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Technology and Parenting in the Digital Age: Opportunities and Risks

Abiola Adiat OMOKHABI, *Ph.D.*
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

In the 21st century, digital technologies have become an integral part of children's lives. Child-rearing practices have become more complicated in recent years as digital media have become more common and pervasive in everyday life, even in the modern home. Parents are now caught between two worlds: on the one hand, they encourage their children to use digital media for educational and social purposes, and on the other hand, they are concerned about their children's safety online. They, however, strive to reduce the risks and limit the negative consequences of their children's use of digital media. Based on these, this paper examines digital technology, digital parenting, opportunities and risks, and how parents can employ a variety of techniques to regulate their children's digital media activities, such as setting limits, setting up internet filters to block unsuitable websites and content for child(ren), spending time with their child(ren), and so on. It recommended that parents and children alike should have adequate digital literacy skills. This is one of the most important prerequisites for safe internet use, thus, promoting a safe and healthy online environment for them and their children.

Introduction

Children all over the world are experiencing a digitally-enhanced childhood. There is a growing number of Internet users, including children and young people. Young people often adopt new technologies like the Internet, mobile phones, social media, and other devices before others. Therefore, they tend to be among the most technologically savvy. Technology has been a part of their lives since birth, unlike the generations before them who had to learn it as they grew older. As a result, younger generations are reluctant to disconnect from technology, believing that if they are not connected, they will be left behind socially. Thus, they spend a significant amount of time using various types of technology. Children are increasingly being born into digital homes, and they grow up knowing how to be stimulated by digital tools (Holloway, Green & Livingstone, 2013). Apart from traditional television, which continues to play a significant role in children's home entertainment (Lauricella, Wartella & Rideout, 2015), children and adolescents are easily drawn to smartphones and tablets (Genc, 2014). New digital technologies have a dual nature for children: they can be powerful tools of empowerment and self-expression, as well as being almost limitless sources of information and social resources, but they also carry multiple risks to which children are especially vulnerable (Livingstone, Cagiltay & Olafsson, 2015).

Parents have long been taught to view their child's growth as a capability, with the goal of maximising that capability. At the same time, children's normal developmental processes must be allowed to run their course. Digital technology has the potential to improve children's developing abilities while also posing a risk of disrupting their normal development. Parents should try as much as possible to supervise not only their children's and teenagers' actions in the physical world, but also their use of digital technology. Many children are unaware of the paradox of

digital device use. Most youngsters are capable of using digital technology at a medium to high level, yet they are unaware of the dangers it poses (Chang, Chiu, Chen, Chiang, Miao, Chuang & Liu, 2019). Parenting has a major impact on children's internet use, according to several research (Ozgür, 2016).

Parents are one of the most important determinants of children's levels of interaction with digital technologies, and they are thought to play three key roles during children's digital technology use: facilitator, teacher, and gatekeeper (Judge, Floyd & Jeffs, 2015). When evaluating children's digital technology use, parents' own digital technology use as well as their patterns of technology co-use, such as monitoring and supervision, are two important factors to consider (Johnson, 2015). Co-use and shared digital activities reduce the risk of negative content being exposed to children (Cho & Cheon, 2005). Observing parents' use of digital technology can potentially influence children's use of it, as research shows that children's use of media is related to their parents' attitude towards media (Lauricella & Cingel, 2020).

Furthermore, according to the UNICEF (2017) report *The State of the World Children: Children in a Digital World*, parents should set an example for their children by being responsible and respectful Information Communication Technology (ICT) users. Parents must also be much more proficient in the use of the Internet to prevent a digital divide between them and their child(ren) and also stay informed of new products and trends. As a result of the inevitability of digital parenting responsibilities, parenting education programmes all over the world have begun to include digital parenting in their curriculum. This article is of great significance since it seeks to illuminate the concepts of digital technology, digital parenting, and the negative aspects of digital technology in the parenting of adolescents. It also highlights the benefits that digital technology presents to parents.

Literature Review

Digital Technology and Digital Parenting

Digital technology in this context refers to devices such as computers, tablets, and mobile phones, as well as the myriad of digital activities children engage in today. These devices may be used to surf the Internet, visit social networking sites, chat, or play video games. The use of digital technology as a parenting aid is referred to as digital parenting. It entails policing children's use of digital and mobile media. It is concerned with how parents utilise the Internet and cellphones in relation to the moral economics of their household. It presupposes that both children and parents have basic digital skills. According to Mascheroni, Ponte and Jorge (2018), digital parenting refers to how parents participate in their children's use of digital technology (parental mediation), as well as how parents incorporate digital technology into their daily activities and parenting practices, and the development of parenting concepts. The interaction between parent and child, parental discipline techniques, socialisation, and parental mediation techniques are all forms of digital parenting (Chou, Chou & Chen, 2016).

Digital parents are defined by Kabakç Yurdakul, Dönmez, Yaman and Odabaş (2013) as individuals that do not ignore the needs of the digital age, competent in basic digital tools, aware of the possibilities in digital environments, and can protect their child(ren) from the risks in these environments. Digital parents take great pleasure in providing their children with cutting-edge technology. It is the responsibility of parents to limit their children's exposure to digital and mobile technologies and monitor or limit their children's online activities using different software (Mascheroni, 2014).

An individual who is referred to as a digital parent possesses basic technology literacy, is aware of risks and threats online and knows how to protect their child(ren) from these risks, has the ability to integrate digital technologies into parenting applications, controls their child's interaction with digital media, and stays abreast of technological developments

(Huang, Li, Chen & Straubhaar, 2018). By adopting a digital parenting approach, parents can assist their children in taking advantage of the opportunities digital media and online settings provide, while also protecting them from the harms these settings might create (Livingstone & Helsper, 2008, cited in Fidan & Seferoğlu, 2020).

As illustrated in Manap (2020), digital parenting is a way for parents to navigate and model their children's behaviour in the digital environment, and it is defined in five dimensions: efficient use, risk aversion, role modeling, digital non-neglect, and open-mindedness. Media monitoring, finding information, and nurturing relationship with a child are all portions of digital parenting (Huang, Li, Chen & Straubhaar, 2018). There are two approaches to dealing with digital parenting. The first involves parent access to digital media, frequency of usage, and level of use, while the second involves parental awareness of the child's use of digital media and parental supervision of the child. As a result, digital parenting should not be defined solely as the parent monitoring and supervising their child's digital media and Internet use, but also as making guidelines for it.

In today's mobile world, where mobile devices and wireless network capabilities are available everywhere and anytime, parents also have the opportunity to benefit from these sources for their own parenting practices (Lupton, Pedersen & Thomas, 2016). The above activities constitute digital parenting, including exchanging information and receiving advice from one another; using the Internet to socially interact with each other; downloading educational applications or games; and accessing the learning resources children require (Livingstone, Blum-Ross, Pavlick & Lafsson, 2018).

Parents are usually categorised by a series of attributes called responsiveness/warmth (responding to the child's needs in a supportive, accepting, nurturing, and involved manner) and demandingness/control (setting demands, rules, constraints, expectations, and boundaries to integrate the child into society) (Spera, 2005). There are four distinct parenting styles that can be classified along

these dimensions based on their warmth, intensity, and demand. The four parenting styles are: authoritative (high warmth, high demandingness), laissez-faire (low warmth, low intensity), authoritarian (low warmth, high intensity), and permissive (high warmth, low intensity).

The table below shows the traditional and digital parenting styles

Parenting Style	Traditional Parenting	Digital Parenting Style
Authoritarian parents	Parents place high expectations on their children while providing minimal feedback or nurturing	Parents may offer their child with the most up-to-date technology and apps, as well as rigorous regulations to follow, but they do not provide ongoing assistance or direction
Authoritative parents	Parents place high expectations on their children while also being attentive and supportive.	Parents will have high standards and will explain (as best they can) internet safety and screen limitations to their children, but they will allow them to surf the web and utilise technology.
Permissive parents	Parents are attentive but not overbearing to their children.	Parents will encourage their children to use the Internet and technology as they see fit, and will counsel them to check in if they so desire.

Helicopter parents	Parents ensure that their children are safe by watching them closely.	Parents will have strict restrictions in place to protect their children from internet risks, as well as parental control software and regular monitoring.
Lawnmower/snow-plough parents	Parents remove any potential impediments in their child's path.	Parents will be heavily involved in removing any online pain rather than focusing on resilience-building

Source: Adapted from OECD, Educating 21st Century Children: Emotional Well-Being in the Digital Age.
http://www.oecd.org/education/ceri/21st-centurychildren.htm

Review of Studies of Children Digital Technology Usage

A number of researchers has recently documented adolescents' digital technology usage in a variety of countries (Chaudron, 2015; Ofcom, 2015; Konca & Koksalan, 2017; Rideout & Robb, 2020). In the 2000s, television and computers were the most widely used technologies. Since 2010, touchscreen devices such as tablets and smartphones have grown in popularity (Dunn, Gray, Moffett & Mitchell, 2016). The result is that children now spend more time using mobile devices than watching television (Ofcom, 2015). According to recent United States data, 97% of homes have at least one smartphone, 75% of families have a tablet computer, and 44% of young children have their own tablet computers (Rideout & Robb, 2020). The use of tablet computers by children in the United Kingdom increased significantly between 2015 and 2019 (Ofcom, 2019). Meanwhile, Neumann (2015) reported that most Australian households own at least one mobile phone, and more than 80% own a laptop, tablet, or touchscreen phone. Importantly, according to Merdin's (2017) research in Turkey, the accessibility of advanced gadgets in the computerised media climate of kids as old as 6 years in the home setting is 98.3% for televisions, 93.2% for cell phones, 63.3% for tablets, and 62.9%

for personal computers for instance work area.

According to Livingstone, Kardefelt and Hussein (2019), children in Albania who use mobile phone to access the Internet at least weekly are 89%; Argentina (88%); Bulgaria (83%); Brazil (93%); Chile (87%); Italy (90%); Montenegro (83%); Philippines (45%); Uruguay (69%); Ghana (64%); and South Africa (88%). Children who use a mobile phone to access the Internet at least weekly, by gender, in Albania are 92% boys and 86% girls; Argentina (boys is 84% while girls is 92%); Bulgaria (boys is 83% while girls is 83%); Brazil (boys is 91% while girls is 95%); Chile (boys is 86% while girls is 89%); Italy (boys is 89% while girls is 90%); Montenegro (boys is 85% while girls is 82%); Philippines (boys is 44% while girls is 46%); Uruguay (boys is 69% while girls is 69%); Ghana ((boys is 66% while girls is 62%)) and South Africa (boys is 88% while girls is 87%).

The scholars further discovered that children who use a mobile phone at least weekly, by age, in Albania are 92% for 9–11 year olds, 96% for 12–14 year olds, and 99% for 15–17 year olds. Bulgaria (9–11 is 97%, 12–14 is 98%, and 15–17 years is 99%); Brazil (9–11 is 89%, 12–14 is 87%, and 15–17 years is 90%); Chile (9–11 is 85%, 12–14 is 93%, and 15–17 years is 97%); Italy (9–11 is 96%, 12–14 is 98%, and 15–17 years is 97%); Montenegro (9–11 is 89% ,12–14 is 93%, and 15–17 years is 95%); Philippines (9–11 is 40%, 12–14 is 47%, and 15–17 years is 60%); Uruguay (9–11 is 63%, 12–14 is 83%, and 15–17 years is 88%); Ghana (9–11 is 47%, 12–14 is 62%, and 15–17 years is 75%); and South Africa (9–11 is 85%, 12–14 is 89%, and 15–17 years is 95%).

Digital Parenting: Opportunities and Risks

Opportunities

Youngsters who approach computerised innovation can acquire the abilities and proficiencies they need to learn and plan for life in an inexorably advanced society. It could provide them with well-being or instructive administrations, as well as data on subjects that are critical to youngsters but are untouchable in their social orders. Above all, utilising

innovation to draw in youngsters is turning into a more normal method for understanding their privileges, as illustrated in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Advanced innovation is a vital driver of progress and assists with accomplishing the Sustainable Development Goals to some degree (Livingstone, 2014).

Youngsters might utilise virtual entertainment to oversee schoolwork tasks or become interested in schoolwork-related substances (Blair, Millard & Woollard, 2017). Digital technology use can be associated with numerous benefits for child development: for example, cognitive function and abilities to work, socialise, and/or enjoy leisure time (Canadian Paediatric Society, 2017, cited in Sampasa-Kanyinga, Hamilton, Goldfield & Chaput, 2022). Smaller investigations have discovered that the web can benefit hard-to-arrive-at youngsters and those in weak circumstances, for example, those managing drug use, emotional well-being issues or self-hurt, by making data and looking for help more open (Curry, Rhoades & Rice, 2016; De Riggi, Lewis & Heath, 2018). These starter discoveries recommend that innovatively based intercessions to further develop kid prosperity might be gainful for certain children.

In a study of 1,186 Nigerians aged between 11 to 19 years, it was discovered that 63% of kids and youngsters utilise the Web consistently to look for well-being data (Shabi & Oyewusi, 2018). Solid eating regimen and sustenance; body size, shape, and picture; physically communicated contaminations; and other sexual issues are among the most famous inquiry points. The accessibility of effective internet-based data is particularly useful for hard-to-arrive-at kids who find it hard to look for help face to face. According to a study of 527 Northern Irish young men aged 14 to 16 years old in a school setting, 42% used the Internet for health information retrieval. The overall survey respondents were aware of the importance of reliable and trusted online health information, but they used search engines (57%) and social media sites (48%) most often to locate information. Young males who communicated with online friends about personal problems reported higher levels of mental well-being (Best, Manktelow & Taylor, 2016).

Risks

The literature has established that children using digital technological devices may experience risks such as internet addiction; exposure to inappropriate and harmful content (for example, explicit sexual content, vulgar language, hate speech); cyberbullying (suffering from and perpetrating it); commercial content (advertisements); inaccurate information (false information); children's access to services and platforms before the prescribed age; contacts with malicious people (internet predators) who are planning to harm them (sexually or otherwise); inappropriate use of personal information (including those shared by parents, referred to as sharenting); identity theft, phishing, and internet fraud; misuse of personal information; and theft of money. Other dangers that ICT and the Internet pose to children include video game, internet, social media, and screen addictions (Ahmed, Abouhashish, Aly & Okab, 2019; Cox, 2020; Domoff, Harrison, Gearhardt, Gentile, Lumeng & Miller, 2019; Hsieh, Hsiao, Yang, Lee & Yen, 2019; Law, 2018; Liu & Ma 2018; Misra, Singh & Singh. 2020; Oberst, Wegmann, Stodt, Brand & Chamarro, 2017; Payam & Mirzaeidoostan, 2019; Uddin & Mamun, 2018; and Zhang, Wang, Luo, Zeng & Cui, 2020).

There are various other digital dangers focused on youngsters and teens. They include nomophobia, apprehension about passing up a great opportunity (FOMO), like-habit, Facebook misery, crack berry (a handheld smartphone to which users have a tendency to become addicted), phubbing (the practice of ignoring a companion or companions in order to pay attention to a smartphone or another mobile device), photo lurking (people purposely appearing in the background of other people's photos), cyberchondria (a condition in which a person feels anxious or worried about their health when using the Internet to seek medical information), and Hikikomori (abnormal avoidance of social contact typically by adolescent males).

Although children can gain a great deal of knowledge and skill through the Internet, the digital world also offers some risks. Sexual sharing is the most common digital risk, according to parents: children send their own

nude photos to each other or strangers; and children communicate with insecure people digitally (Badillo-Urquiola, Page & Wisniewski, 2019). Cyberbullying occurs between the ages of 12 and 18 (Pengpid & Peltzer, 2019), sexual messaging occurs between the ages of 14 and 16 (Fajardo, Gordillo & Regalado, 2013), and grooming occurs between the ages of 9 and 13 (Balanza & Romero, 2014). Character factors, for example, sensation-chasing, low confidence, and mental hardships (acting both as causes and outcomes of internet fixation issues); social elements, like an absence of parental help and friend standards; and computerised factors, like explicit web-based rehearses, online locales, and abilities (acting both as causes and results of internet compulsion issues) are portions of the danger factors (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, [OECD], 2018).

Digital Parenting Strategies

Parents have a significant influence on their children's use of digital technology. Consequently, parents can use a variety of parenting strategies to ensure that their children benefit from digital media. Here are some strategies parents can use to ensure that their child(ren) are able to take advantage of digital media:

- **Create family digital technology usage strategy:** Digital technology should serve family's ideals and parenting style. Media, when used appropriately, have the potential to enhance daily life. However, when used irresponsibly or without care, media obviate the need for many crucial activities including as face-to-face conversation, family time, outdoor play, exercise, and sleep.

- **Parents should treat digital technology in the same way they would in any other environment in child's life:** The same parenting principles apply in both the actual and virtual worlds. Parents should set boundaries as children require and expect them. Parents should know their children's online and offline

friends, what platforms, software, and apps they are using, what websites they visit, and what they do online.

- **Set boundaries and encourage playtime**. Digital technology use, like all other activities, should be subject to acceptable constraints. Play that is unstructured and takes place outside of the classroom fosters creativity. Make unplugged playtime a daily priority for children, especially the very young.

- **Screen time should not always be spent alone**. Co-viewing, co-playing, and co-engaging with screens increase social interaction, bonding, and learning for children. Parents should play video games with their children. It's a great method to show off sportsmanship and game manners. Parents should also watch a show with their children. Doing so affords them the chance to introduce and discuss their life experiences, thoughts, and advice with their children and also communicate with them so they can grasp what the children are up to and be a part of it.

- **Set a good example**. Online, teach and model kindness and good manners. Parents should limit their personal media use because youngsters are excellent imitators. In fact, interacting, cuddling, and playing with children rather than looking at a screen will make parents more available and connected to children.

- **Understand the importance of face-to-face communication.** Two-way correspondence is the best methodology for exceptionally youthful babies to learn. Volatile discussion time is fundamental for language improvement. Discussions can occur face to face or then again, if essential, through video with a travelling parent

- **Inform children about the value of privacy as well as the hazards of predators and sexting**. Adolescents must understand

that after they have shared anything with others, they will not be able to delete or remove it completely, and this includes sending inappropriate pictures. They may also be unaware of or choose not to use privacy settings, and they should be cautioned that sex offenders frequently contact and exploit minors through social networking, chat rooms, e-mail, and online gaming.

- Check to see if the child is sharing any personal information on the Internet. Also, do not reveal the child's personal information to the public.

- Obey age restrictions when using online platforms and services.

- Select digital contents, apps, and video games for child(ren) that are appropriate for their age (for example, using child-friendly search engines).

- Pay attention to any changes in the child's behaviour that could indicate that they have been exposed to some of the online dangers.

- Establish a mutually trusting relationship with child(ren) by encouraging them to talk whenever something on the Internet scares, upsets, or worries them.

- For children online, parents should use parental controls, privacy settings, and other technical safeguards.

According to Marsh, Downs, Cranor and March (2017), the following parenting strategies are effective in digital parenting:

- **Monitoring that is not technical**: Monitoring what teens are doing online by looking at their social media accounts and reading their posts and messages.

- **Monitoring Software:** Monitoring what teens do online with parental controls and other software tools.

- **Rules and Regulations**: Limiting device use for a set period of time, taking away devices as a form of punishment, and telling them not to share certain types of content are all options.

- **Appeal to Fear**: Informing teenagers about how other teenagers' risky online behaviour has had serious consequences for their own personal safety in order to deter them from doing the same.

- **Education**: Teach teens about what types of online activities are appropriate for them and how to handle potentially dangerous situations online.

- **Communication:** Discussing online activity and potentially dangerous situations with teenagers, including asking and answering questions and sharing personal experiences.

- **Complacency among parents**: Allowing teenagers to explore social media on their own without providing additional information or supervision is a good idea.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Digital parents have provided their children with smart phones, laptops, and tablets to explore the digital world; it is now their responsibility to provide a safe and healthy online environment by installing necessary security tools such as anti-virus and firewall to protect all internet-connected devices. They can also set up internet filters to block unsuitable websites and content for child(ren) as well as requesting additional information from Internet Service Providers (ISP). They can set a time limit on a child's or children's access to the Internet using tools as well as enabling safe search mode on search engines and YouTube to avoid being exposed to inappropriate content. They need to help children navigate

the online risks to personal safety, security, and privacy, just as they teach them to be aware of dangers and risks in the physical world.

Digital parents should also think of the benefits of digital technology for their families, not just the risks. Children can learn the skills they will need for their future careers with age-appropriate digital literacy education. Apart from employing various strategies, digital parents should teach their children valuable skills like critical thinking and best practices so that they can be street smart online. Parents and children alike should have adequate digital literacy skills; it is one of the most important prerequisites for safe Internet use which will promote a safe and healthy online environment for them and their children.

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