A Lived Experience of Mothers' Perspectives on Their Children's Use of Digital Technology: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Digital technology, firmly entrenched in the rapidly evolving and diverse landscape of the 21st century, has become an integral part of our lives. This Phenomenological study aims to explore the faced challenges and benefits that mothers associate with their children's engagement in digital technology and screen used. It focuses on understanding the lived experiences of mothers in navigating their children's engagement with digital technology. This study delves into the multifaceted challenges and opportunities that mothers encounter as they bridge the gap between their children's digital world and the physical realm. It explores the ways in which mothers perceive and manage the impact of digital technology on their children's well-being, education, and social development. In an era marked by virtual connectivity and the digitalization of education, mothers' insights are invaluable in shaping effective parenting strategies and promoting healthy digital habits among children. Result of study reveal two major themes; parenting in digital era and learning from the globe. The conclusion of the study highlights the importance of balancing children's digital technology use time, maintaining open communication, setting clear boundaries, being aware of screen time and, encouraging outdoor plays as critical components of effective parenting process. This study focused on empowering mothers with knowledge and resources to navigate the complexities of the digital age while fostering meaningful connections within the family, enhancing socialization and improving the parenting process.

Keywords: Use of digital technology, experience, mothers, social learning theory

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Introduction

The technological advancements of the 21st century stand as the era's greatest achievement, offering an extensive wellspring of knowledge and serving as the paramount conduit for virtual connectivity and communication. Digital technologies have become an undeniable reality in the lives of people especially young children. These technologies have seamlessly integrated into their daily routines, becoming an integral part of their world (Lunar, 2017). Children's experiences are increasingly characterized by the use of digital technologies, disrupting the divide between the physical and virtual world (OECD, 2017). However, the digital environment offers children with many opportunities, but it also exposes them to risks equally. Participation in the digital environment must therefore be balanced with protection, ensuring that children have the knowledge, skills, capacity and resilience to identify and manage digital risks (Livingstone, 2011). Such as cyber bullying, pornography (Livingstone and Helsper, 2013), moodiness, irritability (Jameel et al., 2019).

Children are immersing themselves in digital environments more extensively and at increasingly younger ages (Chaudron, 2018). This trend has given rise to a noteworthy phenomenon known as "screen attachment," which is becoming more prevalent across various age demographics in our modern society. This attachment to screens exhibits characteristics akin to addictive behaviors, resembling a digital dependency. Notably, the global count of mobile phone users has surged to 5.19 billion individuals, and a significant 40% of these users openly acknowledge exceeding reasonable phone usage (Arthu, 2020). Furthermore, a research study conducted in Nepal discovered that individuals who dedicate over seven hours daily to electronic media activities are 40% less likely to attain commendable academic success is one of the best examples (Adhikari, 2021).

As a positionality of researchers, mother and sister of a school-going boys, researchers are dealing similar situation as our boys used to get reward for their good grades. However, since they became more engrossed with screens, their academic performance has taken a hit due to their increased usage of technology. In our community, a situation are similar. Many of us are dealing with the challenge of our kids being constantly glued to screens, and it is a struggle to get them to cut back. It seems like without screen time, our kids believe they cannot fully engage with their routine life. Some evidences revealed that the usage of screens found among all people without any age limits. Without these screens, people are not able to live their life (Yobel, 2019). This heavy reliance on screens and internet use are having direct negative effects that are increased risk of depression, thoughts of self-harm, feelings of isolation, physical health, mental well-being, and academic underperformance, challenges in time management, sleep disturbances, adopting unhealthy lifestyles, poor dietary habits and disruptions in family relationships (Kim Y, 2010; Chen Y, 2016;McDaniel, 2018). Furthermore, studies have shown that the influence of screen time on the frontal cortex of the brain resembles the impact of substances like cocaine (Kathryn, 2023). As the prevalence and accessibility of social media

have surged in recent years, children enjoy unbound access to their social circles. However, the consequences of this growing adoption of social media by children, and how mothers perceive these changes, remain largely unexplored.

The existing literature offers limited insights into the comprehensive consequences of modern technology and the significance that mothers attribute to their children's engagement with social media as a means of global connectivity (Clark-Pearson, 2011). In response, the present study seeks to probe this phenomenon by exploring the experiences of mothers whose children have recently embraced social media. Previous research has predominantly centered on children's use of technological devices, leaving a crucial gap in understanding of influence of parental behavior on holistic child development. After a decade of motherhood experience of researchers encountered a situation that has inspired us deeply to explore the live experiences of mothers on this ongoing issues. The aim of this study is to fueled by researcher's enthusiasm for addressing this pivotal issue within the context of child development as well as to understand the mother's experiences and knowledge about it.

This study seeks to explore mothers experiences concerning their children's utilization of technological devices. The primary objectives are to gain a comprehensive understanding on how do mothers perceive the impact of technological devices on their child's behavior and what are the emotional and social effects of children's screen time on parent-child relationships. Concurrently, the research aims to explore the range of challenges and benefits that mothers associate with their children's engagement with digital technology and screen. By accomplishing these aims, the study not only contributes to an awareness of modern parenting dynamics but also offers invaluable insights that can pave the way for enhanced parenting strategies and the formulation of informed policies.

Digital technology has significantly transformed family dynamics, particularly in raising children. Understanding the impact of digital gadgets on children's development and family life is crucial, with mothers playing a crucial role (Nijholt, 2024).Mothers' digital technology use strategies vary based on socioeconomic status, education, and cultural background (Lauricella, Wartella, & Rideout, 2015), necessitating understanding of their experiences to develop effective solutions.

Theoretical underpinning

In this context, a sociocultural theory, combined with theory of social-cognitive thinking, was adopted as a theoretical lens to look at the phenomenon of understanding the children's use of technological devices. The theory of social-cognitive thinking explains that the people and things around us really affect how motivated we are, what we learn, and how we control ourselves, idea comes from the (Bandura 1977; Schunk & Di Benedetto, 2020). Furthermore, he thought that how we act and our feeling comes from our own thoughts explained that just wanting to change or do something is not enough. People also need to know how to make change

and actually do it are important (Bandura, 1997). Further he explained about these old ideas about learning from others talked about how we can learn even when we are just watching, without doing anything ourselves. People used to call these ideas as "social learning theories" (Schunk & Di Benedetto, 2020). Where we need to have someone to watch, remember what they did, copy their actions, and want to do the same. Similarly, if parents use technology too much, kids might do that too. Furthermore, studies also show that when parents use technology a lot when they were with their kids, they might not pay as much attention to the kids, and this can make the kids feel like their parents are not interested (Radesky, 2018). Parents have even said that they use technology to take a break from family stress, and this might show kids that technology can help when they are stressed (Domoff, 2020). Therefore, parents need to engage in conversations, provide instruction, and demonstrate the correct use of technology and other aspects of life.

In relation to this study, children today are growing up in a screen-dominated media culture, where a wide array of digital devices profoundly influences their daily lives as their social learning influenced by digital technology. They often observe and mimic the behaviors of their parents. Kids often copy what their parents do from a young age, so how kids use things like phones or tablets might be because they have seen their parents use them (Domoff, 2020).

Excessive parental screen use can lead to digital addiction in children. Family environment influences healthy lifestyles, and effective parenting encourages responsible technology use and offline activities. Parental time and guidance are crucial for socialization and development. Family and society serve as role models.

Methods and Materials

This study followed Phenomenological research design under qualitative research method to investigate the use of digital technology by children in their daily lives. It explores mother's individual experiences (Creswell, 2018) and multiple realities (ontology), with mother's experiences as key knowledge (epistemology). Researchers are also having similar background of respondents, the study will be value laden while interpreting the theme in result section.

The purposive sampling method (Koul, 1984), were applied to understand children's behavior using digital technology. Two teachers from a nursing college in the Kathmandu valley were selected as sample for the study. The participants have a schools going children and they cultivate them with regular use of digital technology and understand the both positive and negative impact of technology in their daily life.

To protect the identities of respondents, researchers assigned pseudonyms (i.e., A1 & A2). Verbal consent and consensus were made with both participants before interview. Researchers explained to the participants about In-depth Interviews (IDs) process and their availability, and conducted In-depth Interviews (IDIs) as the primary method of information collection. In addition to IDIs, informal interaction with both respondent from before and during

research period helps to understand the mothers' perceptions in their children's using digital technology in everyday life. Kuragraphy approach (NHRC and UNICEF, 2024) as informal talked helps to saturate the information in the phenomena which researcher were exploring during lunch, tea break and travelling together allowed opportunity to become additional sources of information through kuragraphy in this research process. This interaction provides the opportunity of recording information of their lives (Hamed, 2022). IDIs interview was design to gain insights into the phenomenon based on mothers ' lived experiences. The interviews started with a casual "social conversation" to establish a comfortable and trustworthy atmosphere. The Interviewed were conducted with A1 at her home for 32 minutes whereas A2 is conduct in her official setting for 35 minutes. IDIs were recorded digitally and informal talked as a kuragraphy information were capture in headnote and later recorded in field notes which were subsequently transcribed into Nepali and translated into English language for analysis.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis, following a six-step process outlined by Clarke and Braun (2017): becoming familiar with the data, generating codes, identifying sub-themes and themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and selecting illustrative examples. This analysis was aligned with the central research question and focused on mothers' experiences related to children's use of technology. Key thematic results were presented in the results section below, where findings are also discussed in alignment with existing literature. Finally, the study's conclusions were drawn based on the generated themes and the discussion of results.

Results and Discussion

Two major themes are derived, that explains how mothers in Nepal experiences their children's habit for using technological devices. There have been two main theme generated that are parenting in digital era which covers digital screen and its impact in children well-being, their socialization and responsive parenthood. Learning from the globe is another important theme which cover acquiring knowledge by observing existing environment and learning from the global environment. These are well reflected and articulated with the mothers' experiences in below section.

Parenting in Digital Era

The digital era is expanding rapidly, making people increasingly dependent on technology. Since COVID-19 pandemic, education has also become reliant on technology. Children today are more engaged with the digital world than with the social world.

Digital Screen Impact in Children's Well-being

Technology is a dual-edged sword, capable of both connecting and disconnecting us from our well-being and self-awareness. It serves as a valuable resource for our children's education and social interactions, yet it also has the potential to divert them from real-world experiences

and have adverse effects on their mental health. In the contemporary landscape, youngsters have digital gadgets such as smartphones, laptop and tablets, which offer educational and entertaining opportunities (Rashid, 2023). Nonetheless, an overabundance of screen time can usher in problems like digital dependency and a decline in physical activity, ultimately influencing their holistic well-being.

Impacting to children's holistic health by digital dependency among children is indeed a growing concern in today's era, and it presents a unique set of challenges for parents. Risky screen time can affect their physical health, social skills, and academic performance (Aboujaoude, 2022). Respondent A1 reflected that,

My son has developed a significant reliance on digital technology, to the extent that he becomes irritable when I suggest him to power down his device. Subsequently, I sought guidance from a psychiatrist who recommended reducing screen time and encouraging participation in alternative activities.

It is clear that the child has developed a considerable dependency on digital technology, to the point where he reacts negatively when asked to disconnect from his device. This reliance has led to irritability. Respondent A1, recognized the issue and took proactive steps to seek professional advice by consulting a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist advised reducing screen time and promoting engagement in other non-digital activities as a potential solution to address the child's dependency on technology. This highlights the acknowledgment of the problem and the willingness to seek expert guidance to find a solution for the child's well-being. Similarly, respondent, A2 explained, "my daughter is more inclined towards mobile phones. She gets quite upset if I tell her to reduce her digital device usage". She reveals that her daughter displays a strong inclination toward mobile phones and becomes upset when asked to limit her usage of digital devices.

Both respondents statement recommends a significant attachment to digital technology and potential challenges in managing screen time. It highlights the need for parents to address their child's emotional response to screen time restrictions and find a balanced approach to digital device use that ensures the child's well-being and healthy interactions with technology.

Therefore, it is important to note that each family's experience with digital dependency is unique, and there is no only one solution suitable to solve the all problems. Mothers and parents, in general, must adapt their approaches to technology based on their child's needs and developmental stage while considering the potential benefits and drawbacks of digital devices in their lives. Open communication, setting clear boundaries, and being aware of the content and context of screen time can help parents navigate this complex issue.

Socialization and Environment

Managing screen time and preventing digital overload is indeed one of the most prevalent challenges in modern age parenting. The attraction of screen-based activities can lead to various issues, including anxiety and behavioral changes in children. Studies have indicated that compared to children who view screens for ≤1 hour per day, those who engage in two or more hours per day, or three or more hours per day, are more likely to experience behavioral problems (Arthu, 2022). Respondent A1 explained, "My son has started showing signs of anxiety, getting angry over small issues, and becoming distant from family and social activities''. Furthermore, respondent explained that child has exhibited noticeable changes in behavior, including signs of anxiety, increased irritability over minor matters, and a growing tendency to distance themselves from both family and social activities.

These observed behavioral changes are indicative of possible emotional or psychological distress in the child. It underscores the importance of recognizing these signs early and addressing the potential underlying issues, to ensure the child's emotional well-being and healthy social interaction is maintained. Likewise, respondent A2 explained, "My daughter is not as involved in family gatherings and other social activities. When I ask her to join us, she strongly disagrees, saying she needs her own space and doesn't want to be part of a group". She articulates that her daughter has become less engaged in family gatherings and other social activities, expressing a desire for personal space and a reluctance to participate in group activities.

These statement suggests that, their children's may be experiencing a sense of isolation or a preference for solitary activities, potentially linked to their digital device usage. It highlights the need for open communication and understanding between parents and the child to address her social and emotional needs effectively and ensure a balanced approach to technology and family interactions. Therefore, excessive screen time can give rise to a multitude of problems, ranging from disruptions in sleep patterns to decreased physical activity and difficulties in maintaining focus. To tackle this challenge, it is essential to establish well-defined limits on screen usage, not only for our children but also for ourselves. Encouraging outdoor pursuits, nurturing hobbies, and fostering family interactions can help strike a harmonious equilibrium between the digital and physical realms, promoting a healthier and more balanced lifestyle.

Responsive Parenthood

The family environment is vital in developing children's healthy lifestyles, and parenting styles from parent-child relationships might influence the digital attraction of children. Parents of adolescents with digital addiction showed poor parenting (Karaer, 2019). Respondent A1, mentioned that, "Because, I do not spend enough time with the kids, they are more drawn to screens. I also feel that it may be my fault for not being there for him when he needs me".

In this statement, the mother, admits that her child's increased attraction to screens may be a result of the parent not spending sufficient quality time with them. She expresses a sense of responsibility, feeling that she herself and her husband might be at fault for not being present when the child needs them. This reflection highlights the parent's concern about their role in their child's screen time habits and their recognition of the importance of parental involvement and emotional support in shaping a child's behaviors and preferences. It underscores the significance of parental engagement in fostering a healthy balance between technology use and family interactions. Similarly, Respondent A2 expressed, "Sometimes, I feel that I might be part of the problem. "When they were younger, I used to give them mobile phones to keep them occupied until I completed household tasks. Looking back, I realize, this was a mistake". Furthermore, also admits that she may have contributed to the issue of her children's screen time habits. She expresses a sense of responsibility, feeling that she might be "part of the problem." She reflects on her past actions, specifically giving mobile phones to her children to keep them occupied while she completed household tasks when they were younger. With hindsight, she recognizes that this decision was a mistake.

Overall, parents recognize the importance of their role in managing their children's technology use and are reflecting on past actions that may have contributed to the current situation. They express concern about their children's well-being and the need for a more balanced approach to screen time and family interactions. In this era, parenting also involves being role models for healthy tech usage and nurturing offline activities to ensure a well-rounded upbringing for the digital-native generation. Ultimately, effective parenting in the digital era involves equipping children with the skills and awareness they need to thrive in a connected world while maintaining their physical and emotional well-being.

Learning from the Globe

Global learning opportunities are broadening quickly, leading to greater interconnectedness and dependence on technology. The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital tools in education worldwide. Students are now more immersed in online learning environments than traditional classroom settings (Collis & Moonen, 2002).

Acquiring Knowledge by Observing Existing Environment

Children are like sponges, eagerly captivating knowledge from the surrounding and existing environment around them. From the moment they are born, they embark on a lifelong journey of learning, and their environment plays a crucial role in shaping their understanding of the world. As they grow, children continue to draw from the rich tapestry of their surroundings, each moment a potential lesson that adds to their growing reservoir of wisdom.

Communication and family dynamics play a fundamental role in shaping children's behavior, including their digital device usage. Children often imitate the behaviors and habits they observe in their parents, friends and family members. If they frequently use digital devices

in front of their children, whether it is for work, entertainment, or communication, children are likely to perceive this as normal and may develop a similar inclination toward screen usage. Respondent, A1 said, "My son is also influenced by his friends, like making TikTok videos, playing fortnight games in group, and chatting frequently has led him to become deeply immersed in the use of digital devices". Furthermore, Respondent A1, belief her child's adoption of digital technology habits is strongly influenced by peer behavior. The child is seen imitating friends in various activities such as making TikTok videos, playing Fortnite games, and chatting. As a result, this mimicking has led to the child becoming deeply engrossed in the use of digital devices. This observation underscores the significance of peer influence in shaping a child's digital behavior and highlights the need for parents to be aware of their child's social interactions in the context of technology use. On the other hand, respondent A2 explained,

When I attempted to limit my daughter mobile phone usage, she would often respond with frustration saying, you all can watch anytime you want but why can't I? She pointed out that most of the time, nearly all of us were engrossed in our own devices, and she felt like she was the only one constantly being told to put hers away.

Furthermore, Respondent A2 focused and further explained her child's reaction when she tries to set limits on the child's mobile phone usage. The child responds with frustration, questioning why the rest of the family is allowed to use their devices freely while she is being asked to put hers away. The child points out that, most of the time, everyone else in the family is also absorbed in their own devices, making her feel singled out for restrictions. This statement stresses the importance of consistency and fairness in enforcing screen time rules within a family, as perceived inconsistency can lead to tension and resistance from children regarding screen time limitations. Researchers also highlights the need for open communication and understanding among family members regarding technology use. If parents and caregivers engage in healthy, balanced screen time practices and prioritize face-to-face interactions, children are more likely to follow accordingly.

Learning from the Global Environment

The COVID-19 pandemic indeed had a significant impact on education worldwide, driving a rapid transformation towards virtual and online learning. While virtual classes helped prevent the spread of the virus and ensured continuity of education. Those classes, also brought several challenges, including the risk of digital addiction among children. Respondent A1 explained, "My son developed a stronger attachment to screens during the COVID-19 pandemic due to staying at home and attending virtual classes". Over time, this habituate to increase screen time for the children. This statement emphasizes the significant impact of the pandemic on children's screen habits, with remote learning and limited outdoor activities contributing to heightened screen use. It also highlights the challenge of breaking such habits once they are habituated. It emphasizes the importance of parents' roles in monitoring and managing screen

time to ensure a healthy balance between digital engagement and other activities in a child's life. Similarly, Respondent A2 shared, "It is true that most of my daughter's schoolwork shifted online during COVID-19 period, this transition may pose challenges for children in terms of behavior and adaptation, even though it might make things easier for teachers." She agrees with the fact that a significant portion of her daughter's schoolwork transitioned to online platforms after the COVID-19 pandemic. However, she acknowledges that this shift may bring about challenges for children in terms of their behavior and adaptation to the new learning environment. Even though it might streamline the teaching process for educators. This statement underscores the dual nature of the transition to online learning, recognizing both its potential benefits for teachers and the challenges it may present for students, including the need for adaptability and the potential impact on children's behavior and learning routines.

The COVID-19 pandemic transformed children's screen and technology interactions, promoting online learning and increased screen use. Parents should monitor screen usage to prevent addiction and promote a healthier offline life. The digital shift in education has led to children relying more on digital devices for learning and group work, increasing their screen time. This presents challenges for parents trying to monitor their children's screen usage, as they are increasingly dependent on these devices for academic tasks. The child's desire for autonomy and need for screen time for group work creates conflict between parents and children, emphasizing the need for open communication and a balance between meeting educational needs and maintaining healthy screen habits. Likewise, respondent A2 explained,

> "My daughter argues that she needs these devices for her assignments, presentations, and project work. Many of her assignments were post on WhatsApp and Viber groups, which force her to spend more time on screens. If it were not for that, we might be able to control their screen time by locking the devices away".

Here, the mother describes her child's perspective, that she require digital devices for completing assignments, presentations, and projects, as many of these assignments are posted on WhatsApp and Viber groups. This circumstance compels the child to spend more time on screens. The mother acknowledges that if it were not for these academic requirements, she might be able to control her child's screen time more effectively by restricting access to devices. This statement highlights the dual role of screens in education and the challenges it poses for parents. On the other hand, screens are essential for academic tasks at the same time, they contribute to increased screen time.

Parents must strike a balance between harnessing the educational benefits of technology and ensuring their children maintain a healthy relationship with screens by setting boundaries and encouraging offline activities. Digital technology is an integral part of modern education, and it is essential to prepare children to navigate the digital world responsibly. Balancing screen time while harnessing the benefits of digital learning can be challenging but is achievable with

proactive parenting and a supportive educational environment. Moreover, the quality of family interactions and bonding time is essential. Spending quality time together without screens, such as sharing meals, playing games, or having meaningful conversations, can foster stronger family connections and reduce the lure of excessive screen use as children seek meaningful engagement with their loved ones. Ultimately, a supportive and communicative family environment can greatly influence a child's behavior and their ability to manage screen time effectively.

In this study, researcher have explored into the complexities of modern parenting in the digital era, drawing insights from the experiences of mothers who have lived experiences in their life from the global prospective.

It has explored how the excessive use of technological devices can influence overall well-being of children and their socialization and learning in this world. The findings emphasize the critical role that parents play in monitoring and guiding their children's technology use. They reveal that when parents are not mindful of their own digital behavior, it can potentially harm the holistic health of their children. This study highlights the importance of parental awareness and active involvement in promoting a balanced and healthy technological environment for their kids in today's digitally interconnected world.

Parenting in today's digital world comes with new sets of challenges. Technology is everywhere, and children use digital devices a lot. Therefore, being a parent today means thinking about how to guide them in this digital age (Akanksha, 2023). They offer valuable insights into the challenges parents face in the digital era, emphasizing the importance of proactive technological management and clear boundaries. The participants in the study, particularly the mothers, reflect their shared experiences and concerns regarding their children's technology usage. Mothers, further experienced that children learn more from their social environment and global trends and changes. Studies have suggested that parental problematic media use could be an important predictor of children's smartphone and internet addiction (Lui 2012; Cho 2017; Hong 2019; Mun 2021; Gong 2022). They validate their challenges and underscore the significance of their roles in shaping their children's tech behaviors.

To the field of study, these findings contribute significantly by advancing our understanding of the intricate relationship between environmental factors, parental behavior, and children's digital device use. In addition, combined with Social Learning Theory (Kytle, 1978), children will observe and imitate their parents' problematic screen media use, leading to the intergenerational transmission of screen addiction.

Therefore, when parents are addicted to screen use, young children are at high risk of screen use addiction. Study highlight the role of parental modeling and emotional support in children's tech habits and underscore the importance of setting rules for healthy screen time. These insights provide a foundation for targeted interventions and strategies that can promote

responsible technology use among children while considering family dynamics, contributing substantially to the fields of child development, parenting, and technology use.

Conclusion

Based on the study's results and discussion, it is concluded that parenting in the digital era, along with global learning, is essential for all children. The researchers identified mothers' experiences regarding children's use of digital technology and recommend strategies such as fostering open communication, setting clear boundaries, and maintaining awareness of screen time based on content and context.

Encouraging outdoor activities, hobbies, and family interactions to balance digital and physical aspects of a child's lifestyle. By establishing screen time limits for both children and parents, which provide emotional support from parents to shape their children's behavior positively. A supportive family environment influences children's effective screen time management.

In conclusion, this study highlights the crucial role of parental awareness and active involvement in shaping children's technology use in the digital age. The experiences and concerns of research participants highlight the far-reaching impact of parental behavior on children's digital habits and well-being. Furthermore, the study aligned with Social Learning Theory, emphasizing that children observe and imitate their parental activity. Thus, parental modeling and emotional support are pivotal in fostering responsible technology use among children. These findings provide a foundation for targeted interventions and strategies that consider family dynamics, environment, ultimately contributing to a more balanced and healthy coexistence with technology in today's unified world.

This research focused solely on mothers' experiences with digital technology, specifically examining current environments and the behaviors of both parents and children. However, relying only on mothers' perspectives may limit the scope of insights. Therefore, a broader study is recommended to include the experiences and views of fathers, children, society, and policymakers to gain a more comprehensive understanding of digital technology use.

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