

Exploring Parents' Perceptions And Approaches To Parenting In The Digital Age

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Abstract

Introduction: Today, technology has become an integral part of individuals' lives, particularly for children and young people who extensively use it. Parents are responsible for protecting and securing their children's safety and health, as well as reintegrating them into society. With the advances in the digital world, parents need to be able to use the internet and be a role model for their children in terms of internet use. This research illuminates the attitudes and methods of parents towards parenting during the digital era

Aim: This study aims to explore parents' attitudes towards digital parenting and to determine whether digital technology makes parenting more challenging or easier.

Methodology: A descriptive quantitative approach was used, and an online questionnaire was administered to 400 mothers with children under 14 years in Kottayam district, Kerala.

Result: Results showed that while some mothers believed that digital technology makes parenting more challenging, others believed that it makes it easier. Additionally, a majority of the mothers agreed that digital technology has an impact on their day-to-day lives.

Conclusion: The study emphasizes the need for parents to educate their children on the positives and drawbacks of the internet instead of banning their use of technology. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of encouraging children to be active and engage in creative activities. Although technology has made life easier, it is crucial to preserve human values.

INTRODUCTION

Digital parenting is a popular but automatically adding concept that refers to how parents are increasingly involved in regulating their children's relationships with digital media (parental mediation) as well as how parents incorporate digital media in their daily activities and parenting styles. Digital parenting is a common but automatically adding concept that refers to how parents are increasingly involved in regulating their children's relationships with digital media (parental mediation) as well as how parents incorporate digital media in their daily activities and parenting styles. Parents are feeling challenged in their competence, role, and authority as children in high, middle, and even low-income countries gain access to the internet through a variety of digital devices and services, most commonly via mobile phones⁽¹⁾. Parents feel challenged by digital parenting because their children's excessive use of digital devices is difficult to supervise, and parents may not understand technologically complex services. They are also influenced by widespread concerns about screen time, internet addiction, stranger danger, and other issues. So, whatever is expected of parents normatively, there are practical limits to what they can do.⁽²⁾

Many parents, educators, and psychologists have reasonable concerns about their children's use of technology.⁽²⁾⁽³⁾ We live in a risk-averse society, and this is especially true for children. While the internet and technology introduce both opportunities and risks for children, restricting access or removing technology from their lives appears ineffective. We know that children are more likely to be at risk if they use the internet unsupervised or for extended periods. Adults' fears for their children, as well as their concern about their lack of control over their children, are the single most significant barriers to accepting digital technology. As parents in this 24-hour digital universe, there are some new rules that we must learn for ourselves and then teach to our children⁽⁴⁾.

Young children are immersed in a digitally rich environment from tablets to desktop computers, texting to social networks. Digital technologies have the potential to improve cognitive, social, and physical development. They have a lot of appeal to children, and this can be used to help them interact, develop, and learn.⁽⁵⁾ At the same time, parents and social scientists are concerned that children's excessive use of digital technology will lead to physical problems like obesity, social problems like isolation, or psychological problems like high levels of aggression.⁽⁶⁾⁽⁷⁾

Significance of the study:

The research study "Exploring Parents' Perceptions and Approaches to Parenting in the Digital Age" is significant because it addresses a topic that is becoming increasingly relevant in today's society. As technology continues to advance, it has become more prevalent in our daily lives, and children are growing up in a world where technology is ubiquitous. This study explores how parents perceive and approach parenting in this digital age, including how they manage their children's use of technology.

In this digital era, children spend a significant amount of time watching television, and this tendency begins at a young age. In today's digital environment, parents have a significant influence on their children's media use. Because parents spend so much time with their children and create an environment in the house that influences their behavior. Parents' media habits, attitudes toward media, and parenting techniques have all been cited as factors in their children's media habits. Many studies are conducted related to the impacts of digital technology on children. On the contrary, there has been very little research on parents' attitudes regarding digital parenting. As a result, it's critical to comprehend parents' positive and negative attitudes toward digital parenting. The findings of this research study can have practical implications for parents, educators, and policymakers. For example, the study can provide insights into how parents can better manage their children's technology use, and how educators can design effective programs that incorporate technology while also promoting healthy development in children. Policymakers can also use the findings to inform regulations and guidelines that protect children from potential harm associated with technology use. Overall, this research study is significant because it provides valuable insights into how parents are navigating the challenges of raising children in the digital age, and can help inform strategies to support healthy development in children

Aim: The goal of this study is to learn about parents' attitudes toward digital parenting in today's world. It also intends to determine whether digital technology makes parenting more difficult or easier or changing life styles of parents.

METHODOLOGY: -

The study focused on mothers (n= 400) who had children under the age of 14 years in Kottayam district, Kerala, as the target population. To collect data on their attitudes towards digital parenting, an online questionnaire was employed. The questionnaire comprised 25 items organized in a five-point Likert-style scale, divided into three-item subscales. These subscales were used to evaluate if the use of digital technology makes parenting more challenging, simpler, or necessitates parents to alter their lifestyles.

The study utilized a five-point Likert-style rating scale to assess participants' responses to statements, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Before administering the questionnaire, it was reviewed and validated by experts, and demographic information was collected, including age, time spent on social media, and the purpose of using digital devices. The questionnaire was pretested, modified, and clarified based on feedback. Data were collected in January 2021 through a self-administered online questionnaire, resulting in a high response rate of 98%.

Data Analysis:

The collected data was carefully checked for completeness, and inconsistencies were corrected. The statistical package SPSS version 20 was used to capture and analyze the data. Descriptive analysis was conducted using frequencies, mean, median, mode, and standard deviation for all questionnaire items. Attitudinal statement responses were re-coded to a 5-point Likert scale, with coding values assigned as 5 = strongly agree, 4 = agree, 3 = neutral, 2 = disagree, and 1 = strongly disagree.

RESULT

The research study found that 46% of the participating mothers were between the ages of 30-49, and only 14% were above the age of 50. In terms of educational status, the majority (37%) had completed at least primary education, while a small minority (2.5%) were literate only. In terms of family income, the majority (40%) fell in the income group of Rs 15,000 and above, while the least majority (14.5%) fell in the income group of Rs.10,001 – 15,000/month. Most of the participating mothers (76.5%) were from rural communities, lived in nuclear families (83%), and were unemployed (74%).

Parent's Attitude towards Digital Parenting

The research study drew three main conclusions. Firstly, the attitudes of parents towards digital technology can create challenges for parenting. Secondly, parents' attitudes towards digital technology can also make parenting more convenient and straightforward. Finally, the study identified that parents hold certain perceptions regarding the impact of digital technology on their daily lives.

The overall attitude towards digital parenting:

According to the study's findings, parents were aware of the impact of digital technology on their parenting practices. Digital parenting, which involves supervising and regulating children's digital device usage, can lead to both advantages and disadvantages for parenting in the digital world. Among the participating mothers, 57% agreed or strongly agreed that digital technology made parenting more challenging, while 49% believed it made parenting easier. Furthermore, 68% of the mothers acknowledged that digital technology has an impact on their daily lives. (Figure1)

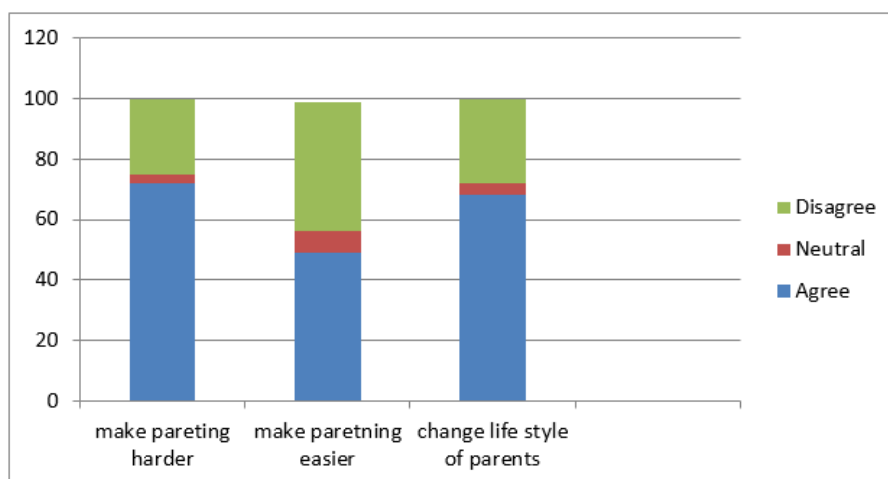


Fig 1 : Overall attitude towards parents towards digital parenting

Parents' attitudes toward digital technology, which makes parenting more difficult

The study found that many parents have concerns about the impact of digital technology on their children. The majority of parents (78%) worry that their child may become addicted to digital technology. Additionally, 76% of parents feel pressured to buy expensive digital devices for their children due to technological advancements. Most parents (over 90%) agree that digital technology provides children with access to or exposure to things at a young age. Furthermore, 74% of parents believe that digital media makes it harder for them to discipline their children's behaviour.

The study found that a significant percentage of parents face challenges in digital parenting. About 75% of parents believe that digital parenting is difficult due to children's exposure to age-inappropriate content, while over 70% agree that access to violent content online affects children's behavior and makes parenting more challenging. Additionally, more than half of parents (54%) feel that dealing with cyberbullying and protecting children's digital privacy in the online world is a challenge. The study also found that advances in digital technology have reduced family time, with 63% of parents agreeing to this statement. Furthermore, 70% of parents agreed that digital parenting is difficult as children tend to hide their online activities. Lastly, 66% of parents agreed that keeping up with the rapidly changing digital world is making digital parenting more difficult than ever. (Table 1)

Table 1 : Parents' attitudes toward digital technology, which makes parenting more difficult

		N=400											
Criteria		SA		A		N		DA		SDA			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1	Concern about Children's digital addiction	184	46	128	32	12	3	60	15	16	4		
2	Forced to purchase expensive digital devices	192	48	112	38	8	2	64	16	24	6		
3	DT gives access/exposure to things at a younger age	328	82	44	11	4	1	16	4	8	2		
4	Difficult to discipline the digital children.	196	49	72	18	24	6	80	20	28	7		
5	Children exposed to inappropriate online content for age.	208	52	96	24	8	2	72	18	16	4		
6	A child views violent content on the internet, which influences their behavior.	152	38	144	36	16	4	56	14	32	8		
7	The digital world minimizes family time.	100	25	152	38	16	4	112	28	20	5		
8	children have a greater tendency to hide their online activities from parents	144	36	136	34	12	3	68	17	40	10		
9	Parents must be aware of cyberbullying and protect their children's digital privacy.	104	26	112	28	24	6	108	27	52	13		
10	lack of time and knowledge to update with the rapidly changing digital world	136	34	128	32	12	3	76	19	48	12		
		1744	44	1124	28	136	3	712	18	284	7		

Parents' attitudes toward digital technology, make parenting easier.

The research study showed that most parents have varying opinions and beliefs about the impact of digital technology on parenting. While 75% of parents believe that digital technology provides access to global progress, only 27% agree that it provides more parenting advice or information. Half of the parents agree that the digital world allows them to pursue their children's hobbies and interests, while 44% disagree. The study also revealed that parents are divided on whether the digital world simplifies digital parenting, with 50% agreeing and 50% disagreeing. Furthermore, more than half of the parents disagree that the digital world helps children learn effective social skills, develop healthy friendships, or aid in the development of creativity. However, the majority of parents (73%) agreed that digital technology has made it easier for parents and children to communicate, which in turn facilitates digital parenting. (Table 2)

Table 2: Parents' attitudes toward digital technology, make parenting easier
N=400

	Criteria	SA		A		N		DA		SDA	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Facilitates access to global progress.	216	54	60	15	32	8	56	14	36	9
2	Parents can get more parenting advice or information due to the digital world.	56	14	182	23	28	7	184	46	40	10
3	The digital world enables parents to pursue their children's hobbies and interests.	48	12	144	36	32	8	84	21	92	23
4	The digital world keeps children occupied.	52	13	128	32	44	11	84	21	92	23
5	Children learn effective social skills	64	16	100	25	28	7	176	44	32	8
6	Can develop healthy friendships among children	20	5	60	15	52	13	132	33	136	34
7	Exposure to technology aids in the development of creativity in children.	48	12	120	30	44	11	96	24	92	23
8	Easily get in contact with child	248	62	44	11	8	2	64	16	36	9
		752	23	838	26	239	7	876	27	520	16

Parents' attitude towards the effect of digital technology on their daily life

The study shows that the majority of parents believe digital technology has negative effects on their daily lives. Specifically, 80% of parents agreed that they spend too much time on their smartphones and social media, and 67% agreed that digital technology has reduced their reading habits. Furthermore, 63% of parents agreed that digital technology has reduced the time they spend with their families and children. Despite these concerns, 61% of parents still express a desire to share their family's information and photos on social media. Additionally, the study found that 77% of parents reported feeling pressured to use digital devices while dining with family, and 74% admit to being easily distracted by their phones or other devices while spending time with family. Lastly, 70% of parents agree that they are unable to be role models for their children when it comes to digital device use.(Table 3)

Table 3: Parents' attitude towards the effect of digital technology on their daily life
N= 400

	Criteria	SA		A		N		DA		SDA	
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1	Too much time with smartphone and social media	132	33	184	46	8	2	56	14	20	5
2	Declined book or newspaper reading habits	92	23	176	44	8	2	84	21	40	10
3	Less time with family and children	116	29	96	24	24	6	88	22	76	19
4	Interested to share photos, videos, or information about the child and family	92	23	152	38	8	2	136	34	12	3
5	Using digital devices while dining at home or out with family at a restaurant	52	13	248	62	16	4	48	12	36	9
6	Distracted by phone or other devices while spending time with children	88	22	208	52	24	6	48	12	32	8
7	Not able to act as a role model for children in digital device use	132	33	144	36	8	2	96	24	20	5
		704	25	1208	43	96	4	556	20	236	8

DISCUSSION

The study examined parents' perceptions and approaches to parenting in the digital age and how it affects their lives. The findings indicate that a majority of mothers think that digital technology can make parenting more challenging, but almost half of them think that it simplifies parenting. Furthermore, a significant percentage of mothers (68%) agreed that digital technology has an influence on their daily routine.

The "Parenting in the Age of Digital Technology: A National Survey" by Common Sense Media (2016)⁽⁸⁾ aimed to explore parents' attitudes towards digital technology and parenting. The study found that the majority of parents agreed that digital technology provided access to global progress. However, half of the parents disagreed that the digital world makes parenting easier. Additionally, the study found that most parents spend too much time on their smartphones and social media every day, and many agreed that digital technology had reduced their reading habits.

The Pew Research Centre (2015)⁽³⁾ surveyed over 2,000 parents to understand their attitudes and behaviours towards digital technology and parenting. The study found that 65% of parents were concerned about their children interacting with strangers online, and 60% were worried about their children being exposed to inappropriate content. Additionally, 43% of parents felt overwhelmed by the amount of information available to them about parenting, and 64% believed that parenting is harder today than it was 20 years ago due to digital technology.

Van der Goot et al. (2015)⁽⁹⁾ conducted a study to investigate the impact of parental attitudes and mediation on children's digital media use. The study included over 1,000 parents and found that positive parental attitudes towards digital

technology were associated with greater use of it by their children. The study also showed that parental mediation was crucial in shaping children's digital media use and reducing the likelihood of negative online experiences. Parents who were more involved in their children's digital media use had children who were less likely to experience negative online incidents

Parents' attitudes toward digital technology can create challenges in parenting.

The current study is consistent with a previous exploration by Nikken and De Haan (2015)⁽¹⁰⁾, which revealed that parents with children up to eight years old encounter diverse difficulties in regulating their children's use of media.⁽¹¹⁾ In agreement with that, in the study conducted by the Centre for Media and Human Development School of Communication at Northwestern University on parental issues caused by technological advancements, the vast majority of parents (70 %) believe that technology does not make parenting easier, while only 29 % believe that it does.⁽¹²⁾

Correspondingly, 76 % of parents strongly agree that advancements in digital technology have forced them to buy expensive new digital devices for their children or family members. This agrees with the survey conducted by Common Sense Media(2020)⁽¹³⁾ more than half of American children (53%) have a smartphone by the age of 11, and almost 70% have own one by the age of 12. The price of smartphone and computer programs (apps), as well as the possibility of in-app purchases, frequently influence parents' app selection and download for their children (Marsh et al., 2017)⁽¹⁴⁾

Parents' attitudes towards the impact of digital games on their young children suggest that it is challenging to categorize digital parenting because of the accessibility and exposure that digital technology provides to children at a young age. The study also supports the findings of Rideout (2019)⁽¹⁵⁾ that exposing children to more technological experiences has numerous benefits. As more children, known as "digital natives," are born and raised in environments with widespread access to new digital technologies, their interactions with digital technologies become more diverse, beginning as early as infancy due to the growing prevalence of touchscreen devices among younger children, also known as the "touch generation."⁽¹⁶⁾ 67 % of parents agree that the influence of digital media on children's behaviour makes it more challenging for parents to discipline their children than in the past, while 27 % disagree. This observation agrees with Shreya Gupta (2021)⁽¹⁷⁾ which was similar to that investigated in this study. Parenting has never been simple, but in the digital age, it is proving to be one of the most difficult challenges that parents and families have ever encountered.

The study discovered that approximately 75% of parents find digital parenting challenging because their children watch videos that are not suitable for their age, while 22% of parents disagree. Given the vast amount of content available on the internet, it is inevitable that children will come across inappropriate material that is not age appropriate. These findings align with a previous survey conducted in the UK on secondary school students' attitudes towards online pornography, which revealed that 63% of teenagers consider accidentally encountering inappropriate content online to be a concern. Additionally, what is deemed inappropriate for children varies based on their age and level of maturity.⁽¹⁸⁾

The study's findings reveal that over 70% of parents believe that children's exposure to violent online content alters their behavior and makes parenting more challenging. Only 22% of parents agree that online content has no impact on their children's behavior. The Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago conducted a survey of nearly 3,000 parents of teenagers to examine the influence of social media on children's behavior. The survey showed that more than 50% of parents are highly worried about the changes in adolescent behavior.⁽¹⁹⁾

Another key finding in this study was that 63% of parents acknowledge that digital technology advancements have decreased the amount of time families spend together, making parenting more challenging. Abraham B (2020)⁽²⁰⁾ found that almost half of adolescents do not believe that social media weakens their relationship with family members. Zhou, Zhang,⁽²¹⁾ support this idea by stating that digital technologies have allowed separated families and friends to stay connected, fostering strong family bonds and enabling children to maintain friendships. Jafar Abbas (2019)⁽²²⁾ asserts that social networking sites are an effective means of bridging geographical distances.

The present study revealed that 70% of parents find digital parenting challenging because their children tend to conceal their online activities from them. A similar finding was reported by McAfee, the largest dedicated security technology company globally, who conducted research on the online habits, interests, hobbies, and lifestyles of American teenagers. The study discovered that 70% of teens keep their online behavior hidden from their parents⁽²³⁾. The Global Kids Online (GKO) project⁽²⁴⁾, which interviews and surveys parents and children aged 9-17 from various continents to assess children's online access, skills, opportunities, risks, and safety, as well as their parents' protective actions and skills, revealed that children are less likely to seek help when they encounter internet-related problems⁽²⁵⁾

Over half of parents contend that digital parenting is challenging because they must be vigilant about cyber bullying and safeguard their children's digital privacy in the online world, while the remainder do not perceive these as difficult tasks. A cross-sectional study conducted among 1249 Saudi parents to determine their views on cyber bullying indicated that approximately 64% of parents strongly believed that cyber bullying causes psychological harm, and 78% of parents stated that it is crucial to monitor their child's internet usage.⁽²⁶⁾

The study found that the majority of parents (66%) feel that digital parenting has become more challenging than ever because they lack the time and knowledge to keep up with the constantly evolving digital world. On the other hand, 31% of parents disagreed with this statement. Research conducted by EU Kids Online,⁽²⁷⁾ which involved 9-16-year-old children and their parents from 25 different countries, revealed that parents are often unaware that their children are

exposed to online risks. For instance, 40% of parents whose children have viewed sexual content online do not know that their child has seen it, while 56% of parents whose children have received hurtful or abusive messages online are not aware of it. Similarly, 52% of parents of children who received sexual messages are unaware of the situation. Although these risks affect only a small number of children, parents' uncertainty is high. ⁽²⁸⁾

Parents' attitudes toward digital technology, make parenting easier.

In line with this finding, the study suggests that parents perceive digital technology as a means of accessing global information and obtaining more guidance on parenting. A 2020 Pew Research study⁽³⁾, found that 30% of parents agree that parenting has become easier due to technological advancements, increased access to information and advice, and the ability to monitor their children more easily. Digital technology also enables children to use various media sources from around the world, including international news in local languages and English translations, for analysis and evaluation. The perception of parents regarding the benefits of digital technology for their children varies. Nearly half of the parents agreed that the digital world provides avenues for parents to explore their children's hobbies and interests, while 44% disagreed. However, the Common Sense Census (2020)⁽¹³⁾ reported that only 42% of parents believed that technology exposure helps their children develop creativity. Half of the parents in the current study believed that the digital world helps keep children engaged and makes digital parenting easier. To compare these findings, the results will be compared with those of a peer-reviewed survey conducted in 2020.⁽²⁹⁾ In that survey, a majority of parents (82%) reported that their child used digital devices to play music or gather information (66%). A smaller percentage of parents (47%) acknowledged that their child used voice-activated assistants to listen to jokes or play games (30%).

The study revealed that only 52% of parents believed that the digital world helps children acquire effective social skills, thereby simplifying digital parenting, while 64% thought that children can establish healthy friendships in the digital world. According to the Ofcom Media Use and Attitude Report 20-21⁽³¹⁾ child's online presence helped them build and maintain friendships. The Common Sense Census (2020)⁽¹³⁾ found that 34% of parents believe media use had a positive impact on their child's social skills. The way people communicate has changed dramatically in recent years, from direct face-to-face conversations to simple messaging. This has significant implications for children, as they may develop poor interpersonal skills as they grow older. People who spend most of their time in front of screens may have limited experience of good human interaction, which could lead to a loss of confidence. This can significantly affect a child's professional success if they grow up in such a technological environment.⁽³⁰⁾

According to the study, a significant majority of 73% of parents believed that digital technology has made communication between parents and children easier, thus facilitating digital parenting. Digital connections have revolutionized language learning, especially among students, who can now connect with native speakers and their peers worldwide. This technology enables them to practice their language skills with ease, visit classrooms in foreign countries, and make meaningful human connections with people from different parts of the world. (Asia Society, 2019)⁽³³⁾

Parents' attitude towards the effect of digital technology on their daily life

Eighty percent of parents acknowledged that they spend excessive time on their smartphones and social media platforms every day, and 67% of them agreed that digital technology has decreased their reading habits for books and newspapers. The advent of the internet, smart boards, tablets, and e-readers has transformed the way we read and learn. A study conducted on 1247 individuals regarding the impact of modern technology on reading and information processing revealed that 41% of people still favour printed copies of books, whereas 44% have choose either an e-book or a printed book based on various reasons.⁽³¹⁾

With digital devices taking up more of their time, a significant portion of parents (63%) feel that they have less time available to spend with their families and children. Although they may seem to be participating in activities with their children or spending quality time with their families, half of their focus is frequently pulled away by emails or other digital diversions. Bringing work home is a primary contributor to broken relationships, as it diminishes the opportunity for intimacy by consuming time ⁽¹⁵⁾

Out of the parents surveyed, 61% expressed their desire to share family-related media, such as photos or videos, on social media. A Peer review survey⁽³⁵⁾ revealed that among parents who use social media, a majority of 82% have uploaded similar content related to their children on these platforms.

According to the study, 77% of parents admitted that the use of digital technology compelled them to use digital devices while having meals with their families, either at home or in a restaurant. Having at least one meal together is an important aspect of maintaining good relationships among family members. However, the habit of eating together is being disrupted due to the increasing use of technology. Even if family members sit together to eat, their attention is often divided between their food and their digital devices. The significance of kitchens and cooking has reduced significantly as fast-food delivery is just a phone call away. In addition, children's preference for computer games over outdoor sports is contributing to the problem of poor eating habits.⁽³²⁾ 74% of parents admit to being easily distracted by their phones or other devices while spending time with their children and family. A peer-reviewed survey⁽³³⁾ found that 68%, said they were distracted by their smartphones while spending quality time with their children. However, in a Commonsense survey⁽¹³⁾, 60% of parents whose children use screen media said their child spends the "right amount of time" on screens. According to the study, 70% of parents admitted that they are unable to serve as role models for their children when it comes to the use of digital devices. To be effective role models for their children, parents should practice positive digital

parenting. Parents must follow the same rules they set for their children because children learn by example. Parents can also help their children develop a balanced perspective on technology by weighing its pros and cons. This way, parents can act as a role model in their children's lives and set them up for success in the digital world.⁽³⁴⁾

CONCLUSION

The present study discusses the varied attitudes of parents towards digital parenting and its impact on daily life. Many parents believe that digital technology makes parenting more difficult and has a negative impact on healthy habits. It is important for parents to set a positive example for their children and evaluate the pros and cons of technology. Schools are also recognizing the negative impacts of excessive technology use and are promoting outdoor activities. While technology has made life easier, it is important not to forsake human values and to encourage children to be more active and creative.

In conclusion, this research sheds light on the perceptions and approaches of parents towards parenting in the digital age. The findings indicate that while many parents recognize the benefits of technology for their children's education and entertainment, they also feel that digital devices can have a negative impact on family relationships and children's development. Parents adopt various strategies to manage their children's use of technology, including setting limits and modeling healthy tech habits themselves. However, the study highlights the need for more resources and support for parents to navigate the challenges of parenting in the digital age. Overall, this research contributes to the ongoing conversation about technology use and parenting, and provides insights for parents, educators, and policymakers on how to promote healthy tech habits and foster positive family relationships in the digital age.

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