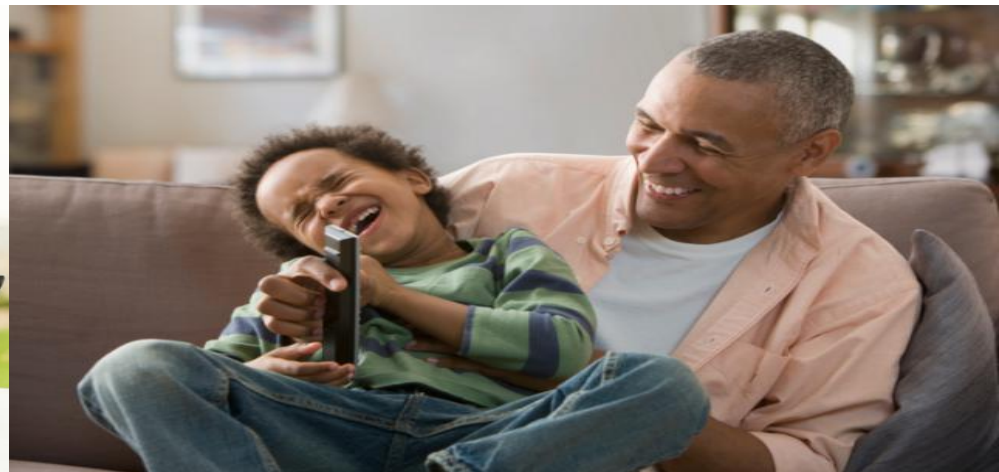


# Children and their grandparents – socialization and consumption practices across the generations in the digital world



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# Presentation format

- First, a brief overview of research gaps related to grandparent/ grandchild relationship in the digital age
- Outline the aim of the research
- The methodology
- The four key emerging themes
- Summarise contribution



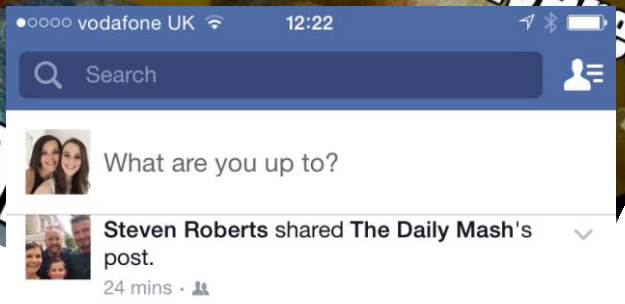
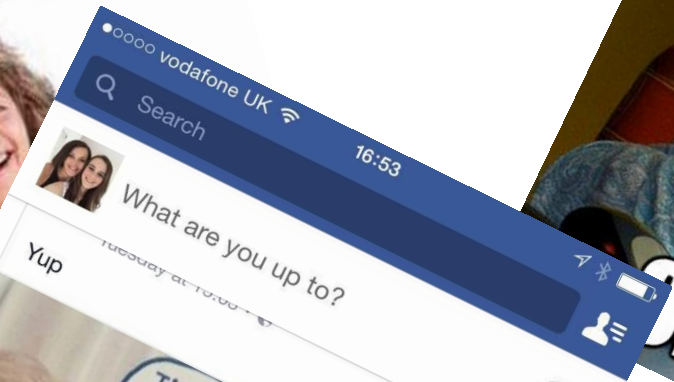
**CALLS YOUNG PEOPLE  
STUBBORN AND DUMB**

**DOESN'T BO  
USE A  
NA**

I've been trying to text you all day.

That's a calculator.

**Do emails get delivered**



Alex Roberts



Like Comment Share

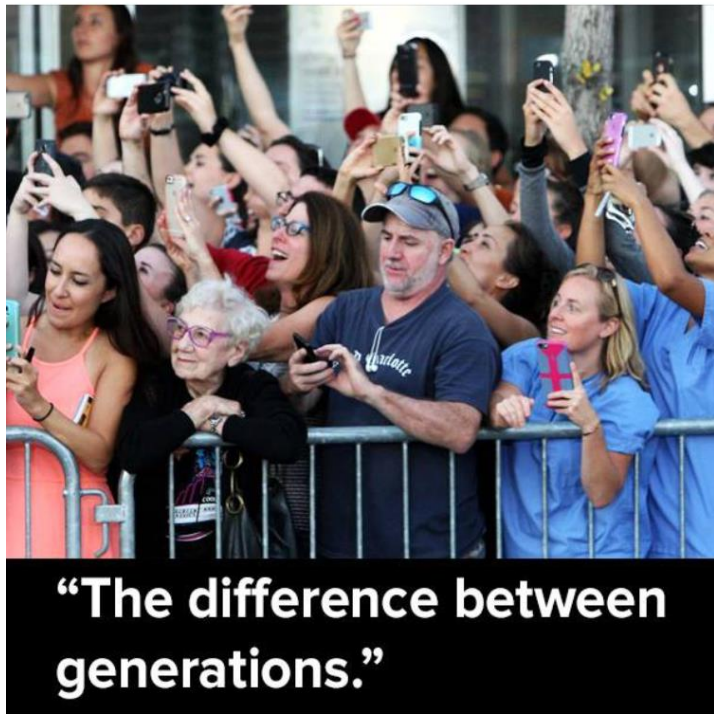
News Feed Requests Messenger Notifications

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In a single photo...



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# Research gaps: grandparent/child in consumer research

- Overall consumer research gives limited attention to the grandparent/grandchild relationship
- Older generation often still seen as burdensome and can be viewed via a wide age range (55-80 years by Mathur 1999!)
- or studied separately from the family context (Belk-Smith & Moschis 1990, Arber & Timonen (2012))

Yet grandparents: *'family historian, mentor, nurturer and surrogate parent'* (Tsai et al 2011)

# Research gaps: family and digital practices

‘Moral panic’ (Ekstrom 2006) transferred from mass media to digital and social media in the twenty first century which is polarising opinions. The Media often (rightly or wrongly) fuelling this:

- Digital natives versus digital immigrants and power relations
- ‘Alone together’ (Turkle 2011)
- Continuing bonds via technology (Epp, Price & Schau 2014, Marchant & O’Donohoe 2014, Wilding 2006)
- ‘Helicopter parenting’ (Schofield-Clark 2012)

# Research gaps: family and digital practices (2)

Studies into digital usage often focus on the young as individuals rather than on extended family and **day to day practices** as a whole (Shove et al 2012)



Personal communications technologies (PCTs) including smartphones, laptops, tablets are not new but embedded within and connecting **all** our lives regardless of age .....

# OfCom (August 2015) Communications Market Report ...

- **93%** UK adults own mobile phone of which 66% are smartphones leading to '*smartphone society*' (OFCOM 2015)
- **83%** of UK households now have internet access (ONS 86%)
- **93%** 16-24 year olds have social media profiles  
almost **50%** of 55-64 year olds and **28%** of 65+ age group ...  
12-15 year olds: **77%** have used Facebook, **55%** Instagram
- 'Technology has changed the way I communicate': 16-24 year olds **73%**, 55+ years, **64%** agree
- 'New communications methods have made life easier' 16-24 year olds **66%**, 55+ years, **52%** agree
- Top four methods for weekly communication by over 55's: email (**78%**), text messaging (**66%**), face-to-face (**63%**), Voice (**54%**)

# Summary of aim of research

*To understand the relationship between grandparent/grandchild PCD socialization and any resulting ongoing consumption practices between them*



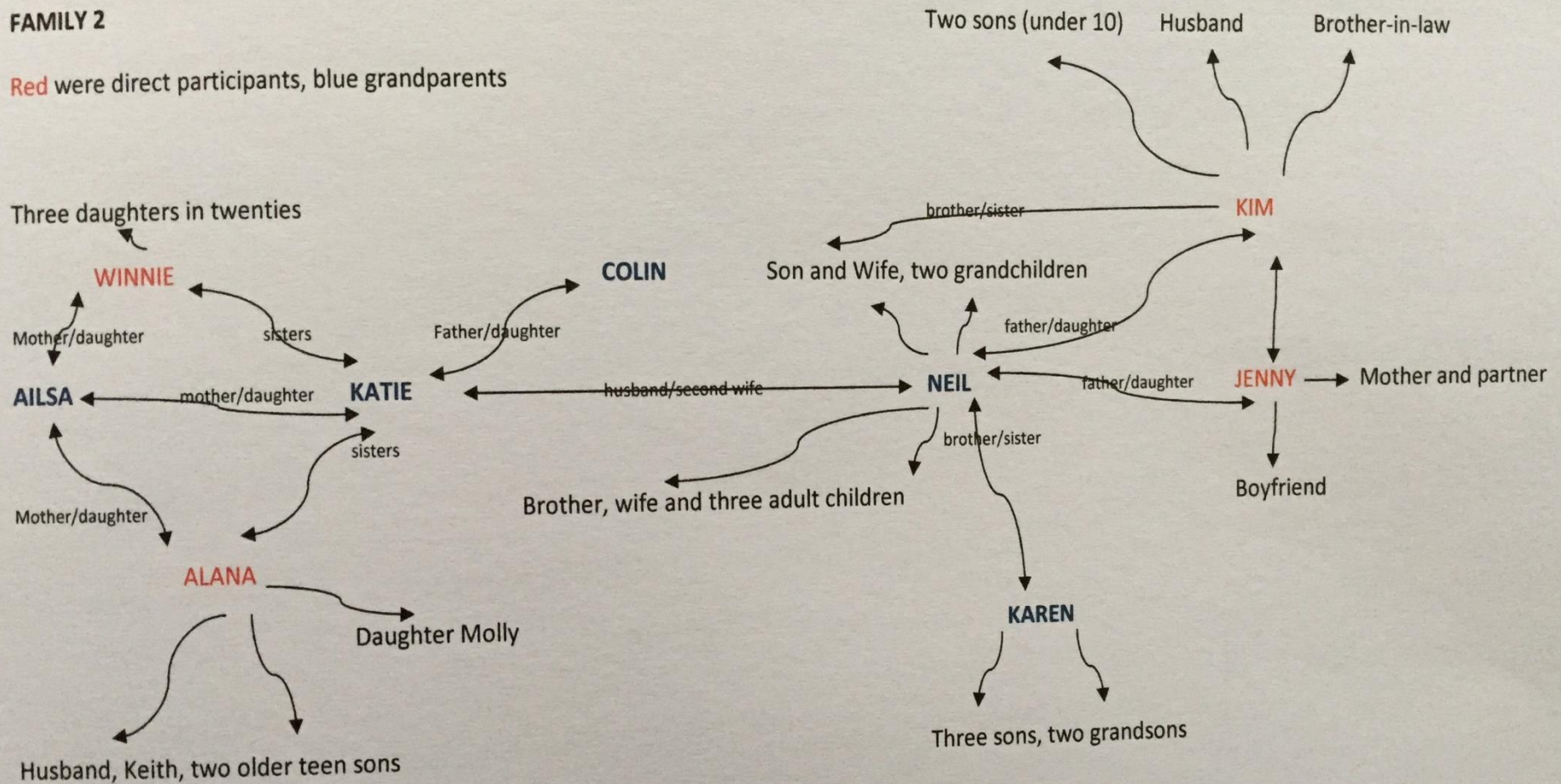
# Methodology

- This study forms part of a larger inductive, qualitative three generational study into 5 extended family networks cascading out from core families in Central Scotland
- Utilised a combination of phased data generation methods: Family focus groups, Family communications diaries and individual semi-structured interviews
- **16 Grandparents** (grandparent couples, step-grandparents and lone grandparents) and **40 grandchildren** (ranging from under 5s to adults) in total forming part of a **complex picture** of communications and consumption across the family network

# Family 2 Family network diagram

## FAMILY 2

Red were direct participants, blue grandparents



# The traditional and the new



Face-to-face (voice) via traditional landline preferred by grandparents and PCDs preferred by grandchildren – hardly a surprise!

... but PCDs were creatively incorporated by both the grandparent, grandchild and middle generation to facilitate three overarching practices:

- bridge the gap: see, hear, update, share stories and photos, involve, continue the conversation offering ongoing **emotional** engagement/support
- plan trips/visits/babysitting: supporting **face-to-face** contact
- When together to arrange pick ups, play games, share photo and ideas: **sharing for practical and entertainment purposes**

# Four key emerging themes between grandparent/child

- Goal driven - reverse and reciprocal socialization
- Private communications networks facilitating the creation of embedded routines
- The influence of new family roles and preferences
- Generational '*othering*' (Brons 2015)

# FIRST THEME: Goal driven, reverse and reciprocal socialization

## Goal driven reverse socialization

Grandparents often pro-actively sought greater inclusion from observation/ socialization of peers or inclusion was driven by grandchild or middle generation

Goal-driven reverse socialization to ensure greater ease of contact and inclusion in family life:

eg follow on Facebook, send/receive family photos, set up/join group chats on Whatsap, Skype to physically see each other, text or email for updates.

## Reverse socialization created ongoing communication practices:

Lynne (15, Family 5): *'if something, like, something happens today like an exam or something, they phone us and we tell them how it's gone'*

Karen, (70's, Family 2) *'they are absolutely appalled at my lack of knowledge...so the two older [teenage] boys say 'Hey Grannie, we will show you how to do it' ...if I make mistakes or do something I shouldn't or just to set up things for me quite frankly, or rectify any mistakes on my phone which can happen quite often, they are very helpful'*

# Traditional and reciprocal socialization

## Shifting roles, learning and growing together:

Ruth (70's, Family 5, grandson's in early teens now): *'well sometimes they do one or two games. Actually when the boys were here this weekend, they were making Mothering Sunday cards on the computer and going through messages ... David, my husband, likes being with them and when they were very little he did lots of things with them on the computer, well obviously they're more computer literature now than he is, they say, you know, "I can do this myself Grandpa"'*



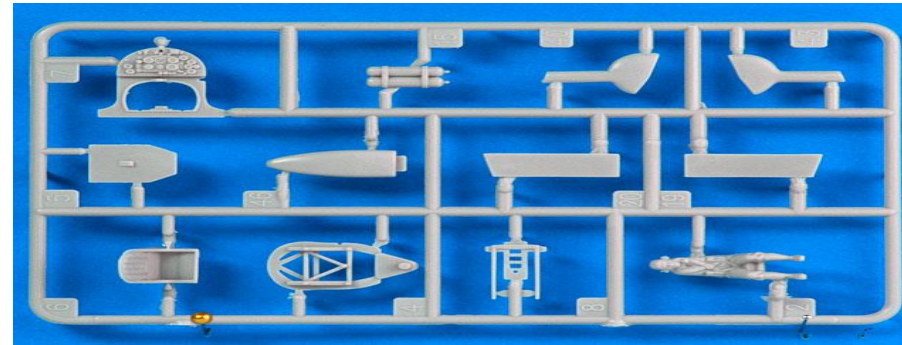
# Doing is not always teaching

## Sharing moments were not always teaching moments :

'...well I wanted a knitting pattern the other night and Gina managed to get that for me, erm, what did Mary do for me? Oh yes, she uploaded some photos for me, she **does my photographs for me, another thing I can't do**' Alisa (70's, Family 2)

'When we are in Edinburgh, Kathy will say, 'I'll show you how to use this', I **think its an iPad that she uses**. And **she'll get things up** like, about maybe the shoes that they've got at the new John Lewis in York. And she'll **straight away will have a look and we'll have a look together.**' (Shona, 80's Family 1)

Not always **opportunity and repetition**



## SECOND THEME: Private communications networks facilitating embedded routines

- (Sometime) removal of intermediary role of the middle generation - allowing grandparents to be in grandchildren's lives discretely and from a distance **right through teenage years** – being there when needed but '*non-interfering*' (Cunningham-Burley 1985)



# Continuing the conversation – into teen years and beyond...

... can also establish direct and ongoing practices between the grandparent/child:

- Ruth (70's, Family 5) when trying to attach a photo of the grandchildren to send to her daughter: *'She [granddaughter Ginny] is very good, yeah. I remember asking. Last time when we went there a few weeks ago, I asked Joe (son) you know, 'how do you do this?', he said "I have no idea, ask Ginny"'*
- Robbie, (70s, Family 2): *'I have an open ear for the eldest one – she has her own file and she comes up to my office and she sits here and I don't even know what's in the file but I am sure it is very interesting (laughs)'*

Sometimes middle generation instigated PCT practices and remain intermediaries:

Ivy (70's, Family 5): *'Carol sends photos, she's very good our daughter-in-law, she very often sends photos and sometimes little videos of what they (grandchildren) have been doing'*

# Private communications networks facilitating embedded routines (2)

...but lack of PCT socialization can create barriers to the relationship:

*'I've got another Grandma but she's deaf so I don't contact her. She doesn't use technology so I don't really contact her at all... If I needed to talk or tell her anything, I'd either send a card or send a message through my mum'* Lauren (24, Family 1)

# THIRD THEME: The influence of family role: 'technology experts'

Widespread network understanding of family 'technology expert' – not always the digital natives:



Laura (18, Family 4) to her Granddad:

*'I think you've helped me out more than I've had to help you. You helped me get rid of a couple of viruses, I'm not, I'd say I know how to use the internet but I'm not very good at technology'*

Eddie: (23, Family 4, Laura's brother): *'my grandparents are better than I am. They went up to, they own a caravan and they went up there for a weekend once and they said they used a dongle so that he could watch the football and I had never heard of a dongle...'*

# New role of reluctant socializer?

Identifying a technical expert can sometimes create **'reluctant socializers'** particularly in the younger generation: grandchildren were not always as interested, knowledgeable or patient as assumed,

Michael (15, Family 1): *'if mum can't do something, she'll ask me to do it so, its that kind of thing that makes me think they think I know the most about technology but whether I do is the question to answer'*



**KEEP  
CALM  
AND  
LEAVE ME  
ALONE**

# The influence of family role: the family glue (2)

- **Role of family 'glue'** – often the grandparents

*Researcher: so how do you find out what your cousins are doing?*

*Ellen (21, Family 1): Usually through my grandparents*

*Researcher: and how often do you speak to them?*

*Ellen: I'd say once every fortnight, something like that.*

*'I don't really know what they [cousins] are doing, its just through my grandma that I get told about them'*

# THEME FOUR: Generational 'othering'

Generational 'othering' (Brons, 2015): Setting apart/stereotyping both the grandparents lack of ability whilst assuming the children's expertise (digital immigrants v natives?)

Helen (22, Family 4): *'My Gran has a massive interest in it, but Mum won't let her have it because she wouldn't be able to handle it (laughs) because she would get scared by the viruses and she'd be calling either me or my Mum up every other day... 'it's done this. It's done that' or 'what do I do?'*

*'I gave her a shot with my laptop and she can't actually work it... Like she can't use the mouse or anything'*

# Dangers of othering (2)

## Exclusion via assumptions

- *Researcher: does she [Grandma] have a computer?*
- *Gillian (early 20's, Family 2): No, no, nothing at all, the mobile [not used] she has was given to her by I think my cousin or auntie, but no she's got her phone [landline], TV and DVD and that's as far as she goes with technology...I think she just can't take it in, if you try and teach her, if you haven't been using stuff like that all the time I think its not easy to adapt... I don't think she'll ever use something like that, no.*

# Dangers of Othering (3)



## Exclusion – via object:

- Helen (22, Family 4): *'My Gran's got a mobile and they're very basic. They're like the second, so the first phone I ever had... That's what she uses, so it's got, it's old-fashioned (laughs) its got the actual little jelly buttons on it and the tiny little screen... But I can't work it because I've forgotten (laughs)'*

# Dangers of othering (4)

## Active Exclusion (of Facebook)

**Emma (70's, Family 4):** *'...but what I feel, I miss out on certain things, like you saying Sarah had a dog, that's another granddaughter*

**Jane (daughter, 50's, family 4):** *You'd have heard it sooner rather than later*

**Emma:** *its just the fact that things are going on and you never hear about them 'cos its all done on Facebook now.'*

# Choosing to opt out?



Ivy (70, Family 5): *'we are dinosaurs when it comes to technology and we've decided that that's how it will probably be.'*

*'The other Grannie of the ones up north, she's much more interested and she's got an iPhone and she does stuff with them, but we just communicate on a different level, I've taught the children to knit and sew and we talk a lot and watch films and go for walks and do other things, we communicate in a different way'*

Ivy is choosing to opt out, continuing the landline call weekly to all, frequent visits, yet are they still missing out?

# Summary/Contribution.

- Greater understanding of cross-generational family network socialization, specifically between grandparents/children in the digital age
- Recognising the establishment of embedded communications practices across the generations, strengthening rather than weakening bonds, via PCD communications (Moffat et al 2013)
- PCDs allow usurping of the middle generation controllers via the establishment of routine private communications channels (although PCDs also enables easier middle generation coordination and sharing)
- Highlights the awareness of, and expectations on, family technical experts and reluctant socializers – from any native or immigrant generation!
- Active othering and self-exclusion creates dangers: limiting the opportunity to build cross-generational relationships, limiting family inclusion

# Any questions?

