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THE IMPACT OF NEW MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES ON SOCIAL INTERACTION IN THE HOUSEHOLD

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New Media Technologies in the Household

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ABSTRACT

How are new media technologies impacting on social interaction within households?

This study examines the relationship between new media technologies within the household and social interaction between individuals. It explores how new media technologies such as, "video games, computer games, the internet and e-mail" (Aarsand 2007:235) as well as televisions, mobile phones, Mp3 players and other types of modern technology are playing a major role in everyday life in modern society. This study set out to explore if new media technologies within the home are serving to bring different generations of the family or a household together or if it is leading to an increasing privatisation within the household.

Empirical data was received from four case studies which involved participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The qualitative data obtained shows that new media technologies are negatively impacting on social interaction between individuals within the household. Firstly, it emerged that new media technologies are immersed into the household and into the daily routines of individuals. Secondly, it became known that there is a close correlation between the location of new media technologies within the home and social interaction. In addition, the main findings to emerge from the research process found that new media technologies within the home are leading to increased social isolation and a privatisation of people's lives within the household.

1. Introduction

New media technologies are having a major impact on society as a whole. The integration of such technologies into social settings within society, such as the household, is having a major influence on social interaction between individuals. It is evident from existing literature that new media technologies impact on the social interaction within households in many different ways. New media technologies can assist in increasing interaction amongst families by bringing generations and family members together. As a result, it can help bridge generational and digital divides. On the other hand however, new media technologies within a household can lead to a growing privatisation within family life, with individuals increasingly using technology independently rather than collectively. For that reason, I set out to investigate the research question; 'How are new media technologies impacting on social interaction within households?' I want to explore if new media technologies do in fact bring family members together and increase social interaction amongst one another, or if it leads to a family divide instead.

I first became interested in the impact that technology can have on social interaction within a household from observing my own family home. In recent years, I have began to note the influence that technology is having on my family as a unit and how communication between family members is now revolving around certain technologies such as, multiple televisions, laptops, Mp3 players, mobile phones, game consoles and so forth. This interest of mine was heightened even more so during a period when I supervised two young teenagers after school three days a week, over an extended timeframe. From watching these teenagers, I soon realised just how much of an important role technology plays in their lives and how all communication between the two siblings was based around their use of new media technologies. Therefore, I propose to investigate this further and to see if technology inside

the family home is resulting in a growing privatisation amongst family members and if there are people increasingly using technology individually rather than collectively. On the other hand, I want to explore, if technology within the family home could serve to bring different generations of the family together.

This investigation will have great significance in the contribution that it will make to the world of sociology. It is through the study of sociology that allows for a better understanding and insight into today's society. New media technologies and the impact they are having on social interaction within the household is a topic that is evident and of great importance to the present world. It is through my research that one of the most important institutions of society; the home and the family will be looked at in greater detail and it is in this institution where society functions. My investigation will study the household and the role that new media technologies play in the development of social interactions in family life.

The value and merit of my research is to inform society and individuals further on modern life and to assess the impact that new media technologies are having on today's society. My investigation will yield a greater insight into and the appreciation of the social interactions of family members within the household. My study will have direct bearing on the initial efforts of new media technologies are having on the present world. It will help contribute towards finding solutions to the new social phenomenon that is new media technologies. My research will ultimately provide a greater understanding that will enable individuals to control the conditions of social life and therefore, help improve these conditions.

2. Review of Literature

2.1 The Family

The family is defined by the Irish constitution as "the natural primary and fundamental unit

group of society" (Lalor et al. 2009:58). The family is a group of people that "live together in a permanent arrangement separated from the rest of the world by the walls of the family dwelling" (Cheal 2002:4). As argued by Lalor et al. (2009) the family is essential to a young person as it is their "most important source of security, love, belonging and identity" (p. 76).This traditional notion of the "nuclear family" which consists of a husband; a wife; and one or more children; and the household were often considered as one for "practical purposes" (Cheal 2002:4). In recent years however, the Irish family has experienced considerable change with the moving away from the traditional concept of the family unit to more varying forms of the family. As a result, the family and the household are now considered as two entirely different entities.

Modern society has given rise to a complexity and diversity of personal relationships, which has lead to an "increased questioning about the future of family structures" (Cheal 2002:35). According to Scott (1997) there has been a decline in "traditional nuclear family households" (p. 591) as people have become "more individualistic" (p. 592) and families are spending "less and less time together" (Turtiainen et al. 2007:478). For that reason, it has been advocated that the family's position in society has changed, and so "traditional family values and the family itself have eroded" (Turtiainen et al. 2007:478). Along with the rise of individualism and the decline in family values, new media technologies are now much more immersed into people's daily routines than ever before. Some of the changing dynamics that are impacting on Irish families in modern society include: the increased participation of women in the workforce, a falling birth rate, a fluctuating marriage rate, an increase in divorce and the number of children being born outside of marriage (Lalor et al. 2009).

In addition to these changing family dynamics, as argued by O'Carroll (2008), Ireland is suffering from a "time-squeeze" (p. 246). In recent years, there has been a change of tempo in

all aspects of Irish society, such as people's working lives, which has led to an increased speed and pacing in life and an "intensity of time" (O'Carroll 2008:248). This in turn, has impacted on the dynamics of family life and how families operate on a day-to-day basis. Furthermore, Turtiainen et al. (2007) argues that change in working life and the labour market "have affected family life" (p. 478) so much so that family members no longer spend time together. According to Cowan (1976) the only social functions that families now perform are "consumption, socialization of small children, and tension management" (p. 2). As a result of their functions diminishing, it can be concluded that "modern families are in trouble" (Cowan 1976:2).

There has also been a drastic change in familial relationships. Pahl and Spencer (2004) argue that a social shift has occurred; from relationships that are primarily given, through kin or family ties, to relationships that are chosen, through kin or non-kin ties. Regardless if these relationships are chosen or not, they involve variable levels of commitment. For instance, family members may "feel a sense of obligation towards each other" (p. 212), whilst on the other hand "friends are perceived as chosen relationships which have to be developed and maintained" (p. 213). This alteration in familial relationships, alongside the rise of individualisation, family members spending less time together, combined with a change in daily routines, has led to the emergence of the household as a different entity from the family. As "the relationship between family and individual biography" has loosened in recent years (Scott 1997:595) and as a result, the concept of the traditional family has been replaced with the notion of a household. The household as a very different entity from the family is one of the main merits for carrying out this research.

2.2 The Household

Lalor et al. (2009) define the household as "a greater range of living arrangements" (p. 58). The household can also be defined as "a group of people living together under the same roof and sharing basic accommodation facilities" (Scott 1997:593). For that reason, the household includes any individuals within the social setting which may incorporate the nuclear family, extended family members, as well as, friends and peers. In other words, individuals don't have to be related to one another and the notion of the household is therefore extended to include more individuals. For the purpose of this study, I am investigating the household as a whole, which includes individuals outside the family unit. I want to explore if new media technologies are having an impact on social interaction and communication between friends and peers, as well as, parents and siblings.

2.3 The Importance of Communication & Social Interaction

The family is a social system that has "a collective identity", which is the "result of shared recollections of togetherness that are created as family members spend time together in shared meals, games, and chatting" (Mesch 2006:123). Communication is "a symbolic, transactional process or the process of creating and sharing meanings" (Smith et al. 2009:79) and it plays a significant role in the relationship between individuals for the functioning of a family or a household. Families that spend time together "in common activities enjoy a higher quality of communication" (Mesch 2006:124). A lack of communication within a household can have a detrimental impact on family interaction, family cohesion and thus on the relationships between individuals within a household. For that reason, family communication is essential to any family and household as it "plays a significant role in the relationship between family leisure and family functioning" (Smith et al. 2009:80).

So far, this paper has defined the family and how it has changed in recent years. Modern society has led to a change in family dynamics which has resulted in the emergence of the household as a different entity from the family unit. This paper has also discussed the main differences between the family and household, along with the importance of communication and social interaction within this social setting. This article will advance by discussing the impact that new media technologies are having on social interaction and communication between individuals within the household.

2.4 New Media Technology in the Household

Within the household, there has been a process that is referred to as "domestication" (Mesch 2006:120). Domestication mainly refers to domestic technologies that aid the running of a household in everyday life and alters "family culture and patterns of interaction" (Mesch 2006:120).This however, can be correlated to the introduction of new media technologies into the household. As Mesch (2006) outlines "families with access to information and communication technology differ from those without them, not only in access to technology but in family dynamics as well" (p. 120). New media technologies have become embedded within daily domestic routines and are now an "intrinsic part of contemporary life" (Church et al. 2010:264). The adaption of such new media technologies has impacted on contemporary society in a number of different ways. One of the main amendments however, is the impact it has had on personal everyday relationships. As Mesch (2006) delineates "the introduction of new technologies such as the Internet into the household can potentially change the quality of family relationships" (p. 119).

As a result of domestication, digital and new media technologies such as "video games, computer games, the internet and email" (Aarsand 2007:235) are now a fundamental part of children's everyday lives in the western world, regardless of their access to it or not.

Technology is defined by Venkatesh and Vitalari (1985) "as the system of tool-using behaviour" (p. 5) and it has become "part of the fabric of daily life for young children" (Plowman et al. 2008:316). It is quite astonishing just how immersed new media technologies have become in modern society. Plowman et al. (2008) revealed from their UK based study that almost all children aged three and four are growing up in homes which have a range of different technologies. They found that 98% of their survey respondents' children were living in a household with access to a mobile phone and 75% had access to a television with interactive features (p. 308). Most of the children surveyed also had access to laptops, games consoles, handheld games, laptops and interactive books (p. 308). In addition to this, "all children encountered a wide range of leisure technologies, such as television and DVD players, as well as cameras and MP3 players" (Plowman et al. 2008:308).

Technology has affected the life of a household in a number of different ways and has become "a basis for future social behaviour" (Venkatesh and Vitalari 1985:3). The submersion of new media technologies into society has led to major social change which has meant that individuals, families and households have had to adapt in a number of ways. Social change is defined by Venkatesh and Vitalari (1985) as "the process by which alteration occurs in the structure and function of a social system" (p. 4). One of the main impacts that it has had, is on that of social interaction and on the communication between family members and between individuals in a household. So much so, that Church et al. (2010) argue that human interaction is now "mediated, if not governed, by the situation or the portability of particular devices" (p. 280). One of the main impacts that new media technologies have had on the household and its inhabitants is the introduction of a digital divide.

2.5 A Digital Divide

A digital divide is "a generation gap between those who master and do not master digital technology" (Aarsand 2007:235). Essentially, a digital divide is "the difference between those who know and those who do not know how to act in a digital environment" (Aarsand 2007:236). It is the assumption that children as regular users of new media technologies develop a wider and more substantial knowledge base in how to use them from their parents and grandparents (Aarsand 2007). Children may use this digital and generational divide as a way to separate activities as "non-adult spaces" where adults don't have access (p. 251). On the other hand however, adults may use this divide to their advantage as a way to interact with their children and in order "to enter into social intercourse with children" (p. 252). Thus, a divide of this nature is created and sustained through social interaction and can help communication social relations within a household, or it can interfere in communication and lead to individualisation further. This concept is central to this research question. I am seeking to find out if new media technologies do in fact increase or decrease social interaction within a household.

2.6 New Media Technologies Facilitating Social Interaction

Technology within the home has many benefits for a household and a family and it has changed the "meanings of family time" (Mesch 2006:124). New media technologies have created new prospects for individuals within a household by "enhancing different patterns of social interaction, access to information, and allocation of time" (Venkatesh and Vitalari 1985:12). According to Mesch (2006), access to technology such as personal computers and laptops "has made the boundary between work time and family time more permeable than ever" (p. 124). As a result, individuals have the opportunity to do their paid work at home. In turn, this increases the time spent together, communication and social interaction between

one another. On the other hand however, this can also mean that individuals are "distracted into the solitary world of technology, which demands their individual attention" (Mesch 2006:124). This can have a negative impact on social interaction within a household as well as providing individuals with the opportunity "for shared activity within the home" (Mesch 2006:124).

Whether or not new media technologies facilitates or impedes social interaction within a household is the focal point of this investigation. This can depend greatly on the type of digital technologies in question. Morrison and Krugman (2001) argue that new media technologies can be regarded as being "internal" or "external" (p. 142). Internal social functions facilitate "social interaction among members of the household" whilst external social functions promotes "interaction with persons not physically present in the home (Morrison and Krugman 2001:142). As Morrison and Krugman (2001) argue, new media technologies are changing the way "people learn and entertain, and facilitate privitisation of social activities previously conducted outside the home" (p. 136). For instance, the computer like many other new media technologies, such as game consoles and mobile phones can increase social interaction amongst individuals within the home. For instance, Fromme (2003) argues that "electronic gaming" does not lead to social isolation; instead it enhances and is "fully integrated into existing peer relationships".

One way that new media technologies positively influences social interaction is due to the fact that they reduce "the effort required to perform task- and work-related activities and thus allows households to engage in many non task activities" (Venkatesh and Vitalari 1985:9). In doing so, leisure time is increased which allows individuals more flexibility on how their free time is spent. In turn this permits "additional control over one's life" and thus can increase

social interaction (Venkatesh and Vitalari 1985:9). Additionally, the computer facilitates social interaction within the home "when one individual in the household, most often and expert" has to teach another how to use such technology "creating a shared experience" (Morrison and Krugman 2001:143).

The household is an important site of learning for children and older adolescents where they can "observe and participate in authentic activities and to develop a sense of the cultural value and role of technologies" (Plowman et al. 2008:318). For that reason, Children use technology within the home "for communication, self-expression, work-related tasks and entertainment" (Plowman et. al 2008:316). In recognising and using technology in this way children are being prepared "for a life in which technology would play an important role" (Plowman et. al 2008:316). For that reason, technologies such as "computer and video games, television or the internet can make a key contribution to older children's social and intellectual development" (Plowman et. al 2010:65). Therefore, digital technologies in the home not only aids social interaction as it is a way that children can be taught how to use these technologies as they play such a fundamental role in their lives, but it is also a way for children to acquire new skills and improve school achievements (Mesch 2006).

Television is another prime example of how nem media technologies endorses social interaction between family members and friends within a household. Morrision and Krugman (2001) argud that television viewing is primarily "a social activity" (p. 137) and is done so with other family members. In addition, the concept of a "family night" was extremely popular in their findings, where family members would rent a film and watch it or television together (p. 143). Furthermore, television viewing promotes "television talk" which is another way that family members and friends can establish a means for postive

communication and social interaction (Morrison and Krugman 2001:137). Television programmes can become "a topic of conversation" whilst giving "people something to talk about" (Morrison and Krugman 2001:145) and as a result, is contributing to social interaction between individuals.

In addition to the computer and the television, the internet is one of the main new media technologies that has become immersed in the household and indeed, encourages social interaction between individuals in and out of the household. The internet is an "electronic network of networks" that links individuals and information together "allowing person-to-person communication and information retrieval" (DiMaggio et al. 2001:307). The internet is an opportunity "for family collaboration and communication as parents and children can play games together and collaborate on software installation" (Mesch 2006:120). Mesch (2006) argues that the internet "has become a shared household activity" (p. 122) and it has the ability to reinforce the family "by moving many family activities such as working, learning, and shopping" (p. 120) back into the home.

DiMaggio et al. (2001) argues "that the internet enhances social ties" by putting "users in more frequent contact with families and friends" (p. 317). Thus, the internet plays a vital role in social relationships between individuals. As Yoon (2006) outlines "the internet enables young people to re-establish and intensify familial relationships via constant contact between the members" (p. 158). It allows individuals "to strengthen their connection with the extended family beyond their own nuclear family" (Yoon 2006:158). The internet is therefore a new form of online interaction that enhances "offline relationships" (Wellman et al. 2001:438). It does so by filling "communication gaps between face-to-face meetings" (p. 438). Furthermore, DiMaggio et al. (2001) found that the internet is a way of increasing

"interaction with family members and closeness to friends" (p. 317). In saying this however, the frequency of daily internet use by adolescents plays a vital role in "the quality of their relationships with parents and friends" (Mesch 2006:122). Mesch (2006) found that adolescents who have low internet usage had "better relationships with parents and friends than was high Internet use" (p. 122).

2.7 New Media Technologies Impeding Social Interaction

It is therefore evident from existing literature that new media technologies can indeed positively encourage and aid social interaction with a household between individuals, such as family members and friends. However, in stark contrast to this, it can be also been argued that new media technologies are having a negative impact on a household and social interactions. It has been argued that such an impact of new media technologies has resulted in the "technologisation of childhood" (Plowman et al. 2010:72). This is a view that regards childhood as being inherently different from the past than in modern society. Modern society is so "technology-driven" which has resulted in childhood being "toxic" (Plowman et al. 2010:72). Plowman et al. (2010) establishes three main negative impacts that the technologisation of childhood has resulted in "through television, computers and games consoles" (p. 65). These refer to risks that children are prone to as a result of using digital technologies on a daily basis. For instance, children's social development is at risk due to increased social isolation as children playing by themselves; their linguistic intellectual and imagination development are at risk. Furthermore, their well-being is under jeopardy as children are spending increased time indoors, and are at risk of obesity. One of the main arguments that Plowman et al. (2010) presents that is central to this study, is that "opportunities for interactions with family members that promote emotional development are

reduced." (p. 65). In other words, new media technologies are having a negative impact on the social interaction between individuals and family members within a household.

Bovill and Livingstone (2001) develop this argument further and argue that in the second half of the twentieth century children are spending more and more time in their bedrooms. In recent years a "bedroom culture" has emerged which implies that children and young people are spending "significant proportions of their leisure time at home with the mess media" (p. 3), rather than spending their time in "communal or family space" (p. 3). Bedrooms are now media rich and young people are spending more and more time in their bedrooms for "consumerism and individualisation" (Bovill and Livingstone 2001:12) which is resulting in the "privatisation of children's lives" (Bovill and Livingstone 2001:3). Children and young people are becoming more individualised and socially excluded and as a result, they are spending less time with their family members. This is having a major impact on family communication and social interaction. There is a negative association "between spending time in the bedroom and spending free time with the family" (Bovill and Livingstone 2001:9).

On the other hand however, it can also be argued that this bedroom culture is in fact encouraging social interaction with friends as oppose to family members. Bovill and Livingstone (2001) outline that having a "media rich bedroom opens up a new space in which to share media not with family but with friends" (p. 10). It emerged that having media in the bedroom encourages "social contacts outside the family circle, rather than encouraging them to spend time alone" (Bovill and Livingstone 2001:11). The media-rich bedroom has become a focus of "peer activity" by bringing "the outside world indoors" (Bovill and Livingstone 2001:17).

In addition to the emergence of a bedroom culture in recent years and so children and young people have become more individualised, other new media technologies such as the internet, can also reduce social interaction between family members. As Mesch (2006) argues the internet is "an activity that reduces the time parents and children spend together in common activities" (p. 120). Thus, it can be argued that internet use is impeding social isolation by means of eroding social capital which enables "users to retreat into an artificial world" (DiMaggio et al. 2001:315). Individuals are also substituting "interactions with weak ties on the internet for time spent with close friends and relatives" (DiMaggio et al. 2001:316). The internet within the home is therefore "negatively related to time spent with family" and it is thought to have a "negative effect on family communication and closeness" (Mesch 2006:122). The internet is perceived as an activity that consumes time that adolescences could be spending with their families (Mesch 2006) and "alienates people from interaction" (Wellman et al. 2001:439). In addition, Mesch (2003) argued that internet use at home is "positively associated with family conflicts" (p. 122) thus affecting communication and social interaction between family members. As Wellman et al. (2001) argues, when "internet use increases, social contact offline decreases and depression and loneliness increase" (p. 439).

2.8 How are New Media Technologies Impacting on Social Interaction within Households?

Therefore, the introduction of new media technologies into the household, has the ability to increase and decrease social interaction between individuals within the household. Buckingham (2000) outlines two contrasting arguments regarding the affects of media on children. Firstly, he outlines a negative viewpoint that electronic media has been argued in the past to have had on children; as being "the death of childhood" (p. 41). It can "exploit children's vulnerability, undermine their individuality and destroy their innocence" (p. 41). A

more positive and optimistic argument however, Aarsand (2007) outlines how new media technologies have the ability to equip children with a "powerful form of media literacy" as well as providing "children with new opportunities for creativity, for opportunity and for self-fulfilment" (p.41). New media technologies therefore have encouraging potential especially with regard to learning and as an "educational medium" (p. 43). Digital technologies can be used to the advantage of family members by using it as "a space where generations meet and do something together" (Aarsand 2007:251).

Aarsand (2007) and Buckingham (2000) both argue how new media technologies can unite and help bring family members and generations together. Those new media technologies can assist in supporting generational divide and can help in maintaining familial relationships. This is one of the main merits for carrying out this research. I want to investigate if this is actually the case; that if new media technologies unite family members together. In contrary to this, my investigations may however yield that there is a growing privatisation within family life, with people increasingly using technology individually rather than collectively. Therefore, are these new media technologies "undermining natural family interaction" (Buckingham 2000:43) within the family home?

3. Methodological Approach

In carrying out this research, I wanted to explore if new media technologies are having a positive or negative impact on social interaction within households. My main objectives set out to examine if new media technologies bring family members together and increases social interaction within a household, or if it leads to a decline in social relations amongst individuals. I wanted to investigate if new media technologies can bring family members and friends together or if it in fact leads to a growing privatisation within a household due to the fact that individuals are using technology independently rather than collectively.

The purpose of my research is to capture large amounts of unstructured information without explicit explanations, in an attempt to investigate the social phenomena of new media technologies and the impact it has on household and family life. I aimed to investigate my research question by conducting exploratory research which "seeks to find out how people get along in the setting under question, what meanings they give to their actions and what issues concern them" (Schutt 2009:14).

My approach to this research question is within the constructivist paradigm, which are my general assumptions of how the social world can be investigated. Constructivist philosophy is the perspective that "emphasises how different stakeholders in social settings construct" my beliefs (Schutt 2009:92). In other words, it is my belief that people construct an image of reality based on their own preferences and interactions with others, and peoples' perceptions of reality are understood differently by different people. Therefore, when carrying out my research I was aware that it is these perceptions of reality which I as a researcher, had to focus my attention on (Schutt 2009).

For that reason, I felt that the most appropriate research methods to adapt in researching my topic were qualitative research methods which are methods that are designed to capture social life as participants experience it rather than in a category predetermined by myself; the researcher (Schutt 2009). Qualitative research methods are an intensive measurement approach in which indicators of concepts are drawn from direct observations and in-depth commentary. Therefore, I determined the most suited methods to include participant observation, along with, semi-structured interviews. I was aware that by conducting qualitative research of this nature, the explanation derived would be based on fewer cases from a limited area, yet, be finely textured and rich in information. I wanted to see the

social world from the same perspective as my participants, and I wanted to hear what they had to say in their own words.

This approach is deemed most appropriate to this research question surrounding new media technologies, as it is unclear what meaning people will attach to this research or what sense they might make of particular questions about it. Qualitative methods are best suited to this research question as it was also unclear what concepts would assist in understanding the situation of new media technologies and the impact they may have on household social relations. Furthermore, qualitative research methods are very appropriate because of the small number of participants required and the unique social setting; the household, that I was investigating (Schutt 2009:542). My qualitative research methods have therefore relied heavily on spoken words and observations in order to explore the meanings attached by participants to their lives.

By combining two qualitative research methods, intensive interviewing and participation observation, I am confident that extensive research was conducted and for that reason, there is more validity in my research results. This is otherwise known as triangulation; "the use of two or more different measures of the same variable" (Schutt 2009:18). By making use of two research methods there is a "less likelihood of omissions, embellishments and statements" (Deacon *et al.* 2007:33). Triangulation has enabled me to obtain a clearer picture of the social reality I was studying by viewing it from a number of different perspectives. I was aware that if my findings from my two different research methods yielded very similar results, I could have more assurance in the strength of my research.

A non-probability sample was generated through snowballing via my own social networks. This meant that all participants, including children and adults who took part, all did so voluntarily, reflecting Schutt's (2009) comment on the importance of "voluntarily

participation" (p. 348). A total of 17 individuals were observed over the course of four observation sessions in four different households, during February and March 2012. Eight of these individuals were then interviewed following each of the observations. Four children participated in the study aged between 12 and 17 of which three were girls and one boy. The remaining 13 participants of the sample were adults above the age of 18 varying in gender composition. From which, five were male and eight were female. For that reason, it must be noted that the sample is non-representative, and was very limited in terms of ethnicity, gender and social class. All of the participants were white and Irish and were from a middle class background.

I began my research by observing the social interaction of individuals within four different households, before proceeding to interview the social actors in depth on the issue. Firstly, I carried out several hours of participant observation in the homes of four different families. I conducted each of the observations in the evening time, when all family members were present for approximately one hour in length. I observed the interaction of the household as a whole and how family members interacted and communicated with one another, as well as, observing individual interactions. I was aware that by conducting participant observation, it would reveal information directly and immediately. Participation observation has the ability to access what the participants themselves are observing and their understandings of what they are doing. It allows for the understanding of social action in which action is taken and opinions are formed (Schutt 2009). As the researcher, I could witness the events unfolding first hand, rather than being dependent on second-hand indicators, such as a recording or the frailties of memory (Deacon *et al.* 2007).

As referred to in Table 1, 'Household 1' consisted of four individuals whom were all present during the observations. They were all adults ranging from the age of 23 and above. Two of the individuals were male, and two were female. I interviewed the two female participants after the direct observations took place. 'Household 2' consisted of four participants, two females and two males. Two of the individuals were aged 12 and 15 and their parents. I conducted the interviews with the eldest teenager and her mother. 'Household 3' consisted of five participants; four females and one male. The youngest participant was 13 years of age; the next contributor was aged 17, then 20 and again, their parents. I conducted the interviews with the male participant John and the eldest girl in the family, Jennifer. 'Household 4' consisted of four participants again; three females and one male. The youngest participant was aged 20. I conducted the interviews with Sarah, the youngest participant and her mother, Ann.

Research Sample

Household	Age Category	No. Males	No. Females	Family Composition	Interviewees
Household 1	23-45+	2	2	2 Parents & 2 Adult Children	Mother & Daughter
Household 2	12-45+	2	2	2 Parents & 2 U18's	Mother & Daughter
Household 3	13-45+	1	4	2 Parents; 2 U18's & 1 Adult Child	Father & Eldest Daughter
Household 4	20-45+	1	3	2 Parents & 2 Adult Children	Mother & Eldest Daughter

Table 1-The Four Households

As a result of entering a series of private settings, the access obtained was "overt access" (Silverman 2007:81). This type of access is based on informing subjects prior to the research taking place and getting their agreement to take part in the research. This was done by "informed consent" (Silverman 2007:81). Furthermore, during my direct observations, my

role as researcher was as an overt participant. In other words, I revealed my identity as a researcher to those who were being observed (Schutt 2009). This role was perfectly suited to my investigation as it was taking place in a series of private spaces; the household. As an overt participant, I had the facility to take jottings during my observations which were crucial to me as they are the primary means of recording participant observation. Jottings are "brief notes written in the field" and they usually serve as memory joggers when writing up field notes at a later stage (Schutt 2009:332). Additionally, being an overt participant meant that I will had the capacity to ask questions whilst I was in the setting. This allowed me to investigate the participant's attitudes and their actions even further (Schutt 2009).

Following my direct observations, I conducted a series of semi-structured interviews which allowed me to explore my observations further. What's more I used my direct observations as a template for my interviews. Initially, I planned to interview each family member from all of the four households. However, once I commenced my research process, I realised that this wasn't feasible within the time constraints of the project. Conducting a series of semi-structured interviews is a lengthy and time consuming process. For that reason, I proceeded to interview two household members from each household. This included one parent, as well as, one child, adolescence or adult from each household setting. I was confident this would still allow me to gain more of an insight into my investigations and I could complete the research process in a more realistic time frame. In turn, this allocated me more time after the completion of my research process to develop an explanation for what had been found and what my investigations had established (Schutt 2009).

In conducting my series of semi-structured interviews, I hoped I could learn more about my research topic from my interviewee on their terms. A main reason for this is that a semi-structured interview relies on a series of open-ended questions and therefore, each of my

respondents could answer each of the individual questions in their own words (Schutt 2009). I established a rapport with each interviewee from the onset as this is a very important feature of a semi-structured interview. At the very beginning of the interview I explained what the interview was about, how it would work and I read through the already signed consent form with them. I responded to any questions they had honestly and I emphasised that all the content of the interview would remain strictly confidential. For the duration of the interview, I made use of probes and follow up questions in order to get each interviewee to expand more on certain topics. One of the main advantages of assisting my participation observation with semi-structured interviews is that it allowed me to develop a comprehensive picture of the interviewee's backgrounds, attitudes and actions on their own terms (Schutt 2009).

Additionally, as my research focused on a very small sample of four case studies, this afforded me a more intensive representation of the chosen actors. Each interviewee acted as a "key informant survey" (Schutt 2009:173). In other words, each interviewee was particularly knowledgeable about the issue under investigation of new media technologies and social interaction within households. The interviewees were chosen for their awareness and familiarity with the topic in question, and also on the basis of their willingness to talk and their ability to be "representative of the range of points of view" (Schutt 2009:173).

Throughout the research process, ethical guidelines were of paramount importance and had to be adhered to. As already mentioned, I ensured the willingness of each individual to participate and that they were doing so on a voluntary basis. I warranted voluntary participation by allowing each household to choose a convenient time for the direct observations to take place. Furthermore, the participants decided themselves who would volunteer to be interviewed following the direct observations.

Secondly I was aware, as a researcher, of the wellbeing of the subjects and I didn't want my research to present any adverse consequences to any of the participants. I ensured that no direct harm to the reputations and feelings of the participants would be caused by affecting the course of events whilst I was engaged in the setting. In addition, I am maintaining the confidentiality of the research subjects by not disclosing their identities. In order to preserve subject confidentiality I removed any information that could be used to identify individuals from my final report. I am using a fictitious names and place names for each interviewee and household location.

Another major and vitally important characteristic of ensuring that my research remained ethical was obtaining informed consent. Informed consent ensured that each participant was fully aware of the purposes and consequences of my research. I approached and informed the parents of each of the four families that I was interested in basing my research on. In doing so, they each acted as gatekeepers for my research, and I received formal permission via informed consent. "Informed consent means that research subjects have the right to know that they are being researched, the right to be informed about the nature of the research and the right to withdraw at any time" (Silverman 2007:324). The informed consent form that I presented to each of the households was a detailed account that outlined the nature of the research I was conducting and what the role of being a participant entailed. It too outlined the main ethical issues that I had to abide by in order to ensure that my research was ethical. I discussed the nature of my research with each individual in all four households.

Every individual received their own consent form in which they signed and dated in their own time, prior to the research taking place. It outlined the nature of my research investigations, the purpose and procedures of my research that they could withdraw from the research at any time, the risks and benefits of the research, the voluntary nature of research

and the procedures I was undertaking in order to protect their confidentiality and anonymity. It also stated my commitment to the standard of maintaining privacy and confidentiality. For instance, other unauthorized persons will not have access to the recorded data. By presenting an informed consent from, it also allowed me to ensure that deception would not be a problem in the research which is when a subject is "unknowingly exposed to harm" (Silverman 2007:318).

When my research process was complete and after I had conducted the four observation sessions and the eight interviews, I invested a large amount of time analysing the data. Immediately after each direct observation, I wrote up my field notes in great detail using the field notes and jottings I took during the observations. Similarly, I scrutinised the interview transcripts in immense detail. I analysed the data using a grounded theory approach which are "observations that are summarised into conceptual categories, revaluated in the research setting" (Schutt 2009:379). In other words, I summarised my observation and interview findings into conceptual categories and by selecting indicators, such as, the amount and regularity of new media technology use within the home; the number of devices present in a room at any one given time; the multi-usage of such devices by users, its impact on communication and so forth. Thus, the key themes to emerge that are explored further in this article include: the extent that new media technologies are now immersed into today's society; the impact that the location of such technologies can have on social interaction within a household; social isolation and a growing privatisation of people's lives within a household.

4. Findings

Aarsand (2007) looks at how new media technologies "are used in different contexts" (p. 236) particularly focusing on how digital technologies are used within family environments.

This was central to my research question and to my investigation, as I was exploring how new media technologies are used in relation to, or with other family members in order to create and recreate family relationships. The "media-rich home" (Livingstone 2002:11) is a fundamental "social setting for the adoption and use of the new technologies" (Venkatesh 1997:4). My study has found that new media technologies have in fact become embedded in the lives of children and young people within the family home, and are much "more common for children and young people" (Fromme 2003) in today's society. My results have established that new media technologies are now "taken for granted within our homes, meaningfully embedded in the routines of children's daily lives" (Livingstone 2002:4), and in turn, this is having a negative impact on family life, communication and social interaction within the household.

4.1 The Immersion of New Media Technologies into the Household

My findings from my research methods, especially from my direct observations concur with Mesch (2006) that a process known as "domestication" (p. 120) has occurred in recent years. In other words, new media technologies have become fully immersed into the household in modern society. As argued by Livingstone (2002), "today's children comprise the first generation to live in an ICT-rich environment" (p. 15). It became evident from all four households that digital technologies have "become an intimate aspect of our lives" (Church et al. 2010:272). Within each household there was an array of digital technologies present. For instance, all four households had wireless internet access installed in the home; there was a least one smart phone in each household and all participants owned a mobile phone. There was a minimum of two iPods in each household, two television sets and at least two DVD players on display. Each household also contained one home computer along with a minimum of another laptop. Two of the households also had an iPad and three of the social

settings had at least one games console on display. This indicates that new media technologies are now embedded in society and especially within the social setting of the household.

4.2 The Impact the Location of New Media Technologies in the Household has on Social Interaction

Firstly, I was aware that in order to gain an in-depth understanding of the household, I had "to gain a clear understanding on household adoption and use of technologies" (Venkatesh 1997:9). In doing so, it emerged during my investigation that social interaction can be influenced by the location of new media technologies within the household. My results convey that communication and human interaction is "governed" (Church et al. 2010:280) by the position of new media technologies within the home. For instance, it emerged that there is a close link between "where a television is located, to who then uses it, and when it is watched" (Church et al. 2010:278). As Church et al. (2010) outlines, "shared viewing occurs in the lounge room" and "individual television viewing occurs in the bedrooms" (p. 278). This became very evident during my direct observations. In 'Household 1' for example, the four participants were having dinner and they were all situated around the kitchen table. Whilst the meal was taking place they were watching television which was located in the corner of the room. Similarly, in both 'Household 3' and 'Household 4', there were two participants in each setting, watching television together for the duration of the two direct observation sessions (See Appendix 2). This proves that the location of particular digital technologies within the home, are key to social interaction between household members.

Mesch (2006) emphasises the importance of "shared activities" on social interaction as they are described as forces "that contribute to the perception of the identity and uniqueness of

one's family" (p. 124). My findings advocate that when a device such as the television is located in a public area within the home, i.e., the living room, human interaction is encouraged by watching television together, because it becomes a shared activity. In saying this however, it emerged from my observations that communication was still not encouraged during this process of interaction. Even though they were watching television together, as a family unit ('Household 1'), they did so in silence and there was no form of conversation or dialogue between them, and likewise in 'Household 3' and 'Household 4' (See Appendix 2). Nevertheless, it still demonstrates that the placement of new media technologies in public spaces in the household can improve interaction on the whole as individuals are not isolated from one another, even if there is little direct communication between them. As observed in 'Household 3' the two individuals who were watching television together spoke about the programme in question at convenient times throughout the programme. Therefore, shared television viewing and other forms of interaction is still an advantage to household members as such shared activities can contribute to "strengthening family boundaries because they create opportunities for interaction, communication, and memories" (Mesch 2006:124).

However, this also shows that when a device is located in a private location within the household, social interaction is not promoted and this has a negative impact on communication between household members. For instance, in 'Household 3', the home computer was located in a very small confined space; in an alcove, underneath the stairs, in the main entrance hall of the house (See Appendix 2). Even though, this was a public space within the home, the confinements of the area in question, did not encourage social interaction. For the duration of the observation in 'Household 3', Eva, a 17 year old teenager, used the computer on her own. She was logged onto her Facebook account whilst listening to music via iTunes. For the duration of the observation, she was isolated from the rest of her

family. This was similar to 'Household 2' where Daniel aged 12, spent all of his time in his bedroom playing a games console. Therefore, social interaction "shapes and is shaped by the practices and routines of everyday life" (Livingstone 2002:13). For that reason, there has been a change in the way media is used in recent years and social interaction within the household depends on the location of these digital technologies. In other words, there has been a change "from an era best characterized as family television to one of individualized media lifestyles" (Church et al. 2010:279). Furthermore, the frequency and type of consumption of new media technologies "are negatively related to family time and positively related to family conflicts" (Mesch 2006:119).

Therefore, my participant observation suggests that the placement of new media technologies in private spaces within the family home has a negative impact on social interaction and communication between individuals. Not only can individuals become isolated in terms of their location in the household relative to other household members, but digital technologies also has the capacity to "draw people's attention away from their immediate physical environment" and as a consequence, "they pay less attention to their physical and social surroundings" (Wellman et al. 2001:439). This became even more apparent during my observations in 'Household 4' where two of the individuals were in the same room together, but consuming a range of different technologies simultaneously. They were both so consumed with their own individual tasks, and they paid little attention to one another (See Appendix 3). This became even clearer during one of the interviewees in 'Household 4'. When I asked if new media technologies are affecting communication within the household, the respondent informed me; "like when we are in the same room together we don't really talk to one another" (Household 4; Interviewee 8-See Appendix 3).

Thus, my findings are in correlation to DiMaggio et al.'s (2001) study which found, that higher levels of usage of digital technologies are "associated with declines in communication with family members" (p. 316). My findings show that the location of new media technologies can in fact improve social interaction within the household when they are located in a public space within the home ('Household 1', 'Household 3' and 'Household 4'). Although, when digital technologies are located in a private space within the household, in the case of 'Household 2' and 'Household 3' social interaction is not encouraged and instead, individuals are isolated from one another and, their activities as a result, are individualised.

4.3 A 'Bedroom Culture' leading to Social Isolation

In addition to the impact that the location of new media technologies within the household can have on social interaction, my results also show that the domestication of the household and the technologisation of childhood has led to the social isolation of individuals, within the household. My results are therefore in opposition to the idea that new media technologies are serving to bring different generations of the family together and thus, increasing social interaction within the household. Aarsand (2007) found a digital divide to be a place "where generations meet and do something together" (p. 251). It is a space where adults can display a lack of knowledge surrounding new media technologies in order to enter into social interaction with children (Aarsand 2007). Children are positioned "as someone in the know, while the adult is placed and ratified as the less knowledgeable" individual (Aarsand 2007:251). Aarsand's (2007) investigations concluded, that contrary to expectations, digital technologies can be used to the advantage of family members. However, my findings are in stark contrast to this and are parallel to academic debates which suggest, that recent societal changes have affected family life negatively by creating social isolation within the household. My findings depict that the digital divide is a place that allows young people to "spend

sizable proportions of leisure time at home in their own room" (Bovill and Livingstone 2001:4), thus "creating generation gaps" (Livingstone 2002:13) in everyday life.

My results are in agreement with the proposition that a "bedroom culture" (Bovill and Livingstone 2001:3) now exists in modern society. As a result, "children have moved their activities from the streets into their homes and, more specifically, into their bedrooms" (Aarsand and Aronsson 2009:497). As argued by Bovill and Livingstone (2001) children's bedrooms in Europe are "increasingly well equipped with media" (p. 2), and for many teenagers, the bedroom is perceived to be "a safe private space in which experimentation with possible selves can be conducted" (p. 3). This became very evident during my direct observations, in which I observed a 12 year old boy in his bedroom for a period of time in 'Household 2'. Within the space of his bedroom, there was a television, a home computer and three game consoles present; an X-Box 360, a Playstation 2 and a Nintendo Wii. There was also an iPod and an iPod docking station in the room along with a smart phone (See Appendix 2). This portrays just how immersed new media technologies have become in the home, and especially in the bedroom. A young person's bedroom can now "function as a private space outside parents' immediate gaze" (Aarsand and Aronsson 2009:497) and it is a "media-rich space" (Bovill and Livingstone 2001:3).

During my observations in the young participants' bedroom in 'Household 2' he played 'Call of Duty' on the X-Box 360 during which he chatted with one of his friends via a headset. They discussed tactics with each other and how to overcome certain aspects of the game and to proceed to the next level (See Appendix 2). In this sense, social interaction was enhanced through the mediation of new media technology. This depicted that even within the private space of his bedroom he could talk to his peers as if they were in the same room as him. In

saying this however, the presence of new media technologies did not encourage face-to-face interaction. This supports Church et al.'s argument (2010) that new media technologies have "extended the notion of home; intimacy, family, friends, relaxation, into the street" (p. 271). It also supports the idea that computer games are "more closely connected to peer relations than to family life" as they are "interested in integrating the games into their peer activities" (Fromme 2003). The emergence of this new leisure site raises a series of questions for family life and social interaction as "having a media-rich bedroom is associated with greater use of the bedroom" (Bovill and Livingstone 2001:8).

On the other hand however, the young participant was isolated from his family and was confined to his bedroom because of the presence of an array of different digital technologies. When I asked his mother, on average how much time her son spends in his bedroom, she replied: "Eh, to be honest, most of his time. Sometimes he will go out to play but once homework is done, he more or less, heads straight to his room" ('Household 2; Interviewee 3). This not only raises questions regarding social interaction within the household, but also raises concerns regarding the fact that the young boy is more acceptable to social isolation and his general well-being is also at risk because he is spending an increased amount of time indoors. For that reason, my findings support the arguments put forward by Plowman et al. (2010) that the "technologisation of childhood" (p. 72) is a prominent feature of modern society, and in turn this is having a negative impact on social interaction within the household.

Therefore, new media technologies and the emergence of the bedroom culture can be used to connect friends with one another and as it provides another space for them to interact in. This in turn however, is having a negative impact on social interaction between household

members as more time is being spent in the constraints of the bedroom, and less time in public rooms, i.e., the living room, interacting with individuals within the household. As Aarsand and Aronsson (2009), found from their study, "when game equipment was located in the child's bedroom, the parents did not join their children's gaming activities either as players or as commentators" (p. 504). As a result, adults are not active participants in children's "gaming cultures in an active or interactive way" (Fromme 2003). Instead of interacting with family members, young people have become "immersed in practices relating to popular culture, media and new technologies" (Plowman et al. 2008:316). By spending an increased amount of time in one's bedroom, there is less time being spent as a family or household unit, and thus, individuals are becoming more isolated from other household members.

4.4 A Growing Privatisation within the Household

It also emerged in my investigation process that not only have household members become more isolated from one another, but the activities of individuals have become much more individualised. Individuals within the household are increasingly using technology individually rather than collectively, and as a result, new media technologies are "undermining natural family interaction" (Buckingham 2000:43). As Livingstone (2002) argues, the arrival of new media technologies in the home has led to wider social trends "towards the privatised, media-rich home and the individualisation and commercialisation" of the family home (p. 11). It emerged from one of the case studies, that daily activities such as sharing a family meal together, has become so individualised that it is now perceived to be a "solo activity" (Morrison and Krugman 2001:154). My findings therefore, support the idea that individuals within a household are spending less time together and this has resulted in the erosion of family values (Turtiainen et al. 2007).

Once more, during my observations in 'Household 2' the 12 year old participant was called downstairs and informed by his father that dinner was ready. He left his bedroom for a short period of time and returned moments later with his dinner in hand. He proceeded to eat his dinner and to play 'Call of Duty' simultaneously (See Appendix 2). This portrays once more just how individualised life has become within the household due to the presence of new media technologies. Turtiainen et al.'s (2007) study revealed "that family meals have become a more important form of a joint activity over time" (p. 489) and is of vital importance to daily family life. However, instead of sharing dinner together, as a family, which I observed in 'Household 1', the family unit was dispersed around the house eating dinner separately. A young girl, 15 years of age, present in 'Household 2' had dinner in front of television in the family living room whilst their parents had dinner watching television in the kitchen. When I questioned their mother during the interview if eating meals separately was a daily occurrence, she replied "yeah we never eat together. It's just easier if we all do our own thing" ('Household 2'; Interviewee 3). Thus, my findings are in accordance with the idea that there has been a shift in recent years towards an "individualized media lifestyles and, particularly for children and young people, of bedroom culture" (p. 279). As Morrison and Krugman (2001) argue that "day-to-day behaviours done in the home" (p. 137) have changed due to the adoption of new media technologies within the home towards "individual uses of the technology in lieu of more social activities (p. 137).

For that reason, families have become much more privatised and are increasingly spending time apart. This is in contrast of the findings of Turtiainen at al. (2007) who found that family members are in fact spending more time together than ever before. Their study found that "family time had actually increased over time so that families with teenage children spent more time together in 2004 than six years earlier" (p. 489). Instead, my findings support the idea that individualism is very much "a prominent feature of contemporary culture" and

young people are faced with "much greater choice" (Lalor et al. 2007:48). New media technologies have become so immersed into society and the household that "the majority of media consumption takes place in the home and the family represents a primary consumption unit" (Morrison and Krugman 2001:136). Such technologies are having a negative impact on social interaction within a household beacuse they are limiting "the extent of family time" (Mesch 2006:134) that can be spent together. As a result, household activities have become individualised and this is negatively affecting household dynamics as a whole (Pahl and Spencer 2004). This was particularly evident in the case of 'Household 2' through the emergence of a bedroom culture which has led to a separation of individuals from one another because of their individualised use of new media technologies; as "technology is a 'one person' effot, demanding absolute and full attention" (Morrison and Krugman 2001:137).

5. Conclusion

The technological revolution that has occurred in recent years has impacted on daily life within a household in a variety of different ways. New media technologies have become embedded in today's society and have resulted in major societal changes. One of the main social settings that have been affected is that of the household. The goal of this study was to investigate if and how new media technologies have impacted on social interaction within a household. My main focus was centred on the household and if digital technologies have the ability to bring household members together, or if they increase individualisation within the home.

Firstly, my investigation process confirmed that new media technologies are now an intrinsic part of family and household life. This was evident as each household was immersed with a variety of different digital technologies, everything from mobile phones to home computers

and game consoles. It was clear that they play a fundamental role in daily life. My research shows that new media technologies are having a negative impact on social interaction within the household in terms of "time allocation patterns, in the choice of social functions, in the transmittal of cultural values, and in overall human behaviour" (Venkatesh and Vitalari 1985:3).

My results suggest that the location of digital technologies within the household plays an inherent role in the social interaction between household members. When a device is situated in a public space within the household, social interaction and technology is encouraged ('Household 1', 'Household 3' and 'Household 4'). However, when such technologies are placed in private spaces within the home, i.e., one's bedroom, social interaction is impeded ('Household 2' and 'Household 3'). Thus, new media technology "has the ability to change the way family life is organised" (Venkatesh 1997:9). When this is the case, there are two main negative effects that become apparent in social interaction. Household members become isolated from one another and in turn, there is a growing privatisation within the household.

One of the main findings from my research process is that domestication of the household and the technologisation of childhood has led to a bedroom culture and a digital divide in a negative way. Instead of a digital divide being perceived as a way to bring different generations together, it increases social isolation between individuals in the household. This was particularly evident in 'Household 2' as social interaction and communication between the family members was decreased due to an increased amount of time being spent in isolation from one another. Additionally, my findings convey that there has been a growing privatisation within the household. Again in the case of 'Household 2' and it emerged that household activities have become much more individualised and this has meant that individuals are spending less time engaging with one another.

When all of the above social changes are combined; social isolation, individualisation and privatisation, it is clear that the presence of new media technologies within the household are having a negative effect on communication within the household. Positive family communication is a fundamental part of social interaction. Smith et al. (2009) define positive communication as "sending clear and congruent messages, expressing empathy, providing supportive comments, and demonstrating effective problem-solving skills" (p. 79). Without such communication in the family home, individuals have a "lower functioning in regard to cohesion and flexibility" (Smith et al. 2009:79). In turn, this impacts on social interaction between individuals as communication is vital for "good family relationships" (Turtiainen 2007:490) and they are a precondition for well-being. Turtiainen (2007) found "that the family continues to have a significant role in young people's life" (p. 490). However, this theory is being put under a great deal of pressure as family values are being eroded though social isolation and the privatisation of the household. Social interaction and communication is vital to the functioning of any household, but it is obvious to say that this social interaction has been negatively affected due to the presence of new media technologies within the household.

Although my study provides important and very interesting findings regarding the impact of new media technologies on social interaction within the household, there are a number of limitations in this study. My data was obtained by focusing my attention on four case studies. Four direct observations were conducted and two interviews in each household. While a greater understanding and in-depth knowledge was attained, expanding the sample would yield a greater range of findings. If there were no time or cost restraints in conducting the investigations, a greater range of households could be investigated. A number of direct observations could be conducted in each household over a longer period of time. This would

allow me to observe a larger number of individuals within each household, beyond the family unit. Initially, this is what I set out to investigate, however, in each household there were no other individuals present apart from the family. More direct observations would allow me to obtain a clearer picture and to see how new media technologies impact on friends and other social actors outside of the family unit. Additionally, this would permit me to build up a better relationship witch each participant and I could gain more from them over a longer period of time. I could also interview each participant, instead of being confined to just two social actors from each household.

Despite these limitations however, this study enhances our knowledge of the impact that new media technologies has on social interaction within households. It is evident from my findings that digital technologies lead to social isolation and a growing privatisation within the household. Thus, digital technologies are negatively affecting social interaction and communication between individuals. In turn, this is leading to a drastic change in family relationships and family values have become eroded. In order for digital technologies to positively impact on social interaction within a household, family members must use these devices as a way of communicating and interacting with one another. This may involve using the digital divide as a place to interact, such as, playing a computer game together or watching television together and discussing it afterwards. Therefore, it is important for individuals to consume new media technologies collectively, as a unit, instead of individually. By consuming technology individually, this leads to social isolation, household activities become individualised and thus, there is a growing privatisation within the household. In turn, this results in a drastic decrease of communication and social interaction within a household.

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Appendix 1-Informed Consent Form

Appendix 2-Participant Observation Field Notes

Appendix 3-Interview Transcript*

(*Due to the large number of transcripts, it is not feasible to attach all necessary documentation. Please find attached herewith one example of an interview transcript which was carried out during my research).

<div align="center">**Informed Consent Form for BA Research Paper**</div>

Date: February 2012

Research Topic: New Media technologies and Social Interaction within the Household.

Researcher: Siobhan McGrath, BA Candidate of Media Studies and Sociology, National University of Ireland Maynooth.

Purpose of the Research: To investigate the impact of new media technologies on social interaction within the household.

My role in the Research: My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation. Participation involves being observed and interviewed by the researcher, Siobhan McGrath. Direct observations will be 1 hour in duration. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes. Notes will be taken during the direct observations and during the interview. Subsequent dialogue during the interview will be recorded by audio tape. If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.

Benefits from participating: The benefit to you is that you will have access to the research when it is finished and you may use it to understand how your experience compares with others or to the wider sociology literature. A copy of the interview tape will be made available to you afterwards if you wish to hear it.

Risks and Discomforts: There are no risks involved in this research and the interview does not constitute any type of counselling or treatment.

Voluntary Participation: My participation in the study is completely voluntary and I may refuse to answer any question or choose to stop participating at any time.

Withdrawal from the Study: If I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty. Should I decide to withdraw from the study, it will remain confidential; all data generated as a consequence of my participation will be destroyed.

Confidentiality: I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this observation session or interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure. All information I supply during the research will be held in confidence and, unless I specifically indicate my consent, my name will not appear in any report or publication of the research. My data will be safely stored in a locked facility and only the researcher will have access to this information.

Questions about the Research: If I have questions about the research in general or about my role in the study, I can contact the researcher Siobhan McGrath, BA Candidate in Media Studies and Sociology, National University of Ireland Maynooth by phone: or by e-mail:

Signatures: I have read and understand the explanation provided to me and I have been given a copy of this consent form. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand the nature of this project and wish to participate. My signature below indicates my consent.

Signature   Date_____   Signature   Date_____

Researcher   Participant

Excerpt from Field Notes

Prior to each participant observation session, I made contact with each household. After communicating with each household via e-mail and a number of phone calls, I travelled to each household at a suitable time for a short period of time. During these very short, informal meetings I was introduced to each potential participant. I explained my research process in depth and I answered any queries they had. Each individual was given their own consent form to read and sign in their own time. Once each participant agreed to participate, I arrange a convenient date and time for the observation session to take place. This meant that once I arrived at each setting on the day of each direct observation, it commenced immediately. This intended that my observations would take place as the individuals were carrying out their day-to-day activities as normal and I wasn't interrupting their routines.

'Household 1'

Date: Wednesday 15th February 201   **Location:** Kilcock, Co. Kildare   **Time:** 6pm

I arrived at the house which was located in an estate on the outskirts of the town and parked my car on the road. The house was a large, red brick bungalow with a short driveway. I was greeted by Mary, the mother of the household at the front door. Upon entering the house, I was led into the kitchen which was through the first door on my left hand side. The kitchen was a large, bright open space. To my immediate left there were kitchen units in an L-shape covering to walls. On the counter top that was on my left hand side, there were three phones placed on it. One mobile phone was charging, and the other two phones were 2 high spec smart phones. Directly in front of me there was a large pine kitchen table with six chairs around it. There were four individuals seated around the table and they were having dinner. At the far right of the table was a male participant whom I was introduced to as Stephen

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(aged 26). The next individual was a female individual, Marie (aged 23). She was seated with her back to me. Beside her, was where Mary was seated. To her left, at the opposite end of the table to Stephen, was the father of the household Ciaran. Beyond the kitchen table, there was a small two setter couch which was situated in front of a very large widescreen television with an integrated DVD player, approximately 36inches in size. It was mounted on the wall and was on full view from the kitchen table. I took a seat on the couch, whilst the family continued with their dinner.

For the next twenty minutes approximately, the family sat in complete silence whilst they all watched the 'Six-One news' on RTE1 and eating dinner. Even when each family was finished eating, they proceeded to sit there and watch the television until they were all finished. The only dialogue or any sort of conversation that was exchanged was when one person asked for something to be passed along the table. There was no other form of conversation whatsoever. Then when there was an advertisement break in the news programme the individuals began to disperse. Stephen, Marie and Mary all took their empty plates from the kitchen table and put them in the dishwasher which was integrated into one of the kitchen units. After placing his plate in the dish washer, Stephen left the kitchen and it later emerged from the interview that he retreated to his room. On leaving the kitchen, he took his mobile phone from the worktop with him. Marie continued to clear the kitchen table for a few minutes and she then left the kitchen. On leaving the kitchen, she too took her phone from the worktop which was an iPhone. Mary continued to wash saucepans at the sink. In the meantime, Ciaran was still seated at the kitchen table and having switched through several TV channels, was now watching a soccer match.

A few moments later, I entered the sitting room which was the room adjacent to the kitchen, across the hall. It was a very large room. Just inside the sitting room door, to my right hand

side was a large three setter couch placed along the wall. It was mainly brown in colour. The other side of the couch was a nest of tables in which there was a lamp, which was turned on. Placed beside the lamp was a digital photo frame that was switched off. To my immediate left, there were two single arm chairs. Diagonally across the room from me, there was a massive black flat screen television on a stand. It was approximately 50 inches in size. On the stand that it was placed on, there were three devices. There was a silver DVD player; a black Blu-ray DVD player and a black VCR. There was a large bay window facing me in which the blinds were pulled down. In the bay window, there was a third arm chair. Beside the arm chair, there was a Mahoney brown coffee table. On which there was a large music stereo with two very larger speakers either side of it. There was also a very large fire place to my left. The fire was lighting. All the furniture in the room was facing towards the television, in the far corner of the room. There was also a surround sound system installed in the room with three small black speakers mounted on each wall.

I took a seat on the couch inside the door. Marie was seated on the arm chair situated in the far left hand corner of the room. She was watching 'Home and Away'. She had a laptop on her knee and she was carrying out her paid work on the computer by preparing a presentation. She continued to watch television, and work on the laptop simultaneously. Intermittently, she used her iPhone to text. Every few minutes she received a text message and she replied immediately. Approximately, twenty minutes later, Mary entered the sitting room and sat down on the arm chair the opposite side of the room to Marie, situated in the bay Window. For the remaining time I was there, she drank tea and was texting using her mobile phone. There was very little communication between the two individuals apart from control of the television and what television programme to watch.

<center>**'Household 2'**</center>

Date: Friday 17th February 2012   **Location:** Kilcock, Co. Kildare   **Time:** 7pm

I entered the house through the main door. It was a large two story, red bricked house that was located in an estate a short distance from the town. Sarah opened the door to me, the mother of the household. To my immediate left was a door leading into the family living room. There was a large, wide screen television just inside the living room door that was visible from the hall. There was a stairs on my left-hand side. On my right hand side there was a white door leading into a study. The door of the study was open and inside the door was a large desk facing me. On which there was a home computer. I was led straight into the kitchen, which was a white door a short distance in front of me. The kitchen was a large rectangular shaped room. All the kitchen units were directly in front of me in an L-Shape and along my right hand side. There was door to my immediate right hand side that was leading into a small utility room. On my left hand side there was a wooden kitchen table with six chairs situated around it. On my far left hand side there was a small television, mounted on the wall, very high near the ceiling. It was switched on. On the worktop in front of me, there was a CD player with separate speakers either side of it. There was a mobile phone on the work top beside it. John and Sarah were both in the kitchen cooking dinner.

Moments later, I entered the living room that was just inside the main door on the left hand side. It was a small rectangular shaped room. On my left hand side, there was a large window. Directly in front of me there was a large, wide screen television. Inside the door, on my right hand side there was a large, cream couch. Sinead, (aged 15) was lying on the couch watching television. I walked to the back wall of the room where there was another couch situated, and I sat on it. To my right hand side then, there was a fire place. Sinead was watching music channels. As she was lying on the couch, there was a very small coffee table

to her right hand side. There was a smart phone and an iPod Touch placed on it, side by side. She used her smart phone for short periods of time intermittently whilst watching television. I asked some brief questions regarding the amount of time she spends watching television briefly and the type of programmes she usually watches.

Sometime later, I continued on upstairs. At the top of the stairs on the landing there was a door to my immediate left hand side. A door straight in front of me which was the family bathroom and door on my right hand side. I entered this room and it was Daniel's bedroom. As I entered the room, there was a built in wardrobe on my left had side. There was a large double bed in the centre of the room with a locker either side of it. On one of the lockers there were a smart phone and an iPod docking station on it. As I closed the door behind me, Daniel (aged 12) was sitting on the floor. In front of him, there was a large television positioned on a small, low sized, wooden table. Underneath the table there were three different game consoles. There were a number of controllers, wires and several games all over the floor. Daniel was playing 'Call of Duty' on the X-Box 360. He was wearing large black and gray headphones. There was an adjustable, mouth piece attached to the headphones. He was speaking to one of his friends via the headset and they were discussing tactics and how to complete the level they both appeared to be on. I sat on the bed and observed him and how he was playing the game. Moments later he was called downstairs by his father. He told me he would be back in a minute and he would explain the game to me then. He returned moments later with his dinner in his hand which consisted of pizza and chips along with a glass of milk. He sat down on the floor once more and put the head set back on. He proceeded to eat his dinner and play the game at the same time. He intermittently explained the nature of the game to me.

Approximately ten minutes later I left the room and made my way back downstairs and entered the living room once more. Sinead was now sitting on the couch, in the same place that she was beforehand with her dinner placed on her knee. She was still watching music channels. A short time later, I entered the kitchen and Sarah and John were eating dinner at the kitchen table. They were both watching television. For the time I observed the couple, there was little direct communication between them as they both watched 'Coronation Street'.

'Household 3'

Date: Friday 2nd March 2012   **Location:** Kilcock, Co. Kildare   **Time:** 6pm

I arrived at a large two storey house, painted yellow that was located on a very narrow country road some distance from the town. The house was situated on its own grounds with a long drive way leading up to it. I parked my car and made my way to a large black front door. I rang the door bell and was greeted by John, the only male participant in the house. Inside the door, I was standing in a very large, open plan entrance hall. There were a number of doors off the well light and bright hall. To my left, there were two brown wooden doors that were some distance apart from one another. The first door led into the family living room. At the very far right hand corner of the hall, there was another brown door and beside which there was a wooden staircase. There was a large but compact alcove underneath the stairs and between the brown door. Located here, there was a small piano and a computer. The computer was on a very small, wooden computer desk and was facing in the direction of the front door, underneath the stairs. Eva (aged 17) was using the computer but was not in full view from the main door.

I was led through a brown door on my right hand side. This brought me into a very large open space that consisted of three rooms' altogether. Firstly, on my left hand side there was the kitchen units and there was an island in the centre of the wooden units. Liz, the mother of the household was in the kitchen baking bread. Straight in front of me there was an arch way that led into a white PVC conservatory. This room was rectangular in shape and the kitchen table was positioned here in the centre of the room. On my right hand side, there was another arch way that led into a very large living area. I entered this space ant there was a huge cream leather sofa, which was an L-shape. It was facing a large wide-screen television that was mounted on the wall. I took a seat at the end of the sofa. There were two participants seated on the opposite side of the couch. They were John and Katie (aged 13) and they were watching a Discovery Programme together regarding wildlife. There was a surround sound system in the room. There were three small silver speakers that were mounted onto three of the walls in the room. Directly underneath the wide screen television, there was a pine cabinet. On this cabinet there was a silver DVD player and a 'Playstation 3' placed on top of it. There were a number DVD's stacked on top of one another to the right of the cabinet on the floor. At the ad breaks of the programme, Katie and John discussed the programme they were watching. But during the programme, there was no communication between them. I observed them for approximately thirty minutes.

I then left the room and I made my way back across the hall into the main living room. It was a huge rectangular shaped room with a massive bay window covering the entire left hand wall. There was a leather couch directly in front of me, and one the exact same to my left had side. There was a black leather arm chair placed in the bay window. There was a fireplace at the end wall facing me, and to its far left, there was a television that was placed on a wooden cabinet in a diagonal position. Jennifer, (aged 20) was seated on the couch to my left hand

side. I sat down on the couch directly in front of me. Jennifer had a laptop on her knee and was on Facebook whilst watching MTV music channels at the same time. She had an iPhone paced beside her on the arm of the couch and she was sending and receiving regular text messages every few minutes.

'Household 4'

Date: Friday 16th March 2012   **Location:** Leixlip, Co. Kildare   **Time:** 8pm

I arrived at a large, white bungalow that was located at the end of a very narrow country lane that was on the outskirts of the village. I parked my car in the drive way and rang the door bell. There were two large white windows to the right of the main door, and three large windows to the left of the door. I was greeted at the door by Sarah (aged 20). Inside the door, I was in a rectangular shaped entrance hall. On my right hand side there was a brown wooden door with glass panes in it, leading into the family living room. Directly in front of me, there was a door leading into the kitchen. I entered the sitting room. There were two black leather couches in the room. One was placed inside the door on my right hand side, and the second couch was facing me. On my left hand side there was a wooden cabinet with two doors on the front of it. On the cabinet, there was a television that was placed on top of a black DVD player. I took a seat on the couch nearest the door. I was sitting beside Karen (aged 23). Sarah sat down on the opposite couch. The wall that I was now facing had a marble fireplace, and the fire was lighting. To the right of the fireplace, there was a large, very high Mahoney wall cabinet. There were several shelves and doors on the cabinet. On all the shelves, there were hundreds of DVD's stacked neatly on top of one another. The television was switched on. Karen was using an iPad that was placed on her knee for the duration of the observation. She surfed the net, connected to 'Facebook' and played 'Angry Birds' at different stages throughout the observation. Sarah had a laptop on her knee. She was completing a college

assignment. Her smart phone was placed beside her on the couch and she was sending a text minute every few minutes. There was no direct communication or conversation between the pair. They were paying more attention to their individual tasks than they were to one another or the television. The television acted as background noise and neither of them changed the television channel at all.

Approximately, thirty minutes later, I left the sitting room and entered the kitchen. The kitchen was a very large rectangular room. The room was divided in two by an island in the centre of the room. On my right hand side there were kitchen units that covered three walls. At the far right hand side of the kitchen there was a white, wooden door that was leading into a utility room. To the left of the island there was a small living area and a kitchen table. The table was situated parallel to the island. To the left of the table there was an arm chair that was facing a television. Along my left hand side there was a three setter couch. I took a seat at the kitchen table facing the television. Ed the father of the family was sitting on the arm chair and Ann was sitting on the couch. Ann had a laptop on her knee and she was playing 'Solitaire'. Ed was watching a documentary and he had the remote control. He switched television channel during the advertisement breaks of the programme in question. The television was positioned on a built in wooden cabinet that covered the wall. Surrounding the television there were a number of DVD's, photographs and trophies. On a shelf underneath the television, there was a 'Nintendo Wii' and a black DVD player. On the island, in the centre of the kitchen there was a mobile phone on the countertop and it was charging. There was some conversation between the couple regarding the daily news, family relations and work. This conversation mainly took place during the ad breaks of the documentary Ed was watching.

Interviewee: Karen   **Location:** The Kitchen   **Date:** Monday 19th March 2012

Interviewer: Hi Karen. Now you have read and signed the consent form already but do you have any further questions for me before we begin?

Respondent: Eh (pause) no. Everything seems pretty straightforward. Can I get you anything actually? Like tea or something?

Interviewer: No no. Thanks a million though. So are you ready to get started?

Respondent: Yeah whenever you are.

Interviewer: So Karen, do you mind me asking what age you are.

Respondent: No not at all. I'm 23 and I still live at home with my parents. I work as a Carer in a Nursing Home.

Interviewer: So what technologies do you own and use on a regular basis?

Respondent: Oh God (pause) well there's my iPhone which I love a lot. It's with me all the time. Like I can't leave the house without it. Then I have an iPod Touch, an iPad, a Mac. I've a TV in my room as well, and I have a Playstation 3 that I got for Christmas. Then I have the usual like a CD player in my room.

Interviewer: Ok cool. So you said there about your iPhone and you bring it with you everywhere you go. What do you use it for?

Respondent: Yeah I actually couldn't live without it. I have the iPhone 4 now, I had the 3GS before that and loved it as well. I use it for everything to be honest. Mainly for the internet, texting and calls. It's just so handy. I have the Facebook and Twitter Apps so I'm on them all

the time. I can check my e-mails whenever I want and just use the internet in general. I even have exercise Apps that I use for running. I just couldn't do without with to be honest.

Interviewer: So what do you use your iPad for then?

Respondent: (Pause) Well I mainly use that for the net. Again for Facebook, Twitter, e-mails. I sometimes use it for watching music videos or TV like when I'm in bed. I just use that around the house. But my iPhone is so handy when I'm outside the house and when I'm in work.

Interviewer: And how often would you use your Mac or iPod Touch?

Respondent: I don't use my Mac that much anymore, especially since I started working. I used to use it all the time when I was in college but I've no real need for it now. My iPad is much handier for the little things.

Interviewer: You also said there a moment ago that you have a TV in your room. Do you use that often?

Respondent: Oh no not at all. It's just collecting dust! I only ever use it for watching DVDs on the Playstation but that's it.

Interviewer: Ok. Would you have any idea of the amount of time you spend using technology a day?

Respondent: (Laughs) Oh God I've no clue. (Long pause) I really wouldn't know!

Interviewer: Well when you're at home then, how much of your time is spent using technology?

Respondent: (Pause) A lot. I usually come home from work in the evening and I go for a run. So Ill use my iPod for that for listening to music. I'll also use my running App to track how much I've run, my speed and so on. Then, I've a docking station in my room that I use a lot of the time as well. It's my alarm in the morning and there's always music playing on it when I'm in my room getting ready or whatever. Then I might watch TV for a bit or use my iPad.

Interviewer: So would I be right in saying that music plays a big part in your life?

Respondent: Yeah definitely. I'm always using my iPod in my room, in the car, running, etc.

Interviewer: And do you watch much television?

Respondent: Eh (Pause) not really to be honest. Like there's not many programmes I watch apart from Jersey Shore and Desperate Housewives. And even at that I can watch them on my iPad so if I miss them it's no big deal like.

Interviewer: During my observations on Friday, I noticed that the TV was on when you were in the sitting room and it was also on in the kitchen. So would that be the norm?

Respondent: Ah yeah (pause) probably, now that you say it. Yeah the television is probably on most of the time. I've never really taken much notice before.

Interviewer: Is the television on during meal times or where do you eat meals?

Respondent: We always eat together in the kitchen if we are all here. But yeah the TV would be on during dinner and that. Like Dad is always watching the news and that. So yeah it is on most of the time.

Interviewer: Do you ever watch television together as a family?

Respondent: (Long pause) Eh yeah sometimes. Like if we are all in the sitting room on a Friday night or something we would. But otherwise not really because we always want to watch different programmes.

Interviewer: So the rare time that you do watch television together, does this mean you talk to one another more?

Respondent: (Pause) No not really. I don't think we would ever just be watching TV. I'd always be on my phone or using my iPad and then Sarah is always on her computer doing assignments and stuff.

Interviewer: In your opinion then, are new media technologies impacting on communication between you as a family?

Respondent: (Long pause) Now that you say it, it probably does. Like when we are in the same room together we don't really talk to one another. Or we would be talking but I'd be on Facebook or something as well. I haven't really given it much thought before now.

Interviewer: And in a situation like that, what are your main reasons for using Facebook?

Respondent: Definitely to talk to my friends. Especially people I don't see that often, like my friends from college, Facebook is my only real way of keeping in contact with them.

Interviewer: And is there ever a time when you as a family spend time together that is not centred on technology?

Respondent: (Laughs) No I don't think there ever is. The TV is always on during dinner and that and any time we do spend together would be watching TV. Sometimes we will watch a DVD together. But (Long pause) I really don't think there is a time where some form of technology is on in the house.

Interviewer: And one last thing. You mentioned earlier that you use Facebook to keep in contact with friends. Do you use any technology as a way of keeping in contact with your family?

Respondent: No. I use my phone when I'm out to ring home or to text Sarah or Mam would that be it. Like I wouldn't really talk to Sarah on Facebook or anything like that.

Interviewer: Ok Karen, I think that is everything. Thanks a million for talking to me this evening.

Respondent: Oh no problem at all. Hope it's of some use to you.