

The Relationship Between Digital Parenting and Children's Moral Development in the Technological Era

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ABSTRACT

The transformation of parenting patterns in the digital era reflects a fundamental paradigm shift in the relationship between parents and children that no longer only takes place in physical space, but also penetrates the virtual realm that is full of value ambiguity. Digital parenting is not just about mastering technology, but also demands reflective, participatory, and ethical abilities from parents to guide children in navigating the digital world. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature study method to examine the relationship between digital parenting patterns and children's moral development amidst the onslaught of instant global information and values. The findings show that the digital literacy gap between generations and the lack of value-based parenting approaches are the main factors in weakening children's moral formation. In this context, adaptive parenting strategies require active parental involvement through value mediation, dialogic communication, and strengthening digital moral literacy. The digital space that has become an agent of value socialization implicitly demands the critical presence of adults as ethical facilitators, not just technical controllers. This study emphasizes the urgency of reconstructing the parenting paradigm towards a model that is responsive to the moral challenges of the technological era, as well as the importance of collaboration between families, schools, and communities in forming an ethical and reflective digital parenting ecosystem.

Keywords: Children's Morality; Digital Literacy; Digital Parenting

INTRODUCTION

The transformation of parenting patterns in the digital era is a complex and ambivalent social phenomenon, which does not only involve changes in parenting tools, but also involves a paradigm shift in the relationship between parents and children. The presence of digital technology—especially gadgets and internet connectivity has created a new field of interaction called the digital parenting sphere, where the boundaries between the family's private space and the outside world become blurred. In this context, the role of parents is not only limited to physical supervision and direct provision of moral values, but is also extended to a virtual dimension full of ambiguous values and norms.



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According to Dini (2022), digital parenting patterns include three main areas: regulation of media use, assistance in digital exploration, and mediation of values in content consumption. Unfortunately, many parents are still trapped in a reactive and repressive approach to their children's use of technology, instead of building critical and participatory dialogues that reflect the essence of relationship-based parenting.

In addition, digital parenting also creates a literacy gap between the parent and child generations, which has the potential to create an imbalance of power in parenting. Children of the digital native generation are often more proficient in operating technology than their parents who are classified as digital immigrants, causing parental control to become merely symbolic without substantial effectiveness. This phenomenon is exacerbated by the tendency of some parents to use technology as a "digital babysitter" to reduce fussiness or fill their children's free time, without considering the value content of the content consumed. A study by Asmarany et al (2025) shows that although most parents are aware of the potential risks of digital media, they still feel overwhelmed in setting clear boundaries due to the lack of guidelines and practice models that are appropriate to the socio-cultural context of each family. Therefore, the transformation of digital parenting patterns is not enough to be understood as a technical adjustment, but must be seen as a reconstruction of parenting values and roles that are more reflective and adaptive to the moral challenges of the digital era.

Children's exposure to diverse and uncensored digital content presents serious challenges in the formation of their value systems and morality. Amidst the flood of information, children are not only passive consumers, but also subjects who shape and reproduce the moral meaning of what they see, hear, and feel through digital media. Content containing violence, hedonism, visual manipulation, and individualistic values are often presented in attractive and entertaining formats, making it easier for children to accept and normalize these behaviors without a process of critical reflection. Isnaeni et al (2025) emphasized that individuals, including children, learn through observation and imitation of models presented by the media. This means that if digital media displays characters or narratives that prioritize violence as a solution, popularity as a measure of existence, or an instant lifestyle as a goal in life, then these values have the potential to be imitated and embedded in children's moral schemes.

Ironically, the absence of parental or adult guidance with moral authority in the media consumption process actually strengthens the possibility of value disorientation. In a situation like this, digital space is not only an entertainment arena, but also a "value socialization agent" that works implicitly and latently, without adequate cultural or ethical filters. In fact, in research by Jeffery (2021), it was found that elementary school-aged children have begun to build moral justifications based on social media responses, not based on internal principles or family advice. This shows that when traditional value authorities such as parents and teachers fail to enter children's digital space, then digital media itself will take over the role of determining right and wrong values (Yusuf et al., 2020). Therefore, adaptive parenting strategies and adequate media literacy are no longer additional options, but rather pedagogical inevitability in overseeing children's moral development in an era of increasingly invasive technology.

Children's moral development in the technological era is no longer only constructed through direct interaction with primary social environments such as family and school, but is now heavily influenced by digital experiences that are multisensorial, transnational, and almost limitless. Social media platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram have become very powerful value representation spaces, where moral

narratives are not formed through reflective discourse, but through "likes," "followers," and popularity algorithms. Children learn to judge what is right or wrong based on social validation in cyberspace, not on solid ethical principles. In this context, weak, permissive, or inconsistent digital parenting has the potential to let children get carried away by instant and shallow morality. Apdillah et al (2022), technological developments have created a "new media environment" that shifts the orientation of children's moral development from internalizing values to externalizing identity with a focus on image, popularity, and consumption. Thus, the absence of critical and consistent guidance from parents in the digital space contributes greatly to the formation of a fragile and pragmatic moral identity.

Furthermore, the failure to integrate moral values into children's digital activities reflects a systemic weakness in parenting approaches that have not been able to bridge the real world and the virtual world pedagogically. Digital supervision that only focuses on the duration of gadget use without regard to the quality of its content is a form of technical control that is poor in educational meaning. Meanwhile, moral communication that is not adapted to the symbolic world of children in digital media will only build an increasingly wide intergenerational distance. Utomo et al (2025) emphasize the importance of meaningful parental engagement in children's digital lives, namely active involvement based on dialogue, role models, and contextual value orientation. Without this kind of approach, children will build their morality based on media logic: instant, performative, and utilitarian. Therefore, the quality of digital parenting is not only about mastery of technology, but also requires ethical skills and reflective awareness in forming children's moral foundations amidst the onslaught of global values that often conflict with local and religious norms.

The urgency to study the relationship between digital parenting and children's moral development is not merely theoretical, but also an urgent practical demand in responding to the value crisis in the midst of a digital society. When parents do not have adequate digital literacy skills, they tend to choose two extreme paths: completely freeing children to explore cyberspace without supervision, or conversely, exercising repressive authoritarian control without dialogue. Both models have proven ineffective in shaping children's morality in a healthy way. According to Samho (2024), overly permissive parenting can open up space for the internalization of problematic values from digital media, while authoritarian patterns actually encourage resistance and deviant behavior due to the lack of psychological security in children in establishing relationships with parents. Therefore, a scientific approach is needed that is able to map the complexity of these dynamics contextually, so that family education policies and interventions do not fall into moral simplification or technologization of parenting that is devoid of values.

Moreover, the urgency of this study also lies in its role in filling the epistemic gap in the discourse of moral education in the digital era. So far, research related to parenting and morality has been too focused on conventional dimensions, while the reality of today's children has experienced decontextualization of values through digital media that are transcultural and hyperreality. Without a deep understanding of how children experience, interpret, and respond to moral values in the digital space, the parenting approach will continue to lag behind methodologically and normatively. As emphasized by Mertala et al (2024), the digital native generation requires a value approach that is not only conveyed narratively, but also carried out in dialogical and reflective practices that are relevant to their digital culture. Therefore, studies on contextual digital parenting must be able to bridge local value traditions, global moral challenges, and the cognitive-emotional complexity of children in cyberspace. This kind of research is not only academic, but is a

strategic contribution in building a resilient moral ecosystem amidst the uncertainty of the digital era.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method as the main strategy in exploring and analyzing the relationship between digital parenting patterns and children's moral development in the technological era. Literature review was chosen because it is able to provide an in-depth conceptual and reflective understanding of complex phenomenological dynamics, without the limitations of a particular empirical space. The purpose of this method is to identify patterns, tendencies, and conceptual gaps in existing literature, as well as to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework as a basis for further study.

Data sources in this study include national and international scientific journals, academic books, conference articles, institutional research reports, and policy documents relevant to the topics of digital parenting, family media literacy, and children's moral development. Data collection techniques were carried out through systematic searches of digital databases such as Google Scholar, ScienceDirect, Taylor & Francis, and SAGE Journals, using keywords such as digital parenting, moral development in children, media literacy, and technology and parenting. The data obtained were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, by identifying recurring and significant main themes related to the relationship between parenting and moral development in the digital context. The validity of the analysis results was maintained through triangulation of sources and critical reviews of various theoretical perspectives, including from developmental psychology, family sociology, and media studies. This approach is expected to produce a critical and reflective synthesis as a normative and pedagogical basis for developing parenting practices that are responsive to children's moral challenges in the technological era

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

1. Conceptualization of Digital Parenting Patterns in the Context of the Technology Era

The conceptualization of digital parenting in the context of the technological era is a response to major changes in children's social environment due to massive digital media penetration. Different from traditional parenting that focuses on physical control and time discipline, digital parenting requires a more adaptive and reflective approach, because children not only grow in real social spaces, but also in virtual spaces that continue to develop. In this context, digital parenting is understood as a parental strategy in guiding, directing, and controlling children's use of digital media, so that the digital experiences they experience do not damage their moral values and socio-emotional development. Purnama's study (2018) shows that effective digital parenting is highly dependent on parents' ability to understand the dynamics of technology, not just limiting access.

The main dimensions of digital parenting include active mediation, passive supervision, cooperative involvement, and authoritarian and democratic styles in technology-related decision-making. Active mediation, according to Modecki et al (2022), involves open discussions between parents and children about the digital content consumed, with the aim of forming children's critical understanding of the values contained in the media. Meanwhile, passive supervision is more observational, where parents monitor from a distance without too much intervention. Cooperative involvement,

such as playing games together or watching educational videos with children, provides opportunities for parents to provide direct guidance in a fun context. In practice, the choice of authoritarian parenting style tends to limit children's participation in decision-making, while the democratic style encourages dialogue and shared responsibility, which has been shown to be more effective in shaping children's digital literacy (Wahyuningrum et al., 2020).

The typology of digital parenting patterns developed by Livingstone and Helsper (2008) is an important theoretical framework in understanding parental mediation strategies. They divide mediation into three forms: active mediation, restrictive mediation, and technical mediation. Active mediation reflects the educational role of parents in developing children's digital awareness through conversation and discussion. Restrictive mediation is done by setting time limits or content types, while technical mediation is done through the use of software or parental control features. All three require digital skills that are not uniform among parents, which according to Kurt (2023), creates a digital literacy gap between generations. This gap is a major challenge, because children tend to adapt to new technologies faster than their parents.

In this context, the role of the family as the first value control actor in the digital space becomes very crucial. Digital literacy is not only about technical skills, but also includes ethical, critical, and social skills in dealing with online content and interactions. Without these skills, parental control becomes irrelevant or even counterproductive. The success of digital parenting depends on the active involvement and ability of parents to be learning partners for children, not just controllers (Sulhan & Despriani, 2022). Therefore, a transformation of the parenting paradigm is needed from a repressive approach to a participatory approach that positions children as subjects of learning and parents as value facilitators. Thus, digital parenting is not only a technical instrument of control, but also a pedagogical space that shapes children's character in a complex digital ecosystem.

2. The Influence of the Digital Environment on the Formation of Children's Morals

The influence of the digital environment on the formation of children's morals is a complex issue, because children are no longer in a stable traditional social environment, but rather in a fluid and ever-changing digital ecosystem. The development of information technology has expanded the field of children's moral socialization, not only through families and schools, but also through digital media that are rich in symbols, narratives, and behavioral models. Within the framework of developmental psychology, Kohlberg stated that children form their moral reasoning gradually through meaningful social interactions. However, digital interactions often do not provide a deep reflective space; content on social media and digital entertainment tends to provide instant, permissive moral messages that are not always based on ethical logic, but rather on emotional and visual appeal. This affects children's moral cognitive structure, where the concept of right and wrong is more determined by trends and social acceptance (peer acceptance) than by stable ethical principles (Azizah et al., 2024).

Furthermore, in the affective domain, intense exposure to digital media has an impact on children's ability to develop empathy and moral sensitivity. Marchenko & Murzina (2022) emphasize the importance of the role of models in moral learning. Children who see digital figures or influencers practicing violence, manipulation, or a consumerist lifestyle tend to imitate this behavior, especially if the figure is given social

rewards in the form of likes, positive comments, or popularity. Learning through observation not only internalizes patterns of action, but also the values that accompany them. At this point, the digital space is not neutral, it inserts dominant values from the market, the ideology of individualism, and performative aesthetics that often conflict with prosocial moral principles such as cooperation, simplicity, and justice.

Behaviorally, children who are accustomed to fast responses and instant feedback from the digital environment begin to lose the capacity for delayed gratification, an important indicator of moral maturity. Children become more reactive, impulsive, and dependent on external validation. This is where the role of the family becomes crucial. Unfortunately, many parents do not have adequate digital literacy to accompany their children in distinguishing between educational and misleading content. According to Hermawati et al (2022), the generational digital gap causes children to adapt to technology more quickly than their parents, so that moral control in the family is getting weaker. Without the active presence of adults as value mediators, children tend to form their morality from dominant digital content that does not always contain positive ethics.

Ultimately, digital space has replaced many of the classic social functions in the process of internalizing values. If previously moral values were transmitted through interpersonal relationships in real communities, now children learn more from narratives built on YouTube, TikTok, or Instagram. McLuhan (1964) even predicted that media is not just a channel, but also helps shape the way humans think "the medium is the message". This means that the way digital media conveys messages also influences the structure of children's awareness of morality. Therefore, moral education in the digital era must shift its focus from merely transferring values to critical reflection on digital content, strengthening digital moral literacy, and involving parents and teachers as value facilitators (Damayanti, 2022). Without this strategy, the risk of value disorientation will continue to haunt the generation of digital children who are shaped not by real social interactions, but by algorithms and viral content.

3. Implications and Strategies for Strengthening Digital Parenting Patterns that are Responsive to Children's Morality

Responsive digital parenting to children's morality is a necessity in the technological era filled with unlimited information flows and conflicting values. In this context, parenting can no longer be unilateral or authoritarian, but must be dialogic, participatory, and reflective. Children as digital natives are involved in media spaces that shape their moral orientation through the process of observation, imitation, and internalization of values from the digital content consumed (Fatmawati & Sholikin, 2019). Therefore, parents as primary moral figures must understand that parenting is not enough with just technical control, but also requires moral and cognitive skills to guide children in navigating the complex digital world. This approach is in line with the ideas of Darling and Steinberg (1993) in the theory of value-based parenting, where the success of parenting is determined by the quality of value communication that takes place in a supportive and coherent relationship between parents and children.

In practice, digital literacy for parents is a crucial point that cannot be ignored. Digital literacy here does not only include the technical ability to operate devices or set parental controls, but more deeply, namely understanding the social, cultural, and moral implications of digital media. Shoffiyah et al (2025) explained that parents who have a critical understanding of the risks and opportunities of digital media tend to carry out effective active mediation, such as open discussions and instilling values. This is where

moral literacy complements digital literacy. Parents who are able to read the potential moral dilemmas of digital content can more easily build moral scaffolding of value structures that are gradually strengthened in children's daily interactions. Moral education in the family is also required to be more adaptive to digital dynamics, including in dealing with ambiguous content, fake news, and viral culture that can influence children's social ethics.

For this reason, an educational intervention model is needed that is not top-down, but rather based on children's participation and contextual value mediation. Participatory parenting provides space for children to articulate their digital experiences, build critical dialogues, and jointly evaluate the moral values of their online interactions. Meaningful involvement between parents and children in the moral discussion process can shape children's internal moral structures in a stronger and more lasting way (Salisah et al., 2024). In addition, value mediation is an important strategy, where parents explicitly link children's digital experiences to larger values, such as honesty, empathy, responsibility, and justice. When children are invited to interpret digital content not only from an entertainment perspective, but also within an ethical framework, a more reflective and not merely normative moral awareness is formed.

The implications of this strategy require a renewal in the pedagogical approach and family education policy. Digital parenting programs need to go beyond purely technical approaches, and enter into ethical and affective areas, namely strengthening parental awareness as moral mentors in children's digital world. An integrative family education curriculum must include empathetic communication training, ethical media literacy education, and strengthening parents' reflective capacity in dealing with digital moral dilemmas. The government, educational institutions, and civil communities must play an active role in building a values-based digital parenting ecosystem, for example by providing educational modules, interactive discussion platforms, and public campaigns that emphasize the importance of parental moral involvement in the digital space. Without this kind of structural intervention, efforts to strengthen children's morality in the digital world will be trapped in short-term solutions that do not touch the root of the problem.

CONCLUSIONS

Digital parenting in the technological era cannot be separated from the dynamics of children's morals that are increasingly influenced by digital media. In this context, the role of parents is not enough as an access controller, but must be a value facilitator who guides children ethically. Children now grow up in a digital ecosystem that is full of permissive content and trends that often conflict with prosocial moral values. Without the active involvement of parents, digital space will become an agent of value socialization that works implicitly without control. The digital literacy gap between the generations of parents and children worsens this condition, making moral control weaker. Therefore, a participatory and dialogical parenting approach is needed to instill values contextually. Active mediation, cooperative involvement, and open discussion are the main strategies in effective digital parenting. Parents' digital literacy must also include the ability to read the moral risks of media algorithms. Value intervention in children's digital consumption is an important part of forming their ethical awareness. Value-based parenting programs need to be developed collaboratively between families, schools, and communities. In this way, digital parenting becomes a pedagogical space that shapes children's morality reflectively.

Without this strategy, children will grow up with a fragile and pragmatic moral identity.

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