotypes. Therefore, these methods could be used to explore these issues further with families at all socio-economic levels, especially those who are most vulnerable (Rivera-Vargas et al., 2024).

In-Depth Interviews with Digital Prompts: Human Narratives in the Platform Era

Interviews and focus groups are another traditional qualitative research method for capturing families' perspectives. These tools can be more or less structured and co-produce information about the phenomenon under study through interactions between researchers and participants (ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, 2024, p. 22). They are particularly effective for understanding family dynamics since they can capture and compare the stories of various family members (Nash et al., 2021). Unstructured and in-depth interviews may allow families to explore personal and relational aspects of their lives in detail, generating both individual and collective family narratives (Nash et al., 2021).

In the context of studying platformization, it may be particularly useful to incorporate digital tools into interview methods in order to capture a more detailed view of the interactions that families have with and across digital platforms. One example is that platforms themselves generate data

about users and their activities within the platform, including engagement metrics, search queries, location data, and interaction patterns, among others. While some of this is proprietary, other data is readily accessible to users, such as dashboards that show users' data about their activities within the app. Other data is less obvious to users but is readily accessible, such as log files, which are computer generated files that record activity within a particular system, such as an app or device (Kroehne & Goldhammer, 2018). By combining platform-generated data with interviews in qualitative research, "users will be able to reflect upon, explain, and contextualise their actions" (Kaufmann, 2018), allowing researchers to generate detailed insights into the use of platforms by families. Similarly, Caliandro et al. (2024) propose two strategies to study platformization: ´follow the medium´, which involves using digital tools and data, such as APIs and hashtags, to understand how platforms structure communication and interaction, and ´follow the actors', which focuses on examining how users engage with and repurpose these tools, and how their practices influence digital interactions and socio-cultural processes. This combined approach offers a comprehensive view of both the technological mechanisms and user interaction within digital platforms.

Interviews can also be extended by asking participants to review and reflect on their digital and online experiences, using their own devices or platforms as prompts. For example, mobile media elicitation, as proposed by Kaufmann (2018), offers a specific method for using digital data captured by smartphones—including geographical, personal, and behavioural information—within interview processes. Kaufman presents two studies where smartphones were integrated into interviews with young people, serving as an icebreaker, a source of information, and a reference point for conversation, thereby enhancing the interview process and helping participants to recall and elaborate on their mobile media practices. Interviewees showcased their devices and provided screenshots, enabling discussions of elements such as icon arrangements, files, and folders. Another variation is outlined by Robards and Lincoln (2019) who propose the scroll back method—a qualitative interview method whereby a researcher and participant "scroll back" through the social media history of the participant. This approach is versatile and applicable to a wide array of social contexts and can be used to explore the posts and stories generated by users on different platforms (such as Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, or X), as well as the content they have consumed, saved, or liked. It could serve as a catalyst for

discussions of various aspects of family life, including communication patterns, internet usage, tracking behaviours, and privacy concerns.

A third way of enriching interviews is through 'video-stimulated accounts' (Theobald, 2017). Video-stimulated accounts involve using video-recorded interactions to prompt discussion. Initially, researchers or participants capture videos of activities in natural settings. Later, these video recordings are shown to participants during small group or individual interviews. The aim of these interviews is to stimulate conversation about the activities shown in the videos, rather than solely relying on participants to recall past events (Theobald, 2017). In studying family platformization, this approach can be useful for investigating face-to-face family interactions ´around´ platforms. For example, it could help examine the dynamics and decision-making processes of family members when choosing what to watch on Netflix, and even compare the interactions between children and parents versus children and grandparents. Additionally, it could be used to observe how siblings collaboratively create Spotify playlists for listening in their parents' car or to analyse interactions when a parent helps a child with their homework on the school's Google Classroom platform.

Next, we present a case from Mannell (2019) where mobile phone messages are used as digital prompts to stimulate interviews.

Case 2. Mobile messages as prompts for interviews with young people (Mannell, 2019)

Project. This research moves away from the common discourse about mobile messaging as a medium that connects people and instead studies how disconnection practices are central to mobile messaging, as people leverage the disconnective affordances of messaging technologies to resist being continually available. The project explored how young adults use mobile messaging among friends and findings indicate how young people manage their availability to and through mobile messaging.

Methods. The methodological design was based on semistructured interviews with 24 people (11 male and 13 female) between 2015 and 2016. Each participant was interviewed twice over approximately six months. Prior to their first interview, the researcher asked participants to send a sample of their messaging activity from a 24-hour period of their choosing. Participants were given instructions on how to anonymise their sample and redact any sensitive information, or any messaging content they simply wished not to share. Portions of the messaging sample were used as prompts within the interviews to aid discussion of mundane, vernacular practices. Prior to their second interview, participants looked for examples of specific kinds of messaging exchanges and brought these to the interview.

Results. This study describes how the features of messaging platforms produce disconnective affordances that participants use to limit their connections. It concludes that even though the features of these platforms produce opportunities for different kinds of disconnection (such as block features), this is not encouraged. Managing and limiting availability requires navigating a complex array of functionalities that pull both towards and against the possibility of disconnection.

Platformization of the family. WhatsApp has been identified as a fundamental digital platform that facilitates family interaction across generations (Taipale & Farinosi, 2018). Therefore, using message samples as prompts in interviews could help develop better understanding of the importance of platforms in creating social coherence among families, especially extended ones.

Co-design, Visual, and Art-Based Methods: Participatory Research for Inclusion

Methodologies based on participatory research seek to involve a diverse range of participants and perspectives, often advocating for the empowerment of less privileged groups and individuals within communities (Aldridge, 2012; Kleine et al., 2016). Participatory methods can help promote and foster mutuality in relationships between researchers and vulnerable participants. These techniques lend themselves more readily to the flexibility, ethics, and adaptability of approaches needed when working with vulnerable participants, including children, people with disabilities, and families with diverse cultural capital. From this perspective, the intention of participatory methods has been to promote inclusion by putting participants' stories and voices at the centre of the research design and implementation processes (Aldridge, 2012).

Co-design is a method of participatory research that brings together various stakeholders to collectively identify problems and practical issues, design solutions, and take action towards them. Ishimaru et al. (2018) outline four iterative stages of a solidarity-driven co-design process: a) building relationships and theorising; b) designing and developing tools to support new relationships and theories of change; c) implementing theories and practices; and d) analysing and reflecting on the process for ongoing learning and innovation. An example of co-design methods can be seen in the following case:

Case 3. Using the Asynchronous Remote Communities Method to co-design with families (Michelson et al., 2021)

Project. During the pandemic, families were required to adapt to doing many activities remotely. The aim of this project was to create a community of families who were brought together to discuss, via digital platforms, the main stressors they faced during remote learning and to co-design recommendations for improving everyday family technologies, such as education platforms. The project addressed two main questions: How could families meet the competing needs of working remotely and caring for children? And what technology-supported solutions did families feel would assist in addressing these needs?

Methods. The researchers applied the Asynchronous Remote Communities method, which involves supporting a longitudinal engagement with communities and populations who face stigma or are geographically disparate. Over 10 weeks, they used *Slack*—an online chat platform usually used in business settings—to investigate the main needs of families related to digital technology, including defining their problems, identifying resources, and co-designing solutions. Participation was asynchronous, so families could connect with each other using three different moderated channels. The research team conducted follow-up interviews with the families.

Results. The main result was a set of proposals to improve educational platforms, elaborated from families' expectations, experiences, and needs related with remote learning. The findings also identified dynamics of inequality, since children who needed more attention during the pandemic also faced greater risk of falling behind in school. However, the differential element of this project was that it generated a space for families to share personal stories, learn from others in similar circumstances, and explore creative solutions to their needs.

Platformization of the family. Incorporating co-design methods in researching digital platforms with families can be valuable in diverse ways. Firstly, to encourage intergenerational and interfamily reflexivity and dialogue on their experiences, expectations, and common and differential concerns. Secondly, to recognise how the platformization of family life may be contributing to reproducing or mitigating inequalities among and between families. Thirdly, to take into consideration families' perceptions in the generation of regulations and policies aimed at 'Big Tech' and in the design of new digital platforms.

Another example of participatory methods are visual and arts-based methods. Research studies involving children, the elderly, and people experiencing vulnerabilities have been more adaptive and creative in their approaches to collaborative research, thus incorporating less common methods such as techniques based on the arts and the visual (Possamai-Inesedy & Gwyther, 2010). Visual and arts-based methods offer ways of meaning-making that go beyond the hegemony of traditional linguistic-based literacy. These methods allow meaning to be embodied in images that convey participants' ideas, feelings, and experiences (Tian, 2023).

Visual methods refer to a broad range of approaches that incorporate visual aspects in different ways. This may involve directly analysing visual

elements such as artwork or cultural imagery, as well as using or creating visual elements during interviews or other collaborative processes (van den Scott, 2018). Participatory techniques involving visual materials can capture complex aspects of participants' lives, allowing them to provide context for the images they produce and highlight details and subtleties that might be lost in verbal explanations. Thus, these methods can offer multiple layers of meaning and add depth to qualitative analysis (Aldridge, 2012). Similarly, arts-based methods are research approaches that utilise expressive practices, such as drawings, photographs, media productions, dramatic play, performances, dance, or crafts, to create and analyse data (ARC Centre of Excellence for the Digital Child, 2024). By using artistic processes, researchers aim to explore and understand participants' experiences while empowering them to express their voices, build community connections, and enhance their agency for driving social change (Blaisdell et al., 2019). These methods can be particularly beneficial for engaging with multi-generational families, a key aspect in examining platformization. We now describe three examples of visual and art-based methods that have become increasingly popular: digital storytelling, mapping, and photo-voice elicitation.

Kalantari et al. (2023) used digital storytelling to explore narratives generated by children and their parents, and the process of family co-creation. Researchers asked parents to create narratives with their children using a tablet at home, but they did not provide specific story criteria, thus allowing families the autonomy to shape the storytelling process. This method offered open-ended and multimodal opportunities for families, especially for children, to express their experiences, knowledge, and identities.

Illustrating a different visual approach, Drysdale et al. (2020) examined families affected by stigmatised infectious disease. They developed a "mapping" exercise in which participants were asked to create a visual diagram to express the closeness and distance in their family relationships. Unexpectedly, participants needed to modify their diagrams several times during the research. This led Drysdale and colleagues to highlight the dynamic and negotiated nature of family relationality, especially in groups where what counts as family oscillates in response to changing circumstances of living with stigma and disease.

In Shaw's study (2020), a third method—the photo-voice technique—was employed, wherein participants took photographs and interpreted them through reflection exercises. Researchers used this method to engage with 56 children aged four to five years and investigate their perceptions

of inclusion. Through careful, critical, and conscientious application, the photo-voice method allowed for self-expression without relying solely on oral competency, reducing power differentials and enabling different voices to be heard.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have identified some of the methodological challenges facing researchers interested in the platformization of family life and have suggested methods, approaches, and strategies that might offer useful and creative solutions.

First, in order to access and understand interpersonal dynamics and to capture intimacy in the mundane aspects of family life mediated by digital platforms, we highlight how ethnographic methods can be extended through the use of self-produced and multimodal family data (such as videos, photos, text messages, audio recordings, etc.), as well as through the design of hybrid and/or remote methods (such as virtual ethnography or remote diaries). This reduces the need for researchers to physically enter family settings to observe and take field notes (Collins et al., 2017) and can empower family members to become co-researchers (Given et al., 2016). On the other hand, social research must pay attention to the new forms of relationships that develop across virtual and in-person contexts. In the study of technology-mediated social interaction, successfully tracing the intricate dynamics between human and non-human entities in constant transformation remains a significant theoretical and empirical challenge.

Second, regarding the interpretation of what happens at the intersection of platform data and human experience, we have highlighted increasingly popular strategies that combine platform-generated data with interviews in qualitative research. While these methods can be used to investigate a variety of issues relating to the platformization of family life, such as how families engage with and understand specific platforms, they provide particular promise in terms of understanding issues such as datafication, tracking, and privacy. Digital prompts, such as mobile media elicitation, scrollback methods, and video-stimulated accounts, can act as catalysts for discussions about how families perceive, understand, and do or do not engage with the forms of datafication and surveillance that are central to many platforms. As Kaufmann (2018) highlights, this methodological approach allows users to reflect upon, explain, and contextualise

their actions based on detailed log data. However, even when researchers can access and use data generated by platforms, they may encounter difficulties in interpreting them, as they are often opaque and safeguarding participant privacy needs to be carefully considered.

Finally, regarding the challenge of researching with vulnerable families and underrepresented collectives, participatory methods and co-design offer promising ways to conduct research with intergenerational families and to move away from an adult-centric perspective. Co-design is a methodology that allows researchers to bring together various stakeholders to collectively identify problems and practical issues, design solutions, and act towards them. Therefore, we highlight the need to incorporate not only family members in these participatory spaces but also educational leaders, policymakers, funders, and media and technology developers. Other participatory methods of a visual and artistic nature can also help give voice to underrepresented groups. Some examples include digital storytelling, the use of maps, and photo-voice methods. Nevertheless, questioning normative assumptions associated with the family, minimising power dynamics between researchers and participants, and enhancing the interpretation of visual and artistic data are ongoing challenges.

Throughout the chapter, we have discussed how qualitative, participatory and creative methods might help us in the understanding and representation of complex and diverse human experiences mediated by digital platforms. This builds on the argument made in Chap. 2 about attending to the micro-processes of family life, an argument further elaborated in the conclusion to this book. In general, the wider social discourse often considers "evidence-based research" to be more closely related to quantitative methods focusing on metrics and abstraction, in concert with experimental methodologies that aim to control different variables (Denzin & Giardina, 2008). Thus, while methodological challenges related to platformization are enabling researchers to develop new methods to explore relationality in a way that is consistent with contemporary, digital, and diverse family lives, we want this chapter to advocate for greater recognition and appreciation of qualitative research in academia. We see the need to validate the contributions of qualitative and interpretive science in public discourse, including policymakers, stakeholders in the technological sphere, and especially families.

Research methods like the ones we have reviewed can help strengthen forms of contemporary science that focus less on traditional academic languages and more on empowering social actors to become involved in the

discussions about digital change. This will be of greater importance in the following years, when digital devices and platforms will be even more embedded in our private lives. As we have already seen in the discussion of appropriation here in the preceding chapters, such developments provoke not only forms of appropriation, but also forms of resistance. These might be a valuable contribution to future-making that considers human rights, social justice, and equality. The question is: are researchers and policy makers ready to listen and consider them?

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Conclusion: Towards Further Research into the Platformization of the Family

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Abstract The final chapter of the book brings together key ideas, theories, and questions raised across the book to propose an agenda for progressing research on the platformization of the family. It summarises the key dimensions of platforms and families and proposes a theory of extended-domestication that bridges the micro and macro elements of these dimensions.

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INTRODUCTION

This book has drawn attention to the intersections between the complex, varied, intimate lives of families and the broad processes of platformization occurring across many domains of contemporary life. What does it mean for the family to be platformized? How is platformization occurring in family life and with what implications? And what research approaches are needed to understand these changes? The book has begun to address these questions in order to more fully account for the meaning of platforms in people's everyday lives and in social life more broadly. Taken together, the chapters have argued that families are an important modality through which to understand the ongoing cultural processes bound up in the development of digital platforms and have suggested that the family itself is of particular importance for understanding how people deal with emerging digital environments.

In this concluding chapter, we bring together key ideas, theories, and questions raised across the book to propose a research agenda that will progress understanding of the platformization of the family. We do this by offering three contributions. Firstly, we identify key elements of platformization and families discussed across the book—elements that we see as central to properly grasping the processes and meanings at play in the platformization of the family. In light of the discussions across the five preceding chapters, we then propose a theoretical approach that draws on the rich history of domestication theory but extends it by connecting the micro contexts of family life to the meso and macro contexts of platform operations. We suggest that this 'extended-domestication theory' offers a middle path reaching both towards the sociological complexity of social groups like the family and towards the political-economic structures of platforms. Lastly, we outline a research agenda that identifies key empirical, methodological, and conceptual lines of inquiry that we see as important for progressing research on the platformization of the family.

The Platformization of the Family

The impacts of platformization are ongoing and likely to be far-reaching. Yet much critical research into the platform society has tended to look 'downwards as it were from a point of power' (Sefton-Green & Pangrazio, 2022, p. 201), creating a kind of 'platform gaze' (p. 202) that sees the

effects of platformization from above. This book has consciously tried to understand what a platform is and does by bringing together how platforms might see families with how families look back at platforms. As discussed by Livingstone and Sefton-Green in Chap. 2, both platformization and the family are conceptualised as ongoing mutually constitutive processes. One of the key findings from Chaps. 2 and 3 especially is that part of the ingenuity of the platform as a technology or social mechanism is its shape-shifting capacity to 'platformize' at a number of levels simultaneously.

Below, we draw on key themes from across the book in order to outline three layers (or levels) at which processes of platformization operate, followed by key dimensions of family life that intersect across these levels. While these layers and dimensions are important in themselves, it is the interrelationship between them that, we argue, provides a conceptual framework for examining the platformization of family life.

The Layers of Platformization

There are several different layers that could help us understand how platformization works as a process and the impacts this process can have. We think of these as occurring at a macro, meso, and micro scale, as outlined below.

The platform society. During the last ten years, macro-societal perspectives on platformization have been prominent. As noted in Chap. 2, the social transformations generated by global commercial platforms structure much of how our societies now operate—a systemic change often referred to as 'the platform society' (van Dijck et al., 2018). Their major impact has been described in terms like 'platform capitalism' (Zuboff, 2019) and 'platform imperialism' (Jin, 2013), as well as in terms of cultural production and creation of new market forms (Poell et al., 2021). As such, there has been a major power shift as global tech companies have gained increasing influence on our societies, including shaping how democratic processes like elections and public discourse take place. For the family this means that the social, political, and economic infrastructure that people must navigate in their daily lives is increasingly structured according to platform logics.

State/commercial platforms. At a meso level, platformization has had an impact on the organisations and sectors that structure our social life, from educational institutions to services such as utilities, tax, shopping, banking, and health. For example, as Chap. 3 notes, public health services for new parents increasingly provide or endorse platforms for infant tracking and care. Across a broad range of contexts, state and commercial platforms are the primary (and often the sole and exclusive) means by which societies are organised. They are places where services are delivered and accessed and where civic and commercial transactions take place. These platforms have often replaced the physical places (such as shops or offices) where face-to-face transactions occurred in the past. For families, this means there are new challenges in how they access information, communicate, and use services, with uncertainty about how digital data generated by them are used by institutions beyond their control (Eubanks, 2017).

Use and negotiation. Platformization also plays out at the micro level of personal use through processes that are frequently conceptualised in terms of a shift from 'media audiences' who viewed content to 'media users' (Burgess & Green, 2018) who contribute content, data, and attention (van Dijck, 2009). People's interactions with and through platforms are shaped by platforms' interfaces, their social meanings and vernaculars (Gibbs et al., 2015), and the meanings and uses they hold for individual users and their social networks. The very notion of being part of a public or civil society now frequently comes down to digital acts (Isin & Ruppert, 2015). As demonstrated by Chaps. 3 and 4, platform use always involves negotiations with platforms themselves and between family members. In the context of family life, these patterns of use and negotiation are at once individual and collective and are shaping how families engage by creating both possibilities and tensions.

The Dimensions of Family Practices

Across this book, we have also drawn out key dynamics and interrelationships that define family life.

Collective/individual dimension. Families are both a collective unit and a group of individuals. This is important for understanding the use of platforms by families as uses shift across and between these different registers of family life. For example, when does the platformization of the family occur through the actions of individuals—such as the father in Chap. 3 who drove his family's adoption of new technology—and when does it

occur through the development of shared uses—such as the families in the same chapter who co-developed communication practices around the STRAVA app? It is also an important dimension for considering the friction that can occur between families and platforms. Platformization is a process that usually involves, or is assumed to involve, managing and commodifying individual users. Social groups like families, with their fuzzy and shifting membership boundaries, are at odds with the orderly, stable, standardised user typically desired by platforms.[1]

The intergenerational dimension. As collectives, families are an arrangement of people from different generations. These generations are differentiated not only in terms of biological age but also in terms of the media experiences they've accrued (Bolin, 2017). How different generations within the family relate to each other is now, in part, routed through and around platforms as platforms are used for communication and are themselves points of discussion and debate. The three-generation family described in Chap. 3, for example, employ location-tracking platforms across grandparent, parent, and child, with different practices and challenges arising across and between generations. Beyond this, the intergenerational dimension of family is also significant to platformization because it involves a kind of vertical integration of people from different generations into one unit. To date, many studies of platformization have focused on interrelationships between platforms and more 'horizontal' arrangements of people, such as peers and affinity groups (Rosenblat & Stark, 2016; Tufekci, 2017). Families, with their vertical arrangement of generations, highlight different kinds of social relationships and norms.

The family-as-practice dimension. Throughout the book, we have emphasised *doing* family. As described in Chap. 2, and emphasised throughout subsequent chapters, we have seen families as entities that are continually constructed through relational practices. In part, this points back to the previous dimensions as the always-unfolding collective process of a family making itself sits in tension with many platforms' need for distinct and stable users. It also raises questions about how platforms feature in the relational practices of families and with what implications—if families are constructed through practices, and those practices are increasingly platformized, what does this mean for the nature of the family, and how it

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[1] It is worth considering to what extent this remains true for non-commercial platforms. For example, to what extent do state platforms for social service delivery account for the varied and shifting nature of family groups?

is expressed? This dimension also raises questions about power, trust, and autonomy that we will return to below, as the practices that constitute a family also involve negotiations of power and powerlessness. As platforms are used across family life, how do they support, disrupt, or otherwise intersect with trust and autonomy?

The internal/external dimension. Family life is defined in part by the internal dynamics of the family—that is, how family members relate to one another and the care, support, harm, etc. that may occur through these interrelations. But it is also defined through families' outward interactions with the world beyond—that is, how families interface with communities, institutions, businesses, governments, and so on. In Chap. 4, for example, infant feeding apps are integrated into the internal dynamics of parents caring for a child, as well as the external dynamics between parents and public health providers. Both internal and external dimensions are important for understanding the meaning and significance of family life, including the extent and nature of its platformization. How does the use of platforms shift the internal dynamics of family life, and how does it shift the ways that families connect to and engage with external entities?

Across this book, we have sought to provide a vocabulary, a set of questions, and some theoretical and methodological starting points that could be used to shed light on how platformization works across these dimensions and layers. In Fig. 6.1, we demonstrate one possible way of illustrating the relationships between the dimensions of family life and the layers of platformization as a weave. Like any representation, it has limitations—namely, the static illustration implies a set of fixed relationships where our attention across this book has been on the processual. With this in mind, we encourage others to approach the image as a conceptual tool to be amended and reworked as the field develops a greater understanding of the constituent parts and processes within the platformization of the family.

Valuing Empirical Research

The impetus for this book came from speculation about the interrelationship between the changing powers of platforms and the changing nature of family life. The book has explored possible connections between these two phenomena and fields of study. However, as is apparent from the data-driven Chaps. 3 and 4, and the methods focus of Chap. 5, our interest is empirically focused. Identifying cases where we can see platformization as a *process in action* alongside how people *do* families allows us to properly
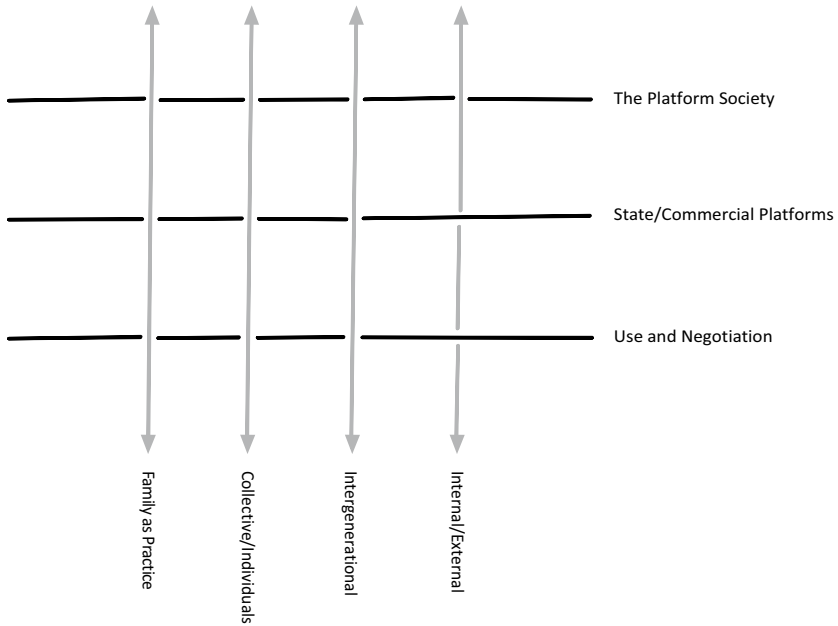
The Platform Society

State/Commercial Platforms

Use and Negotiation

Family as Practice

Collective/Individuals

Intergenerational

Internal/External

Fig. 6.1 Diagram showing the relationship between platform layers and the dimensions of family interaction

interrogate the validity of our speculations about what the platformization of the family is and why it matters. Integral to this challenge of empirically studying families and platformization is a methodological problem space (Lury, 2021)—working out what kinds of research could tell us about the nature of any relationship and indeed the nature of any explanations between such dynamic fields. This challenge animated the focus of Chap. 5.

Our interest in a form of research that can capture processes of co-construction while also being capable of generating broader theoretical insights led us in Chap. 2 to science and technology studies (STS) as the most suitable means to locate, conceptualise, and theorise processes of platformization. We noted in that chapter (and reiterated in Chaps. 4 and 5 especially) how the analytical apparatus provided by socio-technical methodologies allows us to examine the processes through which platforms achieve meaning at the same time as providing insight into the dynamics of family relationality. STS approaches do not shy away from

trying to capture the 'complexities' which characterise contemporary societies (Law & Mol, 2002). By bringing together the features and logics of platforms with the activities and agencies of people interacting separately and collectively, we have tried to articulate the processes of platformization as a series of relationships that we could assemble together as a single system (Latour, 2007)—that is, a system meaningfully held together by the dependencies and relationships between its different parts. We would stress that it is the empirical research that has allowed us to explore and test this conceptualisation of platformization as an assemblage by drawing attention to activities, practices, and routines. Simultaneously our attention to how people 'do families' across this book has conceptually reinforced this focus on activities, practices, and routines: in Chap. 2 we noted the influence of a turn to relationality in studies of the family and in Chaps. 3 and 4 we showed how family members are constantly negotiating and constructing their relationships with each other as they make and remake the family itself.

Towards a Theory of 'Extended-Domestication'

In the earlier section, we proposed an illustration of a weave (Fig. 6.1) as one way of conceptualising the relationship between platform layers and family dimensions and suggested that this could inform an agenda for future research on the platformization of the family. Before outlining that research agenda in more detail, we now address a need for new theoretical approaches that can shape and support this research.

In Chap. 2 we noted that, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, science and technology studies inspired a programme of research that examined how a new wave of media technologies—especially time shift video (VCRs) and home computers—were given meaning and value by families in the home. Scholars like Roger Silverstone (Silverstone & Hirsch, 1992) and David Morley (1986) shifted academic focus away from mass media institutions and content towards studying the dynamics of family life in concert with the adoption of new domestic media technologies. These studies made explicit how the power relationships within families shaped the uses and meanings of such media and technologies (see also Hartmann, 2023). Through its attention to the processes of collectively living together with media, this tradition broadly informs much of the research reported in this book—from the theoretical challenges outlined in Chap. 2 to the

empirical focuses of Chaps. 3 and 4 and the research approaches discussed in Chap. 5.

These media scholars developed 'domestication theory' as a means of theorising the processes through which new media technologies were brought into the home and 'tamed'. Of particular significance for us is the fact that this theory had deep 'macro' ambitions alongside its 'micro' focus—that is, it wanted to explore and evidence what happened within the micro-sociological context of the home and then explain this with reference to society at large (Silverstone et al., 1992). Trying to connect the micro contexts of media consumption to macro social contexts was, and has remained, a key challenge in this scholarly tradition. As Sonia Livingstone (1998) argued, the audience research emerging at the time was successful in demonstrating the diverse array of practices and perceptions that people brought to their media consumption but struggled to explain to its critics why this mattered for research about the policy, production, and political economy of media and culture. Livingstone's arguments in respect of these debates (that build on earlier insights by Alexander et al., 1987) prefigure claims we want to make about the agency of social actors and the determining power of broader social institutions in contexts of platformization. For Livingstone at the time, how we characterise what people do to create meaning as part of a wider audience depends at the same time on how we imagine that broader social structures determine opportunities for making meaning. Translating this interrogation of television audiences into the contemporary relationship between families and platforms, we raise similar questions about how platforms work at a macro level just as we characterise family interactions at the micro one. Traditional domestication theory proposed ways of resolving this macro-micro link. On the one hand, studying how these new technologies were 'appropriated', 'objectified', 'incorporated', and then 'converted' (Silverstone & Hirsch, 1992; Haddon, 2007) allowed an analysis of the media that incorporated how institutions and the outside world affected identities and relationships. On the other hand, the banal, the everyday, the familiar, and the domestic were exposed as a key site for the influence of media in society.

As domestication theory has been applied to other contexts beyond the home, such as cafes and care centres, this interest in bridging micro and macro contexts has remained a feature. This is particularly evident in a recent study where it was used to explore the domestication of surveillance technology in schools (Selwyn & Cumbo, 2024). That study argued that

an educational technology used for monitoring students called *Study Screen* 'did not appear to be an especially awkward, disruptively "wild" technology clash[ing] substantially… with the school context. [The technology] appears to have slotted seamlessly into the […] context of school use' (p. 99). We detail this study here to indicate how flexible domestication theory can be in explaining the processes of meaning-making by a range of social actors in a complex social situation. In this example, the authors argued that such an STS approach allowed them to not only describe the integration of surveillance technology into 'everyday routines' but that it also allowed the study of 'larger social and institutional structures' (p. 91). We want to highlight this relationship between the micro and the macro, and the case and the conceptual, to show how domestication theory can be used for wider insight into social change itself.

We would, however, argue that while domestication theory has been extended in the sense of being applied to diverse contexts, the processes of platformization highlighted across this book call for further, more conceptual, extensions that lean further into the theory's capacity to bridge the micro and macro. We see this as necessary because of the way that platformization operates differently to the mass media industries it was originally conceptualised to address, and thus there are different dynamics at play across the micro, meso, and macro levels at which it operates. In describing these levels in our discussion above, we've sought to emphasise how platformization operates via interactions between interface affordances (see Tkacz, 2022), institutional governance, and forms of discipline and responsibilization, all constituted through the social interactions by which families produce themselves and make their identities. While domestication theory allows us to approach the complex messy phenomenon of family-based interactions from a methodological point of view by calling attention to what families do with platforms, it does not quite encompass how platforms might *do* power within and through these interactions. We therefore want to propose a modification of domestication theory—'extended-domestication theory'—that can inform further study beyond this book.

In our definition, *extended-domestication theory*[2] scales up explanations of the negotiated and contested interpersonal everyday use of digital

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[2] When devising this term we noted that the term 'neo-domestication' has been used on a few occasions to build on the original theory (e.g. Campbell et al., 2014; Matassi et al., 2019). However, in these instances the term 'neo' signifies an interest in technology use outside the home. Our own suggestion goes beyond extending domestication into non-domestic settings and so we have adopted an alternative term to signal this distinction.

technologies to account for the interplay between state and commercial platforms (meso level) and the wider structure of the platform society (macro level) platforms in creating meaning and relational structures between people in collective units, such as the family or home. It situates the iterative and interactional processes of meaning-making deriving from constructivism (in the socio-cultural tradition) within frameworks of human-non-human-digital assemblages deriving from science and technology studies (STS). Studying of the processes of platformization (within the family, for example) exemplifies how extended-domestication theory can contribute to explaining the relationship between lived experience, digital infrastructures, and the political economy of digital platforms at the level of inter- and intra-personal and social norms and values.

Our characterisation of *extending* domestication theory encompasses three components. First, it involves an extension beyond the more fixed or discrete technologies (such as television) found in the original idea of domestication to include the more fluid, varied, and complex nature of platforms. This is similar to Johannessen et al.'s (2023) idea of *multi-sited* domestication in which technologies are tamed differently in different institutional settings. Second, it draws attention to how these digital technologies extend meaning through the complex flow of interactions running between the platform, data, the family, and other nodes that comprise the modern platform. This includes the relations of dependency through which they generate power (Nieborg et al., 2024). Here, we build on Johannessen et al.'s (2023) idea to emphasise not only that platforms operate across a range of settings where users engage differently but also that platforms themselves intentionally present and define themselves differently across these settings (Gillespie, 2010). And third, it extends the reach of domestication theory to explicitly address the challenges of theorising relationships between micro uses and macro structures—that is, the interplay between family agency within micro contexts of *use and negotiation*, and the meso and macro levels through which platforms derive power and influence. The original formulation of domestication tried to link micro and macro contexts by theorising how households tamed technologies, yet processes of taming are less relevant in an environment in which platforms are pervasive and their use is required as often as it might be voluntary. Extended-domestication theory is therefore not so much vexed by the challenge of understanding how technologies are tamed as it is by understanding how they are embedded in daily routines and practices, often in ways that are diverse and individualised. The accounts of platform

use in Chaps. 3 and 4 might suggest that the objectification of the technology is less startling and that the domesticating work of platformization focuses more on incorporation and conversion than taming.

We would further argue that many studies of the uses of digital media in the home arising and developing from notions of *parental mediation* (such as how parents gatekeep and control their children's media uses) are also influenced by domestication theory in that they explore the flow and use of everyday technologies (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020; Mascheroni & Siibak, 2021). These studies, including those by authors of this volume, have not yet investigated how the processes of platformization might require us to reconceptualise the assumptions of power and agency present in both parental mediation frameworks and traditional domestication theory. We therefore propose that this move to *extended*-domestication as defined above is required in order to properly understand changes to family life in an era of 'platform powers' (Nieborg et al., 2024).

A New Research Agenda

So far, we have outlined a series of interwoven elements that make up the platformization of the family (Fig. 6.1) and proposed a theoretical approach to help examine them. Here, we offer some possibilities for translating these conceptual and theoretical tools into an agenda for research that would push forward our understandings of families and platformization while also testing and refining these tools. We have also suggested, in Chap. 5, that social science needs more expansive methodologies and that these need to be more widely employed in order to properly apprehend and analyse the shape-shifting phenomena of platformization.

First, we argue for a research agenda focusing on what platforms mean for family life. In short, at the micro level of use and negotiation, we need to know more about how families use platforms and how platforms provide opportunities and challenges for families. Doing so requires going beyond concerns with parental mediation of children's screen time or the idea of a household of individuals using their own devices, and instead paying attention to the intra- and interpersonal dimensions outlined earlier. It also requires attending to the diverse and evolving meanings of families, and an acknowledgement of how 'the family' has changed over time. Across the book, we've argued that relationality and how it is figured within family practices and relationships using platformized interactions is of key interest in exploring how different generations come together to do

family in 'platformized' spaces. That is, we need research that considers what it means when the relational practices through which families constitute themselves are mediated by platforms.

These lines of enquiry are situated most obviously at the micro level of use and negotiation; however, we particularly encourage research that draws on extended-domestication theory to link these micro contexts of platformization to meso and macro contexts. One example of this is considering the different starting points of platformization. What are the pathways through which platforms enter family life? How do they 'get in', and when are they 'left out'? What can these different pathways (or 'vectors' as discussed in Chap. 2) tell us about how the process of platformization unfolds on the ground? A family deciding to subscribe to a new streaming platform involves a different constellation of needs, interests, and agencies than a new parent adopting an infant feeding app at the suggestion of a paediatrician. These questions point to classical domestication concerns with how technologies come into family life. However, we would emphasise that a full understanding of these processes needs to account for how they are also shaped by the platformization of public life—the meso level—described above, such as the very many instances in which families are *required* to adopt platforms in order to participate in everything from schooling and recreational sport to social services. It also requires stretching up to the macro level to ask how the broader logics and economic structures of a 'platform society' come to bear on families' options and processes for adopting platforms.

Second, and with this in mind, we emphasise that while our primary argument across this book is that we need to understand platformization from the perspective of family life, it is important to retain sight of what families mean to platforms. How do platforms act on and through families and to what ends? In asking this question, we echo recent calls for more detailed, nuanced, and situated analyses of 'platform power' (Nieborg et al., 2024). Typically, concerns about 'what platforms do' focus on how they structure relationships between user groups of different kinds. For example, how social media platforms extract data from end users for use by advertisers or data brokers, or how cultural platforms, such as music streaming services, set the terms of engagement between music consumers and creators. These kinds of concerns are certainly present here. At the macro level of the 'platform society', how does platform capitalism extract value from family life, and through what markets is this value realised? Or, at the meso level of state and commercial platforms, how are specific

platforms structuring relationships between families and other institutions of social life, such as schools, local neighbourhoods, or social service providers? These are difficult questions that pose a further set of methodological and epistemological challenges, especially given that often platforms, 'in their role as market makers, are the only actors that have a full view of how their markets operate' (Nieborg et al., 2024).

We also suggest, however, that there might be other forms of power at play in the platformization of the family besides the way they mediate relationships between different groups, and that platforms may engender other kinds of interactions between micro, meso, and macro contexts. For example, amid the intimacy and complexity of family life, what are the more ideological lines along which platforms (seek to) structure, manage, and standardise family life? As discussed in Chap. 3, what models of 'good parenthood' are presented by infant feeding apps, for example? Or what norm of the family unit is encoded in smart home group accounts? Given the massive diversity of platforms embedded in the daily lives of families, we need to look beyond the well-studied forms of power wielded by 'big tech' platforms and consider how platform logics of control, standardisation, and datafication are playing out across the broad ecology of platforms present within family life.

Properly accounting for these forms of platform power will also require accounting for their limits—the places where the platformization of the family breaks down or is contested, and the ways that families may derive value from and speak back to platforms. As Nieborg et al. (2024) note, 'platform power is never absolute'. We therefore also call for attention to questions of power and agency between families and platforms. For example, digital literacies have become of key importance in many countries as a way of resisting the new power dynamics created by platformization, as signalled by terms like 'data literacy' and 'AI literacy' (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2019). Yet, to what extent such an approach to building competence among citizens really works as a way of increasing agency remains a more open question. This question of agency also includes considering differential forms of agency within and across families as they relate to platforms. There is a need to consider, for example, how new inequalities may emerge in the ways that families engage with platforms, for example, between families where the use of platforms is open for discussion and critical reflection, and ones with less such interaction.

Looking towards the future, it is difficult to predict new aspects of integrated platforms and technology use. The prospects, for example, of

virtual and augmented realities, as well as artificial intelligence, are far-reaching. At the same time, we see initiatives that both increase resistance and/or position families towards the dominance of technologies in everyday life. In this sense it is important to develop research that critically understands the ongoing processes of platformization. Platformizing the family significantly explains how families are constituted today but is equally important as imaginaries of future family life inevitably bring possibilities, challenges, and risks. This book offers a research agenda to support insight into these social transformations.

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