
THE DILEMMAS AND PARENTING STRATEGIES OF WORKING PARENTS IN THE DIGITAL AGE: THE ROLES AND CHALLENGES OF PARENTS IN RAISING CHILDREN IN AN ERA OF INCREASINGLY ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY

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Abstract

As technology evolves, so do the concerns about children's dependency on gadgets and the potential behavioral issues, such as aggression, that arise when devices are restricted. This research explores how digital media and technology impact parent-child relationships in the modern age, focusing on how parents manage their children's use of technology. By adopting a qualitative approach, this research examines the phenomenon of Intimate Surveillance, which describes how parents balance monitoring and guiding their children in the digital world with a focus on love and care, rather than authoritarian control. In this era, digital parenting requires a shift from traditional control toward understanding how children form their identities, values, and meaning through interactions in the digital space. The study highlights the complexities faced by parents in navigating the digital landscape, as they seek to maintain a balance between freedom and discipline. The findings emphasize that parents are no longer just authorities but partners in guiding their children's digital experiences. The concept of Intimate Surveillance shows how parents act as both protectors and facilitators, helping children make responsible decisions in the digital world. The research underscores the importance of open communication, emotional support, and digital literacy as essential components of modern parenting. As children grow and engage more with technology, parents must adapt, ensuring that they foster a healthy, balanced relationship with technology that supports their children's development while minimizing risks like addiction or exposure to inappropriate content.

INTRODUCTION

Technology is very powerful and can either enhance or harm children's lives from the moment they are born, even for parents raising very young children (Astuti et al., 2022; Das, 2023; Davis, 2023; Nansen, 2023). The comfort and additional opportunities provided by technology are present in many parts of life, but there are also risks of negative development and even technological addiction in children. Parents today are very concerned about mobile phones and children's use of them (Akter et al., 2022; Gür & Türel, 2022; Lerner et al., 2022; Rose et al., 2022; Shah & Phadke, 2023).

When access to such devices is restricted, children often display strong and frequent emotional reactions, including anger, aggression, and rage. This is significant because, in today's digital world, the rise of digital media and communication technologies influences

many people's experiences of themselves and others, shaping social and emotional interactions, as experienced by both children and parents. These changes are occurring in contemporary history: today, the speed of technological development in communication is faster than ever before. In this era of information and technology, it is no longer just a way of thinking but a way of life and mentality. PN Anggraeni et al. (2022) found that over the past decade, extraordinary advances in communication technology and mobility have greatly accelerated human activities compared to previous periods, representing a leap that has never occurred before.

Over the past ten years, since the rise of the internet into the modern era, work, education, social life, and family dynamics have all been transformed (Akour & Alenezi, 2022; Deroncele-Acosta et al., 2023; Hanandini, 2024; Kaputa et al., 2022). The internet and social media, along with new and modified applications, have reshaped daily life and continue to drive ongoing changes. For each individual, there is both a digital and a physical world that coexist. People construct a kind of digital boundary that continues to expand, influencing where and how they live, regardless of their origins or physical limitations. Today's generation of children uses devices such as mobile phones, tablets, and computers extensively, often from a very young age, with many owning at least one electronic gadget. In addition to integrating into daily life, digital devices influence their surrounding environment, making children active members of a highly technological society.

The learning experiences enabled by technological advancement allow education to become more personalized and focused, extending beyond core curricula. However, this also raises new concerns about how children should be treated and guided. At the same time, this rapid expansion highlights the importance of effective parenting at home, which must now be more parent-centered. This does not mean that parents' authority cannot be exercised; rather, it emphasizes the complexity of guiding children in a digital environment. Even if children spend excessive time online, it does not mean they are engaging in meaningful or balanced activities.

Parents often report difficulty using technology to positively influence their children's emotions and behavior, particularly on social media, and struggle to help children develop a healthy sense of self online. While technology offers valuable experiences, it remains the responsibility of parents to guide children in becoming responsible digital users and thoughtful consumers of technology. Educators also play a crucial role by teaching values, ethics, and digital citizenship, alongside fostering moral character through character-centered curricula, especially for adolescents.

Excessive screen use among children and adolescents negatively affects physical, psychological, social, cognitive, and environmental development (Aslan, 2019). Strong parenting and consistent monitoring are required to prevent children from developing addiction and dependence on devices, which can delay emotional development and impair their ability to regulate emotions in the future. Today, nearly everyone owns a smartphone, particularly in urban areas. One of the most significant social issues is our dependence on these devices, which can reduce emotional availability for friends and family. Young children who frequently spend time online tend to have shorter attention spans and lower levels of social behavior. Research shows that excessive screen time can harm brain development, affecting emotional regulation, attention, and self-control.

Children who are not engaged with screens may still develop negative emotional responses such as anger or frustration. Parents therefore face a dilemma: they do not want their children to be exposed to the dangers of excessive screen time, yet technology has become an essential and lifelong part of children's lives. Parents aim to guide their children effectively, but this requires redefining parenting approaches and recognizing children's digital maturity. This situation can lead to family conflicts, particularly when disagreements arise over control, time allocation, and device usage. Children may also lose trust in their parents if restrictions are perceived as excessive or overly controlling.

In this era, digital literacy is essential. It involves understanding how technology functions and how to use it effectively within the family. Young people must develop digital literacy, but parents must also act as educators and role models. Children learn by observing parental behavior; therefore, parents must demonstrate intelligence, ethics, and responsible technology use. Parents should not only set rules but also become positive role models and, when appropriate, healthy digital influencers for their children.

Prameswari et al. (2021) suggest that parents should follow technological trends in child development, as we live in a digital era that requires continuous learning and adaptation. Proportional supervision and educational control of technology use should be promoted. Evidence also shows that children may display aggressive behavior when device use is not effectively and consistently regulated by parents. This highlights the importance of communication studies, particularly interpersonal communication within families. Communication between parents and children involves not only speaking but also empathy, emotional understanding, active listening, and adapting to the child's situation to support psychological well-being.

In modern technology-driven families, open, respectful, and gentle communication is essential for achieving a harmonious home environment. Closed and authoritarian communication styles tend to provoke negative attitudes and resistance in children. Therefore, parents must adapt their communication methods according to the child's personality and context. In this environment, parents act not only as supervisors but also as flexible learning facilitators who adapt to changing dynamics, embrace innovation, and provide guidance in technological matters. Technology should no longer be seen solely as a threat but as a tool that can support growth, provided that children learn to think critically about the digital world and parents are capable of teaching creative and productive technology use. Parenting in the digital era, like in previous eras, must balance parental control and child autonomy.

This balance affects not only online behavior but also face-to-face communication. Although technology is beneficial, poor digital literacy can lead to issues such as addiction, social isolation, and declining relationships within the household. Therefore, a clearer understanding of digital literacy and constructive family discussions is essential. Parents should act not only as regulators but also as companions and partners in their children's learning journey. This reinforces the idea that younger generations can become smarter, wiser, and more responsible citizens in a rapidly evolving digital era if they develop strong moral values and analytical skills in relation to technology.

This study aims to explore the dilemmas and parenting strategies of working parents in the digital age, focusing on how they manage the intersection of technology and child-rearing. The research offers novelty by addressing the concept of Intimate Surveillance within the

context of digital parenting, a concept that has not been widely explored in prior literature. It will also investigate how parents adapt their approaches to foster a balance between freedom and discipline in their children's digital activities. By examining how parents navigate the challenges of digital technology, this study provides new insights into the evolving nature of parenting in the digital age.

The benefits of this research are twofold. First, it offers valuable insights into the changing nature of parent–child relationships in the context of technology, contributing to the development of more effective parenting strategies in the digital world. Second, it provides a framework for parents to engage in Intimate Surveillance, a practice that fosters both emotional connection and responsible use of technology, helping children navigate the complexities of digital spaces in a healthy and informed manner. The findings can also serve as a resource for educators and policymakers who aim to support families in managing the challenges of parenting in the digital era.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used a qualitative research design because it was considered the most appropriate approach for understanding lived experiences and the meanings derived from interactions between parents and children in the digital realm. Therefore, the aim of this study was to document various parenting practices that emerged within social environments undergoing technological transformation. The research process involved interviews and non-participatory observations to ensure a comprehensive analysis of digital parenting. Several interviews were conducted using Google Forms with open-ended questions, allowing respondents—particularly parents—to share their experiences, perspectives, and strategies related to digital parenting. A qualitative approach was chosen to explore underlying meanings associated with parents' everyday use of technology.

According to Niam, MF, et al. (2024), qualitative research is interdisciplinary and can be applied in fields such as sociology, anthropology, and psychology. This approach enabled a deeper understanding of the importance of parental strategies in shaping child development in the context of rapid digitalization. Participant sampling was conducted using a purposive sampling strategy, with participants selected based on specific criteria, such as being parents engaged in digital-era parenting. This method facilitated the collection of detailed and relevant information from individuals with sufficient knowledge of the research topic. The study also employed non-participant observation, in which the researcher did not engage directly in participants' activities but instead conducted passive observation.

This approach was consistent with Romdona, S., et al. (2025), as it supported objectivity and neutrality in data collection. The study was further supported by a review of relevant literature to validate the field data against existing theories and prior research. Data were analyzed using inductive thematic analysis by examining interview transcripts and identifying patterns of meaning within the data. The analyzed findings were then integrated with relevant theoretical frameworks to provide a deeper understanding of how parenting styles influenced child development when children were exposed to a rapidly evolving digital environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Parenting as Forms of Intimate Surveillance

Of all the findings, parenting is often assumed to have inherent properties. It is felt that in the age of digital technology, parenting, in a sense, involves controlling children's behavior and monitoring them, but it also means realizing and conceptualizing digital technology, as well as understanding children's perceptions of digital media and technology. This transition describes how parents not only manage behavior but also become aware of who their children are and how children think about themselves, especially as they negotiate and communicate within digital spaces.

Data patterns show that families are also creating new dynamics in their relationships with technology, especially regarding levels of emotional attachment and shared presence. This has changed over time; above all, interaction is communicated through both physical contact and mediated communication, where intimacy is shaped by proximity through technology (sending messages, video calls, and shared digital engagement).

Thus, technology can become a source of generational differences, but there are various types of parents who try to remain flexible and adapt to these changes. They do their best to understand when their children are online, what they are doing online, and how to respond with care, guidance, and a sense of responsibility. This approach shows how parents adapt to new digital technologies and how much they value emotional integrity and moral development when engaging in digital life.

These conditions align with the concept of Intimate Surveillance proposed by Amanda Sinanan and Larissa Hjorth (2018) in *The Oxford Handbook of Digital Media Sociology*. In their work, they explain that every family member not only becomes an observer but also participates in "supervision" practices that form intimate surveillance within digital family life. This means that in modern families, both parents and children participate in and support each other in a personal, emotionally rich process of supervision in digital spaces. Thus, parenting in the digital age is no longer only about protecting children from technological risks but also about building new forms of emotional closeness through digital media as a means of communication and expression of love.

A. Technology as a Space of Family Proximity

According to Suryani, I., et al. (2025), generational differences in technology are a common obstacle that creates communication gaps in society, which can not only trigger conflict but also cause misunderstandings. Several findings reveal that digital technology stimulates children's cognitive and social development. Parents also view digital devices as tools for learning new languages, trying new things, exploring new worlds, and introducing children to a broader global perspective. One respondent (W01) reported that their children use YouTube as a tool for learning foreign languages and exploring new ideas.

Similarly, another respondent (W07) stated that technology supports their child in becoming more creative and responsive to learning, and that their child engages more effectively with school-based learning. However, if technology is a means for children's development, parents must also play a role in how devices are used. This is because technology carries risks; without proper knowledge, it can negatively affect cognitive and social development. Parental intervention in children's behavior is not only an act of control but also

a form of deep emotional and moral involvement within digital parenting. In this situation, parents not only share in children's activities but also shape how children engage with technology by minimizing risks while actively supporting positive use (through explanation and guidance) to build an inclusive and beneficial digital culture.

Parental supervision helps children understand that technology is more than just a source of entertainment; it can be used wisely, with awareness and purpose. In these interactions, the parent-child relationship extends beyond traditional relational aspects into digital spaces that are now embedded in everyday life. In relation to intimate surveillance, this form of supervision in the digital realm can be seen as a practice of expressing love through attention, presence, and active involvement in children's digital lives. Rather than strict control, emphasis is placed on emotional closeness and the aspiration to create a healthy and enjoyable digital experience for children.

As noted above, technology has multiple roles in modern families. On one hand, it helps children learn, develop their talents, and explore new worlds. On the other hand, it creates opportunities for emotional bonding within families through cross-generational interaction in digital environments. In doing so, parents become supporters not only of children's well-being but also of responsible and ethical technology use. Parents must act as guides and role models, demonstrating how technology use should align with positive moral and social values.

B. Anxiety and Risk as Part of Intimate Surveillance Relationships

Many respondents are aware of the positive attributes created by digital technology but also express concern about its impact, especially on children. Children are particularly vulnerable to age-inappropriate content. Exposure to various types of online material—much of which is easily accessible and difficult to control—can facilitate imitation of behaviors seen on social media. Some children show emotional changes, such as increased restlessness, difficulty managing stress, and reduced concentration. One respondent (W05) noted that exposure to online videos increased their child's levels of anger and aggression.

Another respondent (W02) highlighted concerns about digital advertising and algorithms, which continue to appear even when devices are set to child-friendly modes. This demonstrates that even relatively child-safe systems cannot fully prevent exposure to harmful content. Family anxiety in this context can be linked to the idea of intimate surveillance, representing a parenting style rooted in emotional connection facilitated through digital monitoring. The concern is not only about children losing behavioral control but also about parents' moral responsibility to protect them from ambiguous digital environments where values, norms, and threats are often unclear.

Tracking online activity, analyzing usage data, and controlling screen time go beyond technical monitoring; they represent a form of attentive care aimed at protecting children's psychological and moral development in an era of overwhelming digital information.

Respondent (W09) observed that excessive device use makes children more emotionally reactive and less capable of handling real-world situations. They emphasized that early education is crucial in helping children understand values, ethics, and responsibility in technology use. Early digital education acts as a preventive measure, equipping children with the ability to filter information and navigate virtual environments ethically. Likewise, Sinanan and Hjorth (2018) emphasize that intimate surveillance often involves ambivalence: it

simultaneously offers security and closeness while also generating anxiety. Parents feel the need to “be present” in their children’s digital lives, both directly and indirectly, to help them navigate safely.

C. Dilemma between Protection and Freedom

Parental supervision helps children recognize that technology is not only for entertainment but can be used responsibly and meaningfully. However, technology also presents risks, such as exposure to inappropriate content, cyberbullying, device addiction, digital alienation, and reduced face-to-face interaction. This internal conflict was expressed clearly by respondent (W03), who wanted their child to become technologically skilled and adaptable but also worried about the dangers of easily accessible online content.

Digital parenting practices emerge from careful negotiation between trust and supervision, as well as freedom and restriction—balancing children’s independence with parental reassurance. Intimate surveillance is shaped by love but also involves power dynamics between care and control. It is inherently dualistic: rooted in affection yet requiring ongoing management.

Rather than being authoritarian, digital supervision can become more sensitive and relational. This type of supervision can take the form of open discussions, context-sensitive advice, and moral guidance. Parents—especially mothers—often strive to balance allowing children independence in digital spaces while maintaining family values such as politeness, responsibility, and empathy.

Digital parenting is not merely about screen-time management or content control; it is about raising children with critical thinking skills and digital ethics while maintaining strong emotional bonds. Sinanan and Hjorth (2018) conclude that paradox is inherent in intimate online relationships. Parental supervision should not be seen as enforcing control but as a form of digital care—an expression of attention, trust, and emotional connection. Parenting in the digital world reflects complex, layered relationships that transcend time and space, ultimately grounded in love, responsibility, and protection.

D. Parenting Strategies as Intimate Surveillance Practices

The question then becomes: what strategies can guide everyday intimate surveillance practices? Parents face the challenge of raising children in an always-online environment and must adapt accordingly. This involves adjusting social and emotional parenting behaviors to balance children’s engagement with technology and their development as moral individuals.

Such strategies include limiting screen time, co-viewing videos or online games, and fostering open discussions about the benefits and risks of technology. One respondent (W04) stated that they limit children’s playtime and ensure their presence during technology use. Another respondent (W06) emphasized spending more time talking, walking, and engaging in offline activities with children, as well as limiting phone use and checking browsing history when necessary.

These approaches reflect a more democratic, reflective, and participatory model of parental supervision. Parents not only set rules but also explain the reasons behind them. Supervision becomes a form of moral and emotional education, helping children learn to use technology responsibly.

Open and honest communication between parents and children is central to this approach, fostering trust, empathy, and mutual respect. Another respondent (W08) highlighted the importance of direct interaction and open communication with teenagers when using smartphones, while still allowing limited freedom for exploration.

This model shows that supervision is not solely about increasing control but also about expressing care through emotional sensitivity. By providing security and emotional support, parents strengthen their bonds with children in the context of modern technological development.

Based on Intimate Surveillance Theory, this framework illustrates how families create a “soft” monitoring approach that does not violate children’s autonomy but instead fulfills moral, ethical, and digital responsibilities. Such supervision reflects the need for freedom within a safe and communicative family environment. For children, this becomes a way for parents to express love and protection while nurturing positive emotional development in digital contexts.

Ultimately, reflective monitoring strategies demonstrate an evolving understanding of digital parenting. Parents must continuously learn about technology, ethics, and emotional engagement in mediated environments. Families that prioritize open discussion and a humanistic perspective create not only a supervisory framework but also a learning environment where digital literacy, social responsibility, empathy, and emotional intelligence are developed. Therefore, the concept of intimate surveillance evolves from mere behavioral monitoring into a form of care characterized by trust, emotional attachment, and close family relationships in the digital age.

CONCLUSION

The findings indicate that parenting in the digital communication era is characterized by transition, tension, and adaptation, as parents navigate evolving relationships with their children in increasingly mediated environments. Digital parenting extends beyond monitoring or limiting screen time, requiring parents to act not only as authority figures but also as partners and guides who foster children’s emotional, ethical, and cognitive development while ensuring responsible engagement with technology. While technology offers opportunities for learning, creativity, and connection, it also presents risks such as addiction, inappropriate content exposure, and social disconnection, reinforcing the importance of intimate surveillance as a model of care-based, collaborative guidance rather than strict control.

This shift is particularly complex for working mothers, who must balance protection and autonomy, reflecting a deeper relational transformation rather than parental inadequacy. Consequently, digital parenting increasingly emphasizes empathy, open communication, and digital literacy, with parents modeling responsible behavior to support children’s independence and moral development. Future research should further explore how diverse family structures, socioeconomic contexts, and cultural differences shape the practice of intimate surveillance, particularly in relation to long-term child development outcomes and the evolving demands placed on working parents in digitally saturated environments.

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