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Focus on the Family: Representation and Rhetoric in the Marketing of Mobile Family Plans

Abstract:

In theory, the family plans provided by mobile phone companies in the United States promote a progressive image of the American family. Any group of one or more persons willing to enter into a financial agreement can sign up for a family plan. It remains unclear, however, if the broadened definition of family reflects a purposeful act on the part of mobile phone companies to reflect changing notions of “the family.” This paper uses interviews with corporate representatives and ethnographic observations of retail sites to understand how mobile phone companies think about and depict the American family. Additionally, this paper explores some of the methodological issues associated with “studying up” in the twenty-first century.