

Does the term 'research-based' keep parents in the dark?

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Does applying the term 'research-based' to parental advice automatically provide a stamp of authority? A commentary paper published in the *Journal of Children and Media* suggests that parents and caregivers are frequently misled into an 'ignorance trap' by recommendations which are based on ill-informed research.

The risk of ambiguous parental advice is a hazard across health and education journalism, but seems to particularly affect the reporting on media and children. Parents are faced with making sense of increasingly intricate research findings and so are becoming ever-more reliant on advice provided by bloggers and reporters. Meanwhile, new ways for children to use [digital media](#) arrive every year, and so clear guidance and advice is imperative to support parents in their choices.

The commentary names one particular example of a report published by the American Academy of Pediatrics, which contained advice relating to children's use of [social networking sites](#). The report contained reference to the phrase 'Facebook depression', an expression which was quickly picked up by the press and used with the cachet of a real medical term. Stories on this phenomenon appeared across newspapers and television channels worldwide, despite not being based on any real evidence. The commentary finds that the citations actually originated from a first person account in a school newspaper, and from two websites names *Trend Hunter* and *Science a Go Go*. None of the citations referred to any research showing that social media use causes depression. Yet, because of the reputation and authority of the AAP, the one small mention of

'Facebook depression' has had a large impact.

Guernsey suggests that both reporters and professional organizations have a responsibility to communicate clear and transparent advice to parents. Reporters need to gain an understanding of how research works and professional organisations need to be able to back up their statements with carefully reviewed research. To do so otherwise causes confusion, and undermines the credibility of professionals and the important research they conduct.

More information: "Garbled in Translation: Getting Media Research to the Press and Public," Lisa Guernsey. *Journal of Children and Media*, 2014. [DOI: 10.1080/17482798.2014.863486](https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2014.863486)

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