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Digital Parenting and the Communicative Negotiation of Family Authority

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Abstract: *Digital technologies have reshaped family communication, challenging conventional understandings of parental authority. Although digital parenting has attracted increasing scholarly attention, existing studies remain fragmented in explaining how family authority is negotiated across different sociocultural contexts. This study aims to systematically review empirical research to examine the transformation of family authority through digital parenting. A Systematic Literature Review was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 guidelines. Articles were retrieved from Scopus and Google Scholar. Of forty records identified, eleven empirical studies published between 2021 and 2026 met the inclusion criteria and were synthesized using comparative thematic analysis. The review identified three major findings: children's digital agency has expanded their participation in family decision-making; digital privacy has become a central arena of negotiation; and digital literacy has redistributed communicative influence. The novelty of this study lies in its integrated conceptual model demonstrating that family authority is reconstructed through continuous communication rather than determined solely by technological change.*

Keyword: *Authority Negotiation, Digital Parenting, Family Authority, Family Communication.*

Abstrak: Teknologi digital telah membentuk kembali komunikasi keluarga, menantang pemahaman konvensional tentang otoritas orang tua. Meskipun *digital parenting* semakin menarik perhatian akademis, penelitian yang ada masih terfragmentasi dalam menjelaskan bagaimana otoritas keluarga dinegosiasikan di berbagai konteks sosiokultural (research gap). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara sistematis penelitian empiris guna menguji transformasi otoritas keluarga melalui *digital parenting*. Pendekatan *Systematic Literature Review* dilakukan mengikuti pedoman PRISMA 2020. Artikel diambil dari *Scopus* dan *Google Scholar*. Dari 40 catatan yang diidentifikasi, 11 studi empiris yang diterbitkan antara tahun 2021 dan 2026 memenuhi kriteria inklusi dan disintesis menggunakan analisis tematik komparatif. Tinjauan tersebut mengidentifikasi tiga temuan utama: agensi digital anak telah memperluas partisipasi mereka dalam pengambilan keputusan keluarga; privasi digital telah menjadi arena sentral negosiasi; dan literasi digital telah mendistribusikan ulang pengaruh komunikatif. Kebaruan (novelty) penelitian ini terletak pada model konseptual terpadu yang menunjukkan

bahwa otoritas keluarga direkonstruksi melalui komunikasi yang berkelanjutan, bukan ditentukan semata-mata oleh perubahan teknologi.

Kata Kunci: Digital Parenting, Komunikasi Keluarga, Negosiasi Otoritas, Otoritas Keluarga.

INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of digital technology has fundamentally transformed how family members communicate, share information, build emotional intimacy, and organize their daily lives. Smartphones, social media platforms, instant messaging applications, online games, and various digital services have expanded the family's communicative environment while simultaneously presenting new challenges for parenting. Interactions that were once primarily conducted through face-to-face communication are now increasingly mediated by digital technologies, blurring the boundaries between private and public spaces (Qian & Hu, 2024). Consequently, the rise of digital media affects not only children's media usage patterns but also the mechanisms of rule-setting, monitoring, and decision-making within the family.

This development has generated growing academic interest in digital parenting, broadly understood as a set of practices through which parents guide, support, protect, and facilitate children's engagement with digital technologies. Recent research indicates that digital parenting has evolved from a restrictive approach primarily focused on limiting media use toward adaptive strategies involving active mediation, communicative guidance, and digital literacy development (Modecki et al., 2022; Fam et al., 2025). Although this literature is expanding rapidly, most studies examine digital parenting through the lens of child protection or the effectiveness of mediation strategies, leaving the relationship between digital technology and the transformation of family authority underexplored. The research gap in this study is that most literature still maintains the assumption that authority resides primarily with parents, paying insufficient attention to the communicative processes through which children participate in shaping, questioning, or modifying digital media usage rules.

Research integrating the perspectives of Digital Parenting, Children's Agency, Communication Privacy Management Theory, Relational Dialectics Theory, Family Communication Patterns Theory, and Foucault's power relations into a single framework remains highly limited. Therefore, the state of the art of this study lies in developing a cross-national comparative synthesis that conceptualizes digital parenting as an arena for authority negotiation, where shifts in family authority emerge from communicative negotiations involving privacy management and the distribution of digital knowledge. This study aims to analyze the transformation of family authority in the cyber era through a comparative synthesis of digital parenting practices across countries and to develop a conceptual model of authority negotiation in family communication shaped by digital technology.

METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to synthesize contemporary evidence regarding the transformation of family authority within digital parenting practices across various national contexts. This design was chosen as it allows for a transparent, rigorous, and replicable process to identify and synthesize empirical findings (Page et al., 2021). The study adopted the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses) guidelines to ensure methodological rigor in literature identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and data synthesis.

Literature searches were conducted using international academic databases, Scopus and Google Scholar, covering publications from 2021 to 2026. Boolean operators (AND, OR) and keyword combinations such as "digital parenting", "family communication", "family authority", and "children's agency" were utilized to maximize search accuracy. Inclusion

criteria encompassed English-language, peer-reviewed empirical journal articles focusing on authority relations and parent-child communication interactions regarding digital usage. From an initial total of 40 identified records, the selection process yielded 11 empirical studies that met all eligibility criteria. The data extracted from each study were analyzed using thematic comparative synthesis, which consisted of open coding, axial coding, cross-national comparison, and conceptual synthesis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data extracted from the 11 selected studies, three general patterns emerged regarding the transformation of family authority in the digital era. First, all studies reported a gradual transition from unilateral parental control toward a more dialogic form of authority negotiation. Second, digital literacy consistently emerged as a significant factor that redistributes technical expertise and alters traditional assumptions about authority. Third, concerns surrounding online privacy (such as sharenting and location tracking) expanded the scope of negotiation into an ongoing dialogue regarding protection and autonomy (Walrave et al., 2022). Studies in Western countries generally reported higher levels of children's participation in decision-making, whereas in collectivist societies like Indonesia, there was a strengthening of adaptive dialogue within established family authority structures (Elisa & Safitri, 2026).

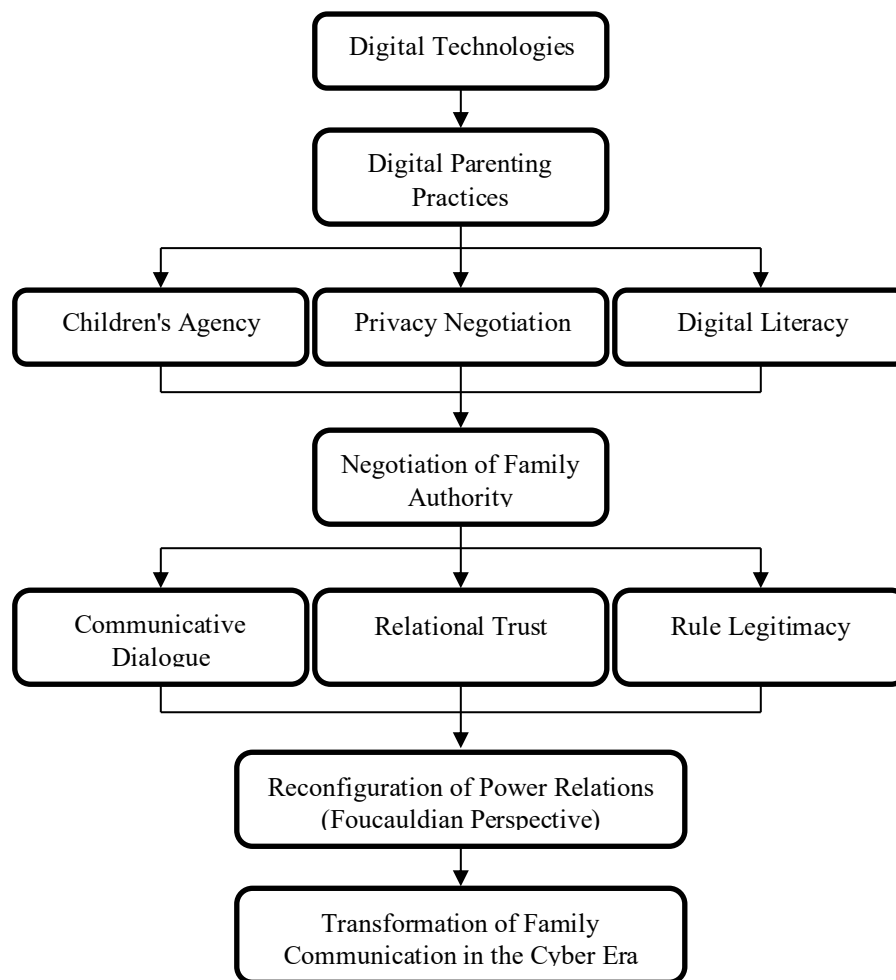
Table 1. Cross-National Comparison of Authority Negotiation

Country	Dominant Parenting Orientation	Key Negotiation Issue	Emerging Pattern
United States	Collaborative	Trust and autonomy	Participatory decision-making
Australia	Co-mediation	Digital literacy	Children's agency
Belgium	Privacy-oriented	Sharenting	Privacy negotiation
Denmark	Surveillance	Location tracking	Boundary management
Norway	Restrictive	Screen time regulation	Resistance and negotiation
Indonesia	Collectivist	Family communication	Dialogic adaptation

Source: Research Data, 2026

Children's agency holds growing prominence in digitally-mediated family communication. Children are no longer passive recipients of parental regulation, but active communicative actors who negotiate screen time arrangements and contribute technological expertise. This does not diminish parental authority; rather, it alters the communicative conditions required for that authority to be rationally acknowledged. Furthermore, digital parenting practices necessitate privacy boundary management (Communication Privacy Management) that is co-negotiated through transparency and trust.

Family authority thus undergoes a reconfiguration that depends more on communicative legitimacy than mere structural hierarchy or status. Parents must actively provide justification and collaborative reasoning regarding digital rules (Kawas et al., 2021). The novelty of this research is the finding that digital technology does not directly alter family authority; instead, it reshapes digital parenting practices that trigger communicative processes (children's agency, privacy negotiation, and digital literacy) so that authority is maintained through continuous communication.



Source: Research Data, 2026

Figure 1. Conceptual Model of Family Authority Transformation (Review Synthesis)

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

This study concludes that the expansion of digital technology has altered the communicative foundations for legitimizing and exercising parental authority. First, digital technology enhances children's agency, enabling them to become active participants in shaping digital rules within the household. Second, privacy management has become a central communicative issue, where surveillance practices are deemed effective when supported by transparency and collaborative boundary negotiation. Third, the distribution of digital literacy reconfigures power structures, demanding that authority be negotiated through mutual understanding. Family authority in the cyber era increasingly relies on communicative legitimacy, relational trust, and participatory rule-making rather than unilateral control.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the SLR search was restricted to publications between 2021 and 2026, thereby omitting earlier historical perspectives on the evolution of digital parenting. Second, the database search was limited to Scopus and Google Scholar, meaning relevant research from other databases such as Web of Science or PsycINFO might have been excluded. Third, this review focused on the conceptual interpretation of heterogeneous qualitative and quantitative study designs rather than estimating effect sizes through a pure statistical meta-analysis.

Recomendations

Future research is recommended to empirically validate this conceptual model of authority negotiation across various cultural settings, specifically comparing collectivist and individualist approaches. The use of longitudinal research methods and examinations of emerging technologies (such as AI or virtual reality) could provide a deeper understanding of the future evolution of family dynamics. For parents and policymakers, it is advisable to prioritize digital literacy programs that equip individuals with conflict resolution skills and open communicative dialogue, rather than focusing purely on rigid surveillance prohibitions.

Author Contributions

All authors contributed significantly to this research. Rofian Dedi Susanto was responsible for research conceptualization, SLR data collection, and initial manuscript drafting. Nurhayani Saragih contributed to data extraction analysis and theoretical framework development. Farid Hamid Umarella played a role in interpreting results, methodological revisions, and article finalization. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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