Chapter 10

Sociomaterial Analysis of Azerbaijani Children's Smartphone Use: Generational Ordering Through User-Technology Interactions

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Abstract

Smartphones play an integral part in many children's lives. Their constant presence in various contexts and the multitude of affordances they present have a tremendous effect on how childhoods are lived today. One important aspect is the way children's interaction with smartphones can affect relationships and particularly generational relations. In this explorative study, we investigated Azerbaijani children's interaction with smartphones in the family and at school using the sociomaterial and relational approaches. Thinking relationally, we followed children's stories to unravel how smartphones can mediate different types of behavior and assist children in negotiating their place in generational order with the adults in their lives. Analyses suggest that smartphones can both present children with bargaining power to negotiate pleasure and fun as well as means to reinforce the generational order by children themselves. The findings point out that children often transfer social norms and expectations placed on them to the ways they use smartphones.

Keywords: Azerbaijan; children and youth; generational order; smartphones; sociomateriality; relationality

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Introduction

Children's use of smartphones has been of prominent interest to many childhood and youth researchers. Recently, with the COVID-19 pandemic, more studies emerged showing that children's screen time has risen to 'alarming' levels (Richtel, 2021). Studies have focused on the harms and potential negative outcomes of children's exposure to smart devices, especially with access to the internet. General findings indicate that children's use of smartphones is often tied to concerns about physical health (e.g. eye strain, sleep, mental well-being, attention span, cognitive and other developmental processes) (Oliveira et al., 2022; Serra et al., 2021). However, in many countries, smartphones and tablets have become an integral part of children's lives, not least in education, both in classroom and at-home formats. Smartphones prominently feature in learning processes and knowledge-construction via digital educational programs, with this need especially exacerbated during the pandemic. While this is more relevant in wealthier countries (e.g., Goh, Bay, & Chen, 2015), in other parts of the world, having access to a smart device can be a more demanding requirement (Mathrani, Sarvesh, & Umer, 2022). In addition, many children have cultural and normative limitations set to their use of smart devices that requires balancing between the necessary, even inevitable use of smartphones and the strict curation to reduce distractions and harms (e.g., Lauricella, Wartella, & Rideout, 2015).

The distractions that smartphones provide also have social and emotional consequences, and have direct impacts on the relationships in domestic environment (Kushlev & Dunn, 2019). Earlier works on the role of digital media in family have already highlighted the values that adults uphold and gate keep to restrain the potential disruptions that media and communication technologies presented. For example, in an ethnographic study of a family in their London home, Silverstone and Hirsch (1992, p. 218) depict the following picture:

> Charles and Natalie both enjoy television plays, but only Charles watches films on television. [...] The television viewing of their children is carefully regulated and only the eldest is allowed to watch television after supper. The doing of homework has a high priority among the children and is clearly separated from any TV viewing. Homework is often done by several children in a group around the kitchen table. Again and again in our discussions about television, it was downgraded as passive and inappropriate form of activity to spend much time on. [...] Their relationships with objects and others, and those of their children, are informed by these and related values.

Today, we are observing similar concerns around children's use of smartphones. Although the technological advancements and the values that smartphones represent might differ from those of a television, they are still often treated as vices of distraction and sources of multitude harms. Parental control and mediation remain central to shaping children's relationships, socialization and learning experiences when it comes to the use of smartphones. In this interaction, parent–child relationships and family values take various forms. For example,

studies have investigated how the innovation and availability of various parental mediation tools affect children's use of digital media (Bakó & Tőkés, 2018; Ko et al., 2015). Some parents rely on the use of such tools by setting limits to daily use, restricting access to certain sites and applications and controlling screen time. These control measures are higher among educated parents whose digital literacy allows for more nuanced interventions. Studies show that negotiated and mutually agreed rule-setting has been proven to be most effective especially among tweens (Ko et al., 2015). As our study will show, however, some parents and especially teachers rely on other more 'hands-on' interventions, not least with admonishment and punishment for excessive or noneducational use.

Smartphone usage and parent–child relations are manifold and manifest in accordance with family values and the household's moral economies (Mascheroni, 2014; Mascheroni et al., 2018). Family values as understood in terms of generational relationships and parent–child interactions, in turn, reflect local, context-specific social norms that can affect the ways in which children themselves perceive and practice smartphone use. Social norms embedded in the learned ways of communication, especially in domestic adult–child relationships, constitute children's interactions, self-control and self-discipline practices involving digital technologies at large. As children explore 'new' ways in digital spaces, they transfer previously learned modes of face-to-face communication, social norms and values to these spaces, too (Yoon, 2006). Moreover, understanding how children themselves perceive the role of smartphones in their lives and learn to use them provides insights into local contexts of family values, social norms and social constructions of childhood itself (Abbasi et al., 2021).

Our interest in this chapter focuses on children from Azerbaijan where, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have been conducted on children's perspectives on smartphone use in school and domestic environments. The study's initial hypothesis expected to find smartphone use to be strictly tied to family and cultural values besides being reflective of hierarchical generational order and strict parental mediation (Savadova, 2021). This study explores how smartphones mediate parent–child relationships and generational order in Azerbaijani families and schools. Drawing on five interviews with groups of children and tweens aged from 9 to 15 years, we investigate how smartphones mediate parent–child relations and how affordances of smartphones continuously challenge hierarchical generational relations.

Contextualizing Childhood in Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan counts in the ranks of resource-rich countries that have poor child development, welfare, education and care systems, despite its comparatively high gross national product and the state's high revenues from natural oil and gas resources (Huseynov & Abbasova, 2021). In addition, infant and under-the-age-of-five mortality rates are considerably higher, for example, in Kyrgyzstan with considerably less resources (SABER Country Report, 2018). The implementation of children's rights to protection and provision remains significantly underdeveloped and has been attracting the critical attention of international researchers (e.g. Ismayilova et al., 2014). As for child protection, existing institutions no longer meet the requirements that are placed on child protection today, as the institutionalization

of children in need of protection is still the usual procedure (Huseynov & Abbasova, 2021). The 'State Programme on Alternative Care and Deinstitutionalization' created with the purpose to address this issue is slow to progress and represents the lack of political will in this regard (Huseynli, 2018). Moreover, the lack of allocated resources shows gaps in the professional coordination of services and in the shortage of social services that could provide alternatives and effective prevention (Huseynov & Abbasova, 2021).

There is also a critical need for fundamental educational reforms in the refs. Early childhood education is insufficient and underfinanced, even in comparison to several other and with comparatively lower income countries in the region (SABER Country Report, 2018). Scores in reading, mathematics and science among the students in the capital Baku, in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) are below the average for Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (OECD, 2019).

In the recent years, some infrastructural progress has been made showing a substantial improvement in children's rights, social protection and 'child-friendly' learning environments in Azerbaijan (UNICEF, 2016). International organizations, most notably UNICEF's international comparative data on childhood, mainly highlight the priorities of international rights and legislations. These focus on early childhood development and disciplinary practices, especially on the use of violence in disciplining. Although based on data collected by UNICEF in 2006, a recent study states a high level of violent disciplinary practices in Azerbaijani families (Huseynli & Jonson-Reid, 2022). Previous studies on Azerbaijani children's role in traditional (i.e. heteronormative) family environments have also shown that children rarely question their parents' parenting strategies and generally agree with the expectations and demands set for them (Hunner-Kreisel, Nasrullayeva et al., 2022). Similar findings were published on other Muslim-majority post-Soviet States such as Kyrgyzstan (Bühler-Niederberger & Schwittek, 2022). In part, this is interpreted as a legacy of Soviet educational doctrines, which did not make domestic violence an issue, but warned against 'too much coddling' (Huseynli & Jonson-Reid, 2022). According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2013), Azerbaijan within the comparative context to European and CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries shows a particularly harsh parental discipline, partly because the country has fewer corresponding child protection laws. Criticism is leveled at the state's overall lack of commitment to a social policy for children where children's well-being is highly dependent on their families and their resources (Hunner-Kreisel, Bühler-Niederberger et al., 2022).

Yet, there is still a significant gap in the literature around the upbringing of children within families, children's voices and their own understanding of subjective well-being. In their pioneering work, Hunner-Kreisel asked about the well-being of children in Azerbaijan and tried to capture this from the children's own perspectives (Hunner-Kreisel et al., 2020; Hunner-Kreisel, Nasrullayeva et al., 2022). They used a concept of a 'spatial well-being' (Fattore et al., 2021), which studies showed to be limited for children in Baku because children are hardly allocated any place in the public infrastructure that they can use with a certain degree of autonomy. In the family, their studies showed that children have limited activities and perceive

themselves in a strongly hierarchical age structure and recognize its limitations as such (Hunner-Kreisel, Ben-Arieh et al., 2022). This research already encountered the possible relevance of a 'translocal own space with friends constructed through the use of digital technologies' (Fattore et al., 2021, p. 18), although without systematic consideration of the design of such spaces by the children and the affordances of digital media.

Taking smartphones as our primary focus, we explore upbringing in Azerbaijani families by asking how children navigate smartphone's presence in the family's life on a day-to-day basis. This perspective allows approaching limits, possibilities and modes of negotiating generational relations as continuous and fluid processes embedded in the heterogenous relations mediated by smartphones. In this way, our study aims to contribute to the study of children's place and well-being in Azerbaijani families by showing how the use of smartphone can continuously reestablish generational relations and renegotiate them as afforded by the device. To do this, we turn to the sociomaterial approach and draw on recent ontological scholarship in childhood studies.

Approach

The ontological theorization of childhood and recent attention to sociomaterial approaches rethinking childhood as a phenomenon have been important impulses in childhood research. The arrival of the 'new' materialism has been received with much debate in childhood studies. Many studies around materialism, especially inspirations drawing on Science and Technology Studies (STS) have focused on rethinking and decentering children's agency (Spyrou, 2018). Against this background, debates have carried on whether understanding childhood as a relational and sociomaterially constructed phenomenon would strip the childhood sociology off its agential achievements (Alanen, 2019). Hence, the recent contributions have engaged with agency differently, to show that seeing agency as distributed and heterogenous (meaning that it includes both human and nonhuman forces) can help deessentialize the idea of childhood. The main reason behind deessentialization is to liberate childhood as a phenomenon from structural and hierarchical interdependencies (Sørenssen & Franck, 2021). If understood as a relational phenomenon, childhood becomes more than just an age category or a structural layer in the society and instead manifests as continuously constructed and shaped in heterogenous relations (Spyrou, 2018, 2019). This has borne studies of material mediation and childhood as a *relational achievement* to highlight the multiple realities in which childhood can be understood and conceptualized.

Shifting the focus from child-centered interpretation of children's experiences and meanings, sociomaterial approach shows how experiences acquire meaning and form in relations between the social and the material. Children's relationships hence shape and become shaped by the effects of material objects in their lives. The term *sociomaterial* here does not denote a harmonious merged state of fixed being; rather, it means the relationality of social and material that do not always combine coherently (Law & Mol, 1995; Sørenssen, 2022). The social and the

material shape each other and *become* in fluid constellation of complexities that coproduce our experiences. The relations of the social and material hence are not causal; they do not *become* from a single source or contain a single agent doing the action, rather they are heterogenous and asymmetrical in ways they come to be (Latour, 2005). While such relationality primarily means the distribution of agency between human and nonhuman, it also highlights the relations and continuous motion at the center of all experiences. It is not merely about adding another dimension, that is materiality, to the array of forces that shape children's social lives, but rather highlighting the social within the materiality itself.

To do this, we follow how *affordances of smartphones* shape the sociomateriality of children's experiences (Hutchby, 2001). In this framework, affordances of the devices are not merely enhancement or extension of children's various abilities and desires, rather active enabling and/or constraining of certain environments, reshaping the very way children understand themselves in different sociomaterial contexts. For example, Ruckenstein's (2015, p. 353) study of children playing the Nintendo-DS game console shows how by the creation of new worlds and new kinds of social bonds they create a "context-specific nature of material encounters".

By integrating a sociomaterial approach in this study, we aim to elaborate on the concept of generational order in the frames of relational and material sociology of childhood. We build on Alanen and Mayall's (2001) ideas of *generational order as a relational phenomenon*, namely, of ongoing processes of attributing values, duties, rights and scopes of action to members of different age categories and generational position within the kinship lineage. These age categories always figure in relation to each other (Bühler-Niederberger, 2020). In such a relational perspective, the researcher is not endowed with *a priori* knowledge and competencies, to study such processes in which the relationship between individuals, groups and material entities is continuously shaped (Emirbayer, 1997). In other words, generational order emerges in fluid constellations of sociomaterial interactions, with fluidity meaning no causality or correlation. Hence, the focus shifts onto emergent relations in which all entities involved simultaneously shape each other without assuming any unilateral direction of impact. Part of the reason why sociomaterial thinking can be fruitful for exploring hierarchical generational relations is precisely due to methodological tools provided to avert hierarchical and causal or symmetrical interpretations (Latour, 1984, 2005). Within the context of Azerbaijan, the aim is to understand how nonhuman actors such as smartphones can help us see beyond culturally familiar depictions of Azerbaijani family relations that are often presumed as old-fashioned, hierarchical and neglectful of children's perspectives and voices (cf. Hunner-Kreisel et al., 2022).

The materialist framework can offer powerful analytical tools in achieving other forms of storytelling in which childhood and children's experiences can be interpreted beyond the traditional, heteronormative and Eurocentric understandings. While still drawing on Western scholarship and concepts such as 'generational order' and 'sociomateriality' for methodological and analytical purposes, it is nonetheless possible to unravel generational order and children's role in families by moving away from familiar narratives on parent–child and family constructs. This approach can help 'target hegemonic interpretive power of specific concepts and its inherent epistemic violence to diverse forms of living' (Hunner-Kreisel, Ben-Arieh et al., 2022).

Using the example of smartphones – a device with global usage and many culturally familiar meanings – Azerbaijani children's lives in families and at school is portrayed in a 'new' light where hierarchies, dependencies, agencies and normative expectations acquire meaning through dynamic contexts and complex, heterogenous relations between human and nonhuman actors (Sørenssen & Bergschöld, 2021).

This chapter provides insights into how a sociomaterial approach can be a useful analytical tool in understanding generational order through focusing on the example of children's use of smartphones. To guide our study, we focus on the various practices that surround the use of smartphones and illustrate the heterogenous relations in which children's relationships, learning and leisure emerge. In this framework, the formative power of the material object, in this case, the smartphone, becomes of interest through the very possibilities it opens up as well as the expectations from and for its use. Using sociomaterial analysis allows us to show that the relationships between parents and children undergo continuous negotiations that emerge within the heterogenous relations between human and nonhuman actors. In addition, we outline the scopes and limits of these negotiations as well as the basic standards that the relationships between parents and children must meet from the point of view of adult participants and the children.

Methods and Materials

We have conducted five peer-supported interviews via video-conferencing tool Zoom with a total of 13 children and tweens – eight girls and five boys – living in Baku (see Table 1). Interviews were carried out in five groups with a maximum of three

Table 1. Overview of the Interviewed Children.

Groups	Pseudonym	Age	Sex	SocioEconomic Status	Languages Spoken at Home
1 (in English)	Firangiz	13	Female	Upper middle class	Azerbaijan, English
	Zarifa	15	Female		
	Teymur	11	Male		
2 (in Azerbaijani and Russian)	Raul	14	Male	Middle class	Russian, Azerbaijani
	Sayyara	12	Female		
3 (in Azerbaijani)	Haydar	10	Male	Lower middle class	Azerbaijani
	Hamid	12	Male		
	Rana	10	Female		
4 (in Azerbaijani)	Tahira	12	Female	Lower middle class	Azerbaijani
	Namiq	10	Male		
5 (in Azerbaijani)	Maryam	9	Female	(Upper) middle class	Azerbaijani, English
	Afat	9	Female		
	Sevinj	14	Female		

interviewees and mostly two researchers in one group. Nigar Nasrullayeva (NN) was responsible for conducting the interviews. Aysel Sultan (AS) and Doris Bühler-Niederberger (DBN) each participated in one interview to facilitate the interviewing process and to collect additional observational data. One interview was conducted in English (DBN and NN) with three siblings who were enrolled in a private English-speaking school; the remaining interviews were conducted in Azerbaijani. Children were recruited through NN's networks (from previous studies) across public and private schools in Baku and were from various socioeconomic backgrounds. In three out of five group interviews, children joined the video call from a separately allocated room at home, without parents' involvement. In the other two interviews, mothers were present in the room and sometimes intervened in children's responses, mostly in the background and after children muted their microphones so the interaction wasn't audible to the interviewers. This occurrence corresponded with our anticipations of parents monitoring the way children's smartphone use could be presented to outsiders henceforth interlinking parental monitoring and children's own perspectives that characterized our analyses.

Only six of the children owned their personal smartphone and the rest shared with a sibling, used a parent's phone, or a different family device such as tablets or laptops. Parents of all 13 children provided their oral or written assent for their children's participation and video-recording of the interviews. Additional to the informed consent form, DBN also provided a signed letter explaining to the parents the purpose of the study and the general theme of this edited volume. The children were informed about the study's purpose at the beginning of each interview and were asked to choose their own pseudonyms for the case if their statements would appear in this publication. Interviews were semistructured guided by questions around children's use of smartphones and any other smart devices (e.g. tablets and computers) in their daily life or what they thought about smartphones if they did not possess one yet. We included questions about various ways and settings in which children used their personal or their sibling's or parent's smartphones and asked if they had any restrictions for their use. We were interested in children's conceptions and constructions of privacy, (in)dependency, learning, fun, socialization with peers and relationships with parents and other family members as narrated about smartphones. While different children were involved in the interview, this was not a focus-group interview in a strict sense (Barbour, 2018) as the interviewers did not focus on the interaction and exchange between the children as focus groups require (Adler et al., 2019). The latter would have been difficult because, although the children all stated that they liked participating in the interviews, they were more oriented toward an adult–child interaction exemplified in the formal addressing of the interviewers, raising their hands to speak, etc. Hence, we have called this style of interviewing a 'peer-supported interview' (see also Parrish et al., 2012). In a peer-supported interview, the presence of several children was intended to address the power imbalance due to adult interviewers and reduce the pressure on an individual child to respond. This also allowed the children to occasionally make jokes or giggle among themselves to potentially 'escape' the hierarchies in the interview setting.

Analysis: Affordances and Use-*ability* of Smartphones

The analysis focuses on different contexts in which smartphones mediate generational relations. Children as users of smartphones exhibit varied values and behaviors that continuously reposition their role and the role of adults in generational relations (see also Hadad, Meishar-Tal, & Blau, 2020). Smartphones, as the nonhuman actors in these relations, *mediate the enactment of social norms and values* in children's lives (Sørenssen & Franck, 2021) at home, at school and in communication with peers. Studying these enactments of the sociomaterial encounters (Law & Urry, 2004) unveils the normative cornerstones of the generational *ordering* and children's perspectives on their own role in this ordering. They become recognizable in children's practices of smartphone use, in the reported conflicts with parents and teachers, in the judgments of 'other' children and adults about their 'mostly wrong' use of smartphones and the strategies through which these norms and expectations are to be adhered to or approximated.

In many cases, children had to share devices with others. This had implications as to what smart devices can be used for and under which circumstances. Since in all cases smartphone use at schools was either forbidden or strictly regulated, smartphones often emerged in punishment scenarios or accidents such as bringing a parent's smartphone in the backpack unknowingly or forgetting to switch off the device. Our data show that the use of smartphones in classrooms is rendered either useful thereby elevating the pupil's status as docile and well-behaved or in contrast, distracting and disrespectful of the classroom environment deserving reprimand and punishment. Children describe a smartphone's use-*ability* in this preconditioned form.

Children in our study expressed significant alertness to such categorization of behavior. When asked to describe their daily use of the phone, children usually began with the examples that are typically associated with the 'right' form of use such as preparing for a class, staying in touch with their parents, or watching extracurricular educational content on YouTube. The approved or 'right' use of smartphones translates into how children align their own understandings about what a smartphone use should be like with expectations of their parents and teachers.

Smartphones as mediators help enact different identities and become a part of being a responsible child, a smart user, a good daughter/son, or a good friend. In the 'proper' understanding of the term mediator, smartphones as technologies of mediation do not simply enhance the already existing customs and relations in which children find themselves. Rather, we observe how children with smartphones transform and *become* in very specific, dynamic contexts (Latour & Venn, 2002).

> Zarifa: When you are chatting with someone, you are not quite expressing your feelings towards them. Like, they don't even know if you are sad or happy, like in general. Like when you chat with them, they don't really know your true feelings. So, they might confuse it with wrong feelings, and instead of thinking positively,

> they might start thinking negatively. If I say something too straightforward, that will stand pretty mean in chat. That would sound kind of not really... That would not have a positive impact, or it would not sound as positive as it would sound in real life. So, in chat, it might sound rude.

Communication over a chat instead of live communication is hence dissatisfactory because of the technological barriers. Here the device simultaneously reinforces Zarifa's need to communicate her feelings while at the same time restricting a full expressivity changing the appearance of her outward personality. This form of meaning-making of the device's specific affordances highlights different ontological realities which children and smartphones co-produce and in which children define and discover their own voices and perspectives.

Simultaneously, this alignment often reflects the general negative image about smartphones in that they are considered harmful and distracting overall. In this vein, socializing in a digital communication form is often degraded as inauthentic and even discouraging of 'real' connections and bonding.

Afat: I think it's a bit bad because this way people lie on the sofa at home and get out for fresh air less and mostly talk on the phone.

Maryam: I think so, too. Because, for example, some people, my relatives, now live in another district, and I want to talk to them; if I have their number I can call or write and the bad thing is that, as Afat said, they spend more time on the Internet than in the fresh air, go for a walk or actually meet friends or relatives.

Sevinj: I think it is bad because people go out less and, of course their ability to talk with each other, their communication has decreased. They can communicate on the Internet but cannot find a common language in real life. Also, the social environment is more favorable for people with a broken arm and in wheelchairs, but they also communicate less now. Now sociability decreased and friends cannot communicate at all. For example, now it is difficult for me to find a common language with my friends. They are more sociable online than outside the home.

Previous research has shown that 'real life' or, in other words, face-to-face interactions carry an important meaning for children through which they establish intimate and meaningful relationships (Davies, 2012). When treated as a nonhuman *actor*, the smartphone translates face-to-face social communication into a digital space where attachments, associations and expectations acquire new meanings and hence, need to be relearned. As quotes above show, children struggle to make sense of their previously learned communication skills in a digital space (e.g. WhatsApp), wherein intimate relationships become distanced

and even misinterpreted. At the same time, 'new' ways of socializing afforded by the smartphone's communication spaces coexist in the same sociomaterial realm as the face-to-face interactions.

> Zarifa: I think it is obvious that they are mostly needed for entertainment, etc. They are also needed for distance communication. I think that's all. [...] I have like all my social life is in my phone. Let's say, all my chats or I don't know, discussions with my friends, all my applications, like the useful apps. Like if I have something to watch or want to entertain myself in general, I just go to my phone, or try to kind of distract myself from real life and concentrate on my social life.

This coexistence is divided into 'real life' and digital spaces with one dispersed across different physical locations and the other assembled in the device. Within a digital space, this coexistence of realms emerges in capitalization of social communication within one's individual, digital space. The 'other' world that socialization in the digital space represents, is also reflected in Zarifa's distinction between 'social life' (in the digital space) and 'real life,' as she points out the evasion of 'real life' to be occasionally more desirable.

Children also narrate about their abilities to choose which social media and communication platforms were satisfactory for socializing with peers. This ability was demonstrated in the careful management of parental demands by, for example, deleting accounts on certain social platforms but maintaining them in others in exchange. The multifunctionality of smartphones allows for articulating different practices of approved use of the smartphone by adults versus the desired use by children. Hence, the affordances of smartphones are dependent on the immediate contexts of their presence and use and are defined in relation to permissions and children's abilities to use them.

For example, children in this study often juxtaposed educational importance of smartphone use that was encouraged in classrooms, and in certain instances at home, with their own desired use featuring children's personal interests such as games, peer group chats and social media platforms. This juxtaposition manifested in smartphones' affordances that offered children a form of bargaining power.

Learning to Use the Smartphone 'Right'

Smartphones offer spaces in secluded 'rooms' for communication and privacy that translates into child–parent relationships at home. In this sense, children expressed different views of the value smartphones presented to them and to their parents. If non-essential use of smartphones was generally condoned at home, one way was combining the 'essential' use with use for pleasure or fun. In this sense, smartphones sometimes act as spaces to navigate different interests in parallel. Using a family chat to communicate with family members inside the house, while

also attending peer chats or games at the same time is one such example. In the following section, the data analysis unveils specific understandings and practices of children learning to navigate smartphone use as allowed and afforded to them. Smartphones achieve significance in relation to the diverse contexts in which children practice their use. Through these contexts that are dynamic themselves (Latour, 2005), smartphones afford various forms of orderings within the heterogenous and generational relations. For example, smartphones are important in the educational context as many children use them to complete tests, watch interactive material, or download their homework. However, their use in classrooms during the in-person lessons is strictly forbidden. As Sayyara tells it:

> You know, the principal's deputies come, take the phone away. The kids' parents will come [to the school] and they [the principal] will say that your daughter should not bring the mobile phone to the school again.

Smartphones become the source of conflict between children and their parents as well as parents and teachers. In this example, the smartphones' variegated uses mediate the educational context and modify children's assessment of the device's use. In the first case, the use is approved for educational purposes limited to specific tasks and guidelines of use. In the second case, the children are admonished making the smartphone a distracting and forbidden object. Hence the temptation to use the phone often translates into judgment of 'bad' behavior. Such a multiplicity of contexts is also evident at home. Smartphones are acknowledged as the source of entertainment, and most children in our study reported playing games or watching entertaining content online on their smartphones.

Children express a very strong sense of judgment about their smartphone use and that judgment often aligns with the expectations of their parents. These expectations and children's respective alignments pertain to values that not only outline and guide the different kinds and purposes of smartphone use but also emerge from the interaction with the device itself. For example, taking care of eye health and spending time with family are frequent examples. Through these examples, smartphones acquire meaning within the contexts of their use and in relation to other entities (human and nonhuman).

> Raul: I set myself the goal to not use the phone for more than 2–3 hours a day or not to enter any programs today, for example. And I do not let myself pick up the phone, and instead, I do my homework. We have mid-term tests, for example, so during those periods I try to limit my use of the phone as much as possible.

What Raul describes in this friction between the need to allow oneself potentially satisfying leisure time spent using the smartphone and the need to study for homework and tests, places the smartphone once again as a distracting actor that persistently demands self-discipline. The desire to use the smartphone

and simultaneously understand its distracting abilities materializes in the ways with which Raul prioritizes his educational goals and being a pupil over being a smartphone user (Ruckenstein, 2015).

Distractions, Pleasure and Fun

Using smartphones also requires constant negotiations of boundaries. Children spoke about protecting their privacy afforded by smartphones especially expressed in the need to having one's own device instead of sharing with a sibling or a parent. Privacy in smartphone use is also part of navigating one's curiosity. This concern came up in insinuations around what content should be considered as 'bad' or 'harmful' versus what they found entertaining or interesting. Entertainment, pleasure and fun are considered distracting and unhealthy in the context of smartphone use and are tolerated to a certain degree, for example, as a reward for completing homework. Children often share these views of their parents and convey similar judgments on others' use of smartphones. This enables certain types of conduct, judgment and ideations that form the social norms around smartphone use and reveal different ways of conceiving of children's status in a traditional family context.

It is important to note that the importance of smartphones is at first always played down by the children as the self-presentation of an obedient child who does not succumb to smartphone's temptations. However, in the course of the interviews, it became clear that smartphones are often an important source of negotiating and establishing boundaries on a day-to-day basis.

> Maryam: I think it [parental mediation] is right, but a little wrong as well. It is wrong because they always tell me to go to sleep, but at that time I want to watch an important scene of an episode. I get angry because at least I want to watch it till the end and then I can sleep. But it is also right because I should be sleeping by one a.m. By that time my eyes get tired, too. That's why it is both wrong and right for me.

Moreover, age-specific differences matter greatly in terms of who is allowed to have their own phone, how much time they can spend with it and should children have a smartphone at all. Within the focus on *generationing* (Bühler-Niederberger, 2020) and generational *ordering*, smartphones as objects with multiple affordances and mediation forces enact different forms of age restrictions, generational relations and show how the roles change what should be afforded and why. For example, children's awareness of how parental mediation tools (might) work impacts the way children understand their own activities different from how their parents do.

> Firangiz: Like sometimes my friends say "oh, my mom is going to check my phone, so, I have to delete something, some social media account." Because like social media is just showing you some

> random stuff, and some parents might not just like it. They might think that their child is just too young for it, and children, instead of understanding, try to avoid their parents checking their phones. I think it's [. . .] they ask other friends to leave some chats because they are just warning them like "my parents are going to check my phone, don't show me or text me that kind of thing."

Awareness of how online algorithms can work affords children advantages over some parents whose limited digital (Terras & Ramsay, 2016) does not allow them to exercise more detailed monitoring over the consumed content or screen time. This example supports the idea of material mediation of generational *ordering*. Smartphones and children's different practices in using them mutually enact on each other, producing desired behavior or manipulating parental perceptions when monitoring screen time.

Renegotiating Generational Ordering

In this final section of the analysis, our focus is on how smartphones affect generational order in the family. Smartphones can enact multiple realities in which renegotiations of generational order are prompted to take different forms. As proposed earlier in the chapter, generational relations are continuously renegotiated, readjusted and maintained through the ways children and parents negotiate smartphone use. Given that most family members own individual smartphones, families' evolving moral economies and values challenge children's ideas of established generational order. In most scenarios, children narrate how their smartphone use corresponds to social norms and family values as they carefully adjust their behavior to adults' expectations and set limits. Simultaneously, children learn and also exercise similar expectations and demands toward adults when it comes to their parents' and grandparents' smartphone use.

What becomes especially apparent in this relationality is the sociomaterial emergence of generational *ordering* (Bühler-Niederberger, 2020). As was stated earlier in the analysis, all those involved in producing the effects of smartphone use (both human and nonhuman entities) put in effort to ensure the 'right' use. This becomes a continuous process of negotiations afforded to the permanent presence of the smartphones and their gradually changing importance. Put otherwise: the *generationing* is ongoing.

Hence, the possibilities of 'wrong' use of the device become the friction point – tempting not only for the children but also for their parents. Interestingly, this temptation manifests in mutual criticism as several children complain about their parents being equally distracted by their own smartphones. It becomes especially important for children to demonstrate that they know the 'right' handling of smartphones and, hence, actively engage in ensuring the subsequent 'right' generational relations.

Maryam: My mom is always looking at her phone, especially at Instagram, and always tells me not to look at mine too much, that my eyes will hurt; she always says the same thing.

Sevinj: For example, adults themselves look at the phone more than us. Even if there were no phones in their time… older people are now looking at Facebook and TikTok because it is more interesting for them than real life; there is nothing more interesting in their lives than looking at the phone. People are more interested in TikTok than walking down the street because it is less interesting than sitting on the phone on Facebook, and also there is a lot of false information and dramatization of life and [so] it is interesting for them on Facebook; they are busy spreading such fake news to everyone.

Children as users of smartphones are embedded in the relationship between their needs and desires, and the expectations of adults in their lives. Smartphones are not treated as mere material objects but rather crucial actors in the reestablishment of structures, power dynamics and meanings of relationships in the generational *ordering*. The dynamic view of general order is positioned here in the very ways smartphones enable certain modes of communication. In a way, smartphones 'embody "social relations"' (Law & Mol, 1995, p. 281) through their constant presence in the lives of children.

Punitive approaches to using smartphones during the class resonate with children's own expectations of how using a smartphone for 'wrong' reasons should be treated. These expectations are often narrated as case-in-point examples from other children's conduct.

> Firangiz: Some students don't give away their phones [at school] as they should and if the teacher notices, she should just punish them because that happens all the time, anyways. For example, I have seen one student not give their phone to the teacher, so the teacher can put it into the box and give it back after the lesson. He got punished and I think he couldn't bring his phone [after that] because the teacher told his parents what he did. His parents didn't give [back] him his phone.

Meanwhile, parents' own distraction with phones often serves as a leeway for children's desire 'to live in a world without phones.' *Distractions result in the same conflict: family time is compromised, and the dissatisfaction is mutual.* High sense of self-discipline and self-critique is reinforced in the family due to excessive use. This often follows with the intentional belittling of any nonessential use and hence, the fun that smartphones can offer. These aligned expectations show up in two ways here: (1) smartphones act as a reminder of the value of spending time with family and (2) the possibilities between choosing what sides of smartphone to amplify according to the situation.

Nevertheless, generational relations do not always require this work of reestablishment and negotiation; rather they *are enacted in these sociomaterial relations* and specific contexts and through what can be expected of children and their relationships in the family. In this sense, the smartphone is at the center of the *generational ordering processes, provoking and enabling the constant generationing* (Alanen, 2020). According to children, this *ordering* appears as a constant practice of raising 'good' children *despite* and with their use of smartphones. Smartphones then trouble the 'natural' order of generational relations in that both parents and children find ways of reestablishing boundaries, expectations and their needs in new ways and new terrains.

Conclusion

This study explored the practices of generational *ordering* in Azerbaijani families by focusing on children's use of smartphones. Smartphones act as the central mediation forces that afford children and adults a variety of tools which they utilize in communicating boundaries, individual freedom, exercising judgment, self-discipline and control. Shifting the focus from human-only interactions to the ways nonhuman actors mediate and enact different realities, we explore the otherwise traditional and hierarchical generational order in a 'new' light. First, our findings challenge the normative conceptualization of familial relationships in Azerbaijan and conventional parenting styles by which we mean the hierarchical decision-making practices in the family. The data show that children's own understandings of the presence of smartphones in their and their families' lives are multidimensional. Smartphones reconstruct the existing social norms, parental expectations and demands that children learn to navigate with(in) their own interests. Because the devices also equip children themselves with a variety of tools, they figure as sometimes reinforcing the familial relationships (such as using the photo gallery to make a birthday video for the grandmother) and sometimes as sources of conflict when children push back on limitations (such as watching a series episode past the bedtime).

Second, studying smartphones as mediators of generational relations also shows how children form identities in accordance with social norms, for example, by matching expectations of 'good' behavior with private and preferred use of personal smartphones. These observations allow researchers to step outside the culturally familiar frames of children's dependency on adults and lack of control over their own preferences and instead explore how generational order and parental mediation are renegotiated on a day-to-day basis, made and remade through the ways children interact with smartphones. It is here that smartphones become the sort of contingent mediators as they trouble generational relations and obligations, but simultaneously co-produce a constant moral discourse around their use in which children are involved and very actively involve themselves. This discourse makes children aware of what is expected from them regarding generational relations and family ties. In other words, while smartphones might break the ties toward the collective of the family, the discourse around it underlines and fortifies generational obligations.

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