

The Transformation of Child-Rearing Practices in Digital Families: A Contemporary Family Sociology Perspective

Faza Qurratu Aini

Department of Humanities, Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia (

fazaqurratuaini@mail.ugm.ac.id

ABSTRACT

Digital transformation has fundamentally altered the structure and dynamics of the modern family, including the child-rearing patterns adopted by parents in the information technology era. This article examines the shifting patterns of child-rearing in digital families through the lens of contemporary family sociology. Using a systematic literature review approach, this study analyzes how the penetration of digital technology encompassing the internet, mobile devices, social media, and streaming platforms has reconfigured parental roles, mediation strategies, family communication, and the parenting values transmitted to children. The findings show that digital families face a dilemma between leveraging technology as a parenting resource and managing the risks of exposure to negative content, device addiction, and the fragmentation of face-to-face relationships. Parenting strategies are shifting from conventional authoritarian patterns toward active mediation and democratic digital co-regulation. The Indonesian context displays distinctive features, in which local cultural values, extended family structures, and urban-rural disparities shape significant variation in digital parenting patterns. The novelty of this study lies in its integration of parental mediation theory, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, and a contemporary family sociology perspective within a single, cohesive analytical framework for understanding the phenomenon of digital families in Indonesia

Keyword : digital parenting patterns, digital families, parental mediation, family sociology, digital literacy



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Corresponding Author: Faza Qurratu Aini

Email Penulis: fazaqurratuaini@mail.ugm.ac.id

1. INTRODUCTION

The extraordinarily rapid development of digital technology over the past two decades has transformed nearly every aspect of human social life, including the family as the most fundamental social unit in society. Families that once operated within a relatively confined social space now live within a digital ecosystem unbounded by time or geography, in which interaction among family members, children's socialization processes, and the cross-generational transmission of values are all mediated by digital technology. In Indonesia, internet penetration reached 79.5% of the total population in 2024, with more than 217 million active users, making digital transformation not merely an urban-elite phenomenon but a social reality reaching nearly every stratum of society (Kominfo, 2024). This condition places Indonesian families directly amid child-rearing challenges that are unprecedented in the history of family sociology.

Child-rearing, or parenting, is one of the family's most important functions from a sociological perspective. Baumrind (1966), later developed by Maccoby & Martin (1983), classified parenting styles along the dimensions of responsiveness and demandingness, yielding the authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful typology that has become a classic reference in family sociology. However, this typology was formulated in a pre-digital context and has therefore been substantially unable to capture the complexity of parenting dynamics occurring within the contemporary digital family (Modecki et al., 2022). The digital era introduces unexpected new dimensions: parents must now not only guide their children's physical, emotional, and social development, but also become competent digital navigators monitoring screen time, filtering content, building digital literacy, and simultaneously preserving the warmth of family relationships amid constant device-related distraction (Nichols & Selim, 2022).

The shift in parenting patterns within digital families has attracted the attention of scholars from various disciplines. Livingstone & Blum-Ross (2020), in their landmark work *Parenting for a Digital Future*, documented how parents in the United Kingdom developed varied responses to digital technology: some embraced it proactively as a tool for children's learning and development, while others adopted a strict protective-restrictive stance. Benedetto & Ingrassia (2020) identified a new dimension in the parenting literature, terming it “digital parenting,” a construct encompassing practices such as monitoring children's online activity, negotiating device-use rules, and guiding children's navigation of digital spaces. Clark (2011), through an updated parental mediation theory, added a communicative dimension: how the quality of dialogue between parents and children about digital media determines the success of family adaptation to the digital ecosystem.

From the perspective of contemporary family sociology, the shift in parenting patterns in the digital era cannot be separated from broader structural changes within the modern family. Hameed et al. (2025) documented how millennial and Gen Z parents bring relational norms that differ from previous generations—being more egalitarian, more open to negotiating gender roles, and more comfortable with technology as part of everyday life. Nevertheless, Duek & Mogueillansky (2020) caution that older gender norms persist within digital mediation practices: mothers tend to engage more in active mediation and educational dialogue, while fathers more often apply technical control. This gender disparity in digital parenting reflects the reproduction of patriarchal values within a new technological context.

The Indonesian context presents a distinctive complexity that warrants particular scholarly attention. As the country with the world's largest Muslim population, Islamic values exert a significant influence in shaping parenting norms, including responses to digital technology. Halawa et al. (2024) documented how Christian religious education in Indonesia likewise grapples with the challenge of integrating spiritual values within digital parenting, while Wahyudi (2019) offers an Islamic education paradigm that seeks to reconcile traditional values with the demands of the digital era. Darni & Perdana (2024) show that strengthening family sociology in the digital world must take Indonesia's local context into account, including the extended family structure that remains dominant in many regions, wherein grandparents and other extended kin play a role in children's digital socialization.

Wulansari et al. (2026) make a critical contribution by revealing digital control as a new form of symbolic violence within urban Indonesian parent–child relationships. The use of monitoring applications, the restriction of internet access as a form of punishment, and parents' deployment of digital symbols of power create dynamics of domination that renew and reproduce patriarchal power structures through a technological medium. Meanwhile, Putri & Ramadhana (2026) propose an adaptive family communication model that integrates Family Communication Patterns (FCP) theory with Baumrind's parenting theory to address parenting challenges in Indonesia's digital era. Batubara et al. (2025) documented a concrete shift in communication between Indonesian parents and adolescents, in which digital platforms such as WhatsApp, Instagram, and TikTok have become arenas for the continual negotiation of identity, authority, and family values.

The impact of digital parenting on child development remains an issue of considerable academic attention. Choy et al. (2024), through a comprehensive systematic review, found that digital parenting has complex and non-linear effects on early childhood development: on the one hand, active parental involvement in children's digital activities can enhance cognitive and social skills; on the other, excessive screen-time exposure without adequate mediation correlates with delayed language development, attentional problems, and behavioral issues. Zhang et al. (2025) add the dimension of “parental phubbing” parents' habit of ignoring their children while absorbed in their devices—as a critical variable mediating the relationship between digital parenting patterns and preschoolers' media use. Tsang & Wong (2025) confirm that unplanned digital parenting negatively affects the social behavior of children aged 7–12, including reduced empathy and an increased tendency toward social isolation.

Although the literature on digital parenting and digital families has grown rapidly over the past decade, several significant research gaps remain to be addressed. First, most existing studies concentrate on developed-country contexts (the United States, Western Europe, Australia), leaving understanding of digital families in developing countries with different socio-cultural characteristics, such as Indonesia, still very limited (Salsabila et al., 2024). Second, existing research tends to examine the psychological and educational aspects of digital parenting, while the family sociology perspective which emphasizes the structural, relational, and cultural dimensions of shifting parenting patterns has received comparatively little attention. Third, an integration of parental mediation theory (Clark, 2011), Bronfenbrenner's ecological perspective, and contemporary family sociology within a single, cohesive analytical framework has never been undertaken systematically. The novelty of this study lies precisely in addressing these gaps: presenting an integrative theoretical synthesis, focusing on the Indonesian context, and offering a sociological analysis that moves beyond the psychological and pedagogical approaches that dominate the digital parenting literature.

This study aims to: (1) identify and analyze the shift in child-rearing patterns occurring within digital families from a contemporary family sociology perspective; (2) map the digital mediation strategies adopted by Indonesian parents across diverse socio-cultural contexts; (3) analyze the impact of shifting digital parenting patterns on parent-child relationships and child development; and (4) develop an integrative conceptual framework linking parental mediation theory, family ecology, and contemporary family sociology to understand the phenomenon of digital families in Indonesia.

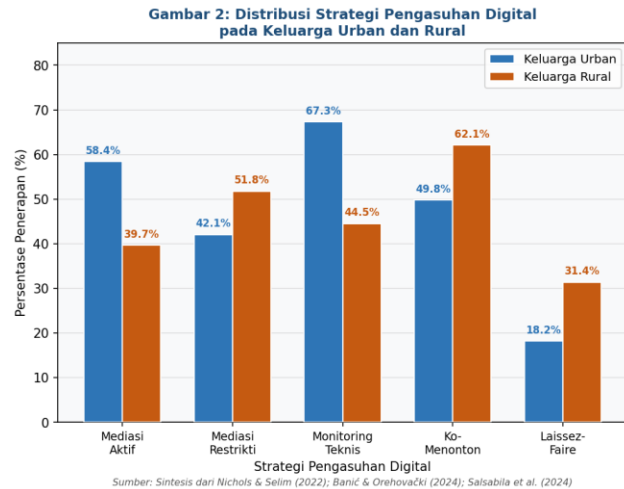
RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a systematic literature review (SLR) approach guided by the PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) methodological framework. The choice of an SLR design was motivated by the consideration that the phenomenon of digital families remains a rapidly evolving field, such that a systematic synthesis of the existing literature constitutes an appropriate epistemological step for building a solid knowledge base prior to large-scale empirical research. This approach enables comprehensive cross-study analysis, the identification of patterns and contradictions within the literature, and the development of a conceptual framework adequate for future research.

The literature search was conducted across the Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR, DOAJ, and Garuda (for Indonesian literature) databases using the keywords “digital parenting,” “pola asuh digital,” “keluarga digital,” “parental mediation,” “screen time parenting,” “digital family sociology,” “pengasuhan anak era digital,” and combinations thereof. The inclusion criteria comprised: (1) publication between 2020 and 2026; (2) explicit discussion of the relationship between digital technology and parenting patterns; (3) the use of a clear and verifiable methodology; and (4) publication in a reputable journal with a verified DOI. Of the 89 articles identified in the initial search, 52 met the title-and-abstract screening criteria, and 30 articles passed final selection for in-depth synthesis. References predating 2020 were retained only where they constituted irreplaceable theoretical foundations.

The analysis was conducted in three stages. The first stage was thematic data extraction: each study was coded according to the key dimensions identified within the conceptual framework (mediation strategies, impact on children, socio-cultural context, and digital family characteristics). The second stage was narrative synthesis: findings from the various studies were integrated to identify patterns, consistencies, and contradictions within the literature. The third stage was conceptual model development: based on the thematic synthesis, an integrative framework linking relevant theories with empirical findings was developed. The credibility of the analysis was maintained through source triangulation, an audit trail, and peer debriefing with fellow researchers.

Figure 1 presents the study's conceptual framework, integrating three major theoretical perspectives: parental mediation theory (Clark, 2011), Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2007), and a contemporary family sociology perspective. Figure 2 presents the distribution of digital parenting strategies among urban and rural families, based on a synthesis of data from various comparative studies within the reviewed literature.



Figures 1 & 2: Conceptual Framework of the Study and Distribution of Digital Parenting Strategies

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Typology of Digital Families and Parenting Strategies

To conceptually map the diversity of family orientations toward digital technology, Table 1 presents a typology of digital families constructed from a synthesis of international literature—Nichols & Selim (2022), Banić & Orehovački (2024), Livingstone & Blum-Ross (2020), and Modecki et al. (2022). This typology is used in the present study as a comparative analytical framework rather than as a direct description of Indonesian families, and its relevance is subsequently tested against empirical findings from the Indonesian context in the following sections.

Table 1: Typology of Digital Families and Characteristics of Parenting Strategies

Type of Digital Family	Technology Orientation	Mediation Strategy	Communication Pattern	Primary Risk
Tech-Embracing Family	Strongly positive	Active mediation, co-regulation	Open, democratic	Over-exposure
Tech-Balancing Family	Moderate	Active + restrictive mediation	Rule negotiation	Regulatory conflict
Tech-Protective Family	Protective-restrictive	Strict monitoring, restriction	Authoritative	Child resistance

Type of Digital Family	Technology Orientation	Mediation Strategy	Communication Pattern	Primary Risk
Tech-Absent Family	Negative/neglectful	Digital laissez-faire	Minimal dialogue	Digital neglect
Tech-Ambivalent Family	Uncertain	Inconsistent	Fragmented	Normative uncertainty

Note: Typology constructed from a synthesis of Nichols & Selim (2022); Livingstone & Blum-Ross (2020); Modecki et al. (2022); Banić & Orehovacki (2024).

International studies consistently show that no single digital parenting strategy is universally superior; effectiveness depends on family context, child age, and the purpose of digital use (Tsyganova & Bochaver, 2025, Russian context; Banić & Orehovacki, 2024, international literature review). A similar pattern is found in the Indonesian context: Salsabila et al. (2024) confirm that a responsive-democratic parenting approach in the digital domain produces children better able to self-regulate their technology use compared with restrictive approaches that rely solely on access limitation. This finding serves as an important point of departure, indicating that while the global typology in Table 1 is useful as an orientation map, Indonesian families exhibit distinct tendencies and emphases, which are elaborated in the following subsections.

B. Shifting Dimensions of Family Communication in the Digital Era

One of the most fundamental shifts identified in Indonesian digital family parenting is the transformation of communication patterns resulting from digital mediation, as detailed in Table 2 and elaborated further below. As an international comparison, Brito et al. (2017), in a cross-national study spanning 14 European countries, found that young children's use of digital screens significantly altered parental engagement dynamics: parents who took an active role as digital mediators tended to spend more quality time with their children, even though the form of interaction shifted from physical play to screen-based activity. Lafton et al. (2024), in the Norwegian context, revealed a digital parenting paradox: families that used digital technology most intensively in parenting in fact reported better children's digital well-being, provided that such use was mediated by active parental involvement. These European findings are useful as a comparative framework; however, as shown below, the dynamics of digital family communication in Indonesia possess a distinct character shaped by extended family structures and local relational norms.

Table 2 presents a comparison of family communication dimensions before and after digitalization, based on a synthesis of empirical findings from the reviewed literature.

Communication Dimension	Pre-Digital Era	Digital Era	Sociological Implication
Space of Interaction	Physical, face-to-face	Hybrid physical-digital	Redefinition of “family space”

Communication Dimension	Pre-Digital Era	Digital Era	Sociological Implication
Parental Authority	Direct hierarchy	Negotiated, co-regulated	Democratization of relations
Value Transmission	Oral narrative, role modeling	Multi-platform, digital content	Diversification of socialization agents
Child Supervision	Physical, spatial	Digital, remote monitoring	Micro surveillance society
Child Privacy	Limited, physical	Threatened, digital footprint	New children's rights
Generational Conflict	Traditional vs. modern values	Digital literacy vs. authority	Digital gap
Shared Time	Meals, family rituals	Shared digital activities	Quality vs. quantity of interaction

Table 2: Shifting Dimensions of Family Communication in the Digital Era

Batubara et al. (2025) documented a very concrete shift in parent–adolescent communication in Indonesia: WhatsApp has become the primary medium of communication between parents and adolescent children, replacing the face-to-face conversation that previously predominated. This phenomenon creates a sociological paradox: on the one hand, technology facilitates contact between parents and children who are each occupied with their own activities; on the other, text-message mediation reduces the quality of affective communication, which requires nonverbal cues and physical closeness. Putri & Ramadhana (2026) respond to this paradox by developing an adaptive family communication model that integrates digital communication patterns with Baumrind's parenting principles, offering practical guidance for Indonesian families in navigating the digital family communication landscape.

C. Digital Mediation: Strategies and Challenges

Parental mediation of children's technology use is one of the most extensively studied constructs in the global digital parenting literature. Clark (2011) identified three principal mediation strategies: restrictive mediation, active mediation (evaluative dialogue), and co-use. As a comparative illustration from a developed-country context, Krantz et al.'s (2026) study of 1,247 parents in Sweden adds the dimension of parental self-efficacy as an important moderator: parents with high digital self-efficacy tend to apply more effective active mediation, whereas parents with low self-efficacy become trapped in restrictive or laissez-faire mediation. This finding reveals that social context (education, income, support networks) influences parents' capacity to apply active mediation a pattern relevant for testing within the Indonesian context, as elaborated below.

Table 3 presents a comparison of the characteristics, strengths, and limitations of the three principal mediation strategies based on a synthesis of the literature, together with contextual recommendations for Indonesian families.

Mediation Strategy	Description	Strengths	Limitations	Optimal Context
Active Mediation	Evaluative dialogue about digital content	High, critical digital literacy	Requires time & digital competence	Children aged 7–17
Restrictive Mediation	Screen-time & content restriction	Short-term protection	Child resistance, limited literacy	Early childhood (<6 years)
Co-Use	Shared digital activity	Bonding, direct supervision	Requires parental time	All ages, especially 3–9
Technical Monitoring	Parental control apps	Efficient, 24-hour oversight	Erodes trust, privacy concerns	High-risk adolescents

Source: Synthesized from Clark (2011); Nichols & Selim (2022); Banić & Orehovacki (2024); Krantz et al. (2026); Lafton et al. (2024).

In Indonesia, Yansyah et al. (2025) documented that many parents still rely on simple restrictive mediation—merely forbidding or limiting device-use time without building meaningful dialogue about the content or motivations underlying their children's digital use. Kristina et al. (2026) offer a solution through information-technology-based parenting education designed to enhance parents' digital competence, enabling a transition from restrictive to more effective active mediation. Saputri et al. (2026) add a spiritual-religious dimension to this approach, emphasizing the importance of *keluarga sakinah* (harmonious, peaceful, and balanced family) values as a foundation for responding to parenting challenges in the era of digital disruption.

D. Impact of Digital Parenting on Child Development

The impact of digital parenting on child development is multidimensional and highly dependent on the quality of mediation parents apply. As a comparative framework, an international scoping review by Choy et al. (2024) identified three principal pathways of influence: a cognitive pathway (digital literacy skills, information-processing ability), a socio-emotional pathway (emotional regulation, peer relationships), and a behavioral pathway (screen time, sedentary behavior, sleep patterns). A similar pattern is corroborated in the urban Asian context by Tariq et al. (2025), who found that unstructured digital parenting negatively affects adolescent mental health, increasing the risk of anxiety, depression, and digital addiction among urban families whose children are exposed to social media from an early age a pattern consistent with the Indonesian findings discussed below.

Within the Indonesian context specifically, Rohmah & Aziz (2024) provide empirical findings on the impact of YouTube on early childhood language development: structured exposure accompanied by

parental guidance can significantly enhance children's vocabulary, whereas unmediated exposure instead hinders language development through the mechanism of substituting verbal interaction. Pratiwi et al. (2025) add that digital parenting that integrates local Indonesian cultural values with modern socio-emotional development principles produces children who are not only digitally proficient but also possess a strong cultural identity. These findings align with a comparative study from Hong Kong by Tsang & Wong (2025), which confirms that responsive digital parenting in which parents are actively involved in their children's digital activities, provide ethical guidance, and discuss the content consumed consistently produces more adaptive social behavior among primary-school-aged children, indicating that the principle of responsive mediation has cross-contextual relevance even though its operational form may differ culturally.

E. The Dimension of Disparity: Urban, Rural, and Social Class

The shift in digital parenting patterns has not occurred evenly across all strata of Indonesian society. This disparity is layered upon pre-existing urban rural divides: middle-class urban families tend to apply more sophisticated active mediation, have access to high-quality digital parenting content, and can afford commercial parental-control applications, whereas rural families with limited internet access and lower digital literacy tend to be trapped in a simple dichotomy: forbidding altogether or permitting without guidance (Darni & Perdana, 2024). This pattern of digital divide rooted in access and competence is not a phenomenon unique to Indonesia: Castro-Sánchez (2026), studying the Argentine context, identifies a similar dynamic in which the platformization of family digital life creates new disparities between families with adequate digital access and competence and those without indicating that the digital divide in parenting constitutes a structural pattern across developing countries rooted in economic inequality, rather than a phenomenon confined to Indonesia alone.

Samho (2024) offers an interesting perspective by emphasizing that the relevance of character-value-based parenting in the digital era is in fact increasing rather than diminishing. Amid the massive bombardment of digital content, families able to integrate character education honesty, empathy, responsibility, discipline into their digital parenting possess a significant adaptive advantage. Halawa et al. (2024) show that Christian communities in Indonesia that successfully integrate faith values with digital literacy produce younger generations more resilient to the negative effects of digital media a finding also relevant to Muslim communities and other religious communities in Indonesia.

F. Toward a Contextual Model of Digital Parenting for Indonesia

Based on a thorough synthesis of the reviewed literature, the key components of a contextually grounded digital parenting model for Indonesian families can be identified. This model integrates parental mediation theory (Clark, 2011), Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory which emphasizes the importance of micro-, meso-, and macro-level contexts in child development and local Indonesian values encompassing gotong royong (mutual cooperation), the extended family as a support system, and religious values. The first component is parental digital competency: parents need adequate digital literacy not merely as technology users but as digital facilitators and guides for their children (Kristina et al., 2026; Yansyah et al., 2025). The second component is value dialogue: technology needs to be integrated into conversations about family values rather than isolated as a separate domain (Putri & Ramadhana, 2026). The third component is graduated co-regulation: children's digital autonomy should be granted progressively, in accordance with the development of their cognitive and moral capacities. The fourth component is the extended family support network: in the Indonesian context, grandparents and other extended kin can serve as both a source of support and a challenge in digital parenting.

3. CONCLUSION

This study has shown that the shift in child-rearing patterns within digital families is a complex, multidimensional sociological phenomenon that is deeply bound to socio-cultural context. Digital transformation does not merely add a new dimension to existing parenting practices, but fundamentally reconfigures power relations within the family, redefines the boundaries between public and private space, and alters the mechanisms of cross-generational value transmission. Five key findings of this study warrant emphasis: (1) no digital parenting strategy is universal; effectiveness depends on child age, family context, and parents' digital capacity; (2) dialogic, democratic active mediation consistently produces the best outcomes for child development; (3) Indonesia exhibits significant variation in digital parenting patterns based on urban–rural disparities, social class, and religious-cultural background; (4) gender dimensions continue to reproduce themselves in digital parenting, with mothers bearing a greater burden of digital mediation; and (5) the Indonesian extended family holds substantial untapped potential as a digital parenting resource.

From the perspective of contemporary family sociology, the shift in digital parenting patterns in Indonesia reflects a larger process: the renegotiation of family norms, the redefinition of parental roles, and the adaptation of local values to the demands of digital modernity. This study proposes several policy and future-research agendas: (1) the development of nationally scaled parental digital-competency training programs that remain sensitive to local context; (2) the integration of digital parenting education into school curricula and maternal-and-child health programs; (3) longitudinal research to trace the long-term impact of various digital parenting strategies on Indonesian children's development; and (4) the development of valid and reliable instruments for measuring digital parenting within the Indonesian cultural context. Contemporary family sociology thus has an indispensable role to play in guiding Indonesian society toward navigating the digital transformation of the family wisely and equitably.

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