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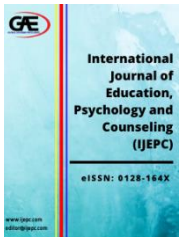

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GADGETS, PARENTS AND CHILDREN: NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE IN FAMILIES

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Abstract:

The rapid proliferation of digital technologies has significantly transformed the way individuals interact with the world around them. This digital revolution has also permeated the sphere of parenting, leading to a marked increase in the use of digital devices by both parents and children. While this shift has brought about numerous benefits, it has also raised concerns about potential negative consequences. This article highlights the research undertaken to understand the trends of digital usage among parents and children in Malaysia, by utilising a cross-sectional survey among parents who have 7-9 years old children using an online survey platform. A total of 532 parents responded to the survey and the data were analyse descriptively. This study found that many households own computers, tablets and smartphones, as compared to other devices such as smartwatch and digital game console. In addition, majority of the parents use digital devices between 3 to 5 hours and more than 5 hours daily, while many children use between 1 to 5 hours daily. Parents also use digital devices throughout the day, while children usage was reported higher during the weekend. Majority of the parents use digital devices for communication purpose, to search for information and to stay informed about current news, but most of the children use digital devices to fill free time, to complete school work and for entertainment purpose, but less use to get current news. Majority of the parents prefer WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube, while children prefer video-sharing and entertainment platforms namely YouTube, TikTok and online games. This study contributes to the enhancement of understanding of the trends in digital usage between parents and children.

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Keywords:

Children, Digital Applications, Digital Gadgets, Digital Usage, Parents.

Introduction

Despite the fact that pandemic Covid-19 affects people at global level, current development reveals Malaysia is performing well in terms of technological awareness, innovation, adoption, and utilisation of artificial intelligence and digital technology in everyday living (UNDP & MBRF, 2022). Prior to that, the Global Knowledge Index 2020 (UNDP, 2020) reported Malaysia ranks 33rd out of 138 countries in terms of its knowledge infrastructure, which is categorised as a strong performer. However, amid the good performance of technological know-how and know-what, the level of adoption and usage among Malaysian younger generations are alarming. Over the past two decades, there has been a sharp increase in digital media usage among Malaysian children. Social media use rises with age, according to a study of 8,000 Malaysian primary and secondary students, with 50% of students ages 7-9, 68% of students ages 10-12, and 92% of students ages 13-17 indicating they had social media accounts (UNICEF, 2020). Furthermore, in this age of globalisation, ICT and digital technologies have shown to be crucial for many societal strata (Said, 2023).

Furthermore, a study by Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission revealed, in 2018, only 28.5% Malaysian children aged between 5 to 17 use the Internet, and undoubtedly during the 2020's MCO, the number increased to 47% (MCMC, 2020). The MCMC also reported the number of children aged 5 to 17 years old who use the Internet has grown by 155% from 2016 (MCMC, 2020). Yet, parents' awareness of parental control decreased from 53.4% in 2018 to 34.4% in 2020 (MCMC, 2020). This shows the lack of awareness among parents in controlling the digital usage, especially to safeguard their children in digital era. Given the increasing frequency with which children use digital technology at home, parents ought to possess adequate digital technology competency (Fidan & Olur, 2023; Hadlington et al., 2019; Rahayu & Haningsih, 2021). With the increasing trends in digital usage among Malaysians, hence this article highlights the research undertaken to understand the trends of digital usage among parents and 7 to 9 years old children in Malaysia.

Literature Review

Parents have a huge influence on the personality of their children. The daily life of a child is very much involved with parents' parenting style. It is known that children are prone to imitation at early ages, thus, they require parents to be involved during their screen time, where the practice of this is appropriate and ethical in digital environments. In digital parenting, these engagements are among the practices that parents must engage in for the "prevention of risks and display of exemplary behaviour in terms of Internet and digital technology" (Tosun & Mihci, 2020). In addition, children born between 2010 and 2020 have a higher chance of growing up in digitally savvy families where parents are proficient digital users who employ proactive digital parenting strategies (Bohnert & Gracia, 2021). In addition, Fidan and Olur (2023) discovered that parents are able to grasp the demands of the digital world and feel adequately equipped as they keep up with the new digital world.

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Ofcom (2023) found that nearly all children in Wales went online in 2022 and majority used a mobile phone or tablet to do so. The report also found that more than 90% of the children 3-17 years old depend on video sharing platforms, and as the age increases, the more they play online games. However, the report also revealed that just four in ten parents knew the minimum age requirement for using most social media. While 40% of parents stated they found it difficult to limit their child's screen time, the majority of parents said their child had a good balance between screen time and other activities. According to a study conducted in Qatar by Al-Harahsheh et al. (2023), fathers used digital technology for both personal and professional purposes. They typically used it for eight to ten hours a day, primarily during working hours, and for social and private purposes in the evenings. Mothers, on the other hand, reported using technology more for socialising and communication, while some reported using it for work, online shopping, and placing orders for groceries and food. A lot of mothers use digital devices at night, and some even during the day.

Increased screen time and psychosocial challenges among disadvantaged families were linked to higher parent digital technology usage and decreased parent-child interactions, and it may be helpful for young children's psychosocial development if parents refrain from using electronics in front of them (Wong et al., 2020). If parents' daily Internet usage increased, it also leads to negative role model and digital negligence of the parents (Kulaksiz & Toran, 2023), which means parents have set negative examples to the children with regards to the digital usage. The study also found that fathers tend to portray negative role model and digital negligence, while mothers set an efficient usage and protecting from risks.

The majority of parents do not spend much time with their kids and only sporadically engage in digital communication with them. Thus, a parent's neglect of their kids translates into a lack of online parental supervision (Periyakannana & Sriram, 2022). However, Nicholas and Paatsch (2023) suggest that parents who get advice to restrict screen time may choose not to utilise digital texts while reading aloud to their children. In addition, Cao and Li (2023) found that the well-being of young children is influenced by both parent and child factors, including digital use, parental perspective, and mediation, as well as the kid's demographics and the amount and location of digital use. With regards to children's screen time, Alfiani et al. (2023) found that children's excitement for learning is not increased by playing online games, and that it may even have the reverse impact by making them less motivated. Therefore, with the increase in the digital usage among parents and children, it is important to identify and compare the digital usage trends between these two groups at home.

Methodology

This study utilised a cross-sectional survey among parents who have 7-9 years old children using an online survey platform. The questionnaire was self-developed which consists of the demographic profile of the respondents and the trends of digital usage among parents and children in Malaysia. The data collection was undertaken between 21st May 2023 until 20th June 2023. The survey focused on five states in Malaysia namely Kedah, Perak, Terengganu, Melaka and Sabah, representing five zones (north, central, south, east, and Sabah/Sarawak). However, the questionnaire link was also distributed and shared to other states, resulting in respondents from all states in Malaysia also responding to the survey. Social media platforms were used to distribute and disseminate the survey link, mostly via WhatsApp personal and groups. In order to participate in the study, respondents had to first tick a consent statement on

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the cover page of the survey before directing to the next page. The data analysis was done by using SPSS version 25.0, focusing on the descriptive analysis of frequency and percentage.

Results

Demographic Profiles of the Respondents

A total of 532 responses were used after the data cleaning process. The demographic profiles of the respondents are shown in Table 1. There were 209 male participants, accounting for 39.3% of the total, while 323 female participants constituted 60.7%. Among the valid responses, 78% are Malays, 1.5% are Chinese, 2.1% are Indians, 15.2% are from Other Bumiputera groups, and 3.2% are other ethnics. While for religious, majority of the respondents are Muslims (90.4%), 0.6% practice Buddhism, 1.5% adhere to Hinduism, 7.3% are Christians, and 0.2% from other religious groups.

For the age group, 2.1% of the respondents are below 25 years old, 25.9% fall within the age range of 26 to 35, 53.8% are aged 36 to 45, 16.7% are in the 46 to 55 age range, and 1.5% are 55 years and older. As for the age of the children, 31.4% of the children are 7 years old, 25.8% are 8 years old, and 42.9% are 9 years old. For the marital status, 95.7% are married, 1.1% are single parents due to the death of their partner, and 3.2% are single parents due to divorce or separation. For the breakdown of the number of children, 14.1% have 1 child, 21.6% have 2 children, 31% have 3 children, 19.8% have 4 children, 8.8% have 5 children, 3.0% have 6 children, 0.8% have 7 children, 0.4% have 8 children, and 0.6% have 9 children.

Table 1: Demographic Profiles of Respondents (n=532)

Demography	*f*	%
Gender		
Male	209	39.3
Female	323	60.7
Parent's Age		
Below 25	11	2.1
26-35	138	25.9
36-45	286	53.8
46-55	89	16.7
55 and above	8	1.5
Child's Age		
7 years old	167	31.4
8 years old	137	25.8
9 years old	228	42.9
Marital Status		
Married	509	95.7
Single Mother/Father (Spouse Passed Away)	6	1.1
Single Mother/Father (Divorced/Separated)	17	3.2
Ethnic		
Malay	415	78.0
Chinese	8	1.5
Indian	11	2.1
Other Bumiputera	81	15.2

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Others	17	3.2
Religious		
Islam	481	90.4
Buddhist	3	.6
Hindu	8	1.5
Christian	39	7.3
Others	1	.2
No. of Children		
1	75	14.1
2	115	21.6
3	165	31.0
4	105	19.8
5	47	8.8
6	16	3.0
7	4	.8
8	2	.4
9	3	.6
Occupation		
Government Servant	336	63.2
Private-sector Employee	77	14.5
Self-employed	40	7.5
Housewife	79	14.8
Highest Level of Education in the Family		
No Certificate	2	.4
UPSR/Standard 5 Examination	5	.9
LCE/SRP/PMR	16	3.0
MCE/SPM/SPVM/O Level	103	19.4
HSC/STPM/STAM/A Level	28	5.3
Skills-related Certificate/equivalent	22	4.1
Diploma	114	21.4
Bachelor Degree	175	32.9
Master's Degree	56	10.5
Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)	9	1.7
Others	2	.4
Monthly Gross Income of Your Family		
Less than RM2500	110	20.7
RM2501-RM3170	81	15.2
RM3171-RM3970	48	9.0
RM3971-RM4850	66	12.4
RM4851-RM5880	57	10.7
RM5,881-RM7,100	56	10.5
RM7,101-RM8,700	38	7.1
RM8,701-RM10,970	25	4.7
RM10,971-RM15,040	37	7.0
RM15,041 and above	14	2.6
Current Residential State		

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Johor	17	3.2
Kedah	38	7.1
Kelantan	9	1.7
Melaka	61	11.5
Negeri Sembilan	11	2.1
Pahang	9	1.7
Pulau Pinang	5	.9
Perak	118	22.2
Perlis	10	1.9
Selangor	41	7.7
Terengganu	41	7.7
Sabah	124	23.3
Sarawak	14	2.6
Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur	13	2.4
Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan	13	2.4
Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya	8	1.5
Location of Residence		
Urban	355	66.7
Rural	177	33.3
Total	**532**	**100.00**

As for the occupation, 63.2% are employed in government servant, 14.5% work in the private sector, 7.5% are self-employed, and 14.8% are housewife. In terms of the highest level of education in the family, 32.9% respondents have a Bachelor's degree, 21.4% have a Diploma, 10.5% have Master's degree, and 1.7% have a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). Meanwhile, 0.4% stated that they have no formal certificate, 0.9% have completed Standard 5 Examination/UPSR, 3.0% have an LCE/SRP/PMR qualification, 19.4% have a MCE/SPM/SPVM/O Level certificate, 5.3% have a HSC/STPM/STAM/A Level qualifications, 4.1% hold Skills-related Certificate/equivalent, and 0.4% stated that they have other qualification.

The monthly gross income of family varies, in which 20.7% have an income less than RM2,500, 15.2% fall within the range of RM2,501-RM3,170, 9% are in the range of RM3,171-RM3,970, 12.4% fall within the range of RM3,971-RM4,850, 10.7% are in the range of RM4,851-RM5,880, 10.5% are within the range of RM5,881-RM7,100, 7.1% fall in the range of RM7,101-RM8,700, 4.7% are within the range of RM8,701-RM10,970, 7.0% are in the range of RM10,971-RM15,040, and 2.6% have an income of RM15,041 and above.

Respondents were also asked to indicate their current residential state, in which 3.2% reside in Johor, 7.1% in Kedah, 1.7% in Kelantan, 11.5% in Melaka, 2.1% in Negeri Sembilan, 1.7% in Pahang, 0.9% in Pulau Pinang, 22.2% in Perak, 1.9% in Perlis, 7.7% in Selangor, 7.7% in Terengganu, 23.3% in Sabah, 2.6% in Sarawak, 2.4% in Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, 2.4% in Wilayah Persekutuan Labuan, and 1.5% in Wilayah Persekutuan Putrajaya. In addition, for the location of residence, 66.7% live in urban areas, while 33.3% reside in rural areas.

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Digital Gadgets At Home

Table 2 presents information about the number of digital gadgets owned by the respondents and available at home. Among the valid responses, 24.1% of households do not have a computer, 35.8% have 1 computer, 18.5% have 2 computers, 7.3% have 3 computers, 6.0% have 4 computers, and 8.3% have more than 5 computers. The total number of valid responses is 519, accounting for 97.6% of the total population. Additionally, there are 13 missing or unspecified responses, accounting for the remaining 2.4%. The cumulative percentage reflects the progressive sum of the valid percentages. For the tablet, 53.4% of households do not have a tablet, 35.5% have 1 tablet, 8.3% have 2 tablets, 1.8% have 3 tablets, 0.4% have 4 tablets, and 0.6% have more than 5 tablets.

Meanwhile, 0.6% of households do not have a smartphone, 5.3% have 1 smartphone, 20.5% have 2 smartphones, 21.5% have 3 smartphones, 26.0% have 4 smartphones, and 26.2% have more than 5 smartphones. Moreover, 57.8% of households do not have a smartwatch, 21.6% have 1 smartwatch, 14.6% have 2 smartwatches, 3.7% have 3 smartwatches, 1.8% have 4 smartwatches, and 0.6% have more than 5 smartwatches. In terms of having digital games console, 78.7% of households stated that they do not have a digital games console, 14.1% have 1 digital games console, 3.5% have 2 digital games consoles, 2.1% have 3 digital games consoles, 0.8% have 4 digital games consoles, and 0.8% have more than 5 digital games consoles. In addition, 80.6% of households do not have other digital devices, 11.7% have 1 other digital device, 4.0% have 2 other digital devices, 2.2% have 3 other digital devices, 0.2% have 4 other digital devices, and 1.4% have more than 5 other digital devices.

Table 2: Number Digital Gadgets Owned

Gadget	None	1	2	3	4	>5
Computer	125 (23.5%)	186 (35%)	96 (18%)	38 (7.1%)	31 (5.8%)	43 (8.1%)
Tablet	301 (56.6%)	176 (33.1%)	41 (7.7%)	9 (1.7%)	2 (0.4%)	3 (0.6%)
Smartphone	4 (0.8%)	28 (5.3%)	109 (20.5%)	114 (21.4%)	138 (25.9%)	139 (26.1)
Smartwatch	315 (59.2%)	111 (20.9%)	75 (14.1%)	19 (3.6%)	9 (1.7%)	3 (0.6%)
Digital Games Console	423 (79.6%)	72 (13.5%)	18 (3.4%)	11 (2.1%)	4 (0.8%)	4 (0.8)
Other Digital Devices	434 (81.6%)	59 (11.1%)	20 (3.8%)	11 (2.1%)	1 (0.2%)	7 (1.3%)

Average Duration of Digital Device Use In A Day

Table 3 reveals the average daily usage duration of digital devices by respondents. Usage times include less than 1 hour for 3.4% of respondents, 1 to 2 hours for 19.3%, 3 to 5 hours for 34.2%, and more than 5 hours for 43.1%. As compared to parents, the usage times among children show that many of them use digital devices between 1 to 2 hours (39.3%), 83 children use less than 1 hour (14.6%), while more than 32% use between 3 to 5 hours, and 53 (10%) children use digital devices more than 5 hours daily.

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Table 3: Average Duration of Digital Device Use In A Day

Duration	Parent	Child
Less than 1 hour	26 (4.9%)	83 (15.6%)
1 - 2 hours daily	101 (19%)	209 (39.3%)
3 - 5 hours daily	179 (33.6%)	187 (35.2%)
More than 5 hours daily	226 (42.5)	53 (10%)

Digital Device Usage Time

As shown in Table 4, total of 305 respondents uses devices in the morning, 267 at afternoon, 316 in the evening, as many as 413 respondents use at night, and 300 on weekend. For the children, usage times include the morning for 61 children, afternoon for 87 children, evening for 212, night for 256, and as expected, 358 parents stated that their children usage time is during weekend.

Table 4: Digital Device Usage Time

Time	Parent	Child
Morning	305 (11.5%)	61 (2.3%)
Afternoon	267 (10.0%)	87 (3.3%)
Evening	316 (11.8%)	212 (7.9%)
Night	413 (15.5%)	256 (9.6%)
Weekend	300 (11.3%)	358 (13.4%)

Purpose of Using Digital Devices

Table 5 shows the purpose of digital devices usage among parents and children. A total of 420 use for communication purpose (13.1%), 413 search for information (12.9%), 407 parents uses digital devices to stay informed about current news (12.7%), 326 respondents use it for completing office tasks (10.2%), 300 use it to fill free time (9.3%) and 272 use for entertainment (8.5%). As compared to parents, most of the children use digital devices to fill free time (317), to complete school work (314) and for entertainment purpose (303).

Table 5: Purpose of Using Digital Devices

Purpose of Using Digital Devices	Parent	Purpose of Using Digital Devices	Child
Communicate	420 (13.1%)	Fill free time	317 (9.9%)
Find information	413 (12.9%)	Completing school work	314 (9.8%)
Get current news	407 (12.7%)	Entertainment	303 (9.4%)
Completing office work	326 (10.2%)	Find information	212 (6.6%)
Fill free time	300 (9.3%)	Communicate	192 (6.0%)
Entertainment	272 (8.5%)	Get current news	49 (2.7%)

Preferred Digital Applications

Respondents were also asked about their preferred applications and their children's preferences. As shown in Table 6, majority of the parents prefer WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube. While for the children, it is obvious that this younger generation prefer video-sharing and entertainment platforms namely YouTube, Online Games, and TikTok. Other applications preferred by the parents include online shopping, Twitter, and Canva, while children also utilise WhatsApp, Instagram and Telegram applications.

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Table 6: Preferred Digital Applications

Digital Applications	Parent *(f)*	Digital Applications	Child *(f)*
WhatsApp	497	YouTube	413
Facebook	391	Online Games	288
TikTok	288	TikTok	238
YouTube	290	WhatsApp	185
Instagram	242	Instagram	70
Telegram	199	Telegram	60
Online Shopping	157	Facebook	46
Online Movies	75	Online Movies	19
Online Games	59	Online Shopping	-
Online Music	50	Online Music	-
Online Anime	13	Online Anime	-
Others	20	Others	-

Discussion

This article aims at discussing the trends of digital usage among parents and children in Malaysia. Thus, this study found that many households own computers, tablets and smartphones, as compared to other devices such as smartwatch and digital game console which reflects the dependency and preference of those devices by members of the society, including parents and children. More so, the smartwatch and digital game console appear to be the peripheral devices, not the major ones. People can still play games and refer to the time using many other devices, most notably the smartphone, as it is a convergence device. As for the duration of usage, majority of the parents use digital devices between 3 to 5 hours and more than 5 hours daily, while many children use between 1 to 2 hours daily. However, it is also alarming to highlight that there are 10% of the children who were reported to use digital devices more than 5 hours daily. As for the time of usage, parents stated that they use digital devices throughout the day, but less usage were found during the weekend. In contrast, children usage was reported higher during the weekend, and less usage was reported during the weekdays. As emphasised by Periyakannana and Sriram (2022), excessive screen time by children may lead to risks such as talking to strangers, social media addiction, paedophiles and many other risks.

This study also compares the purpose of digital devices usage among parents and children. As expected, majority of the parents stated that they use digital devices for communication purpose, to search for information and to stay informed about current news, but less use for entertainment, which is in line with findings from Glatz et al. (2023). In contrast, most of the children were reported to use digital devices to fill free time, to complete school work and for entertainment purpose, but less use to get current news. Majority of the parents prefer WhatsApp, Facebook, TikTok and YouTube, while children prefer video-sharing and entertainment platforms namely YouTube, Online Games, and TikTok. This finding is in line with Ofcom (2023) which found that children depend on video sharing platforms and the older children play more online games. This trend is also alarming as the higher usage of digital devices by children for non-academic purposes might lead to various issues, as emphasized by Alfiani et al, (2023), Cao and Li (2023) and Ofcom (2032).

The usage trends of digital devices among parents and children are increasing especially during and after the Covid-19 pandemic. One of the primary drivers of the increased digital usage among parents is the convenience and accessibility it offers. Parents can now utilise digital

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tools to connect with their children from anywhere in the world, access educational resources, and manage household tasks efficiently. Additionally, digital platforms have emerged as valuable sources of information and support for parents, providing them with access to parenting communities, expert advice, and various parenting resources. For children, the rise of digital technologies has opened up a world of opportunities for learning, exploration, and entertainment. Educational applications, online courses, and interactive games have become integral components of modern childhood, offering children engaging and personalised learning experiences. Moreover, digital devices have facilitated social connections and creative expression among children, enabling them to stay in touch with friends, engage in online communities, and explore their artistic and creative talents.

However, the increased digital usage among parents and children has also raised concerns about potential negative impacts. Excessive screen time can lead to physical and mental health issues, including sleep disturbances, eye strain, and behavioural problems. Additionally, the constant exposure to digital content can contribute to attention deficit disorders, anxiety, and social isolation among children. Parents also face challenges in managing their children's digital usage, balancing the benefits of technology with the need for healthy offline activities and social interactions.

Conclusion

This article has achieved its aim to understand the trends of digital usage among parents and 7 to 9 years old children in Malaysia. There are apparent differences in digital usage among parents and their 7-9 years old children, in terms of time and duration of screen time, applications used, and purpose of usage. Undoubtedly, this study has contributed to the understanding of the differences in digital usage among parents and children, which will also lead to the differences in the digital effects such as addiction, health and psychological issues, and many other effects. Hence, the increasing digital usage by parents and children presents a complex interplay of benefits and challenges. While digital technologies offer numerous advantages, it is essential to acknowledge and address the potential negative consequences. By adopting a mindful and balanced approach to technology integration, parents can harness the benefits of digital tools while safeguarding their children's well-being and fostering healthy digital habits. To mitigate the potential negative effects of digital usage, it is crucial for parents to adopt a balanced and mindful approach to technology integration. Parents should establish clear boundaries and guidelines for digital usage, ensuring that children have ample opportunities for physical activity, face-to-face interactions, and non-digital forms of entertainment. Additionally, parents should engage in active participation with their children's digital activities, fostering open communication and providing guidance on safe and responsible online behavior.

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