

‘Please Let Me Breathe’: A Case Study of Digital Parenting Beliefs and Fears Among Middle-Class Thai Generation Y Parents in Bangkok

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Abstract

In Thailand’s hyperconnected society, middle-class Thai Generation Y parents—raised alongside the internet—are now navigating parenting in a digital age where screens are ever-present. This qualitative study examines how Generation Y parents of children aged 3–6 integrate digital technology into their parenting, the fears they associate with its use, and the belief systems that shape these perceptions. Based on in-depth interviews with fourteen Bangkok-based parents, the data were thematically analyzed to uncover key patterns. The findings reveal that digital technology serves multiple roles in daily parenting: as a caregiver, a pacifier, an educator, and a surveillance tool. Parents expressed seven core fears, including exposure to harmful content, emotional disturbance, developmental delays, pseudo-autism, attention deficits, vision problems, and poor socialization. These fears reflect a hybrid belief system shaped by Western medical knowledge, Buddhist morals, Eastern family norms, and parental intuition. Thus, daily parents of this generation act like negotiators and protectors, balancing institutional guidance and personal judgment. In conclusion, the study moves beyond binary views of techno-optimism and techno-fear, revealing how culturally embedded belief systems shape digital parenting. These insights offer a valuable foundation for reflecting on digital parenting frameworks that are more nuanced and that recognize the various layers that respond to local realities.

Keywords

Cultural beliefs; digital parenting; fear; Generation Y; technology usage

Introduction

In today's hyperconnected world, digital technology is no longer a luxury but a fundamental part of daily life. This reality is particularly evident in Thailand. The country ranks among the top nations globally in internet usage. According to We Are Social (2025), Thai people rank fifth globally in mobile internet use and tenth in overall daily internet use, with an average of approximately 7 hours and 54 minutes per day. Technological intensity and practice are particularly prominent in Bangkok, the capital. In 2022, the average daily usage reached 10 hours, significantly exceeding the national average of approximately 7 hours (Electronic Transaction Development Agency, 2022). This situation highlights Bangkok as the most suitable case study for understanding tech-driven lifestyles in Thailand.

However, digital engagement in Thailand also varies by generation, with Generation Y (born 1980–1994) emerging as a particularly influential group. Often regarded as digital natives, this cohort came of age during the rise of the internet in Thailand and has internalized technology into nearly every aspect of life. They are fluent in digital communication, rely on social media for self-expression and connection, and use digital platforms for news consumption and decision-making (SCB Economic Intelligence Center, 2014; Thianthai et al., 2020).

As this generation enters the parenting stage, typically aged 31 to 45, they have extended their digital habits to child-rearing (Sullivan & Dedy, 2016). Generation Y parents increasingly integrate digital technology into parenting, blending online and offline experiences in their children's lives. Moreover, Generation Y parents are mentors and support their children in using digital learning applications (Kumar et al., 2025). However, many also set screen time limits and monitor content due to concerns about negative effects on child development – ranging from health risks and developmental delays to mental health issues, disrupted sleep, and weakened parent-child relationships (George & Odgers, 2015; Kurt, 2023; Mahdi et al., 2024; McBain, 2024). Therefore, they do not want to have an adverse effect; they are aware that children's development varies across the 3–6-year age group.

For example, children aged 3–4 years exhibit social interaction skills, whereas those aged 4–5 years should demonstrate greater awareness of the need to comply with societal rules (Pathways Foundation, 2024). In the digital era, technological impacts can also be found in the World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines (2019), for example, limiting screen time for children aged 3–4 to 1 hour daily, which has begun to influence Thai psychiatric discourse and Generation Y parenting through social media and websites.

Before COVID-19, parents struggled to regulate children's screen use. However, the pandemic led to a sharp increase in children's use of digital technologies for social interaction, learning, and entertainment, highlighting the growing importance of digital media literacy, shaped by children's age, home digital resources, and parental beliefs (Coulter et al., 2024; Fu et al., 2024). Despite the growing use of digital media in parenting, empirical research on how Thai Generation Y parents navigate these challenges remains limited. Most existing studies focus on how Generation Y individuals use social media or how digital media shapes their lifestyles and civic identities (Naruka & Rajput, 2024). Additionally, although concerns about the use of digital technology have been extensively explored among adolescents and young children, studies adopting Asian cultural perspectives remain scarce. In Thailand, this gap is even more pronounced, with few if any studies addressing the specific beliefs and concerns of Generation Y parents regarding their children's digital engagement.

To address this gap, this study examines *why* and *when* Thai Generation Y parents in Bangkok use digital technology, *how* they integrate it into their parenting practices, the fears they associate with their children's use of such technology, and how external sources shape those fears and beliefs. By examining these dimensions, the study seeks to contribute to a largely underexplored area of research and provide insights relevant to both academic understanding and practical parenting in a digital age.

Literature review

Cultural influence in parenting

Culture influences parenting in many ways. The upbringing of one generation within a specific cultural framework is shaped by dominant norms, beliefs, and values, as well as environmental influences, that govern how individuals interpret and navigate their life choices. This is reflected in how they construct their behavioral and moral frameworks for raising their children. However, what is considered normative or effective parenting in one culture may be viewed quite differently in another, raising important questions about cultural relativity in parenting practices. Moreover, cultural influences on parenting are not static; they evolve across time, geographic settings, and within subcultural groups. This aspect of cultural influence on parenting invites a closer examination of context-specific dynamics.

Bornstein (2006, 2012) proposed a useful framework for analyzing parenting through two lenses: human universals—core assumptions shared across cultures, such as the nurturing and protective functions of parents—and cultural specifics, which manifest in different beliefs and behaviors related to caregiving and child-rearing in everyday life. This framework examines how parenting serves as a vehicle for enculturation, transmitting one's societal values and behavioral norms. Cultural influences shape how parenting roles are perceived through both shared and culturally specific assumptions.

Feminist perspectives describe an ideology of "intensive motherhood," in which mothers view themselves as primary caregivers who prioritize their children over their own needs—an ideal reinforced across many cultures (Baigent, 1998). Alongside this, the notion of "blanket accountability" is particularly salient among middle and lower-working-class women who work outside the home, as they often feel responsible for the disruption caused by their absence and are compelled to find the best possible ways to care for their children (Macdonald, 2011). Working mothers, therefore, frequently experience a "double burden," as they balance primary responsibility for child-rearing with paid work outside the household (Hochschild & Machung, 2012).

In addition, parents acculturate to alternative cultural models through globalization, technological adaptations, and exposure to digital media. This process often gives rise to cultural hybridity, in which parents blend local practices with external ideologies from other cultural sources, sometimes harmoniously and sometimes in tension. Adding further complexity, Bornstein (1995) argued that parenting behaviors that appear structurally similar across cultures may be grounded in different cultural logics and meanings. Therefore, gaining parenting narratives can uncover hidden belief systems, normative expectations, and value negotiations within a particular cultural group. These narratives reveal not only how

parenting is practiced but also how it is conceptualized, negotiated, and reshaped in response to broader social and cultural changes.

Parenting in Asia and the Thai approach to child-rearing

Cultural beliefs and values are the most important sources shaping parenting practices and parent–child interactions (Chen et al., 2019). Rooted in collectivist traditions, these societies reflect distinct subcultural norms that shape everyday life, including child-rearing practices (Yim, 2022). In Thai society, Buddhist approaches to child development emphasize principles from Buddhist teachings that articulate parents’ responsibilities to care for and protect their children from harmful influences (Mujiyanto et al., 2023). Parenting in many Asian contexts tends to follow an authoritarian style, marked by a strong focus on discipline, obedience, and respect for authority (CP Mental Wellbeing, 2024).

In contrast, Western societies prioritize individualism and freedom, which is associated with an authoritative parenting style. This approach balances emotional warmth and high expectations, with parents setting clear boundaries while encouraging children's independence and self-expression (CP Mental Wellbeing, 2024). A few studies have also contributed to Thai parenting-related knowledge by describing Thai parenting styles using parenting categories derived from quantitative data analysis. For instance, research has shown that during the first six months of a child’s life, Thai parents most commonly exhibit an overprotective style, followed by an authoritative or reasoning-based approach, where authoritarian (strict control) and neglectful styles are rarely reported (Phuphaibul et al., 2012).

Among Generation Y parents in Bangkok, the authoritative style remains predominant, with the authoritarian style as a secondary approach (Kaesonbua & Thamrongat, 2019), reflecting both global influences and local cultural continuities. However, significant research gaps remain, calling for new insights into parenting approaches and perceptions reflected in modern-day parents’ narratives of a local subcultural group.

Parenting with technology: A generational perspective

Parenting styles and the adoption of digital technology vary significantly across generations, influenced by the social, economic, and technological contexts in which parents were raised. Baby Boomer parents, who are the parents of Generation Y and grew up in traditional family structures, often emphasize discipline, hard work, and loyalty in their child-rearing. Their parenting approaches were therefore grounded in highly traditional methods, such as instilling respect for authority and compliance with rules. They also held high expectations for their children regarding educational achievement and quality of life (Hogan, 2025; Times of India, 2023), rather than placing responsibility for parenting on technology use.

In contrast, Generation Y (born between 1980 and 1994), having matured during the rapid rise of the internet and digital technologies, tends to embrace innovation, diversity, and creativity. As a result, Generation Y parents are generally more receptive to integrating digital technology into everyday parenting (Szymańska, 2024). They grant their children greater autonomy and utilize a wider range of parenting styles than previous generations (Hogan, 2025; Nulsen, 2023). Generation Y parents use screen-based digital technologies for various parenting purposes, often employing devices such as smartphones and tablets to entertain, educate, and manage their children’s behavior.

A study by Lev and Elias (2020) classified parental screen use into three types: (1) background media during children's playtime, (2) a babysitter-like tool used when parents need children to be occupied (Beyens & Eggermont, 2014; Nikken, 2019), and (3) a pacifier-like tool to calm children or prevent tantrums, a practice informally labeled "shut-up toys" (Radesky et al., 2015). These patterns reflect not only parental convenience but also an emerging dependency on screens as everyday parenting tools.

Furthermore, many studies emphasize that parents strategically use screen time during high-stress situations, such as meal preparation or work-from-home duties (Brauchli et al., 2024; Hiniker et al., 2016; Parks et al., 2016). Some parents believe that well-curated educational applications can foster early literacy and numeracy skills (Neumann, 2016). However, this confidence in digital tools often comes with concerns about overexposure, creating an internal conflict for many modern-day parents. The need to balance convenience with caution represents a key tension in Generation Y digital parenting, a group that is both familiar with and skeptical of digital technology.

Cultural variations in perceptions towards using technology to assist parenting

Parental attitudes toward digital technology are deeply embedded within cultural contexts, influencing not only how technology is used but also the purposes it serves. In Western individualistic cultures, digital technology is typically employed to promote children's independence, creativity, and learning through self-directed exploration (Li et al., 2024). For example, American parents with children aged 6 months to 6 years often use technology to entertain their children while attending to other important tasks, reflecting a broader cultural emphasis on fostering children's independence and enabling parents to maintain personal freedom and productivity (Rideout et al., 2003). Similarly, Portuguese parents often regard digital technologies as entertainment tools that provide enjoyment and temporary relief for both children and parents (Lev & Elias, 2020).

In contrast, parents in collectivist cultures, particularly in East Asia, tend to be more cautious. Chinese parents, for instance, associate unregulated digital use with risks to academic success and behavior. While they do not wholly reject digital media, they often employ it selectively, such as using educational videos or applications to support structured learning (Cao et al., 2022; Chaudron et al., 2018). Likewise, Japanese parents tend to be mindful of young children's use of information and communication technologies (ICT), often believing it should not be used independently and showing limited recognition of its developmental benefits (Katsumi & Tamura, 2021).

Cultural influences are not monolithic, even within the same geographic region. For example, in Indonesia, digital tools are used for both entertainment and religious education. Parents encourage children to use YouTube to learn Islamic practices such as prayer and fasting, and audiovisual content is perceived as an effective medium for moral instruction (Astuti et al., 2022). Meanwhile, in Singapore, where educational performance is highly valued, parents favor digital tools that are directly tied to academic outcomes. Singaporean parents typically discourage recreational screen time and instead promote the use of learning apps to enhance children's school readiness and academic competence (Shin & Lwin, 2022).

Building on these findings, a study in Singapore found that screen time is often mediated by parents' digital proficiency and their trust in the quality of digital content. Moreover, in

cultures with strong academic expectations, such as Singapore and South Korea, digital technology often functions as a performance-enhancing tool, including e-learning devices (Goh et al., 2015; Park et al., 2019). However, researchers warn that this approach may inadvertently introduce pressure and contribute to early academic stress in young children (Dong, 2018).

Thai parents similarly utilize smartphones and tablets as educational tools, particularly in urban areas. Manaakkarakul (2018) observed that Thai parents believe that digital tools can improve young children's memory, attention span, and problem-solving skills. These patterns suggest that, in many Asian societies, digital technology is not used haphazardly but is embedded in broader parental goals, such as academic success and behavioral control. Moreover, this goal-oriented use reflects both cultural priorities and the practical need to balance work and parenting responsibilities.

Global concerns and local fears related to digital technology in parenting

Media use has generated fear and anxiety among the public, including parents. It has raised moral questions about whether allowing children to use media leads them to addiction, drawing comparisons between media and addictive substances. New media have been framed as harmful, prompting debates about “moral panic” that cast social media in a negative light. These debates are often driven by socially accredited experts or psychologists who present exaggerated or sensationalized claims about children’s use of social media and screens (Redman, 2021; Tække, 2022).

While digital technology offers convenience, many parents still fear that excessive screen exposure might reduce real-life social interaction, delay language and motor development, and cognitive growth (Radesky et al., 2015). Such fears are supported by evidence. Studies across multiple European countries, including Russia, Belgium, Germany, and the United Kingdom, report that parents of children aged 1–8 years associate prolonged screen time with impaired emotion regulation and reduced attention span (Chaudron, 2015).

In Asian contexts, concerns are more content-specific. For example, Chinese parents worry about privacy invasion and children’s exposure to inappropriate or violent content. Cao et al. (2022) found that Chinese parents believe young children lack sufficient self-regulation and the ability to assess digital content, thus requiring adult supervision to mitigate online risks. Similarly, Indian and Pakistani parents, particularly those from religious communities, often reference moral concerns, fearing that unmonitored access to digital content might erode cultural and religious values (Franceschelli & O'Brien, 2014; Mahroof et al., 2018).

As a result, cultural ideologies also shape how digital technology is framed as either a threat or an opportunity. In South Korea, where education is closely linked to future success, digital technology is used to motivate students. Dong (2018) noted that screen time is frequently positioned as a reward for academic achievement, reinforcing meritocratic ideals. While this incentive model may boost compliance and study habits in the short term, it risks reducing learning to a task and pressuring children.

Overall, these fears are rooted in broader sociocultural systems. These systems include religious doctrines, educational ideologies, and generational values. Although parents across cultures express it differently, they share the same feelings: a desire to use digital

technology for its benefits but a fear of its negative effects. This complex interplay between opportunity and fear continues to shape parenting practices in both global and local contexts. In summary, the foregoing calls for further research to elucidate the interplay among culture, science, and other factors in the use of technology in parenting practices that help nurture future generations.

Methodology

This research employed a qualitative approach to examine how Thai Generation Y parents in Bangkok integrate digital technology into their parenting practices. Digital technology in this study was defined as online media interaction through screen use. The study focused particularly on the beliefs and fears arising from this integration, examining how everyday life experiences, cultural norms, and institutional influences shape them. This is because the researchers view parenting not as an isolated behavior, but as a culturally situated practice.

Fieldwork was conducted from November 2024 to March 2025 and approved by the Research Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Research Participants Group 2, Chulalongkorn University, Code No 385/67. The research was conducted in Bangkok, providing fertile ground for studying how digital media technologies intersect with urban parenting.

The selection of participants employed purposive sampling to identify individuals whose parenting experiences could illuminate contemporary digital culture. We began contacting three participating parents who did not know one another, then used snowball sampling from there, with informants referring others they thought would be suitable and who met the study's criteria. The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) all born between 1980 and 1994 (classified as Generation Y), defined by United Nations International School of Hanoi (2024) and McCrindle, and Wolfinger (2018); (2) were either lifelong Bangkok residents or had lived in the city for over a decade ensuring that their family practices were shaped by sustained exposure to Bangkok's digital infrastructure and urban lifestyle; (3) belonged to Bangkok's middle class who has been as a key agent of social change in society and also domesticating face to adapt with new technologies (Pishnyak & Khalina, 2022), with household incomes between 40,000 and 120,000 THB (1,295–3,880 USD) per month (Siam Commercial Bank Public Company Limited, 2023); and (4) had children between the ages of 3 and 6, a developmental stage about emotional regulation, cognitive development, socialization, and moral development during which parental mediation of technology is particularly active and contested.

Parents were excluded from the study if they did not meet the aforementioned criteria for primary caregiver status, were single parents, or were parents of children with special needs, as their daily parenting routines and activities may differ substantially from those of the target informants. In total, 14 informants, whose educational backgrounds ranged from bachelor's to doctoral levels, were drawn from a variety of occupations, such as accountant, researcher, university lecturer, private business owner, marketer, and government officer. Despite this occupational diversity, the parents also varied in their work patterns (i.e., full-time, part-time, or stay-at-home).

All participants identified as primary caregivers within middle-class families who regularly engage with digital services, both personally and professionally. Many shared responsibilities

with spouses or relied on temporary caregivers, such as grandparents or hired help, particularly during working hours. Despite differences in daily routines, all participants described themselves as members of the Thai digital-native generation, closely involved in their children's upbringing and consistently using digital devices in both personal and parenting contexts.

Table 1: Informant Characteristics of Middle-Class Generation Y Parents in Bangkok

ID	Informant age	Gender	Education level	Occupation	Number of children	Children age	Children sex	Parenting Tool (Type of Screen-based Technology)
1	33	Female	Bachelor	Accounting audit consultant	1	4	Male	- Smartphone (YouTube, Video Call, TikTok) - Tablet (YouTube, Games)
2	34	Female	Master	Housewife and Homeschool Mom	1	4	Male	- Smart TV (YouTube Premium, Galaxy Kids) - Smartphone (YouTube Kids, YouTube Premium, Online Applications), - Tablet (YouTube Premium, Galaxy Kids, Educational Apps) - CCTV
3	35	Female	Master	Publishing marketing executive	2	4	Male	- Smart TV (YouTube, Netflix Kids) - Smartphone (YouTube, FaceTime)
4	36	Male	Master	Business owner	1	3	Female	- Smartphone (YouTube Kids) - Tablet (YouTube Kids),
5	36	Female	Bachelor	Housewife	2	3	Female	- Smart TV (YouTube Kids) - Smartphone (YouTube Kids) - Tablet (YouTube Kids)
6	36	Female	Doctorate	Business employee	1	3	Female	- Smartphone (Disney+, Video Call) - Tablet (Disney+, Games, Educational Apps)
7	37	Male	Master	Construction contractor	2	6, 3	Male	- Smart TV (YouTube) - Tablet (YouTube, Games, Educational Apps, CCTV)
8	39	Female	Bachelor	Housewife	2	5	Female	- Smartphone (YouTube) - Tablet (YouTube)

ID	Informant age	Gender	Education level	Occupation	Number of children	Children age	Children sex	Parenting Tool (Type of Screen-based Technology)
9	39	Male	Bachelor	Government officer	1	5	Male	- Smart TV (YouTube Kids), - Closed-Circuit Television (CCTV), Smartphone (YouTube Kids, YouTube)
10	39	Female	Master	Part-time real estate agent	2	4	Female	- Smartphone (YouTube Kids, TikTok) - Smart TV (YouTube Kids)
11	40	Female	Doctorate	University lecturer	1	4	Male	- Smart TV (Netflix Kids) - Smartphone (YouTube) - Tablet (YouTube) - Computer (YouTube)
12	41	Female	Bachelor	Stay-at-home mother and part-time insurance sales representative	3	5	Male	- Smartphone (Educational Apps, Games, YouTube) - Tablet (YouTube, Games)
13	41	Female	Doctorate	University lecturer	2	6	Male	- Tablet (Educational Apps, Games, YouTube)
14	42	Male	Master	Researcher	2	3 and 6	Female, Male	- Smart TV (YouTube Kids, Netflix Kids), - Tablet (YouTube Kids, Netflix Kids, CCTV)

Note: All participants are Buddhist.

Unlike quantitative research, which selects participants to mirror a statistically generalizable population, the researchers aim to trace the shared logic and cultural meanings that parents attach to their use of technology. Through careful attention to lived realities, the researchers explore recurring patterns of child rearing. These diverse configurations of family life were not treated as variables for comparison but as situated responses to parenting in the digital age. Their characteristics are seen in Table 1.

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews that enabled narrative exploration and personal reflection. We interviewed the primary parent, identified by the family as the one who most frequently used digital technology in parenting and who spent the most time with their children. Only one parent provided information. Each selected parent was interviewed during two visits. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Interviews were conducted face-to-face or online, depending on participant preference and logistical constraints.

During the first visit, the open-ended questions were centered and organized around the theme of daily parenting practices related to technology. On the second visit, questions focused on perceived fear and the risks parents associate with their children's technological engagement, as well as on the sources of their beliefs. The interview process was designed to elicit thick descriptions and first-person accounts of how parents navigate the digital landscape with their children, and to obtain data for cross-cultural analysis.

All fieldnotes and recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. Thematic coding emphasized inductive reasoning, allowing categories to emerge from the data rather than being imposed beforehand. Patterns of meaning were identified through repeated readings, with particular attention to how parents justified their decisions, negotiated boundaries, or expressed ambivalence about their roles. To ensure confidentiality, all data were anonymized. Participants' names were removed from the transcripts and replaced with ID and other descriptive details. Transcriptions were translated from Thai to English.

This ethnographic process was not limited to formal interviews. Informal conversations and follow-up dialogues also provided insight into the details of participants' everyday lives. These interactions helped the researchers understand how digital parenting was embedded in broader household routines and emotional labor. Their narratives contribute to a deeper understanding of how this generation navigates both the opportunities and the challenges of raising children in a digital environment.

Results

For Thai Generation Y parents, digital technology is not just a tool but an integral part of daily childcare, helping manage the challenges of raising young children. In this study, the digital technologies integrated into their parenting included smartphones, tablets (e.g., Galaxy Tab and iPad), smart TVs, closed-circuit television (CCTV), and computers. In addition, parents used Google, Facebook, YouTube, Online applications, ChatGPT, TikTok, podcasts, and Instagram to access parenting knowledge/information/trends. However, in children's use, parents may engage in close surveillance by keeping children's technology use within sight, using content-filtering applications, and remaining nearby to monitor what children are

viewing. Interviews revealed six repeating themes that illustrate ‘when’ and ‘why’ it is strategically used.

“Please let me breathe” – Digital technology as a surrogate caregiver

Digital technology offers a practical solution for Thai Generation Y parents to balance child rearing and work. In Thai and most Asian beliefs related to parenting, where children are traditionally closely monitored and cared for with constant presence, the intensity of caregiving is doubled. Parents often turn to screens as surrogate caretakers, allowing themselves space to rest, complete tasks, or simply reclaim a moment for themselves.

As a stay-at-home parent and part-time insurance sales representative, she shared her layered responsibilities and the logic behind offering a screen to her child:

“Since the past, Thai women have been expected, taught, and assigned to be primarily responsible for managing the household. As a woman in the family, I have to take care of everything – ironing, sweeping, mopping, all of it – and also raise a child. During those times, other women and I would let the kids watch TV or an iPad so we could finish our chores.”

This interplay between cultural expectations and digital support is echoed across various households. Another participant, a working mother, reflected on using a tablet as part of a routine delegation of parenting tasks:

“In my house, as a mother and wife taking care of the home by myself, I just hand the tablet to my child and say, ‘Here, play a game for a bit while mommy does some housework.’ When I’m done, I turn it off, and then we go do something else together.”

In situations where parenting is all-encompassing, even the most personal moments can be mediated by a screen. One full-time mom recounted:

“I parent full-time. My child is always attached to me because I’ve cared for them since birth. Even going to the bathroom or taking a shower, they’d come in with me when they were little. But nowadays, sometimes I think they don’t need to come in. I give them a smartphone to play with for a while so I can do my personal business, and after that, we can play together again.”

Moreover, fatigue and emotional burnout also drive screen usage. As one mother of three explained, parenting later children sometimes shifts the balance between ideals and exhaustion:

“Please let me breathe! I’m a mother of three, and I raise them myself. With my first child, I focused a lot on developmental activities because I’d never done them before, like drawing, coloring, and reading stories. With the second, we did puzzles. But by the third, I was already worn out from raising little kids. It wasn’t fun anymore. Plus, I had more things to do than just parenting. I had lots of other tasks. I admit, I used screens because I had no time. I gave the child a moment to swipe the screen, and

I gave them a tablet to play games with their older siblings. One device each. It was comfortable for me as a mom, honestly."

Moreover, when comparing mothers' and fathers' reasoning, none of the fathers in the study viewed screen-based technology as a time-saving tool for household labor. As one father revealed the underlying gendered division of labor:

"Domestic household work is mainly women's work; we (men) do not feel the need to spare time or energy on it."

"Keeping the peace in public" – Screens as tools of social compliance conclusion

For generations, Thai parenting has emphasized cultivating calm, obedient children in public settings. To these Thai Generation Y Parents, technology is used strategically to suppress disruptions and preserve the social decorum expected in collectivist Thai society. Whether in airports, restaurants, or even at home during moments of waiting, digital devices serve to pacify, distract, and keep children 'in place.' A mother expressed wonder at the mesmerizing effect screens have on her child:

"When flying abroad, I pre-load apps on the iPad – drawing, coloring, games, dress-up. Flights are long, or we'll use the cartoons on the plane. If I let her watch, she can sit and watch for hours. It's like she's enchanted. I notice things moving constantly on the screen in front of her, but she sits so still. I wonder how screens have such a magical spell over her."

Navigating public judgment, parents also bend their own rules. One mother confessed,

"Honestly, I used to be strict about not letting kids use mobile phones during meals out. But I can't deny that lately I've done the same. I let my child watch the screen, so they don't disturb others. If they cry, they scream. Usually, it's after they've finished eating but still have to wait for others. With nothing to do, I just let it go – give them the phone. I worry about what people around us will think, you know? We don't want our child crying, so we have to manage it. Sure, we could take them outside to calm them down, but sometimes we're tired or hungry. We're not always ready. So mostly, I just let them watch. And if I don't use this method first, people in the restaurant will definitely judge us."

"Getting through the struggles" – Technology as a tactical parenting aid

Technology has become a tactical aid in situations of daily resistance. When children refuse to brush their teeth, cut their hair, or stay awake at the right time, screens serve as distractions. They help calm children and support parents through the moment. A working mother described setting clear boundaries:

"I only allow tablet time during morning and evening toothbrushing because my child dislikes brushing. They only watch for 3–4 minutes, so

they'll stay still and let me do it. I tell them, if you want to watch, you have to stay still. Open your mouth. If they don't, I cover the screen. No open mouth, no watching."

Another dad also recounted how Generation Y parents view technology as their aid in everyday parenting challenges and routine struggles with children:

"There are two special occasions when I use a screen with my child during haircuts, because they hate it. I know it's not great, but it's better than them moving and the barber not being able to cut. I let them focus on the screen. Another is during car rides in the late afternoon, around 4 or 5 pm., when I know they're about to fall asleep. If they nap, they won't sleep at night. So, I let them watch something to stay awake."

"Learning with screens" – Digital technology as an educational companion

For Thai Generation Y parents, digital technology is more than a pacifier—it is a gateway to global learning. Tablets and smart TVs support skill-building, particularly language development, and are viewed as active educational tools that complement or substitute for formal early childhood education. As one homeschooling mother observed,

"We put on the British Council channel for our child, and they picked up so many words. Part of me didn't want to believe it came from watching videos, but it did. They remember vocabulary and full sentences in context. We never taught them directly. My sister said my child has great pronunciation, and that's all thanks to YouTube. We just didn't have time to teach them ourselves."

Another parent echoed a deliberate, goal-oriented approach, highlighting that screen use is often intentional and planned rather than random or purely for entertainment:

"In our family, we've used screens to help our child learn languages from the beginning. We set a goal for them to recognize English alphabet letters by age two. I go on YouTube and look for teaching clips that are engaging. If I see the pronunciation is clear, I'll let my child watch and follow along."

"Not alone, just screened" – Digital backgrounds as companionship

In households where extended community interaction has declined, many children spend long hours at home. During these times, when parents cannot be playmates, digital devices are left running in the background. These devices serve as a passive companion. The TV or tablet becomes ambient presence, filling the silence and alleviating solitude without requiring the child's full attention. As a homeschooling mother reflected,

"We like to leave the smart TV on at home while our child plays. They're not always watching it; sometimes we just leave it running. While the kids watch smart TV, we do housework and other tasks, keeping an eye on them."

Interviews revealed insightful cross-cultural reflections, such as one participant comparing her Thai parenting experience with that of her British in-laws.

“From what I’ve seen, my husband’s siblings [UK natives] are in their mid-30s and live in the UK. One time, they visited Thailand with their one-year-old. I noticed they would just leave the screen on for the child, a live streaming sports show, or other programs. When we had our kid, we started doing the same. It’s not really for us or the child. We just turn it on, so the house isn’t too quiet.”

“Watching from afar” – Surveillance technology as a bridge between presence and absence

In the digital age, watching over a child no longer requires physical presence. Surveillance tools, especially home CCTV systems, have become vital for Thai Generation Y parents. These systems not only offer peace of mind and security but also allow remote communication and real-time emotional connection. One homeschooling mother described:

“When I have to go outside the house, I still worry about my child. So, we installed a CCTV system that lets us talk to them. Sometimes, if the baby cries, the system alerts me with a ‘crying baby’ message. I open the app to check what’s going on. I want to know whether they fall or get hurt. Then the child will ask, ‘How did mommy know?’ It’s a camera that lets us communicate with them directly.”

Similarly, like any other, another father emphasized its dual function:

“I also use cameras at home. Partly for security, but also to check on my child when I’m not home. So that I can see what they’re doing, what they’re playing. If I see anything inappropriate, I can warn them or tell whoever’s helping with childcare.”

In summary, across these themes, digital technology emerges as a multi-functional actor, ranging from caregiver and teacher to mediator and companion, for Thai Generation Y. Parents do not perceive themselves as passive consumers of technology but as active negotiators who adopt tools to suit cultural expectations, emotional needs, and pragmatic realities of raising young children in a changing world.

Perceived fears of Thai Generation Y parents associated with children’s technological engagement

The integration of digital technology into family life has reshaped the landscape of parenting for Thai Generation Y parents. Their concerns are not merely personal anxieties but reflect a blend of Western medical discourse, Thai cultural values, and everyday parenting experiences. The following section presents the seven major fear-related themes voiced by these parents.

Fear 1: “We can’t always control what they see.”

A common fear among parents was that digital platforms would expose their children to content unsuitable for their age. This concern reflects an alignment of global anxiety about media influence, known as ‘moral panic’, with Thai cultural ideals of propriety and age-appropriate behavior.

A mother voiced concern over the unfiltered content on platforms like YouTube:

“When I let my child watch a screen, I worry about short clips that pop up on YouTube. First, the content is irrational. Second, it appears and disappears quickly; it’s fast-paced and trendy. Third, we can’t control it. Before, we had to wait for movies or TV shows on Channels 3 or 7 at scheduled times. Now, anyone can record and upload content to a platform. There’s no filtering at all. It doesn’t go through the programming guidelines. I’m scared because this reaches children directly. Sometimes we don’t choose it, it’s just suggested. So, we adults must step in and interrupt.”

This fear persists even when children attend school:

“My child has started school, and media exposure also comes from there because the school uses digital technology. The teacher showed a children’s movie, probably thinking it was appropriate, like ‘Khan Kluay’, a cartoon that promotes patriotism and introduces history. But it contains violent language. I didn’t want my child to watch that part. I’m afraid he’ll absorb it.”

The concern extended beyond overt forms of inappropriate content to subtler effects such as misinformation, emotional manipulation, and desensitization. These concerns illustrate the parents’ sense of vulnerability in the face of algorithm-driven, unregulated content. Many felt a responsibility to mediate children’s exposure to ensure they could distinguish between reality and fiction, and between good and harm.

Fear 2: “I worry screens are changing my child’s emotional control.”

This theme of fear reflects parents’ deeper fear that emotional outbursts, mood shifts, or screen dependence are altering their child’s natural temperament. It communicates a sense of loss of the child’s authentic self, blending psychological concerns with cultural ideals of emotional composure.

Parents reported that these concerns were influenced by both Western psychological and medical information and Thai ideals of emotional discipline. Thai parents value emotional discipline, patience, and endurance, teaching their children to endure discomfort and frustration rather than express them. Such values are seen as building their child’s moral strength. For example, a part-time real estate agent mother described monitoring her child for such changes:

“We do let our child use a smartphone because parents from our generation have to work outside while raising kids. But we try to observe if there are any bad signs. For example, if my child is watching and I take

the phone away, does she show signs of aggression from being addicted to the screen? I'm scared of how it will affect her emotionally."

Even a laid-back father worried that screen time could disrupt his child's responsibilities:

"My child is already in school and has other activities to do. I'm afraid screen use will affect time management, like when the school gives homework, but he doesn't do it, or when he has music practice but skips it to watch YouTube. I also worry about emotional control – whether he can manage himself."

Parents generally tolerate extended screen use only on child-specific platforms, such as YouTube Kids, where content is screened. This fear links children's screen exposure to concerns related to responsibility, focus, and emotional control. Rooted in Western psychological discourse yet shaped by Thai parenting values of obedience and self-discipline, it reflects both scientific and cultural ideals of what a "well-raised" child should be.

Fear 3: "Other kids are already talking – why not mine?"

Many parents, like most Asian cultures, during the interviews expressed anxiety about the possibility that excessive digital media use might hinder their children's developmental progress. Rooted in medicalized notions of normative milestones, this fear was often linked to pediatric evaluations and developmental checklists that parents regularly consulted from pregnancy through early childhood.

Parents' fears were reinforced by observing developmental delays in children around them. As a working mother with elder family support stated her observation,

"From what I've seen, parents like us worry about language development. I've seen it with people close to me. A coworker's child is around the same age as mine – three years old – but still isn't talking. Normally, at that age, a child should be able to speak and communicate with others. That makes me think that she is a neglected parent because, to some extent, she let technology affects her child's development. It makes children not want to speak or causes delayed speech."

This theme highlights fears of developmental delay, particularly in language and cognition, shaped by Western biomedical models and Thai cultural norms that link a child's progress to family reputation and perceived adequacy of parenting. Parents see themselves as guardians of both biological and social timelines.

Fear 4: "Have I caused my child's autism-like traits?"

One of the more recent and culturally specific fears expressed by Thai Generation Y parents is the fear of "pseudo-autism." This condition is said to resemble autism. Pseudo-autism is believed to be caused by early and excessive screen exposure. As a result, an overview of children has been changed from 'normal' to 'abnormal'. Although not medically defined, the term is widely used in parental discourse, shaped by online sources, peer accounts, and health advice.

One mother who delayed screen use explained:

"We're worried – worried about pseudo-autism. That's why we limited our child's tablet use. Why do we let her watch screens only after she can speak? Because of pseudo-autism. We must be able to communicate with her before we allow screens. I had never heard of it before, but I found out from friends and from reading about pseudo-autism today. The child looks normal but doesn't speak."

Parents often believe that if their child becomes abnormal, it is not only their fault but also a form of bad karma they have created for themselves. Another working mother confirmed how commonly the term circulates in Thai parenting circles:

"In Thai society, people often say that letting kids watch smartphones causes pseudo-autism. It's a debate, but we've heard it constantly. And yes, we're scared. That's why we set time limits on how long our child can watch."

In summary, the fear of pseudo-autism illustrates the blending of medical and moral narratives, particularly when combined with a strong sense of personal responsibility for either causing or preventing harm.

Fear 5: "I let him watch – and now he can't sit still."

Closely tied to the previous theme, parents also feared that digital technology might contribute to shortened attention spans or even attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). This concern was strongly influenced by global medical frameworks and reinforced by personal observations. A homeschooling mother shared a deeply personal concern:

"As a mom, when I let my child use digital technology, I'm scared of attention deficit. If one day my child becomes ADHD, as the main caregiver, I would probably blame myself. I'd feel that I was the reason my child became unwell. Because I was the one who was permitted to watch in the first place."

Another mother described behavioral changes she observed in her children after screen exposure:

"From watching my two kids, I feel screens have an effect. I'm afraid they'll have less patience with things around them and can't stay focused for long. That might even lead to aggression, like when they can't get something right away. They become kids who can't wait and don't know how to wait. They space out and don't focus on what's in front of them. That's attention deficit. It's something many parents fear because if a child develops it, treatment takes time."

These narratives also suggest that attention deficit is not only a feared diagnosis but also a symbol of perceived parenting failure in an era where constant digital stimulation is the norm.

Fear 6: "I'm scared her eyes will be damaged forever."

Health concerns extended to the fear of vision problems from prolonged screen exposure. Blue light, screen proximity, and long viewing durations were cited as harmful, with myopia

being a primary concern. For some, these fears were tied to both aesthetics and health. A father shared:

“I’m a father, and I have a daughter. I’d be especially worried if she had eye problems and had to wear glasses. That would affect her appearance. I don’t want her to wear glasses from a young age. So, I try to be careful not to let her watch too close to the screen – it could harm her vision and cause early nearsightedness.”

Another mother mentioned how she tried to reduce screen harm proactively:

“I let my child use a screen, but I’m still worried. Screens emit blue light, and that harms the eyes. I have to tell her, ‘If you watch too much, your eyesight will be damaged.’”

Health-related fears drive parents to actively manage screen use, with concerns about eye damage, framed in Western biomedical language (e.g., blue light, myopia), and cultural anxieties about appearance under others’ gaze (Kakar et al., 2023). Being presentable in Asian culture conveys respect and helps avoid social comparison, which can have lasting effects.

Fear 7: “They just sit alone with a screen – they don’t know how to be with people.”

Finally, many parents worried that excessive screen time would hinder their children’s socialization. In Thai and broader Asian parenting beliefs, sociability and proper group behavior are core values. A child who withdraws from others or fails to demonstrate these traits may be seen as poorly raised or at risk of social isolation. One mother shared her observations of her nieces and nephews:

“Personally, I’m afraid that too much screen time will ruin their ability to socialize. These two things affect each other. Take my three nieces as an example. I feel that those three kids became very screen-dependent because of the freedom they had. As they grew up and interacted with us, their personalities were poor – they kept their heads down. They weren’t good at socializing. Now, they mostly stay in their rooms and just use their screens. If they hadn’t been glued to screens, maybe they wouldn’t have turned out this way.”

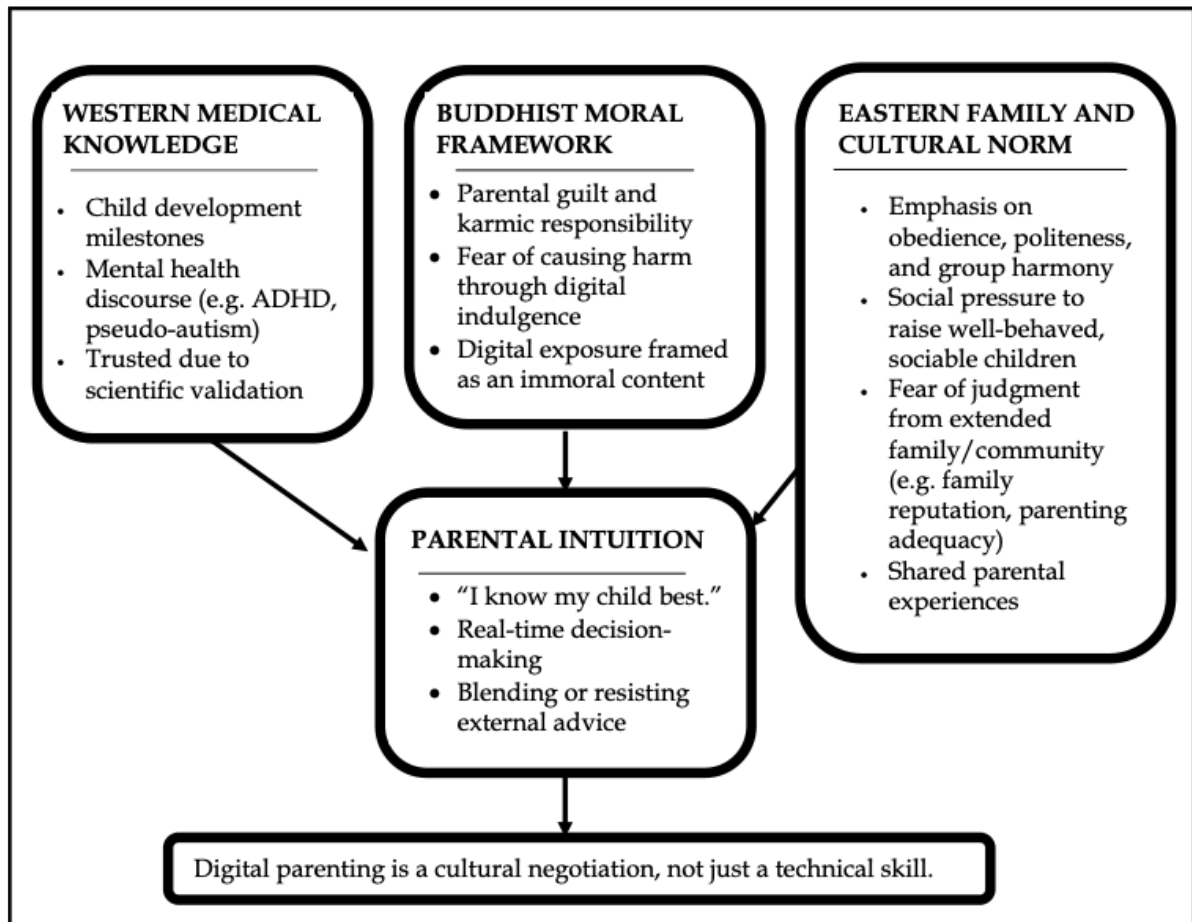
This fear illustrates how deeply intertwined digital anxieties are with broader cultural ideals regarding social behavior, family reputation, and the child’s future success. Fear of social isolation and poor interpersonal skills reflect Thai and Asian cultural philosophies emphasizing collectivism, group harmony, and the importance of social adaptability. When children withdraw into screens and struggle to engage with others, parents fear not just individual dysfunction but failure to raise a child who is culturally appropriate and socially accepted.

This fear bridges psychological concerns with social reputation, marking digital technology as a threat to cultural collectivity. However, a few parents also stated that they accept screen use and do not fear excessive screen-based technology if it enhances their children’s learning, such as reading English words, learning new alphabets, and counting numbers, to help them surpass children of the same age. This exception is the only trade-off that overrides their fear.

Sources of belief influencing digital parenting among Thai Generation Y parents

Beneath the seven core fears articulated by middle-class Thai Generation Y parents lies another layer of network beliefs shaped by different and sometimes conflicting knowledge systems. They navigate parenting through personal experience and authoritative influences, including Western medical science, Thai Buddhist teachings, Eastern cultural norms, and parental intuition (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Belief Systems Behind Thai Generation Y Digital Parenting



Thai Generation Y parents often draw on Western developmental knowledge as their primary source of health literacy, with a particular emphasis on their children's health and psychological well-being. They seek information from multiple sources (e.g., doctors, psychologists, and global parenting resources through hospitals, social media, and online articles). To them, this knowledge is credible because of its empirical foundation and international recognition.

This scientific framework is informed by parenting experiences through routine medical procedures, such as prenatal ultrasounds, milestone checklists, and child development screenings. From informal conversations, the researchers found that these tools not only shaped what parents feared but also how they interpreted and responded to their children's

interactions with digital technology. Therefore, parents adjusted their parenting strategies based on health knowledge and balanced fears about technology use with its benefits.

Regarding biomedical narratives, many parents framed their fears in moral terms grounded in Buddhist teachings, particularly when discussing conditions like pseudo-autism or attention disorders. For them, failing to limit screen exposure was more than a mistake. It was a moral dilemma with consequences for their karma arising from their negligence. This guilt often causes parents to blame themselves for possible long-term effects. In such cases, moral and emotional responsibility are intertwined, producing self-shame and others' judgment.

Another source of belief came from Eastern family and cultural norms, in which child behavior was directly linked to parental success or failure. In a collective society, raising a child is not solely a couple's decision. These Bangkok parents often share information about their parenting experiences with others through LINE chat groups, advice from family members, and stories posted in parents' Facebook groups. Likewise, sociocultural expectations around manners, obedience, and group harmony shaped how parents assessed their children's screen habits. Parents were concerned that screen-induced isolation or the encouragement of inappropriate speech would reflect poorly on both their child and the family. These expectations were enculturated and reinforced by intergenerational influence and public critique from relatives or community members.

A final source is situational judgment, a sense of what is right in the moment, which is the final layer of belief systems before making a parental decision. Many participants described moments when they chose to trust their understanding of their child over any guideline or expert. This reliance on lived experience and intuition allowed parents to justify their decisions at the time. For instance, they might trust Western medical knowledge regarding developmental delays; at the same time, they might believe that it creates karma in this life and affects their future life according to Buddhist philosophy; or they might override both with what "feels right" in each situation.

In summary, the parenting beliefs of Thai Generation Y are neither fully traditional nor entirely modern, but rather hybrid. Their fears and actions result from a continual negotiation between structured knowledge systems and flexible, emotionally driven responses rooted in personal and cultural experience.

Discussion and conclusion

This study illustrates the significance of qualitative research findings that reveal how cultural belief systems, global health knowledge, and the demands of everyday life shape digital parenting among middle-class Generation Y parents in Bangkok. Informants' narratives reflect that their parenting is grounded in prioritizing attentiveness, co-presence, and collectivist values. They use digital technology to maintain family order, fulfill caregiving responsibilities, and cope with parental fatigue. To them, these screen-based technologies serve as tools that help ease the burdens of parenting, balancing modern pressures with traditional expectations of care and sacrifice. Particularly mothers, they also experience a double burden of caregiving and domestic labor, which shapes their strategic use of digital technology to manage household responsibilities while maintaining their parental role.

By applying Bornstein's culturally specific approach, the study finds that middle-class Generation Y parents use screen-based technologies to reclaim a moment of self, maintain calm in public spaces, provide support during difficult times, serve as a gateway to learning, function as a companion in the background, and enable remote monitoring. This reflects both global parenting patterns identified in earlier studies associated with technological use as a babysitter, background companion, and pacifier (e.g., Beyens & Eggermont, 2014; Lev & Elias, 2020; Nikken, 2019; Radesky et al., 2015), and cautious Asian parenting patterns in the use of technology with children. Like most Asian cultures, our informants also shared a goal-oriented parenting style in using technology as a learning tool for educational purposes (Astuti et al., 2022; Cao et al., 2022; Chaudron et al., 2018; Goh et al., 2015; Park et al., 2019; Shin & Lwin, 2022).

However, we also identified underlying differences. For example, they negotiate the use of digital technology and associated fears through relational considerations, in contrast to the Western parenting style that emphasizes child autonomy and treats parents and children as independent social actors. Their relational considerations are evident in their highlighting of their obligations, understandings, and evaluations of their parenting through a relational lens.

Regarding fear, parents face dilemmas in anticipating the effects of children's technology use. These fears can be distinguished by their sources and impacts: parental fears are shaped by Thai sociocultural concerns about karma, parenting failure, and social acceptability, whereas fears about the effects of technology on children draw on Western knowledge of child development, emotional regulation, and age-inappropriate content. Being media-literate themselves can enhance health literacy in child-rearing, particularly given limited time and the content accessible to their children. Our findings further show that fear and moral panic arise not only from mass media and medical guidance but also from religious beliefs, guilt, social comparison, shared parenting experiences, and public judgment. Not all screen-based technologies, however, provoke fear or moral panic, as illustrated by the acceptance of CCTV use.

These findings suggest that parents' technological practices with children, as well as the associated fears, are outcomes of socially constructed parental beliefs. Our findings reveal four belief systems underlying digital parenting among Thai Generation Y. The first source is a hybrid belief system that informs both parenting decisions and parental fear. Generation Y parents in Bangkok integrate multiple sources of knowledge into their digital parenting, namely Western medical discourse, Buddhist moral reasoning, Thai cultural norms, and personal intuition, rather than relying on a single authority.

In conclusion, our study challenges frameworks that attempt to categorize parenting styles into patterns of national culture or types. Our findings emphasize the need for a more layered, context-sensitive approach that accounts for the interplay among generational perceptions of social norms, cultural values, and emotional realities. As illustrated, digital parenting among Thai Generation Y parents is not merely a technical task; it is a form of cultural negotiation that reflects broader social changes and moral imperatives. By addressing these complexities, our study contributes to the literature on parental mediation, fear, and moral panics by embedding these frameworks within specific sociocultural contexts.

From insights to implementations

Our findings pointed to the need for culturally sensitive parenting support. Insights from these Bangkok middle-class Generation Y parents in the study can shed light on both new academic knowledge and institutional contributions that address concerns specific to their subcultural group. For example, schools could enhance parent-teacher collaboration by addressing concerns about media content and supporting regulation of screen time. Health professionals, including psychologists and pediatricians, in clinical and online contexts should provide guidance that reflects generational, socioeconomic, religious, gender, and geographic diversity in parenting.

Policymakers are encouraged to incorporate qualitative insights, especially by considering parents' fears and perceived risks, in developing early childhood support programs that resonate with their lived experiences. Likewise, media and technology developers can design culturally relevant, age-appropriate platforms that align with family values and everyday realities. In conclusion, this study offers a foundation for rethinking digital parenting through a culturally grounded lens, calling for narrative-driven, context-aware approaches that reflect the complex environments in which contemporary parenting unfolds.

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