

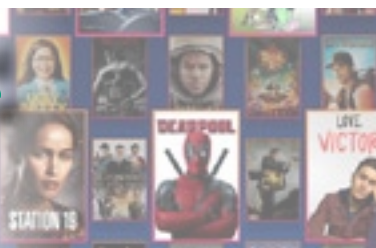


New Mortal Kombat movie is 'as violent' as the game

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Disney's new streaming platform is here, and we have you covered

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First published 1986

Issue No.382

FEBRUARY 2021

## FEARS OVER MATHS GAME

### US coalition lodges complaint to FTC over maths game, *Prodigy*

Twenty two United States child advocacy and consumer groups filed a complaint on February 19, urging the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate the popular maths game *Prodigy* for deceiving educators and parents, and targeting kids with manipulative marketing. They say "*Prodigy* tells teachers and parents the game 'is and always will be free', while aggressively marketing to children a premium membership which gives kids access to coveted virtual swag and allows them to level up faster." "*Prodigy Education* has attracted educators and parents by providing a free in-school version of the game and claiming it will always be free. But that version encourages kids to play at home, on a different version of the game that uses ads and persuasive design to relentlessly

promote premium membership, which costs \$59.88 to \$107.40 per year. The complaint says "in a given time period playing the game, children see up to four times more advertisements than math exercises. To make matters worse, children are repeatedly teased with virtual rewards that are only accessible if their family purchases a membership". A Campaign for a Commercial Free Childhood Board member said "*Prodigy* is designed to attract kids. It is a highly-engaging video game filled with revenue-generating devices masquerading as tools for math practice. *Prodigy* capitalizes on the desires of caregivers and educators to support kids' achievement, and despicably monetizes kids' desire to feel

admired and included by their peers. All kids deserve to practice math without enduring virtual distractions designed to shame or otherwise prod them into nagging their caregivers for memberships priced high enough to break many family budgets." *Prodigy* [has been criticised](#) for being designed to promote prolonged engagement with the game, rather than getting kids excited about maths. Children observed playing "spent almost the entire time engaged in non-math activities—shopping, digging for bones, looking at pets." **See page two for our editorial on persuasive design in games.**



### New online safety bill introduced

After public consultation, the Federal Government introduced new laws to parliament on February 24, to protect Australians online. The Online Safety Bill 2021 will help eSafety Commissioner, Julie Inman Grant, fight cyberbullying, toxic online abuse, harmful content and image-based abuse, such as the non-consensual sharing of intimate images - so called "revenge porn". The Bill can be found [here](#). On February 25, the Bill was referred to the Senate Committee on Environment and Communications whose inquiry into the Bill closed on March 2, and is due to report on March 11.

### Guild, SPA fear 'production void'

Screen Producers Australia (SPA) and the Australian Directors' Guild (ADG) have [identified the potential for a "production void"](#) if there is a prolonged delay between the government's relaxation of local content quotas for commercial free-to-air broadcasters and any imposition of obligations on streamers. Seven, Nine and 10 have been under [new quota obligations](#) since January 1, which allow them to meet their annual first-release requirement through any combination of genres across drama, children's and documentary. Children's programs no longer have their own obligatory quota.

## small screen

issue 382 - February 2021

small screen is published at the beginning of each month and reports on the events of the previous month 11 issues per year (Dec/Jan double issue)

Published by  
Australian Council on  
Children and the Media  
(ACCM)

ACCM is a national, non-profit community organisation. Its mission is to promote a quality media environment for Australian children.

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## editorial

## Can I have your attention?

**BARBARA BIGGINS**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE, ACCM**

Everyone is competing for our attention these days - advertisers and marketers, social media and game developers all want us to stay, play and pay.

This message was brought home in last year's powerful documentary *The Social Dilemma* (Netflix). **Tristan Harris** of the [US Centre for Responsible Technology](#) explored the outcomes of social media's drive for our undivided attention.

This drive for our attention is supported by the persuasive design of much of the media that we and our children consume. **5 Rights**, a UK based group led by **Baroness Beeban Kidron**, documented this in their 2018 report [Disrupted childhood: the cost of persuasive design](#).

They said: *Persuasive design strategies are the hooks and tricks that keep users online; auto-play, auto-suggestion, Likes, re-tweets, notifications, buzzes, pings, typing bubbles, Streaks... Each on their own offer a small symbol of personal worth or fuzzy reward, together they provide a constant, damaging ecosystem of distraction, competition and invasion and with it an epidemic of anxiety, sleeplessness and negative impacts on health education family and social life.* And concluded that the price - for children- is too high.

The outcomes of these enticements are seen in children's growing dependence on screens for entertainment and parents' concerns about too much screen time. Such concerns were demonstrated clearly in the first Australian Child Health Poll (December 2015) that [showed that Australian parents top health concern was "excessive screen time"](#).

A [followup Child Health Poll in 2017 found](#): the vast majority of Australian parents (80 per cent) are concerned children in general spend too much time using screen-based devices and over half (56 per cent) reported their own children spend too much time on screens. Many parents identified concerns about their child's health and wellbeing



and family problems in relation to their child's use of screen-based devices.

So are children becoming addicted or are they simply dependent on screens for entertainment? And does it matter?

Macquarie University's  
**Dr Wayne Warburton**

[writing on the issue of persuasive design in Amplifier](#) (Magazine of Division 46 of the American Psychological Association) in 2018 said *patterns of high screen use are not simply caused by people choosing to engage more with digital media, but also by the deliberate design of digital platforms to elicit high levels of use to keep users actively engaged for as long a time as possible. Relevant design features include motivating use through appealing to areas of psychological vulnerability, minimizing cognitive effort during use, providing frequent prompts and triggers, autoplay features, random rewards and other features that engage brain reward systems, and fostering investment through in-app purchases. Some platforms also create a 'persuasion profile' that identifies areas of vulnerability for each user and produces an individualized program of content based on those vulnerabilities.*

Dr Warburton concluded *whether or not media psychologists accept claims that digital technology can be 'addictive,' it seems clear that some digital technologies are designed to capture the attention of users for considerable periods of time, often more time than would be considered healthy in a balanced life. Therefore, some psychologists have questioned how ethical it is to use knowledge of psychology and neuropsychology in the aid of persuasive design.*

How do parents protect their children? It's yet another very difficult area for parents to have to deal with. There are growing calls for "safety by design" in digital products aimed at children. It's time that we also shouted loudly about the need to combat / remove "persuasive design" in children's digital products.

For further reading, [visit the link to the online version of this editorial](#).

New *Mortal Kombat* movie is 'as violent as the games'

The *Mortal Kombat* movie, inspired by the blockbuster video game franchise and shot in Adelaide, [hits cinemas April 15](#). But the movie, [with financial injections from SA and federal governments](#), is already being tipped to be as violent as the original video game. The Verge reports [two trailers were released, including a "gory" red-band version available on YouTube](#), and said the movie would "adapt the hyper-violent fighting game".



## ADVERTISING

Gabrielli, J; Corcoran, E; Genis, S; McClure, AC; Tanski, SE

**Exposure to television alcohol brand appearances as predictor of adolescent brand affiliation and drinking behaviors**

JOURNAL OF YOUTH AND ADOLESCENCE 2021

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**Child YouTubers: the use of minors as advertising trendsetters**

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## BODY IMAGE

Kaitlyn Burnell, Allyson R Kurup, Marion K Underwood

**[Snapchat lenses and body image concerns](#)**

NEW MEDIA AND SOCIETY FEB 2021

## EARLY CHILDHOOD

Maurer, BT; Taylor, L

**The effect of digital media on children in their formative years**

JAAPA-JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS MAY 2020 VL 33 (5) 46-51

Ackermann, L; Lo, CH; Mani, N; Mayor, J

**Word learning from a tablet app: Toddlers perform better in a passive context**

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**Screen time in 36-month-olds at increased likelihood for ASD and ADHD**

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Gomez, SL; Gomez, SM; Esteve, MIV

**Analysis of mobile applications aimed at early childhood: technical, pedagogical, design and content characteristics**

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Snyder, MN; Mares, ML

**Preschoolers' choices of television characters as sources of information: Effects of character type, format, and topic domain**

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## GAMBLING

Kaluarachchi, C; Warren, M; Jiang, F

**Responsible use of technology to combat cyberbullying among young people**

AUSTRALASIAN JOURNAL OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS 2020 VL 24

Shi, J; Carras, MC; Potenza, MN; Turner, NE

**A perspective on age restrictions**

**and other harm reduction approaches targeting youth online gambling, considering convergences of gambling and videogaming**

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Emond, AM; Griffiths, MD

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**Predicting wellbeing in children's use of smart screen devices**

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Laura Scholes; Nerida Spina Barbara Comber

**[Disrupting the 'boys don't read' discourse: Primary school boys who love reading fiction](#)**

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## SLEEP

Agostini, A & Centofanti, S 2021, **Normal sleep in children and adolescence**

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**Effects of violent video games on players' and observers' aggressive cognitions and aggressive behaviors**

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**Effect of internet use and electronic game-play on academic performance of Australian children**

SCIENTIFIC REPORTS DEC 10 2020 VL 10 (1)

Merilainen, M

**Crooked views and relaxed rules: how teenage boys experience parents' handling of digital gaming**

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION 2021 VL 9 (1) 62-72

## ACCM has reviews for many titles on new Disney Star streaming service, that launched last month

AUS | ACCM

Disney Plus, the online streaming platform for many Disney and affiliated studio movies and TV shows launched in 2019, has launched Star. Many of the movies have reviews on ACCM's website. Check them out at the link below.

[Read more here](#)

## Unequal struggles and impossible digital choices for parents during Covid-19

US | HenryJenkins.org

Provost Professor of Communication, Journalism, Cinematic Arts and Education, Henry Jenkins, has listed a few helpful parenting guides on how to handle screentime during Covid-19 lockdowns.

The titles include Sonia Livingstone and Alicia Blum-Ross' new book, *Parenting for a Digital Future*.

[Read more here](#)

## How rising screen times during Covid-19 affects children

UK | The Oxford Student

Oxford University's student newspaper, *The Oxford Student* has published a guide to appropriate screentime measures during Covid-19.

While pointing to research saying 63 per cent of US children spend more than two hours a day on recreational screen time, the editorial urges parents to consider routines and encourages proper exposure to sunlight.

[Read more here](#)

## New UK report into parenting in the digital age

UK | LSE

A new report by Dongmiao Zhang and Sonia Livingstone discusses the difficulties of digital parenting and how to close the digital gap by supporting less-educated parents and those from lower socio-economic status households.

[Read more here](#)

## US researchers share tips on how to use technology to improve mental health

US | The Daily Universe

Experts from the Brigham Young University in Utah look at ways to boost mental health while using technology.

[Read more here](#)

## Alliance calls for enforcement of age-ratings in gaming to protect children from online harm

UK | Royal Society for Public Health

Gambling Health Alliance research found 83 per cent of children and young people play video games when they are below the set Pan European Game Information (PEGI) age classification.

[Read more here](#)

## Your kids aren't too old for picture books, and neither are you

US | The New York Times

"While children's books are, on the whole, often scorned by the literary world as not altogether serious, perhaps no format is treated with the same dismissiveness as picture books," writes *The New York Times'* Book Review editor Pamela Paul.

[Read more here](#)

## US legislator wants to ban Grand Theft Auto and other violent video games to help reduce crime

US | Fortune

Illinois Democratic state representative Marcus Evans Jr introduced the bill last month, seeking to prohibit the sale of all violent video games throughout the state.

[Read more here](#)

## Groundswell of opposition to children's junk food ads as code nears review

NZ | Stuff

Health groups and researchers have begun lobbying the New Zealand government for tighter controls on the advertising code to prevent marketing of

unhealthy food and drinks to children.

[Read more here](#)

## Social media companies should keep kids safe, UK parents say

UK | University of Birmingham

Findings of a new study with UK parents of children aged 13 to 17 show the majority of parents (83 per cent) expect social media companies to be responsible for ensuring children's safe internet use.

[Read more here](#)

## New study into the effects of virtual reality

AUS | JMIR Publications

Researchers at the University of South Australia have found "no strong evidence" for adverse symptoms 40 minutes after a person exits a virtual reality game.

[Read more here](#)

## What are the benefits of reading to my baby?

AUS | Kids Health

An infant won't understand everything you're doing and why. But reading aloud to your baby is a wonderful shared activity you can continue for years to come - and it's important for your baby's brain.

[Read more here](#)

## YouTube's 'supervised experiences' help parents choose what content their kids can see

US | The Verge

YouTube has announced "supervised experiences", a new set of restrictions that allows parents to better control content their children can access on the streaming video platform.

[Read more here](#)

## Who won the lottery?

Thanks to all those who bought tickets in the People's Choice lottery. ACCM raised a much-appreciated \$3000. [Results can be found here.](#)